



WARGO

NATURE CENTER

Creating awareness, knowledge, and appreciation of our natural world.



Master Plan

Approved by the Parks & Committee Services Committee on April 7, 2015



Anoka County
PARKS & COMMUNITY SERVICES
Respectful, Innovative, Fiscally Responsible



miller dunwiddie
ARCHITECTURE

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Wargo Nature Center Building



Cultural interpretation at Heritage Lab



George Watch Lake - Wargo Nature Center



Introduction

NATURE CENTER HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Wargo Nature Center, located in Anoka County's Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve, is devoted to increasing the awareness and appreciation of natural and cultural resources for all, regardless of age, ability, or background. The nature center sits on a peninsula surrounded by George Watch Lake. The Heritage Lab, located on Peltier Lake, is used for Anoka County's programs and the YMCA's Camp Heritage program.

The development of the nature center fulfilled the dream of Joseph E. Wargo, a long-time Anoka County resident and District Judge. David Torkildson, Anoka County's first Parks Director, was also a long-time advocate for the nature center and played a key role in building the facility to educate Anoka County residents about the natural world. Given the variety of natural habitats and the wonderful water resources available, the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes area was high on their list of ideal locations. Joseph Wargo died in 1987, but thanks to his wife, Edith - who shared his dream - his estate provided funding for the construction of the Wargo Nature Center. This fund, combined with grants from the Metropolitan Council, resulted in the construction of the nature center in honor of Joseph Wargo in 1993.

The Nature Center currently serves as the hub for Anoka County Parks environmental education and outdoor recreation programming, as well as off-site environmental outreach. The 10,000 square foot building houses office space for outdoor education and recreation staff and provides storage for a variety of county-wide programs. In 2013 Anoka County served 47,000 people through its organized programs, events, and drop in visitors.

Wargo Mission Statement

The Wargo Nature Center is dedicated to creating awareness, knowledge, and appreciation of the natural and cultural environments and their resources. We strive to foster responsible stewardship and lifelong learning in people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds through environmental and recreational programs and actions.



The master plan addresses 'hardscape' elements such as existing gardens and other physical site elements



Programming is part of the 'softscape' elements addressed in the master plan

MASTER PLAN PURPOSE

Society's relationship with the outdoors and nature is very different today than it was 20 years ago when the Wargo Nature Center was constructed. People are participating in outdoor recreation less and, on average, Americans are spending significantly less time outdoors. According to a 2014 National Recreation and Parks study, only one in ten adults spend time recreating outside every day. This concerning trend makes Wargo's mission all the more important. As the nature center enters its third decade, it is an opportune time to re-envision the nature center – its building, site, programs, and operations - so that it can better fulfill its mission to create awareness, knowledge, and appreciation of natural and cultural environments.

This master plan serves as a guide to future updates to Wargo Nature Center so that it can better serve the community today and into the future. The master plan is unique in that it does not only guide physical improvement, or 'hardscape' but also addresses marketing, programs, and operations, or 'softscape.' By addressing both, the master plan provides a holistic approach to recommended goals and strategies that will improve the visitor experience, increase visitorship, and promote greater program participation in the years to come.

The Master Plan:

- Integrates physical site improvements with recreation, education, interpretation, and outreach opportunities.
- Provides strategic guidance for program development.
- Delivers recommendations for improving building interiors and outdoor classroom options.
- Identifies new trail alignments, site access, and links to area amenities.
- Recommends implementation strategies for development phasing, capital and operations budgets, and funding.

PLANNING PROCESS

In late 2013, Anoka County hired Hoisington Koegler Group (HKGi) and Miller Dunwiddie Architecture (MDA) to prepare a master plan for Wargo Nature Center. The planning process lasted a year, beginning in January 2014 and concluded in January 2015. The process was guided by a core project team of staff from HKGi, MDA, Anoka County Parks & Community Services Division, and Wargo Nature Center. To increase nature center awareness and foster partnerships with other Anoka County departments, representatives from management, planning, programs, maintenance, marketing and guest services areas were included in staff work sessions. Input from other stakeholders, peer groups, and the general public was also obtained during the planning process. Meetings and input included:

- A project kick-off meeting on January 23, 2014 with staff from HKGi, Miller Dunwiddie Architecture, Anoka County Parks & Community Services Division, and Wargo Nature Center.

- Two stakeholder focus group input sessions on March 27, 2014, including:
 - » Session 1: Wargo volunteers & other nature center/outdoor recreation professionals.
 - » Session 2: Wargo visitors and homeschool parents, and representatives from the Anoka County Library Department.
- A stakeholder questionnaire conducted in winter/spring 2014, available online and as hard copy.
- Four hands-on work sessions with Anoka County Staff held, April 21, 2014, May 7, 2014, June 10, 2014, and October 7, 2014.
- Peer group planning session on July 15, 2014 with the core project team and representatives from the Minnesota History Center, Eastman Nature Center, Minnesota Naturalist Association, Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, and Westwood Hills Nature Center.
- Presentation of the master plan development at the Minnesota Recreation & Park Association Annual Conference on September 24, 2014, by the core project team.
- Presentation by HKGi staff of draft plan to Anoka County Parks and Community Services Committee on October 7, 2014.

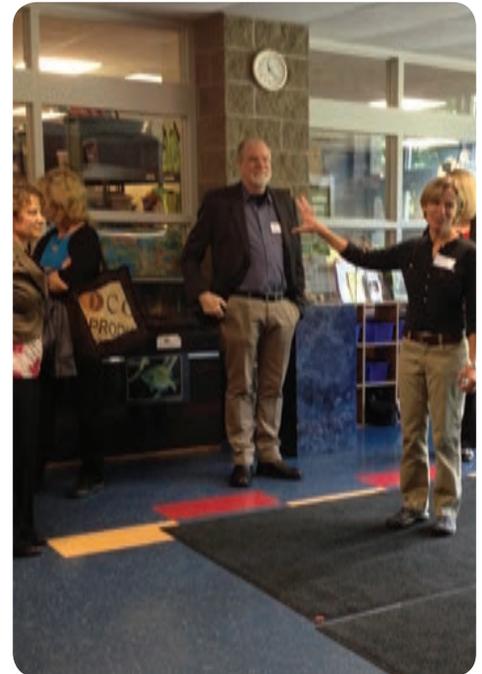


The peer group planning session on July 15 included a site tour for participants

MASTER PLAN ORGANIZATION

The Wargo Nature Center Master Plan is organized into 5 Chapters.

- **Chapter 1 - Introduction** covers the master plan purpose and process
- **Chapter 2- Trends** explores demographic, social, recreation, and nature center trends
- **Chapter 3- Existing Conditions and Needs** discusses existing programs, marketing efforts, natural resources, and amenities, their condition and future needs
- **Chapter 4 - The Plan** - outlines the vision for Wargo Nature Center as well as supporting goals, strategies and recommend physical improvements that support the vision.
- **Chapter 5 - Implementation** covers actions, phasing, costs, and funding sources needed to realize the vision for Wargo Nature Center.



The peer group discussion included programming and marketing

Hardscape and Softscape

The Wargo Nature Center master plan is unique in that it does not just guide physical improvement, or 'hardscape' but also addresses marketing, programs, and operations, or 'softscape'.





Trends

TRENDS

Over the last 20 years, society's relationship with nature has been changing. The state of the environment is frequently discussed in the news, yet we are increasingly disconnected from nature. We no longer view ourselves as being an integral part of nature; the natural world is an unfamiliar place to visit. This disconnect makes the educational role of nature centers more important than ever and, along with other changing demographic, social, and recreation trends, has implications for the future physical and operational needs of Wargo Nature Center.

Changing Demographic and Social Trends

Increasing Awareness of the Health Benefits of Nature

- Time in natural environments is important to children's intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, and physical development
- Exposure to natural areas can help reduce anxiety, and other mental health and learning disorders related to attention deficit disorder



Children's Nature-Deficit Disorder

- Children's play has changed from being outdoors to indoors since the 1950s
- Adolescents' concerns about conservation and the environment have generally declined since the early 1990s

-Children & Nature Network Children's Nature Deficit: What We Know – and Don't Know *September 2009*



Increasingly Diverse Population

- Changing outdoor recreation and nature education demands
- Need to expand and adapt outreach methods
- Opportunity to increase diversity within the fields of conservation/environmental sciences



Financially Pinched

- Need for partnerships
- Focus on quality
- Increased need for revenue
- Balance between new and existing
- Life-cycle cost considerations



Aging Population

- More senior recreation and leisure
- More mid-day programs
- More focus on lifelong learning
- Volunteer opportunities



Transportation Challenges

- Bussing costs for K-12 schools have become a barrier to visiting Nature Centers
- In Anoka County 17.5% of rent-occupied households do not have access to a vehicle, compared to 2% of owner-occupied households



Increased interest in Local Food Production

- Gardening
- Foraging
- Organics
- Animal husbandry
- Beekeeping
- Farmers Markets



Interest in Sustainability

- Sustainable building & maintenance practices (reduced use of fertilizers, pesticides, mowing, hybrid vehicles, etc.)
- Water conservation and management (on-site stormwater treatment, rain gardens, cisterns, grey water-reuse)
- Increased awareness of native plants versus invasive species
- Volunteer opportunities



Changing Nature-Based Recreation Demands

Increased Trail Use

- Walking
- Hiking
- Mountain/Fat Tire biking
- Road biking
- Cross country skiing/snowshoeing



Increased Viewing & Photography of Plants, Animals & Scenery

- Increased popularity of wildlife 'cams'
- Increased participation in Wildlife Observation Data Collection programs
- 2,155,000 Minnesotans participated in wildlife watching

-(2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation -US Fish & Wildlife Service)



Increased participation in Kayaking & Paddle Boarding

- Expanded water access
- Equipment acquisition & rental
- Greater audience potential
- Niche opportunity



Increased Interest in Birding

- 82 million Americans participate in birding
National Survey on Recreation and the Environment
-USDA Forest Service
- Birding ranks as the 15th most popular outdoor activity
- Increasing interest in birding among younger people



Changing Nature Center Trends

Fostering Environmental Stewardship Through Demonstration of Green Infrastructure

- Gray and black water systems
- Stormwater treatment
- Pervious pavement



Increased interest in Rental Space for Meetings & Events

- Multi-use classrooms
- More flexible/unprogrammed areas
- Comfortable, inviting facilities



Increased demand for Interactive Learning Environments

- Increased understanding of different learning styles
- Technology is making interactivity easier to implement
- Current social trends require more analytical thinking and synthesis skills



Creating Memorable Experiences

- Distinctive programming
- Special events
- Integration of art





Existing Conditions & Needs

An evaluation of Wargo Nature Center's existing site, building conditions, programming and operations was conducted at the beginning of the master planning process. The project team used site visits, walking tours, input from nature center and county staff, an online questionnaire, stakeholder/peer group evaluations, and map and photo analysis to assess existing conditions and understand needs.

LOCATION & REGIONAL CONTEXT

Wargo Nature Center is located within the Twin Cities metropolitan area, 25 miles north of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. The 20 acre nature center campus is located on a peninsula on George Watch Lake, within the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Regional Park Reserve in Anoka County. Vehicle access to the Nature Center can be obtained from both Interstates 35W and 35E. The nature center's distinctive features include an outstanding outreach program to area schools through its relationship with Connexus Energy, wonderful birding opportunities, great proximity to wetlands and the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes, and rare access to four different ecotypes of lake, wetland, wood, and prairie.

Three other nature centers are within 15 miles of Wargo; Lee & Rose Warner, Tamarack, and Springbrook Nature Centers. Additionally, there are 15 nature centers within the Twin Cities seven county metropolitan area, each

cultivating and relying on a distinct niche to attract and retain visitors. For example, Tamarack Nature Center has developed a popular interactive nature play area, Dodge Nature Center has a well-known preschool program, and Eastman Nature Center's newly constructed 14,000 square foot building has a strong event space rental program and exceptional indoor/outdoor relationship. Among Twin Cities area nature centers, Wargo's niche is outreach and recreation-based environmental programs, but it lacks a strong regional identity.

While the nature center's location on a peninsula gives it outstanding potential access to wetland and lacustrine habitats, it also results in limited access and connectivity within the larger Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Regional Park Reserve. The wetlands and water surrounding Wargo Nature Center make it difficult to create additional trail connections to the park beyond, although the center does benefit from the Central Anoka County Regional Trail along County Road 14.

Needs identified throughout this chapter are based on input from Anoka County Parks staff, focus group input, on-line survey feedback and site and building assessment by the consultant team.

FIGURE 3.1 Regional Context

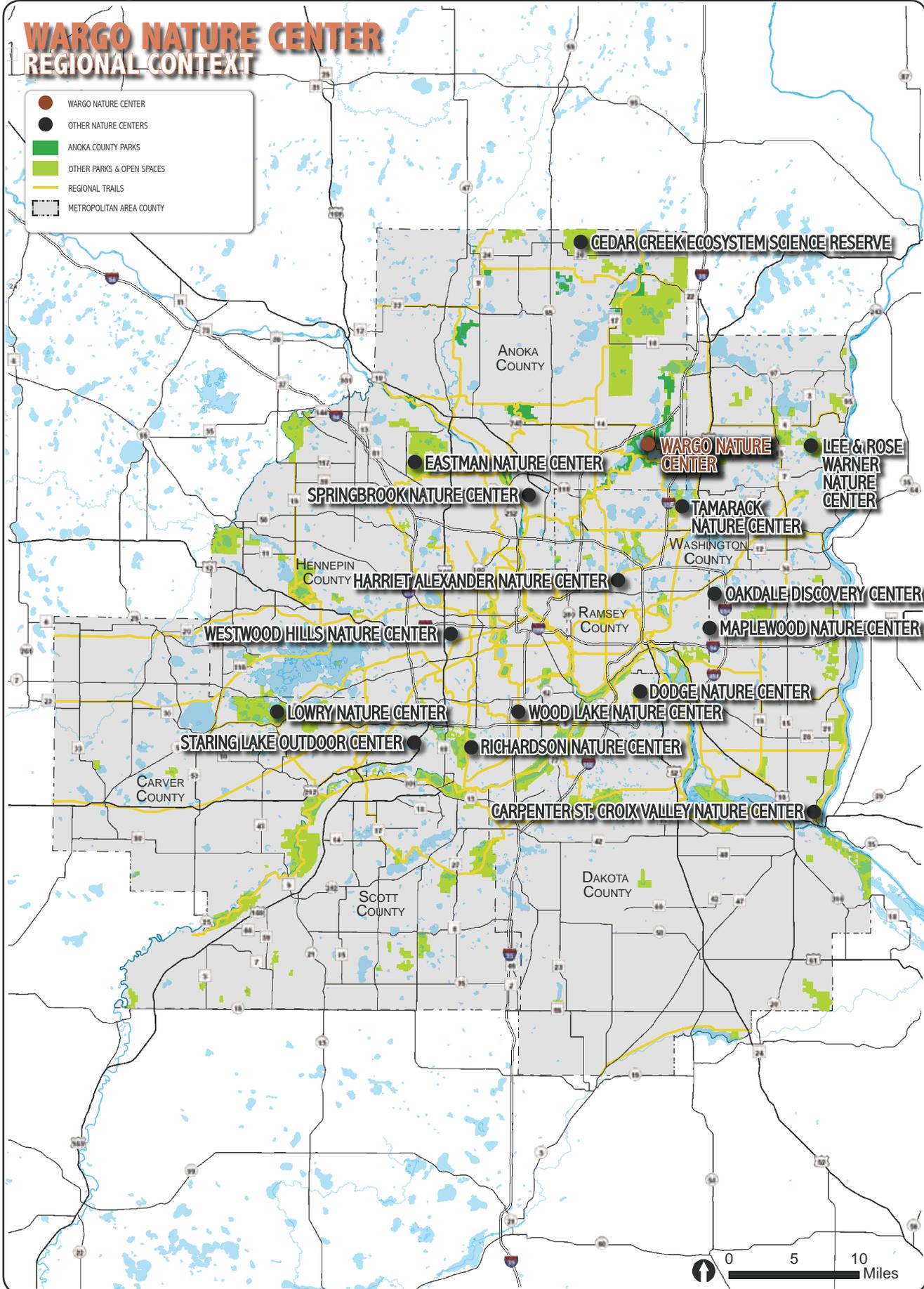


FIGURE 3.2 Regional Nature Center Market

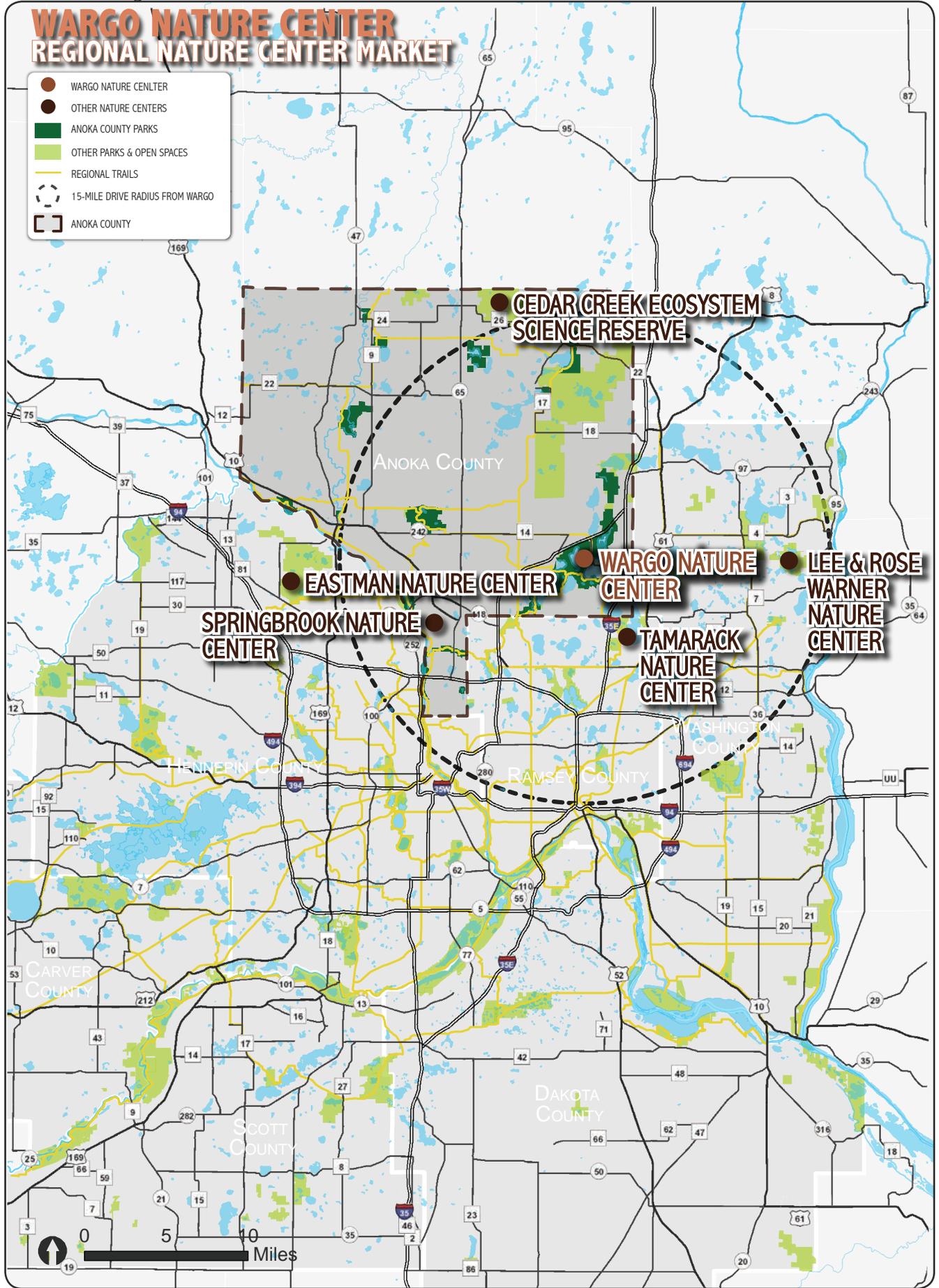
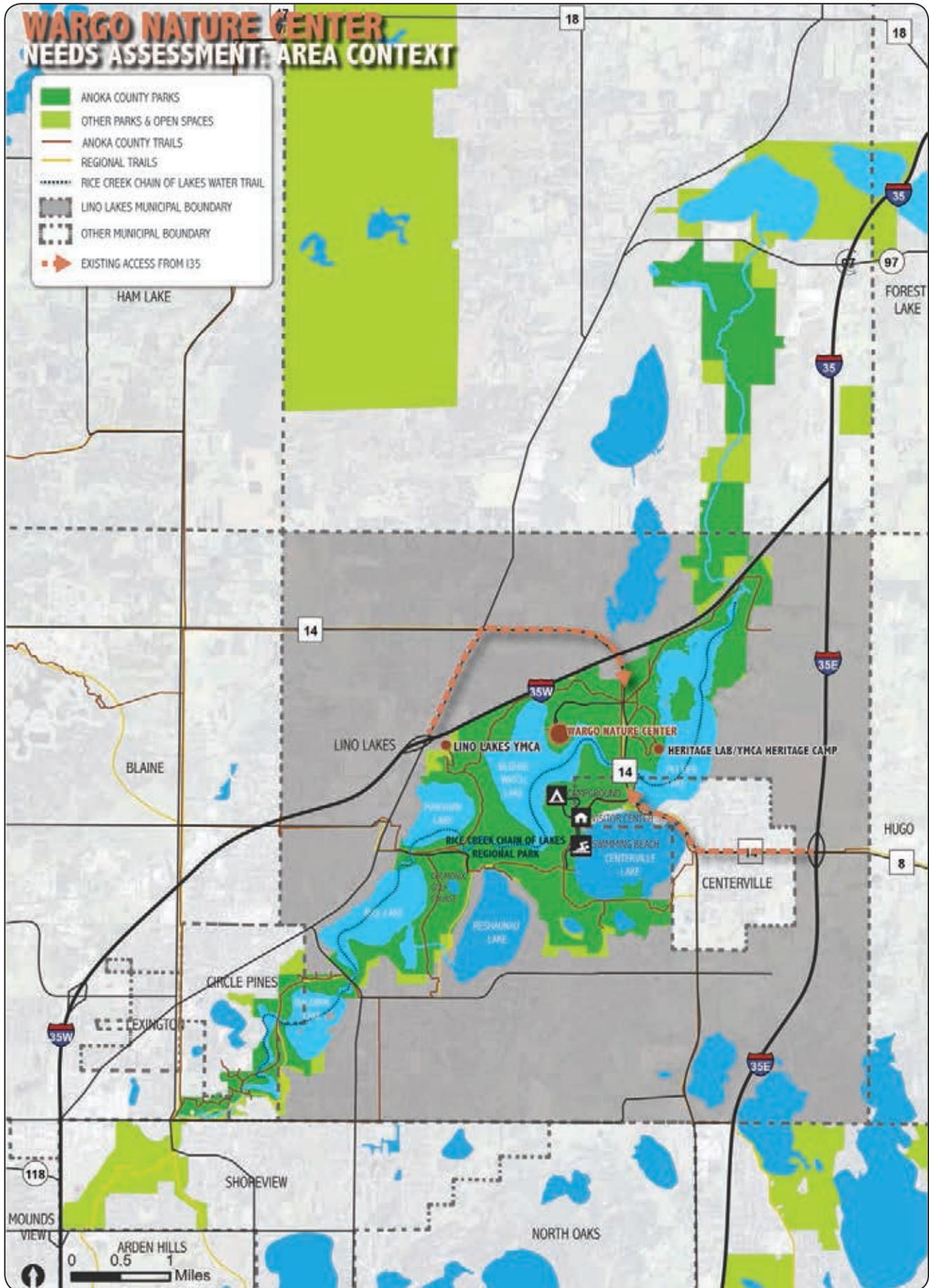


FIGURE 3.3 Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Area Context



PROGRAMS

Existing Programs

Wargo Nature Center is home base for Anoka County Parks and Recreation program staff. Programs are offered both at Wargo Nature Center and other locations throughout Anoka County's parks system. Current program offerings focus on outdoor recreation, environmental education, outreach, cultural heritage, and special events (see Figure 3.4 on page 16). The outreach program, where Anoka County staff conduct environmental education in area schools, is one of the most successful programs. In total, there are approximately 40,000 annual program and event participants. This is an impressive number, given the County's relatively small programming staff.

Many of programs and events are the result of partnerships with area organizations, including:

- Local schools
- Connexus Energy
- School Forest Partnership Program
- YMCA Camp Heritage
- Anoka County Libraries
- Local park and recreation departments
- Volunteers

Programs are developed by staff based on current recreation trends, equipment availability, and the interests of staff and visitors. Staff capacity, budget, and equipment needs are all considered during the program development process. Participant feedback is collected via survey monkey and informal oral feedback. Paper surveys distributed to summer camp parents is one of the more successful mechanisms currently used. Programs are monitored and adapted based on numbers of participants and participant feedback.

