



BACKGROUND & FAQs

Upper Lock at St. Anthony Falls
January 2021

What is Friends of the Falls?

Friends of the Falls is a public charity working with the City of Minneapolis, National Park Service, Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI), business and tourism entities, neighborhood associations, and a broad array of other stakeholders to transform the Upper Lock into a community gathering place, restoring public access to the river.

Friends of the Falls has secured \$2.8 million in state funding and committed a \$2.5 million match to make early enhancements to the site. It is also partnering with NACDI to lead the engagement effort with First Nations people, under the direction of Dakota tribal leadership.

What actions were directed by Congress in the Water Resources Development Act of 2020?

The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) was signed into law on December 27, 2020. In it, Congress directed the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to convey property surrounding the Upper Lock at St. Anthony Falls to the City of Minneapolis or its designee for use as a “comprehensive recreational, touristic, and interpretive experience”. The USACE is to retain ownership of the Lock and Dam, and with it, its responsibility for flood management. This action is considered “**partial disposition**”.

This legislation reflects over six years of bipartisan effort by the Minnesota delegation, including Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, Representatives Angie Craig, Ilhan Omar, and, in prior years, Erik Paulsen and Keith Ellison.

The City of Minneapolis and Friends of the Falls support partial disposition.

If WRDA 2020 directed “partial disposition” of the Upper Lock, then what is considered “full disposition”?

In its initial draft report, the USACE recommended “Complete Deauthorization and Disposal [of the Upper Lock] combined with offering a monetary incentive to the new owner in exchange for expediting the disposal through a direct property transfer.”

In other words, the USACE recommended that the federal government fully divest in the property and look for a new owner.

This “**full disposition**” of the Upper Lock indicates the Corps seeks to abandon the Lock structure, including the cost of maintenance and its responsibility for flood management.

The City of Minneapolis and Friends of the Falls are opposed to full disposition.

Why support partial rather than full disposition?

Partial disposition is consistent with the law, as enacted in WRDA 2020.

We know of no entity outside the Corps that is willing and able to fully acquire the Upper Lock and assume associated flood mitigation responsibilities.

Partial disposition would unleash funding needed for the revitalization. It would activate a \$2.8 million state commitment and a \$2.5 million private sector match secured by Friends of the Falls.

It is critical that the USACE continue its water supply and flood management responsibilities for two reasons: 1) over a million Twin Citians rely on the river for their water supply, and 2) the risk of flooding from climate change is growing. We can't leave vital oversight of this critical infrastructure to unproven parties.

Why is a swift conveyance necessary?

Over \$5 million in funding secured for the project is at risk if Corps insists on full disposition or does not commit to a swift conveyance and the project is subjected to indefinite delay.

There is threat of the site becoming a hydroelectric facility rather than serving as a public asset. It is essential that the USACE act quickly to ensure the public interest is served on this site, rather than turning it over to a for-profit energy company with an aggressive profit motive. We have worked hard to steward the site for use with public purpose, in line with historic preservation, neighborhood and Congressional goals for the Falls.