Frequently Asked Questions

Why are the dams being removed?
In 2005, Traverse City Light and Power determined it was not economically feasible to produce hydropower at the Brown Bridge, Boardman and Sabin dams. The dam owners – the City of Traverse City and Grand Traverse County – organized a citizen-based Boardman River Dams Committee to gather community feedback, encourage community involvement and manage an engineering and feasibility study to assess the environmental, economic and social implications of retaining, modifying or removing the dams.

After thorough review and discussion, the dam owners decided to remove the Brown Bridge, Boardman and Sabin dams and modify Union Street Dam. If Boardman Dam was left in place, significant upgrades including a new emergency overflow structure (2009 estimate $1,760,000) and additional repairs without the function of hydroelectric production (2009 estimate $2,230,000 to $3,060,000) would have been required. In addition, maintenance of Boardman and Sabin dams was estimated in 2009 to range between $30,000 and $60,000 every year. The decision to remove the dams was based on the economics as well as the hazard the aging infrastructure posed to the community and the continued negative effects the dams have on the Boardman River’s water quality, fishery and wildlife.

What are the benefits of dam removal?
The benefits of dam removal include restoring more natural river flows for fish and wildlife, eliminating the safety risks of aging infrastructure and enhancing opportunities for recreation.

How much does it cost to remove Boardman Dam?
The construction phase of the dam removal and related restoration work is estimated to cost $8.4 million. Engineering designs (incl. Sabin Dam conceptual design) and permits for Cass Road bridge and Boardman Dam cost $1.4 million. Additional non-construction costs including project management, communication and monitoring are currently estimated at $250,000/yr during active management.
How is the removal of Boardman Dam being paid for?
Through the Environmental Protection Agency – Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is bringing $8 million for the construction phase of the project. In addition, funding has been secured from the Bureau of Indian Affairs through the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa & Chippewa Indians, City of Traverse City, Grand Traverse County, Great Lakes Fishery Trust, Michigan DNR – Dams Management Program, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation – Sustain Our Great Lakes and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service – Great Lakes Fish Basin and Great Lakes Fish & Wildlife Restoration Act programs.

How is this dam removal different than Brown Bridge Dam removal?
This phase requires two seasons of construction to first replace Cass Road bridge in 2016 then remove Boardman Dam in 2017, at which time the river will be rerouted under the new bridge. The other major difference is how Boardman Pond will be dewatered. The pond drawdown will be done utilizing a bypass pumping/siphon system to dewater the impoundment prior to removing the dam. This approach will maintain the dam structure during the drawdown process and provide an added measure of safety.

What are the risks of flooding after removal of Boardman Dam?
Boardman Dam was constructed for power generation, not for flood control management. The removal of Boardman Dam removes the risk of an unintentional dam failure and also provides a restored and reconnected floodplain enabling the watershed to better manage high water events.

How might the removal of Boardman Dam change the river downstream?
Long-term impacts from removing Boardman Dam will be fully realized once Sabin Dam is also removed. These impacts are expected to include colder water temperatures, increased dissolved oxygen levels, and the natural movement of sediment, nutrients, fish and wildlife.

What is the role of the Implementation Team (IT)?
The IT is a collaborative body formed in 2005 to provide oversight of the disposition of the dams. Voting members of the team consist of representatives from the City of Traverse City, Grand Traverse County, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Hydro Relicensing Coalition, Traverse City Light and Power and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

What is the role of Grand Traverse County?
Boardman Dam is owned by Grand Traverse County. As the owner, the County is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the dam. In 2009, the County elected to remove Boardman Dam as part of The Boardman: A River Reborn. The County is contributing non-federal funding for dam removal and is an active partner in the project.

What is the role of Grand Traverse County Road Commission?
The Road Commission is responsible for the road system in Grand Traverse County including the Cass Road bridge. The new bridge project has been developed to correlate with the removal of Boardman Dam. It is managed by Grand Traverse County Road Commission with funding from Michigan Department of Transportation Local Assistance Program and Road Commission General Funds. Parallel to the bridge project in 2016, the Road Commission is upgrading the Keystone Rd / Cass Rd intersection including longer turn lanes and signal improvements.

What is the role of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers?
The Army Corps is a key project partner in the removal of Boardman and Sabin dams as well as the modification of Union Street Dam. Through the Environmental Protection Agency – Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the Corps is helping to bring $8 million in funding for the removal of Boardman Dam. The Corps will be managing the Boardman Dam removal and related river channel restoration in partnership with local stakeholders.