

ABSTRACT

PROJECT NAME: Wisdom Woods Vision + Communications Plan

LOCATION: Spooner, WI

ENTRY CATEGORY: Communications

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The landscape architect's delicate approach provides visitors with subtle ways to engage with the natural environment. An interpretive guide, wayfinding features, and a maintenance manual help guests and staff understand the landscape and their relationship with it. These communication tools invite visitors to slow down, pay attention to their surroundings, appreciate the beauty of Wisdom Woods, and seize opportunities for personal reflection.

NARRATIVE

Nestled between two lakes, the 80-acre Wisdom Woods property is located outside Spooner, Wisconsin. Northwoods retreats are treasured destinations for many in the Midwest. Ritualistic pilgrimages to retreats offer a sense of renewal, restoration, and clarity. The client sought to capture this essence, asking the landscape architect to shape an experience that brings peace and rejuvenation to all who seek it.

At Wisdom Woods, users encounter a range of dynamic landscapes including stands of red pine, dense aspen thickets, littoral lake edges, and a quaking bog. The main project challenge was to stay true to the essence of the place and let the landscape be the main driver for the experience.

The resulting Vision and Communications provide visitors and staff with direct opportunities to engage with the exceptional natural environment and all the living things within it. Sensitively sited trails lead guests through the site's micro-ecologies and connect the user with varied landscape experiences. The trails feature points of interest that invite users to pause, observe, and interact with their surroundings.

The landscape architect created a suite of media with the goal of enhancing users' connection to the site. The media - including a tarot deck, interpretive guide, wayfinding features, and maintenance manual - facilitates a more profound connection with landscape along with a heightened awareness of the human-nature relationship.

UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE

To understand what makes Wisdom Woods unique, the design team devoted considerable time and energy to familiarizing themselves with the site and establishing a relationship with it. They explored the landscape across the seasons to reveal paths and rituals. Using walking, photography, and inventory, the team developed strategies to locate and record distinct ecozones, identify key landscape features and structures, and document movement. This process of exploration and discovery opened the design process from a place of genuine understanding.

USER-CENTERED COMMUNICATION

Realizing that a traditional planning document would just sit on a shelf, the team produced communications deliverables that were tailored to specific audiences, making them approachable, fun, and useful. The media highlights sensory experiences and employs storytelling to drive curiosity and encourage exploration of Wisdom Woods. Communication tools for staff and ownership are more straightforward, synthesizing information into one easy-to-use package.

ENGAGING EXPLORATION TOOLS

The Wisdom Woods Tarot Deck helps visitors explore the landscape and uncover its true spirit. People can use the cards like a traditional tarot deck, or to find points of interest within the deck and plan their journey across the site. The resulting personalized routes ignite questions and discovery. Prompts on the cards invite guests to reflect and contemplate their environment. Guests are encouraged to take the tarot deck with them and continue to cultivate the knowledge and insights gained during their stay.

NARRATIVE *continued*

The Adventure Guide includes site maps and stories of place, helping guests explore the site with confidence. The wayfinding system at Wisdom Woods includes tree tags and guideposts that serve as unobtrusive directional markers. Tree Tags guide users through the site during day and night, thanks to reflective borders that make them visible in low light conditions. All three tools – the Tarot Deck, the Adventure Guide, and Wisdom Woods Wayfinding – are woven together through a shared set of symbols and colors. The symbols are emblematic plant species which visitors will encounter multiple times while exploring. Repeated exposure to these plants will help users develop a sense of familiarity and fondness towards the plants and ecologies.

GUIDING THE VISION

The Wisdom Woods maintenance manual is an essential guide that helps both day-to-day operations and long-term planning to stay in line with the organization's mission and values. The manual is designed for convenience, consisting of a sturdy binder of standard-sized pages which can be edited and used on-site. The Introduction chapter is used as part of the training for new and seasonal staff. The design team distilled complex analysis and construction documents into simple guidelines and imagery so that the Wisdom Woods team can quickly access vital information. Colorful and engaging diagrams illustrate typologies and record critical dimensions and materials to facilitate phased implementation.

