

**MISSOURI-MADISON RIVER FUND RECREATION PROJECT
FY2027 GRANT APPLICATION FORM**

Project Name: Squatters Landing Take-Out Site Development
Missouri River - Black

Reservoir or River Segment: Eagle County(ies) Cascade

Site Name (or project location): Squatters Landing / former barge landing

Applicant Name: Carley Chapman

Position and Agency: Giant Springs District Recreation Manager, Fish Wildlife and Parks

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Email: Carley.Chapman@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: Alex Sholes

Position and Agency: Regional Recreation Manager, Fish Wildlife and Parks

Telephone: (406) 454-5859

Email: Alex.Sholes@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:	\$98,500	
Applicant Contributions – cash	\$6,000	
Applicant Contributions – value of in-kind:	\$1,500	
Other Contributions – Please list by source:		
City of Great Falls, in-kind	\$1,000	
NorthWestern Energy – cash pay for design, trail conversion, and landscape boulders	\$29,000	
	\$	Percentage of
	\$	Total Project
		Cost:
Total Applicant and Other Contributions:	\$37,500	38%
NorthWestern Energy Match Request:	\$8,500	9%
River Fund Grant Request:	\$52,500	53%
Proposed Project Implementation Period:	2027	

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.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), NorthWestern Energy, and the City of Great Falls are interested in developing the Squatters Access Site, a new designated non-motorized river access and take-out along the Missouri River, immediately upstream of Black Eagle Dam. The site would complement the City's existing non-motorized hand launch at West Bank Park and upstream access at Broadwater Bay, creating a logical point-to-point paddling opportunity through the Great Falls/Black Eagle river corridor. Because the Missouri River downstream of the railroad bridge is closed to motorized use, a designated downstream take-out would provide an important connection and additional exit point for non-motorized users.

The site is located on NorthWestern Energy property that was developed as a temporary barge landing for the recent Black Eagle Dam construction project. This creates an unusual opportunity to convert an already-disturbed, already-developed location into a permanent public recreation asset. NorthWestern Energy has completed preliminary site planning and cultural-resource review, and its site-remediation/capital work is expected to cover removal/modification of the temporary barge landing, regrading, shoreline work, site grading/gravel, eco-blocks, and seeding. Those leveraged improvements are separate from the River Fund request.

This application focuses on the infrastructure needed to open the site as a functional, safe, secure, and sustainable public access point: purchase and installation of a vault toilet; conversion of the vehicle crossing over a short segment of the River's Edge Trail to concrete; trail-crossing safety improvements and signage; an entrance gate that can be closed during high-water or other unsafe conditions; removable bollards at the river access to prevent unauthorized vehicle travel; an informational/regulatory kiosk and site signage; fencing located in previously disturbed ground to discourage entry into the culturally sensitive area; and associated access/parking delineation and site-security features. Landscape boulders may also be used where needed for traffic control, subject to final design and available site-remediation materials.

The current planning-level budget is \$98,500, which included completed site design; mobilization; vault toilet purchase and installation; fencing; removable bollards at the ramp; an entrance gate; a kiosk and signage; concrete conversion of the trail crossing; trail safety measures and signage; and landscape boulders. NorthWestern Energy is contributing \$29,000 through funding for the completed site design, concrete trail conversion, and landscape boulders. FWP is contributing \$6,000 in cash from Cooperative Management Agreement funds plus approximately \$1,500 in-kind. The City of Great Falls is anticipated to provide approximately \$1,000 of in-kind support for installation of trail safety measures and signage. After these contributions, the application requests \$8,500 from the NorthWestern Energy matching funds program and \$52,500 from the River Fund.

Project Item	Cost
Completed Site Design	\$5,000
Mobilization	\$8,500
Vault Toilet & Installation	\$35,000
Fencing	\$11,000
Removable Bollards at Ramp	\$1,500
Entrance Gate	\$6,000
Kiosk & Signage	\$6,000
Trail Conversion to Concrete	\$20,000
Trail Safety Signage	\$1,500
Landscape Boulders	\$4,000
Total Project Cost	\$98,500

The site is intentionally designed as a limited-development river access rather than a traditional day-use park. A kayak dock, trash service/receptacles, picnic tables, and other optional amenities are not included in the current request. Those features can be considered later based on observed use and demonstrated need. This approach concentrates the current investment on the improvements required to make the site functional and secure while minimizing long-term maintenance and protecting the surrounding natural and cultural resources.

