



Collaborative
Network
for Valuing
Earth Information

Release Date: September 2026

Response Deadline: Pre-proposals will be reviewed on a rolling basis through September 20, 2026

Fellowship Timeline: October 2026 – August 2027

Funding: \$40,000 (flat) per award, plus up to \$5,000 for research needs

Number of awards: 1

Contact: CONVEI@wwfus.org

Request for Proposals (RFP) for Socioeconomic Assessment of USGS National Land Cover Database (NLCD)

The Collaborative Network for Valuing Earth Information (CONVEI), a collaboration between WWF, NASA and USGS, is seeking pre-proposals for research that quantifies, in monetary terms, the economic value of [NLCD data products](#) to their users and to society.

CONVEI—together with USGS and the NLCD team—is seeking valuation experts to design and execute an economic valuation of NLCD. This work will address persistent gaps between data producers who want the value of their products quantified and the specialists equipped to do so. We are seeking expertise from both experienced researchers and early career researchers. Selected teams will collaborate closely with CONVEI and NLCD partners throughout the work.

ABOUT NLCD and Motivation

The National Land Cover Database (NLCD), produced by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) with additional support through the Multi-Resolution Land Characteristics (MRLC) Consortium, is the definitive land cover dataset for the United States. Built from the Landsat record at 30-meter resolution, NLCD has for more than three decades served as foundational information for scientists, land managers, planners, and decision-makers across thousands of applications. With the release of the latest Annual NLCD (Collection 1.2), the product suite now provides consistent land cover and land change information for the conterminous United States for 1985–2025, a substantial increase in both temporal frequency (annual compared to the prior 2–3 year epochs) and length of the temporal record.

Despite this broad use, the economic value that NLCD delivers to society has not been rigorously quantified. Prior economic valuation of Earth observation programs — most notably the USGS studies estimating that Landsat imagery provided users roughly \$3.45 billion in benefits in 2017 — has focused on raw satellite imagery. NLCD is distinct: it is a derived information product that transforms imagery into an analysis-ready, classified land cover layer. Valuing NLCD therefore requires quantifying the value of the classification, integration, and continuity that turn Landsat pixels into usable land cover information.

Establishing credible, defensible estimates of NLCD's economic value serves several concrete purposes: informing investment prioritization; demonstrating the return on public investment in land cover monitoring; guiding decisions about product scope, resolution, and update frequency;

and strengthening the broader evidence base on the socioeconomic value of Earth science information.

Purpose and Objectives

This Request for Proposals (RFP) seeks research that quantifies the economic value of NLCD data products to their users and to society. Pre-proposals should clearly articulate how NLCD improves decisions or outcomes and estimates the economic value of that improvement.

Specific objectives include:

- Producing credible estimates of the economic benefits that NLCD data products provide to users and downstream applications.
- Advancing and adapting valuation methods for derived Earth science information products, as distinct from raw imagery.
- Generating decision-relevant evidence and communicable case studies that demonstrate NLCD's value across sectors.
- Contributing methods, data, and findings to the broader community valuing Earth science information.

Scope

Pre-proposals may address the NLCD product suite as a whole or focus specifically on land cover and impervious surface.

Pre-proposals may also address cross-cutting attributes of the suite, such as the marginal value of the shift to annual temporal frequency, the value of the long (1985–2025) consistent time series, or the value contributed through downstream products and models that embed NLCD (for example, land cover classification used in the USDA Cropland Data Layer, or impervious-surface inputs to hydrologic and stormwater models).

Eligible Valuation Approaches

Eligible approaches include, but are not limited to:

1. **Stated- and revealed-preference methods (e.g., contingent valuation, willingness-to-pay).** Survey-based estimation of aggregate user benefits, following the model used in prior USGS Landsat valuation work. Well suited to producing a defensible aggregate benefit figure; pre-proposals should address survey design, sampling frame, and non-response.
2. **Value of Information (VOI) case studies.** Estimation of improved decision quality attributable to NLCD in a specific decision context, relative to a clearly defined counterfactual (the best decision achievable without NLCD). Well suited to concrete, communicable, decision-anchored results.
3. **Macroeconomic dependency / economic-atlas methods.** Top-down estimation linking NLCD usage to economic activity in land-cover-dependent sectors via dependency relationships. Well suited to sector- or national-scale estimates.



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4. **Avoided-cost / replacement-cost methods.** Estimation of the cost users would incur to reproduce similar national land cover information independently. Useful as a defensible lower-bound anchor.
5. **Downstream product and model dependency analysis.** Tracing NLCD's value through the products, models, and decisions that embed it.

