

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
Midwest Region

Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program & Hydro  
111 East Kellogg Boulevard Suite 105  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-1288

May 20, 2014

Mr. Ray French  
Management Analyst  
City of River Falls  
222 Lewis Street  
River Falls, Wisconsin 54022

re: Comments on PAD and Study Requests, River Falls Hydroelectric Project, FERC Project  
No. 10489, Kinnickinnic River, Pierce County, Wisconsin

Dear Mr. French,

The National Park Service (NPS) has reviewed the Pre-Application Document (PAD) and attended the Joint Meeting: First Stage Consultation for the relicensing of a Federal Energy Regulatory Commission license on March 17, 2014 in River Falls, Wisconsin. In addition, the NPS has undertaken walking tours of the area, met with City Staff in relation to the new FERC Form 80, and researched the history of the subject Dam(s) operation. The City is commended on the open nature of the discussions and willingness to work with and learn not only the new Form 80 but also to hear comments and input on the overall relicensing process.

In accordance with 18 CFR, Section 16.8(b)(5), the NPS is filing these comments no later than 60 days after the joint meeting held under 18 CFR, Section 16.8(b)(3). Our Authority for Review, General Comments, Comments on the PAD and a Request For Study entitled "Recreation Study" follow.

**AUTHORITY FOR REVIEW**

The NPS should be consulted on all hydrokinetic projects, not just those with the potential to affect units of the National Park System. Regulations created pursuant to the Federal Power Act, as amended, require consultation with the NPS and other resource agencies (18 C.F.R. § 4.38(a) and 18 C.F.R. § 5.1(d)). The NPS provides technical assistance about outdoor recreation resources pursuant to the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1963 (16 U.S.C. § 4601-1), the NPS Organic Act (16 U.S.C. § 1 *et seq.*), the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-542), and the National Trails System Act of 1968 (16 U.S.C. § 1246(a)).

## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

The River Falls Hydroelectric Project consists of two hydroelectric dams: (1) Upper facilities with; (a) a 140-foot-long and 32-foot-high concrete dam; (b) a 15.5-acre reservoir with an original storage capacity of 142.7 acre-feet; (c) an 80-foot-long by 6-foot diameter penstock; (d) a powerhouse containing one 250 kW generator, and (2) Lower Facilities with; (a) a 110-foot-long and 16.5-foot-high concrete dam located approximately 0.5 mile downstream of the upper dam; (b) a 15.4 acre reservoir with an original storage capacity of 37 acre-feet; and (c) a powerhouse containing one 125 kW generating unit; for a combined total installed generating capacity of 375 kW.

A unique feature of this project is its proximity to the high quality cold-water trout fisheries of the Upper and Lower Kinnickinnic River. The Kinnickinnic River is designated as a premier cold-water trout fishery, and is one of only a few in this category in Wisconsin. The hydroelectric dams at River Falls bisect the Kinnickinnic River into high quality cold-water trout fisheries upstream and downstream, with a marginal warm-water fishery in the vicinity of the dams.

The main area of interests for the NPS in relation to Hydro projects include Recreation, Land Use and Aesthetics. Of these three, and one in which a Study Request is submitted by the NPS, is that of Recreation. This topic is felt to be of importance both currently and in the future in relation to use and opportunities of the Project area, Kinnickinnic River, shoreline and nearby community Trails, Parks, and other recreational interests. The other two topical areas, Land Use and Aesthetics, are felt being covered by the public and special Interests Groups that are submitting comments and requests as part of this FERC process. It is also noted that one Interest Group in Particular, Friends of the Kinni, has highlighted "Recreation" as also a special topic with a Requested Study.

## **COMMENTS ON THE PAD**

The NPS has reviewed the PAD for the River Falls Hydroelectric Project dated November 27, 2013. Following are comments related to certain portions of that Document.

### **Section 3.5 "Recreation and Land Use"**

This Section of the PAD is very short, general in nature and does not cover the research, extent/depth, and existing as well as future recreation interests and opportunities related to the Project, Location Area and River Falls as a Community. There is an opportunity, as part of the FERC process, to further study and analyze "Recreation" both as an important element of the Kinni River Corridor and also as this area relates to the public use enjoyment now and in the future. Other than stating simply in the PAD that there are "abundant opportunities for recreation with the Project Area, analysis and study are felt required to make determinations on how

recreation opportunities and assets are used and could be made further available through Project amenities and development. Simple reference to the 2009 River Falls Park Inventory in Appendix H of the PAD is not felt adequate in this regard (This more than 5 year old study does not recognize current recreation interests and demands nor physical attributes that recreation public facilities and trails can provide). Besides overall Community public interests, the location of the University of River Falls and, in particular, the South Fork of the Kinnickinnic River further substantiates the need for “Recreation” research, summaries, and opportunities. Simply stated, the PAD does not cover this topic adequately to make those decisions and recommendations for the good of people using and enjoying this area.