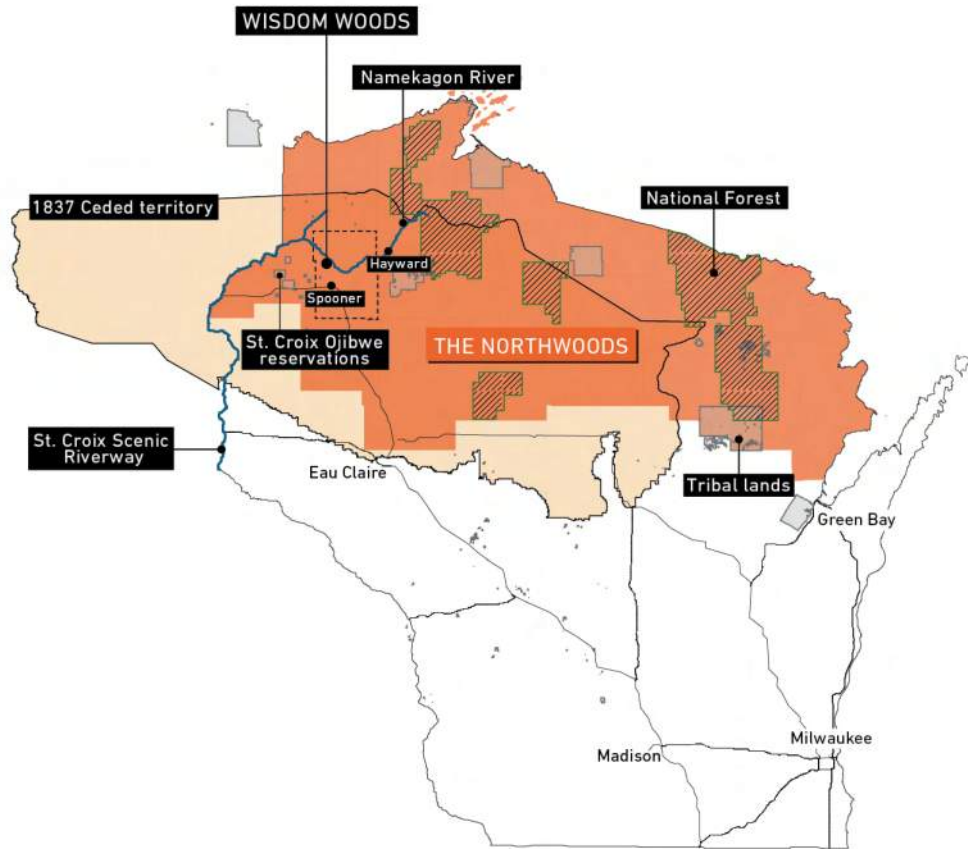
CONCLUSION

The client's openness to accept and investigate the spiritual and intangible aspects of the retreat experience gave the landscape architect the opportunity to create special communication tools that surpass the idea of a conventional result. Like the Vision Plan, these tools are rooted in a close relationship with the landscape and mirror the collective knowledge and excitement of the client, the Wisdom Woods staff, and the design team.



WELCOME TO WISDOM WOODS

Wisdom Woods is a Northwoods retreat, and a treasured destination for many in the Midwest. Ritualistic pilgrimages to this land offer a sense of renewal, restoration, and clarity. The client sought to capture this in the site design, asking the landscape architect to shape an experience that evokes peace and rejuvenation.



