

**MISSOURI-MADISON RIVER FUND RECREATION PROJECT  
FY2026 GRANT APPLICATION FORM**

Project Name: King Bridge Redecking

Reservoir or River Segment: Below Black Eagle Dam County(ies) Cascade

Site Name (or project location): Rivers Edge Trail

Applicant Name: Arthur Smovir

Position and Agency: Trails Coordinator – City of Great Falls Park and Rec.

Telephone: (406)-791-8984

Email: asmovir@greatfallsmt.net

All projects are required to have a Project Sponsor to be considered for funding by the River Fund. Project sponsors serve as active members of Missouri-Madison Regional Working Groups and will consult with applicants on projects. Sponsorship denotes that the proposed project meets the basic criteria for consideration (below). A project that does not meet the basic criteria or does not have a project sponsor will not be scored by the Regional Working Group.

Project Sponsor Name: Kevin Vining

Position and Agency: Parks Manager – City of Great Falls Park and Rec.

Telephone: (406)-791-8982

Email: kvining@greatfallsmt.net

The Basic Project Criteria below must be met for a project to be considered for funding:

1. The project is consistent with the FERC Project 2188 License.
2. The project occurs in the Missouri-Madison Project Area.
3. The project must be consistent with or support management plans in the Project Area
4. The project provides a public recreation benefit.

Refer to the Grant Application Instructions for further clarification on these criteria.

Awarded River Fund grant funds or NorthWestern Energy matching funds may be used for the purchase of materials, supplies, and equipment, or to pay contractor services or other non-agency project components. Project funds may not be used to pay agency or applicant overhead expenses, such as agency staffing costs for design and engineering, project management, or administrative expenses. Funds may be used to pay costs for contracted design and engineering, as appropriate. Accounting of project expenses must be included in status reports provided for the annual River Fund Board meeting.

Requests for review of draft applications must be submitted two weeks prior to the submission deadline.

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Project Cost Breakdown and Financial Request:

Complete the financial section below by providing total project cost (to the nearest dollar), contributions by applicant and cooperators, request for NorthWestern Energy match of agency funds (see detailed instructions), and River Fund Grant request. Document in-kind contributions by public agencies for determination of NorthWestern Energy match request. A description of funding sources and in-kind contributions should be included in the Project Description.

	<u>Nearest Whole Dollar</u>	
Total project cost:	<u>\$119,600</u>	
Applicant Contributions – cash	<u>\$10,000</u>	
Applicant Contributions – value of in-kind:	<u>\$</u>	
Other Contributions – Please list by source:		
Rivers Edge Trail Foundation	<u>\$15,000</u>	
	<u>\$</u>	
	<u>\$</u>	
	<u>\$</u>	Percentage of Total Project Cost:
Total Applicant and Other Contributions:	<u>\$25,000</u>	<u>20.9%</u>
NorthWestern Energy Match Request:	<u>\$10,000</u>	<u>8.36%</u>
River Fund Grant Request:	<u>\$84,600</u>	<u>70.74%</u>
Proposed Project Implementation Period:	<u>Spring 2026</u>	

1. Has this project been previously submitted for funding consideration by the River Fund Board, either as a separate project or part of another project? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes      x   No

*If yes, please identify which years the application was submitted and, if the project was previously funded, list the amount funded by year.*

2. **Project Description:** Provide a description of the proposed project. Be sure to include specific project elements that are planned, and any associated cost detail.

► This proposed project involves the demolition and removal of approximately 162 linear feet of deteriorating decking on Kings Bridge, an old beam and girder rail bridge constructed in 1902, located on the Rivers Edge Trail between the caboose trailhead and Giant Springs Rd. The existing decking will be replaced with new 4x6 #2 treated timbers to improve structural integrity and safety for both pedestrians and maintenance equipment.

The scope of work includes:

- Demolition and disposal of 162 feet of existing decking
- Installation of 4x6 #2 treated timber decking
- Installation and removal of temporary work platforms
- Setup and removal of fall protection systems, including harness anchor points, safety lines, and barricades
- Installation of 2x8 pressure treated rim boards along both sides of bridge decking planks
- Keeping existing railing in place to be attached to new 4x6 pressure treated mounting blocks

Safety measures are necessary during construction and will be removed upon completion of the project.

