



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### 2026 Request for Proposal

#### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2026-116

**Proposal Title:** Studying Dam Removal Feasibility for the Mississippi Gorge

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Colleen O'Connor Toberman

**Organization:** Friends of the Mississippi River

**Office Telephone:** (651) 477-0923

**Email:** ctoberman@fmr.org

#### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** Assessing the feasibility, environmental benefits, river restoration potential, and costs of dam removal for two locks and dams in the Mississippi River gorge.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$1,099,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** December 31, 2028

**LCCMR Funding Category:** Water (B)

#### Project Location

**What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?**

Region(s): Metro

**What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?**

Region(s): Metro

**When will the work impact occur?**

During the Project and In the Future

## Narrative

**Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.**

Minnesota is facing a generational decision about two major dams, but we don't have enough information to make it.

The Army Corps of Engineers is conducting disposition studies of two Mississippi River locks and dams in the heart of the Twin Cities: the Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam and Lock and Dam 1.

These structures have drastically altered the river. Dam removal would restore rare habitat, improve water quality, and enhance river recreation. But it's not clear whether dam removal is the right choice once all tradeoffs and costs are considered. Yet no comprehensive study of dam removal is currently planned.

The Corps' disposition study is a high-level review that will not include in-depth assessment of water quality, habitat changes, etc. The Corps has said its study will likely recommend transferring the dams to any willing owner. This could foreclose the potential for dam removal before the question is even fully studied.

Elected officials at the local, state, federal, and tribal levels will all have authority over aspects of this decision. The Rapidan Dam failure shows the high cost of delaying decisions about aging dams. We need actionable information as soon as possible.

**What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.**

We propose a dam removal feasibility study for the Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam and Lock and Dam 1. This study would address questions important to elected leaders and community members, including:

- 1) What are the ecological and recreational benefits of dam removal? Which species would benefit, how many acres of habitat would be restored, etc.
- 2) How might dam removal impact surrounding infrastructure such as bridges, stormwater systems, and utilities? What adaptations would be needed and at what cost?
- 3) Are there any geologically fragile areas that might be destabilized by a change in river water levels, and how can those be protected?

Study findings will be disseminated to the public and policymakers in several ways.

This study builds upon the University of Minnesota St. Anthony Falls Lab's 2024 proposal (recommended for 2025 funding) for a physical model assessing sediment transport in the river gorge. We have designed these two projects together. This proposed study would digitally model sediment transport further downstream, including analyzing possible impacts to Pool 2 and Lake Pepin. Both forms of sediment transport analysis are essential to decision-making, and the project teams are collaborating to ensure information-sharing and no duplication of work.

**What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?**

This project will support scientifically sound decision-making to improve the health of the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities and downstream. We will examine habitat restoration opportunities, water quality impacts, endangered species impacts, sediment transport, and recreational changes. The study is large because it is designed to provide comprehensive information that policymakers can act on immediately without waiting for additional future studies.

Quantifying the costs and benefits of dam removal, and disseminating that information swiftly, will enable our leaders to make the best decision about these structures before they deteriorate to the point of requiring major reinvestment—or fail.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Technical study of dam removal feasibility

**Activity Budget:** \$1,036,500

**Activity Description:**

An engineering consulting firm will be selected via a competitive bidding process to conduct a dam removal feasibility study. The study scope will include:

- Habitat assessment and preliminary ecological restoration planning
- Sediment surveys, samples, and modeling to assess transport scenarios, impacts, contamination, and remediation needs
- Assessment of geomorphic and hydrologic response to various dam removal scenarios
- Assessment of affected infrastructure (bridges, culverts, etc.) and potential modifications
- Hydropower generation impact analysis
- Preliminary permitting coordination
- Title review of affected properties and easements
- Feasibility report, including dam removal cost estimates
- Report summary for public use

This study scope has been developed through prior engagement led by FMR and community partners. We hosted researcher forums to engage over 50 technical experts in determining study needs and existing data. Additional engagement has included Dakota tribal councils, state and local elected officials, river recreation users, and the general public. Since 2022, over 1,000 stakeholders have participated in forums, tours and presentations led by FMR and partners about the future of these dams.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Bidding and contracting complete	October 31, 2026
Technical study complete	June 30, 2028

### Activity 2: Stakeholder engagement during study

**Activity Budget:** \$34,147

**Activity Description:**

FMR and the contracted engineering firm will lead a Technical Advisory Committee to guide the study. Key representatives from government agencies (city, state, federal, and tribal) that could be affected by dam removal will be invited, many of whom have been informally engaged in the study design. The TAC will meet four times throughout the project and will have individual meetings with project team members as well. Additional technical experts will be engaged by the project team for specific information gathering as needed.

