

Recreation Resources Study

Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Project
(FERC No. 2362)

November 2, 2021

Prepared for:
Minnesota Power

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1 Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

ALLETE Inc., doing business as Minnesota Power (“MP” or “Licensee”), is the Licensee, owner, and operator of the Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Project (FERC No. 2362).

The Grand Rapids Project (Project) is licensed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (“FERC” or “Commission”) under the authority granted to FERC by Congress through the Federal Power Act (FPA), 16 United States Code (USC) §791(a), et seq., to license and oversee the operation of non-federal hydroelectric projects on jurisdictional waters and/or federal land. There are no federal lands associated with the Project. The Project previously underwent licensing in the early 1990s, and the current operating license for the Project expires on December 31, 2023. Accordingly, MP is pursuing a new license for the Grand Rapids Project pursuant to FERC’s Integrated Licensing Process (ILP), as described at 18 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 5.

This report describes the methods and results of the approved Recreation Resource Study conducted as part of obtaining a new license for the Project.

1.2 Background

The Grand Rapids Project is a 2.1-megawatt (MW), run-of-river (ROR) facility located on the Mississippi River in the City of Grand Rapids in Itasca County, Minnesota. On December 13, 2018, MP initiated the ILP by filing a Pre-Application Document (PAD) and Notice of Intent (NOI) with the Commission. Major ILP milestones to-date are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Major ILP Milestones Completed

12/13/2018	PAD and NOI Filed
02/07/2019	Scoping Document 1 (SD1) Issued by FERC
03/06-03/07/2019	FERC Agency and Public Scoping Meetings Conducted
03/06/2019	Project Site Visit Held
05/16/2019	Scoping Document 2 (SD2) Issued by FERC
05/28/2019	Proposed Study Plan (PSP) Filed
06/20/2019	PSP Meeting Conducted
09/23/2019	Revised Study Plan (RSP) Filed
10/16/2019	FERC Issues Study Plan Determination (SPD)
10/19/2020	Initial Study Report (ISR) filed
10/29/2020	ISR Meeting held
7/30/2021	Draft License Application (DLA) filed

2 Study Goals and Objectives

The Recreation Resources Study will collect information regarding current recreation use levels and the condition of the existing Project recreation facilities. The goals and objectives of this study are to:

- Gather information on the condition of the MP-managed, FERC-approved recreation facilities and identify any need for improvement; and
- Characterize current recreational use and future demand of the MP-managed, FERC-approved recreation facilities within the Project Boundary

3 Study Area

The Project supports a variety of recreation opportunities. MP manages a FERC-approved canoe self-portage for recreationists. The canoe self-portage trail take-out and signage are located approximately 1,000 feet upstream of the dam on the southwestern bank of Blandin Reservoir on land owned by the City of Grand Rapids (Figure 1). MP currently assists the City of Grand Rapids in the maintenance of the take-out area of the FERC-approved canoe self-portage trail. The canoe self-portage extends approximately 0.5 miles along the City of Grand Rapids streets and sidewalks to the put-in site at the City of Grand Rapids' Steamboat Park, approximately 0.3 miles downstream of Blandin Dam. The canoe self-portage take-out is the only public recreation area associated with the Project that's maintained by MP, and thus is the only surveyed location in this study.