#### Section 4.0 Preliminary Issues and Studies List

Under “Additional resource management plans” the River Falls Park Inventory, 2009 is listed. This document is somewhat outdated in terms of current conditions and needs and further study and analysis is felt needed in relation to the subject Hydro Project and its location within the River Falls Community. No other references or current studies are noted in the List.

#### **REQUEST FOR STUDY entitled “RECREATION STUDY” (attachment)**

Based on the general nature of “Recreation” description and analysis in the PAD and the need to further research and analyze this topic in relation to the subject FERC relicensing effort, the NPS is requesting that a “Recreation Study” be undertaken. Beginning on the following page, as an Attachment, is the rationale for this request following FERC criteria.

In addition to these comments, the NPS has reviewed and substantially concurs with comments provided by the Kinnickinnic River Land Trust, Kiap-TU-Wish Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Wisconsin DNR, River Alliance of Wisconsin (Note: NPS is interested in the researching and evaluating the existence or removal of the Hydro Dams through a cost/benefit analysis type approach), and the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service. Please feel free to contact me at [randy\\_thoreson@nps.gov](mailto:randy_thoreson@nps.gov) or 651-293-8450 if you have any questions pertaining to this letter and Study Request.

Sincerely,

Randall R. Thoreson  
National Park Service/ River’s and Trails Program, Hydro  
Midwest Field Office  
St. Paul, MN

#### Attachment

CC. Ms Kimberly Bose, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C.  
Nick Utrup, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bloomington, MN  
Dr. Michael S. Page, Friends of the Kinni, River Falls, WI  
Kent Johnson, Kiap-TU-Wish Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Hudson, WI  
Cheryl Laatsch, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Horicon, WI  
David Fodroczi, Kinnickinnic River Land Trust, River Falls, WI  
Denny Caneff and Jim Fossum, River Alliance of Wisconsin

Attachment-  
NPS Requested Study

## Recreation Study

The following study request addresses each of the seven study criteria as required in 18 C.F.R. 5.9(b)

5.9(b)(1) – *Describe the goals and objectives of each study proposal and information to be Obtained.*

The goal of the study is to determine the existing use and demand for recreational facilities provided at the following areas:

- 1) Defined and Project Area of the River Falls Hydroelectric Project (P-10489).

Included is the two hydroelectric dams, Kinnickinnic Riverway and associated areas. Further defined is the Upper facilities that includes the Dam area itself and associated operational powerhouse structures, a 15.5-acre reservoir, and recreational use areas bordering and along both the reservoir and Riverway. (note: The reservoir should be considered for recreational analysis in terms of fishing, wildlife viewing and water activities). Also included is the Lower Facilities with a concrete dam and powerhouse located approximately 0.5 mile downstream of the upper dam, a 15.4 acre reservoir, and recreational use areas bordering and along both the reservoir and Riverway. (note: This reservoir should also be considered for recreational analysis in terms of fishing, wildlife viewing and water activities).

- 2) The impacted Project Area of the River Falls Hydroelectric Project (P-10489).

The impacted Project Area of River Falls is also felt to be important in terms of a Recreation Study. Although more loosely defined (further definition can be incorporated in the Study), both the River Falls Downtown and Residential areas are located in and along the Project Corridor. In addition, the University of Wisconsin/River Falls is located in close proximity to the Dam(s) areas and, in fact, the South Fork of the Kinnickinnic River flows along the edge of the Campus. Consideration is felt warranted for existing and future recreational users on Trails, pathways, fishing areas, parks and general viewing areas.

The objectives of the study are to:

- 1) Quantify existing recreation use levels at all locations identified above.

- 2) Document the types of recreational use occurring by season at each location.
- 3) Identify user perceptions regarding the operation and management of outdoor recreation facilities at each location.
- 4) Assess the impact of project operations on recreation and experiences.
- 5) Document public awareness of existing recreation facilities.
- 6) Identify potential measures to alleviate any negative impacts as well as to enhance recreational opportunities.
- 7) Use the information and methodologies for the Recreation Study for the completion and submittal of new FERC Form 80.
- 8) Assist in the development of a Recreation Plan for the project.

*5.9(b)(2) – If applicable, explain the relevant resource management goals of the agencies or Indian tribes with jurisdiction over the resource to be studied.*

Not Applicable

*5.9(b)(3) – If the requester is not a resource agency, explain any relevant public interest considerations in regard to the proposed study.*

Although the NPS is a resource agency in terms of public interests in regard to recreation, it is important to note the following:

Sections 4(e) and 10(a) of the Federal Power Act require the Commission (FERC) to give equal consideration to all uses of the waterway on which a project is located. When reviewing a proposed action (such as the subject relicensing project), FERC must consider the environmental, recreational, fish and wildlife, and other non-developmental values of the project, as well as power and developmental values.

