

# ABSTRACT

**PROJECT NAME:** Historic Fort Snelling at Bdote Revitalization

**LOCATION:** Minneapolis, MN

**ENTRY CATEGORY:** General Design

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION (100 words):**

Dakota elders tell of the creation of humans occurring in their homeland of Mni Sota Makoce (Land Where the Waters Reflect the Clouds). This sacred place is at Bdote, meaning the juncture of two bodies of water and refers to the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers. Historic Fort Snelling's newly restored prairies, paths, gathering spaces, overlooks, and messaging features are perched on the bluffs above Bdote, creating a landscape experience that describes the site's layered history as Dakota Homeland and a former military fort, where stories of Indigenous people, trade, soldiers, veterans, enslaved people, and immigrants now co-exist.

# NARRATIVE

## A CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Historic Fort Snelling is a short distance to the Twin Cities downtown cores, and it adjoins two park systems - Fort Snelling State Park and Minnehaha Regional Park. Perched on the bluffs above the rivers, the site provides an opportunity to convey deep history through tactile connections with the landscape.

The landscape at the Fort is an accumulation of the past; it bears the traces of physical, natural, and cultural influences over time. As a National Historic Landmark, the design follows recommendations set forth in the Cultural Landscape Report (CLR). The landscape architect worked with the client, engineers, architects, cultural landscape architects, and contractors throughout design and construction to minimize negative impacts on archaeology and to celebrate the natural and cultural significance of this place.

## A COMPLEX HISTORY

The Mississippi River was once a small tributary where Native people traded with each other for thousands of years. Europeans arrived in the 1600s, followed by fur traders, and in 1805, the U.S. Army built the Fort as a military post along the river.

Fort Snelling represents a complex and layered history, making it a painful and traumatic place for many people. This site bore witness to construction, violence, and injustice throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries: from the illegal enslavement of Black Americans at the Fort through 1858 and the U.S.-Dakota War that violently and tragically altered Native American communities in 1862, to the Fort's service as a Military Intelligence Service Language School to train Japanese language interpreters and interrogators in the 1940s.

The landscape architects worked to design a new landscape with integrated messaging that brings depth to the cultural understanding and diverse perspectives of the many people who have been part of the Fort's remarkable history.

## CONNECTING PEOPLE TO PLACE

Cultural connections to this place hold great importance to communities who were not engaged in decisions about the site's use and treatment over the past century. Essential to the revitalization project was extensive collaboration and co-design through partnership with the Dakota Community Council (DCC - a representative entity of multiple nations with ties to this land whose passionate connections to this place provide the basis of its significance), the Minnesota Historical Society (client), and community participants.

## **NARRATIVE** *continued*

### **REVITALIZATION PROJECT**

The revitalization project includes the removal of a failing 1980s underground visitor center and creation of the dynamic new Plank Museum & Visitor Center inside a rehabilitated 1904 cavalry barracks. A new network of paths weave across the landscape to connect the historic buildings with new gathering spaces in more intuitive and meaningful ways. A re-configured parking lot and simplified arrival sequence bring visitors to the Hale Welcome Plaza where they are immediately grounded in the site's history as Dakota homeland. River overlooks along the bluff provide a range of places for groups of different sizes to connect to the river and gather.

The western end of the site hosts a large teaching lawn with a stone fire slab for ceremonies, flanked by foraging plants and picnic tables. The eastern end of the site is home to the Wokiksuye (Place of Remembrance), a circular memorial space embraced by two arching berms planted with healing and protector plants such as red-twig dogwood, sweetgrass, and white sage. This space pays tribute the generations who lived, died, labored, and learned here; to recognize the pain, loss, and sacrifice of those connected to this place.

### **PRAIRIE RESTORATION AND RESILIENCE**

One of the most significant contributions to the site's transformation is the expansive restored savanna, woodland, prairie, and wet meadow landscapes that extends from east to west across the site. The landscape architects worked to curate a resilient plant palette using several tools: historic inventories of plants that were catalogued here in the 19th century, culturally significant plant lists from Dakota elders, and climate change research showing how the hardiness zones within the river valley is shifting over time.

### **WEAVING LANDSCAPE AND STORIES TOGETHER**

As a symbol of colonialism and destruction for Native culture, it is essential for this landscape to become a space where Dakota and other Native peoples can feel like they belong. Prior to this project, commemoration and interpretation focused on stories of westward expansion and military history. The landscape architects worked with the Ina Maka subcommittee, DCC, and Indigenous artists to incorporate Dakota language, knowledge, and worldviews into the narratives, images, experience, and dynamic prairie landscape, now providing informed, honest, empathic, and respectful accounts of a difficult past while offering spaces for reflection and healing.



