



Frequently Asked Questions - 2023

What is *The Falls Initiative*?

The Falls Initiative is an effort to create a place of healing at Owámniyomni, St. Anthony Falls, on property adjacent to the Upper Lock. The lock closed to commercial navigation in 2015 and is owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

What is Friends of the Falls?

Friends of the Falls is a non-profit organization that has been working since 2016 to protect the property from further privatization, find ways to transfer the land to local control, and to develop a Native-centered community engagement process.

Friends of the Falls is the City and Park Board's agent in negotiations with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It is also a cost sharing partner.

What is the project timeline?

Coalition building and community engagement began years ago, in 2016. In 2023, we anticipate the property will be conveyed, or transferred, from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to the City of Minneapolis or its designee. Small scale changes may occur on-site in the next 2-3 years (2024-2025), but significant site transformation will not take place for at least five years (2028+).

Who will own it?

Friends of the Falls is advocating for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to maintain ownership and operations of the Upper Lock itself.

Property adjacent to the lock - about 3 acres - will be conveyed, or transferred, from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to the City of Minneapolis or its designee. If the City takes ownership, it would serve as a short-term owner.

Friends of the Falls, the City, and Park Board - in partnership with the four Dakota Tribal Nations in Mní Sóta - are assessing various structures for long-term ownership of the site. Tribal ownership is one possible scenario.



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What are the four Dakota Tribal Nations in Mní Sóta?

The four federally recognized Dakota communities in the area we call Minnesota are the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community located south of the Twin Cities near Prior Lake; Prairie Island Indian Community located near Red Wing; Lower Sioux Indian Community located near Redwood Falls; and Upper Sioux Community, whose lands are near the city of Granite Falls.

What are Tribal Nations?

There are 574 federally recognized Tribal Nations in the United States. Tribal Nations have inherent sovereignty, meaning that the Nations' authority to govern predates the formation of the United States and has existed since the Nations themselves came into being. Tribal Nations have the power and/or right to determine their form of government; define citizenship; make and enforce laws through their own police force and courts; collect taxes; regulate the domestic affairs of their citizens; and regulate property use, among many other authorities. Tribal sovereignty is recognized in the U.S. Constitution and other federal laws, all of which reaffirm Indian Nations' rights to govern themselves and manage their own lands and resources.

Sources: National Congress American Indians, Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, Indian Land Tenure Foundation, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs

Who will pay for the project?

It is expected that both public and private funds will be required to implement the project. To date, Friends of the Falls has committed \$7.7 million and the State of Minnesota has committed \$2.8 million via a Legislative-Citizen Commission for Minnesota Resources grant.

We are currently assembling cost estimates for site preparation, construction, and ongoing operations. Friends of the Falls anticipates launching a capital campaign to support the project in 2023.



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Is the Friends of the Falls (and its partners the City of Minneapolis and Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board) coordinating with Great River Passage Conservancy?

Great River Passage Conservancy is a partner of the City of St. Paul and leads advocacy and fundraising efforts for three projects along the Mississippi River - Mississippi River Learning Center, River Balcony, and East Side River District.

Friends of the Falls is not affiliated with Great River Passage Conservancy, though we share an interest in creating meaningful places on the riverfront in both of the Twin Cities.

How is *The Falls Initiative* related to Water Works Park? How will these places work together?

The property that will be conveyed to the City of Minneapolis or its designee for *The Falls Initiative* abuts land owned by the Park Board. The portion of land south of Portland Avenue is Mill Ruins Park, and the portion north of Portland Avenue will be transformed as part of Water Works Phase 2.

Friends of the Falls is actively coordinating with the City of Minneapolis and Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board regarding the design and programming of these spaces. The intention is for the properties to be compatible and experienced seamlessly as one place by the public.

Will the National Park Service continue to operate and host programming at the Upper Lock?

The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) is a 72-mile protected corridor along the Mississippi River that includes the portion of river that runs through Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Since the Upper Lock closed to commercial navigation, the National Park Service (NPS) and its non-profit partner Mississippi Park Connection (MPC) have activated the site by hosting visitor services, tours, and arts and education programs.

These National Park Service and Mississippi Park Connection programs are made possible by a use agreement between NPS and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is expected to continue owning the lock structure. We anticipate NPS and MPC to be long-term partners at the lock, though the scale of future operations is



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not yet known and will be determined based on Dakota tribal leaders' final vision for this place.

Why has Friends of the Falls put Native voices in the lead?

Centering *The Falls Initiative* on Native voices recognizes that the Upper Lock, and the entire City of Minneapolis, are located on Dakota homeland. Dakota people came to Owámniyomni (St. Anthony Falls) for ceremony and to Wíta Wanáǵi (Spirit Island) to give birth. This place of power had spiritual significance long before it was forcefully claimed by settlers. The Falls and Spirit Island were destroyed as Ĥaǵa Wakpá, or Wakpá Tháŋka (Mississippi River), was harnessed and industrialized.