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

The preferred approach is to fund the functional core of Squatters Landing in this grant cycle, with construction occurring over one or more construction seasons as procurement, permitting, site-remediation work, and contractor schedules allow. This is a single project with a multi-year implementation option rather than a plan to defer essential safety or site-security elements.

The vault toilet should be advanced early because these units typically have a 9–12 month procurement lead time. During that period, NorthWestern Energy can continue permitting, coordination for shoreline/site-remediation work, and some development (the gate, bollards and fencing) while partners finalize the trail crossing, safety signage, , kiosk,, and other site details. NorthWestern Energy’s barge-landing remediation/capital work is expected to complete the grading, shoreline work, eco-blocks, gravel, and seeding needed to transition the construction site toward public use.

If available River Fund dollars require a reduction in the award, the project can still be phased without changing the long-term objective. Priority would remain on improvements necessary for a functional and secure public access site: barge-landing removal/regrading through the remediation project, vault toilet, concrete trail crossing and safety measures, entrance gate, removable bollards, kiosk/signage, and cultural-resource protection. Optional amenities such as a kayak dock, trash receptacles, and picnic tables are intentionally deferred and may be considered later after actual use patterns are known.

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.

NorthWestern Energy has completed cultural-resource assessment work associated with the property and has identified a culturally sensitive area where ground disturbance and public access must be limited. The site design and proposed improvements will avoid that area and concentrate new infrastructure in previously disturbed portions of the former barge-landing site.

The current project scope includes fencing to discourage public entry into the protected area. Coordination with NorthWestern Energy's cultural-resource staff indicates that fencing located close to the parking area and within already-disturbed ground is an appropriate protection measure

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

5.1 Does the project occur at a 2188 license site?

No. The proposed Squatters Landing Access Site is a new recreation site within the Missouri-Madison Project Area and is not an existing Project 2188 License recreation site.

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.

No. This project is not operation or maintenance of an existing recreation site; it establishes a new public access point at an already-developed former construction site. The design intentionally limits infrastructure to what is necessary for safe, functional use and long-term site protection. NorthWestern Energy and will work on updating their cooperative management agreement which would allow FWP to provide routine management and maintenance following development, with NorthWestern Energy funding contributing to FWP recreation management. Deferring optional amenities such as a dock, trash service, and picnic tables also reduces recurring maintenance obligations until actual use demonstrates a need.

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.

NorthWestern Energy has already contributed substantially to development of the project through preliminary site planning, cultural-resource review, and coordination. NorthWestern Energy will also assist with applicable permitting for future site development through resources separate from the River Fund grant request.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is assisting with the coordination of the recreation-development project and would assume an ongoing role in management and maintenance of the completed site.

The City of Great Falls has participated in site-development discussions and is an important project partner because the proposed Squatters take-out would directly complement the City's existing non-motorized river access at West Bank Park. Together, the two access points would establish a logical point-to-point paddling opportunity, allowing recreationists to launch at West Bank and exit downstream at Squatters. This project would require a small section of the River's Edge Trail to be altered to allow vehicle crossing of the trail for access to the parking area.

The River's Edge Trail Foundation is also a consulting partner- because of the site's relationship with the River's Edge Trail and the need to appropriately integrate river access with the existing trail corridor.

The City of Great Falls Parks and Recreation has also offered in kind support for signage and kiosk installation.

This project is a cooperative development among NorthWestern Energy, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and the City of Great Falls, with coordination from the River's Edge Trail Foundation. NorthWestern Energy is providing the project site, has completed preliminary planning and cultural-resource work, is contributing \$29,000 directly for contracted site design, concrete conversion of the trail crossing, and landscape boulders, and is expected to use separate site-remediation/capital funds for barge-landing removal/modification, grading, shoreline work, gravel/eco-block work, and seeding. NorthWestern Energy will also assist with applicable permitting.