While programs are offered for all age groups, the County's most successful programs are focused on preschool and school age children.

Summary of the Online Survey Results

Conducted spring of 2014 with 61 responses

» Why people visit Wargo:

- Trails
- Bird watching
- Special events
- Family program/activities

» Why people don't visit Wargo:

- Unaware of Wargo or programs
- Location not convenient

» What people like most about Wargo:

- Nature center building
- Natural character
- Birding
- George Watch Lake
- Programs
- Trails

» Suggested Improvements:

- Observation dock at lake
- Expand hours (weekends and evenings)
- More trails/connectivity
- Cross country ski rental
- Enhanced nature play area
- Entry experience and character

» Most visitors learn about Wargo and Programs through the Anoka County Parks website

» People list email as their preferred communication method to learn about Wargo

FIGURE 3.4 2013-14 Program Highlights

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
Environmental Education	
Environmental Education Programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • over 12,000 students served in 2013 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs offered at the Wargo Nature Center, Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park, and at schools • Curriculum aligned with MN State Standards
Homeschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First grade to 12th grade environmental education programs allow homeschool children to discover the natural world through hands-on outdoor activities
Preschool <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 students enrolled in 2013, ages 4-5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership between Wargo Nature Center and Forest Lake Early Childhood Programs • Taught by a licensed preschool teacher and interpretive naturalist
Natural Living Series – Adult Classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Natural Living Series are adult programs that focus on natural and healthy lifestyle options. Classes include; food preservation, shop local, sustainable gardening, rain barrel workshops and cooking classes
Outdoor Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paddle boarding • Fishing programs • Kayaking • Cross Country Skiing • Snowshoeing • Canoeing
Podcasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birdwatching with Bob series
Outdoor Recreation	
Outdoor Recreation Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paddle boarding • Fishing programs • Kayaking • Cross Country Skiing • Snowshoeing • Canoeing
Cultural Heritage	
Heritage lab (in partnership with Connexus Energy) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,805 students served in 2014 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program focused on the Native American People of Minnesota with 8 interactive outdoor learning stations

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
Outreach	
School Forest partnership with Oneka and Linwood Elementary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 800 students on two campuses (Oneka Elementary and Hugo Elementary) and over 400 at Linwood Elementary
Outreach in partnership with Connexus Energy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16,300 students served in 2014 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Wargo naturalist visits each classroom in the school once per season (fall, winter, and spring)
Anoka County Library Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Music and local authors at public events
Rentals	
Birthday Parties, weddings, community gatherings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Space rental
Special Events	
Special Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Snow Day, Ski by the Light of the Moon, Kids Fishing Clinic, Bunker Prairie Stampede 5K, Earth Day Celebration, Fall Fest

Needs

One of the biggest challenges for programming is the need to keep it dynamic; programs must periodically change to reflect evolving trends and participant interests. To maintain successful programs, fill offered programs to capacity, and grow participation there is a need to:

- Expand and enhance the existing program evaluation system, including improving participant and volunteer questionnaires, and annual stakeholder focus groups, tracking programs with waiting lists and new program topic requests.
- Increase teen and adult program participation.
- Expand volunteer and service learning programs.
- Develop distinct programs based on unique park assets and facilities.
- Improve self-guided interpretation opportunities.
- Continue to monitor and adapt programs based on recreation and education trends, education standards, and participant interests.



Wargo special events such as the Bunker Prairie Stampede 5K are well attended



Wargo offers programs for homeschool students, and should target that group of users for special marketing efforts

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Existing Conditions

Marketing and advertising for Wargo Nature Center is currently handled by the Anoka County Parks and Recreation Department in coordination with the County's Public Information Office. Primary marketing activities include:

- Monthly internal Anoka County Parks Marketing & Visitor Services meetings
- Distribution of three program brochures annually, mailed to all vehicle permit holders and recent program participants
 - These brochures cover activities held during the summer, fall/winter, and winter/spring
 - Approximately 6,000 copies are distributed
- A dedicated webpage for Wargo Nature Center and its programs within the Anoka County website
- Social Media: including Facebook, Twitter, Constant Contact, and Instagram
- Staff participation in cooperative meetings with municipalities, school districts, and other potential partner organizations in order to promote activities, provide efficient use of resources, and collaborate to develop services
- Programs and events advertised at electronic message/display boards within the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park, Bunker Hills Regional Park, Licensing Centers, and Government Center

The oversight of the County Public Information Office of the Nature Center's marketing materials results in the distribution of content that is county-approved, and very attractive graphically. The downside of this arrangement, however, is the lack of control it allows nature center staff on a day to day basis

Needs

Developing tools that allow the nature center and recreation staff to better coordinate needs with the Public Information Office and allows for more flexibility in spreading the word about specific programs and events would be beneficial. Needed staff actions and tools include:

- Email distribution of announcements regarding specific upcoming programs and events
- Email distribution lists of previous and potential visitors, including a general list and more specific, targeted groups such as adults interested in natural living courses, or homeschool families and groups
- Expanding social media presence to include Twitter, Instagram, and others as they arise
- More video offerings accessible via the web
- Working with other nature centers and groups to cross market
- Increased communication between programming staff and the County's Public Information Office



Existing natural trails



Main entrance to the existing Nature Center building



The existing sign at the Nature Center's main entrance

Visitor's Bill of Rights

A list of important human needs as seen from the visitors' perspective, the Visitor's Bill of Rights was used to help assess existing conditions and identify needs at Wargo Nature Center, as well as prioritize future improvements.

#1. COMFORT **"MEET MY BASIC NEEDS."**

Visitors need fast, easy, obvious access to clean, safe, barrier-free restrooms, fountains, food, baby-changing tables, and plenty of seating. They also need full access to exhibits.

#2. ORIENTATION **"MAKE IT EASY FOR ME TO FIND MY WAY AROUND."**

Visitors need to make sense of their surroundings. Clear signs and well-planned spaces help them know what to expect, where to go, how to get there and what it's about.

#3. WELCOME/BELONGING **"MAKE ME FEEL WELCOME."**

Friendly, helpful staff ease visitors' anxieties. If they see themselves represented in exhibits and programs and on the staff, they'll feel like they belong.

#4. ENJOYMENT **"I WANT TO HAVE FUN!"**

Visitors want to have a good time. If they run into barriers (like broken exhibits, activities they can't relate to, intimidating labels) they can get frustrated, bored, confused.

#5. SOCIALIZING **"I CAME TO SPEND TIME WITH MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS."**

Visitors come for a social outing with family or friends (or to connect with society at large). They expect to talk, interact, and share the experience; exhibits can set the stage for this.

#6. RESPECT **"ACCEPT ME FOR WHO I AM AND WHAT I KNOW."**

Visitors want to be accepted at their own level of knowledge and interest. They don't want exhibits, labels or staff to exclude them, patronize them or make them feel dumb.

#7. COMMUNICATION **"HELP ME UNDERSTAND, AND LET ME TALK, TOO"**

Visitors need accuracy, honesty, and clear communication from labels, programs, and docents. They want to ask questions, and hear and express differing points of view.

#8. LEARNING **"I WANT TO LEARN SOMETHING NEW."**

Visitors (and their kids) come to learn something new, but they learn in different ways. It's important to know how visitors learn, and access their knowledge and interests. Controlling distractions (like crowds, noise and information overload) helps them, too.

#9. CHOICE AND CONTROL **"LET ME CHOOSE; GIVE ME SOME CONTROL."**

Visitors need some autonomy; freedom to choose, and exert some control, touching and getting close to whatever they can. They need to use their bodies and move around freely.

#10. CHALLENGE & CONFIDENCE **"GIVE ME A CHALLENGE I KNOW I CAN HANDLE."**

Visitors want to succeed. A task that's too easy bores them; too hard makes them anxious. Providing a wide variety of experiences will match their wide range of skills.

#11. REVITALIZATION **"HELP ME LEAVE REFRESHED, RESTORED."**

When visitors are focused, fully engaged, and enjoying themselves, time stands still and they feel refreshed: a "flow" experience that exhibits can aim to create.

-1996 Judy Rand, *"The 227-Mile Museum, or, Why We Need a Visitors' Bill of Rights,"* Visitor Studies Association.

WARGO NATURE CENTER EXISTING CONDITIONS AND NEEDS

The Wargo Nature Center extends from the peninsula within George Watch Lake, where the nature center building is located, to the Heritage Lab site located across County Road 14 on Peltier Lake. Most visitors access Wargo Nature Center along the 3/4 mile entry drive that is shared with the Anoka County Compost Site, passing through upland, wetland, and prairie areas. Existing conditions and needs at Wargo are discussed at three scales; the full site, the nature center campus, and the nature center building. The full site includes the peninsula within George Watch Lake where the nature center building is located, as well as the Heritage Lab area east of County Road 14. The nature center campus focuses in on the area within the peninsula around the nature center building.

Full site

Main Entrance and Entry Drive

Existing Conditions

Public access for the Wargo Nature Center site is along the 3/4 mile, 24' wide paved entry road that is shared with the Anoka County Compost Site. The entrance/entry drive:

- Provides a pleasant driving experience as it passes through uplands, wetlands, and prairie
- Lacks a dedicated lane or trail for bicycles and pedestrians
- Currently relies on a main entrance sign that does not provide visual interest or reflect Wargo Nature Center's mission and vision

Needs

- A more prominent entry sign on County Road 14
- Bicycle and pedestrian trail and amenities along the entry drive to connect Wargo Nature Center to the regional trail along County Road 14, and the wider park system
- A parking lot for "after-hours" trail access

The Heritage Lab

Existing Conditions

The Heritage lab is utilized jointly with the Lino Lakes YMCA and is used to host outdoor programs for three weeks each fall, rotating students through eight different stations and camps in the summer. The area is not open to the general public. Currently, the area is unimproved, and would benefit from permanent restrooms, reliable shelter, and water.

Needs

- Permanent restrooms
- Reliable shelter/designated program space
- Water



Existing entry walk at Wargo Nature Center

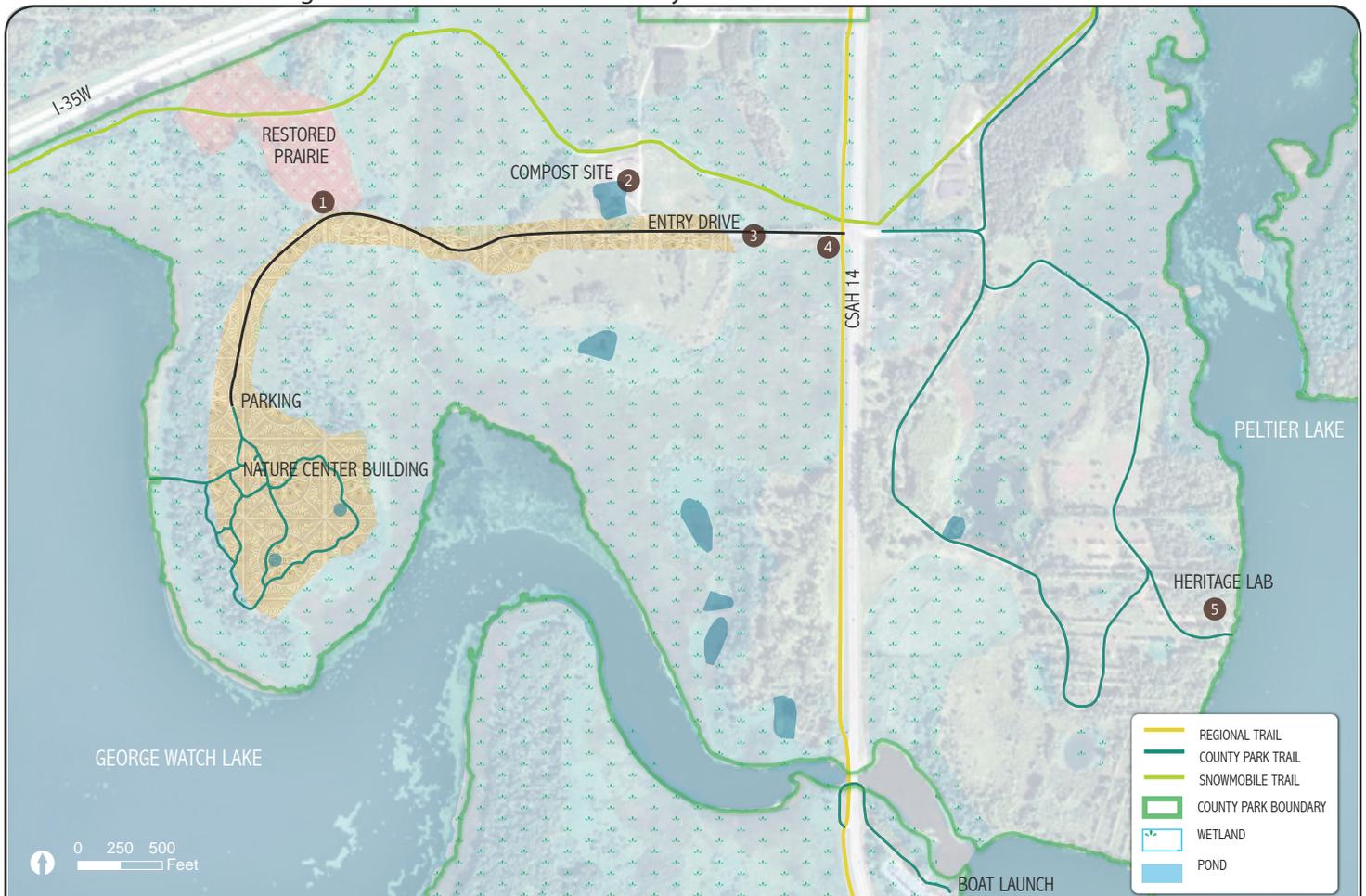


Existing kayak storage at the main dock



Existing signage and entry to compost site

FIGURE 3.5 Full Site Existing Conditions and Needs Summary



- ① Need to add facilities to interpret prairie and accommodate maintenance and access
- ② Need for interpretation at compost site
- ③ Need to enhance entry experience and public access to site for bicycles, pedestrians, and after-hours visitors
- ④ Need to enhance entry signage on County Road 14
- ⑤ Accessibility improvements and bathrooms needed
- Overall Lack of trail connections/safe pedestrian routes throughout the full site
- Wetlands limit development throughout the full site



Existing conditions at the buildings lower west entry

Compost Site

Existing Conditions

One of two Anoka County Compost sites is located near the main entrance to Wargo Nature Center. The site is a drop-off location for Anoka County residents to properly dispose of leaves, grass and tree waste. In its current configuration, the compost site:

- Feels disjointed from the nature center
- Detracts somewhat from the entry experience to the nature center

Needs

- Improved physical and programmatic integration with the nature center
- A partnership with Anoka County's Integrated Waste Management Division to implement proposed improvements
- Parking lot outside of entrance gate, near compost site



The existing entry walk as seen from the parking lot

Natural Resources

Existing Conditions

Wargo Nature Center is unique in that there are four distinct habitats – prairie, woodland, wetland, and water- in a relatively small area. This provides the opportunity for a diversity of visitor experiences. There are extensive wetland areas, a maple-basswood forest, and a restored prairie:

- The restored prairie area provides nice natural surface walking trails and currently houses an observation blind in poor condition
- The extensive wetland system provides excellent bird habitat
- The pine plantation in the upland area south of the entry drive is overgrown
- The Maple Basswood forest on the peninsula includes a strong presence of green ash and buckthorn

Needs

- More proactive utilization and access to the four ecotypes within the full site
- Replacement or removal of the existing blind in the prairie area
- Forest management plans that:
 - Guide actions within in the Maple Basswood forest in anticipation of a potential Emerald Ash Borer invasion and existing buckthorn
 - Guide thinning within the pine plantation to improve stand health



Existing entrance to the prairie

FIGURE 3.6 Nature Center Campus Existing Conditions and Needs Summary



Existing dock and kayak/canoe storage



Existing parking lot



Existing program/picnic space

Nature Center Campus

The nature center campus consists of the peninsula on George Watch Lake where the nature center building and outdoor amenities are located. The nature center building and surrounding site is the focal point for most visitors. Much of the daily environmental education and outdoor recreation activities take place in the areas adjacent to the building, including the existing dock, trails, open lawn, nature play area, and picnic areas.

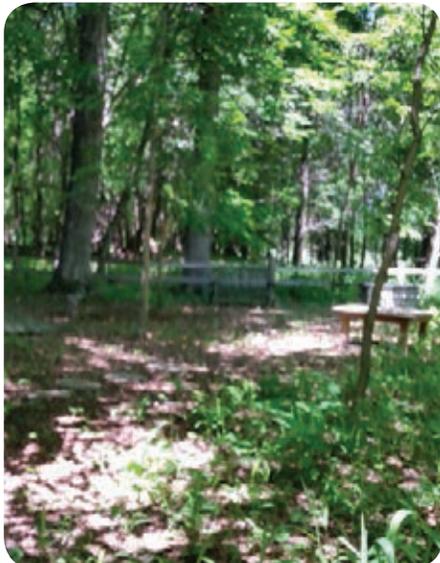
Circulation

Existing Conditions

- Landscaping around the building that is minimal and does not improve the building as viewed from outside, or reflect a sense of care for nature and our outdoor environment
- An entry walk from the parking lot to the building that lacks experiential character, does not provide orientation to the site, has erosion issues, is shared with vehicle access to the building, and does not provide visitors with a clear path to the building's main entrance
- A lack of well-defined places for outdoor programming
- Trails throughout the site provide access to a large portion of the peninsula but are not ADA accessible

Needs

- A more welcoming pedestrian experience from the parking lot to the building along the entry walk
- Greater connectivity between site amenities
- Better indoor/outdoor relationship between the building and the area surrounding the building
- Improved landscaping around the building that includes green infrastructure, and stormwater management practices to contribute to a sense of place and provide interpretive/demonstration opportunities



Existing nature play area

Amenities

Existing Conditions

Amenities are the things that attract and retain visitors. Their appeal and cohesion are essential to creating a memorable place that people return to again and again, and tell their friends about. Wargo Nature Center's main campus amenities and their existing conditions include:

- An amphitheater that is utilized but lacks 'curb appeal'
- Picnic areas with tables and trash receptacles that are also used as gathering/programming space
- A nature play area east of the building that is underutilized due to a lack of visibility from the building/main walk, an overabundance of tall, exotic grasses, and a lack of attractive play elements
- A prairie garden north of the building that provides visual interest, but poses a maintenance issue and is not designed to be interactive or experiential



Existing amphitheater

- A dock that provides access to George Watch Lake, and is utilized for environmental education and recreation programming, but is not wide enough to comfortably accommodate student groups

Needs

- Screen the amphitheater from the maintenance garage and picnic area with vegetation to create an “outdoor amphitheatre room”
- Widen the dock west of the nature center building to better accommodate groups, and provide universal accessibility to the dock and water for kayaker/boaters with disabilities
- To be welcoming and inclusive, provide at least one loop of ADA accessible trails on site
- Improve the nature play area by controlling tall exotic grasses, adding a signature play feature, clarifying circulation, creating strategic openings in the tree canopy to create areas of sunshine, and make the play area entrance more visible
- Create more self-guided activities for drop-in visitors

Support Facilities

Existing Conditions

Support facilities are the elements necessary to facilitate the smooth operation of the Nature Center. They may not be highlights of the physical site, but they will enhance or detract from user experience based on how well they fit with other elements. Support facilities at Wargo Nature Center and their existing condition include:

- The parking lot is in fair condition and provides adequate parking. The parking area lacks shade and runoff filtration
- The canoe/kayak storage is separated into three different locations. Boats are stored on racks along the trail to the dock. Rack space is insufficient to accommodate all boats at this time, and leave boats outside during the winter season. The Center’s voyageur canoe is housed offsite
- The garage is currently too small to meet every day needs, and lacks visual separation/screening from core campus area
- Small storage shed is an outbuilding southwest of the main building that stores life vests, paddles, and other equipment. While functional, this small building’s cottage-style appearance is incongruous with the rest of the campus architecture

Needs

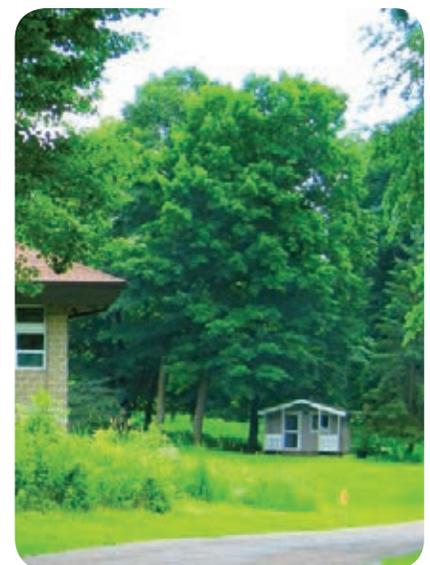
- Add planting islands, trees, and stormwater filtration areas to the parking lot to capture pollutants and be more welcoming and harmonious with the Nature Center experience
- Expand and improve current boat storage to accommodate all boats and ensure proper storage during the winter
- Create additional cold storage to supplement the existing garage
- Replace or refurbish the existing storage shed to better accommodate gear storage and fit in with the look and feel of the rest of the site



Existing canoe and kayak storage



Existing storage garage



Existing storage shed

The Nature Center Building

The two level, 10,000 square foot Nature Center building was built in 1993, and features two multi-purpose classrooms, a display area, a small library, staff office space, fireside seating, preschool space, storage areas, a kitchen, and lunchroom/craft area.