3. **Project Phasing:** Briefly discuss whether the project could be phased over more than one year or construction season.

► This project is not suitable for phasing over multiple years or construction seasons due to the short length of the decking section (162 feet). Splitting the work would result in unnecessary mobilization costs, prolonged safety hazards, and extended disruption to a highly trafficked section of the trail. Extensive parameters for worker safety are necessary and once set up will have to remain in place until the project is complete. For efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and user and worker safety, the project must be completed in a single construction season.

4. **Cultural Resource Management:** Cultural Resource Management (CRM) requirements for any activity related to this Project must be completed and documented to NorthWestern Energy as a condition of awarded River Fund grant funds or NorthWestern Energy matching funds. Grant and matching funds may not be used for any land-disturbing activity, or the modification, renovation, or removal of any buildings or structures until the CRM consultation process has been completed. Agency applicants must submit a copy of the proposed project to a designated Cultural Resource Specialist for their agency. Private parties or non-governmental organizations are encouraged to submit a copy of their proposed project to a CRM consultant they may have employed. Private parties and non-governmental organizations may also contact the NorthWestern Energy representative for further information or assistance. Applications submitted without this section completed will be held without any action until the information has been submitted.

Summarize how you will complete requirements for Cultural Resource Management.

► Kings Bridge is a historical piece of infrastructure. The decking was replaced in 1992, and documentation of this work is available. In preparation for the current project, I have been in contact with the City of Great Falls Historic Preservation Officer regarding the need to replace the decking again and the appropriate materials to use. A letter from the Historic Preservation Officer is included in the pictures section. We will continue to meet these requirements by documenting any additional consultations with both the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and the City of Great Falls Historic Preservation Officer.

5. **Scoring Criteria.** Respond to the following Scoring Criteria. Start answers after ►.

5.1 Does the project occur at a 2188 license site?

► Yes

5.2 Project is for operation and maintenance of an existing recreation site. Describe if the project will meet operation and maintenance needs. Higher points awarded to projects that are higher priority and are not a recurring expense. Lower points awarded to projects that are low priority and/or have been previously funded. It is unlikely that the timeframe of River Fund would address emergency operation and maintenance needs but could support non-emergency operation and maintenance needs.

► The proposed replacement of the decking on Kings Bridge is a high-priority project for the Rivers Edge Trail system, addressing critical safety, accessibility, and maintenance concerns. Kings Bridge sits on one of the most heavily used segments of the trail, serving both recreational users and daily commuters. Its condition directly impacts the usability of this vital trail corridor.

- **Safety Concerns:** Several of the existing bridge timbers are rotting, with temporary patches made using road mix and two boards replaced earlier this summer. These short-term fixes are not sustainable. Without full replacement, the risk to pedestrian safety will persist, and the need for emergency repairs will continue, increasing maintenance costs and liability concerns.
- **Trail Accessibility:** If Kings Bridge becomes unsafe or impassable, it would effectively shut down this high-traffic section of the trail. This would disrupt access for a number of users and create a significant gap in the trail network.
- **Maintenance Hazards:** The bridge is also used by maintenance crews operating vehicles and equipment essential for trail upkeep. The deteriorating decking has reduced the bridge's load-bearing capacity, creating hazards for both staff and the public. Continued degradation would further limit access for maintenance vehicles.
- **Operational Benefits:** This project directly addresses ongoing operations and maintenance needs. It replaces decking that currently demands frequent repairs and emergency interventions. Once complete, the new decking is expected to require minimal maintenance for many years, significantly reducing long-term upkeep costs and extending the functional life of the bridge.
- **Strategic Alignment:** While not an emergency repair, this is a proactive, long-term solution that aligns with the River Fund's mission to support non-emergency operational and maintenance needs. The project has not received previous funding and represents a one-time investment with long-term community and infrastructure benefits.