What is the Native Partnership Council?

Friends of the Falls, NACDI, and CDA Enterprises convened the Native Partnership Council as a channel to share stories about Owámniyomni, consider this place from an Indigenous perspective, and set guiding principles for the project. All four Mní Sóta Dakota Tribal Nations were invited to participate. Additional Council members were identified from the following categories: History Keepers, Spiritual Leadership, Artists, Environmental, Youth/Young Adult, and Exiled Dakota Descendants.

At the conclusion of the first season, the Native Partnership Council released this vision statement:

The vision of the Native Partnership Council is to create a place of healing at Owámniyomni that restores connections to Ĥaǵa Wakpá, Dakota culture, and language; teaches us to honor and care for all our relatives, including the land and water; and addresses the parallel trauma of colonization by recognizing the transformative power of this place.

Wókizi. Ihdúwitayapi. Waúŋspekhiye. Wówaš'ake. Wówakhaŋ.
Heal. Connect. Teach. Strength. Power.

What is the 'first season' of work?

The 'first season' refers to our work in 2021 and 2022 engaging the Native Partnership Council, hosting Community Conversations, and weaving together community voices. The first season resulted in the Native Partnership Council's vision statement, four guiding principles, and early design ideas.



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What guiding principles are the early design ideas based on?

Guiding principles were established during the first season of work that acknowledge Indigenous worldviews and values. The four principles are: A Place to Restore a Story Disrupted, A Place of Power, A Place of Connection / Mitákuye Owas'îŋ (All Our Relations), The River is a Spirit / Mní Wičóŋi (Water is Life).

What are the early design ideas?

The early ideas are to create a place of healing, restoration, and learning. The site could include gathering places for ceremony and healing, recognition of the former site of Spirit Island, interpretive signage, art, and places to connect physically with the river.

Why not remove the Upper Lock and Dam?

Removal of the lock and dam was considered as part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' draft disposition study. Removal was not considered financially viable or beneficial to the river's ecosystem.

If the dam were removed without extensive stabilization, the falls would disintegrate into rapids. The river would erode far upstream, potentially as far as 30 miles. The upper pool would effectively be eliminated, which would significantly reduce the water level at the location of the Minneapolis water intake.

If the lock was removed, its function as part of the damming surface would be lost. Significant investment would be required to extend the spillway and block the opening caused by removing the lock. Additionally, removal would increase the possibility of upriver intakes for Minneapolis water supply running dry in low water.

Furthermore, members of *The Falls Initiative* Native Partnership Council were in favor of retaining and repurposing the lock rather than removing it. Removing the lock would conceal its role in the desecration of the Falls and Spirit Island. The river cannot be truly restored to what it once was.



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What is the status of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Disposition Study for the Upper Lock?

In January 2021, a draft disposition study for Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam was published. The draft disposition study report recommends disposing of all Upper Lock property that is not conveyed to the City of Minneapolis for *The Falls Initiative*. The Corps has said it plans to issue the final disposition study report further along in the conveyance process.

For more information: <https://www.mvp.usace.army.mil/USAF/>

What impact does this have on plans for the Lower Lock and Lock #1?

The Army Corps is currently conducting disposition studies for the Lower Lock and Lock #1 in an effort to determine whether there is a federal interest in continuing to own and operate the lock and dams.

Lock and dam removal may be feasible at the Lower Lock and Lock #1, which would drop water levels in the river gorge and expose the riverbed's boulders, islands, and rapids.

Disposition and/or removal of the Lower Lock and Lock #1 are NOT dependent on the disposition of the Upper Lock. However, the reduced water level would affect the shoreline, water access, and programming opportunities at this site.

Friends of the Falls has not taken a position in support or opposition of removing Lower Lock or Lock #1.

For more information: <https://www.mvp.usace.army.mil/LSAF/>



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Cultural Resources / Library:

National Congress of American Indians, “Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction”

<https://www.ncai.org/about-tribes>

Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC), “Tribal Nations in Minnesota”

<https://mn.gov/indian-affairs/tribal-nations-in-minnesota/>

Indian Land Tenure Foundation, “Tribal Land Tenure Issues”

<https://iltf.org/land-issues/issues/>

MIAC, Smithsonian Nat’l Museum of the American Indian, Minnesota Humanities Center, “Why Treaties Matter: Self-Government in the Dakota and Ojibwe Nations”

<http://treatiesmatter.org/exhibit/welcome/>

U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Federally Recognized Tribes

<https://www.bia.gov/service/tribal-leaders-directory/federally-recognized-tribes>