Existing Conditions

- Arrival inside the building does not lead to a clear orientation or circulation of the space
- The display area, including some animal mounts and display cases, feel static and outdated
- The library feels private and visitors are not sure if it is a public space, resulting in the underutilization of a great resource
- An overall lack of indoor/ outdoor relationship – no access to outside from upper classrooms, limited number of windows, views to outside do not add to natural experience
- Staff space is not fully separated from preschool area; noise from one area travels to the other area easily
- Limited staff space restricts the flexibility to add staff members or have more separated staff space
- Storage capacity does not fully meet program needs
- Aging building means that capital repairs will be needed in the near future

Needs

- Entrance needs distinction to attract visitors from the outside
- Orientation inside the building needs improvement
- Display area needs incorporation of sensory, interactive displays
- Library should be welcoming and comfortable
- Additional windows and attention to views from inside the building
- Reconfiguration of space to provide quiet, private space for staff
- Improved storage
- Full assessment of mechanical systems



Existing display cases



Existing fireplace and fireside seating

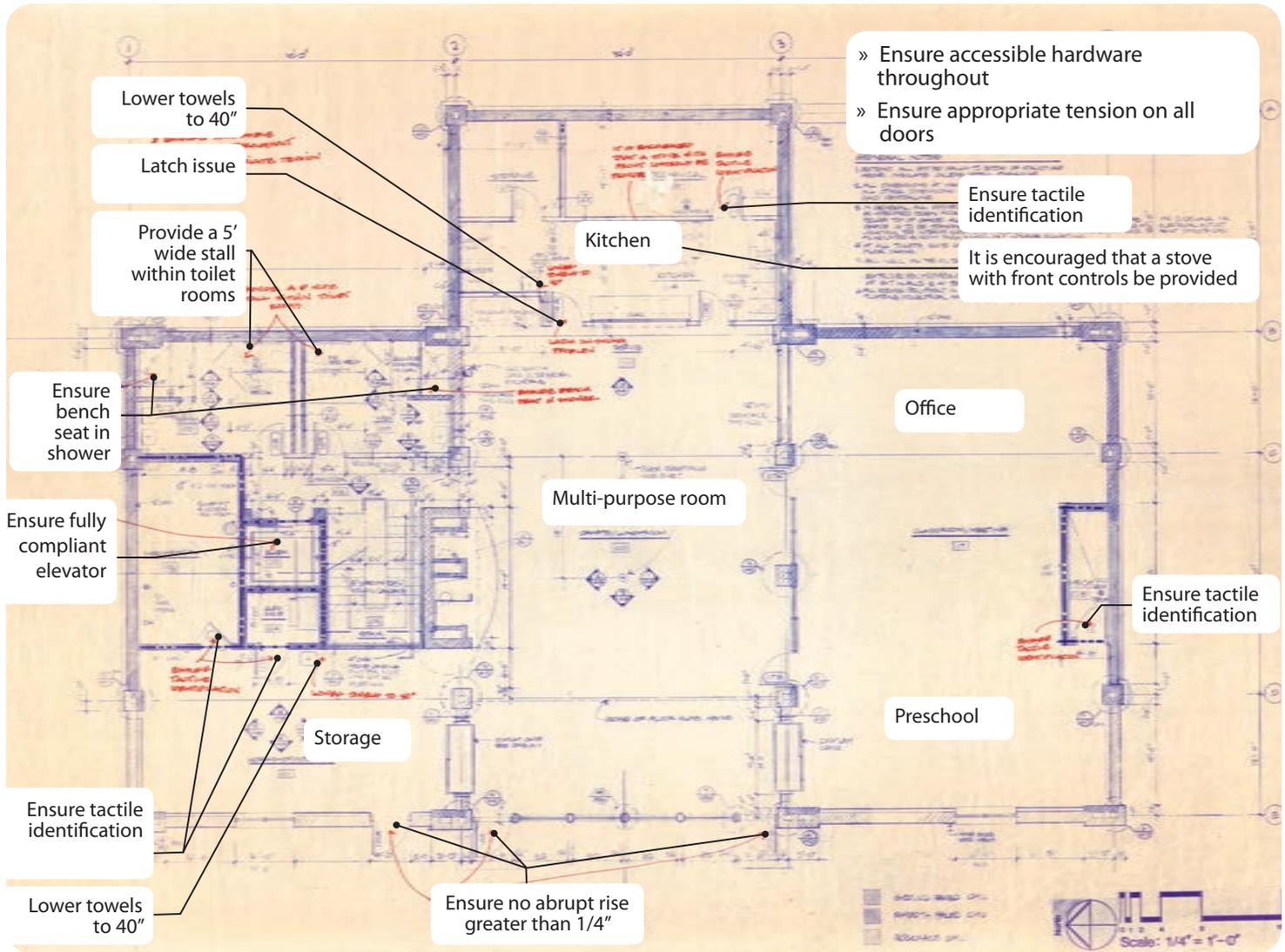


Existing reception desk



Existing library

FIGURE 3.8 Existing Building Floor Plan - Lower Level



Existing preschool classroom



Existing staff space

NEEDS SUMMARY

Needs that cover programs, marketing, as well as physical improvements to the nature center site and building outlined in this chapter are the basis for goals and strategies presented in Chapter 4. Overall, there is a need to:

- Improve awareness about the nature center and programs
- Increase connectivity to other activity areas within the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Regional Park and nearby communities
- Enhance the Wargo experience by improving the entry and sense of welcome
- Develop a regional niche among nature centers
- Improve the drop in visitor experience by enhancing existing activities and providing more to do
- Improve outreach and program participation



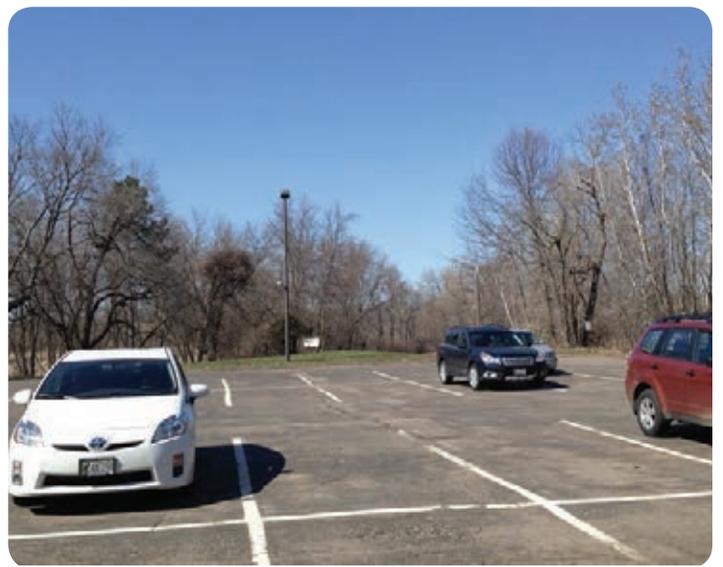
Existing display mounts in main entry area of building



Existing programming includes homeschool courses



Existing rain garden



Existing parking lot looking north





The Plan

This chapter is divided into two sections; goals and strategies and the development plan. Goals and strategies address both the softscape (programs, marketing and operations) and the hardscape, or physical improvements to the Wargo Nature Center site and building. The development plan provides more detail on the recommended physical improvements that are needed to support enhanced programs and operations.

VISION

The prevailing vision for Wargo Nature Center's future is to increase visits to the nature center, improve the visitor experience, and promote greater program participation. Six goals and associated strategies for physical improvements, marketing, programs, and operations are identified that work to achieve this vision.

Goals

- #1** Increase awareness of Wargo Nature Center and County-wide outdoor recreation and environmental education programs and events
- #2** Increase connectivity to Wargo Nature Center
- #3** Improve the entry experience and sense of welcome, from CSAH 14 to the building
- #4** Increase programming around 'Essential Experiences': Water Access, Access to four Ecotypes, Birding, and Tree House (Outdoor Classrooms)
- #5** Improve the drop-in visitor experience
- #6** Better serve current core program audiences and expand new program audiences
- #7** Improve financial sustainability

GOALS & STRATEGIES

Goal #1:

Increase awareness of Wargo Nature Center and County-wide outdoor recreation and environmental education programs and events

Strategies:

1. Add prominent and welcoming signage:
 - a. At the main entrance on Highway 14 that is reflective of Wargo's vision as a place to interact with nature
 - b. That is visible from Interstate 35W northwest of the prairie
 - c. At the entrance to the Heritage Lab area, promoting the use of the walking/hiking trails east of Highway 14
 - d. At the Peltier Lake boat launch to indicate to boaters the location of the Nature Center on George Watch Lake
2. Improve Wargo's digital presence on the web with video, an Instagram feed, smart phone apps, etc
3. Improve marketing:
 - a. Work with the Anoka County Public Information Office to improve awareness of programs and events
 - b. Conduct additional special events to increase awareness
 - c. Expand cross and target marketing (home schools, other nature centers, cities, partner organizations, YMCA, etc)
 - d. Create an on-line video of Wargo activities to give potential visitors a sense of what the site and programs have to offer
 - e. Direct e-mail market to past visitor and program participants

Goal #2:

Increase connectivity to Wargo Nature Center

Strategies:

1. Create a non-motorized trail / boardwalk connection to the YMCA and Lino Lakes
2. Improve the pedestrian and bicycle connection along the entry drive to the Central Anoka County Regional Trail
3. Establish the water trail between Wargo Nature Center and the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Regional Park Reserve campground:
 - a. Provide maps at Wargo, the campground, and on-line
 - b. Expand canoe and kayak rentals to the campground

Goal #3:

Improve the entry experience and sense of welcome, from CSAH 14 to the building

Strategies:

1. Create nature experience pullouts along the entry road that are accessible after hours, adding a few parking spaces and interpretation at the compost site and prairie



A prominent entry sign along Highway 14 will improve the visibility of Wargo



A striped lane for bicycles and pedestrians will promote the shared-use of the entry road



Water trail wayfinding would increase connectivity to Wargo Nature Center via George Watch Lake

2. Partner with Integrated Waste Management to use the compost site as a learning experience – for example compost demonstration area with interpretive information
3. Add welcome and wayfinding signage
4. Enhance the natural experience between the parking lot and the building by adding native plantings, a learning station, and seating along the entry path
5. Make the building's main entry more visible
6. Screen the dumpsters and garage with vegetation
7. Separate visitor access (by foot) along the main entry walk from maintenance and operational access (by vehicle)
8. Improve the landscaping around the building
 - a. Screen the service area on the southwest corner of the building
 - b. Reflect the center's vision by investing in and caring for native plantings
 - c. Add a 'pollinator pathway' thru the garden north of the building to provide an interpretive opportunity and provide easier access for maintenance
 - d. Screen the amphitheater with vegetation to create an 'outdoor room' experience

Goal #4:

Increase programming around 'Essential Experiences': Water Access, Access to Four Ecotypes, Birding, and Tree Houses (Outdoor Classrooms)

Strategies:

1. Create indoor exhibits
2. Build and utilize new learning station platforms, dock access, and boardwalks to create water stewardship demonstrations and water-oriented recreation
3. Create interpretive exhibits that introduce visitors to the four ecotypes at Wargo, and provide a deeper understanding of their ecology
4. Add an outdoor classroom structure to the restored prairie area for programs
5. Improve birding programs with focused exhibits, habitat improvements, viewing areas, nest cams, and special events tailored around seasonal bird activities
6. Build and utilize a "Tree House" classroom for outdoor programs, events, and rentals
7. Create an ADA accessible 'Wild Things' trail loop that showcases the four ecotypes and birding
8. Create a trail segment thru the uplands area, south of the entry drive and compost site
9. Prepare a forest management plan to address Emerald Ash Borer, thinning of existing pine plantings, management of the maple basswood and floodplain forests



Interpretation would help integrate the compost site with the Nature Center



Features that filter runoff and provide vegetative buffers soften the parking lot experience



A boardwalk and observation deck brings visitors in close contact with water and wildlife, adding to Wargo's "Essential Experiences"



Native plantings provide visual interest, as well as opportunities for observing and fostering wildlife



A tree house classroom is a memorable learning space



A signature feature in the nature play area will help draw visitors to the nature play area

Goal #5: Improve the drop-in visitor experience

Strategies:

1. Expand access and/or hours of operation:
 - a. Expand building hours on weekends and evenings
 - b. Allow non-staffed after-hours access by the moving the entry gate further west and adding an easterly parking/turnaround for trail access near the prairie entrance
 - c. Create a trailhead at the Heritage Lab Site to encourage hiking/walking during un-programmed hours
2. Create temporary, flexible outdoor learning stations/ demonstration tables (staffed or stand-alone) on select weekends
3. Bring nature indoors:
 - a. Provide interactive exhibits in the lobby
 - b. Provide a viewing balcony that extends over the current lunchroom area to bring visitors closer the west windows/views
 - c. Enhance views from other building windows by improving the landscape
 - d. Create an outdoor 'tree house' classroom accessible from the building
 - e. Construct an outdoor deck off the classrooms on the south side of the building
4. Make the nature play area more visible and functional:
 - a. Add a second entrance to the nature play area that is visible from the main entry sequence
 - b. Add a signature play feature
 - c. Clarify circulation within nature play area
 - d. Control tall exotic grasses within nature play area
5. Create a longer walking experience on site by connecting the Nature Center to the Heritage Lab Site, restored prairie, upland trail, and regional trail system
6. Improve infrastructure and support facilities with a 'light touch' in keeping with the natural setting:
 - a. Consider the use of sustainable building materials and technologies for all future capital improvements.

Goal #6: Better serve current core program audiences and expand new program audiences

Strategies:

1. Expand adult outreach & programs:
 - a. Expand adult program offerings
 - b. Improve volunteer participation and outreach
 - c. Develop service learning programs
 - d. Develop a young naturalist program to train high school students as volunteer weekend naturalists

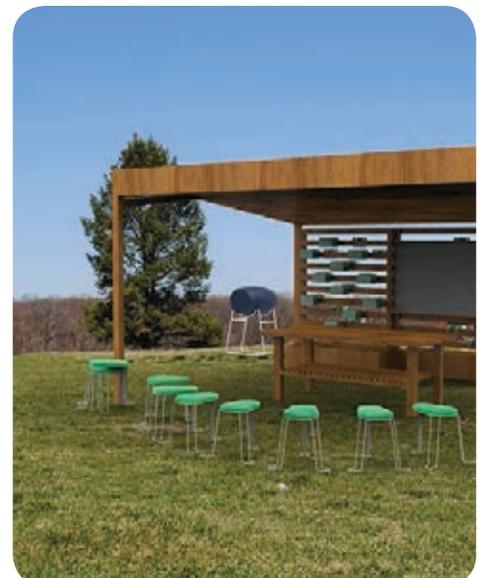
2. Enhance or formalize communication with local schools and homeschool organizations to align programming with curriculum needs
3. Consider off-site program expansion beyond schools to other groups/settings
4. Expand on-line video programs along the lines of 'Birding with Bob' series
5. Improve the visitor and program participant feedback system:
 - a. Continue to administer program participant feedback surveys
 - b. Conduct quarterly focus group meetings with stakeholders such as volunteers, homes school participants, program participants, non-participants, teachers, and potential partners to measure program satisfaction, identify program improvements, identify new program and partner opportunities, identify new markets and communication/marketing opportunities
6. Improve the Heritage Lab site with eight outdoor classroom structures and a weather shelter
7. Increase staff resources with increases in program participation:
 - a. Renovate building to allow for modest staff expansion
8. Improve storage capacity:
 - a. Consider enhancing access to the existing storage building with access off the parking lot and/or offsite storage
 - b. Add covered, all season boat and equipment storage near the dock, replacing the current shed west of the building

**Goal #7:
Improve Financial Sustainability**

1. Increase revenue
 - a. Fill current programs and expand programs
 - b. Expand equipment and rental opportunities
2. Expand Partnerships
3. Seek more grant opportunities
4. Consider a State Bond Request for improvements outlined in this plan
5. Create a Friends of Wargo group for funding and advocacy
6. Continue phased upgrades to reduce building energy use/costs
7. Maximize use of volunteers



An outdoor observation deck and birding platform will encourage visitors to enjoy and study the prairie ecotype



Outdoor classrooms shelters in the Heritage Lab will provide shade and other amenities for daycampers



Bituminous ADA accessible trails will allow for use of the 'Wild Things' loop by people of all abilities



Boardwalks provide connections and experiential opportunities

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The master plan development concepts are organized by full site, the nature center campus, and the nature center building. The full site includes the entire Wargo peninsula, as well as the Heritage Lab site east of Highway 14. The Wargo campus area focuses on the areas adjacent to the nature center building, including the parking lot and primary water access site. The building improvement concepts focus on plans for the building itself.

Full Site Concept

The full site concept shows the relationship between the Nature Center building and the larger site. Elements include connections to the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Water Trail, the Lino Lakes YMCA, and the Heritage Lab Area. Also shown are the locations of primary signage, proposed connections and additions to the prairie and upland area, and the secondary water access site and viewing platform.

Wargo Full Site Concept

- A** Additional signage: wayfinding, and welcome signage at major roadways/boat launch
- B** Entry drive improvements: lane re-striping for shared vehicle/bicycle/pedestrian use; relocation of entry gate; added parking and interpretive stations
- C** New trail in uplands
- D** Heritage lab weather shelter
- E** Add Heritage Lab trailhead and parking
- F** Heritage Lab classrooms
- G** Secondary water access site & birding platform
- H** Trail connection to YMCA and Lino Lakes City Center
- I** Boardwalk from Nature Center to Prairie
- J** Prairie building

FIGURE 4.1 Full Site Concept Plan

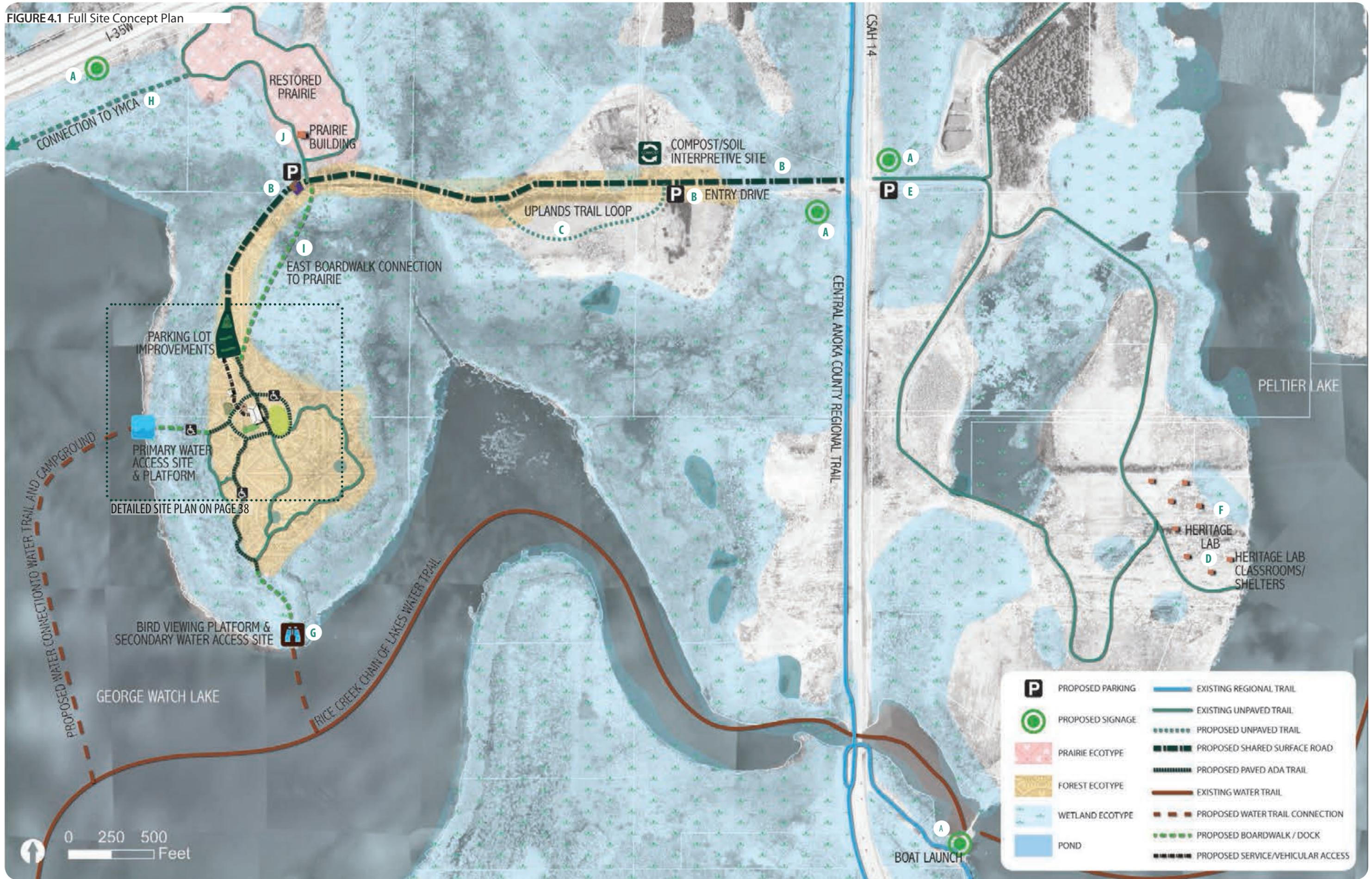


FIGURE 4.2 Wargo Campus Concept Plan



Wargo Campus Concept

The Wargo Campus concept shows improvements around the Nature Center Building, and include redevelopment of the parking lot, entry walk, primary water access station, and landscaping around the building. New items include

the ADA 'Wild Things' loop, a gravel service area and drive, the proposed treehouse classroom, additional storage, and a signature play feature for the nature play area.

FIGURE 4.3 Entry Walk Rendering



A landscaped entry and walkway helps create a sense of place and orient visitors to Wargo. Amenities include bicycle racks, welcome signage and wayfinding, benches, ADA trail access, seating, and seating areas that can be utilized as outdoor program space or interpretive nodes.

Wargo Campus Improvements Summary

- K** Improved entry node and walkway
- L** 'Wild Things' ADA interpretive trail loop
- M** ADA access to water station/dock improvements
- N** Nature play area improvements; new entrance and signature play feature
- O** West entry gathering area and landscape improvements
- P** Improve boat rental and storage area
- Q** Restore woodland garden
- R** Parking lot improvements
- S** Separate service area / drive
- T** Add plantings around amphitheater to provide screen
- U** Bird thicket plantings
- V** Treehouse classroom addition
- W** Create larger open field / play space
- X** Improve primary water access site and add accessible boat launch



Indoor learning spaces should encourage hands-on experiences



Indoor interpretive learning opportunities should also be fun



Indoor exhibit space and interpretation follows a clear path and is well-lit

Building Improvements

Physical improvements to the Nature Center building focus on making the interior space more dynamic and welcoming for visitors, as well as modifications that improve functionality for staff.

Improvements that call attention to the main entrance to the building from the entry walk will help orient visitors to the center. Reorientation of the current reception desk will help visitors know where to go upon arrival. Other important improvements include the updating of current displays in the main lobby to provide visitors with a more hands-on, interactive experience.

Improvements to the indoor/outdoor relationship include the addition of windows, and additional doors that provide greater access between the inside and out. A balcony that extends over the lower level cafeteria/craft area will bring visitors closer to the west facing windows that provide views of the Wargo campus.

Staff and storage spaces are also reconfigured to allow for more convenient access to equipment and flexible space to accommodate staffing needs and provide the appropriate separation of public and private space.

With the addition of an outdoor 'Treehouse' classroom Wargo will gain a memorable space that visitors will enjoy for a variety of programs and events.

Building Improvements Summary

- » Reconfigure interior space
- » New artful structure to draw attention to main entrance
- » Reconfigured welcome desk area
- » Redesigned lobby with interactive interpretive displays
- » 'Treehouse' outdoor classrooms
- » Reconfigured lower level with more staff space and full walls to separate offices and public space

***Concept plans for building improvements are flexible**

FIGURE 4.4 Building Improvements Concept Plan -Main Level

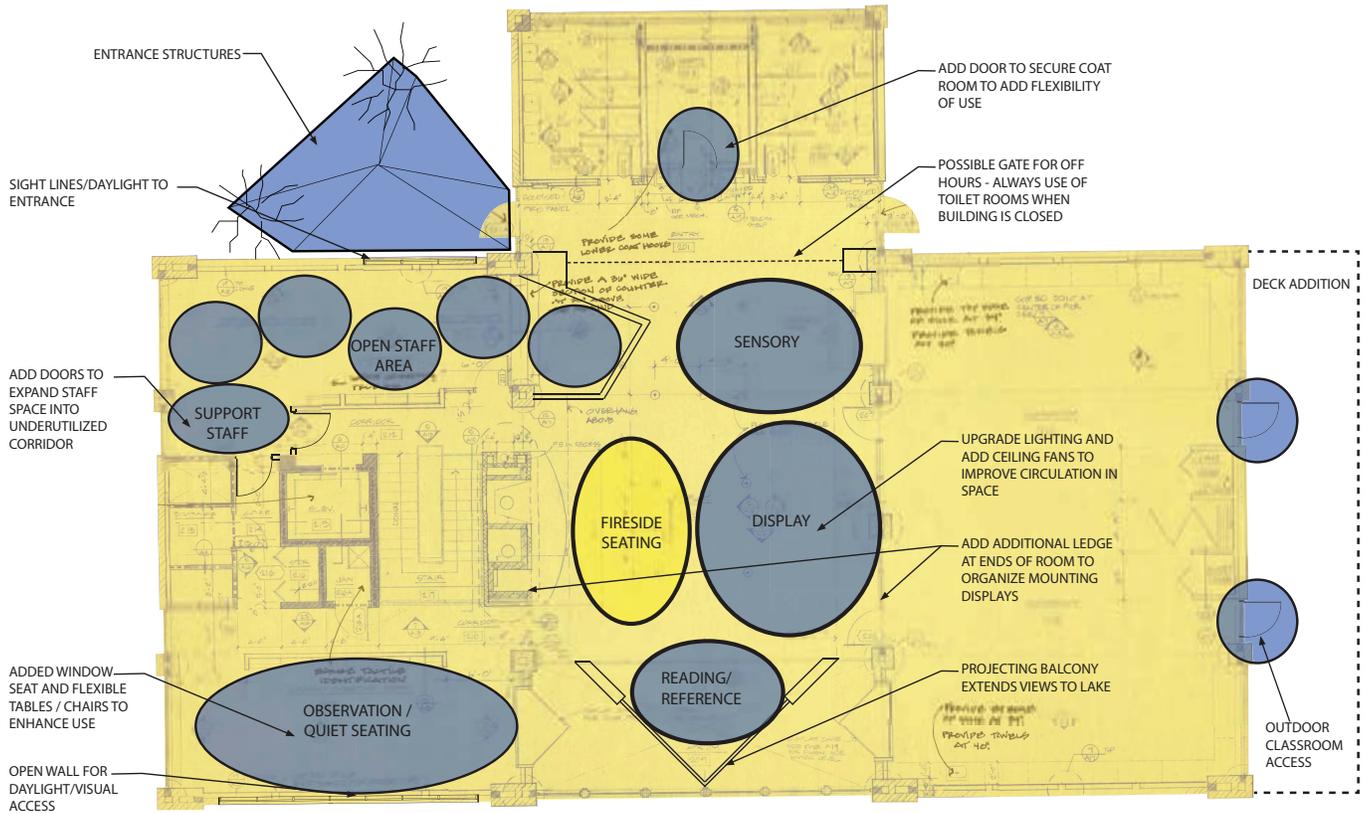


FIGURE 4.5 Building Improvements Concept Plan -Lower Level

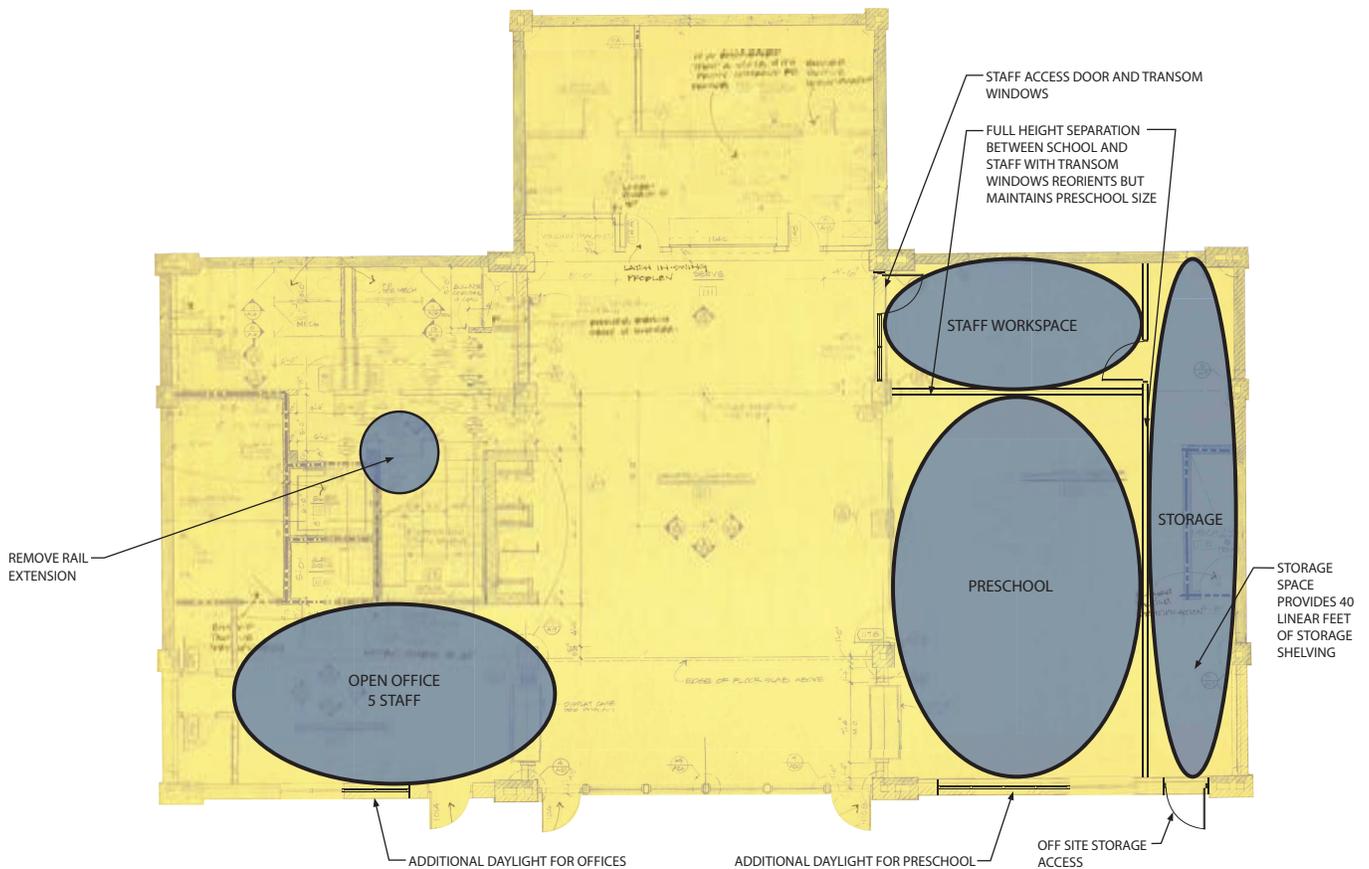


FIGURE 4.6 Treehouse and West Entry Gathering Area Rendering



Improvements to the building and surrounding landscape improve the indoor/ outdoor relationship.