Ongoing public communication throughout the project, including quarterly e-newsletters and a webpage, will be maintained. Readership of these specific communications will be measured; FMR's current annual communications reach totals over 35,000 subscribers and followers.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Technical Advisory Committee formed	December 31, 2026
Public communications complete	December 31, 2028

### Activity 3: Public dissemination of study findings

**Activity Budget:** \$28,353

#### Activity Description:

Our project is designed to be put into action swiftly. This large, complex study will need to be disseminated to policymakers and the public to inform decision-making about the future of the dams.

Public engagement will focus on dissemination of study findings. For community stakeholders, activities will include two open houses for the broader public as well as presentations targeted for river user groups, neighborhood associations, etc.

A video will be produced to make study findings available and understandable to a wide audience in a lasting way. This video, or series of videos, will total approximately five minutes and include animations and graphics. Video production will be subcontracted out via the required process.

FMR will also lead briefings with elected officials at all levels of government. These meetings will only discuss study findings and will not include any lobbying.

The engineering team's technical staff will participate in some public and policymaker briefings.

#### Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Public-facing study summary complete	August 31, 2028
Video complete and posted online for long-term access	December 31, 2028
Public meetings complete	December 31, 2028

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Christine Goepfert	National Parks Conservation Association	Study advisor	No
Serena McClain	American Rivers	Study advisor	No

## Long-Term Implementation and Funding

**Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?**

Local, state, federal, and tribal governments will gain necessary information to make decisions. Dam removal or ownership transfer would require Congressional authorization and funding, but all levels of government hold permitting authority.

We will contract with an engineering firm experienced in working for the Army Corps so that study findings can be accepted by the Corps and incorporated into any future processes. Close coordination with the Corps will ensure that this study expands upon the agency's disposition study without duplication.

A separate study about the economic impacts of Twin Cities dam removal is already underway to provide additional context.

## Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Pollinator Habitat Creation Along The Urban Mississippi River	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 08j	\$129,000
Urban Pollinator And Native American Cultural Site Restoration	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 08l	\$213,000
Assessing Restorations for Rusty-Patched and Other Bumblebee Habitat	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 03a	\$75,000

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Colleen O'Connor Toberman

**Job Title:** Land Use and Planning Program Director

**Provide description of the project manager's qualifications to manage the proposed project.**

Colleen O'Connor Toberman is the Land Use & Planning Program Director at Friends of the Mississippi River. In this role, Colleen works with community and public-sector partners to develop land-use policies, advocate for parks and public access and guide riverfront development. Since taking this role in 2019, she has been FMR's lead on lock and dam policy issues.

Colleen is a subject-matter expert as well as an experienced project manager. She oversees a variety of project teams and budgets, manages contractors and staff, and produces grant proposals and reports.

In this project, Colleen will oversee the contract bid process for the technical study, manage all contractors, and lead community engagement and public dissemination.

Recent projects managed include:

- Co-leading community engagement about locks and dams through projects that have engaged more than 1,000 people in this issue since 2022.
- Managing an engagement process with Dakota tribal councils about the future of the locks and dams.

**Organization:** Friends of the Mississippi River

**Organization Description:**

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) was established in 1993 to engage people to protect, restore and enhance the Mississippi River and its watershed.

With 26 staff; 2,500 members; and over 5,000 annual volunteers, advocates and event participants, FMR is known for taking an inclusive, place-based, and strategic approach to protecting and enhancing the health of the Mississippi River and its watershed, as well as protecting the many assets the river brings to our region.