Mature Red Pine Stand



Aspen Regeneration With Some Larger Trees



Thick Mixed Pine Forest



Mature Oaks + Red Pine Savanna



Mixed Predominantly Aspen



Area of White Pine Regeneration



Half-Mature Red Pine Plantation



Littoral Edge



Northwoods Conifer/ Hardwood Mix



Cattail Pond



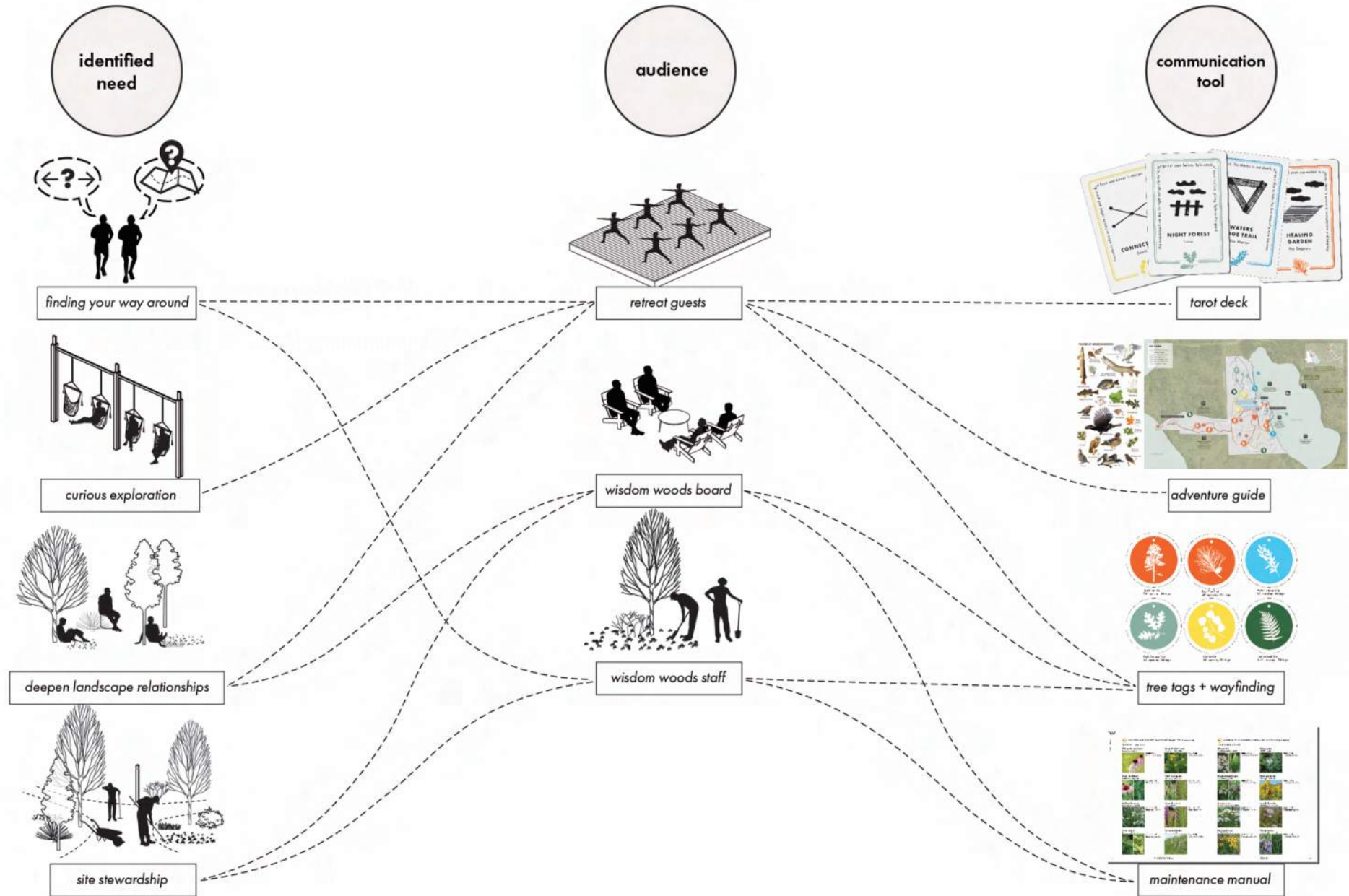
New Aspen Regeneration



Quaking Bog

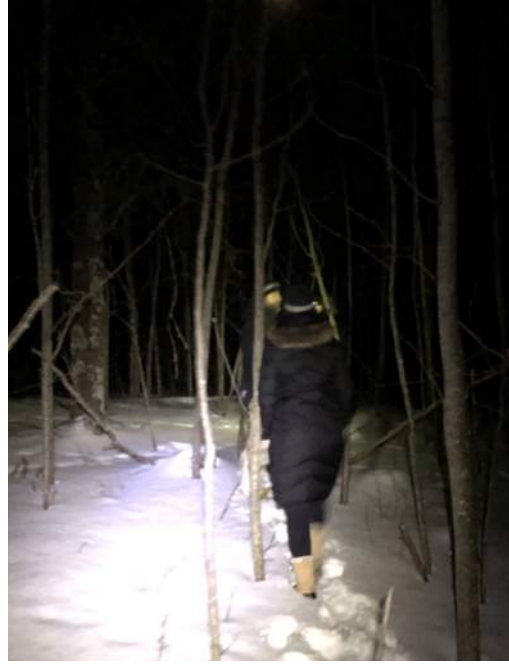
ECOLOGICAL ZONES + SITE CHARACTER

Wisdom Woods is unique because of its habitat diversity and tie to regional ecologies. Guests can encounter a range of dynamic landscape types including towering stands of red pine, dense aspen thickets, and a mysterious and majestic quaking bog.



