

**MISSOURI-MADISON RIVER FUND RECREATION PROJECT
FY2025 GRANT APPLICATION FORM**

Project Name: Missouri Riverfront Land Preservation and Access Project

Reservoir or River Segment: River reach from Ulm to Rainbow Dam County(ies) Cascade

Site Name (or project location): The project is located on the edge of Great Falls city limits on the southwest edge of town. The Legal Description is 47.92 acres within Government lot 6 in Section 23, Township 20 North, Range 3 East, Cascade County, Montana

Applicant Name: George Liknes

Position and Agency: Volunteer with the Missouri River Open Lands Preservation (MROLP) group.

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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.

- ▶ The Missouri River Open Lands Preservation (MROLP) group, in cooperation with Cascade County, is requesting funds for Phase 1 of a project to place a perpetual easement on 47.92 acres of school trust lands managed by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) for the benefit of the University of Montana. The easement would allow for continued public access on the parcel on the very edge of Great Falls. This project will maintain public recreational access to the parcel and the Missouri River, protect wildlife habitat, and provide fisheries enhancement. The proposed easement area is legally accessible by public roads for walk-in access on 2 sides – the North and West as well as being accessible and providing access to the Missouri River, which is recreationally navigable under the Montana’s Stream Access Law, on the east. If Phase 1 is successful, Phase 2 would be attempted to add another 31.35 acres south of Phase 1 and provide access from the south as well to provide open space totaling 79.27 acres

The proposed project will maintain, in-perpetuity, the current public recreational access to 47.92 acres for non-motorized recreation. The parcel supports activities including hiking, trail running, fishing, Nordic skiing/snowshoeing, mountain biking, horseback riding, paddle sports (carry-in or caddy access for kayaks, canoes and stand-up paddleboards), wildlife viewing, dog walking and training, as well as geocaching for several geocaches that are present. The terms and conditions of public access to the area follow DNRC regulations, state law and rules that would be posted on site, which include unlimited walk-in use, no motorized use, weapons restrictions and all lawful hunting.

Completion of the project will maintain approximately 2.6 acres of riparian habitat as well as upland grassland habitat in addition to providing continued public access on the very edge of Great Falls. It ensures one of the last pieces of public lands with over a quarter mile of Missouri River frontage upstream from Great Falls remains available for the public to use for this and future generations in a natural state. Much of the land cover is native vegetation, including bunch grasses, shrubs and forbs. This land includes a stable rocky beach along the northern end of the parcel that provides access to the Missouri River with riparian vegetation dominating the bank of the Missouri River to the south. Maintaining the area as open space in a natural state provides for hydrologically maintaining a natural radius of curvature of the Missouri River on the parcel which is on an outside bend of the river channel. The project’s need is also linked to threats directed towards native habitats, which includes residential subdivision, commercial development along with associated detriments such as hardening (i.e., rip-rap) and stabilizing river banks after removal of native vegetation, and noxious weed encroachment, which usually creates additional problems up and downstream. Across the channel is a naturally vegetated island, Taylor Island, which is mapped at 48.6 acres and owned by the City of Great Falls, which provides habitat for many species of animals and complements this open space habitat. Cascade County does not have a land trust organization or an open lands bond program like many other areas in Montana. MROLP has come together as a volunteer organization in an effort to maintain this special place as open space and provide river access in its natural condition since the majority of riparian and shrub grassland habitats along the Missouri River have been converted to housing developments or to grain and domestic hay production. This project will protect riparian areas which are identified as a Community Type of Greatest Conservation Need in Montana FWP’s Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Management Strategy. This strategy also identified this reach of the Missouri River as a Mixed System Aquatic Community Type of Greatest

Conservation Need, which is a community type transitioning from cold water trout species to cool and warm water species. The project also follows the guidance of the City of Great Falls' 2004 Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan and recommendations in the 2002 Missouri River Urban Corridor Inventory & Assessment.

Species of animals that have been observed on the parcel include mule and white-tailed deer, fox, Canada geese, snow geese, mallard ducks, North American racer, coyotes, eagles, great blue herons, redtail hawks and numerous other song birds, including the western meadowlark.

State law requires a local or state government entity to hold an easement such as this. Consequently, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) would convey a deed to Cascade County for the perpetual easement for a public recreation park, ensuring public access is secured forever without the need for a state land use recreation permit.

The project's goal is to protect habitat and ensure walk-in public access on this Trust Management Land. DNRC plans are to actively pursue a mixed-use development, which means the current public uses of the land will be permanently harmed or completely eliminated and its natural character eliminated. Manicured lawns down to the water's edge, loss of open space, and restricted or no public access could be the result.