FWP is assisting with coordination of the recreation-development project, contributing \$6,000 cash from Cooperative Management Agreement funds toward the vault toilet and approximately \$1,500 in-kind support, and is anticipated to assume routine management and maintenance after development. The City of Great Falls is an important partner because the project connects directly to the City's West Bank hand launch and requires a safe vehicle crossing of the River's Edge Trail; approximately \$1,000 of City in-kind support is anticipated for installation of trail safety/warning signage. FWP is also coordinating with the River's Edge Trail Foundation to ensure the access integrates appropriately with the trail corridor.

Together, these contributions demonstrate that the project is not dependent on River Fund dollars alone; the requested grant leverages substantial existing site investment, direct partner funding, agency match, and remediation work.

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.

The Squatters Access Site would provide a significant public recreation benefit by establishing a designated non-motorized river access and downstream take-out within the Great Falls/Black Eagle area.

The City of Great Falls installed the West Bank Park hand launch in 2011. That facility provides an important upstream access point for kayaks, canoes, paddleboards, and other non-motorized watercraft in a section of the Missouri River that is closed to motorized use. However, the absence of a clearly established downstream take-out limits opportunities for point-to-point river trips. Development of Squatters would build upon the existing West Bank investment by creating a logical destination: recreationists could launch at West Bank, travel downstream through the river corridor, and exit at a designated public access.

The project directly addresses several issues and goals identified in Chapter 2-1 of the **Missouri-Madison Comprehensive Recreation Plan (CRP)**:

Condition and Capacity of Recreation Sites and Use Areas: The project expands the capacity of the existing recreation system by establishing a managed access point at a location where much of the preliminary development and planning has already occurred. Rather than relying upon informal river access, users would be directed toward a site specifically designed and managed for public recreation.

Public Safety: A designated downstream take-out would provide an additional safe exit from the river. Wind, changing weather or river conditions, fatigue, equipment problems, or other circumstances may make returning upstream to West Bank difficult or impractical. A known downstream take-out gives non-motorized users an additional option for safely ending their trip.

Responsible Outdoor Recreation: Designated parking, sanitation, signage, and river access would concentrate use at an appropriate location and provide opportunities to communicate regulations, safety information, and responsible recreation practices. A vault toilet would also provide appropriate sanitation infrastructure for users of the site and adjacent recreation corridor.

Protection of Natural and Cultural Resources: Concentrating recreation at a planned site can reduce informal access and associated impacts elsewhere along the river. Preliminary cultural-resource review has already identified areas requiring protection, and development will be designed around those constraints.

Collaboration: Development of the site involves coordination among NorthWestern Energy, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, the City of Great Falls, and local recreation partners, both in concept and for funding. This collaborative approach allows existing recreation investments and agency resources to work together to provide a greater public benefit.

The result would not simply be another isolated recreation site. Squatters would increase the utility of the existing West Bank launch by helping establish a connected non-motorized river recreation route through Great Falls and Black Eagle.

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.

The project responds to a clearly identified need for additional managed non-motorized river access within the Great Falls/Black Eagle area.

The Missouri River is one of the area's most significant natural and recreation resources, yet this portion of the river remains relatively underutilized for non-motorized public recreation. While West Bank Park provides a developed hand-launch opportunity, there is currently no corresponding designated downstream take-out in the Black Eagle area. This limits the functionality of the existing access and the types of point-to-point trips recreationists can comfortably undertake.

The Squatters Access Site addresses this gap by establishing a clearly identifiable, managed downstream destination. Development would expand the geographic range available to paddlers, provide an additional exit point when conditions change, and better connect existing recreation infrastructure along the Missouri River corridor.

The project represents a unique opportunity because much of the preliminary groundwork necessary for development has already occurred. NorthWestern Energy has completed preliminary site planning and cultural-resource review, an appropriate location has been identified, permitting assistance is available, and the proposed site can complement existing infrastructure at West Bank and along the River's Edge Trail. Consequently, a relatively modest additional infrastructure investment has the potential to create a substantial long-term public recreation benefit.