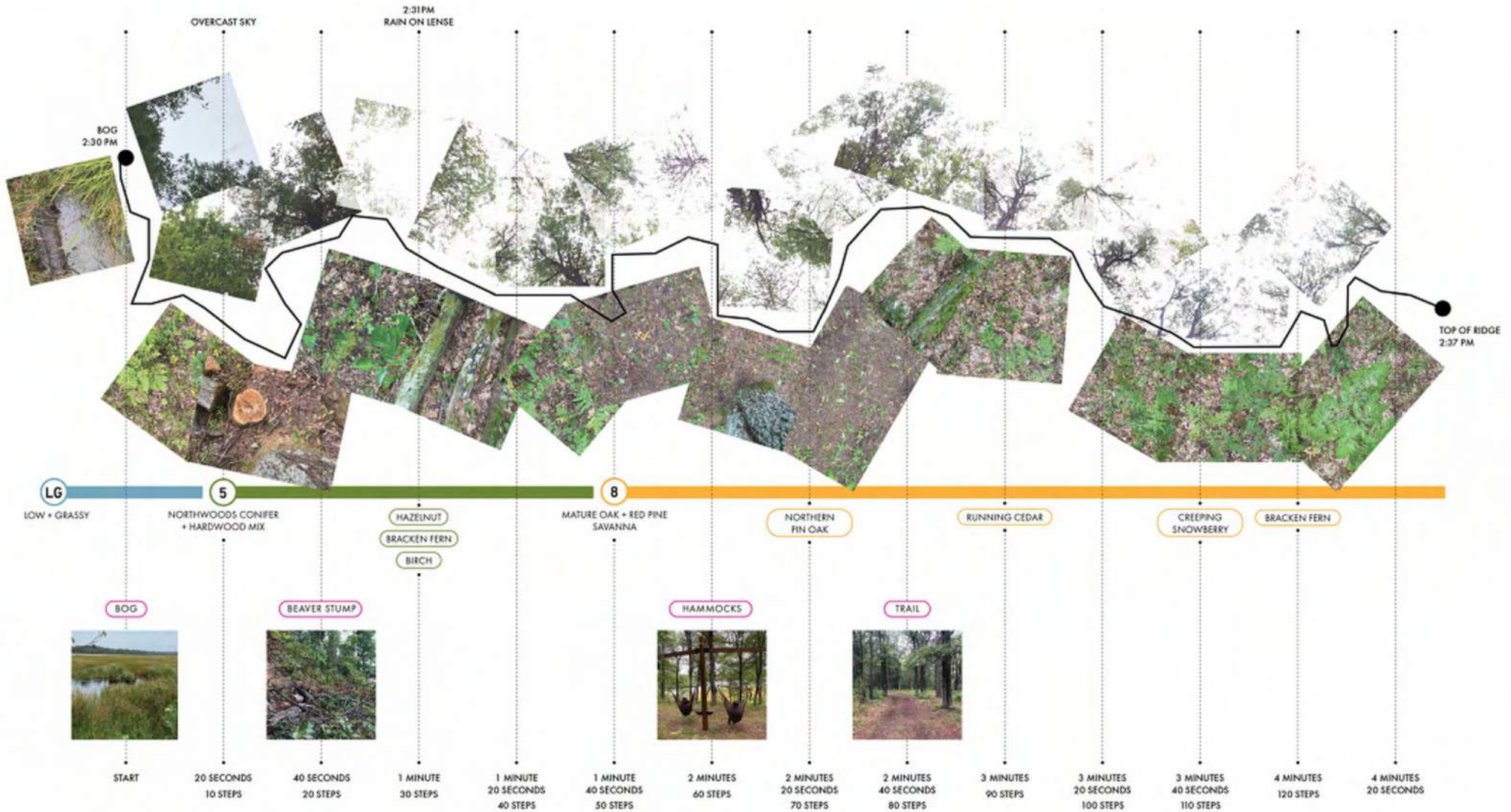
AUDIENCE + COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Soon after being hired for the project, the landscape architecture team set a goal of staying flexible to meet the client's needs. We realized that a traditional planning document would not suffice, so we instead produced communications deliverables that were tailored to specific audiences, making them approachable, fun, and useful.



