
GREEN MUSEUM

A Land Use Vision for Coldwater Park

Coldwater Spring has been flowing for 10,000 years, experts say, even under the last glacier. The 27 acre Coldwater campus is located atop the Mississippi River gorge, between Minnehaha Regional Park and Fort Snelling State Park, just above the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers. Coldwater furnished water to Fort Snelling for a century and still flows at about 100,000 gallons a day.

Coldwater is the Birthplace of Minnesota, where the soldiers who built Fort Snelling lived (1820-3) and where a civilian community developed to service the fort. Those settlers founded Pig's Eye (later St. Paul), St. Anthony, Minneapolis and Bloomington, setting the stage for Minnesota statehood in 1858.

Before European immigration into what is now Minnesota, the 2.5-mile stretch from Minnehaha Falls—to Coldwater—to the confluence of rivers, was a traditional gathering place for upper Mississippi tribes. Eddie Benton Benais, Grand Chief of the Mdewiwin (Medicine) Society, Anishinabe spiritual elder from Lac Courte Oreilles, Wisconsin, gave court-ordered testimony (3/19/99) about the cultural significance of the Coldwater area:

My grandfather who died in 1942...many times he retold how we traveled, how he and his family, he as a small boy traveled by foot, by horse, by canoe to this great place to where there would be these great religious, spiritual events. And that they always camped between the falls and the sacred water place [the spring]....We know that the falls which came to be known as Minnehaha Falls, was a sacred place, a neutral place, a place for many nations to come....And that the spring from which the sacred water should be drawn was not very far...a spring that all nations used to draw the sacred water for the ceremony....How we take care of the water is how it will take care of us.

Coldwater is the last natural limestone bedrock spring of size in the Twin Cities, including all of Hennepin County.

Green Museum is a concept of preserving a living, changing piece of land—a museum quality landscape. At a Green Museum the land is the museum, the land is the teacher. Instead of a building with artifacts inside frames or glass boxes, or a reenactment where history is fixed in time, a Green Museum is a landscape where change is studied. Without buildings or roads, Coldwater could become an urban wilderness, a place among burr oaks and prairie grasses, where people have gathered for centuries, even millennia—around an ever-flowing spring.

It is astonishing that man's footprint has not crushed this last great spring. Euro-American soldiers settled at Coldwater in May of 1820 because the water was good—because they had lost 20 percent of their company with tainted meat and unsanitary practices during the winter. Pioneers followed the soldiers, building cabins and businesses to supply and service the army.

Coldwater as a Green Museum would preserve a 27-acre patch of geologically, ecologically and culturally significant land for present and future generations. Here we can read the story of the land "written" on the rock face of the Mississippi bluff—above the only true river gorge on the entire 2,350-mile length of the Mississippi.

And we can tell the story of 9,500 years of Native American history and 200-years of Euro- and African-American history. We can teach prairie restoration by *doing* it and teach about Dred Scott who based his famous case for freedom in part on his residency at Fort Snelling (1836-40), slave to an army surgeon.

As spring water flows and erodes its way through creek, wetland and waterfall, history speaks and Coldwater is revealed as the dwelling place of Un Kte Hi, Dakota deity of waters and the underworld. Coldwater is special land, traditionally sacred to Native Americans

Coldwater is the only fenced non-park land along the west bank of the 9-mile gorge from the confluence of rivers, the *B'dota*, upstream to the falls now called St. Anthony. From 1920 to 1950 "Coldwater Park" showed on maps. It's time to return Coldwater Park. Congressman Martin Sabo said he was "pleased to reach an agreement with the Department of Interior to protect the Camp Coldwater Spring and restore the Bureau of Mines property to open green space" (6/24/02).

The Coldwater Spring Green Museum could be the first living museum in the United States.