The project also supports broader statewide recreation priorities identified in Montana's 2026–2030 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, particularly Goal 2, expanding access and inclusivity in outdoor recreation, and Goal 5, supporting economic vitality through outdoor recreation. Development of an accessible point-to-point paddling opportunity within the Great Falls urban area would reduce barriers to utilizing the Missouri River and create an additional sustainable outdoor recreation opportunity for residents and visitors.

If funding is unsuccessful, development of the site would be delayed and an opportunity to capitalize on the planning, permitting, partnerships, and existing recreation infrastructure currently in place could be lost or postponed. The public would continue to lack a designated downstream take-out associated with the West Bank launch.

Following development, FWP is anticipated to provide routine management and maintenance, with NorthWestern Energy funding contributing to FWP recreation management under applicable cooperative management arrangements. The intentionally limited infrastructure would further minimize long-term operating costs.

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 has advanced beyond the conceptual stage and has been refined through coordination among NorthWestern Energy, FWP, the City of Great Falls, and local trail/recreation partners. NorthWestern Energy has completed preliminary site planning and cultural-resource review, and the preferred design takes advantage of the already-disturbed former barge-landing footprint rather than developing an undisturbed site.

The preferred alternative is a limited-development access site focused on the elements required for functionality, safety, and resource protection. The current planning-level scope includes a vault toilet (\$35,000), fencing (\$10,000), removable bollards (\$4,000), entrance gate (\$4,000), kiosk/signage (\$4,000), concrete trail-crossing conversion (\$20,000), trail safety signage (\$1,500), and completed contracted site design (\$5,000), for an estimated \$83,500 project scope. Separate NorthWestern Energy site-remediation/capital work is expected to address barge-landing removal/modification, grading, shoreline work, gravel/eco-blocks, and seeding.

The design has also been intentionally simplified. Parking can be delineated using existing eco-blocks and small “Head In Parking” signs rather than more intensive barriers. Trash service and a kayak dock are deferred until actual use demonstrates a need.

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 project is designed to increase public recreation opportunities while protecting the natural and cultural resources of the Missouri River corridor.

Establishing a designated access location allows recreational use to be concentrated at a site specifically developed and managed for that purpose rather than encouraging informal access at unmanaged locations. Clearly defined parking, river access, sanitation, and visitor-use areas will reduce unnecessary ground disturbance, vegetation and cultural impacts, erosion, human-waste concerns, and conflicts with adjacent lands.

The limited-development concept is intentional. The project is not intended to create a highly developed destination recreation site or substantially intensify use through extensive amenities. Infrastructure would instead be limited to what is necessary to safely accommodate non-motorized river users and manage parking, sanitation, information, and access.

Cultural-resource protection has already been incorporated into preliminary planning. NorthWestern Energy’s cultural-resource review identified an area where ground disturbance must be avoided, and future development will be designed around that restriction. Any remaining cultural-resource requirements will be completed prior to ground-disturbing construction.

The project supports Montana’s 2026–2030 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, particularly its goals of expanding access to outdoor recreation and supporting economic vitality through sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities.

Finally, the project strengthens connections among existing public recreation resources. The proposed take-out would complement the City of Great Falls’ West Bank Park hand launch, allowing investments made by multiple recreation providers to function as a more connected system.

Overall, the Squatters Access Site represents an opportunity to transform an existing developed location into a functional public recreation asset with relatively limited additional infrastructure while protecting the natural and cultural character of the Missouri River corridor.

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.

Attachments should clearly mark the River’s Edge Trail, former barge-landing area/public take-out, proposed parking/toilet/kiosk/gate/bollards/fence, culturally sensitive avoidance area (as appropriate for public disclosure), Broadwater Bay, West Bank Park, Squatters Landing, and the railroad bridge below which motorized use is closed.