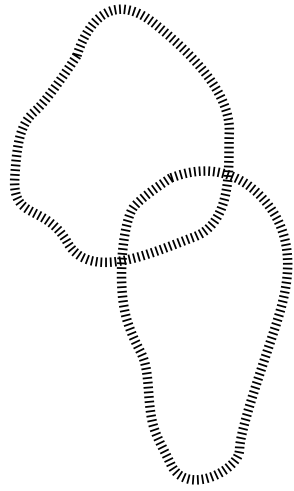
SPENDING TIME ON SITE

In order to comprehend what makes this place extraordinary, the design team devoted considerable time and energy to getting acquainted with the 80-acre site. We explored the site across the seasons to discover the paths and rituals that would be essential to communicate to future guests.



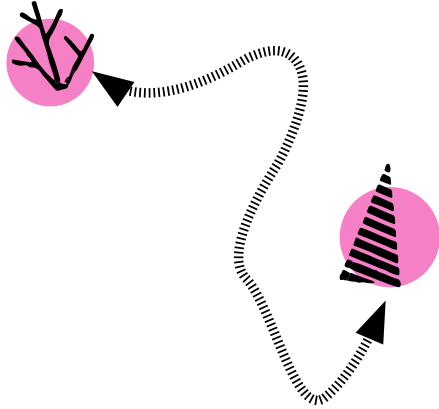
SITE DISCOVERY

Using walking, photography, and inventory, we developed strategies to record the ecozones, identify landscape features, and document movement. This process of exploration and discovery opened the design process from a place of genuine understanding, emphasizing the values of Wisdom Woods experiences from an intimate relationship with the site.



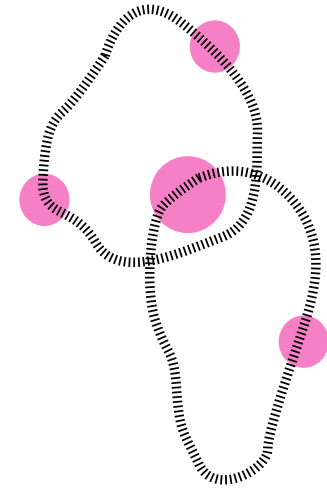
1.

**CREATE PEDESTRIAN TRAIL LOOPS
ACROSS THE SITE**



2.

**CONNECT EXISTING FEATURES AND
HIGHLIGHT UNIQUE ECO-ZONES**



3.

**PROPOSE POINTS OF INTEREST ALONG
PEDESTRIAN LOOPS**



A VISION FOR WISDOM WOODS

The Wisdom Woods vision strengthens the human-nature connection with trail loops leading guests through the site's micro-ecologies. Points of interest along the trails encourage guests to explore more of the diverse landscape by creating spaces of solace and meditation that stimulate our senses, captivate our attention, and make us feel relaxed.



ENGAGING EXPLORATION TOOLS

A critical aspect of the vision plan is a set of communication tools to guide both guests in their experience of Wisdom Woods and the organization in preserving the land and long-term vision. These tools urge visitors and staff to slow down and recognize the singular beauty of Wisdom Woods and their relationship with the landscape.



CENTERED ON EXPERIENCE

Communications geared towards guests leverage high-quality craft to highlight sensory experiences and employ storytelling to intrigue and delight.



INVITATION TO LEARN

The Adventure Guide supports guests as they explore the property's trails with confidence. Playful folds reveal a site map along with stories of the history and ecology of the area.