FIGURE 4.7 Building Improvement Concept - North Elevation

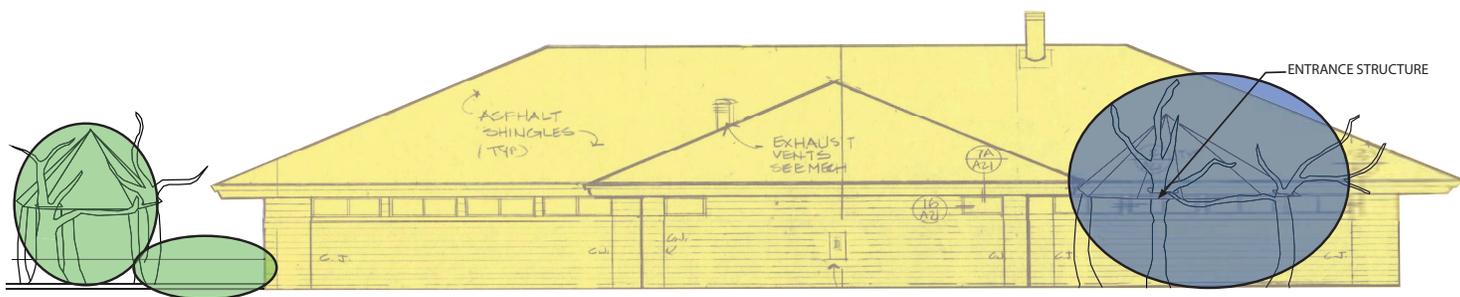
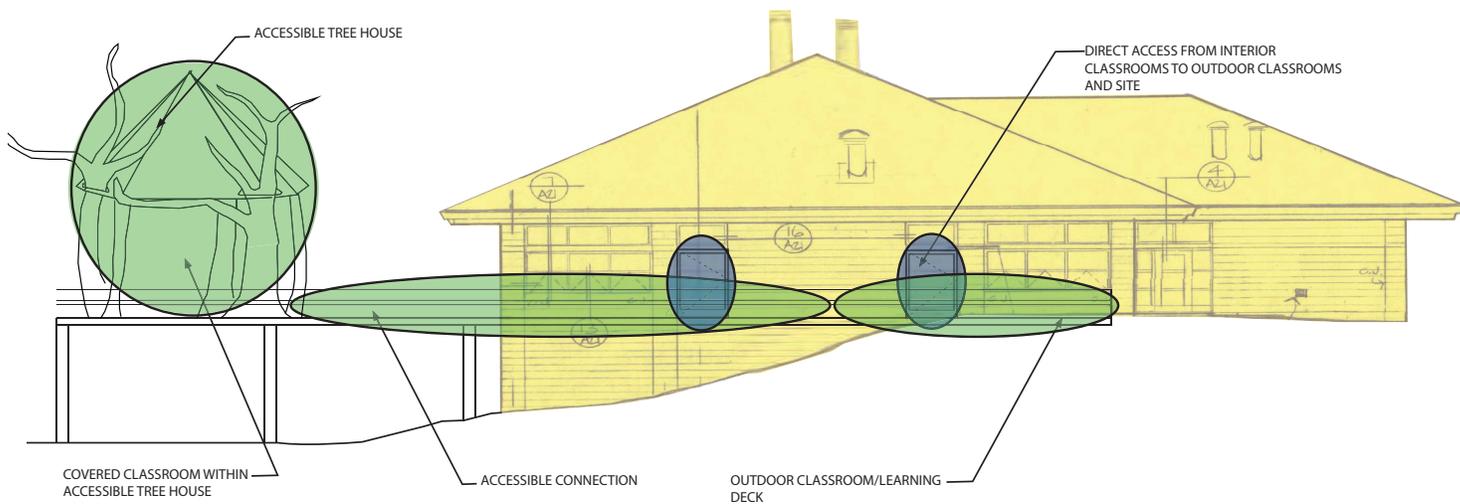


FIGURE 4.8 Building Improvement Concept - East Elevation





A water access site/outdoor classroom provides a comfortable space for water-related programming



Stormwater features provide ecosystem services and interpretive opportunities



A welcoming entry walk invites visitors into the site



Themed details help create a sense of place and overall site character



Boardwalks can also be gathering places



Implementation



The Master Plan identifies the future vision for Wargo Nature Center and the goals, strategies, including physical improvements, to achieve that vision. Implementing the plan will take continued effort in terms of staff time and funding and is intended to be phased over time, as resources are available. This chapter addresses phasing, funding resources, costs and to implement the plan. The chapter is divided into four sections. The operational plan addresses timing and actions for the 'softscape' elements of the plan: staffing, marketing, and operations. The phasing plan addresses physical improvements, the 'hardscape' elements. This is followed by a cost estimate for site and building improvements and potential funding resources.

OPERATIONAL PLAN

The operational plan addresses timing and actions for the 'softscape' elements of the plan: staffing, marketing, and operations.

Goal	Strategies	Action Required	Timeline
#1: Increase awareness of Wargo Nature Center and county-wide outdoor recreation and environmental education programs and events	Signage/wayfinding at the Peltier Lake boat launch that indicates the location of the Nature Center on George Watch Lake	Design and install sign	2015
	Improve Wargo's digital presence on the web with video, an Instagram feed, smart phone apps, etc.	Develop an annual digital media plan with recreation, nature center, and marketing department staff	Annually
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve marketing • Work with the Anoka County Public Information Office to improve awareness of programs and event 	Develop an annual strategic marketing plan for in coordination with Anoka County Public Information Office. Meet quarterly to track progress. Formally coordinate marketing activities between the nature center and marketing staff.	Annually Quarterly Monthly
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand cross and target marketing (home school community, other nature centers, cities, partner organizations, YMCA, etc) 	Address as part of the annual marketing strategic plan	Annually
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an on-line video of Wargo activities to give potential visitors a sense of what the site a programs have to offer 	Develop a series of short (less than 3 minute) videos highlighting specific programs at Wargo – water sports & rentals, winter sports, summer drop in activities, and summer camps.	2015
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct e-mail market to past visitor and program participants 	Develop mechanisms to allow recreation and nature center staff greater control over direct email marketing to past program participants	On-going
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct additional special events to increase awareness 	Develop and hold one additional annual special event	Annually

Goal	Strategies	Action Required	Timeline
#2: Increase connectivity to Wargo Nature Center	Establish the water trail between Wargo Nature Center and the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Regional Park Reserve campground	Develop and provide maps at Wargo, the campground, and on-line Expand canoe and kayak rentals to the campground	2016
#3: Improve the entry experience and sense of welcome, from CSAH 14 to the building	Obtain funding for capital projects Expand partnerships	Budget for phased physical improvements in the County's annual Capital Improvement Plan Identify partnerships for implementation Apply for grants	On-going 2015-2020
#4: Increase programming around 'Essential Experiences': Water Access, Access to Four Ecotypes, Birding, and Tree House (Outdoor Classrooms)	Improve birding programs with focused exhibits, habitat improvements, viewing areas, nest cams, and special events tailored around seasonal bird activities	Install nest cams & stream on-line Repair bird blinds at Wargo Nature Center Create birding exhibit in Wargo Nature Center Lobby detailing birding opportunities in Anoka County Host one seasonal birding event	2015-2020
	Prepare a forest management plan to address Emerald Ash Borer, thinning of existing pine plantings, management of the maple basswood and floodplain forests	Prepare forest management plan	
	Develop programs around new program spaces as they are built (boardwalks, expanded docks, tree house, etc.)	During the design process for new spaces identify potential programs, space/design requirements, equipment, staff needs, and partnership opportunities	On-going
#5: Improve the drop-in visitor experience	Expand access and/or hours of operation	Expand building hours on weekends and evenings Expand staff hours to coincide with rental demands	2015-2016
	Create temporary, flexible outdoor learning stations/ demonstration tables (staffed or stand-alone) on select weekends	Staff or develop volunteer program for temporary learning stations (touch and feel tables, water resources, geocaching) on weekends	On-going

Goal	Strategies	Action Required	Timeline
#6: Better serve current core program audiences and expand new program audiences	Expand outreach & programs	Expand adult program offerings Train volunteers to assist naturalists with programs Develop service learning programs Develop a young naturalist program to train high school students as volunteer weekend naturalists	On-going
	Consider off-site program expansion beyond schools to other groups/ settings	Identify and meet with potential other off-site program audiences to test market and specific audience needs	2017
	Expand on-line video programs along the lines of 'Birding with Bob'	Produce an on line video program that highlights each of Wargo's four ecotypes	2015
	Enhance or formalize communication with local schools and homeschool organizations to match programming with curriculum needs	Hold an annual focus group meeting with each group	On-going
	Improve the visitor and program participant feedback system Continue to administer program participant feedback surveys	Conduct semi-annual or annual focus group meetings with stakeholders such as volunteers, homeschool participants, program participants, non-participants, teachers, and potential partners to measure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • program satisfaction • identify program improvements • identify new program and partner opportunities • identify new markets and communication/marketing opportunities 	On-going
	Increase staff resources	Add staff along with increases in program participation	As needed

Goal	Strategies	Action Required	Timeline
#7: Improve Financial Sustainability	Increase revenue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill current programs and expand programs • Expand equipment and rental opportunities 	Adjust program mix based on trends, participation rates, and participant feedback Coordinate hours for equipment rental at Wargo Nature Center with rental demand Expand rental offerings at the campground Offer and market the tree house and other new program spaces for private rental	On-going 2015 2015-2020 As spaces are developed
	Expand Partnerships	Actively work to enhance partnerships with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anoka County Integrated Waste Management through incorporated recycling into the on-site and off-site programs and interpretive displays • The Cities of Lino Lakes, Blaine, and Centerville • Connexus Energy, YMCA, and municipal parks and recreation departments • Rice Creek Watershed District 	On-going
	Seek more grant opportunities	Dedicate staff time to grant writing. Use Edith Wargo Powers Endowment as leverage for matching grant funds	On-going On-going
	Consider a State Bond Request	Identify priority projects and begin State Bond Request Process	2015-2016
	Create a Friends of Wargo group for funding and advocacy	Work with Anoka County Parks and Community Services Committee to identify potential founding members Hold focus group with existing volunteers to test idea	2016-2020
	Continue phased upgrades to reduce building energy use/costs	As building system upgrades are needed, replace systems with energy efficient models	On-going
	Maximize use of volunteers	Develop new programs that combine education with volunteer training & events (service learning, teen naturalists, wildlife counts, invasive species control, construction of small wildlife viewing blinds, bird boxes, etc.) Expand opportunities for trained volunteers Coordinate volunteer activities with Friends of Wargo group	On-going

PHASING AND PRIORITIES

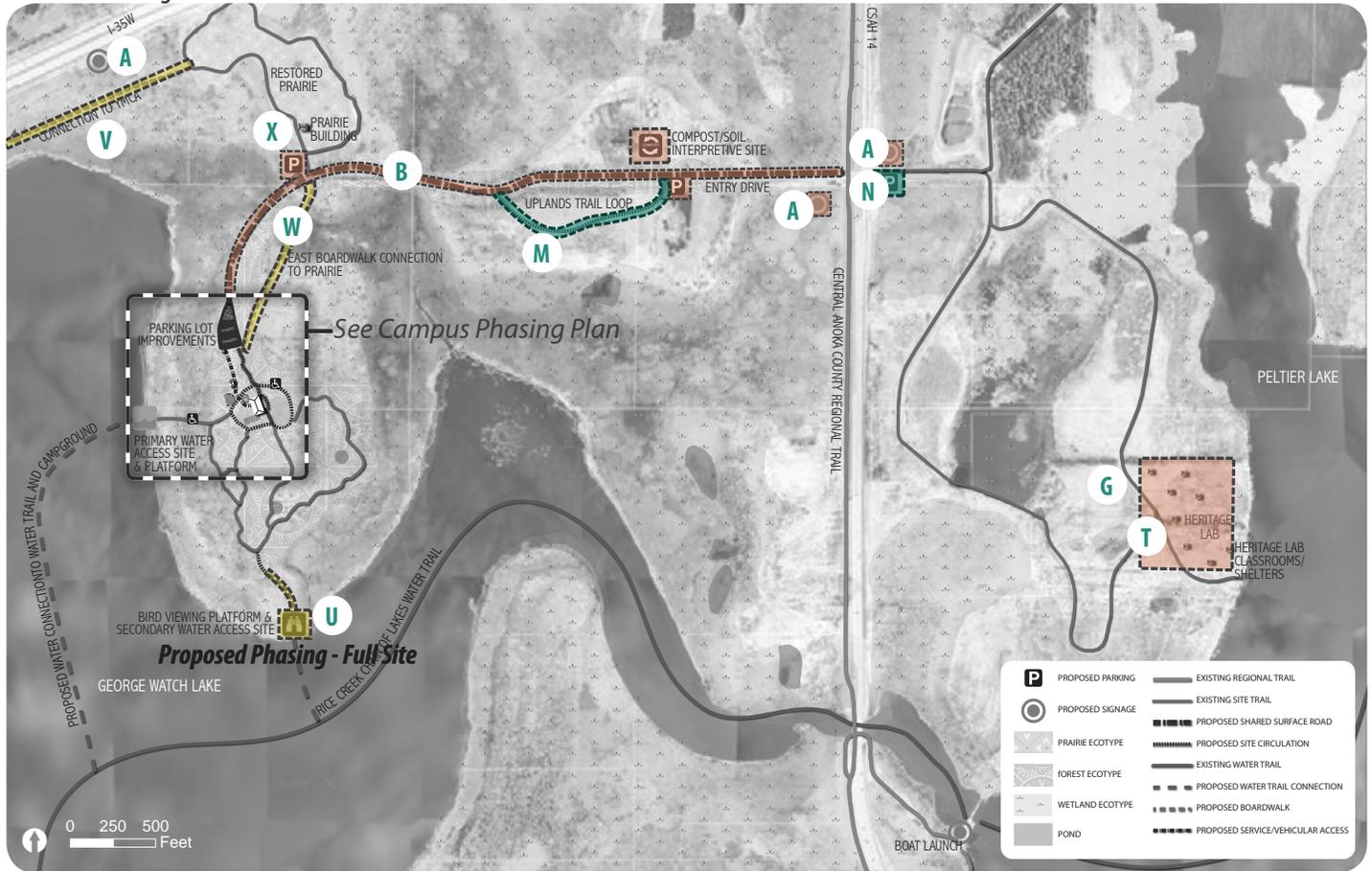
The Wargo Nature Center master plan has been developed to support phased implementation. Improvements are organized into near term (0-5 years), mid-term (5-12 years), and long term (12+ years) phases. Phasing allows for areas of the overall project to be completed in independent stages. It is anticipated that near-term projects will be built first, but the Master Plan remains flexible so that projects can be implemented as partnership or funding opportunities arise.

Priorities were developed based on input from the core project team, and reflect the needs and knowledge of staff, visitors, and other stakeholders that provided input throughout the process. The first phase focuses on more easily implementable improvements, as well as improvements that address issues such as visitor safety, ADA accessibility, place-making, and erosion. Long-term, or third phase improvements, include items that will require larger capital investments and may take more time to secure partnerships and funding for implementation.

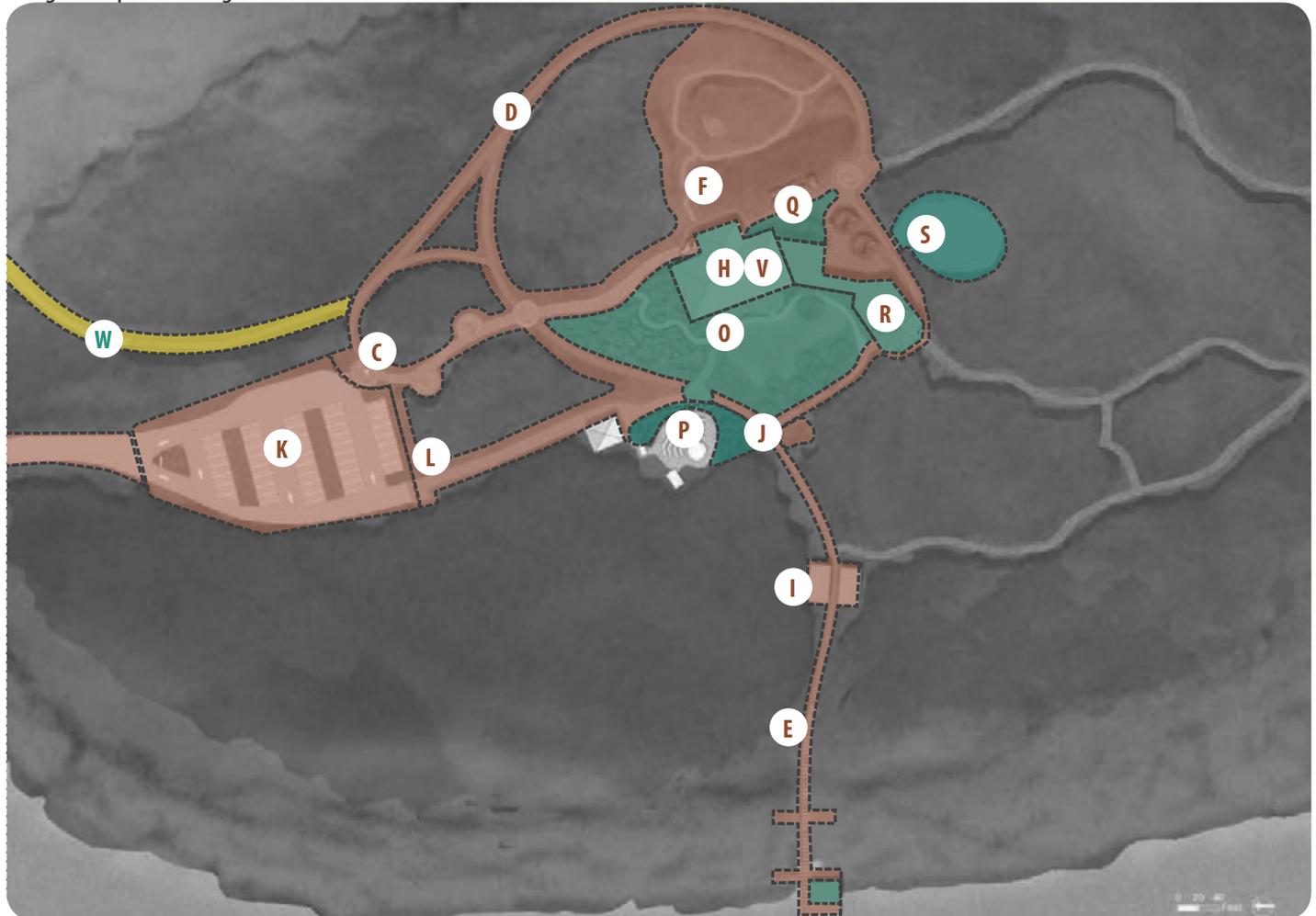
KEY: **A** See Full Site Phasing Plan **A** See Wargo Campus Phasing Plan

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Signage & wayfinding B Entry drive improvements: bike & pedestrian lane and parking areas C Entry node and walkway D 'Wild Things' ADA interpretive trail loop E ADA trail/dock to water station F Nature play area entrance and improvements G Heritage Lab classroom structures H Interior space reconfiguration I Rental storage improvements J Woodland garden restoration K Parking lot improvements L Service area and drive V Indoor interpretation/displays 	<p>NEAR TERM 0-5 years</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M Upland trail loop N Heritage Lab area parking O West entry gathering area and landscape improvements P Amphitheatre screen planting Q Bird thicket plantings R Treehouse classroom S Open field T Heritage Lab weather shelter 	<p>MID-TERM 5-12 years</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> U Secondary water access site & birding platform V Connection to the Lino Lakes YMCA W Boardwalk connection to the prairie X Prairie building 	<p>LONG TERM 12+ years</p>

Full Site Phasing Plan



Wargo Campus Phasing Plan



FUNDING & PARTNERSHIPS

At present, Wargo has a wide array of funding sources, ranging from its own operating budget to private grants and endowments, with approximately 75% of its operating budget coming from the Anoka County budget. Current funding sources include:

- Wargo Nature Center Operations Budget
- Metro Regional Parks Rehab and Enhancement Program
- Metro Regional Parks C.I.P.
- Metro Regional Parks and Trails Legacy Program
- Edith Wargo Powers Endowment
- Koch Pipeline Company Easement Funding (one-time)
- Connexus Energy Grant

In order to realize the funding required to make the proposed improvements in this plan, additional funding strategies will need to be pursued. Staff currently devotes some capacity to pursue federal, state, and foundation grants to help support the operations and development of the Center, but grant funding should be supplemental to other additional sources. Potential new funding strategies include:

- Increase revenue return from rentals, programs, and events
- Seek grants through new opportunities
- Seek matching funds using the Edith Wargo Powers Endowment as leverage
- Consider a State Bond Request
- Create a Friends of Wargo group for funding and advocacy
- Continue phased upgrades to reduce building energy use/costs
- Partnership with the University of Minnesota's College of Design Architecture Department

As the mission, vision and goals of Wargo Nature Center match or overlap with other organizations, potential partnerships should be explored to share resources to help implement the redevelopment plans. As such, Wargo should actively work to increase and enhance partnerships with:

- Anoka County Integrated Waste Management through incorporated recycling into the on-site and off-site programs
- The Cities of Lino Lakes, Blaine, and Centerville
- Connexus Energy, YMCA, and municipal parks and recreation departments
- Rice Creek Watershed District



Our Backyard Nature Preschool is offered at the Nature Center through a partnership with the Forest Lake Family Center



Wargo naturalists provide programming at designated school forests offered in collaboration with area elementary schools



With the aid of a Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom grant, Wargo added a Farm to Market Summer camp in 2013

CURRENT PARTNERSHIPS

Wargo Nature Center currently has several successful partnerships with the University of Minnesota, Connexus Energy, the YMCA, Anoka County Libraries, Forest Lake Family Center, and Oneka and Linwood Elementary School Forests. Two important partnerships are highlighted below.