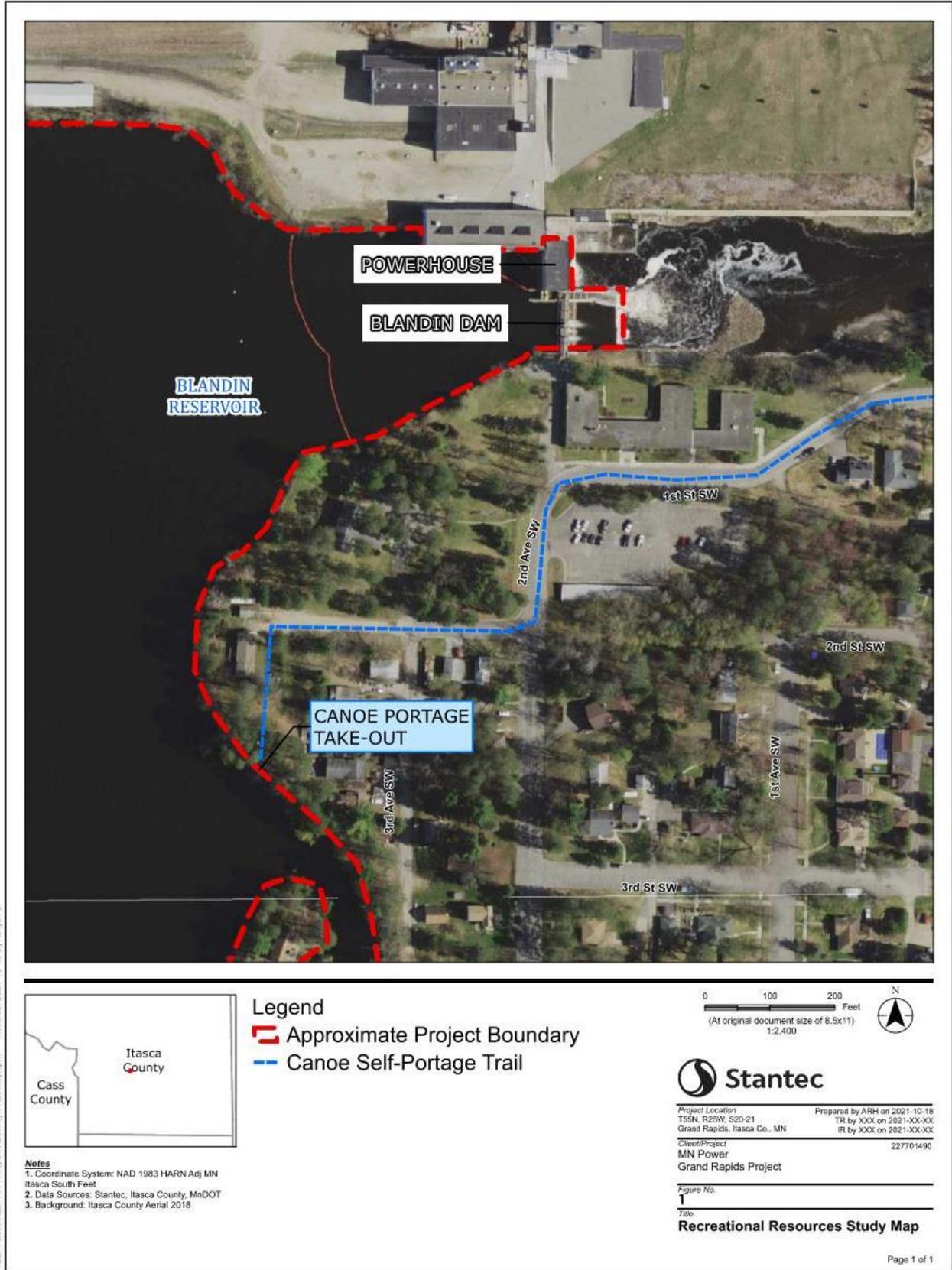


Figure 1. Grand Rapids Project site and recreational resources maintained by MP.

4 Methodology

Recreation surveys were completed at the Grand Rapids Project site following procedures outlined in the Recreation Resources Study Plan (2019) and listed below in Table 2. There were 20 total survey events May 22nd through September 11th, 2021. The surveys were originally scheduled for the 2020 season but were delayed a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2. Survey requirements stated in the RSP (2019).

May	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two weekend days, one during Memorial Day Weekend• Two randomly selected weekdays
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two weekend days• Two randomly selected weekdays
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two weekend days, one following the 4th of July• Two randomly selected weekdays
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two weekend days• Two randomly selected weekdays
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two weekend days, one during Labor Day Weekend• Two randomly selected weekdays

Surveys were performed at the Grand Rapids Project recreation site on the following dates:

- May: 22nd, 25th, 27th, and 30th
- June: 2nd, 12th, 14th, 27th
- July: 3rd, 13th, 24th, 30th
- August: 8th, 12th, 21st, 24th
- September: 1st, 5th, 9th, 11th

During recreation surveys, the observer recorded the following information:

- Date and time;
- Observer;
- Weather conditions;
- Number of people observed;
- Observed activities; and
- Pertinent notes

An example of the online site observation form can be found in Appendix A.

In addition to site observations, an online form was developed to administer a survey to recreational users encountered during site visits. These surveys recorded the number of

people in a party, their primary reason (activity) for visiting the Project, their perception of level of use of the site, and their opinions about the amount and types of recreation opportunities offered at the FERC-approved recreation site. An example of the survey form is included in Appendix B.

Methods developed for use in FERC Form 80 reporting were used to estimate the use of MP-managed, FERC-approved facilities on-site. Information collected from recreational use observations were used to determine the adequacy of current recreational opportunities and estimate future recreational demand.