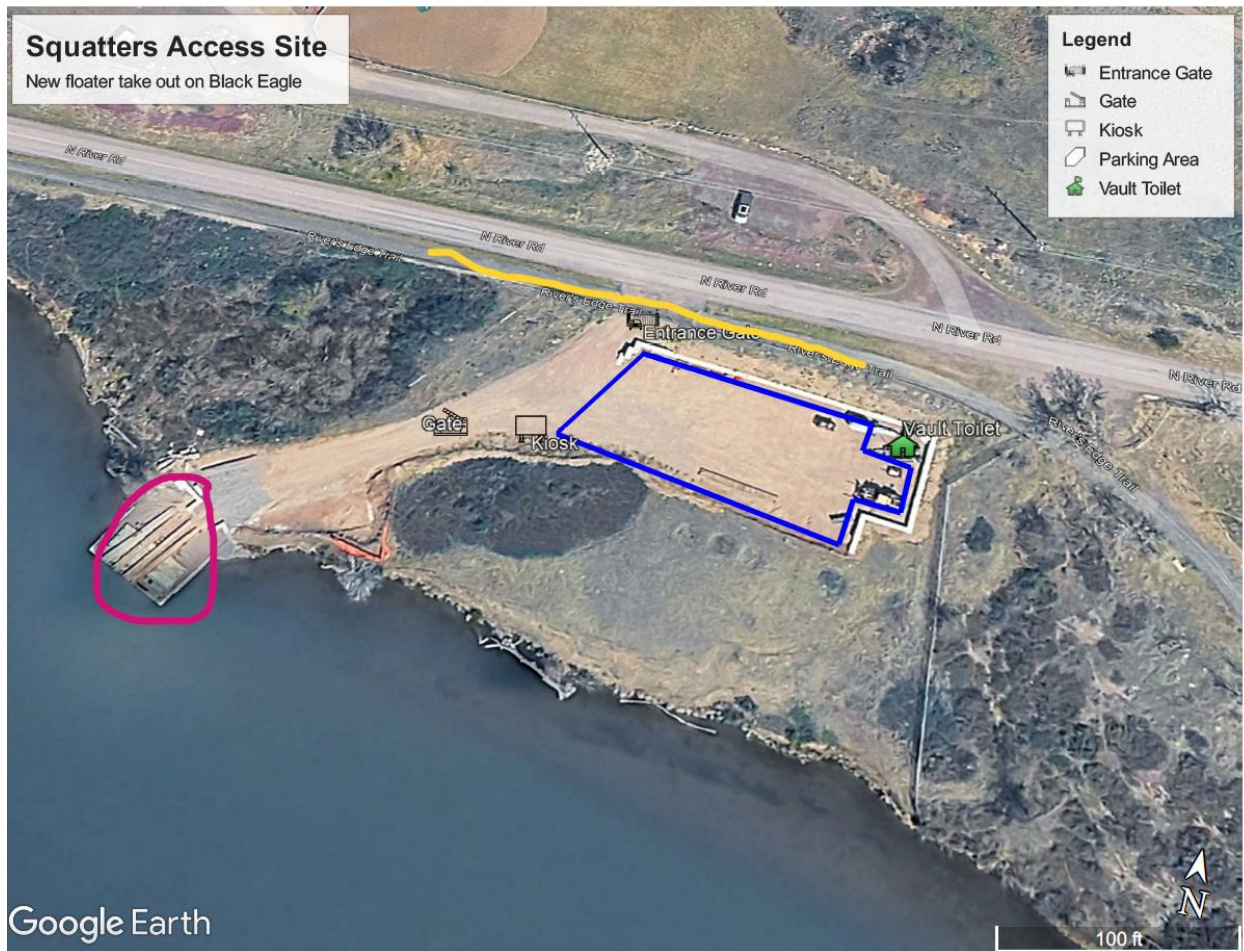


GREAT FALLS, MONTANA





Blue: Broadwater Bay
 Red: West Bank Hand Launch
 Purple: Squatters Access Site



Yellow: Rivers Edge Trail
 Pink: Barge landing Area which would be modified to provide public take out.