University of Minnesota Partnership

The University of Minnesota School of Design - Architecture Program, will be partnering with the Anoka County Parks and Recreation Department in the design and installation of a variety of structures and enhancements at the Wargo Nature Center. There are several exciting initiatives outlined in the new Nature Center Master Plan that are well suited to this endeavor.

Starting in the spring of 2016, graduate level students will be engaged in a design/build program focusing on "real life" projects at the Nature Center. This will be followed with hands on production during the summer months. It is anticipated that the program could last for several years.

The new collaboration will also include the development of strategies for securing matching funds to advance the projects from alumni and enthusiasts of the University of Minnesota Architecture Program. The County will also be seeking grants to be combined with the Edith Wargo Fund to underwrite the cost of these projects.

Connexus Energy Partnership

Connexus Energy has been an outstanding support organization for the Anoka County Parks and Recreation Department for over 20 years. Connexus Energy, a local customer-owned utility, has provided financial support of over \$500,000 for two award-winning programs.

Thanks to Connexus's generous continuing financial support, over 600,000 students in Anoka County have been able to participate in the Wildlife Outreach and Heritage Lab programs. The Wildlife Outreach program is provided free to local schools and provides presentations on Minnesota animals in an informal and fun manner. The Wildlife Outreach Program is conducted by staff naturalists at various school sites in the northern metro area. School groups choose a topic from a list of eight possible MN animals to augment their curriculum. The presentations are about 45 minutes each and focus on the animal's habitat, adaptations and conservation issues. Artifacts such as furs, bones, mounts, and costumes are used to bring the animals to life. Each student takes home a brochure that covers key points of the presentation.

Participants to the Heritage Lab travel through a daylong living history program that focuses on different time periods of MN history. Heritage Lab is a full day, out-door environmental and historical program. Students come for the entire day and participate in hands-on activities that typify an historical period such as: the Voyageur Era, Minnesota Milling, Mining, & Lumbering, Native Americans and the Civil War Era. Students fully engage in the time period as the area is transformed into a specific time period and staff members take on the persona of individuals from various walks of life in a given time period.

Without the tremendous financial assistance of Connexus Energy, these programs would not happen.



Wargo's Wildlife Outreach program is supported by Connexus Energy



Heritage Lab day camps are also supported by an annual grant from Connexus Energy

Cost Estimate

The preliminary cost estimate shows a total redevelopment cost of approximately \$6.0 million (2015 dollars) to implement all proposed improvements. Near term phase redevelopment is estimated at \$2.4 million; mid-term phase at \$1.2 million; and long-term phase at \$2.4 million. These figures include contingencies for construction and engineering.

FIGURE 5.1 Cost Estimate

Wargo Nature Center									
Hugo, Minnesota									
03.11.15									
Preliminary Schematic Cost Estimate: based on Master Plan									
Prepared by Hoisington Koegler Group Inc.									
Description	Qty.	Unit	Unit price	Totals	with 30% escalation	Subtotals	Near term	Mid term	Long term
A CIRCULATION									
Entry Walk + Node									
8' permeable path	355	lf	\$ 120	\$ 42,600.00	\$55,380		\$ 55,380.00		
bicycle parking and entry plaza permeable paving	1000	sf	\$ 15	\$ 15,000.00	\$19,500		\$ 19,500.00		
Bike hoops	4	ea	\$ 300	\$ 1,200.00	\$1,560		\$ 1,560.00		
plantings/landscaping (9 x 125 sf areas)	1125	sf	\$ 10	\$ 11,250.00	\$14,625		\$ 14,625.00		
seating + gathering area	2	ea	\$ 2,500	\$ 5,000.00	\$6,500		\$ 6,500.00		
ADA Loop									
Paved bituminous or limestone ADA trail to water station 2 8'x890'	890	lf	\$ 35	\$ 31,150.00	\$40,495		\$ 40,495.00		
Paved bituminous or limestone ADA trail 8'x1620'	1620	lf	\$ 35	\$ 56,700.00	\$73,710		\$ 73,710.00		
Paved bituminous service drive 10' x 230'	230	lf	\$ 50	\$ 11,500.00	\$14,950		\$ 14,950.00		
Paved bituminous ADA trail to main dock 10'x360'	360	lf	\$ 45	\$ 16,200.00	\$21,060		\$ 21,060.00		
Wayfinding/Interpretation/Signage									
Main entrance sign	1	ea	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000.00	\$6,500		\$ 6,500.00		
Site welcome sign/directional	1	ea	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500.00	\$3,250		\$ 3,250.00		
Site orientation sign/wayfinding at entry node	1	ea	\$ 300	\$ 300.00	\$390		\$ 390.00		
misc. interpretive signage (compost, prairie, forest restoration/invasives)	3	ea	\$ 800	\$ 2,400.00	\$3,120		\$ 3,120.00		
Miscellaneous wayfinding	7	ea	\$ 500	\$ 3,500.00	\$4,550		\$ 4,550.00		
Heritage Lab entrance signage	1	ea	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000.00	\$1,300		\$ 1,300.00		
Heritage Lab wayfinding sign	1	ea	\$ 500	\$ 500.00	\$650		\$ 650.00		
				subtotal		\$267,540	\$ 267,540.00		
C PLAZA IMPROVEMENTS + SITE									
Bioswale/Dry Stream	300	SF	\$ 20	\$ 6,000.00	\$7,800			\$7,800	
Plaza/Rear Circulation									
Permeable pavers	2000	sf	\$ 15	\$ 30,000.00	\$39,000			\$39,000	
Landscape allowance	1	EA	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500.00	\$3,250			\$3,250	
				subtotal		\$50,050		\$ 50,050.00	
D NATURE PLAY AREA IMPROVEMENTS									
New Entrance									
woodchip path (4' x 55' path)	55	LF	\$ 5	\$ 275.00	\$358		\$ 357.50		
concrete stairs (4' wide with 12 stairs)	0	LS	\$ 115,000	\$ -			\$ -		
Timber stairs (4' wide, 12 steps)	12	ea	\$ 2,500	\$ 30,000.00	\$39,000		\$ 39,000.00		
Signature Feature									
new nature play/discovery element	1	ea	\$ 35,000	\$ 35,000.00	\$45,500		\$ 45,500.00		
Landscaping Allowance									
selective tree clearing (ash)	1	LS	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000.00	\$2,600		\$ 2,600.00		
woodchip trails	1	LS	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000.00	\$1,300		\$ 1,300.00		
understory tree planting	20	EA	\$ 200	\$ 4,000.00	\$5,200		\$ 5,200.00		
sledding hill clearance and landscaping	.6	ac	\$ 4,000	\$ 2,400.00	\$3,120		\$ 3,120.00		
Restoration/invasive species control	.5	ac	\$ 3,000	\$ 1,500.00	\$1,950		\$ 1,950.00		
Picnic table	5	EA	\$ 1,500	\$ 7,500.00	\$9,750		\$ 9,750.00		
				subtotal		\$108,778	\$ 108,777.50		
E EQUIPMENT STORAGE RELOCATION									
new structure (200 sf)	1	LS	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000.00	\$13,000		\$ 13,000.00		
covered boat storage 30'x 18'	1	LS	\$ 20,000	\$ 20,000.00	\$26,000		\$ 26,000.00		
canoe racks	3	ea	\$ 1,000	\$ 3,000.00	\$3,900		\$ 3,900.00		
				subtotal		\$42,900	\$ 42,900.00		
F BUILDING MODIFICATIONS									
Interior Space reconfiguration (main and lower level, MEP)	1	LS	\$ 352,788	\$ 352,788.00	\$458,624			\$458,624	
Treehouse addition	1	LS	\$ 136,477	\$ 136,477.00	\$177,420			\$177,420	
Front Entrance	1	LS	\$ 31,866	\$ 31,866.00	\$41,426			\$41,426	
Indoor interpretation	1	LS	\$ 105,000	\$ 105,000.00	\$136,500			\$136,500	
				subtotal		\$813,970		\$ 813,970.30	
G TRAIL CONNECTIONS									
Connection to Prairie									
East Boardwalk 8' x 1200' (1200 LF)	1200	lf	\$ 175	\$ 210,000.00	\$273,000				\$273,000
West Boardwalk 8' x 2000'		lf	\$ 175	\$ -					\$ -
Connection to YMCA									
Boardwalk 10' x 3,540'	3,540	lf	\$ 175	\$ 619,500.00	\$805,350				\$805,350
Paved bituminous trail 10'x 3,400'	3,400	lf	\$ 80	\$ 272,000.00	\$353,600				\$353,600
Repaving entry drive 42'10' x 24' (includes base material, prep, mobilization and	101040	sf	\$ 3	\$ 328,380.00	\$426,894		\$ 426,894.00		
Upland natural surface trail loop	1500	lf	\$ 2	\$ 3,000.00	\$3,900			\$3,900	
				subtotal		\$1,862,744	\$ 426,894.00	\$ 3,900.00	\$ 1,431,950.00

Description	Qty.	Unit	Unit price	Totals	with 30% escalation	Subtotals	Near term	Mid term	Long term
H HERITAGE LAB OUTDOOR CLASSROOM/SHELTER									
Outdoor Classroom Shelters	8	LS	\$ 25,000	\$ 200,000.00	\$260,000		\$ 260,000.00		
Weather Shelter	1	LS	\$ 75,000	\$ 75,000.00	\$97,500		\$ 97,500.00		
Heritage Lab trail access/parking lot								\$ -	
gravel parking -4 cars	1600	sf	\$ 8	\$ 12,800.00	\$16,640			\$16,640	
subtotal						\$374,140	\$ 357,500.00	\$ 16,640.00	
I OBSERVATION/TREE HOUSE STRUCTURES									
Prairie classroom/structure		LS		\$ 150,000.00	\$195,000				\$195,000
Primary Water Access/ Platform/shade structure				\$ -					
Wooden Dock/Pier (2,200 sf, 10' x 220')	2200	sf	\$ 60	\$ 132,000.00	\$171,600		\$ 171,600.00		
Covered structure (650 sf, 25' x26')	650	sf	\$ 50						
Secondary water access + bird viewing platform									
Wooden Dock/Pier (2,200 sf, 10' x 220')	2200	sf	\$ 60	\$ 132,000.00	\$171,600				\$171,600
Covered structure (650 sf, 25' x26')	450	sf	\$ 50	\$ 22,500.00	\$29,250				\$29,250
subtotal						\$567,450	\$ 171,600.00	\$ -	\$395,850
J ENTRY DRIVE INTERPRETIVE AREAS									
Prairie observation deck (125 SF @ \$50/SF)	2	LS	\$ 17,500	\$ 35,000.00	\$45,500		\$ 45,500.00		
Parking - 3 lots for 4 cars (Heritage Lab, Compost, Prairie)	4800	sf	\$ 3	\$ 14,400.00	\$18,720		\$ 18,720.00		
subtotal						\$64,220	\$ 64,220.00		
K LANDSCAPE									
Restoration - woodland plantings	2	AC	\$ 2,500	\$ 5,000.00	\$6,500			\$6,500	
Bird thicket	.5	ac	\$ 6,000	\$ 3,000.00	\$3,900			\$3,900	
tree	1	ea	\$ 300	\$ 300.00	\$390			\$390	
understory trees	3	ea	\$ 200	\$ 600.00	\$780			\$780	
shrubs (5' oc)	80	ea	\$ 20	\$ 1,600.00	\$2,080			\$2,080	
Pollinator Garden	.3	ac	\$ 6,000	\$ 1,800.00	\$2,340		\$ 2,340.00		
Woodland Garden improvements .2 acres)	1	LS	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000.00	\$3,900		\$ 3,900.00		
post fence	115	lf		\$ -					
Amphitheatre Screen-woodland establishment	0.03	ac		\$ -					
tree	2	ea	\$ 300	\$ 600.00	\$780			\$780	
understory trees	9	ea	\$ 200	\$ 1,800.00	\$2,340			\$2,340	
shrubs (5' oc)	60	ea	\$ 20	\$ 1,200.00	\$1,560			\$1,560	
subtotal						\$24,570	\$ 6,240.00	\$ 18,330.00	
L PARKING LOT IMPROVEMENTS									
Replace bituminous parking lot	25610	sf	\$ 3	\$ 83,232.50	\$108,202		\$108,202		
Precast concrete bumpers	30	ea	\$ 100	\$ 3,000.00	\$3,900		\$3,900		
30 stall parking lot (permeable pavers with concrete curbing)	41	per stall	\$ 3,000	\$ 123,000.00	\$159,900		\$159,900		
Parking lot lighting	2	ea	\$ 4,500	\$ 9,000.00	\$11,700		\$11,700		
Stormwater raingardens allowance	3500	sf	\$ 15	\$ 52,500.00	\$68,250		\$68,250		
Landscaping allowance	700	sf	\$ 8	\$ 5,600.00	\$7,280		\$7,280		
subtotal						\$359,232	\$359,232.25		
M OTHER									
Overall site lighting- per light pole		ea	\$ 4,500	\$ -					
subtotal									
Construction subtotal				\$ 3,488,918.50	\$4,535,594	\$ 4,535,594.05	\$ 1,804,903.75	\$ 902,890.30	\$ 1,827,800.00
15% construction contingency				\$ 523,337.78	\$ 680,339.11		\$ 270,735.56	\$ 135,433.55	\$ 274,170.00
Construction total				\$ 4,012,256.28	\$ 5,215,933.16		\$ 2,075,639.31	\$ 1,038,323.85	\$ 2,101,970.00
15% Engineering and Design				\$ 601,838.44	\$ 782,389.97		\$ 311,345.90	\$ 155,748.58	\$ 315,295.50
SCHEMATIC PARK IMPROVEMENT TOTAL				\$ 4,614,094.72	\$ 5,998,323.13		\$ 2,386,985.21	\$ 1,194,072.42	\$ 2,417,265.50



MANTOU



Appendix

MEETINGS & OUTREACH

Master Plan Kick Off Meeting.....	A2
Focus Group Session.....	A7
WargoNatureCenterQuestionnaire.....	A15
Vision Meeting.....	A33
Goals & Strategies Meeting	A37
Programming&Marketing Meeting	A40
Peer Review Meeting.....	A43



Joseph E. Wargo Nature Center Master Plan

Anoka County Parks

Master Plan Kick Off Meeting

Thursday, January 23, 2014

9:30 AM - Noon

Wargo Nature Center

Agenda

1. Introductions

County staff, HKGi and MDA

2. County goals, desires, needs and outcomes for the Master Plan

Desired outcomes? Key needs and opportunities? Niche/ role? Audience?

3. Master planning process overview

Discuss any additional data/information needs

4. Programs and activities at Wargo

Overview by County staff

5. Building tour/evaluation and site tour/evaluation

6. Next steps

Stakeholder and visitor on-line survey with display board – Draft survey questions

Stakeholder focus group sessions (2) County to ID participants. Set target dates for sessions.

Needs assessment summary

Feb.-March – Vision Work sessions (2) one at Wargo and one at HKGi

Peer group session 4-6 participants ID participants – MN Tourism, Science Museum,...

Joseph E. Wargo Nature Center Master Plan

Summary of January 23, 2014 kick off meeting with Anoka County staff

Consulting staff from HKGI and MDA met with representatives of Anoka County to discuss Wargo Nature Center existing conditions, programs, desires and opportunities for the future. The purpose of the meeting was to set the stage for the master plan process. Key elements of the discussion are summarized below.

Master Plan Goals:

- Increased use of Wargo and recreation program visits county-wide.
- Increased awareness of Wargo.
- Find what is special and unique (niche) about Wargo compared to other nature centers.
- More involvement of cultural communities/minorities in recreation programs and env. ed. to reflect the increasingly diverse population of the County.
- Sustainability – financial, maintenance, volunteers and partnerships.
- Involve the County Board in the planning process.
- Increase Wargo’s connectivity to Rice Creek Park (campground, visitor center, trails and beach) and to the Lino Lakes YMCA.
- Continue to utilize technology to effectively deliver information.
- Improve the visitor experience and “curb appeal” of the site and building.

10 year plan - The Master Plan is to be a vision and 10 year phased action plan to improving Wargo Nature Center. The master plan will also include programming strategies reflecting Wargo’s role as the hub for County recreation and env. ed. program staff.

Wargo’s **unique location** on a peninsula, surrounded by water and cattails, offers opportunities (woodland and water based programs) and challenges (connectivity and limited land for programming and trail use).

Current use of Wargo:

- Environmental education and recreation programs
- School groups/classes – up to 85 children at a time in the five usable spaces
- Nature pre-school (15 students enrolled)
- Homeschool programs
- Special events – natural resource, cultural heritage and recreation
- General use – Birders, cross country skiers
- Heritage Lab – Cultural, wildlife and recreation day camps (rotating annual heritage themes)
- Hub for County recreation and environmental education program staff and recreation program equipment storage
- County compost site

- Site for harvesting firewood for Rice Creek campground

Issues and Opportunities (site, building and operations):

Site –

Need to improve the visitor entry experience and the pre-school drop off (long walk to the building).

Need for more outdoor storage capacity and better access to recreation equipment – canoes, kayaks, snow shoes, etc.

High levels of use in some areas wear out the turf.

Trail connections are needed to the YMCA and better connections are needed to the main portion of Rice Creek Park.

Need a forest management plan to address Emerald Ash Borer in Green Ash, thinning of existing pine plantings, management of the Maple Basswood forest and establishment of a working forest to supply firewood for the campground. There is an interpretive opportunity with the working forest.

There is lots of bounce (up and down fluctuations) in the water level of the lake which makes dock access difficult at times. The dock area also becomes hard to find when out on the lake and a bottleneck when returning to shore. A floating dock hasn't worked in the past – research new methods and alternatives for water access.

Desire to develop a water trail between Wargo and the campground. A canoe landing is needed at the campground.

Need more things for children to do.

Group program use is limited by the entry road which inhibits groups walking along the road (safety issue). A trail separated from the road is needed, at least to access the prairie area.

Take more advantage and better reflect the water based nature of the park through programs, displays and facilities.

Better awareness and connections between Wargo and Rice Creek Park and Chamonix Golf Course clubhouse.

Deer management program could be an interpretive opportunity (deer exclosures, etc.).

There is a lack of accessible trails at Wargo. Trail to the dock should be accessible. The trail to the dock is also the “driveway” for trailer access to move canoes and kayaks to and from the water’s edge. Look at alternative materials (permeable pavers, flagstone) for accessible trails rather than bituminous surface.

An outdoor classroom is desired (beyond the amphitheater area). Outdoor classroom criteria include: a roof, seating, electricity (solar panels?), a display screen, program storage, and access to water (could be a cistern with rain water). A prairie shelter could be added as well with tables, roof with skylights, water, power, restrooms.

Lots of storage needs. Garage could be 4X larger than current size. Need for an additional vehicle for transporting staff to programs.

The amphitheater works well but needs upgrading.

Add green infrastructure (best practices and as public demonstration/interpretation). There is no storm water control features in place at Wargo.

Difficult to maintain the small prairie area in front of the building (can't burn it for regeneration).

Erosion issue along the entry walk. Entry walk is also used as a driveway to the building.

Heritage Lab – issues with restroom accessibility, porta-potties only there now

Building –

Building has some functional issues –under-whelming visitor entry experience, storage needs (?), mechanical issues, “cold” feeling in the classrooms, static displays, lack of indoor/outdoor connections, lack of use of “green” environmental-friendly materials and measures, lots of digital technology opportunities, dynamic interpretive and information displays, need for digital media/screens in each room, add a theater room?

Enhance the inside/outside relationships between the building and the outdoors. Add doors to access outside. Create a place(s) to relax/hang out inside and enjoy nature/view birds. Add a tree house/canopy level space?

The building entry experience is stale and should be more interesting. Need more changeable dynamic exhibits (beyond the static stuffed animals). For example, add an “osprey camera” to the existing nesting platform and web link/display.

Staff offices are isolated by the touch and see room and affected by program noise/activity.

Operations –

Desire to have the Center hours and program offerings align with resident needs. The Center is closed evenings. The Center is not open on weekends during the winter. Is this the best fit with people's desires for programs and access and the available staff time/budget?

Partnerships – Connexus Energy, area schools, Rice Creek Watershed, Anoka County Libraries, MN DNR, MN Historical Society, Lino Lakes YMCA, Forest Lake School District, Banfill-Locke Center for the Arts (need to connect with them), Springbrook Nature Center (can we connect with them?) area cities. Grants are available from Integrated Waste Dept. for sustainable materials.

There is a group of active volunteers at Wargo who assist with event and programs.

Next Steps (February and March)

Post the master plan questionnaire on-line (and potentially available at the nature center)

Conduct two focus group sessions with key stakeholders. County staff to identify stakeholders to invite.

Needs Assessment summary

Vision plan work session with County staff

Peer group planning session.



Wargo Nature Center Master Plan

Focus Group Session

Wargo Nature Center - 7701 Main Street, Lino Lakes, MN
March 27, 2014

Anoka County Parks is preparing a master plan for Joseph E. Wargo Nature Center. The master plan for the Nature Center will be a guide to improving the building, grounds, programs and operations. The planning process will also include strategies and actions to enhance environmental education and recreation programming in the County. The County is interested in your thoughts and ideas about how to improve Wargo's facilities and programs and how partnerships and connections can be enhanced.

AGENDA

A. Introductions

B. Nature Center and Master Plan Overview

C. Focus Group Questions

1. Do you currently visit Wargo Nature Center? If so, what do you like most about Wargo Nature Center?
2. Do you visit nature centers other than Wargo? If so, why?
3. What trends (social, economic, environmental, etc.) do you see affecting the future of nature centers, environmental education and outdoor recreation programs?
4. What should be improved at Wargo Nature Center?
 - a. Activities and programs – at Wargo and County-wide
 - b. Indoor facilities – building, exhibits, meeting rooms, technology, etc.
 - c. Outdoor facilities – trails, gardens, program space, interpretive experiences, etc.
 - d. Operations - partnerships, hours of operation, maintenance, communications, marketing, etc.
5. What other suggestions do you have for improving Wargo Nature Center or enhancing delivery of recreation programs within Anoka County?

C. Next Steps and Use of Focus Group Information

Wargo Nature Center Master Plan – Anoka County Parks



Wargo Nature Center Master Plan

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C. Next Steps and Use of Focus Group Information

Wargo Nature Center Master Plan – Anoka County Parks

Joseph E. Wargo Nature Center Master Plan

Summary of March 27, 2014 Focus Group Meetings

Consulting staff from HKGi and representatives of Anoka County met with two stakeholder groups to discuss Wargo Nature Center existing conditions, programs, desires and opportunities for the future. The purpose of the meeting was to gather stakeholder input to inform the master plan. The first stakeholder group included Wargo volunteers and other outdoor education and recreation professionals. The second stakeholder group included a Wargo visitor whose children attend homeschool programming at Wargo. Key elements of the discussions are summarized below.

SESSION 1: 3:00-4:30

ATTENDEES:

Greg Ingraham, HKGi

Anna Springer, HKGi

Nancy Fitzgerald, Volunteer

Glennie Giller, Volunteer

Sean Gokey, Warner Nature Center

Alex McKinney, Outdoor Recreation Supervisor, Three Rivers Park District

Julie Grecian, Warner Nature Center

Maggie Snow, Anoka County Librarian

John VonDeLinde, Anoka County Parks & Recreation Director

Cory Hinz, Anoka County Recreation Services Manager

Todd Murawski, Recreation Specialist Wargo Nature Center

Lisa Gilliland, Interpretive Naturalist, Wargo Nature Center

Krista Harrington, Program Supervisor, Wargo Nature Center

OVERVIEW OF WARGO:

Wargo is the county-wide hub for outdoor recreation—all county recreation programming is housed at Wargo.

Wargo's operating budget comes from a variety of sources

- about 75% from levy dollars from the County
- Capital projects accounted for more than \$50,000 last year
- Legacy fund money
- Met Council
- Do need to generate some income revenue
- Connexus partnership—for school visits and heritage lab

Three Rivers has as a revenue goal of making 40% of its operating costs. They can overspend their budget but they have to recover 100% of their over-budget costs.

The building has 2 classrooms, a small library, naturalists downstairs, a larger kitchen, a preschool room, indoor storage, a garage for storage and a van, visitor center with interpretive displays, new bike trail from access road. Hours are Tues-Fri 8-4:30; Sat-Sun 12-5. Gates are locked when Wargo is closed.

Compare to 3 Rivers daytime hours are the norm, although some Three Rivers facilities have bathrooms/vestibules open when the nature center is closed, and gates are left open until 10pm.