## WELCOME PLAZA

Visitors are immediately grounded in the site's history as Dakota homeland. A bronze inlay of Bdote marks the sacredness of the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers. The site provides an opportunity to convey deep history through tactile connections with the landscape.





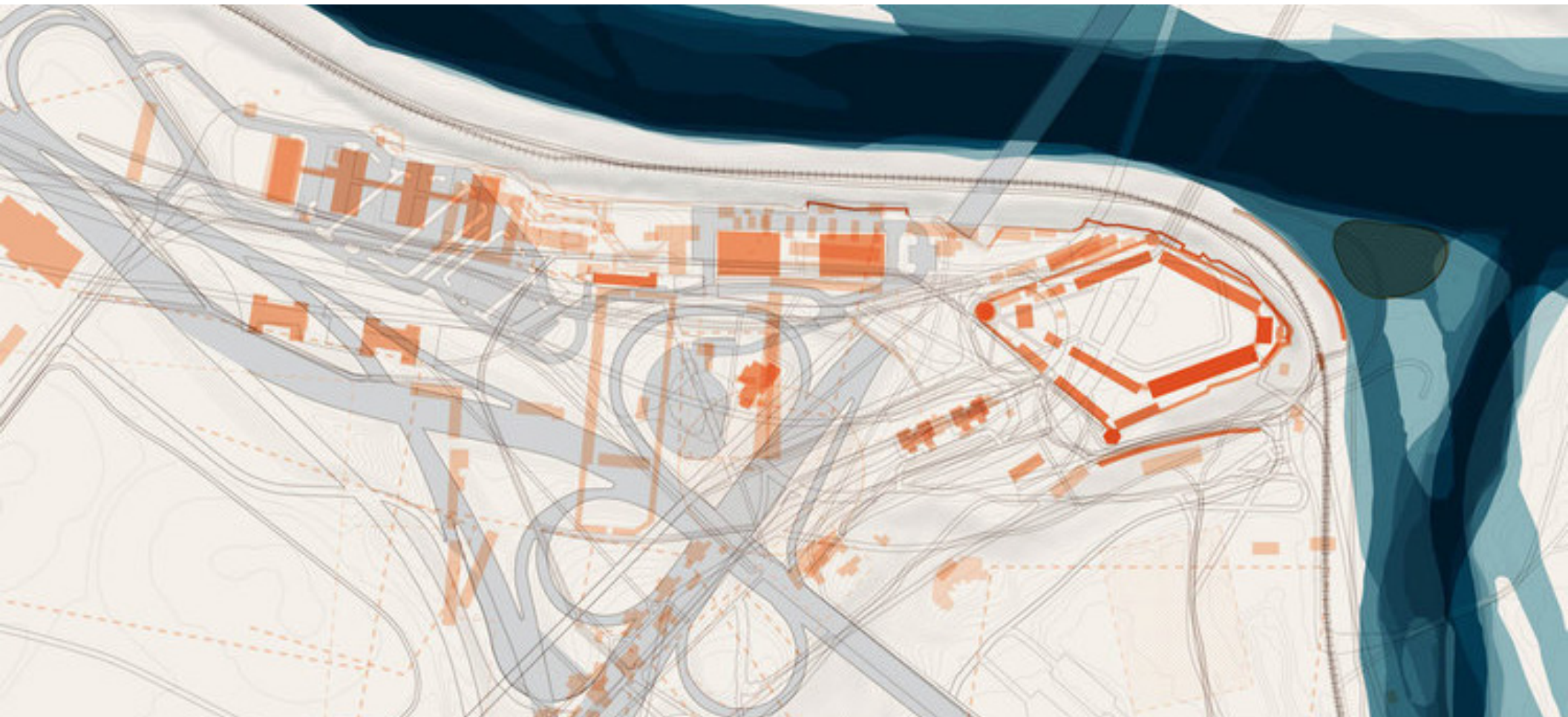
The Concentration Camp, 1862 or 1863  
Source: MNHS Collections



View of Fort Snelling from Pike's Island  
Painter: Seth Eastman  
Source: MNHS Collections



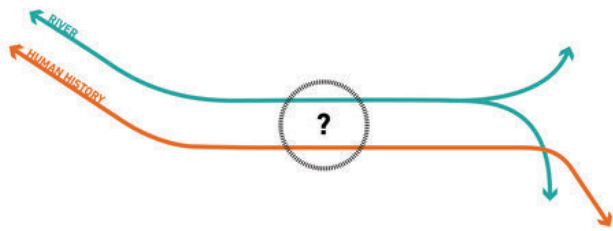
Company B of the Twenty-Fifth United States Infantry, 1883  
Source: MNHS Collections



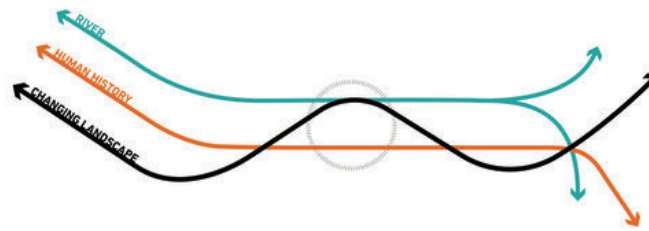
## A LAYERED HISTORY

The landscape at the Fort is an accumulation of the past; it bears the traces of physical, natural, and cultural influences over time. As a National Historic Landmark, the design follows recommendations set forth in the Cultural Landscape Report.





