

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

Project Name: Varney Bridge Fishing Access Site Improvement Project

Reservoir or River Segment: Hebgen-Madison County(ies) Madison

Site Name (or project location): Varney Bridge FAS

Applicant Name: Mark Filonczuk

Position and Agency: Recreation Manager; MT Fish Wildlife and Parks

Telephone: 406-577-7894

Email: mark.filonczuk@mt.gov

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: Linnaea Schroeer

Position and Agency: Region 3 Recreation Manager, MT Fish Wildlife and Parks

Telephone: 406-577-7887

Email: lschroeer@mt.gov

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>\$180,000</u>	
Applicant Contributions – cash	<u>\$45,000</u>	
Applicant Contributions – value of in-kind:	<u>                    </u>	
Other Contributions – Please list by source:		
Madison-Gallatin Chapter Trout Unlimited	<u>\$5,000</u>	
	<u>\$</u>	
	<u>\$</u>	
	<u>\$</u>	Percentage of Total Project Cost:
Total Applicant and Other Contributions:	<u>\$50,000</u>	<u>28%</u>
NorthWestern Energy Match Request:	<u>\$11,250</u>	<u>6%</u>
River Fund Grant Request:	<u>\$118,750</u>	<u>66%</u>
Proposed Project Implementation Period:	<u>2026-2027</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    ☒ 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.

The Varney Bridge Fishing Access Site (FAS) is located 8 miles south of Ennis, MT and is heavily used by the public for river access and camping. The most recent data from 2024 on commercial use of the site indicates there were a total of 3,645 trips (1345 put in, and 2300 took out) that used Varney FAS, which is 11.4 % of the total amount of commercial trips on the Madison River.

The site is just under 10 acres in size and includes one latrine, a concrete boat ramp with parking area, and 6 campsites. The original design of the site located 3 of the campsites directly in the riparian area of the Madison River. This has caused erosion and a corresponding decrease in streamside vegetation. There is a more suitable location for these sites within the FAS boundaries. The project proposal would move the 3 streamside campsites to the meadow area with the existing other 3, providing a consolidated campground loop and improved access road. The previous location of the campsites would be revegetated to improve aesthetics and stream health while also allowing for the creation of a boat rigging/staging area. The project also proposes to expand the current boat ramp to double in size (from a current 12 ft to 24 ft concrete ramp) which will help alleviate congestion in that area. The parking area will also be better delineated with curb stops and a new turnaround constructed to improve traffic flow while maximizing the parking spaces (for truck/trailer, single vehicle and ADA parking). A new ADA concrete pad for latrine access would be constructed in a better location to also maximize the boat trailer parking area.

**Construction Cost:** Total \$134,800

Mobilization cost: \$13,500

Concrete boat ramp expansion: \$38,000

Reclamation of river campsites/access roads: \$18,000

ADA concrete pad: \$17,500

Fencing/barrier rocks: \$15,000

Road base/gravel/ wheel stops for new campsites/parking area: \$23,800

Site signage upgrades (includes kiosk): \$9,000

**Miscellaneous Project Costs:** Total \$9,575 (includes picnic tables, fire rings, permits, incidentals)

**Contingency Cost @ 20%:** \$28,900

**Total Project Cost** (including inflation @ 4%) = **\$180,000**

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

► In order to maximize construction/design cost components we propose this project is not subject to being phased out. This will also allow for efficiency to minimize site closure time and keep the site operable to the public. Alternatively, if phasing is the only way to secure grant funding for the project, increases in the total project cost would be incurred due to multiple mobilizations and the constant rise in material and production costs. The two logical phases include (1) expansion of the boat ramp, and (2) all other remaining project elements. Establishing a boat rigging lane and delineating the parking area requires that the existing shoreline campsites first be moved to their new

location. While this is not an ideal scenario, anticipated costs for expanding the boat ramp would be \$45,600 and the remaining project elements would be \$134,400

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.

- ▶ MT FWP is required to complete an environmental assessment prior to initiating this proposed project. This will include a thorough cultural survey of the site prior to construction per Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) statute requirements.

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

5.1 Does the project occur at a 2188 license site?

- ▶ NO

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.

- ▶ This project is a major upgrade to the existing FAS and is a high priority project for Region 3 FWP. Improvements to the parking area, access roads, and campsites will increase overall site efficiency for access and alleviate congestion at both the parking area and boat ramp. This will be achieved through the construction of a wider boat ramp, designated rigging area, and delineated parking spots. The last site improvements were done here in 2016, and since then there has been an exponential increase in use on the Upper Madison River. Improvements have not been made since then due to the high number of FAS sites in Region 3 and other priority needs. Operation and maintenance will continue to commence within the existing regional budget.

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.

- ▶ The non-profit organization Madison-Gallatin Chapter of Trout Unlimited has approved a \$5,000 grant towards the match for this project.