AUDIENCE:

45 schools come out to Wargo every year, and staff visit 60 schools/year, going into Sherburne and Isanti Counties. Bulk of students at Wargo are k-5, but camp attendance is k-7. Adult visitors come mostly for birding. It's hard to get high school students to come in, although some alternative schools do send kids. Older kids & alternative high schools are more involved in outdoor recreation activities. They are getting a few more requests for accommodating special needs kids. The nature play area (built by eagle scouts) gets used by local moms clubs, but is not a draw for the general public, especially when compared with Tamarack.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM:

Currently not too many volunteers, but Wargo is trying to tap into the volunteer resource from Parks & Recreation. Do have MN Conservation Corp volunteers for 10 months in the park system. Need to update & expand. Volunteers are not currently used for programming. Volunteers do some maintenance, as there is no on-site maintenance person. Both volunteers present report helping out with whatever is assigned to them. Mostly desk duty, envelope stuffing, bird programs, maple sugaring, etc.

WHAT OTHER NATURE CENTERS DO PEOPLE VISIT & WHY?

Eastman-likes the new nature center building(2 years old) with a great indoor/outdoor relationship.

Dodge Nature Center has great events and festivals

Tamarack for its great outdoor nature play area

Richardson NC has new sculptures and 3D interpretive displays.

Green Bay nature center has a great interactive display-beaver lodge slide for staircase

Walk-ins versus Pre-registration programs. Pre-registration programs are generally experiencing declining interest, especially with families. Warner NC recently cancelled a Saturday pre-registered event for lack of interest.

MARKETING& OUTREACH AWARENES:

Email list serve, twitter, newspaper, a printed Activities Guide gets sent home with every kid and is also available online, does not get sent out to every resident in the county, but is sent to those on the mailing list. Find the links

Three Rivers Program Outreach: website, repeat visitors, events calendar mailing, word of mouth (in order of effectiveness from high to low). Warner NC would like to do more targeting marketing-who does what?

Cross marketing of Chamonoix, Bunker Hill, & Wargo

TRENDS:

Alex sees a renaissance in Conservation sports; fishing, archery. Has had over 5,000 participants in archery last season and would like to have an indoor/outdoor archery range. (Wargo used to have an

archery range, but there is one at Bunker Hills, and they were more successful with it so Wargo stopped pursuing it. Fishing is big at Wargo and fishing camps fill up.) Trend towards outdoor recreation as a springboard for natural education. Lifelong Learning trend, including programs for adults. Three Rivers just commissioned a study regarding what people want that got a 95% response rate. Satellite/ mobile units, with the nature center as a hub that serves other locations. (Three Rivers has mobile programs at libraries, funded by legacy dollars). Another example is a mobile sailing club.

TECHNOLOGY:

Wargo will be introducing iPads this spring.

Warner uses iTouches for bird sounds and has GPS technology classes (Geo-caching/GPS is popular, although people now do this using their smart phones)

Warner NC recently had their exhibits redone and like to think of their exhibits as a springboard to get people outside –“ The Hidden Wonders of Warner”

- new apiary for pollinator exhibits
- Jumping wall-how does your jumping distance compare to the animals
- Destination teaching spots-get people to outdoor ‘classrooms’

Audobon Center has solar panels to power and is a good link to nature/green energy

QR codes for interpretive information, such as flower identification on trails

Trail Cameras-live feeds from nests

High Ropes Course is an approach to outdoor activities

Glennie laments all the apps and just wants kids to get outside, but agrees that it may be part of getting kids interested. She mentioned Carol Henderson and her practice of giving kids cameras to photograph nature.

Overall discussion of the benefits of digital literacy, ease-of-use, and ‘unplugging’, the quandary of keeping current with the technology expectations of visitors while balancing the cost and benefit.

TRANSPORTATION:

Transportation is a barrier, especially for school groups. Busing is a cost issue, and often costs more than the programs that schools are trying to attend. \$400/bus trip cost. Warner has a bus scholarship program from a private family scholarship of \$5,000)

Three Rivers has satellite schools with mobile Rec & Env. Ed programs

Flexibility to move/bring programs to the people

Wargo does outreach visits in Anoka County to 60 Schools, 25,000 kids (big volume)

School visits to Wargo have been stable

STAFF:

Todd & Krista are full time staff members at Wargo, all others are Pt: 4 at 29 hrs/wk , and 1 at 19 hrs/wk.

This can affect morale. All recreation leaders at Wargo are also naturalists. Members of MN Naturalist Association, which does have annual conference. MN Master Naturalist program is more volunteer related and requires a 40 hour training course and a ‘capstone/ service project’. Wargo hosted a 40 hour course and got 8 volunteers from that.

PROGRAMMING:

For adults, Warner NC offers Woodcocks and Wine program. Wild Edible/food related programming is popular with adults. For Three Rivers, the educational Farm is popular; there are wait lists to get into the farm.

Three Rivers has new Log Rolling and Slacklining program

WHAT IS GOOD ABOUT WARGO?

Access to Rice Creek/ Rice Creek Watershed and to the Mississippi -22 miles

Canoe, Kayak, and paddle board rentals are successful and distinctive. Warner NC's advanced canoeist program comes to Rice Creek to canoe in a natural and more advanced setting. Wargo's recreation and nature center combination is unique Wargo is great for birding-upland, wetland, and shorebirds.

Interest in birding recently has increased. They currently offer 'feeder watch' and 'phrenology' programs for birding. Other wildlife is also great-turkeys, deer, otter, etc. Overall, the natural setting is great, and the tie with camping is unique. The entry sequence is very peaceful and welcoming, and well developed like a state trail, and the length is nice, relaxing, and paved. Can get 600-800 visitors here for events. Many panel members said they loved the wildlife mounts in the building. The smartboard is nice.

WHAT WOULD MAKE WARGO BETTER?

#1 Build on the Lakes & Water Niche. Put it all together by improving connectivity. Make it 'triathlon-friendly'

Conservation activities (hunting & fishing)

Compost area is a question mark-what is it and why is it

Advertise more to Washington County

Need a big Welcome sign on 14

Add ADA accessible bird blind (mobility mats)

An elevated platform for bird watching that can accommodate about 20 students

Heritage Site lacks infrastructure

- No shelter
- Only port-a-potties
- Has hand pump for water (should get an electric pump)
- It is in the 100 year floodplain so permanent structures are not-allowed by the city of Lino Lakes
- Lean-to is an eyesore

Wayfinding improvements

Enhance the entry experience

A library collaboration with Anoka County

Hide some of the clutter when you enter-make it more about nature

Consider the aging population

ADA accessibility overall-eg. nature trails, bird platform, boardwalk, boats, dock

Boat launch for the voyager canoe

Need to approach low-hanging fruit first (John); entrance (Wargo has a \$300,000 fund from Edith Wargo and should use it to leverage more funds)

SESSION 2: 5:30-6:30

ATTENDEES:

Greg Ingraham, HKGi

Anna Springer, HKGi

Jill, Homeschool parent

John VonDeLinde, Anoka County Parks & Recreation Director

Cory Hinz, Anoka County Recreation Services Manager

Todd Murawski, Recreation Specialist Wargo Nature Center

Lisa Gilliland, Interpretive Naturalist, Wargo Nature Center

Krista Harrington, Program Supervisor, Wargo Nature Center

OVERVIEW:

Home School Audience:

Home schoolers usually have larger families. 60 hours of coursework is ½ a credit.

MACHE - MN Association of Christian Home Educators

HERO-Home Education Resource Organization

WHAT IS GOOD ABOUT WARGO:

- Teachers
- Variety of topics
- Affordable
- Convenient- Like to have all age kids together for classes for convenience (Tamarack didn't offer multi-age programming so it didn't work for Jill)
- Love the Heritage Camp/Lab Area –like the rustic feel
- Rentals are a positive-canoe, Kayak, cc ski, snowshoe
- Bird Banding was Awesome(done years ago)
- Like the winter recreation trial/sampler program-cc ski, snowshoe, etc

WHAT WOULD MAKE WARGO BETTER?

- The library is underutilized& feels like you maybe aren't supposed to be there.
- Sometimes it is hard to find a quiet place
- Date night once a month?-focusing on foraging, cooking, wild foods, etc.
- Nature Play area could have more things to do/ more variety
- Survival Skill Training program for kids
- a program for young teens to assist/volunteer for heritage camps ; ' teacher-in-training'
- Offer school credit for recreation /nature/science programs (an alternative to biology) (High School or Middle school credits)

- More project-based, longer-term curriculum
- Foraging classes for families/adults
- More events geared toward younger children

TECHNOLOGY:

Why use it here? Kids have enough at home.

MARKETING:

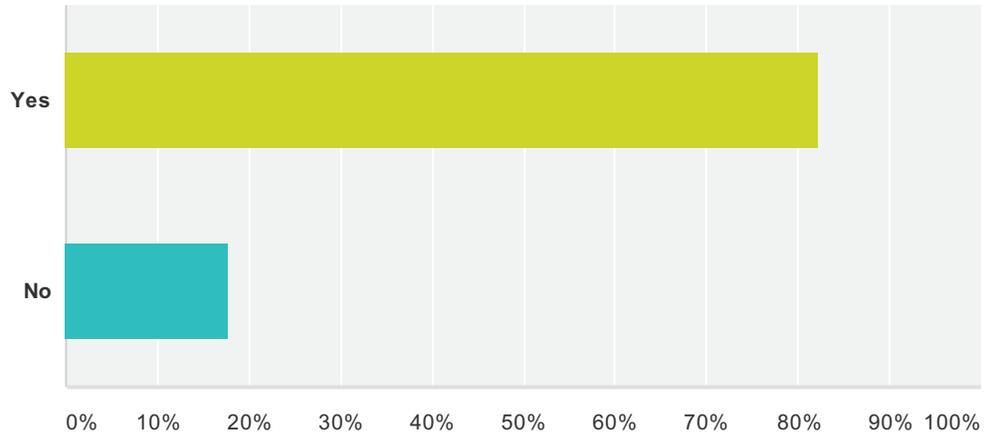
Should advertise at the MACHE conference in April

HERO fliers

Wargo Nature Center Questionnaire

Q1 Do you or your family members visit Wargo Nature Center?

Answered: 45 Skipped: 0

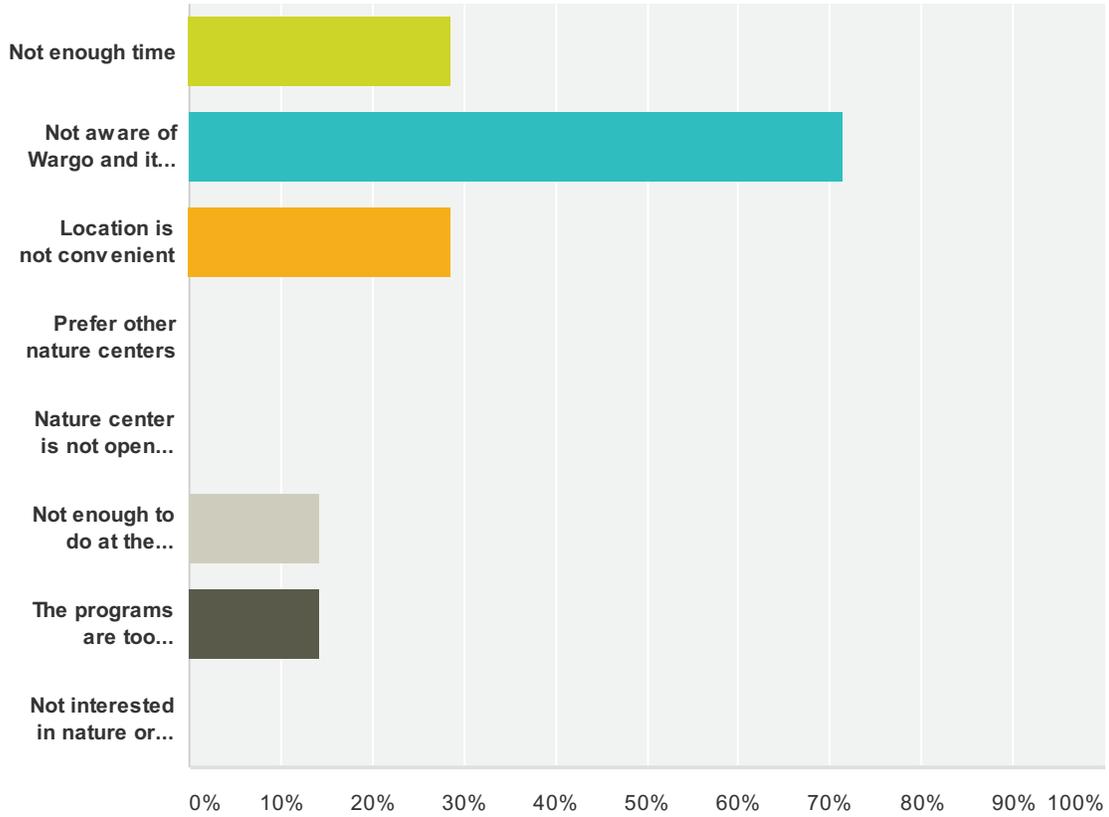


Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	82.22% 37
No	17.78% 8
Total	45

Wargo Nature Center Questionnaire

Q2 What are your reasons for not visiting Wargo Nature Center? Please check all that apply.

Answered: 7 Skipped: 38

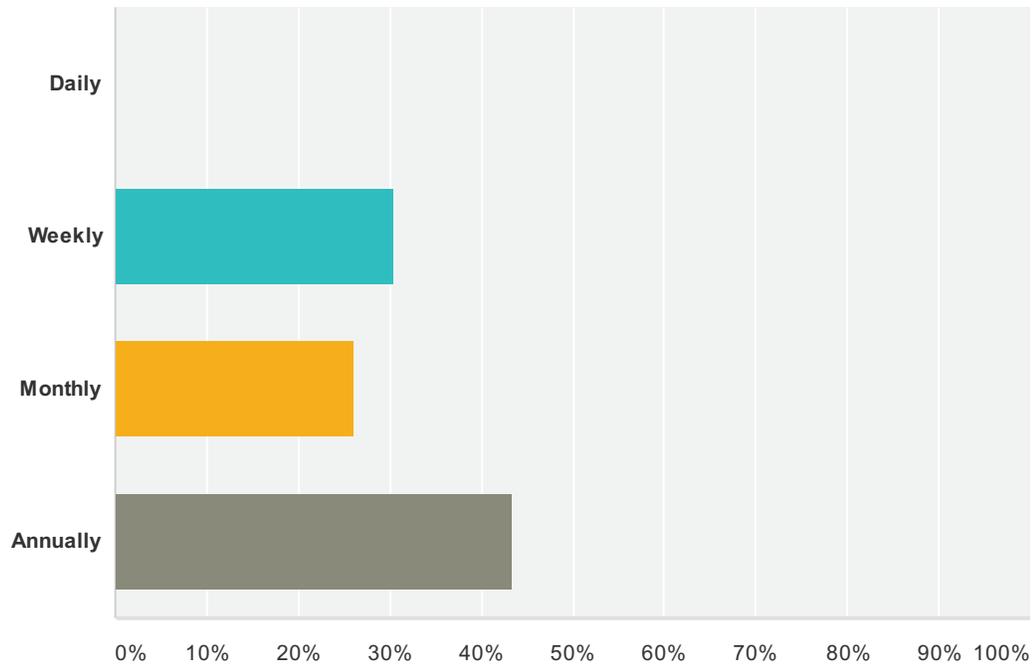


Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Not enough time	28.57%	2
Not aware of Wargo and its programs	71.43%	5
Location is not convenient	28.57%	2
Prefer other nature centers	0.00%	0
Nature center is not open when I can visit	0.00%	0
Not enough to do at the center and grounds	14.29%	1
The programs are too expensive	14.29%	1
Not interested in nature or recreation	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 7		

Wargo Nature Center Questionnaire

Q3 How often do you or members of your household visit Wargo Nature Center?

Answered: 23 Skipped: 22

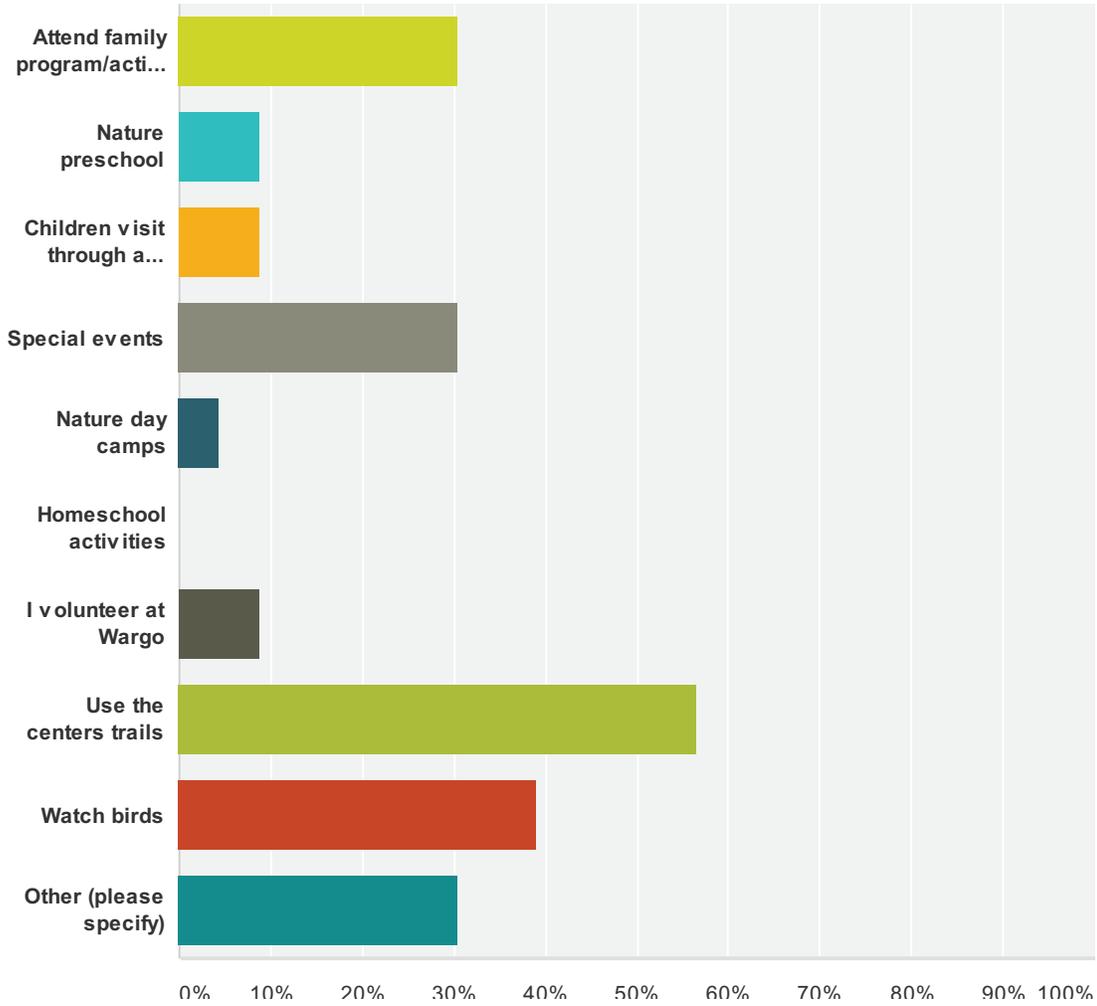


Answer Choices	Responses
Daily	0.00% 0
Weekly	30.43% 7
Monthly	26.09% 6
Annually	43.48% 10
Total	23

Wargo Nature Center Questionnaire

Q4 What are your reasons for visiting Wargo Nature Center? Please check all that apply.

Answered: 23 Skipped: 22



Answer Choices	Responses
Attend family program/activities	30.43% 7
Nature preschool	8.70% 2
Children visit through a school program	8.70% 2
Special events	30.43% 7
Nature day camps	4.35% 1
Homeschool activities	0.00% 0
I volunteer at Wargo	8.70% 2
Use the centers trails	56.52% 13
Watch birds	39.13% 9

Other (please specify)	30.43%	7
Total Respondents: 23		
#	Other (please specify)	Date
1	nature walks	4/28/2014 12:41 PM
2	experience nature	4/28/2014 12:38 PM
3	kayak	4/27/2014 10:55 AM
4	Nature walks/explore	4/25/2014 4:44 PM
5	Enjoy nature	3/14/2014 10:28 AM
6	Boat rental, play day in touch and see room / Maple Hollow	3/14/2014 9:21 AM
7	birdings, especially, ospreys.	3/7/2014 9:28 AM

Q5 What do you like most about Wargo Nature Center?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 23

#	Responses	Date
1	Convenient location. Handicap accessible building.	4/28/2014 8:42 PM
2	everything	4/28/2014 12:45 PM
3	proximity to Rice Creek, nature preschool	4/28/2014 12:43 PM
4	natural/not built up. no paved paths	4/28/2014 12:41 PM
5	absolutely natural environment! Kids rope-play area is awesome	4/28/2014 12:38 PM
6	trails & library	4/27/2014 10:55 AM
7	that the trails are not paved and left natural feels like you are out in the wild	4/25/2014 4:44 PM
8	1. That there is a nature center with indoor plumbing. 2. The bird feeders 3. George Watch Lake	4/20/2014 8:03 PM
9	Variety of programming	4/17/2014 3:24 PM
10	Trails and outdoor nature playground	4/11/2014 9:05 AM
11	quiet!	4/10/2014 12:24 PM
12	trails, canoes and indoors of the nature center building	4/8/2014 3:16 PM
13	Walks in the Heritage area across the road. MANY more birds and animals observed if no dog walkers.	4/7/2014 6:21 PM
14	gorgeous nature center; beautiful environment outdoors	4/7/2014 2:36 PM
15	so close to my home	4/6/2014 8:38 PM
16	Minimal "improved" features	3/28/2014 2:50 PM
17	That they have kept it natural, and not full of lights and asphalt and signs.	3/14/2014 10:28 AM
18	Variety of things to do for all ages	3/14/2014 9:21 AM
19	The people	3/12/2014 1:17 PM
20	The quiet setting	3/7/2014 6:06 PM
21	The naturalists and the functions they do to teach about living in nature.	3/7/2014 4:01 PM
22	watching bird feeder, butterfly, and birds, of course see the resident Red-tailed Hawk	3/7/2014 9:28 AM

Wargo Nature Center Questionnaire

Q6 What should be improved at Wargo Nature Center?