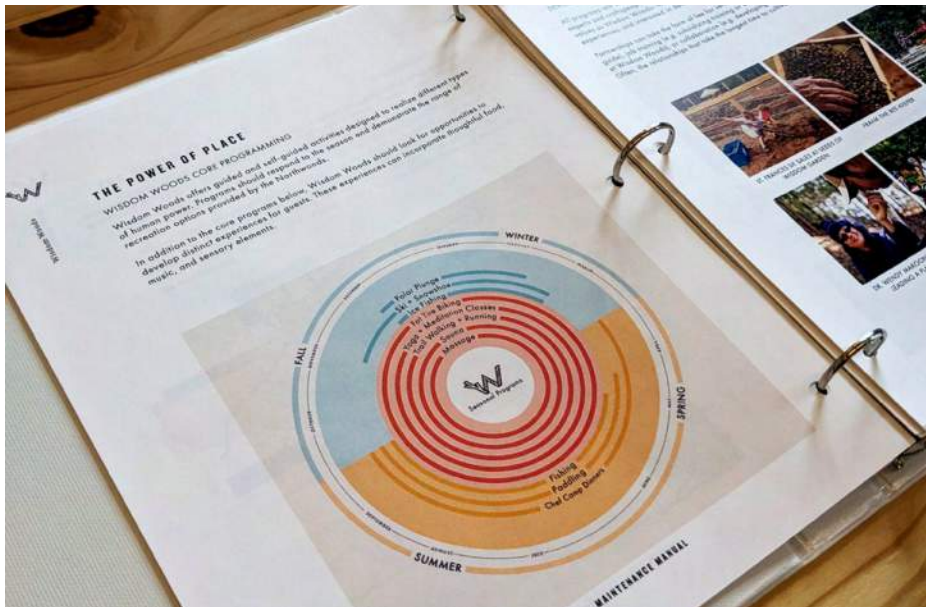
FACILITATING LANDSCAPE CONVERSATIONS

The team created the Wisdom Woods Tarot Deck to help visitors explore the landscape and uncover its true spirit. Guests can use the cards like a traditional tarot deck, or to find points of interest and plan their journey across the site. The resulting personalized routes ignite curiosity, questions, and discovery.



PLAYFUL EXPLORATIONS

Prompts on the cards invite users to reflect on their environment. This tool helps visitors make connections with the land, each other, and themselves. Guests are encouraged to take the deck with them and continue to cultivate the knowledge and insights gained during their stay.



WISDOM WOODS

I.O INTRODUCTION

With our deliberate words and actions, we communicate a consistent and compelling message about the story of Wisdom Woods. We have compiled the most relevant information so that all employees and contractors may have a shared understanding of the foundational concepts, identity, and characteristics of Wisdom Woods.

This document is meant to inspire as well as inform. We recognize that the design intent embedded in the following recommendations will be interpreted by those executing the acts of experience and management in their own way. However, this document should be used as a tool to pull us all in the same direction to achieve shared goals.

WISDOM COLLECTIVE

Wisdom Woods is part of the Wisdom Collective portfolio of projects. Wisdom Collective projects move curious individuals out of the norm and challenges them to initiate positive change in their industry or community.

Four Brand Pillars, quality, authenticity, collaboration, and passion, define the core values embedded in all Wisdom Collective pursuits. They are critical to the Collective's success and longevity.

RELATES	QUALITY	AUTHENTICITY	COLLABORATION	PASSION
IN ACTION	MAKE INTENTIONAL CHOICES FOR OUR VISITORS	REFLECT A TRUE SENSE OF PEOPLE, HISTORY AND PLACE	EMBRACE AND ENGAGE IN RELATIONSHIPS	DEMONSTRATE COMMITMENT AND COMMITMENT
GUIDING PRINCIPLES	Create a lasting impression of excellence by showcasing the best of our people and providing services with care.	Foster authentic experiences by reflecting a true sense of people, history and place.	Collaborate strategically to deepen relationships, empower partners, and create positive change.	Demonstrate passion by committing to high creative values. That equates efforts to maximize resources in pursuit of positive growth.

WISDOM COLLECTIVE MISSION STATEMENT
The Wisdom Collective inspires leaders and the next generation by investing in community, building connections, and promoting healthy ways of living.