Replacing the decking on Kings Bridge will ensure continued safe access to a critical section of the Rivers Edge Trail, eliminate a recurring maintenance burden, reduce long-term costs, and preserve essential connectivity for trail users and maintenance operations alike.

*5.3 Project involves collaboration with other agencies or organizations.* Identify project partners other than NorthWestern Energy or River Fund, if any, and describe their participation. Document all funding sources and all in-kind support and services to a project, because all are sources of partnerships and in-kind contributions from public agencies qualify for calculation of NorthWestern Energy matching funds. If there are no project partners, explain why.

► Development, maintenance, and operation of the River's Edge Trail is carried out through a strong, long-term partnership between many stakeholders, including, among others, several City Departments, MDT, Montana State Parks, the River's Edge Trail Foundation, local advocacy groups, many volunteers, and North Western Energy. Partners in this project include:

- The Rivers Edge Trail Foundation is providing public support and \$15,000 which demonstrates a high level of support for this project. These funds are raised from private local donations by Great falls businesses and community members who love the trail.
- City of Great falls Park and Rec. will provide \$10,000 from Parks District funds.
- Local groups such as Get Fit Great Falls provide public support

*5.4 Project provides a benefit to public recreation in the Project Area and addresses specific issues and goals of the Missouri-Madison Comprehensive Recreation Plan (CRP).* Identify how the project provides a benefit to public recreation and describe how the project specifically addresses issues and goals in Chapter 2-1 of the CRP.

► This project provides a significant benefit to public recreation by ensuring continued safe access to a highly used segment of the Rivers Edge Trail, one of the most popular recreational assets in the region. The Kings Bridge serves thousands of walkers, runners, cyclists, and other trail users annually. Without this decking replacement, the bridge could become unsafe or impassable, effectively closing off over three miles of continuous trail, severing the connection of the trail to Giant Springs State park, and negatively impacting public access and enjoyment.

The project aligns directly with several key goals and issues outlined in Chapter 2-1 of the Missouri-Madison Comprehensive Recreation Plan (CRP), including:

- Goal: Maintain and Improve Existing Recreation Facilities  
This project rehabilitates existing infrastructure to ensure long-term usability and safety, rather than allowing it to degrade to the point of failure or emergency closure.
- Goal: Provide Safe and Accessible Recreation Opportunities  
The replacement of decayed decking removes tripping hazards for pedestrians and prevents structural risk for maintenance vehicles, directly improving user safety.
- Goal: Enhance Connectivity and Trail Systems  
By preserving one of the most critical links in the Rivers Edge Trail, this project supports the CRP's vision of an interconnected, reliable, and accessible regional trail system.

Additionally, this work supports equitable outdoor access by keeping a free, public recreation resource open to users of all ages and abilities.

5.5 *Project responds to a clearly identified need.* Describe and document the need for this project and how the project would address that need. Cite specific sources, as possible, to establish need and support the project. Discuss consequences if the funding request is unsuccessful. For a new construction or acquisition project, identify how post-project, long-term costs (such as site maintenance and management) will be provided.



- Project Need and Response

The proposed decking replacement on Kings Bridge addresses a clearly identified and urgent need for infrastructure repair on one of the most heavily traveled segments of the Rivers Edge Trail system. Kings Bridge currently contains multiple rotting and failing timbers. While temporary measures—such as the replacement of two boards earlier this summer and road-mix patching—have been implemented, these are unsustainable stopgap solutions that highlight the structure’s ongoing deterioration rather than resolving it. Importantly, there is no feasible alternative for trail alignment in this area due to the steep gully the bridge spans, making it impossible to reroute the trail elsewhere. As a designated 2188 site, Kings Bridge must remain open to the public and maintained in good condition. Replacing the decking is essential to ensure continued safe access and long-term usability of this critical trail infrastructure.

- Documentation of Need

**Maintenance Records:** Internal records from Parks and Recreation document repeated repair interventions on Kings Bridge over the past several years, demonstrating an escalating pattern of structural decline.

**Community Feedback:** Trail users have expressed concerns about uneven surfaces and tripping hazards, citing safety risks for pedestrians, cyclists, and especially children and seniors who frequent this section of the trail. Staff reports confirm ongoing observations of surface and structural damage that present risk both to the public and to maintenance equipment.