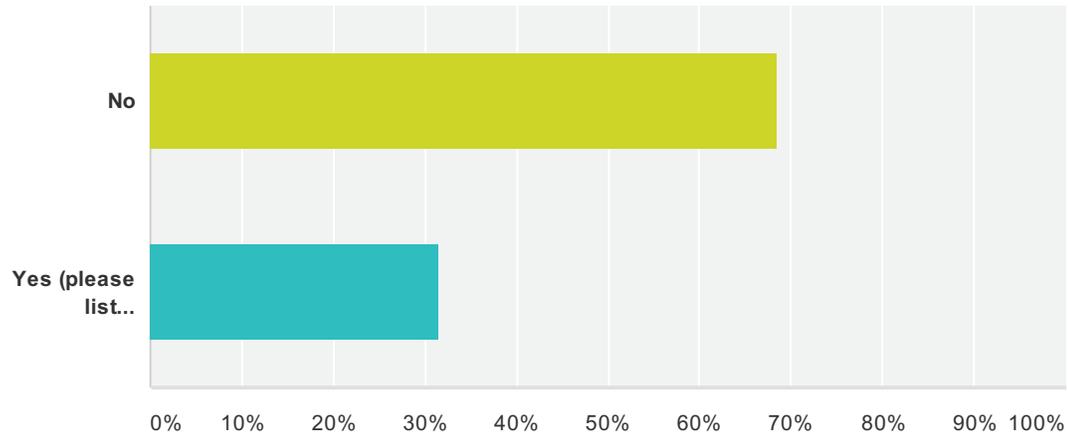
Answered: 18 Skipped: 27

#	Responses	Date
1	A family member uses a wheelchair, so a longer paved walking path would be appreciated.	4/28/2014 8:42 PM
2	more trails	4/28/2014 12:43 PM
3	nothing	4/28/2014 12:38 PM
4	love it the way it is. possibly have handouts for birds	4/25/2014 4:44 PM
5	It would be very nice if you could have at least one observation deck that extended beyond the cattails and closer to the lake. The two that exist now are very poor for observing waterfowl on the lake. It would also be nice if you would open up the center in March, at least during warm years when the lake opens early.	4/20/2014 8:03 PM
6	More general neutral programming, there are currently several programs offered to only women and many would pertain to men as well.	4/17/2014 3:24 PM
7	More structured rental programs - X-country skiing rental	4/11/2014 9:05 AM
8	need some character - e.g. lady slippers garden	4/10/2014 12:24 PM
9	expand open hours (if possible)	4/8/2014 3:16 PM
10	restrict dogs since they impact wildlife.	4/7/2014 6:21 PM
11	nothing	4/7/2014 2:36 PM
12	Birding walking trips through other organizations don't cost anything.	4/6/2014 8:38 PM
13	Expand trail to go around north side of George Watch Lake and eliminate snowmobile trail. Add connection to Chomonix ski trail.	3/28/2014 2:50 PM
14	More natural hiking trails around the shorelines and other areas. Make some observation decks near open water areas.	3/14/2014 10:28 AM
15	Roadway, pathway leading up to building, improve the trails	3/14/2014 9:21 AM
16	Flexibility of staff and marketing	3/7/2014 6:06 PM
17	Updating some of the outdoor structures in the play area.	3/7/2014 4:01 PM
18	Road is closed at the entrance gate and can not come in the area before 8 or 9:00 am (not sure the exact time) at weekend.	3/7/2014 9:28 AM

Wargo Nature Center Questionnaire

Q7 Are there activities or facilities that are missing from the Nature Center building or the Nature Center outdoor campus?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 26



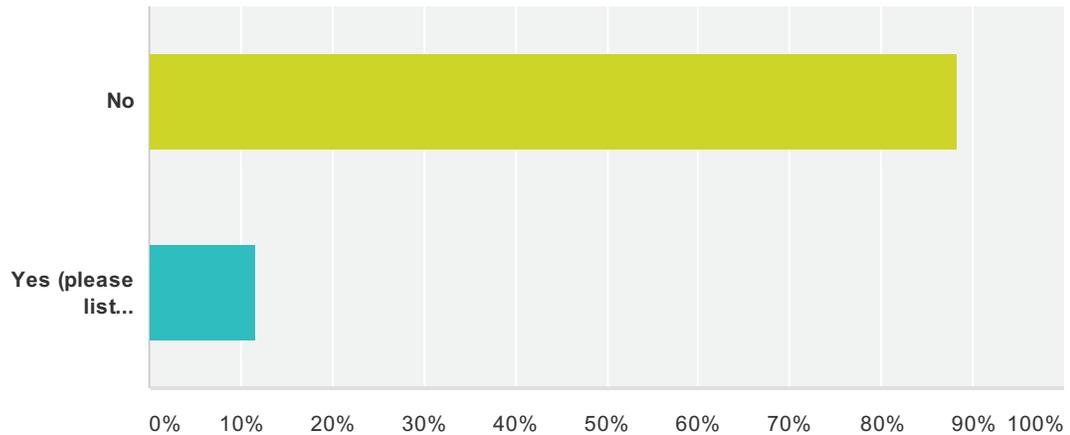
Answer Choices	Responses
No	68.42% 13
Yes (please list suggestions)	31.58% 6
Total	19

#	Yes (please list suggestions)	Date
1	Connection to the main street trail and connection to the trail behind the YMCA in Lino Lakes. More interpretave signs.	4/17/2014 3:24 PM
2	XC ski rental	4/11/2014 9:05 AM
3	a bonfire area would be kinda cool expand the trail system	4/8/2014 3:16 PM
4	X-C skiing	3/28/2014 2:50 PM
5	Provide a seasonal comfort statio, rest rooms on the Heritage site.	3/14/2014 10:28 AM
6	Themed Birthday parties!	3/7/2014 4:01 PM

Wargo Nature Center Questionnaire

Q8 Are there improvements or new additions that you would like to see made to the displays inside the Wargo Nature Center?

Answered: 17 Skipped: 28



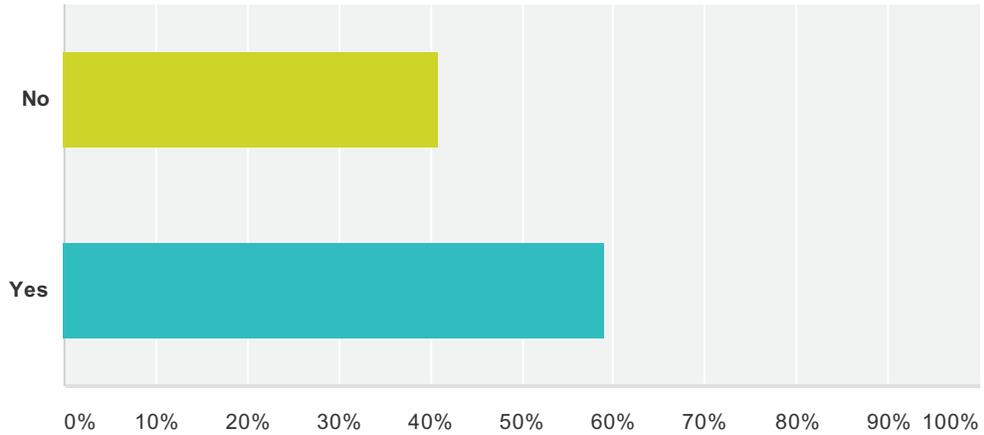
Answer Choices	Responses
No	88.24% 15
Yes (please list suggestions)	11.76% 2
Total	17

#	Yes (please list suggestions)	Date
1	Displays could be updated, maybe focus on Minnesota species.	4/17/2014 3:24 PM
2	connect trail from osprey pen (14 acre prairie) to YMCA (in lino lakes)	4/10/2014 12:24 PM

Wargo Nature Center Questionnaire

Q9 Do you participate in natural resource, recreation or learning programs, or activities within Wargo and/or Anoka County?

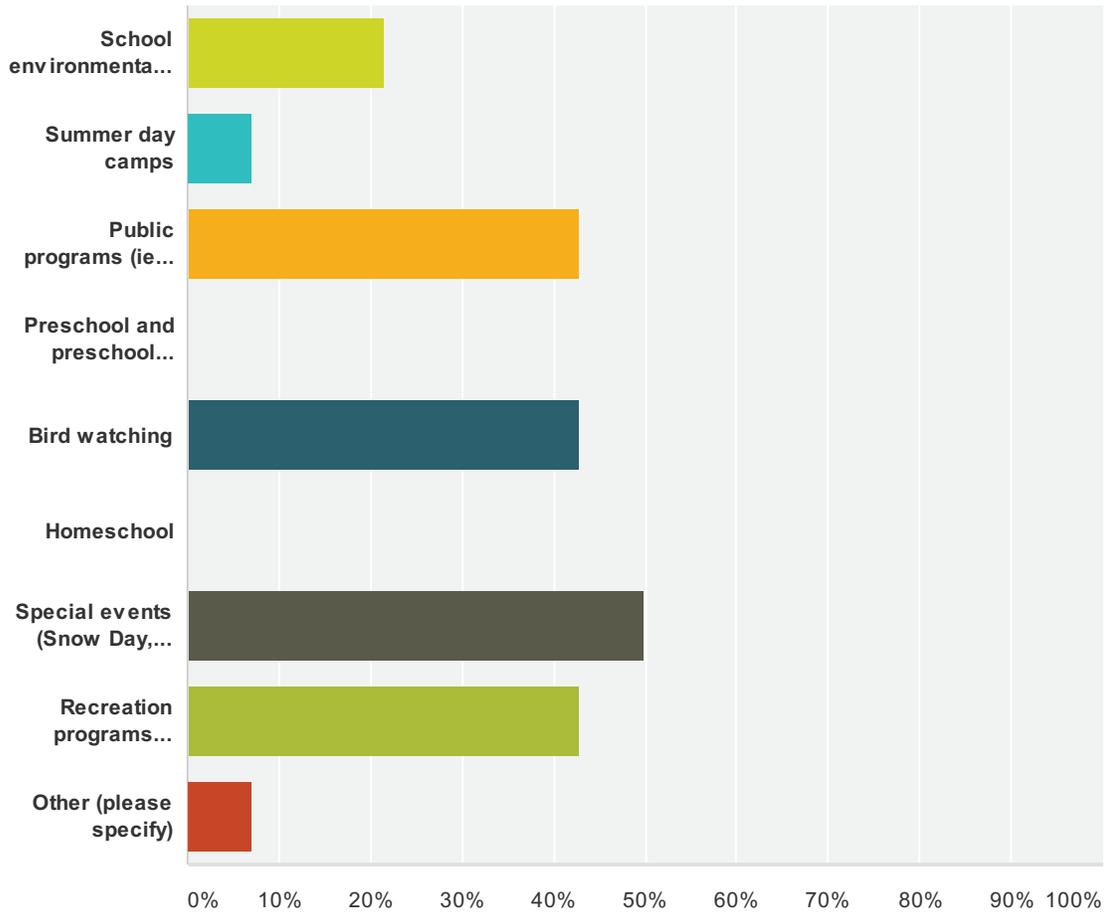
Answered: 22 Skipped: 23



Answer Choices	Responses
No	40.91% 9
Yes	59.09% 13
Total Respondents: 22	

Q10 Please indicate which programs you participate in.

Answered: 14 Skipped: 31



Answer Choices	Responses
School environmental education and school forest programs (at Wargo and in schools)	21.43% 3
Summer day camps	7.14% 1
Public programs (ie. Explore Wargo, Appreciating Plants, Wild Edibles, Technology in Nature, Searching for the Stars, etc.)	42.86% 6
Preschool and preschool programs (nymphs and nuthatches, nature play)	0.00% 0
Bird watching	42.86% 6
Homeschool	0.00% 0
Special events (Snow Day, Moonlight Ski, Fishing Clinic, Earth Day, Bunker Stampede 5K, Apple Cider/Fall Festival, etc.)	50.00% 7
Recreation programs (canoe/kayak, nordic walking, natural living, snowshoe, cross country ski, team building, etc.)	42.86% 6
Other (please specify)	7.14% 1
Total Respondents: 14	

#	Other (please specify)	Date
1	earth day, bunker stampede, apple cider fest, canoe;kayak)	4/8/2014 3:17 PM

Wargo Nature Center Questionnaire

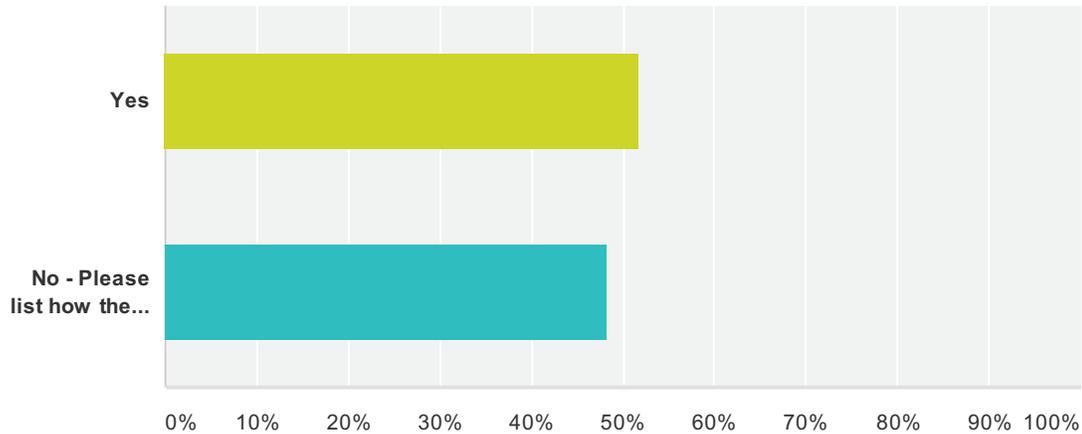
Q11 Anoka County Parks and Wargo Nature Center offer several outdoor recreational opportunities (listed in previous questions). Please comment on any additional recreational activities you would like to see offered.

Answered: 5 Skipped: 40

#	Responses	Date
1	great variety	4/28/2014 12:46 PM
2	The only other change I'd like to see in the county is to have the hiking trail restored on the east side of Linwood Lake. That is one of the most interesting trails for birdwatching in the entire county, and I've been actively birding in the county for 25 years.	4/20/2014 8:16 PM
3	XC ski rental for kids & adults	4/11/2014 9:09 AM
4	access to the canoe route to the lakes further down the chain would be nice. They have been overgrown recently.	4/7/2014 6:22 PM
5	Botany based programs	3/28/2014 2:51 PM

Q12 Do Wargo Nature Center's spring/summer/fall hours of operation (see below) match up well with the times you or members of your household would want to visit the center? Spring, Summer, Fall Hours: Tuesday-Friday (8:00am-4:30pm); Saturday (9:00am-5pm); Sunday (Noon-5:00pm); Closed on Monday

Answered: 27 Skipped: 18

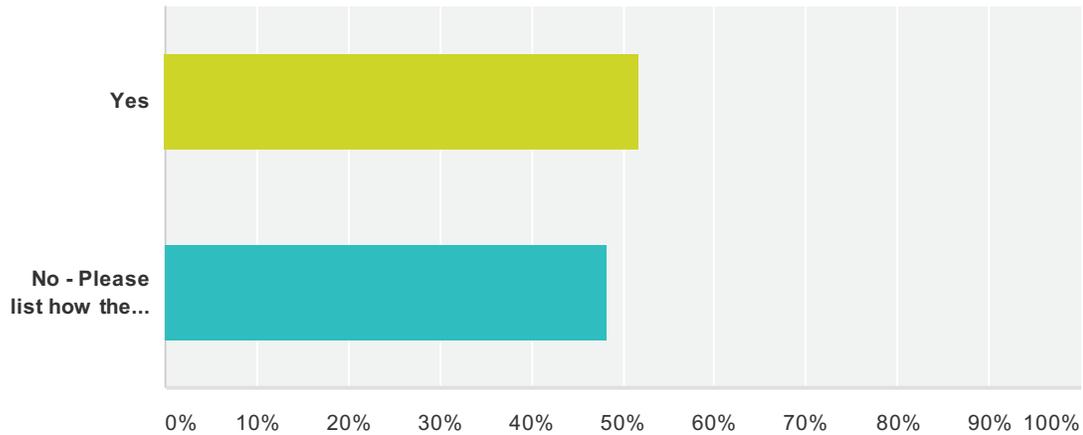


Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	51.85% 14
No - Please list how the hours could be adjusted to best meet your needs.	48.15% 13
Total	27

#	No - Please list how the hours could be adjusted to best meet your needs.	Date
1	close too early - can't take pm walks	4/28/2014 12:42 PM
2	close too early	4/28/2014 12:39 PM
3	offer a later evening once during the week - i know that is difficult with a budget	4/27/2014 10:57 AM
4	closes early, could be open later in the evening for walks	4/25/2014 4:46 PM
5	It would be great if the Center was open with the daylight - or there were night hours for bonfires etc.	4/22/2014 1:21 PM
6	As noted previously, I would like to see the center open earlier in the spring, at least during warm years.	4/20/2014 8:20 PM
7	It would be nice if the center would be open later in the evenings as it is difficult to go there when both parents work and the kids are at school during the day.	4/17/2014 3:29 PM
8	please keep the center opened later and open on mondays, too	4/8/2014 3:19 PM
9	later hours in the weekend in the summer	4/7/2014 2:38 PM
10	Keep it open every day with longer hours.	3/14/2014 10:40 AM
11	Possibly stay open a little later on the weekdays (1 or 2 of the days)	3/14/2014 9:47 AM
12	could visit in late Spring into Summer and Fall if open until 6pm, at least.	3/10/2014 10:45 AM
13	during the week it is hard to visit	3/7/2014 6:08 PM

Q13 Do Wargo Nature Center's winter hours of operation (see below) match up well with the times you or members of your household would want to visit the center? Winter Hours: Tuesday-Friday (8:00am-4:30pm); Closed Saturday-Monday

Answered: 27 Skipped: 18



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	51.85% 14
No - Please list how the hours could be adjusted to best meet your needs.	48.15% 13
Total	27

#	No - Please list how the hours could be adjusted to best meet your needs.	Date
1	one weekend day might be nice	4/28/2014 12:44 PM
2	it would be nice to have a way to rent snowshoes after 4:30	4/27/2014 10:57 AM
3	I will always be working during these hours. Adjusting for weekend time would help the most.	4/22/2014 1:21 PM
4	I can only visit on weekends, so having the center open on weekends is ideal for me.	4/20/2014 8:20 PM
5	Same as previous, also with no weekend hours there is no opportunity for a working family to visit.	4/17/2014 3:29 PM
6	Please offer open hours on at least one weekend day!	4/11/2014 9:10 AM
7	please expand hrs to the other days of the week and weekend, too	4/8/2014 3:19 PM
8	Saturday and/or Sunday hours	3/28/2014 2:52 PM
9	Saturday, Sunday	3/27/2014 12:39 PM
10	Open Saturday	3/24/2014 9:18 AM
11	keep it open every day.	3/14/2014 10:40 AM
12	Would like to open on the weekends, possibly stay open a little later on the weekdays (1 or 2 of the days)	3/14/2014 9:47 AM
13	would be neat to have one or two eves per week open for movie or 'study' night or enlightenment night or a theme of some kind	3/10/2014 10:45 AM

Wargo Nature Center Questionnaire

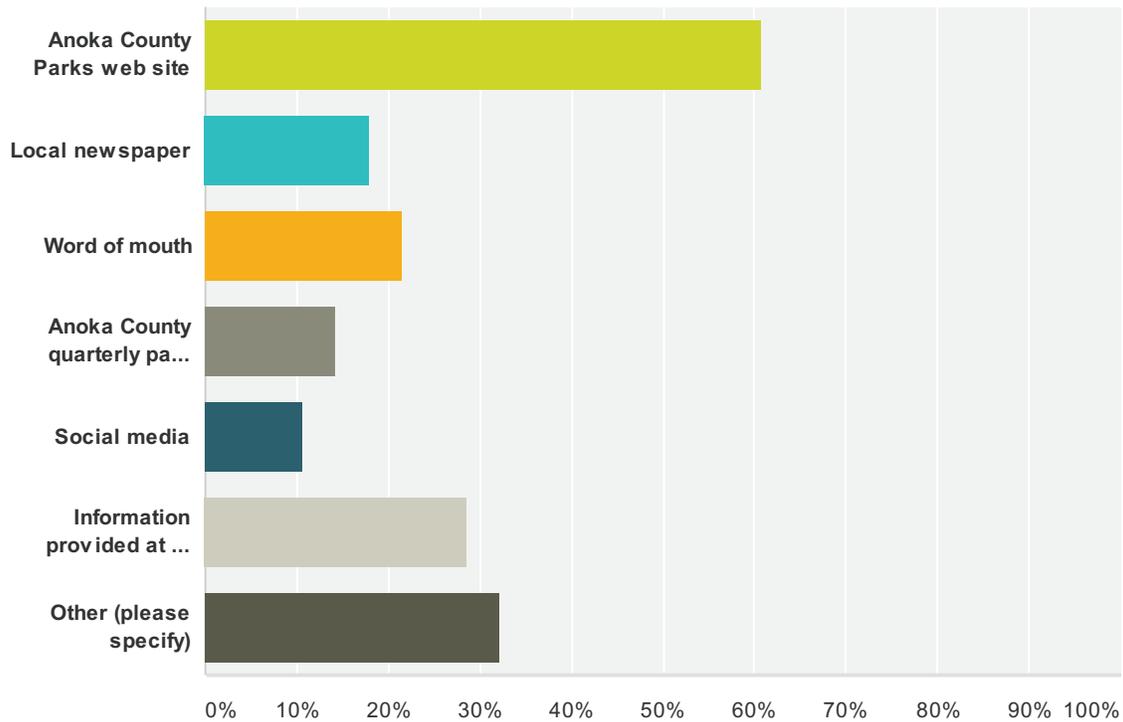
Q14 What additional programs, activities, or facilities would bring you to the nature center more often?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 33

#	Responses	Date
1	canoe, kayak programs	4/28/2014 12:44 PM
2	no	4/28/2014 12:42 PM
3	Adult outdoor learning opportunities - i.e. syruping, mushroom hunting, etc.	4/22/2014 1:21 PM
4	Better observation decks.	4/20/2014 8:20 PM
5	Year round weekend programs for kids. Current programs are developed for the weekdays which does not allow working families to have their kids attend without taking a vacation day.	4/17/2014 3:29 PM
6	XC ski rental, organized nature hikes	4/11/2014 9:10 AM
7	maple syrup classes (if possible) identifying edible and herbal plant in nature center	4/8/2014 3:19 PM
8	Botany based programs	3/28/2014 2:52 PM
9	Make more programs available for youth year around.	3/14/2014 10:40 AM
10	Monthly kid clubs, family programs - possibly offer guided hikes/programs at offsite locations or variety of Anoka County Parks	3/14/2014 9:47 AM
11	building garden trellis	3/10/2014 1:11 PM
12	see above; starwatch, advanced birding or insects or arts classes - drawing/painting nature- fish printing, AIS training classes; group building projects like build a chimney swift chimney, large bat houses for the center; game night! board games in winter - do you have the Food Web game made by a MN inventor, James D. Lux? nighthikes, rare species of Anoka county.	3/10/2014 10:45 AM

Q15 How do you find out about facilities and programs at Wargo? Check the information methods that you use.

Answered: 28 Skipped: 17



Answer Choices	Responses
Anoka County Parks web site	60.71% 17
Local newspaper	17.86% 5
Word of mouth	21.43% 6
Anoka County quarterly parks and recreation activity brochures	14.29% 4
Social media	10.71% 3
Information provided at the Nature Center	28.57% 8
Other (please specify)	32.14% 9
Total Respondents: 28	

#	Other (please specify)	Date
1	girl scouts	4/28/2014 12:48 PM
2	drove by the entrance to the nature center	4/8/2014 3:19 PM
3	bob holtz	4/7/2014 2:38 PM
4	emails from Bob Holtz	4/6/2014 8:39 PM
5	mna, nature center network	3/27/2014 12:39 PM
6	My employer	3/24/2014 9:18 AM
7	By volunteering there.	3/14/2014 10:40 AM
8	WNC staff	3/10/2014 10:45 AM
9	Forest Lake ECFE	3/7/2014 4:02 PM

Wargo Nature Center Questionnaire

Q16 Which newspaper do you get information from?

Answered: 2 Skipped: 43

#	Responses	Date
1	st paul pioneer press city pages	4/7/2014 2:38 PM
2	Citizen	3/7/2014 6:08 PM

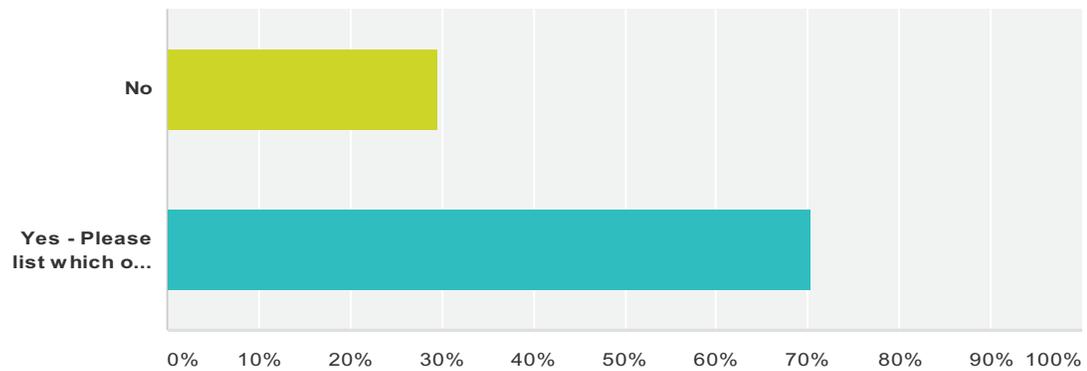
Q17 What communication methods should be used to provide information about Wargo and Anoka County Parks environmental education and recreation?

Answered: 18 Skipped: 27

#	Responses	Date
1	television	4/28/2014 12:48 PM
2	web site, social media, local newspapers	4/28/2014 12:44 PM
3	email	4/28/2014 12:42 PM
4	email	4/28/2014 12:40 PM
5	the signage out front	4/27/2014 10:58 AM
6	email	4/25/2014 4:49 PM
7	Devoted website	4/22/2014 1:22 PM
8	The county website has always been good about posting activities at the parks. Maybe have an email signup for notices. Bulletin boards are good. I heard about this survey from a posting in the mens' room at Coon Rapids Dam.	4/20/2014 8:30 PM
9	email, website	4/11/2014 9:11 AM
10	web site	4/10/2014 12:25 PM
11	st paul pioneer press large LED sign at the entrance to the park	4/8/2014 3:20 PM
12	email listserv? might already have it!	3/27/2014 12:39 PM
13	Improve the website	3/24/2014 9:20 AM
14	All including the use of the latest technology that young people are so into these days. Also a advertising video and more coverage of special events in all the local prints in all forms.	3/14/2014 10:57 AM
15	County Website, local paper, email blasts, brochures, handouts at schools/libraries, Public Radio/TV stations	3/14/2014 9:47 AM
16	periodic email brochures	3/10/2014 1:12 PM
17	All avenues: paper, social media,- add an e-newsletter and email list, please!	3/10/2014 10:52 AM
18	Email and facenook	3/7/2014 6:09 PM

Q18 Do you visit nature centers other than Wargo?

