



*Working to protect the Mississippi River
and its watershed in the Twin Cities area*

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US Army Corps of Engineers
Attn: N. Bischoff (PM-B)
180 5th Street East, Suite 700
St. Paul, MN 55101

Re: Comments on the Scope of the Environmental Assessment for the Disposition Study for the Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock, the Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam and Lock and Dam #1

Dear Ms. Bischoff:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the scope of the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Disposition Study for the above-referenced locks located in the Twin Cities.

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is a non-profit organization with a mission to engage community members and other stakeholders to protect, restore and enhance the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities Region. We represent thousands of people in the metropolitan area who care deeply about the river, including a growing membership of over 2,700 people and more than 3,200 volunteers and 1,800 advocates engaged each year.

FMR was founded in 1993 to provide a voice for the river and newly formed National Park – The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA). In 2014, we helped to organize and lead the Stop Carp Coalition's advocacy campaign to close the Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock. Today we work closely with MNRRA and a myriad of other agency and organizational stakeholders to help care for and celebrate the Mississippi River's amazing natural and cultural resources.

The significance of the Mississippi River throughout the study area cannot be overstated. St. Anthony Falls is the centerpiece of the Minneapolis riverfront and the reason for the city's founding. It is also the only natural waterfall on the entire length of the Mississippi River, the sounds and sights of which have attracted visitors for generations. Downstream of the falls, the Mississippi Gorge provides a continuous corridor of exceptional bird and wildlife habitat in the heart of the city. Because these unique resources are so naturally and culturally significant, they played an important role in establishing the National Park designation for the river corridor.

During the past 25 years, the Minneapolis downtown riverfront has undergone an enormous transformation. Decades of neglect and environmental damage inspired the community to convert a blighted area to a National Historic District, a National Park and a vibrant downtown neighborhood, with well over two billion dollars invested to date. The river gorge has been a protected natural area since the late 19th century that today draws millions of hikers and bikers each year and a growing number of paddlers and rowers seeking refuge from the sounds and sights of the city.

We urge the Corps to conduct a thorough investigation of all the potential impacts to these important natural, cultural and recreational resources. Any recommendation to dispose of lock and dam infrastructure must be done in a manner that protects the environment, ensures public safety and provides public benefits to the community.

Generally speaking, FMR strongly supports the vision for a new visitor center at the Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock, put forth by Friends of the Lock Dam and the National Parks Conservation Association. We also support a robust evaluation of the environmental, social and economic impacts of dam removal for Lower St. Anthony Falls L&D and Ford/L&D1. Our comments on the scope of the EA are detailed below, followed by our specific recommendations for each component of the lock and dam infrastructure.

In conducting the disposition study and EA, Friends of the Mississippi River requests that the Army Corps of Engineers evaluate and report on the following:

The Corps should include more options/alternatives in the study, including partial disposition.

As described in the June 20, 2018 Scoping Public Notice, the disposition study evaluation will be limited to two possible outcomes: 1) no action, and 2) deauthorize and dispose.

The scope of the study is narrow and puts constraints on a process that should include a broad community discussion looking at multiple options. With so many stakeholders involved, this approach makes it difficult to truly serve the public interest.

A better approach would be to include “partial disposition” as an option. This would facilitate disposition of an individual location or infrastructure component, enabling the Corps to conduct a more nuanced evaluation that is better matched to the variable infrastructure, geography and uses in the project area. A one-size-fits-all approach is not a good match for studying the locks and dams at this location.

Right now there is a lot of community enthusiasm around the idea of repurposing the USAF Lock as a visitor center—partial disposition would allow these consensus ideas to move forward on a shorter timeframe.

Likewise there is an intense amount of energy around the proposal to remove the LSAF L&D and the L&D1, but the topic is very controversial, and the proposed ideas could benefit

from a longer and more inclusive process that is separated from studying disposition of the USAF Lock.

The Study should give high priority to alternatives that will continue to serve the public interest.

As described in our introductory comments, the locks and dams to be studied are at the center of some of Minneapolis and St. Paul's most treasured public spaces. Located within a national park, a state critical area and two regional parks, these places have a history of public investment and serving the public good.

The downtown riverfront, in particular, is surrounded by historic treasures and other civic uses, and is bursting at the seams with people who are filling up new parks and trails faster than they can be built. The Army Corps of Engineers is part of the community that has and will continue to expand opportunities for the public to enjoy this special place on the iconic Mississippi River.

We strongly urge the Corps to carefully examine how each alternative will continue to serve the public interest and give the highest consideration to those alternatives that prioritize public use and enjoyment of the river, the parks and other public amenities. To accomplish this, the Corps will need to expand the scope of the study to include evaluation of more than two options. As we noted above, the current scope is too narrow to adequately address the needs and interests of the public for a site of this significance.

In addition to the inherent value these places provide, the locks and dams and everything that surrounds them represent many billions of dollars in public investment. We believe that all Corps recommendations to the U.S. Congress that result from this study should serve the public interest.

Special consideration should be given to evaluate potential impacts to the national park and its resources and programs

The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) was established by Congress as a National Park in 1988. The 72-mile corridor that runs from Dayton to Hastings represents the only unit of the National Park Service dedicated to celebrating and interpreting the Mississippi River. The Twin Cities metropolitan river corridor was given national park status because of its historical significance and outstanding natural resource value—and because this is where the Mississippi River changes the most, transitioning from a low-banked prairie river to a broad floodplain river lined with tall bluffs. A significant part of those changes occur at St. Anthony Falls and downstream in the Gorge.