**Usage Data:** City records confirm that this segment of the Rivers Edge Trail system—particularly the area surrounding King’s Bridge—is among the most frequently traveled portions of the entire network. Closure of King’s Bridge would sever public access to critical downstream amenities including Giant Springs, the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, and several other key recreational and educational sites. Such a disruption would significantly impact thousands of residents and visitors who rely on this route for both daily recreation and tourism-related activities. Additional data supporting this high usage is provided in Appendix A of the Missouri-Madison Recreation Visitor Survey, which highlights this section of the trail as the second-highest use area across the trail system. Furthermore, closure of this section would likely displace users to other, less equipped or already congested areas of the trail, increasing the potential for user conflicts, trail degradation, and diminished recreational experiences elsewhere on the system.

- Addressing the Need

This project proposes a full replacement of 162 linear feet of failing bridge decking. The new decking will utilize durable 4x6 #2 treated timbers engineered for long-term performance in high-use and outdoor conditions. Construction will be undertaken with robust safety protocols—including temporary platforms, harness anchors, safety lines, and barricades—to protect contracted workers and maintain public safety during the project period. Upon completion, the bridge will once again provide a safe, long-lasting, and reliable link within the trail system.

- Consequences of Not Funding the Project

Failure to secure funding will force the City to continue a cycle of piecemeal repairs that are both ineffective and increasingly costly over time. More critically, the degradation of the decking may eventually necessitate the closure of Kings Bridge for safety reasons. Closure would disrupt connectivity along the Rivers Edge Trail, cutting off access to major points of cultural, recreational, and natural interest, and jeopardizing both resident recreation and tourism. Emergency repairs, if required down the line, would be significantly more expensive than proactive replacement at this stage.

- Long-Term Maintenance and Management

Post-construction, the City will provide ongoing maintenance of the bridge, including inspections, snow removal in winter, and periodic timber sealing to protect against rot and weather damage. These services will be absorbed within existing Parks and Recreation staff and operational budgets, ensuring sustainable long-term oversight and stewardship of the investment.

*5.6 Project design options have been considered, estimated, and a preferred design selected.* Well-designed projects reduce occurrences of budgetary overages, design changes, and additional complications. Discuss the current design phase for this project, demonstrate that the project has been well vetted, and include cost estimates.

► The project is currently in the pre-construction planning phase, with design considerations and material choices reviewed in detail. Park and Rec. staff and a local professional have assessed the structural requirements of the bridge, especially given its dual use by both pedestrians and maintenance equipment.

Several options for decking replacement were evaluated:

- Trex (Composite) Decking was considered but dismissed due to its insufficient load-bearing capacity for the maintenance equipment that regularly crosses the bridge. Using Trex would require costly additional structural reinforcement, making it impractical and cost prohibitive.
- Precut, Non-Treated Timbers were also reviewed. While less expensive initially, they lack the durability and weather resistance of treated wood, resulting in a shorter service life and increased long-term maintenance costs.
- 4x6 #2 Treated Timbers were selected as the most suitable material due to their load capacity, longevity, and resistance to environmental wear. These timbers provide the structural strength required while minimizing future maintenance needs.

A contractor has suggested a detailed cost estimate based on the selected materials and full scope of

work the estimate reads as follows:

Replace bridge decking as shown in detail and as follows:

- Replace bridge decking for entire length of bridge  
Width to remain the same (steel beam section =12' wide wood beam section =10' wide)
- Remove & dispose of existing bridge plank decking and edge rim beams  
Main supports to remain in place  
Railing to remain in place and be reattached to new bridge rail mount timber
- Install new pressure treated 4x6 timber bridge deck planks  
Deck planks to span across main steel & wood beams  
Install continuous 2x8 pressure treated rim board along both sides of bridge decking planks  
4x6 timbers to be screwed together at every plank with 7" timber screws 4 per plank
- Existing railing to remain in place and be attached to new 4x6 pressure treated railing mounting blocks
- Bid does not include city permitting fees or 3<sup>rd</sup> party engineering/design (if needed)

Total amount of work described above 119,600

The use of experienced contractors, known materials, and clearly defined project parameters helps limit the potential for change orders or delays.

