

New National Parks Service headquarters gets environmental praise  
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Behind the browns and grays of this preformed concrete, glass and metal structure along Omaha's riverfront is one of the world's "greenest" office buildings.

The public will get its first look at the latest addition to the changing riverfront during a 10 a.m. dedication Saturday for the Carl T. Curtis National Park Service Midwest Headquarters. The building's Omaha-based development team expects the \$12.5 million, three-story building to become the world's 28th building to achieve the environmental "gold" rating.

It is the first building in Nebraska to be rated under the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design system, or LEED. The care taken is exemplified by the native plants surrounding the building and the interior wood acquired from approved forests. Before landscaping began, a Lakota elder performed a blessing ceremony attended by the workers to emphasize that this bank of the Missouri River is sacred to Omaha's heritage.

Most materials, including the Kansas limestone, came from within 500 miles of Omaha. Sensors adjust the lighting depending on available sunshine. The glass provides the greatest level of thermal protection, and the overhangs help block the hot sun of summer but let through the rays in winter.

The efforts to preserve water extend to the native plants, which after two years won't require any watering, to the bathrooms. Waterless urinals are being tested, and users can select whether they need the minimum or maximum amount of water to flush the toilets.

Craig Kenkel, chief of the cultural resources division in the Midwest Regional Office, said the building will "fit the urban environment of downtown Omaha and the back-to-the-river effort."

The office space is particularly bright for the workers, 90 percent of whom will have either a view south toward the river, Rick's Cafe Boatyard and downtown, or a view north up the river to the Gallup University campus.

For Noddle Development, Pacific Realty Development Services, Leo A. Daly and Kiewit Construction Co., the project was their first in the green construction movement.

And it probably isn't the last.

"This is a business we want to be in," said Harlan Noddle, whose company develops commercial space in 17 states. "We are not bound by geography."

Though construction costs were higher for the Park Service building, Noddle said, they will be offset over time by lower operating costs. Over the long run, he said, being green can save some green.

Certified LEED buildings are becoming a more frequent requirement for new federal construction, Noddle said.

"Leo A. Daly and Kiewit are the fastest rabbits" on environmentally sensitive construction, said Patrick J. Morgan, a Daly architect. Other architectural firms and construction companies will be catching up, he said.

The new building is a big change for the National Park Service in Omaha.

For the past 44 years, the Omaha headquarters for the 13-state region was tucked away at 17th and Jackson Streets, making it invisible to most people.

The new headquarters is also the home base for oversight of the Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail. Exhibits, beginning with one on the Lewis and Clark expedition, are planned for the entry to the new headquarters.

The building will be used as a visitor center, open all year, with rangers leading discussion groups. Pamphlets on parks, trails and monuments will be available, and a bookstore operator is being sought.

The building's meeting space will give environmental groups a place to gather and students on school field trips a new educational experience.

The landscaping may take until next spring to fill out. The cooperation between the city and the Park Service is exemplified by the landscaping plans.

The city scrapped the idea of a grass lawn at the base of a planned pedestrian bridge across the Missouri River. Instead, the city opted for the natural look of the Park Service garden just south of the bridge landing.

Reps. Tom Osborne and Doug Bereuter, Omaha Mayor Mike Fahey and Noddle will be among the dignitaries who formally open the headquarters to the public Saturday.

How green do you mean?

Here are some of the Carl T. Curtis National Park Service Midwest Headquarters' "green" or environmentally friendly features:

- Native plants surround the building. After two years they shouldn't require watering.

Interior lighting adjusts according to available sunshine.

Windows provide greatest possible protection from heat and cold.

Exterior overhangs block the sun in summer but not in winter.

Toilet facilities use less - and in some cases no - water.

National Park Service

Midwest Region

Headquarters: Omaha

Employees: 170

Budget, regional: \$101 million

Budget, headquarters: \$8.2 million

States: Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Arkansas, North Dakota and South Dakota

Facilities: 54 park areas and nine major national trails in the region, Midwest Archeological Center in Lincoln

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