

CASE STUDY



Mississippi Gateway Regional Park – Gateway Center

*Connecting Community, Nature, and
Learning Through Purpose-Built Design*

BUILDING HISTORY & USE

For decades, access to the Mississippi River at the Coon Rapids Dam area was spread across multiple park spaces with limited amenities and minimal interpretive infrastructure. While the river itself remained a powerful natural asset, visitors lacked a clear entry point — a place to learn, gather, and fully understand the river's ecological and cultural significance.

Beginning in 2017, Three Rivers Park District and the City of Brooklyn Park launched a community-driven master planning process to reimagine the area as a unified regional destination. Central to that vision was the creation of a new visitor and education facility that would serve as both a physical and symbolic gateway to the Mississippi River.

Rather than retrofit older structures, the decision was made to invest in a new, purpose-built facility designed specifically to support education, programming, and year-round public use. The result is the Gateway Center, a 15,000-square-foot visitor and learning hub that anchors Mississippi Gateway Regional Park and provides a welcoming starting point for exploration.

The fully redeveloped park and Gateway Center officially opened to the public in September 2025, following several years of phased construction and site improvements.



1

WELL
SYSTEM



540

MBH HEATING
DEMAND



45

TONS COOLING
DEMAND

PROCESS

From the beginning, the Gateway Center was envisioned as a long-term public asset — one that balanced environmental responsibility with practical operation. Sustainability was not treated as an add-on, but as an integrated design principle.

The design team prioritized strategies that would reduce energy demand while supporting a comfortable, durable public facility. Passive daylighting was used to minimize lighting loads and enhance the visitor experience, and the Darcy geothermal heating and cooling system was selected to provide efficient, low-impact temperature control.

Together, these strategies position the Gateway Center on a pathway toward net-zero energy performance, supporting long-term operational efficiency while reinforcing the park's educational message about natural systems and resource conservation.

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

Design development and construction of the Gateway Center began as part of a larger, multi-year park redevelopment effort. Community master planning kicked off in 2017 and formal construction efforts began in July 2019, focusing first on foundational park infrastructure such as site grading, utility installation, and realignment of trails and parking to support future development.

An official groundbreaking on June 14, 2023 marked the start of vertical construction for the new facility, alongside major park features including the elevated Treetop Trail, nature-based play areas, and expanded trail connections.

After nearly a decade of planning and phased construction, the fully redeveloped Mississippi Gateway Regional Park officially opened on September 6, 2025.

LESSONS LEARNED

- ▶ **Integrate sustainability early.** Passive design and geothermal systems are most effective when embedded from the start.
- ▶ **Connect indoors and outdoors.** Learning spaces are strengthened when they seamlessly extend into the landscape.
- ▶ **Plan for longevity.** Public facilities benefit from systems and materials selected for durability and long-term value.

A FACILITY BUILT FOR THE FUTURE

The Gateway Center represents more than a new building — it is the physical expression of a broader commitment to environmental education, public access, and community connection along the Mississippi River.

By combining thoughtful architecture, efficient systems, and immersive learning spaces, the facility supports and embodies its mission to foster stewardship while welcoming visitors of all ages.