MROLP is requesting up to \$150,000.00 of the estimated \$640,000 to buy a perpetual easement to keep this unique piece of land along the Missouri River in its current natural state. The cost of the easement, was determined by an appraisal that MROLP paid for that was ordered by DNRC. The appraisal determined the value of the public park easement as equal to the fair market value of the parcel since state law requires DNRC to manage the land for the highest and best use of the land for the benefit of the University of Montana.

The in-kind contributions listed involves volunteer work. While some volunteer time has already been devoted to maintaining the area such as weed control and litter pickup, the value of in-kind contributions shown in the Project Cost Breakdown involves researching and writing grants, putting together newsletters and mailings to develop support and awareness of the project, meeting to devise strategies to raise funds, maintaining a [MROLP Website](#) and [Facebook](#) page, organizing events such as a block party and public meetings and soliciting funds. It also includes plantings of native cottonwood trees if Phase 1 of the project is successful.

Other funding sources are briefly described below:

Private Individual Donations – Local residents as well as others who value open space and access to the Missouri river south of Great Falls have contributed funds to maintain the public's use of this land.

Montana Fish & Wildlife Conservation Trust – This trust was established by the U.S. Congress in 1998, funded by proceeds from the sale of cabin sites on Canyon Ferry Reservoir that had previously been leased from the Federal government. The purpose of the trust is to provide a permanent source of funding through grants for the acquisition of publicly accessible land in Montana in order to restore and conserve fisheries habitat, including riparian habitat, restore and conserve wildlife habitat, enhance public hunting, fishing and recreational opportunities, and improve public access to public lands.

Northwestern Energy – WildTAC – As part of the Federal FERC license requirements to mitigate for the operation of nine dams on the Missouri and Madison rivers, the Missouri-Madison Wildlife Technical Advisory Committee reviews and approves all projects that protect, mitigate and enhance wildlife habitat. The geographic scope is from Yellowstone National Park to the headwaters of Fort Peck Reservoir. The WildTAC is comprised of NorthWestern personnel and representatives from the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; U.S. Forest Service; and U.S. Bureau of Land Management. TAC members communicate throughout the year

and formally meet once per year to review progress from the previous year, discuss and approve projects for the upcoming year, and ensure approved projects comply with FERC license requirements.

Northwestern Energy – MoTAC – Like WildTAC. The Missouri River Fisheries TAC was created as part of the FERC Licensing and considers projects to protect, mitigate and enhance fisheries and fish habitat from Canyon Ferry Dam to the headwaters of Fort Peck Reservoir. MoTAC is comprised of NorthWestern personnel and representatives from the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; U.S. Forest Service; and U.S. Bureau of Land Management. TAC members communicate throughout the year and formally meet once per year to review progress from the previous year, discuss and approve projects for the upcoming year, and ensure approved projects comply with FERC license requirements.

Cliff Family Foundation, First Interstate Bank System Foundation, Town Pump Foundation – These are philanthropic organizations that corporations have established to support charitable activities.

The Lewis and Clark Trail Stewardship Endowment (LCTSE) – The LCTSE is a fund that provides grants for projects that benefit the Lewis and Clark Expedition's pathways. The LCTSE is a part of the Lewis and Clark Expedition Bicentennial Legacy Project's National Council. The parcel's view on an unaltered prairie landscape of the riverine environment near Taylor Island remains much the same as what the Corp of Discovery would have seen. Meriwether Lewis' party is thought to have passed across this area on the return trip in 1806 and may have camped on/near it. Tourists following the Lewis and Clark Trail would have one more stop in the Great Falls area to visit and learn about the Trail.

The Portage Route Chapter of the Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation Inc. board members have expressed interest in partnering with groups to maintain this area as a natural park in a condition much as it was when Meriwether Lewis camped on or near it the night of July 11, 1806. The Big Sky Country National Heritage Area Board of Directors, a non-profit that promotes history, culture, and landscapes in Cascade County, has also expressed support for the easement project.

MROLP believes this project fits the primary intention of the River Fund, is consistent with the FERC Project 2188 License and would appreciate the grant funding awarded to conserve this unique parcel of land along the Missouri River, south of Great Falls.

