



the falls initiative

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A SHARED VISION FOR THE UPPER LOCK

Friends of the Falls was founded in February 2016 by Paul Reyelts and Mark Wilson as a 501(c)(3) public non-profit, with a mission to re-purpose the Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam to a world class destination and visitor center.

Friends of the Falls, along with the City of Minneapolis, the Native American Community Development Institute, and a broad coalition of stakeholders, envisions a future site that reflects the truthful story of the Central Riverfront as Dakota land, while recognizing the national significance of the St. Anthony Falls Historic District and the Mississippi River.

Design and programming will shine a light on Native American history and experience, and a resilient Native culture that has produced important contemporary voices in the arts, literature, business, planning, and government. District and the Mississippi River.

WHAT WILL IT BE?

The Falls will serve as a recreational and cultural hub that at last makes our river the center of the community rather than its edge. It will contribute to civic and state identity and lead to a more connected and inclusive riverfront.

Though we have generous riverfront parkland, there are still very few moments where the river and the city come together in a way that achieves an authentic sense of connectivity. The Falls will be one of those moments. The Falls can deliver new access to the Mississippi for fishing, hiking and boating, as well as outdoor learning, events and celebrations, and peaceful enjoyment of the river.

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THE SITE

St. Anthony Falls is the cradle of a great Indigenous society, which thrived for hundreds of generations. The Dakota and other Native American communities sanctified the Falls as one of two sacred Indigenous sites on the Upper Mississippi.

Spirit Island was one of three islands that existed downstream of the Falls. It held great significance to the Dakota people, but white settlers quarried the island for limestone to provide building materials for many of the mills in the area. The narrow jetty south of the Upper Lock is all that remains of Spirit Island today.

Following European settlement, St. Anthony Falls became the birthplace of Minneapolis and foundation for the region at large.

The Falls powered the massive sawmills that produced construction lumber used to build the city, as well as the first hydro-electric power station in the U.S. The Falls district was home to the world's two largest flour companies for decades, and the first permanent crossing across the entire width of the Mississippi was built just above the Falls, on the current alignment of the Father Louis Hennepin Avenue Bridge.

St. Anthony Falls is the only major waterfall on the Mississippi River, which today thunders down a 49-foot drop on a concrete spillway at the toe of the iconic Stone Arch Bridge. The Federal Government owns the St. Anthony Falls Lock, which is operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Congress suspended commercial navigation at the Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock in 2015 in response to declining barge traffic and invasive species.



THE 10-STATE **GREAT RIVER ROAD**, A NATIONAL SCENIC BYWAY, FOLLOWS THE MISSISSIPPI & IS CALLED "THE BEST DRIVE IN AMERICA"

THE "MISSISSIPPI HEADWATERS STATE" CLAIMS 565 MILES OF THE TOTAL ROUTE, CROSSING 43 COMMUNITIES IN 20 COUNTIES

THE FALLS, SITED AT THE ONLY WATERFALL ON THE MISSISSIPPI, ANCHORS AN **ICONIC URBAN WATERFRONT** IN A **NATIONAL PARK**, ON THE **GREAT RIVER ROAD**

RIVER CONNECTIONS

The Falls Initiative is one of many transformative riverfront projects within the Twin Cities and across the state. Each project is valuable alone, but taken together they represent a much larger gesture that will place the Mississippi River firmly at the center of the Minnesota experience.

Upriver, city redevelopment projects are underway at Upper Harbor Terminal and the Grain Belt district. The Minneapolis Park Foundation's signature RiverFirst projects are underway at 26th Avenue North, Halls Island, and Water Works Park. MNDOT is undertaking crucial work to care for the Stone Arch Bridge, which lands at the Falls and continues on as a walking and biking path through Water Works Park. The emergence in the last couple years of a new water taxi service, and the National Park Service's Paddle Share kayak rental (now available at numerous sites between Coon Rapids Dam in the north, to Boom Island at the Central Riverfront) sparks the imagination about the future vibrancy of water trails and public docks on the Upper River.

The Falls will be a destination feature of the 10-state Great River Road, a National Scenic Byway. It will draw visitors to discover our city, state, and region at an iconic downtown waterfront location with both cultural and scenic richness. The facility will be a gateway to the Mississippi National River Recreation Area, our river National Park.