As heard and noted at the Joint Meeting: First Stage Consultation for the relicensing of a Federal Energy Regulatory Commission license on March 17, 2014, a number of citizens and Interest Groups expressed a great deal of interest in Recreation both on and along the Kinnickinnic Riverway, Corridor, and associated Park areas and Trails. In addition, a great deal of discussion and media coverage has surrounded the interests by some people and groups in removal of the Dams, Kinnickinnic Falls restoration and new and expanded recreational opportunities. A Recreation Study should look at, analyze and bring forth the effects and influences of such scenarios.

*5.9(b)(4) – Describe existing information concerning the subject of the study proposal, and the need for additional information.*

It is noted that the City of River Falls, as the licensee, did not submit a Form 80 the last cycle of FERC guidelines. As such, a great deal of recreational inventory, user studies, and recreation facilities opportunities and capacities are missing. It is suggested that the subject requested Recreation Study will work toward the gathering of such information not only for the new Form 80 but also for the good and benefit of a workable and usable Recreation Plan for the Project.

Reference was made in the PAD of a River Falls Park Inventory in 2009. This inventory is out of date and can be amended and added to as part of this subject Recreation Study. In addition information can be obtained through the 2011-2016 Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (WI SCORP). Also, it is noted that in 2013, the City of River Falls contracted for a National Citizen Survey. Results of this Survey can be used to assess citizen interests in public amenities such as trails, parks, wildlife viewing, fishing, natural areas, etc..

The subject Recreation Study can work towards the analysis and recognition of the River Falls Community in the interests of recreation both within and along the Project area. Without such

*5.9(b)(5) – Explain any nexus between project operations and effects (direct, indirect, and/or cumulative) on the resource to be studied, how the study results would inform the development of license requirements.*

To be clear, the NPS feels the important Kinnickinnic River, Corridor and River Falls Community, as it relates to this precious and unique system, is an important resource to be studied in terms of recreational use and opportunities. It is felt that a strong nexus can be drawn between citizens and visitors with how they experience and use the Riverway Area, an area influenced by the two Dams, reservoirs and associated features. Glen Park is one example where River Falls has devoted a great deal of time and effort to make this “Community Recreation Feature” an important element to the overall recreational enjoyment of the River Falls public. The area is clearly influenced by the existing dams and any measures (including studying removal as suggested by some) will influence existing and future recreational experiences. The Recreation Study results will not only help in Form 80 but also play a great role in a usable and effective Recreation Plan for the Project. The whole suite of other requested Studies (ie Water Resources, Land Use, Aesthetics, etc.) will work together in concert with the Recreation Study to guide and assist the City in operations and Project decisions as part of the relicensing process.

*5.9(b)(6) – Explain how any proposed study methodology (including any preferred data collection and analysis techniques, or objectively quantified information, and a schedule including appropriate field season(s) and the duration) is consistent with generally accepted practice in the scientific community or, as appropriate, considers relevant tribal values and knowledge.*

A good recreational survey(s) shall “determine the public awareness, usage, and demand of the project’s existing recreational facilities to determine if potential improvements are needed.” Various methods can be employed to carry out such a survey(s). One would be mechanical counters at trails, parks and public use and viewing areas. Such counters can be installed over a period of several months to capture seasonal variations.

In addition to mechanical counts, a visitor intercept (in person) study could be conducted in order to determine use patterns at each recreational facility (ie along a trail or park area). Similar to mechanical counters, interviews should be conducted over a number of months to capture seasonality.

Somewhat easier and more manageable in some regards, to assess public awareness, would be to conduct a telephone or mail survey of potential users with the Kinnickinnic Riverway area and, maybe, River Falls Community as a whole. A one page questionnaire would inform the City regarding public awareness of existing recreational facilities and provide the opportunity to gather information from former users and potential users. Such a method would also help to assess and evaluate future demands and possible additions to recreational facilities and networks.

In all cases, River Falls has the benefit of having the University of River Falls located within the community. Why not ask for assistance from campus classes, Instructors, and student programs in this endeavor.

*5.9(b)(7) – Describe consideration of level of effort and cost, as applicable, and why any proposed alternative studies would not be sufficient to meet the stated information needs.*

Putting a specific price for a Recreation Study as requested is difficult. Many factors would come into play in terms of City staff capabilities, request for assistance from the University of Wisconsin as suggested, or consultants (or a combination of some or all). Elements would be research, data gathering, inventory, analysis, reasonable alternatives and possible design scenarios and Study recommendations. It would be reasonable to assume, given assistance possibilities, that a cost of less than \$20,000 is possible. Further scoping in a detailed Recreation Study outline is suggested. Such an outline would then dictate degree and extent of specific costs. – money well spent for the existing and future recreational interests of River Falls and the subject relicensing Project/Process. No alternative studies are suggested.