

Wetlands begin to take shape

By Elliot Mann
emann@postbulletin.com

Workers began moving dirt today on the centerpiece of a multimillion-dollar, 100-acre environmental center in northwest Rochester.

In the works for more than a decade, the center is intended to be a teaching laboratory for local residents on energy sources and water ecology.

Organizers hope to open Cascade Meadow Wetlands and Environmental Science Center by September. Today, construction crews held a formal groundbreaking for a planned 16,000-square-foot, two-story building.

“It’s exciting,” said Greg Munson, executive director at Cascade Meadow Wetlands and Environmental Science Center. “The reality is that none of us knew what direction this was going at the beginning, but this project truly has taken a life of its own.”

The center will be on native prairie bounded by West Circle Drive, 19th Street Northwest and Wilder Road Northwest, directly south of Rochester Athletic Club. The area is near the future site of Lourdes High School.

Education will be at the forefront, and the center will provide a meeting point for classes and exhibits, Munson said. The center will partner with schools, including Lourdes and Winona State University, which have already asked about water-monitoring studies.

Munson said another long-term goal is a natural play area, which could link some of the family-centered activities of the Rochester Athletic Club to the environmental center.

Organizers don’t want to duplicate services that are already offered at Rochester’s popular Quarry Hill Nature Center, where Munson served as director for more than 20 years, so Cascade Meadow will focus on water and energy.

The on-site science center will incorporate geothermal heating with water from the pond. The water will be used to cool the building in the summer and provide heat in the winter.

Jack and Mary Ann Remick of Rochester are the benefactors of Cascade Meadow. The project evolved from a casual conversation in 2000 between Jack Remick and Larry Tarnow, a member of the Cascade Meadow Core Planning Team.

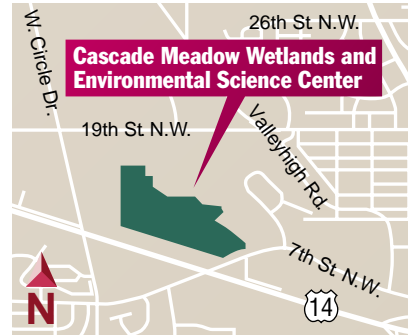


Rochester will get a new look on nature

What happened: Groundbreaking for Cascade Meadow Wetlands and Environmental Science Center was today.

Why it matters: Plans call for a 16,000 square-foot, two-story building at the 100-acre site. The multimillion dollar project is intended to provide water and energy education for local schools and residents.

What’s next: Officials will continue construction on the site and also work to restore the native prairie. The new Lourdes High School and a new Paws and Claws animal shelter are planned nearby as well. Cascade Meadow is expected to open in September.



Rick Dahl, rdahl@postbulletin.com

Remick, who owns the Rochester Athletic Club, wondered at the time if he should create a smaller version of Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center in Lanesboro, which is 80 acres surrounded by 1,000 acres of state-managed forest. Since then, Cascade Meadow has carved out its own niche.

Munson said eight different types of wetlands are planned for the grounds, but they’ll take longer

than the building to take shape.

Crews are already mining gravel at the site of the project’s eight-acre pond, with the hope of expanding it by another three acres, Munson said. Other work will be done to reclaim the natural habitat of the area and clear trails.

“The wetland is like any other natural system. It evolves,” Munson said.