- Maintain federal ownership of the Coldwater campus because federal protections for the environment and Native American cultural heritage are strongest. Also an 1805 Dakota Treaty Rights case is working its way through federal court and may affect the status and use of the property. (Coldwater Spring is included in the Spiritual Map of the Twin Cities, one of nine Knowledge Maps commissioned by the University of Minnesota Design Institute 2001-3. "In nature we find the spring from which all spiritual traditions grow." <http://design.umn.edu>).
- Enforce the 2001 Coldwater Protection state law mandating no loss of flow to or from the spring. Coldwater has been used as an emergency drinking water supply; privatization is unconscionable.
- Remove buildings, ore bins and roads and begin the transition to indigenous burr oak savanna with walking paths. The bluff land below Coldwater Spring is regional and state park land. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has an ongoing prairie restoration project there; it would make sense to free the uphill land of invasive, exotic vegetation, for example buckthorn and garlic mustard, as seeds tend to move downhill. The DNR calls the Coldwater campus an "excellent" asset and would like to "include" it in Fort Snelling State Park with the buildings removed, the site filled and graded, hazardous materials removed, and in consultation with Native Americans about cultural resources. Federal ownership is preferable coordinated with state management.
- Protect and preserve contiguous green land along the Mississippi bluff top. This acts as a buffer for the Mississippi which is the drinking water source for more than 18 million Americans. A contiguous corridor allows for "banking" of prairie plant seed stock in this period of global climate change. The VA land atop the bluff from 54th to 56th Street, currently used as a dump, should be integrated with transition replanting plans.
- Open the fence gates except when Native American ceremonies require privacy.
- Interpret 9,500 years of native history using real live Indian people, and 200 years of American history along with 500 million years of geologic history at Coldwater for the state's school children, and domestic and foreign tourists. The land holds the memories, the land is our legacy. Visitors interested in aboriginal Americans are limited to casinos, libraries or snippets from white museums. Eco- and spiritual tourism opportunities await development here. The National Park Service owns a small Mississippi island which could "complement" or "be incorporated into" nearby recreation and open spaces. If a Green Museum building is constructed, it should be a "green" building on an old building site.

B'dota (Dakota "meeting of waters") is historical anthropologist Bruce M. White's vision for Coldwater. White would incorporate Coldwater with "the entire Fort Snelling area from the Henry H. Sibley House in Mendota to Minnehaha Falls, in a kind of Fort Snelling Historic Park....It's purview could include the management of Fort Snelling, as well as the Dakota prison camp of 1862, the Indian Agency outside the walls of the fort, the site of the Ojibwe Treaty of 1837, Morgan's Mound on the VA property, and many other neglected and unprotected historic and sacred sites in the Fort Snelling area."

Tourism Crescent: For coordinated public-private tour publicity

- Downtown Minneapolis—riverfront public parklands, \$300-million recent facelift
- (proposed) Mississippi River white water rafting
- Nicollet Island *Wita Waste* (we-ta wash-tay, Dakota for Good or Beautiful Island)
- Historic St. Anthony
- Mill City Museum, new \$33-million
- University of Minnesota
- West Bank theatre district
- The Green Institute
- Minnehaha Regional Park
- Coldwater Park *Mni Owe Sni* (mini oh-we snee, Dakota literally water-spring-cold)
- Fort Snelling, State and Historic parks
- Twin Cities International Airport
- The Lincoln Mounds
- Pilot Knob
- Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area, 13,000-acres, largest urban wetland in America, including the Sand Creek Prayer Stone (a giant glacial erratic near Jordan, sacred to the Dakota people)
- Mall of America
- Mystic Lake Casino and Hotel

Tourism and war are great (and opposite) economic engines of the world. Sacred site and environmental tourism are huge, respectful industries. Coldwater is a dream historic site because it is still relatively pristine. We have half the state's population in the greater metro area but most urban parks are developed for playing specific sports or for walking/running/skating/skiing through, and are planted with non-native grasses and flowers.

Native history, sacred water, ecology and global warming, prairie restoration and eco tourism, Dred Scott, Birthplace of Minnesota, photo tourism, birding—are some of the stories Coldwater can tell. Coldwater is where history and nature come together in an urban landscape.

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The draft Environmental Impact Statement for Coldwater can be linked from www.friendsofcoldwater.org. It's about 500-pages long so you may want to check the table of contents and read selectively. We hope people endorse the Green Museum vision for Coldwater's future. But whatever your ideas for Coldwater are, please send your comments by October 24, 2006 to:

Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, National Park Service, 111 Kellogg Boulevard East, Saint Paul MN 55101-1256; Attn: Coldwater comments