Region 3 MT FWP continues to partner with the BLM through the cooperative management agreement with the Special Recreation Permit system in place on the Madison River for commercial use. We have had recent joint meetings with recreation staff from both agencies to coordinate concerns on recreational use and how to best minimize impacts to our sites with suggestions for improvements. FWP also partners with the non-profit Madison River Foundation to gather input and coordinate projects (please see attached letter of support for this project). We look forward to continuing to collaborate with partner groups on future projects for the Madison River corridor.

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 will improve public recreation by offering a defined day use parking/rigging area and construction of a larger boat ramp to alleviate congestion in accessing the river. By moving the campsites to a central location away from the riverbank this will also increase site efficiency and allow for riparian restoration in a heavily eroded area. This project will expand outdoor opportunities for people to enjoy the Madison River and the scenic landscape it provides. These improvements directly correlate to the following specific goals in the Missouri-Madison CRP

1. *“To provide safe and well-managed recreation sites and dispersed use areas that provide enjoyable user experiences across a spectrum of opportunities and seasons”*. Project will improve user experience through consolidation of campsites and rehabilitation of riparian areas near the river.

2. *“To identify and implement strategies that reduce and/or mitigate conflicts among recreation use and users”*. This will be achieved by creating a wider boat ramp, defining a designated boat rigging area and better delineating the parking area to limit congestion and helping to balance the use among outfitters/guides and the recreation public

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.

► Day use and overnight camping at Varney Bridge FAS are very popular and as such places high maintenance demand on the current site. The high level of use has also resulted in occasional noncompliance with site rules and conflicts between users. This project would improve site efficiency, make it easier for users to comply with rules (creating a larger boat ramp to accommodate both take in/pull out of boats and a designated boat rigging area) and reduce conflict among users while also restoring impacted riparian habitat.

The most recent data from 2024 on commercial use of the site indicates there were a total of 3,645 trips (1345 put in, and 2300 took out) that used Varney FAS, which is 11.4 % of the total amount of commercial trips on the Madison River. The proposed project would also improve safety through parking designation, boat ramp expansion and campsite centralization. This will improve overall capacity for people to recreate at the site. Site improvement recommendations from the latest FWP Madison River Work Group were considered and incorporated into design elements of the project.

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.

► FWP's Design and Construction Unit has completed an initial concept design and construction estimates for the project. This is based upon an initial site visit with regional recreation and maintenance staff, and in collaboration with agency project, wildlife and fisheries managers. Site improvement options were carefully evaluated by FWP staff, and this design was found to be the most cost-effective solution to improve user experience, minimize resource damage and reduce congestion at Varney Bridge FAS.

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**Contingency Cost @ 20%:** \$28,900

**Total Project Cost** (including inflation @ 4%) = **\$180,000**

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.

► The proposed project will improve overall site access by reducing congestion near the boat launch area and consolidating the campsites into one spot. This will ease foot and vehicle traffic along the existing shoreline to help decrease erosion in the riparian area. The result of this action should help maintain proper habitat for both fish and wildlife in the area. By expanding the current boat ramp access to and from the river will also be improved.

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.