Answered: 27 Skipped: 18



Answer Choices	Responses
No	29.63% 8
Yes - Please list which ones and why do you visit them.	70.37% 19
Total	27

#	Yes - Please list which ones and why do you visit them.	Date
1	springbrook	4/28/2014 12:48 PM
2	roseville/springbrook/tamarack	4/28/2014 12:47 PM
3	tamarack, wamer, carlos avery	4/28/2014 12:44 PM
4	tamarack - variety	4/28/2014 12:42 PM
5	variety of other ones	4/28/2014 12:40 PM
6	wamer tamarack	4/27/2014 10:58 AM
7	have visited Tamarack in Ramsey Co but Wargo is MUCH BETTER!! Tamarack is too built up with paved paths. Today we spotted many deer tracks in the ground on the path. This would not be possible if the paths were paved.	4/25/2014 4:49 PM
8	I visit numerous parks in the county for birdwatching. My favorites are Coon Rapids Dam, Rice Creek West Reg Trail (including Locke Park), and Linwood Lake.	4/20/2014 8:30 PM
9	tamarack - trails springbrook - trails and to watch the snacks feed (On saturday mornings)	4/8/2014 3:20 PM
10	Springbrook, Bunker Hills, CR Dam + state and federal parks	4/7/2014 6:24 PM
11	tamarack - nice trails	4/7/2014 2:38 PM
12	various centers - all for birding	4/6/2014 8:39 PM
13	Crex Meadows, Tamarack, Ritter Farm Park, Deep Portage, numerous State Parks	3/28/2014 2:54 PM
14	Wamer Dodge Tamarack	3/27/2014 12:39 PM
15	As someone who likes all Nature and Environmental areas, they all have some very different areas of interest to explore. I have visited many all over this state and other areas but having lived here in Anoka County all my life I support Wargo the most as it is only some miles away.	3/14/2014 10:57 AM
16	Minncöota arborctum	3/10/2014 1:12 PM
17	Tamarack for location and wamer for programming	3/7/2014 6:09 PM
18	Tamarack nature center and Wamer nature center	3/7/2014 4:03 PM
19	Richardson Nature Center, Bloomington, Lowy Nature Center etc.	3/7/2014 9:31 AM

Wargo Nature Center Questionnaire

Q19 What other suggestions do you have for improving Wargo Nature Center?

Answered: 14 Skipped: 31

#	Responses	Date
1	GREAT job!!	4/28/2014 12:47 PM
2	DON'T PAVE THE PATHS! Keep it natural	4/28/2014 12:42 PM
3	nothing. keep the way it is! thanks!	4/28/2014 12:40 PM
4	My 8 year old sons LOVE the climbing rope and hollow tree in the play area. It is so much fun after a walk in the woods.	4/25/2014 4:49 PM
5	Have a devoted website like Springbrook does - it helps greatly - [currently going thru the Anoka Parks webstie is cumbersome - and there is not enough information on there]	4/22/2014 1:22 PM
6	Have more weekend programming available for kids as their are numerous programs that we are interested in having our kids attend however they are primarily during the week during normal working hours when we cannot bring our kids.	4/17/2014 3:31 PM
7	kids nature scavenger hunts, more kids programs, programs during non-traditional business hours (so that working parents can take their kids)	4/11/2014 9:11 AM
8	connect trail to YMCA	4/10/2014 12:25 PM
9	perhaps having available a few living animals in house to interact with	4/8/2014 3:20 PM
10	Move more staff to full time status	3/28/2014 2:54 PM
11	Keep it natural. Also provide some form of routine transportatation to and from Wargo for those who may not have any form of transportation available to them. Also the highway department needs to provide a sound barrier along the freeway.	3/14/2014 10:57 AM
12	When improving the grounds, keep it as natural as possible. No paved trailways or large obtrusive items outdoor to take away from the nature experience. Do not change animal habitats, leave fallen trees, and hollowed out trees	3/14/2014 9:47 AM
13	Outreach; Would love to see Wargo more at schools; going to senior centers, disability centers- Let the disabled community know about your accessible programs! Access Press newspaper will list them...accesspress.org	3/10/2014 10:52 AM
14	I like to visit Wargo Nature Center although I have never joined any activities held.	3/7/2014 9:31 AM



Joseph E. Wargo Nature Center Master Plan Anoka County Parks

Vision Meeting

Monday, April 21, 2014

1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Wargo Nature Center

Two work session meetings will be used to create a vision, goals, strategies and framework plan for Wargo Nature Center and for county-wide programming. At the April 21 session we will review the needs assessment findings and define the vision and goals (the big picture and direction). The second meeting (at HKGi) will develop the framework plan which will focus on physical improvements and program actions/strategies (implementation focus). The vision and framework plan will lead to the Draft and Final Master Plan.

Agenda

1. Needs Assessment Findings

2. Nature Center Best Practices/Ideas Presentation

3. Vision and Goals

- a) Role – within the County, within the region, within the park
- b) Audiences – Define core audiences and desired experiences/take aways
- c) Programs, activities and service delivery
- d) Operational goals
- e) Physical improvements/experiences

4. Process Overview and Next Steps

Framework Plan work session - Date at HKGi

Draft Vision and Framework Plan

Peer group review session

Draft Master Plan

Community and stakeholder review

Joseph E. Wargo Nature Center Master Plan

Summary of April 21, 2104 Vision Meeting

Consulting staff from HKGi and representatives of Anoka County met at Wargo Nature Center from 1 to 3pm to discuss the vision for Wargo Nature Center. The purpose of the meeting was to create a vision, goals, strategies, and framework for the center and its programming. Key elements of the discussions are summarized below.

ATTENDEES:

Greg Ingraham, HKGi

Lil Leatham, HKGi

Anna Springer, HKGi

John VonDeLinde, Anoka County Parks & Recreation Director

Cory Hinz, Anoka County Recreation Services Manager

Lisa Gilliland, Interpretive Naturalist, Wargo Nature Center

Krista Harrington, Program Supervisor, Wargo Nature Center

Bob Holtz, Anoka County Naturalist

Mary Morris, Interpretive Naturalist

Deb Gallup, Interpretive Naturalist

SITE ASSESSMENT COMMENTS:

- Harriet Alexander in Roseville is another nature center near Wargo. It is smaller, but worth mentioning.
- Bob suggested a installing a dam to raise the water level of George Watch Lake.
- Timber management plan is still a consideration
- A wildflower interpretive trail in the prairie would be good
- Connectivity to the YMCA is ideal
- Focus should be on getting kids OUTSIDE
- Bob: Wargo is the 3rd highest recipient of grant money of all nature centers in MN
- There is a current trend for nature centers to host wedding events as a revenue generator. Wargo has had smaller weddings but is limited by size/capacity

TRENDS PRESENTATION COMMENTS:

- Would be great to incorporate digital technology with signage on trails
- There is a need for programming to meet the needs of school curriculum
- Trails need to be longer around Wargo-currently the longest loop is 25 minutes, and they should be longer than 30 minutes
- Drop in visitors did rise with addition of trail along hwy14
- Potential to keep grounds open from sunrise to sunset-but can't rely on volunteers for staffing as their availability is not always clear
- John would like to see a parking lot near the compost site

GOALS DISCUSSION:

1. Take better advantage of ecosystem amenities

- George Watch Lake is not great for recreation-very shallow and poor water quality. The curly pond weed takes over from June to July.
- It is very muddy, also. Might be a good spot for a Tough Mudder race.
- Centerville Lake is a better option. A Wargo Outpost there is an option.
- Water play: very cool, but very expensive
- They do a lot of pond study activities with kids
- Current dock is too narrow and hot (it's metal)

2. Improving first Impressions

- A welcoming chalk board for visitors makes students excited
- Embrace the compost site: it could be a funding source/ pay for parking
- Parking areas/ pull outs along the entry road would be good. Should also put one by the osprey nest and the proposed managed forest area
- Move the gate further back
- Install a nature cam
- Need to hide the garage
- People mistakenly drive up to the building
- Erosion along the front walk
- Interpret Edith Wargo's daylilies
- Too much handicapped parking, too far away
- Too much parking on a daily basis, but too little for large events, just right amount for preschool/homeschool (which is only once a month).
- Bus parking could be more organized, but it seems to work ok
- It would be nice if there was a closer drop off area
- Dumpsters need to be screened

3. Programs

- Would need more staff to increase programming, but feel limited right now by workspace for staff.
- Need wifi (its coming soon)
- Current program costs are competitive with other nature centers
- Need to fill current programs they do offer (lack of awareness issue)
- Daycamp tattoos
- More grants-Lisa and Karen write grants currently
- Wargo's niche is 1)outreach 2)Water 3)Birds
- Potential to tie mobility funding into recycling

- Do want to increase drop in visitor numbers (low numbers attributed to low awareness and a lack of things to do)
- Cost recovery?
- Interested in foundation/friends groups for financial support

4. Niche

- Birding, water, ecosystems, intimacy, mobile outreach, location in a Regional Park
- Wants help with indoor displays
- Potential as a place for research? FMR uses the facilities every weekend to categorize invertebrates
- Library-mobile vending opportunity
- Getting a free little library

5. Raise Awareness

- Podcasts-Bob has done about 24 Birding with Bob Holtz (link available on county website)
- They have an ad on a bus
- Billboard (are prohibitively expensive-clearchannel billboard on 694 is \$12000 for 2 weeks)
- Do advertise on stand ups at bunker hills
- Potential to cross market more with homeschool associations and in the homeschool market in general
- Have pamphlets at city hall
- Have 2 videos, but doesn't know where the public can access them

6. Sustainable Operations

- Edith Wargo Funds \$340,000 (generally designated for Wargo campus improvements)
- Storage: Would need to have more equipment to go 'off site', because everything they use has dual purpose, really (ie if there was a Centerville Outpost)
- A second vehicle would likely be a Prius for outreach-currently use mileage reimbursement for staff

General Comments

- Desired building updates -1 or 2 flush toilet would be nice, general water conservation methods, use green cleaning chemicals
- Life cycle strategy will get done by Anoka County in the next 6 months as a county-wide initiative
- Big need is to get more people here.
- Lisa is connection point for staff feedback on today's content



Joseph E. Wargo Nature Center Master Plan Anoka County Parks

Goals and Strategies Meeting

Wednesday May 7, 2014 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

HKGi (2nd floor meeting room) – #100 123 N. Third St., Minneapolis, MN 55401

This work session will build on the needs and goals identified at the April 21 work session. HKGi, MDI and Anoka County staff will confirm/revise goals for Wargo Nature Center and identify physical improvements and actions to implement the goals. A subsequent work session will focus on recreation and environmental education program strategies. The goals, strategies and framework plan will lead to the Draft and Final Master Plan.

Agenda

1. Goals and Strategies Review draft nature center goals and strategies. Refine and add as needed.

2. Design Ideas and Actions – Hands on session to develop key physical design strategies and actions

3. Process Overview and Next Steps

- Programming and Marketing Work Session - Outdoor Recreation and Env. Ed.
- Goals, Strategies and Framework Plan
- Peer group review session
- Draft Master Plan
- Community and stakeholder review

Joseph E. Wargo Nature Center Master Plan

Summary of May 7, 2014 Goals & Strategies Meeting

Consulting staff from HKGi and Miller Dunwiddie, and representatives of Anoka County met to continue the discussion from April 21st vision meeting. Purpose of the meeting was to confirm/revise goals for Wargo Nature Center and identify physical improvements and actions to implement the goals. Key elements of the discussions are summarized below.

ATTENDEES:

Greg Ingraham, HKGi
Lil Leatham, HKGi
Jen Cater, HKGi
Anna Springer, HKGi
Denita Lemmon, Miller Dunwiddie Architects
John VonDeLinde, Anoka County Parks & Recreation Director
Cory Hinz, Anoka County Recreation Services Manager
Lisa Gilliland, Interpretive Naturalist, Wargo Nature Center
Krista Harrington, Program Supervisor, Wargo Nature Center
Sue Doll, Anoka County Solid Waste Specialist
Jeff Perry, Park Operations Manager
Andy, Marketing & Public Relations
Crystal Passe, Graduate Landscape Architect Anoka County

Increase Awareness of Wargo: Add Signage

- Used to have a brown sign along the Interstate but it fell down. Check city ordinances and see Signage document sent by Crystal
- Sign along CR 14; new sign must address issues with road ROW and wetland soils, and shouldn't be too flashy or large.

Improve the Wargo Site Experience: Improve Water Access

- There is no dipping station near the prairie; that was an eagle scout project and it is not very functional. Besides: the prairie is too long of a walk for kids from the nature center so it will not be used for kids programming. Find another location for dipping station
- There is a current water platform that is overgrown closer to the parking lot between the parking lot and the prairie. Not used much.
- However, there is potential for the upland area that is about 1 acre in size on east side of road south of prairie
- Main water access site should accommodate about groups of 20
- Second platform should be at the end of the point and include higher observation tower
- Boardwalk is good and may warrant some creative fund seeking

Improve the Wargo Site Experience: Improve External Physical Connections

- A northern connection to the YMCA would be great. Potential to finance with a T21 grant or other grants? (reminder: snowmobiles cannot go on boardwalks)
- Strengthen water connection to the Group Campsite
- Shared surface entry road could work and should be pursued!

Improve the Wargo Site Experience: Expand Access

- Abandon the managed forest idea, consider a compost interpretation/demonstration site instead
- Still resistant to abandoning the gate altogether, but like the idea of moving it further west
- Consider a boardwalk loop connecting the main peninsula area to the entry drive thru the wetlands north east of the building and a trail thru the uplands area near the compost site.

Improve the Wargo Site Experience: Enhance the sense of Place

- Need to check feasibility and soils for adding driveway to the garage-Jeff thinks they are hydric soils that won't support a drive.
- Consensus was to keep access trail to backside/first floor of basement but make it more trail-like

Improve the Wargo Site Experience: Improve the Heritage Site

- Adding parking facilities at the Heritage site would be fine.
- There is a permanent climbing wall going in at the Heritage Site this fall
- Staff really liked the look and scale of the classroom shelter precedent

Improve Entry and Sense of Welcome: Create a Natural Experience

- No objections to what was proposed

Improve the Nature Center Building

- Staff really liked the rearrangement of the reception desk and the enhanced reading/reference nook over the first level.
- Some resistance to moving staff space to the area next to the utility room; concern about noise and access to utility sink/cleaning supplies. Denita thinks these issues can be addressed.
- Denita has not found a skylight system that lasts more than 10 years.
- Accessible tree house idea is well received and would help achieve views to the lake

Closing Comments

- Staff looks forward to seeing more renderings and budget/cost estimates later in the process



Joseph E. Wargo Nature Center Master Plan Anoka County Parks

Programming and Marketing Work Session

Tuesday June 10, 2014 10:00AM – 12:00 PM

Wargo Nature Center

This work session will focus on recreation and environmental education program strategies. The intent is to develop a long term approach to program identification, development and delivery rather than specific programs to offer.

Meeting Goals: 1) Enhance the approach and process for program development and execution and 2) Identify and prioritize physical improvements and other resource needs to support programs

Agenda

1. **Introductions**
2. **Meeting Goals and Objectives** (*HKGi*)
3. **Confirm programming goals identified in previous work sessions** (*HKGi*)
4. **Review existing program development process, marketing and feedback process** (*Staff*)
5. **Identify program development, marketing, and feedback process improvements** (*discussion*)
6. **Identify and prioritize resource needs to enhance program delivery (Physical improvements, staff needs, partners, equipment, storage)** (*All*)
7. **Next Steps**

Joseph E. Wargo Nature Center Master Plan

Summary of June 10, 2014 Programming & Marketing Meeting

Consulting staff from HKGi and representatives of Anoka County met from 10 am to 12 pm at Wargo to discuss recreation and environmental education program strategies. The purpose of the meeting was to develop a long term approach to program identification, development and delivery rather than specific programs to offer. Key elements of the discussions are summarized below.

ATTENDEES:

Lil Leatham, HKGi
Anna Springer, HKGi
Jen Cater, HKGi
Cory Hinz, Anoka County Recreation Services Manager
Lisa Gilliland, Interpretive Naturalist, Wargo Nature Center
Krista Harrington, Program Supervisor, Wargo Nature Center
Bob Holtz, Anoka County Naturalist
Mary Morris, Interpretive Naturalist
Maria Pierz, Homeschool Coordinator
Deb Gallup, Interpretive Naturalist
Sherry Taplin, Interpretive Naturalist

Confirm program priorities:

In addition to birding programs, water programs, ecotype-based programs, treehouse programs, and volunteering, staff mentioned:

- Programming for adults ages 20-35ish (eg. Art and wine)
- Overnight programmings (currently one overnight kayak camp)-for kids, families. At least 2/per summer or one per quarter
- Homeschool- need to bring in new people, especially in the 1st and 2nd grade group (currently seeing a decline in that group). Need to focus on recreation/physical education credits and longer-term science credits
- *New* recreation programs
- Special drop-in events

Current program development process:

- Consider staff capacity and potential staffing needs
- Budget/equipment considerations
- 'Dream them up' (no formal system or process)
- Personal interest of staff
- Current trends
- Equipment-based (ie they got new ipads and *tried* to hold classes)

- Current programs don't fill. They cancel programs if there is less than 3 people signed up. Class attendance is down by 1/3 this year.

Potential factors affecting success of programming:

- Not a priority for County marketing person
- Have little control over marketing
- Lost hometown connection- do fewer ads in local newspapers

Current Marketing Efforts:

- Krista and Lisa do marketing (communicate with county marketing person)
- Program brochure
- Email blasts
- Press releases
- Blinking kiosk at end of drive
- Facebook (although this does not seem to be an effective tool for them)

Current Feedback Collection

- Survey Monkey surveys after class completion (don't get constructive feedback, however)
- Oral feedback after classes (not formalized)
- Summer school/day camp-paper surveys distributed and feedback is considered 'pretty good'

Volunteers

- Sherry is the on-site volunteer coordinator.
- Weekend volunteer at front desk would be helpful
- Current volunteers are older
- Mixed response/excitement from staff regarding a volunteer recognition program/dinner
- Would like to see more volunteers to assist naturalists during programs

Competition/Partnerships

- Do we know who our competitors are? Eg. REI?
- Is there any benefit to partnering with REI? Staff thinks not

Physical site improvements. Staff would like to see:

- Alternative energy options (eg. Solar panels)
- Non-potable water in the prairie
- Storage/drying racks for pond study equipment
- Prius for outreach
- Truck for recreation
- An additional laptop?
- Canoe/kayak racks for long and short term storage (covered would be ideal, and easy for Todd to access)



Joseph E. Wargo Nature Center Master Plan Anoka County Parks

Peer Review Session

Tuesday July 15, 2014

11:00AM – 1:00 PM

Wargo Nature Center

7701 Main St, Hugo, MN 55038

Peer Session Goals: 1) Test and refine the draft, goals, recommendations, and physical improvements 2) Gather additional informed input, ideas and strategies for programs, marketing, activities, and facilities at the Wargo Nature Center.

Agenda

1. **Welcome & Introductions** (20 min)
 - Peer Session Goals and Objectives
 - Introduction to Wargo
 - Identified Needs & Draft Goals
2. **SITE TOUR** (20 min) *We will give a short tour of the immediate area, talk about some of the needs on the tour, followed by returning to the meeting room and having lunch*
- >> **Lunch Break** *(get food...eat during next presentation)*
3. **Proposed Physical Improvements** (30 min.)
 - Overview presentation
 - Peer discussion & input
4. **Proposed Strategies for Programs, Activities, and Marketing** (30 min.)
 - Overview presentation
 - Peer discussion & input
5. **Next Steps/How we will use input** (5 min.)

Joseph E. Wargo Nature Center Master Plan

Summary of July 15, 2014 Peer Review Meeting

Consulting staff from HKGi and representatives of Anoka County met with a group of selected peers in the area of environmental education/recreation/interpretation to discuss Wargo Nature Center's existing conditions, programs, desires and opportunities for the future. The purpose of the meeting was to test and refine the draft, goals, recommendations, and physical improvements, and gather additional informed input, ideas and strategies for programs, marketing, activities, and facilities at the Wargo Nature Center. The meeting was held at Wargo and included a brief walking tour of the Nature Center.

ATTENDEES:

Lil Leatham, HKGi

Anna Springer, HKGi

Cory Hinz, Anoka County Recreation Services Manager

Lisa Gilliland, Interpretive Naturalist, Wargo Nature Center

Krista Harrington, Program Supervisor, Wargo Nature Center

Dan Spock, MN History Center

Vicky Wachtler, Naturalist, Eastman Nature Center, Three Rivers Park District

Katie Pata, Dakota County Naturalist, MN Naturalist Association

Sandy Tanckt, MN Landscape Arboretum

Mark Oestreich, Westwood Hills Nature Center St. Louis Park

CHANGES TO DRAFT MASTER PLAN:

- Add main entrance to nature play area off main entrance path
- Add turf area on the current meadow(reed canary grass area) and bring nature closer to the building
- Include current plans to improve dock
- Trailhead somewhere within the property?

COMMENTS ON DRAFT MASTER PLAN:

Physical improvements:

- Bring vegetation/nature in closer proximity to the building
- replace the 'sterile' turf lawn with naturalized plantings (no current opportunity for birding/wildlife observation from the building). Create views into the surrounding woods, as well. Get invasive species under control (Reed Canary Grass, Burdock, etc).
- Tree houses are great additions-eg Landscape Arboretum had a successful exhibit.
- Changes need to reflect the overall intent of the center
- Essential experiences-whats the bread and butter?-for Dakota County it's trails. Make better connections to the nearby trail system to draw people in week after week.
- Need to improve the view to the building

- Need to improve signage
- Don't underestimate the entry road as a part of the experience-'mall moms' may never get out of the car.

Inside Exhibits:

- What's the purpose/intent? Who's the audience? Is it to introduce people to what they can do here? The childrens education building at the arboretum has an abstract underpinning theme: photosynthesis. They gain an understanding of whats going on outside and then go out and see it in action. 'a deeper look'.
- Taxidermy: literature review shows that the public really likes diaramas, but they like a story and dramatic tension, not static displays.
- Inside generally needs to be lighter, brighter, softer, cleaner.

Wayfinding improvements:

- strip signage down to the most basic information for clarity, and ensure a continued experience- visitors should make a visual connection with what and where to go next. The lobby at Wargo is overwhelming-not sure where to start. People need landmarks with variety and cohesion to draw them throughout the site (eg. 4 choices right away). Keep it clean and connected.
- Interpretation can be a way to attract/connect with visitors without asking them to come to an event or program-eg Dakota County's 10 interpretive nodes along the MRT.
- ADA is important, especially when we look ahead to baby boomers-who will desparately try to stay busy despite physical limitations

MARKETING:

- Signature special events: really draw people in (non-committal, whole family, seasonal and annual-to get on people's mental calendars). Ideally events are part spectacle part participation. Music and food are critical components.(sensory-see, smell, taste, hear, touch)
- MN naturalist Association has found that the exposure from events and word of mouth is what brings people to your site- not expensive advertising. Consider having a presence at related county events.
- See MIA "Matisse Inspires" hands-on experiences.
- Reconnect with local papers
- Try to get a spot in the county mailer
- Constant contact and twitter
- Network with other groups for exposure (eg. Moms groups use Lebanon Hills for meetings)

OPERATIONS:

Volunteers:

- cannot be relied upon to perform the duties of paid staff. Are looking for social interaction as well as service opportunities. Volunteer groups may be able to perform specialized tasks, however (eg the 'Grumpy Old Mens' club who build things collectively, such as a new raptor cage at Westwood, Volunteers assembling and maintaining the WWII planes and helicopters at the History Center).
- Warner Nature Center has had success in training adult volunteers for program assistance
- Service learning for teens. Westwood (successful since 1990) and 3 Rivers has a successful junior naturalist program/youth leadership program. Treated like work where they commit to a certain number of hours, and have to get someone to fill in if they are absent.
- Improvements to rental program not mentioned in the draft program, and they should be.

The after-hours policy:

- the gate locking at 5pm is 'strange'. People need water and bathrooms to access after hours (canoes need to be locked and hawk secured). Also consider expanding staff hours to coincide with rental demands (ala Dakota County). Most other facilities have automated gate closure systems.

PROGRAMMING:

- Date night and beer has been successful for adult programming. Eg. Craft beer and mountain biking event. Candelight ski-beer and chocolate. Use licensed providers. Adults seem to come to outdoor recreation based events more than nature education events.
- Dan Spock has found that his programming designed for millennials also attracts the baby boomers (eg. Retrorama, history of hip, off-site programs such as a history pub crawl). He tries to be extroverted in developing programming-network with other groups to come up with innovative/current programming, keep reciprocity in mind-how would both groups benefit mutually

PHASING:

- Phase 1: Curb Appeal/exterior improvements \$70K, funding from Integrated Waste
- Phase 2: inside 2015 \$100k
- Phase 3: Tree house next 5 years –additional funding
- Phase 4: connecting to the YMCA (5-6 years)
- Phase 5: observation deck at the point –CIP
- >>>>Near term (within 5 years) and Far term (in 5 to 10 years)



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