WHY NOW?

Congress suspended navigation at the Upper Lock of St. Anthony Falls Lock in the Water Resources Development Act of 2014, closing it to commercial barge navigation in 2015.

Shortly after the Congressional action, both the St. Anthony Falls Heritage Board and the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board adopted plans recommending that the site of the Upper Lock become a visitor center.

The concept took root and was supported by later plans adopted by Meet Minneapolis, the National Parks Conservation Association, City of Minneapolis and Minneapolis Downtown Council.

The City approved reuse of the Upper Lock in keeping with the community's vision in 2018 with Resolution 2018R-098 (by Johnson).

MEET MINNEAPOLIS



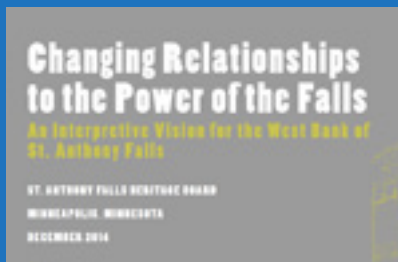
MINNEAPOLIS PARK & RECREATION BOARD



MINNEAPOLIS DOWNTOWN COUNCIL



ST. ANTHONY FALLS HERITAGE BOARD



MINNEAPOLIS CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION



NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOC.



LOOKING AHEAD

Summer 2020

Anticipated release of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Disposition Study on the Upper Lock and opening of public comment period.

Fall 2020

Anticipated confirmation of \$2.8 million in funding from the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) for early enhancements at the Lock.

Fall 2020

Pending bill in Congress: Water Resources Development Act of 2020, which is the next opportunity for Congress to weigh in on the future of the Upper Lock.

2021

Anticipated memorandum of understanding between Friends of the Falls and City of Minneapolis.



JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Join the growing community of individuals, non-profits, neighborhood associations and civic institutions who share our vision for transforming the Falls.

To date, Friends of the Falls has convened coalition meetings with over two dozen organizations and government entities in the spirit of coordination and shared visioning for the Lock and its broader context, including the Central and Upper Riverfront.

“We support the St. Anthony Falls Upper Lock as the centerpiece of an iconic civic and cultural destination, reflective of our shared history, and our stewardship of clean water, for the use and enjoyment of all.”

In 2020, we launch a new phase of civic engagement, aiming to provide engagement opportunities for all Minneapolis communities – especially those who have been historically excluded, under-represented or under-resourced – so all can participate in public planning and decision-making to achieve equitable consensus on this project.

Friends of the Falls has also partnered with the Native American Community Development Institute to train our staff and board members on issues sensitive to the Native American community and create meaningful engagement with First Nations people.

Thoughtful and inclusive engagement is especially difficult today, as we must limit group gatherings and respect social distancing protocols. Engage with us through a series of webinars, round table discussions, presentations to neighborhood associations and digital surveys.



IN THE NEWS

[Friends of the Falls and NACDI launch community engagement for The Falls Initiative, convene Native Advisory Council](#)

Press Release
July 27, 2020

[Floating Ideas for Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock](#)

Finance & Commerce
October 18, 2019

[Plan to remake lock and dam, Minneapolis riverfront taking shape](#)

Star Tribune
October 11, 2019

[Former County Commissioner, Mark Andrew, Joins Initiative to Transform Lock and Dam into World-Class Visitors and Interpretative Center](#)

Mill City Times
October 10, 2019

[Once key to industry and transportation, Mississippi River poised for makeover in Minneapolis](#)

Star Tribune
September 14, 2019

TheFalls.org

   @TheFallsMpls

MEET THE TEAM

The Friends of the Falls Board of Directors is comprised of civic leaders who have a deep commitment to public service, cultural and educational enrichment, and placemaking.

Friends of the Falls is a public charity committed to achieving and sustaining diversity on our Board of Directors. A Governance Committee was formed in 2020 in service to that ongoing mission. Friends of the Falls has made a commitment to prioritize gender, racial and cultural diversity when seeking new members. The board aims to add two additional members in 2020, expanding to 14 members.

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