TRAVERSE CITY — The Michigan Department of Natural Resources will chip in $75,000 to help fund the Sabin Dam removal project.

The department’s Dam Management Grant Program has agreed to help foot the bill for the $800,000 removal phase of the project, which Conservation Resource Alliance is taking on as part of a larger, multi-partner Boardman River restoration campaign. CRA Biologist Nate Winkler said the organization had applied for $200,000 in grant funds, but even the smaller amount will help. The organization currently has $500,000 for the removal phase, and will keep seeking grants to close the gap, Winkler said.

Design work for the project, slated to begin in 2018, is all but complete, Winkler said. Overall the project is set to cost at least $3.8 million.

Sabin Dam removal, by the numbers
Design costs: $407,000
Removal costs: $800,000
Removal timeline: Set to start in 2018
River restoration: $1.8 million
Total cost: $3.8 million to $4.4 million

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Plans call for using a siphon system to reduce the water level in the pond behind the Sabin Dam, Winkler said. Once water drops low enough, removal crews will start digging into the berm starting with the emergency spillway.

The plans are similar to those for the Boardman Dam removal which is set to begin in late spring. Both aim to prevent the kind of catastrophic blowout that occurred during the Brown Bridge Dam removal process in 2012.

“We’ve learned quite a bit from that experience,” he said.

Winkler said he and CRA members had a preconstruction meeting Monday with the contractor picked to remove the Boardman Dam. Crews will start trucking over equipment from Wisconsin as soon as state officials lift seasonal weight restrictions. Tree clearing and siphon installation should begin in April. Removing the Boardman Dam, which is upriver from the Sabin, and restoring the river there is expected to cost less than the $8 million granted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Winkler said. That means there should be leftover money for more fish and wildlife habitat work.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers granted Environmental Protection funds for the project, and the money wouldn’t be impacted by any future cuts to the federal agency, Winkler said.

The Sabin Dam will be the last of three dams to be removed as part of a campaign to restore the Boardman River closer to its natural state. Grand Traverse County owns the Boardman and Sabin dams, and Traverse City Light & Power stopped using all three for hydroelectric power in 2004.

County Deputy Administrator Jen DeHaan said the progress toward removal of both dams is exciting, especially the Boardman.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers representatives were in Traverse City on Tuesday for project planning for the Boardman Dam, and news of the grant means progress for the Sabin Dam project as well.

“I think it’s great that the CRA is able to secure funding for the removal of the Sabin Dam,” she said. “That’s been an excellent partnership.”