# 2026 Request for Proposals for Research at the National Crude Oil Spill Fate and Natural Attenuation Research Site

## Introduction

The Steering Committee of the National Crude Oil Spill Fate and Natural Attenuation Research Site (Site) is soliciting proposals for projects to be conducted after June 1, 2026. The Site is located northwest of Bemidji in Beltrami County, Minnesota.   Proposals for new projects led by academic institutions or private industry are especially encouraged, though proposals for continuing studies will also be considered.  As you develop your proposal, please consult with us (contact information at the end of this document), industry, academic and/or trade organizations and review previous research that has been conducted at the site. Background about the Site and previous research is available on the web at <http://mn.water.usgs.gov/projects/bemidji/>.

Proposals may be for projects 1 to 2 years in duration, or for longer term projects that can leverage the available infrastructure and resources at the site.

A major function of the site is to informally bring together members of academia, consultants and industry. This is accomplished each year through a USGS-hosted field session at the research site. The exact dates of the field session are forthcoming, but we anticipate it happening June 15 – 27, 2026. During the field session, project leaders are expected to give an informal presentation about their research to the entire research team at an evening research sharing event. This event is a way for researchers to gain a broad perspective of research occurring at the site and develop collaborations.

## Proposal Deadline

Proposals are due by 11:59 pm (Central Time) on February 26, 2026. Proposals must be submitted electronically as an email attachment to Jared Trost, [jtrost@usgs.gov](mailto:jtrost@usgs.gov).

## Program Objectives

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the U.S. Geological Survey Upper Midwest Water Science Center, Enbridge Energy Limited Partnership, Beltrami County, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency describes the National Crude Oil Spate Fate and Natural Attenuation Research Site as “a cooperative endeavor to maintain a site in Beltrami County, Minnesota, at which research can be conducted concerning the fate of crude oil in the environment.” Funding for this research program has been provided by Enbridge, as directed by MPCA. The Steering Committee for the Site, comprising one member of each of the four parties to the MOU, evaluates proposals submitted to this RFP.

## Research Priorities

The primary research priority is improving the understanding of the mobilization, attenuation, transport, and fate of crude oil in the subsurface. Examples of desired research include, but are not limited to, the following:

* Investigation of the natural attenuation of petroleum hydrocarbons in ground water;
* Investigation of the behavior and fate of vapors in the unsaturated zone above crude-oil contaminated soil and ground-water;
* Investigation of the properties of biodegradation product compounds, individually and in mixtures, to evaluate the potential effects of petroleum degradation compounds on human health and the environment;
* Investigation of ecological effects of petroleum spills and remediation strategies;
* Development and testing of practical methods for investigation and remediation of crude-oil contaminated sites;
* Development and testing of alternative or enhanced in-situ remediation strategies.

## Budget

Proposals up to $15,000 will be considered; typically, research grants may be provided in the $2,000 - $8,000 range. Because the total cost of requests is likely to exceed available funds, applicants are encouraged to request only essential resources. No specific funding match is required, but priority will be given to projects that demonstrate that matching funding will significantly leverage the requested funds.

## Proposal Review, Selection, and Award Process

Proposals that are incomplete, that do not conform to the Proposal Instructions, that are scientifically questionable, that are in conflict with or redundant with current research at the Site or elsewhere, or that pose risk to the Site will not be considered for funding.

Proposals will be reviewed first by the Site Manager and then by the Steering Committee. Proposals are rated based on several factors, including scientific merit and likelihood of success, meeting the research priorities specified in this RFP, and leveraging of requested funds with matching funds and in-kind contributions. Final funding decisions are at the discretion of the Site’s four-member Steering Committee.

## Proposal Instructions

On all pages (the cover page, main body, and supporting documents of the proposal) use 12 pt font, and leave a minimum of 1-inch margins all around. Proposals must consist of the following three elements:

Cover page (use template provided)

Limited to 1 page. Include the following, in the given order, on the cover page:

* Title, short but descriptive;
* Project duration;
* Funding requested;
* Matching funds pledge;
* Principal Investigator(s) name and affiliation, with full contact information for the lead PI;
* Financial contact information (name, position, email, mailing address)
* Abstract, 300 words maximum.

Main body of the proposal (use template provided)

Limited to 6 numbered pages, including tables, figures, and references. Include the following, in the given order, in the body of the proposal.

* Title, same as on the Cover page;
* Introduction, including identifying research gap to be filled or research area to be expanded upon, and the relationship of proposed work to current work at the Site or elsewhere;
* Nature, scope, and objectives of project;
* Project timeline
* Methods, procedures, and facilities, including enough information to permit evaluation of the technical adequacy of the approach to satisfy the objectives;
* Student training provided during the project (e.g., undergraduate or graduate student participation in the work);
* Expected deliverable, including an information dissemination plan;
* A description of the liability insurance that will cover any proposed work at the site;
* Cited references.

Proposal Budget (use the template provided)

* Budget summary and explanation

Supporting documents

Include the following, in the given order:

* CV for each investigator;
* Matching fund commitment documentation, in the form of a letter signed by a person qualified to make the commitment.

## Other information

All grantees will be required to acknowledge the funding or sponsoring entity as the “National Crude Oil Spill Fate and Natural Attenuation Research Site, a collaborative venture of the USGS, Enbridge Energy Limited Partnership, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and Beltrami County.”

Successful grantees will be paid directly by Enbridge under the direction of the MPCA, or directly by the MPCA.

## Proposal and Budget Questions

As you develop your ideas for research at the Site, you can consult with Barbara Bekins ([babekins@usgs.gov](mailto:babekins@usgs.gov)) or the Site Manager, Jared Trost (763-614-8126, [jtrost@usgs.gov](mailto:jtrost@usgs.gov)).

If you have questions about the RFP process (e.g. proposal and budget format) please contact the Site Manager, Jared Trost, 763-614-8126, [jtrost@usgs.gov](mailto:jtrost@usgs.gov).