Pre-proposals combining a defensible aggregate estimate with one or more illustrative case studies are encouraged. Proposers intending to use methods not listed above should provide additional justification detailing why an alternative method is preferred.

Priority Application Areas

Pre-proposals addressing sectors with clear, traceable economic linkages are especially encouraged, including, but not limited to:

- **Stormwater and impervious surface** – e.g., municipal stormwater utility fees, permit compliance, and lifecycle costs informed by impervious surface and land cover data.
- **Water quality and quantity** – e.g., land cover and impervious surface data used to map and model surface runoff, nonpoint source pollutants, harmful algal bloom risks, groundwater recharge, or sediment budgets.
- **Energy development and infrastructure** – e.g., pipeline routing, mine site assessment, post-mining reclamation, energy infrastructure risks, regulatory compliance, and other potential uses of NLCD land cover data.
- **Insurance and Reinsurance** – e.g., land cover and impervious surface data used to model and quantify economic risk from natural hazards such as fire, flooding, or landslides.
- **Human Health** – e.g., land cover data used to model exposure to disease vectors
- **Natural hazards and safety** – e.g., wildfire risk and exposure, coastal inundation, flood hazards, and/or landslide susceptibility utilizing land cover and impervious surface data
- **Conservation and habitat** – e.g., habitat and land-use change assessment for conservation planning, ecosystem services valuation, environmental policy making, wildlife management, or other conservation applications utilizing land cover and impervious surface data.
- **Recreational Opportunities** – e.g., land cover and impervious surface data informing geospatial assessments of recreation opportunities (e.g., biking, hiking, horseback riding, watersports, or other recreational activities)

Deliverables and Coordination

Funded projects are expected to produce:

- A technical report documenting methods, data, assumptions, and estimates.
- A short, non-technical summary product (e.g., fact sheet, brief, or article) suitable for a policy and general audience.
- Contribution of results into CONVEI's capacity-building and communications activities (which may include a webinar, workshop presentation, or comparable engagement).

Funded teams will be expected to coordinate periodically with program staff and to participate in a synthesis or cohort activity with other awardees, where applicable.



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Funding

- **Award amount:** \$40,000 (flat), paid against agreed deliverables. **Note:** NLCD partners and USGS scientists participate in this process as collaborators and are not compensated through this engagement. Only the selected consultant team(s) receive funding under the resulting award.
- **Research support:** up to an additional \$5,000 for direct research needs (e.g., data acquisition, survey administration, or travel), itemized and justified in the budget.

Eligibility

Proposal teams must be based in the United States; there are no other restrictions on eligibility. Interdisciplinary teams pairing economic or social-science expertise with Earth-science knowledge are especially encouraged.

Capacity building is a critical part CONVEI's mission. We are seeking applications from an experienced, senior researcher paired with an early career professional or graduate student; however, other qualified teams without a mentor/fellow structure are also welcome to apply.

Institutions are eligible to apply, though we encourage applications directly from candidates for this RFP. If institutions do apply, the total award will be inclusive of overhead costs. We will prioritize proposals that allocate the majority of the funding to direct project costs, with low or no overhead.

Pre-proposal Requirements

Interested teams should first submit a concise pre-proposal not to exceed 3 pages describing their proposed approach, team makeup, and expertise. Teams proposing a valuation method not listed above may include up to an additional page. Proposals should include:

1. **Proposed approach** – the valuation method(s) under consideration, the target NLCD product(s) and application area(s), and the intended decision context, at a level sufficient to convey feasibility.
2. **Applicant information** – Name(s), their role(s), institution(s), CVs or resume
3. **Expertise** – demonstrated experience valuing data or information products, relevant economic and social-science methods, and Earth-science domain knowledge.

Selection Process

This RFP uses a two-stage selection process:

- **Stage 1 – Pre-proposal review.** Pre-proposals are reviewed by CONVEI program members together with NLCD partners.
- **Stage 2 – Partner meeting.** A selected number of teams are invited to meet with NLCD partners to walk through their proposed approach, discuss feasibility, and confirm that it satisfies the partners' needs.
- **Finalized proposal** – Following the meeting, invited teams will finalize their proposal in collaboration with NLCD partners and scientists, which reflects joint refinement of the scope, approach and methods and deliverables.



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Timeline

RFP released	September 2026
Pre-proposal due	September 27, 2026
Invited partner meetings	October 5, 2026
Finalized proposal	October 19, 2026
Award notification	October 26, 2026

Submission Instructions

- Pre-proposals are limited to 3 pages, excluding contact information and CVs.
- Submit via email to CONVEI@wwfus.org and cc crystina.mancilla@wwfus.org with subject line: "CONVEI Fellowship Application – NLCD Case Study."
- Questions may be directed to CONVEI@wwfus.org