The Vision

The District’s commitment to renovate the Lost Valley Visitor Center as an adaptive, reuse facility resulted in creating a multi-faceted destination, unique to the region.

Throughout the planning and development of the facility, the District held fast to the vision of creating a distinct building that would make connections with people well beyond the walls of the building; such that, visitors would be encouraged to explore our natural resources in greater detail and find ways to make their lifestyles more sustainable.

The Lost Valley Visitor Center showcases an adaptive reuse of an existing facility, including multiple green technologies which meet the “gold level” of LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification.

The 28,000 square foot Lost visitor center, located in the geographic center of the 3,432 acre Glacial Park in Richmond, IL, opened to the public in August 2010. Renovations began in summer of 2009 working through previous construction that occurred in four phases (1955, 1970, 1985 and 2001) designed to meet the needs of former owners.

With a modest investment the Conservation District could have modified the building quickly and adapted its rooms for immediate use. However, as a conservation organization, District leaders felt that the facility must be renovated in a manner which would accomplish two goals: first, function effectively as a visitor center and environmental education hub for the citizens of McHenry County and second, reduce the facility’s carbon footprint.

This unique building is not just a location for the public to discover interpretive exhibits and information about the District, but also a place where visitors can explore the natural history of the area through a variety of interpretive programs and exhibits and immerse themselves in the study of natural resources.

The facility houses classrooms, exhibits, a research library, several multipurpose rooms, the District’s Research Field Station, the Natural Resource Management Department and the Northeast Education Services Department staff.

History of the Lodge

The original building was a home built by Frank Howard as part of the Hickory Creek Farms operation in the late 1950’s. From the late 1960’s until 1986 the property was a private residence. In 1986, the parcel, along with 1,100 acres north of Glacial Park was purchased by Comdisco Corporation and opened as Tamarack Hunt Club and Lodge.

During this period, the grounds and structures were renovated and expanded by Comdisco. They operated it as a company retreat center, which included 20 bedrooms, kitchen, dining area, meeting rooms and lounge areas, sauna, and swimming pool. In 2001, the corporation added a large conference room to the east end with additional bedrooms on the second floor.

During an economic downturn in the early 2000’s the hunt club and the lodge were sold to a development corporation. In 2006, the Conservation District acquired the former lodge and retreat center from the developer. Its location in the geographic center of Glacial Park, interconnected hydrologic systems and oak savannas, made it a long sought after acquisition.
Building a “GREEN” future...

Many of the resources the earth provides us are limited. We don’t know how long coal and oil will last. There is no more water on earth today than there was a billion years ago. But there are six billion more humans trying to use it. Sharing the available resources among the world’s population becomes more and more difficult, as does keeping our environment clean. No one wants polluted water and air or a landfill in their backyard. But our waste has to go somewhere. Going green is learning how to reduce our use of resources and how to reduce the waste we produce. It is about making our lives sustainable. How do we change our lifestyles in order to leave Earth a healthier place for our grandchildren and their children?

When McHenry County Conservation District renovated the Lost Valley Visitor Center, we attempted to make the building as green as possible. We looked to 1) reduce our use of traditional energy sources; 2) preserve and protect our area’s clean water supply; and 3) reduce our use of the earth’s resources. As you tour the building, look for the symbols below to learn more about how green technologies were applied at the Lost Valley Visitor Center and what you can do to green your home.

**Preserving Nature**

*Green grass* symbolizes conserving our land and its natural resources. By reducing our use of the resources that the land provides, we can preserve more natural areas and open spaces.

**Technologies:**
- Reuse
- Recycling

**Clean Water**

*A blue river* symbolizes conserving clean water. By finding ways to reduce our use of water in the building and preventing water pollution outdoors, we help protect our water supply.

**Technologies:**
- Permeable Pavers
- Bioswales
- Rain Garden
- Level Spreader/Filter Strips
- Native Plants
- Low Flow Fixtures

**Alternative Energy**

*A sun* symbolizes conserving energy. By reducing our use of traditional energy sources and by harnessing the earth’s renewable, natural energy sources, such as the sun, we save energy.

**Technologies:**
- Energy Efficient Lighting
- Energy Efficient Windows
- Harvesting Daylight
- Geothermal
- Energy Efficient Insulation

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**Lost Valley Visitor Center Building Tours**

*(by appointment)*

Learn more about the building’s renovation, why the District decided to apply for LEED certification, how we reduced our environmental impact, and what "green" products we chose to use in the renovations. Tours last approximately one hour. Organized groups are welcome to call (815) 678-4532 to schedule a building tour for their group. Minimum 12 people.

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Lost Valley Visitor Center was awarded LEED® Gold certification in 2011.

Learn more about LEED® certification at www.usgbc.org