To directly address the issues faced by the river, FMR's work focuses on water quality and watershed health, land protection and restoration, community and youth education and engagement, and land use planning. Our primary goals include:

- Local communities appreciate the natural, scenic, cultural, historical, recreational, and other public values of the Mississippi River such that important planning and zoning decisions consistently protect and enhance these values.
- An ecologically functioning and climate-resilient corridor of natural habitat exists along the Mississippi River.
- The Mississippi River meets all water quality standards and fully supports a healthy aquatic ecosystem.
- Individuals and communities feel a connection to the Mississippi River and its watershed that inspires an ethic of active participation in stewardship and conservation.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Program director		Project manager and engagement lead			40%	0.26		\$33,900
Grassroots coordinator		Engagement assistant for events and communications			43%	0.4		\$3,080
Communications manager		Communications lead for digital public dissemination			48%	0.02		\$1,447
Accounting manager		Accounting manager for budgets, contracts, and reporting			56%	0.02		\$2,348
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$40,775</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
TBD pending required bidding process. Anticipated respondents include Inter-Fluve, Barr Engineering, RES, and other river engineering firms.	Service Contract	Technical study of dam removal feasibility				1.84		\$1,036,500
TBD pending required bidding process. Anticipated respondents include the Hamline Center for Global Environmental Education.	Service Contract	Produce video for public project dissemination				0.05		\$20,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$1,056,500</b>



<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Travel for 2 staff to 2 community meetings, 4 policymaker briefings (including to tribal nations), and 2 open houses. Approx. 350 total miles at IRS rates.	Travel for policymaker and community briefings.					\$225
							<b>Sub Total</b>	\$225
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
	Printing	Printing of study report	Printing public-oriented summary of study for community and policymaker meetings.					\$500
							<b>Sub Total</b>	\$500
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
		Event space rental	Event space rental for 2 community meetings, assume needed capacity of 100					\$1,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	\$1,000
							<b>Grand Total</b>	\$1,099,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
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## Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
<b>State</b>				
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Non-State</b>				
In-Kind	Private donations from individual and foundation sources contributed to FMR's general fund	Friends of the Mississippi River in-kind contributions to applicant organizational costs, leadership participation, and overhead	Secured	\$56,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$56,000</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$56,000</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$1,155,000**

**This amount accurately reflects total project cost?**

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [82a93a4e-70c.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

Satellite map showing location of Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam and Lock and Dam 1 in the Mississippi River. Dams are located in Minneapolis and St. Paul between the two downtowns. Project sediment analysis will continue as far as Lake Pepin (approx. 100 miles total)....

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
Certificate of Good Standing	<a href="#">8c49d6a6-8fd.pdf</a>
Audit Report	<a href="#">c9225b1e-abd.pdf</a>
IRS Form 990	<a href="#">7418b68d-7c0.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
FMR Board of Directors Resolution	<a href="#">de68042a-a28.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

#### *Capital Project Questionnaire, Budget Supplements, Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other*

Title	File
Great River Passage Conservancy Letter of Support	<a href="#">e6f765b4-282.pdf</a>
St. Anthony Falls Lab Letter of Support	<a href="#">1f9ba23f-d43.pdf</a>
Hamline CGEE Letter of Support	<a href="#">f02b983c-def.pdf</a>
American Rivers Letter of Support	<a href="#">ae1bd1c2-b23.pdf</a>
NPCA Letter of Support	<a href="#">3031df62-adb.pdf</a>

## Administrative Use

**Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?**

No

**Do you understand that travel expenses are only approved if they follow the "Commissioner's Plan" promulgated by the Commissioner of Management of Budget or, for University of Minnesota projects, the University of Minnesota plan?**

Yes, I understand the Commissioner's Plan applies.

**Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, sale of products and assets, or revenue generation?**

No

**Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?**

N/A

**Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?**

N/A

**Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?**

No

**Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?**

No

**Does your project include the pre-design, design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other fixed capital asset costing \$10,000 or more or large-scale stream or wetland restoration?**

No

**Do you propose using an appropriation from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund to conduct a project that provides children's services (as defined in Minnesota Statutes section 299C.61 Subd.7 as "the provision of care, treatment, education, training, instruction, or recreation to children")?**

No

**Provide the name(s) and organization(s) of additional individuals assisting in the completion of this proposal:**

Whitney Clark, Friends of the Mississippi River

Marty Melchior, Inter-Fluve (cost estimates)

**Do you understand that a named service contract does not constitute a funder-designated subrecipient or approval of a sole-source contract? In other words, a service contract entity is only approved if it has been selected according to the contracting rules identified in state law and policy for organizations that receive ENRTF funds through direct appropriations, or in the DNR's reimbursement manual for non-state organizations. These rules may include competitive bidding and prevailing wage requirements**

Yes, I understand