3. **Project Phasing:** Briefly discuss whether the project could be phased over more than one year or construction season.
 - ▶ State law and administrative rules provides a timeline for the process to apply for and have a public park easement conveyed to Cascade County. The process is designed to take approximately 13.5 months at the quickest, but due to COVID, this timeline has been much longer. MROLP has until late this fall or very early in 2025 to raise funds for Phase 1 to prevent this open space from being offered in an RFP to developers. DNRC also has the option to grant an extension that would allow MROLP an additional 12 months for fund raising but the appraisal likely would be updated and existing funding already secured would be forfeited in December 2024 and April 2025.
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.

- ▶ The proposed project involves purchasing an easement on DNRC school trust lands to prevent development of the area and maintain unfettered access to the parcel and the Missouri River while maintaining the habitat of the natural banks, riparian vegetation and upland areas. Funds awarded to the project would be used to purchase the easement. No ground disturbing activities would occur with this funding and there are no buildings or structures within the proposed easement area. Consequently, no cultural resource analysis would be needed for the purchase of the easement. DNRC's archaeologist has been involved in the MEPA process and a cultural resources inventory was completed. If the easement is secured and plantings of native tree are planned, DNRC's archaeologist will be involved to provide for cultural clearances and any report would be provided to the River Fund and Northwestern Energy when available.

5. **Scoring Criteria.** Respond to the following Scoring Criteria. Put answers in the cell after ▶.

5.1 Does the project occur at a 2188 license site?

- ▶ The proposed project does not occur at a 2188 license site. It does occur in the Missouri-Madison Corridor Project Area in the river reach from Ulm to Rainbow Dam and borders the Missouri River. This project is submitted for consideration based on Article 426 of the FERC Project 2188 license directing implementation of the Revised Madison-Missouri Comprehensive Recreation Management Plan for managing recreational resources, which now provides a process and criteria for projects that support new opportunities for public recreation to be identified. The proposed project will secure public recreation opportunities near an urban setting for generations and is a new opportunity.

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.

- ▶ None of the funds requested would be used for operation or maintenance of a recreation site and this would not be a recurring expense. Instead, the proposed project would utilize funding for acquisition to permanently secure recreational use of DNRC school trust land by obtaining a public park recreational easement on the parcel. The easement would maintain open space, all of its natural characteristics and preclude imminent development that would restrict public access to the parcel and the Missouri River. This project has not been previously funded by the River Fund.

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.

- ▶ MROLP has been working with Cascade County, which would hold the Public Recreation Park Easement in perpetuity and is interested in keeping a buffer between city and county development. In addition, coordination has been ongoing with the DNRC School Trust Lands Division as well as DNRC's Central Land Office staff. The previous mayor of the City of Great Falls has provided a

letter of support as an individual for maintaining this open space, to provide diverse recreational opportunities that improve the quality of life for its citizens. Other organizations that have documented their support for the proposed project include the Cascade Conservation District, the Great Falls Bicycle Club, the Upper Missouri Audubon Chapter, Recreational Trails Inc.'s board, and the previous Region 4 Supervisor of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Wild Montana and its local chapter board members have been partnering with MROLP board members and volunteers to identify funding sources, onsite maintenance, and pledging funds and their staff support. Additionally, the Portage Route Chapter of the Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation Inc. board members have expressed interest in partnering with groups to maintain this area as a natural park. And the Big Sky Country National Heritage Area Board of Directors, a non-profit that promotes history, culture, and landscapes in Cascade County, has also expressed support for the easement project. In addition, local residents have shown support by donating almost \$112,000 to support this project and many have contributed volunteer time for weed control, litter pickup, fundraising and meeting to make this public recreation park a reality. If success is achieved to keep this as open space, all of the potential uses of the area will increase community members engaged by the project and benefit the community's resident's quality of life. The partners mentioned are anticipated to be involved in the implementation phase and maintenance of the project.

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 following identifies the benefits to recreation in the Project area and identifies goals of the CRP that are addressed by the proposed project.

Goal:

To provide safe and well-managed recreation sites and dispersed use areas that provide enjoyable user experiences across a spectrum of opportunities and seasons.

The proposed project's goal is to secure an additional area that can safely be used for recreation that provides a spectrum of recreation throughout the year. MROLP volunteers have met folks not just from the neighborhood, but from all over walking or training dogs, fishing, skipping rocks, riding mountain bikes, bird watching, riding horses, cross country skiing in the winter, searching for a geocache or two, or preparing to float the Missouri River. The proposed easement will maintain public access to approximately 3.86 miles of primitive trails (Phase 1 and 2) currently present on the parcel.