Figure 1: Varney Bridge general location map



Figure 2: Varney Bridge FAS site boundary



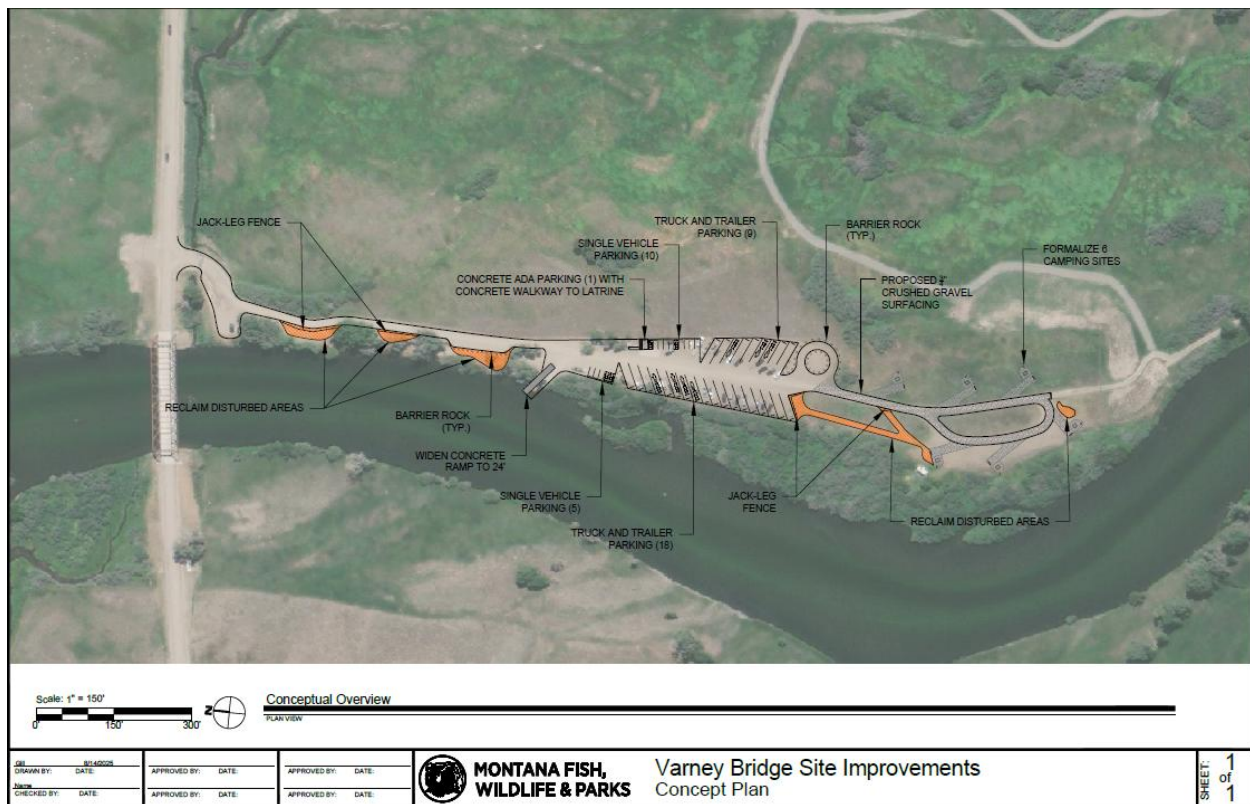


Figure 3: Concept design plan for Varney FAS site improvements

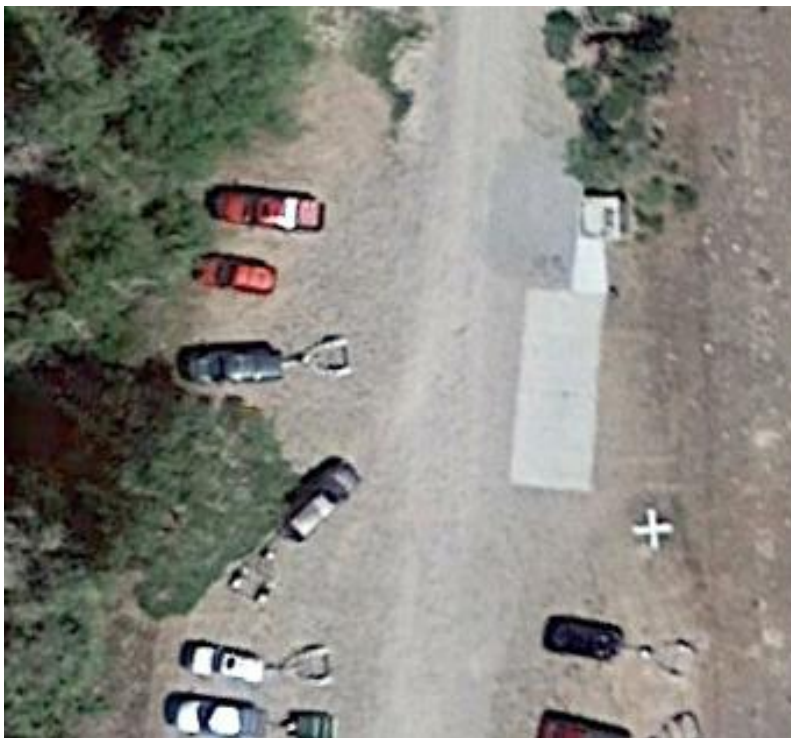


Figure 4: Current campsite located next to boat ramp (proposed boat rigging area)





*Figure 5: Impacts from current campsites along river*



*Figure 6: Current ADA latrine access and parking area (proposed change to reposition concrete pad to accommodate more parking)*



*Figure 7: Current campsite road (needs to be reclaimed and main access road improved)*



MADISON RIVER FOUNDATION  
PO Box 1527  
Emms, MT 59729  
info@madisonriverfoundation.org  
406.682.3148

September 10, 2025

RE: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks / Support for Varney FAS improvements

To Whom It Concerns,

On behalf of the Madison River Foundation, we are writing to express our strong support for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' plans to revitalize the Varney Bridge Fishing Access Site. The Madison River Foundation is dedicated to the long-term health of the Madison River watershed, and this project aligns closely with our mission of conservation and restoration.

We are particularly supportive of the plan to reclaim disturbed areas at the site. Restoring these lands is critical to improving riparian health, reducing erosion, and protecting water quality. These measures will enhance both the ecological integrity of the river site and the experience for anglers, boaters, and visitors alike.

We also commend the addition of ADA accessibility and formalized campsites. These improvements will expand opportunities for all members of the public to enjoy the Madison River, while also reducing user impacts by providing safe, designated areas for recreation.

We commend them for their leadership on this important project. We are pleased to offer our full support and look forward to seeing the positive outcomes for both the river and the community.

Sincerely,

Keith Brauneis, Executive Director  
Mia Cignoni, Conservation Programs Manager  
Madison River Foundation