5 Study Results

5.1 Recreation Facility Inventory and Condition Assessment

Minnesota Power maintains a FERC-approved canoe self-portage take-out on the southwestern bank of Blandin Reservoir on land owned by the City of Grand Rapids. The canoe self-portage take-out falls within Project boundaries. Portage trail extends from the take-out along 0.5 miles of City of Grand Rapids streets and sidewalks to the put-in, approximately 0.3 miles below Blandin Dam and the City of Grand Rapids' Steamboat Park. Approximately 0.3 miles of the portage trail is City sidewalk. Figure 1 shows the Project site, Project boundary, location of the MP-maintained recreation area, and portage trail. The recreational areas owned and maintained by MP are open to the public 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and year-round.

The Project area provides an opportunity for paddlers to safely avoid Blandin Dam as they paddle up or down the Mississippi River.

Dam and power generation facilities on the Project site are not open to the public. There are no public restrooms or outhouses on-site. The City of Grand Rapids provides an easement for access from City roads to the canoe self-portage take-out. Canoe self-portage signage exists on shore facing Blandin Reservoir to designate the take-out, trail, and put-in. The Project recreation site is not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Photos of the Project site, MP-maintained take-out, and signage are provided in Appendix C.

In addition to recreation offered at the Project site, there are numerous recreation areas near the Project site operated by the City of Grand Rapids, Itasca County, and others (Table 3).

Table 3. Recreation sites in the Grand Rapids Project area

Recreation Area	Distance to Grand Rapids Dam	Amenities	Owner/Operator	Relationship to Project Boundary	Operation Use and Condition
Pokegama Dam and Recreation Area	3.0 miles upstream	Boat launch, dock, picnic area with grills, a playground, and 19 RV sites with a disposal station.	USACE	Partially within	May through October Good Condition
Blandin Mississippi River Park and Izaak Walton Landing	2.0 miles upstream	Site of Blandin Reservoir (Lake Sylvan area) boat launch and popular fishing site	Blandin Paper Company	Partially within	Year-round Good Condition
Forest History Center Trail System	1.4 miles upstream of the dam	Contains 5 miles of trails at the Forest History Center that connect to the National Scenic Trail	State of Minnesota Historic Society	Adjacent to	Year-round Good Condition
Sylvan Park with Sylvan Landing	0.8 miles upstream	Contains a boat launch, linkage to several trails along the south shores of the lake, restrooms, benches and a picnic area with grills.	City of Grand Rapids	Partially within	Year-round Good Condition
Skogebo Park	0.6 miles upstream	Undeveloped green space along the lake shore.	City of Grand Rapids	Partially within	Year-round Good Condition
River Park	0.1 miles downstream	Contains a walking trail and scenic overlook.	City of Grand Rapids	Partially within	Year-round Good Condition
Riverfront Trail System	Along the downstream banks of the Mississippi River	Bituminous walking trail with a fishing pier that connects with River Park, a fishing pier, and the Angel of Hope memorial garden on the south shore of the Mississippi River.	City of Grand Rapids	Partially within and adjacent to	Year-round Good Condition
Steamboat Park	0.3 miles downstream	Contains a public boat launch to the Mississippi River and is the put-in site for portagers at Blandin Dam.	City of Grand Rapids	Partially within	Year-round Good Condition
Veterans Memorial Park	1.0 miles downstream	36-acre site with two picnic shelters, toilets, and picnic areas with grills, play area, and trails.	City of Grand Rapids	Partially within and adjacent to	Year-round Good Condition
Oakland Park	1.2 miles downstream	10.7-acre site with athletic fields, equipment, parking, and connections to trails.	City of Grand Rapids	Partially within and adjacent to	Year-round Good Condition

5.2 Recreational Use Observation

In total, one group of three people were observed using the Grand Rapids Project site during the 20 recreation surveys, totaling over 40 hours of observations. Observations occurred in 2-hour increments and captured every day of the week, holiday weekends, and various time windows throughout the day.

The group of three people using the self-portage take-out was observed during the first survey on May 22nd, 2021. No other people were observed using the MP-managed site during the remaining surveys; however, multiple boaters were observed enjoying Blandin Reservoir near the take-out. Boaters were not noted in recreational use observations as users of the Project site.

An online form was used to collect recreational use observations at each site on each day. See Appendix A for full survey data records.