The site includes over a quarter mile of Missouri River frontage and along the northern end of the parcel, there is a stable rocky beach that provides access to the Missouri River and Taylor Island, a 48-acre island owned by the City of Great Falls. It provides shore angling for cold and cool water species and carry in access for kayaks, canoes and stand-up paddleboards. It provides a put in or take out location that provides a variety of trip lengths from Cottonwood Grove Fishing Access Site (FAS) 15.4 river miles (RM) upstream, or evening trips of 3.2 RM from White Bear FAS upstream in the spring and fall or 1.8 RM downstream to Odd Fellows Park near Broadwater Bay. Additionally, serious walleye anglers have been observed from the banks of the parcel in the spring and fall as well as families out for a few hours of fishing during several seasons.

The project area is ideally located along the urban fringe and would maintain a natural area protecting wildlife habitat that is ideal for environmental field day studies by Great Falls District Schools and for neighborhood children to explore in their formative years, developing an interest in outdoor recreation that will last a lifetime.

Goal:

To support agency- and NGO-initiated projects in cooperation with interested private landowners to maintain open space and agricultural lands and to mitigate effects of new development in a manner that is mutually acceptable to landowners and recreationists.

The proposed project involves collaboration of government entities including Cascade County, DNRC, and MROLP, a 501(c)3 organization and is exactly the type of project that addresses this goal. The principal goal of this project is to maintain the riparian and upland habitat as open space and to mitigate the continued development in the area while allowing recreational access in the area and to the Missouri River. This property provides quality habitat along over a quarter mile of the Missouri River in a natural setting that will be an asset to the community for generations that will improve the quality of life for residents as well as some visitors.

Goal:

Continue to improve and expand recreation opportunities that offer universal accessibility.

The proposed project provides numerous primitive trails that would be universally accessible for all recreationalists. However, not all trails on the area would be totally accessible to some due to the steep slope or the trail being too narrow. Access to the site can be accessed from the north by all regardless of mobility.

Goal:

To promote responsible user behavior that protects natural, cultural, and social resources in the Project Area.

The proposed project would also preclude development and would protect in perpetuity native upland vegetation, the 2.6 acres of riparian habitat (Phase 1), and cultural resources present that have been identified as workings by a geologist that likely would be eliminated by a mixed-use development of the parcel.

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.

- ▶ Time is of the essence regarding protecting this open space. DNRC has indicated in the FY22 REAL ESTATE PROJECT LIST the intent to develop the area. If this land is not conserved through an easement, all of its natural characteristics will be permanently harmed or entirely eliminated and the public's use of the existing primitive trails as well as access to the Missouri River would be lost. Manicured lawns down to the water's edge and the loss of open space likely would be the result.

If an easement is conveyed, MROLP would raise funds to address long term maintenance, improvements and insurance to indemnify the entities involved. MROLP would work to create an endowment to fund some of these costs and utilize funding sources such as Montana's Recreational Trails Program for maintenance or improvements.

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.

- ▶ MROLP was responsible for funding a survey (\$3,500), which was included with the formal application submitted to DNRC. MROLP was also responsible for paying for the appraisal to determine the cost of the easement, which is equivalent to the fair market value of the land.

MROLP advocated for an appraiser that had the expertise to value the easement based on state law (77-2-303, MCA) restrictions on land available for sale. School Trust Lands bordering navigable streams are reserved from sale which includes the government lot 6. However, DNRC can lease the land to a developer, which MROLP believed should decrease the potential value of the easement compared to a fee simple title ownership conveyance. Little other project design options are available for conveyance of the easement. If MROLP is successful in funding the easement, any future improvements for hardened tails or signs would be designed to limit maintenance costs and maximize durability.

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.

- ▶ This project address numerous resource issues. It would preserve public access to the only piece of open land on the southwestern border area of Great Falls that is growing rapidly and is a one-time opportunity – now or never – since DNRC intends to develop the area. It provides an easily accessible area that provides diverse recreational opportunities. It would maintain upland grassland and riparian habitat for wildlife by maintaining an additional 49.27 acres of natural habitat adjacent to the 48.6 acres on the city owned Taylor Island. It addresses preservation of riparian habitat, a Community Type of Greatest Conservation Need and a reach of the Missouri River identified as a Mixed System Aquatic Community Type of Greatest Conservation Need in Montana FWP’s Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Management Strategy. It also addresses hydrological and stream bank integrity that will benefit water quality and stream morphology in the Missouri River watershed. These are also habitat protection goals of both the MoTAC and WildTAC committees developed in response as part of the Project 2188 License.

The project also follows the guidance and complements the City of Great Fall's 2004 Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan and recommendations in the 2002 Missouri River Urban Corridor Inventory & Assessment.