By selecting materials and a design approach that balance performance, longevity, and cost, this project is positioned to proceed efficiently and effectively with a low risk of overages or complications.

Note there will need to be a bidding process per city protocol.

*5.7 Project supports or protects other resources and is consistent with or supports resource plans in the Project Area.* Describe how this project will protect resource values (such as public access, water quality, fisheries, wildlife, habitats, and cultural resources) and support other resource and agency plans, including Project 2188 License plans and land use and land management plans in place in the Corridor. Management plans should provide justification for the project.

► This project supports and protects several key resource values in the Missouri-Madison corridor and aligns with existing land and resource management plans, including the Project 2188 License and associated Comprehensive Recreation and Resource Management Plans.

- **Public Access:** Kings Bridge is a critical link in the Rivers Edge Trail system, which provides safe, non-motorized access to public lands along the Missouri River. Replacing the deteriorating decking ensures continued public access to over three miles of trail that would otherwise be cut off. This supports equitable access to nature, recreation, and health benefits for all users.
- **Water Quality and Habitat Protection:** By maintaining the integrity of the bridge and preventing closure or unsafe use, the project helps limit off-trail detours that could degrade riparian areas, cause erosion, and disturb sensitive habitats near the river corridor.
- **Wildlife and Fisheries:** The Rivers Edge Trail runs through habitats used by a variety of



wildlife species. Keeping users on designated pathways reduces the potential for disturbance to nesting, foraging, and migratory behaviors. Proper maintenance of infrastructure like Kings Bridge helps avoid emergency repairs that can be more disruptive to the environment.

- Cultural and Historic Resources: King's Bridge in Great Falls, Montana, is a historic railroad bridge built by the King Bridge Company, notable for its role in the development of transportation and industry in the region during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The bridge at Black Eagle Falls, which the River's Edge Trail now crosses, is a beam girder railroad bridge constructed by the King Bridge Company. The company became one of the prolific bridge builders in the western United States, including Montana. The construction of Kings Bridge was part of a broader expansion effort supporting the Great Northern Railroad and the city's industrial growth. Bridges such as the one built by King Bridge Company enabled railroad access and facilitated connections between the agricultural regions and the railway, providing an essential infrastructure link for both local development and larger transportation networks throughout Montana. The King Bridge Company's work, including King's Bridge, represents a significant era in Montana's bridge engineering, characterized by steel truss designs that helped modernize transport routes across the state. Today, the bridge remains a part of the River's Edge Trail and is recognized as an important landmark reflecting the history of Great Falls' industrial and transportation heritage.

The project supports Project 2188 License goals, including:

- Maintaining safe and sustainable recreation infrastructure
- Protecting the ecological integrity of the Missouri-Madison Corridor
- Enhancing public access while minimizing environmental impacts

It also aligns with land and resource management plans in place through partnerships with the City, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and local trail organizations by:

- Maintaining infrastructure that supports year-round recreational use
- Minimizing the need for high-impact emergency interventions
- Supporting long-term stewardship of public land and water resources

By proactively maintaining this historic piece of infrastructure, this project prevents larger impacts that would result in the failure of one of Great Falls' most used recreational assets. Making it a practical and resource-conscious investment in the corridor's long-term sustainability.

6. Insert map(s) showing the location of the proposed project, drawings and design work related to the project, and a reasonable number of photos (as available) here.



September 11, 2025

Re: River's Edge Trail King Bridge Repair


To whom it may concern,

I have reviewed the proposed undertaking replacing wooden decking on the River's Edge Trail, and it is my opinion that the proposed treatment will not negatively impact the integrity of the site. Rather, it will preserve the structure and enhance its service to the community.

Decking material requires periodic replacement in the course of normal maintenance. Natural-appearing wooden materials, such as the pressure-treated lumber proposed, are an appropriate material choice for this repair and would constitute a repair-in-kind.

If you have any questions or require further documentation, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

  
Samantha Long  
Historic Preservation Officer