As described in detail in the comment letter from MNRRA Superintendent John Anfinson, the Corps should evaluate the potential impacts each alternative will have on the seven resource types identified in the park's enabling legislation: historical, recreational, scenic, cultural, natural, economic, and scientific. Although not specifically called out in the

legislation, water resources play an extremely important role in the health of the river and park, and impacts to water resources should also be evaluated.

In 2016, the State of Minnesota adopted rules for the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area, a state designated corridor that shares a boundary with MNRRA. Since MNRRA does not have regulatory authority for development in the corridor, the MRCCA rules provide standards to protect key resources in the park. The Corps should evaluate all options/alternatives to ensure they are consistent with the state MRCCA rules (chapter 6106).

In addition to ensuring that National Park resources are protected, the Study should consider potential impacts to park users. According to the Metropolitan Council, the Central Riverfront Regional Park and the Mississippi Gorge Regional Park are among the top five most visited parks in the region, with close to five million park users annually. These numbers are likely to grow as Waterworks is built as a public gathering place and housing development continues to add residents, and park users, to the area.

Currently, National Park Service staff provides visitor services and tours at the USAF Lock observation deck. Their involvement has dramatically increased the number of people that visit, experience and enjoy the lock. This arrangement provides great visibility for both the NPS and the Corps, and it should continue.

NPS staff and their partners also conduct paddling activities in Minneapolis with youth and adults, and they host paddle share stations along the river. The Corps should consider potential impacts to these NPS programs and the growing interest in paddle sports on the Mississippi River.

The geographic area of this study is entirely within the MNRRA, and ideally, the Corps would engage MNRRA as a close federal partner in conducting this study. At a minimum, National Park Service staff should play the role of a consulting agency of special significance.

The possibility of disposal of any of the Corps' infrastructure could have enormous impacts on the National Park, and we would like to see MNRRA staff be closely consulted in the Corps' decision-making process.

The Corps should consider and report on adopted plans and initiatives in the EA

The cultural and economic impacts should be studied and reported on in the *cumulative effects* section of the EA. There are numerous local, regional and national adopted plans, resolutions, initiatives and projects underway for this stretch of the river, and it is essential that the Corps review these documents, identify possible conflicts and/or inconsistencies with the disposition study alternatives and report on potential impacts to current and future river corridor plans and projects in the cumulative effects analysis of the EA document.

Documents to review include the following:

- Mississippi National River and Recreational Area - Comprehensive Management Plan;
- State of Minnesota - Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area, Minn. Rules Ch. 6106;
- City of Minneapolis - Downtown Public Realm Framework Plan; City Resolution 2018R;
- Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board - Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park Master Plan; Water Works/Mill Ruins Park; Mississippi Gorge Regional Park Master Plan (to be completed Spring 2019);
- Minneapolis Downtown Council – Intersections: Downtown 2025 Plan;
- Meet Minneapolis Convention and Visitor Association - Destination Transformation 2030;
- National Parks Conservation Association - Transforming the Lock;
- St. Anthony Falls Heritage Board - Changing Relationships to the Power of the Falls

The Corps should provide a detailed summary of the infrastructure O&M costs

Some project elements, like the locks, dams and retaining walls, carry a high degree of risk and liability that a private owner or another agency may not be able to properly manage. For example, the large retaining wall at Lock #1 supports significant infrastructure, including Wabun Park and the Minnesota Veterans Home. Given the significant size of the structure and public infrastructure it supports, it is unlikely any private entity would be capable or willing to provide the same level of maintenance and oversight as the Corps.

Therefore it is imperative that the Corps provide the actual operations, maintenance, rehabilitation, and major rehabilitation costs annually, going back as far as the Corps has owned and operated the infrastructure, as well as all identified repairs or improvements that can be projected. This information is necessary to determine recurring maintenance problems that would require special expertise for any entity that might be interested in future ownership.

These potential costs, liabilities and safety concerns may lead to a determination that some components of the infrastructure cannot be safely conveyed to another entity and therefore must continue to be managed by the Corps. This provides further rationale for including partial disposition as an option in this study.

The Study should consider impacts to the other essential functions of the Lock

In addition to navigation, USAF Lock has other purposes, including recreation, flood mitigation and water supply, all of which the Corps is uniquely qualified to manage given its expertise. The study must evaluate the impact disposal of USAF Lock would have on these other purposes, and spell out how the Corps would prevent or mitigate any negative consequences. If another entity takes ownership, an analysis would be needed to determine if the potential owner has the capacity to successfully maintain and operate this critical infrastructure without jeopardizing the City's water supply, endangering people and property during flooding or cutting off recreational use of the site.

The LSAF and Ford Locks do not serve the aforementioned purposes, but they still provide access to the county sheriff, the U.S. Coast Guard, Minnesota DNR and other safety/law enforcement agencies. Impacts to those agencies should be included in the disposition study.

Recommendations for the future of the locks and dams

Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock

- Continue/renew agreement with NPS for visitor services
- Maintain lock operations and flood control authorization
- Maintain ownership of the lock structure
- Establish partnership with the City of Minneapolis and Friends of the Lock and Dam to plan and develop a visitor center at the lock
- Recommend that the land adjacent to the lock be conveyed to the city for development of a visitor center
- Enter long term lease agreement with the city for use of USAF lock as a visitor center and observation deck

Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock & Dam

- The Corps should expand the scope of the disposition study to include consideration and feasibility of dam removal at LSAF
- Reduce level of service at LSAF lock in coordination with tour boat companies and recreational boaters

Lock & Dam #1 (Ford)

- The Corps should expand the scope of the disposition study to include consideration and feasibility of dam removal at L&D1
- Reduce level of service at Lock #1 in coordination with tour boat companies and recreational boaters

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. Please contact me (wclark@fmr.org) or Irene Jones (ijones@fmr.org) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Whitney L. Clark
Executive Director