THE TOWN OF CRANE LAKE:

COMMUNITY DESIGN AND LAND EXCHANGE PROJECT
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PROJECT BUILDING
Learning from the Community Action Plan

The Community Design and Land Exchange Project is a community-engaged design process that addresses the major land use and community form issues facing the town of Crane Lake today. Rural communities in areas of high amenity resources, are facing a variety of issues that affect economic, social, and ecologic sustainability. In May of 2001 the citizens of Crane Lake completed a community action plan. The need for the plan was described as follows:

Need for Plan:
Various activities and opportunities over the past few years surfaced the need for a community action plan. Reasons for this need include:

The Governor’s Fishing Opener in May 2000 was a community success. It revealed the community’s ability to work together to design and carry out a complex event of statewide significance. The community felt that this success would be a springboard for completing a comprehensive community action plan.

Release of the Voyageurs National Park General Management Plan, the pending revision of the Superior National Forest Plan, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Off Highway Vehicle System Plan for Northeast Minnesota raised issues that may impact sustainable community development.

Land exchange proposals within the Crane Lake Water and Sewer District, Crane Lake Visitor and Tourism Bureau, Crane Lake Fire Department and Snowmobile Club continue to develop. However, the Crane Lake area does not have one united voice that can compete for project grants and address issues common to the community.

Due to the large regulatory presence of Federal, State and County agencies in the area and the lack of a united community voice, establishing lines of communication between the community and government agencies is difficult.

There is a lack of communication between year-round and seasonal residents.

Planning Process:
Two community meetings and one survey were conducted to develop a vision for the Crane Lake community. Topics addressed were community strengths, weaknesses, vision, and barriers. Potential projects were identified and from that list priority projects were selected by a community vote. These priority projects will help to focus the community for the next several years. Other projects may surface depending upon community priorities and available resources, both human and financial.

Community members and project leaders were identified for each project. The Steering Committee plans to periodically meet with each project leader to provide support. Project leaders will keep the steering committee informed. Butch Eggen, as Steering Committee Chairperson, will automatically be a member of each committee.

It is important for each Project Committee to understand that technical assistance and/or project funding may be requested to accomplish the projects. Many State and Federal programs are available to provide technical and funding support to small rural communities to implement projects in their Community Action Plans. The Plan must be referenced in order to be competitive for any technical assistance or grant.

The meetings ended on a high note. Many people expressed favorable comments about the community action plan process and the amount of community involvement. They also expressed strong support for the top priority projects.

Priority Projects:
The community identified a large list of potential projects. They then determined by vote the following top priorities:

Sewer and Water System. The Crane Lake Water and Sanitary District was established under laws of the State of Minnesota in 1996.

Form a Local Government. Research and recommend a form of local government that best serves the community.

Internet and Cell Phone Service. Provide reliable and efficient internet and cellular phone service to the community of Crane Lake to meet personal, business, educational, outreach and marketing needs.

Connecting Multi-Use Four Season Trail System. Support a variety of trail opportunities.

Community Center. Develop a realistic building proposal that meets community needs and a strategy for funding acquisition.
Community Beautification. Develop a coordinated vision for the appearance of Crane Lake.

Other Identified Needs:
Housing
Community marketing
More land for private development
Expanded youth activities

The above text is from the Crane Lake Community Action Plan, 2001.

Scope of Work
The scope of work for this design and planning project was identified as having two major directives:

1. Crane Lake Trails Network and Spaces Plan; and
2. The Land Exchange Design Proposals.

Crane Lake Trails Network and Spaces Plan addresses:
- A network of area trails;
- Connections to existing trail amenities;
- Access to land and water scapes;
- Local community trails;
- Trailhead design;
- Public space development; and
- Enhancement of the town’s identity.

The Proposed Land Exchange Designs address:
- A town hall/community center;
- New recreational opportunities;
- Sub-division options;
- Issues of affordable living;
- The identification of a land base for new development;
- Strategies that promote sustainable development; and
- A public gathering space.
Identifying Community Issues

Project programming that began with the Crane Lake Community Action Plan was continued through the community design process. Preliminary kick off meetings were held with the public, Steering Committee, United States Forest Service (USFS), and other stakeholder and interest groups. These meetings were used to identify community strengths and weaknesses, and develop design programs for the project. The following is a summary of the key opportunities and constraints expressed in these meetings.

Major issues facing Crane Lake:
- Lack of public land in town ownership;
- Escalating land prices;
- Community livability for year-round residents;
- Affordable housing;
- Sale and redevelopment of family owned and operated resorts; and
- Loss of service and skilled workers associated with the changing environment.