Site capacity utilization was estimated using recreational use observations and methods developed for use in FERC Form 80. The total of one group observed at the Project site divided by 40 total hours of observation estimates site capacity utilization at approximately 3%. Current use does not exceed site capacity.

5.3 Recreational Survey

One survey form was administered to the group of three people encountered on May 22nd, 2021. No other surveys were administered at the Project site over the course of the study.

The survey provided an opportunity for respondents to provide an opinion on the type and amount of existing recreational opportunities available at the site, and to provide any additional comments. The group encountered on May 22nd had a positive opinion of the opportunities provided by the MP-operated site and perceived the site to be used moderately. Their only suggestion was to include better, more visible signage for the self-portage take-out from the water, stating that it was hard to see when paddling downstream towards Blandin dam. See Appendix B for the full, detailed response from the party on May 22nd, 2021.

6 Summary

The Grand Rapids Project site provides an important opportunity for paddlers to portage the Blandin Dam. The site saw few users over the course of the survey. The single survey respondent, representing three users, had a positive opinion of the site.

7 Literature Cited

Minnesota Power (2019). Revised Study Plan: Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Project (FERC No. 2362) and Prairie River Hydroelectric Project (FERC No. 2361). Prepared by HDR Engineering, Inc. for Minnesota Power. September 23, 2019.

Appendix A: Recreational Use Observation Records

MN Power Recreation Study: Site Observation Form

* Required

1. Site Name *

Mark only one oval.

- Prairie River Hydroelectric Dam
- Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam

2. Name *

3. Date *

Example: January 7, 2019

4. Time Arrived at Site *

Example: 8:30 AM

5. Weather Conditions *

Check all that apply.

	Bright Sun	Sunny	Overcast	Rain	Snow
Weather	<input type="checkbox"/>				

6. Weather Conditions *

Check all that apply.

	<32	32-50	50-70	70-85	85-100	>100
Air Temp (degrees F)	<input type="checkbox"/>					

7. Weather Conditions *

Check all that apply.

	Still	Moderate	High
Wind	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Weather Conditions *

Check all that apply.

	Dry	Moderate	Humid
Humidity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Number of people observed and approximate time of visit: *

10. Observed Activities (fishing, canoeing, walking, etc.) *

11. Notes

12. Time Leaving Site *

Example: 8:30 AM

Link to user survey if/when users are spotted.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSedMYUD3ZTKnUKwodPLEnKnLsALNojOhpXVLVpoU0XAVsSL3g/viewform?usp=sf_link

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Site Name	Name	Date	Time Arrived at Site	Weather Conditions [Weather]	Weather Conditions [Air Temp (degrees F)]	Weather Conditions [Wind]	Weather Conditions [Humidity]	Number of people observed and approximate time of visit:		Observed Activities (fishing, canoeing, walking, etc.)	Notes	Time Leaving Site
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Katie kemmitt	5/22/2021	8:45:00 AM	Overcast	70-85	Moderate	Humid	3	3	1 kayaker, 2 helpers for portaging	1 kayaker is attempting the Guinness record	10:49:00 AM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Elizabeth Mitchell	5/25/2021	1:30:00 PM	Bright Sun, Overcast	70-85	High	Moderate	No rec area users at all.	0	NA	79F, wind really started to pick up, became consistently high winds, created waves and didn't produce favorable water conditions!	3:30:00 PM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Elizabeth Mitchell	5/27/2021	9:50:00 AM	Overcast	32-50	Still	Moderate	0	0	NA		11:47:00 AM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Jim Potter	5/30/2021	10:05:00 AM	Overcast	50-70	Moderate	Moderate	0		1 fishing boat in bay	Clouds cleared up by 10:45, wind picked up some. Activities 0 by 11:00. Met a homeowner at landing. Her name was Aaron (yes, that is correct spelling per her). She stated that landing is used 3 or 4 times a week by her observation. She also mentioned that Saturday AM she sees most use of site	12:15:00 AM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Elizabeth Mitchell	6/2/2021	1:30:00 PM	Sunny	70-85	Still, Moderate	Moderate	1 man on his boat at 3pm	1	Fishing		3:20:00 PM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Elizabeth Mitchell	6/12/2021	3:00:00 PM	Sunny	70-85	Moderate	Moderate	None	0	NA	Always pretty windy at this spot!	5:00:00 PM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Elizabeth Mitchell	6/14/2021	11:00:00 AM	Bright Sun, Sunny	70-85	Moderate	Moderate	0	0	NA		12:58:00 PM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Elizabeth Mitchell	6/27/2021	5:45:00 PM	Sunny	70-85	Moderate	Moderate	0		NA		7:15:00 PM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Elizabeth Mitchell	7/3/2021	2:30:00 PM	Bright Sun	85-100	Still, Moderate	Moderate	0		NA		4:05:00 PM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Elizabeth Mitchell	7/13/2021	10:53:00 AM	Sunny, Overcast	70-85	Still, Moderate	Moderate	0		NA	the grass was mowed next to the portage	12:45:00 PM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Katie Kemmitt	7/24/2021	10:05:00 AM	Sunny	70-85	Moderate	Humid	0		None	No people observed. Quiet on the lake today.	12:05:00 AM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Elizabeth Mitchell	7/30/2021	10:27:00 AM	Overcast	70-85	Moderate	Moderate	0		NA	broken twigs & branches scattered around site from storm earlier in week!	12:00:00 PM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Ali Stone	8/8/2021	10:20:00 AM	Overcast	50-70	Moderate	Humid	10:20, talked to homeowner near site 11:50, man and women and two dogs in fishing boat		fishing	Tall timber days is going on today (big town festivel) rained the night prior	12:20:00 PM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Anna Healy	8/12/2021	12:45:00 PM	Sunny	50-70	High	Moderate	Saw no people		Saw no people		2:45:00 PM

