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Conservation District presents Concept Plan for a Visitor 's Center in Glacial Park

After a year of planning, McHenry County Conservation District anticipates beginning renovations on the existing Glacial Park Conference Center to create a new Visitor Center for McHenry County citizens.

A Special Public Viewing of the Draft Concept Plan for the Adaptive Re-Use of the Conference Center at Glacial Park will be held January 26, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. at Brookdale Administrative Office, 18410 US Highway 14, Woodstock.

The draft concept plan guides the renovation of the existing 28,450 square foot facility through an extensive renovation that will house a Visitor Center with separate exhibit viewing area, environmental education classrooms, conference center and multipurpose rooms available for community use. In addition, the facility is envisioned as a regional center for the study of natural resources, housing under one roof the District's Natural Resource Management Department and Environmental Education Staff; the Research Field Station; the District's ecological data bases, resource library and map room; Restoration Internship Program and the Ecological Restoration Certificate Program.

The new Visitor Center at Glacial Park will use sustainable architecture which will emphasize in the design and construction a high-performance, sustainable building that minimizes negative environmental impacts. Construction will follow the (LEED) guidelines developed by the U.S. Green Building Council, with the goal of receiving the gold level of certification.

The District proposes to use this facility as a showcase of environmental innovation to promote a shared sense of responsibility for the health of the natural community. The concept plan incorporates many energy efficient and renewable energy technologies, including geothermal heating and cooling. In addition, parking and pedestrian circulation will be constructed to be sensitive to site features and topography. A number of stormwater Best Management Practices will be put into place to restore groundwater hydrology of the site and to protect the creek including interlocking permeable pavement, rain gardens, and a bio-infiltration swale.

Glacial Park has long been considered one of the jewels of the county's open space holdings, characterized by its rolling prairie, wetlands, delta kames, oak savanna and the tranquil presence of Nippersink Creek. Encompassing 3,200 acres, Glacial Park is the District's most well known conservation area, visited annually by more than 64,000 individuals. It supports nine miles of snowmobile trails, six



miles of hiking trails, and four miles of horse trails, contains a five mile segment of the regional Prairie Trail and offers canoeing and fishing in Nippersink Creek. It contains over 400 acres of dedicated nature preserve; harbors 18 state listed endangered and threatened species; and is listed as one of the top five areas to view migratory wetland birds in the region.

The Visitor Center will serve as a central focal point where the natural history of the park and information about the area will be shared with site users; promote interaction between the public and staff; and connect people with the District's mission. Located in the geographic center of the park near the existing trail system and perched on the glacial moraine overlooking the Nippersink Creek valley, the new Visitor Center at Glacial Park lends itself to being a gateway for the start of a day's adventure.

The District has been working with a team of talented firms including LEED certified Williams Architects of Carol Stream, IL; Conservation Design Forum of Elmhurst, IL and Featherstone, Inc. of Downers Grove, IL on the initial planning phases of the project. The estimated cost of the project is \$5 million. It is anticipated that the quantifiable savings in energy costs will top \$40,000 per year. The District has submitted several grants on the project to the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation and Illinois Environmental Protection Agency Section 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Project for approximately \$500,000. The Board of Trustees is expected to approve a final plan in February. If approved, construction will begin in midsummer 2009 and open to the public in summer of 2010.

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