The proposed project also supports the goals and recommendations of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) identified below. These goals include promoting outdoor recreation opportunities for all Montanans, including those with disabilities, and with its close proximity to Meadowlark School, teachers have indicated it would be an asset for providing outdoor recreation education. Additionally, the proposed project would enhance public access to outdoor recreation resources in their own back yard. The collaboration between public agencies at various governmental levels to provide open space and protect water access also displays the spirit and intent of the SCORP’s recommendations. This project also directly addresses improving and expanding front country outdoor recreation opportunities as well as improving the Quality of Life through Outdoor Recreation Experiences where senior, youth, and health-challenged populations can participate in healthy outdoor recreation. Finally, this proposed project fulfills SCORP’s goal of honoring Montana’s Outdoor Legacy by conserving Montana’s outdoor heritage and natural resources; it will seek to balance outdoor recreation use while maintaining ecological function of natural resources of fish, wildlife, and their habitats.

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.



Figure 1. Aerial view looking from the north to south showing the total proposed easement area (Phases 1 and 2).

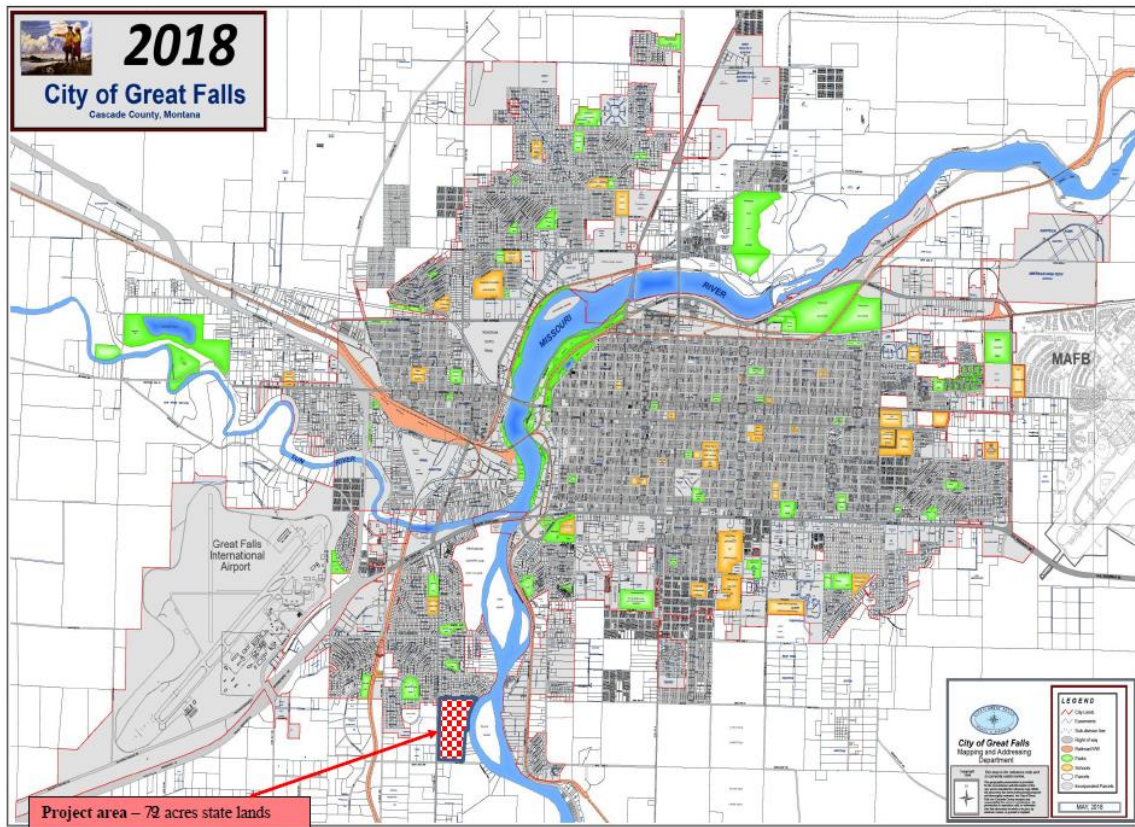


Figure 2. Map of the Total Project Area (Phases 1 & 2) just south of the City of Great Falls.



Figure 5. Missouri River front showing the Missouri River and some of the riparian area.



Figure 6. Upland area – a place to train and let dogs run and a quick hike.



Figure 7. Proposed Public Park Area showing most of the riparian area.



Figure 8. A family fishing trip close to home on the proposed park easement.



Figure 9. Watchable Wildlife in their habitat utilize this undeveloped land.