WISDOM COLLECTIVE BRAND ALIGNMENT

Before initiating a new project, the Wisdom Collective collaboratively evaluates the individual endeavor's alignment with the overarching mission using a Decision Matrix. Should the project become part of the Wisdom Collective portfolio, the collective then develops a set of Brand Guidelines to describe the standards and rules for how that project should be communicated to the public.

These standards form a consistent message about the project's mission, vision, and impact. While some standards may seem tangential to maintenance considerations, the guidelines determining site materials must inform the maintenance team's planning and operations.

WISDOM WOODS

NAMEKAGON NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAY

"Wisconsin's moving national park. Most of the Namekagon is undeveloped, offering a genuine wilderness experience to kayak, canoe, and tube enthusiasts. The riverbanks are abundant with deer, muskrat, beaver, turtles and blue herons, white swan-hell, eagle and osprey can often be seen."
- Namekagonriver.org

"Namekagon" comes from the Ojibwe word "Namekaogong-sibi", meaning "river at the place abundant with sturgeon."

NATURALLY PRESERVED TROUT FISHERY **WINTER - HOT SPOTS** **RIVER OUTFITTERS**

LOCAL CONTEXT AND COMMUNITY

Nearby trail networks and county lands offer countless opportunities to enjoy the Northwoods beyond the boundaries of Wisdom Woods. Extensive biking, cross country ski, ATV and snowmobile trails, as well as the Namekagon River, are widely used by local residents and seasonal visitors.

Wisdom Woods is also committed to building mutually beneficial relationships in the community. In addition to developing authentic programming partnerships, Wisdom Woods should support local businesses and organizations in the area by hiring local vendors or service providers and sponsoring local events.

We must stay informed of local regulations and business developments in order to anticipate new opportunities or impacts on Wisdom Woods.

FINE + OAK BARRENS IN THE NORTHWEST SANDS ECOREGION

"The Northwest Sands is the best place in Wisconsin and, arguably, the planet to manage for the globally rare Fine Barrens community. Large-scale barrens management is possible here because of the ecological variability of the land, the presence of numerous remnants, and substantial public ownership."
- "Ecological Landscapes of Wisconsin" Ch. 17 Northwest Sands Ecological Landscape

FINE BARREN CHIMPHOTOS **EARLY PRAIRIE CLOVER** **SHARP MILKWEED**

EVERY STEP

MAINTENANCE MANUAL **INTRODUCTION**

WISDOM WOODS

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Wisdom Woods is located within the traditional homelands of the people of the Council of the Three Fires, the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa. Currently there are 11 federally recognized Native American sovereign nations in Wisconsin. We acknowledge these Indigenous communities who have stewarded this land throughout the generations and pay respect to their elders past and present.

EUROAMERICAN SETTLEMENT

British and French traders with the Northwestern and XY companies were the first Europeans to arrive in present-day Wisconsin. Euroamerican settlement began in the early nineteenth century, driven by the abundance of natural resources, land speculation, and the expansion of the railroad.

FUR TRADE **LOGGING + MINING** **LAND REDEVELOPMENT & FORTIFICATION** **RAILROADS**

"The relationship Americans sought with the Ojibwe differed dramatically from the relationships established between the Ojibwe and the French beginning in the seventeenth century and continuing later with the British. Both the French and the British recognized economic relationships with the Ojibwe founded on cooperation, as the Ojibwe traded beaver and other furs for technology useful in Ojibwe labor activities. Americans had little interest in economic relationships rooted in respect for Native sovereignty and sought to incorporate Native territory and remove Native peoples from the land."
- from the Murder of Joe White: Ojibwe Leadership and Colonialism in Wisconsin by Erik M. Redix

RAILROAD HISTORY

"1892, the Division Headquarters were moved from Chamberlain, and located here at Spooner, the center of the area... A large passenger depot, freight depot, express office, restaurant, switching yards, roundhouse, locomotive and car shops, lumberyards and Division Offices... were constructed. In all some 600 persons... were employed here during this time. Everyday eighteen passenger trains, eleven logging trains, ten freight trains, 4 section crews and 53 chain gang crews ran out of Spooner."
- SPOONER AND THE RAILROAD

MAINTENANCE MANUAL **INTRODUCTION**

SHEPHERDING THE VISION

The Wisdom Woods Maintenance Manual is a handy guide that helps both day-to-day operations and long-term planning to stay in line with the organization's mission and values. The Introduction chapter is used as part of the training for new and seasonal staff.



