NORTHERN PRAIRIE VISITOR’S CENTER
CROOKSTON, MINNESOTA
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Other Participating Groups:
# Table of Contents

**Introduction**  
Project Scope  
1 - 2

**Region**  
Red Lake River Valley  
3 - 4

**Existing Conditions**  
Site & Facility  
5 - 12

**Design Concept**  
The Natural, Constructed, & The Module  
Program & Players  
13 - 16

**Master Plan**  
Visitor’s Center, Seed Farm, & Nature Preserve  
The Northern Prairie  
17 - 20

**Site Plan**  
Marrywood Facility & the Northern Prairie Visitor’s Center  
21 - 22

**Illustrative Details**  
The Vision  
Design and Details  
23 - 26

**Facility**  
Ground Floor  
First Floor  
Second Floor  
Ground Level  
27 - 34

**Appendix A, B, & C**  
Plant Lists for the Northern Prairie Restoration  
Plant Lists for the Three Biome Educational Pocket Gardens  
Market and Economic Analysis  
35 - 42
Crookston is not unlike many rural communities looking for ways to invigorate the local economy and improve the quality of life for its citizens. However, unlike many rural communities, Crookston has natural resources that can attract a relatively low impact “growth” industry: nature tourism. From a strategic perspective, Crookston is in the enviable position of being the nearest city to the largest prairie and wetland restoration project in history (The Nature Conservancy’s Glacial Ridge Project and newly designated Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge). Over the past 20 years, nature tourism has had a positive impact on local economies – not just in the United States but worldwide. There are numerous models for successful eco-tourism development including the Platte River in rural Nebraska, Rio Grande Valley in Texas, Hawk Mountain in rural Pennsylvania, and others.

To be successful, nature tourism projects have four things in common: charismatic wildlife, infrastructure (visitor center, science center, blinds, boardwalks, field stations), competent guides (naturalists, writers, scientists, tour leaders, photographers), and a competitive marketing strategy. Presently, Crookston has the Tallgrass Prairie, a charismatic biome, with its charismatic and unique nature features - prairie chickens, owls, sandhill cranes, fringed orchids, the aurora borealis, and weather extremes. Furthermore, the Deciduous and Boreal Forest Biomes also occur in the county making the region continentally significant. Publicity and marketing are a significant component of UMC’s Nature Northwest Project which is well underway. What is missing are the infrastructure and knowledgeable local guides.

To build on the work of the Nature Northwest Project and existing natural resource assets, the City of Crookston funded a study to determine the feasibility of a Bird Observatory / Northern Prairie Nature Visitor Center in Crookston. This is the first step in building the infrastructure necessary to highlight Northwest Minnesota’s natural resources, increase tourism, and improve the local economy.

Following this study a design team assembled by the Center for Changing Landscapes worked with the city and a nature center focus group to build project partnerships, design programs, and select a site for design exploration. After multiple meetings and exploration of available sites the Marywood site was chosen. Located at the site of a former convent, the building and site provided the necessary land and infrastructure for the project program.

The Project Scope:

Task 1: Programming:

Identify potential programs for the Marywood building and assign square foot requirements. Identify list of potential tenants, uses, and spatial needs: administrative, residential, educational, outreach, meeting, etc. Produce program matrix for the Marywood facility. Identify a spatial concept for the occupancy of the facility by the groups identified.

Task 2:

Site Design: Prepare a conceptual site design, a recommended site program, and site elements. The design will be represented by a plan view concept drawing. Analysis of opportunities, constraints and critical relationships within the site. Key site elements will be explored using plan, section, elevation and/or perspective drawings.

Task 3: Final Product

All design work will be provided in 30” by 40” hardcopy format (1 set) as well as a reproducible 8.5” x 11” hardcopy format (5 sets). Designs, matrices, and programming will be compiled into a final document. One (1) hard copy will be provided along with 10 digital CD versions. This CD will also contain digital versions of the large format design boards for presentation and reproduction purposes.
Northern Prairie Visitor’s Center

Focus Group Process
Programming
Site Selection
Analysis
Master Plan
Site Design
Building Concept

Creating A Vision