



Glendalough State Park Visitor Center (HF4327)

BONDING PROJECT OVERVIEW

- The Glendalough Park Partners (Friends Group since 1992) requests state bonding support of \$750,000 for the new Visitor Center as referenced in HF4327. This project was approved by MN DNR in 2018 after collaborative planning between DNR professionals and the local Park Partners friends' group. The Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota, Senator Ingebrigtsen and former Rep. Nornes supported the project in the 2018 bonding bill. This HF4327 bonding request is due to time delays and subsequent cost inflation caused by Covid-19, creating a project funding gap.

Original 2017 Visitor Center Rendering



Current 2022 DNR Visitor Center Design (near final)



- Glendalough State Park is nestled between the prairies and hardwood forests in the lakes region of west central Minnesota. The historic Cowles and Ballantine Family Retreat and Game Farm (Star Tribune) was donated to The Nature Conservancy in the early 90s and then to the State of Minnesota to become a State Park in 1992.
- Glendalough is also home to some of Minnesota's oldest Native American artifacts; including the largest earthen ovens discovered during bike trail archeology in 2013. As a result of the compelling historical, wildlife, plant and aquatic attributes, eight school districts in central Minnesota conduct interpretive education in the park.

Park Entrance



The Historic Lodge



Earthen Oven Interpretation



- Glendalough is distinctive among state parks as it is managed as a primitive recreational experience. It features nine miles of shoreline on six crystal clear lakes, cart-in and canoe-in camping, yurts and camper cabins. Annie Battle Lake is a Heritage Lake with an exceptional fishery, and void of motorized devices or electronics.

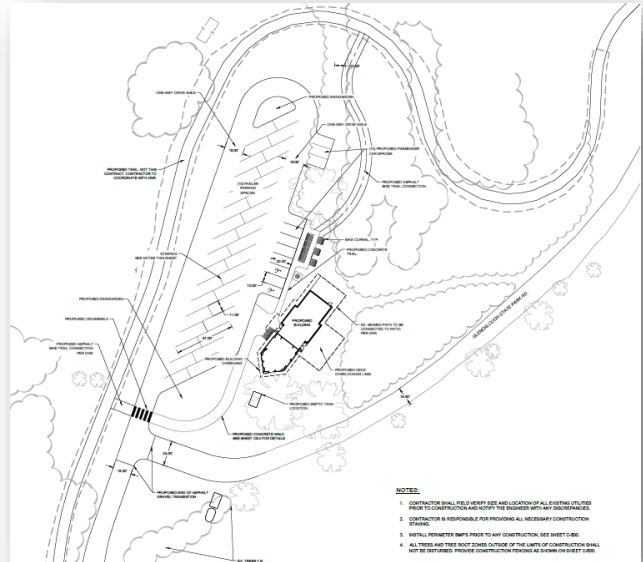
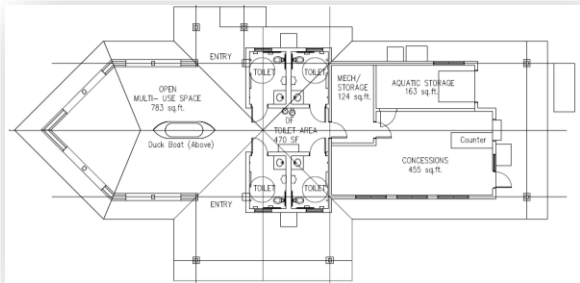
- Glendalough has become a biking destination and is drawing thousands of cyclists, young families, and seniors into the park from around the region and state. Park visitation has grown from less than 50,000 before the trail opened in 2014 to more than 127,000 in 2021. A 5-mile bike loop in the park is part of a 12-mile trail system known as the Glendalough Trail (www.MoreThanATrail.com). A Visitor Center, called out in 1994, is desperately needed.
- The bike trail connects to downtown Battle Lake, Good Samaritan Senior Living Center and School District 542 only three miles away. This interconnectivity has resulted in significant economic development. More than 25 new businesses have opened in Battle Lake (pop. 800) since the trail opened in 2014. An additional 2-mile paved segment will be added in the park this year that takes bikers and families completely off-road.
- The new Visitor Center will be a gathering place for the public to embark upon a variety of recreation and learning experiences. There will be covered patio space overlooking the prairie and Annie Battle Lake and interpretive information to give an orientation to the park and its offerings. The current concessionaire will continue to rent bicycles, canoes, kayaks, and paddleboards; and will operate a small retail space for outdoor recreation essentials.
- The Visitor Center has been called out since the DNR's 1994 park management plan. The need to support visitors and preserve historic buildings has only escalated. The Historic Lodge has unfortunately served as a makeshift Visitor Center and is suffering degradation as it clearly was not intended for this use.