Site Name	Name	Date	Time Arrived at Site	Weather Conditions [Weather]	Weather Conditions [Air Temp (degrees F)]	Weather Conditions [Wind]	Weather Conditions [Humidity]	Number of people observed and approximate time of visit:		Observed Activities (fishing, canoeing, walking, etc.)	Notes	Time Leaving Site
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Kurt Krautmann	8/21/2021	10:30:00 AM	Overcast	50-70	High	Moderate	0		0	Rained from 10:30-11. Sun came out at 11:40 am but then went back to overcast. Water was choppy due to wind.	12:30:00 AM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Anna Healy	8/24/2021	11:45:00 AM	Sunny	70-85	Moderate	Moderate	12:50: one man went by in a pontoon (did not talk to him) 1:15: two people put a boat in		Boating, fishing		1:45:00 PM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Anna Healy	9/1/2021	11:45:00 AM	Sunny	50-70	Still	Moderate	12:20-saw a woman go by in a kayak but did not talk to her		n/a	No people using site	1:45:00 PM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Anna Healy	9/5/2021	9:00:00 AM	Sunny	50-70	Moderate	Moderate	n/a		n/a	Saw no people	11:00:00 AM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Katie Kemmitt	9/9/2021	6:36:00 AM	Sunny	32-50	Still	Humid	0		N/A		8:36:00 AM
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	Katie kemmitt	9/11/2021	12:11:00 PM	Sunny	50-70	Moderate	Moderate	0	67	N/A	Lots of eagles flying around today	2:11:00 PM

Appendix B: Recreational Survey Records

MN Power Recreation Study: User Survey

* Required

1. Site Name *

Mark only one oval.

- Prairie River Hydroelectric Dam
- Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam

2. Today's date (or date you were at the dam site)

Example: January 7, 2019

3. 1. How many people are in your party?

4. 2. About how often do you visit this site?

Mark only one oval.

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Annually
- Other: _____

5. 3. How much do you perceive this area is used for recreation?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Infrequently	<input type="radio"/>	Frequently				

6. 4. What are your primary activities at the site today?

Check all that apply.

Fishing

Kayaking

Canoeing

Walking/hiking

Birdwatching

Other: _____

7. 5. What is your opinion of the amount and type of existing recreational opportunities at the dam site?

8. 6. Other Comments

Thank you for participating in this survey!

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Google Forms

Site Name	Today's date (or date you were at the dam site)	1. How many people are in your party?	2. About how often do you visit this site?	3. How much do you perceive this area is used for recreation?	4. What are your primary activities at the site today?	5. What is your opinion of the amount and type of existing recreational opportunities at the dam site?	6. Other Comments
Grand Rapids Hydroelectric Dam	5/22/2021	3	Never before	4	Kayaking, Attempt Guinness book of world record	Great opportunities here	Need better signage for paddlers and for accessing from land

Appendix C: Photos



Map at canoe portage take-out area above Blandin Dam.



City of Grand Rapids easement providing access to the canoe portage take-out from 2nd Street Southwest.



Canoe portage put-in downstream of Blandin Dam near River Grand Senior Living building in Steamboat Park.



Site user portages kayak at MP-managed canoe portage take-out area on 5-22-2021.