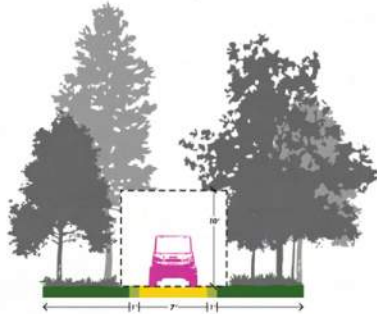
INFORMATION ON HAND

The manual is designed for convenience, consisting of a sturdy binder of standard-sized pages which can be edited and used on-site. The design team changed complex analysis and construction documents into clearer and simpler exhibits so that the Wisdom Woods team can quickly access vital information.

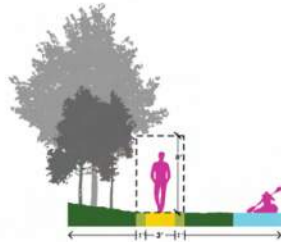


TYPICAL TRAIL WIDTHS + TYPOLOGIES

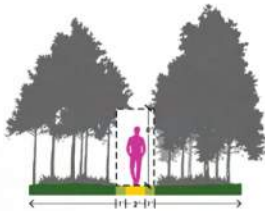
The following diagrams provide detailed considerations for constructing trails according to the established hierarchy and typologies. The primary distinction between trail typologies is trail width. Trail width responds to intended use of trail and character of surrounding vegetation and topography. In all scenarios, trails should respond to and respect existing conditions in order to preserve the natural character of Wisdom Woods.



RANGER TRAILS
vehicle & pedestrian routes
tread width - 7'
clearing width - 9' wide 10' high



SHORELINE TRAILS
pedestrian only
tread width - 3'
clearing width - 5' wide 8' high



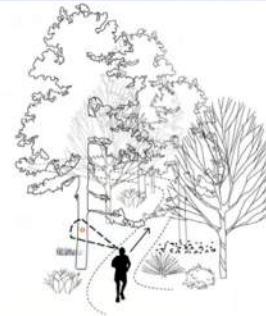
TRAILS THROUGH ASPEN THICKETS
pedestrian only
tread width - 2'
clearing width - 4' wide 8' high



RIDGELINE TRAILS
pedestrian only
tread width - 2'
clearing width - 4' wide 8' high
ideal slope - less than 10%

WAYFINDING LEVEL 1 - FOLLOWING TRAILS: TREE TAGS

"Am I still on the right path? Ah, yes! I see a tree tag up ahead, I will keep going!"



Tree tag markers reassure trail users that they are on the right path.

- **SPACING:** for most trails, locate one tag every 50 feet in both directions. For Connector Trails, locate every 30 feet in both directions.
- **MATERIALS:** printed on galvanized steel. It is rigid yet relatively lightweight and very flat with low thermal expansion so ideal for long term outdoor use. As an added feature the white elements are printed with a reflective 3M vinyl coating, helping the tree tags to stand out both day and night.
- **REORDER:** to order additional or new tags, contact Franklin Press located in Minneapolis, MN (phone number: 763-546-7656).



Red Pine Trail
75' spacing- 80 tags



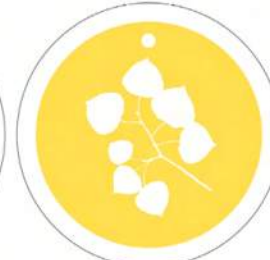
Red Pine Trail
50' spacing- 135 tags



Water's Edge Trail
50' spacing- 80 tags



Oak Canopy Tree
50' spacing- 82 tags



Connector
30' spacing- 97 tags



Northwoods Trail
100' spacing- 120 tags

FROM VISION TO IMPLEMENTATION

Colorful and engaging diagrams illustrate typologies and record critical dimensions and materials to facilitate phased implementation.



THE RIGHT FIT

The client's acceptance of the spiritual and intangible aspects of the retreat gave the landscape architect the opportunity to create special communication tools beyond a conventional result. These tools are grounded in a close relationship with the landscape, reflecting the collective knowledge and enthusiasm of the client, staff, and design team.