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC FUNDING HISTORY

- In 2017, the Visitor Center was designed in a collaboration with the Minnesota DNR professionals. The cost estimate was \$1.2 - \$1.3 million, not including parking lot, septic system and well.
- Existing funds include: \$200,000+ raised in 2017 by the Glendalough Park Partners prior to requesting \$750,000 in 2018 bonding, and \$250,000 in Parks & Trails Legacy funds for a current total of \$1.2 million. That funding was sufficient in the economic environment four years ago, especially considering PP's local fundraising capacity.
- We fully expected the Trail Center to be completed by now; however Covid-19 brought the project work – DNR design, on-site assessments (geology, hydrology, archeology, and septic) and their approvals to a standstill.
- During the Covid-19 delays, the project experienced dramatic increases in construction material and labor costs. The project costs would grow to \$2 - \$2.2 million (DNR current estimates) despite downsizing of the original design. DNR will be updating its cost estimates later this Spring and Summer as the designs are finalized.
- In today's economic context we face a likely funding gap of \$800K - \$1M. The Park Partners group has some additional fundraising capacity (estimated at \$100,000 - \$200,000) but as a small community, we cannot bridge the entire gap. We are working with DNR to identify the remaining funds required.
- Construction of the Visitor Center is now planned for calendar year 2023. The 2018 bond funds for the Glendalough Visitor Center need to be encumbered via the bidding process by December 31, 2022, or they will be forfeited.

DNR TRAIL CENTER DESIGN STATUS

- DNR is providing architecture, mechanical engineering, and landscape architecture design services; and is contracting out septic design and structural, civil, and electrical engineering design.
- DNR has reviewed its near-final design and floor plans with the Glendalough Park Partners board, with approvals.
- The state bonding policy requires this to be a "B3 Sustainability" project, which increases initial investment, but saves operational costs over the long term.
- The Visitor Center site and the new bike trail extension have passed natural and cultural resource assessment and SHPO review, which are major hurdles. (Completed floor plan and land use schematics shown on the next page)



DNR VISITOR CENTER SCHEDULE

- April 2022: Schematic Design and Updated Cost Estimates
- June 2022: 95% Design and Updated Cost Estimates
- August 2022: 100% Design and Updated Cost Estimates
- October/November: Bidding
- December 2022 – November 2023: Construction

DNR COORDINATION WITH OTHER PROJECTS

- An additional 2-mile bike trail extension segment within the park is a separate project and is funded for Summer/Fall 2022 construction with state and federal funds. This addresses a major safety issue by getting bikers and hikers off the main entrance road to the park and completes the final, sixth segment of the Glendalough Trail System. Trail design is being coordinated with the Visitor Center site design. Current trail funding includes \$800,000 in PAT Legacy and \$175,000 Federal Recreational Trail Program funding (the local Park Partners also provided matched funds).
- The renovation of the nearby Annie Battle Lake public water access is a separate project that is being designed in coordination with Visitor Center and Bike Trail Extension projects. There are traffic safety and natural resource management issues that need to be addressed at the current access. This project is not yet funded for construction.

ABOUT GLENDALOUGH PARK PARTNERS

- Minnesota 501 (c)3 organization formed at the inception of Glendalough State Park. Managed by a volunteer Citizens Advisory Board which meets quarterly. 550 paid Park Partner memberships, with more than 2500 followers on the Park Partners and Glendalough Trail Facebook pages.
- Active membership in the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota. As one of the smallest state parks, Glendalough Park Partners has one of the largest memberships and largest treasury among 53 friends groups statewide.
- Publishes a quarterly Tracks & Trails newsletter (107th issue) and conducts the annual “Walk for Glendalough” fundraising event which has funded more than \$300,000 of amenities in the park.