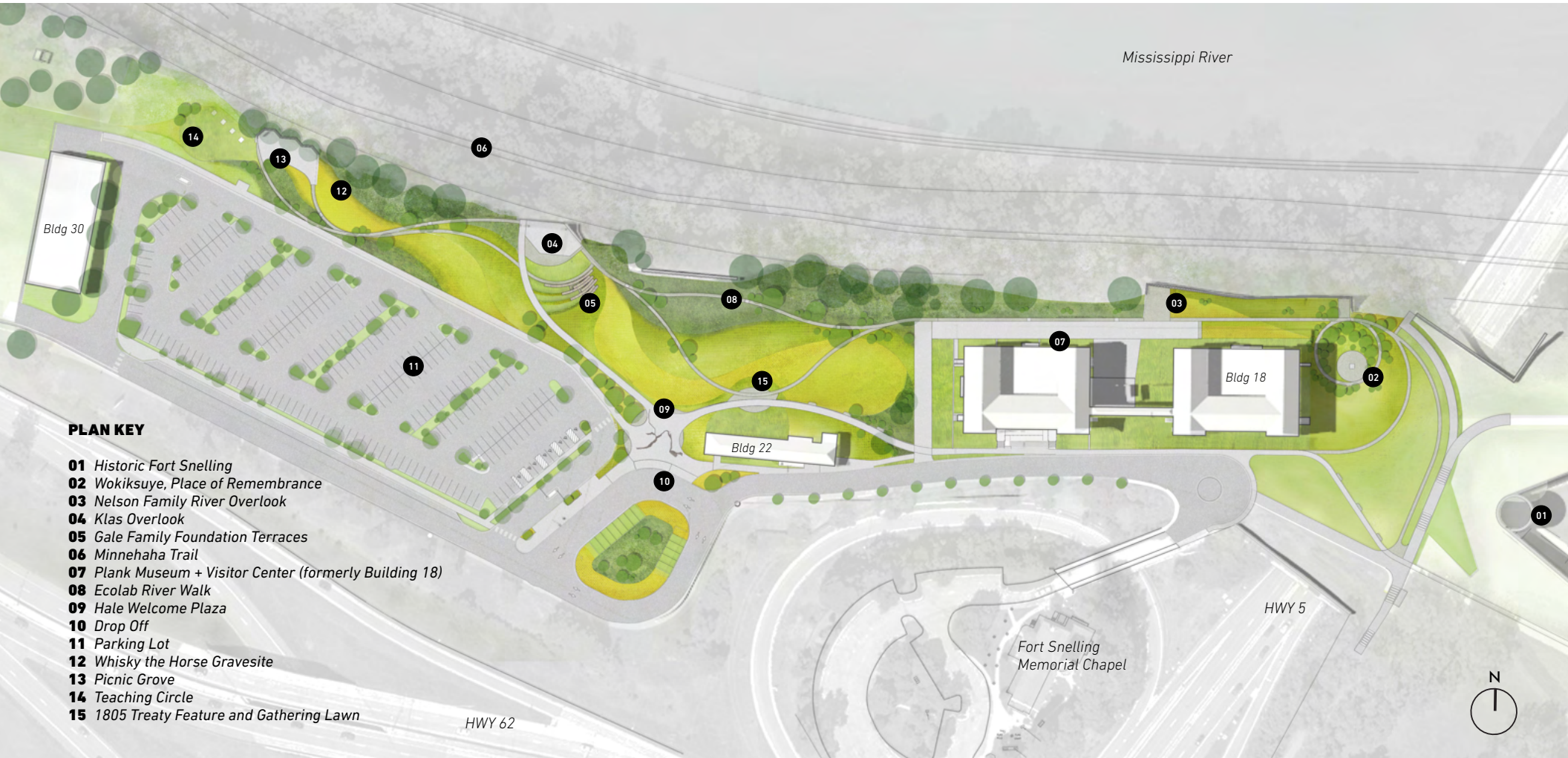
**HOW DOES DESIGN CAPTURE THE MEANING OF PLACE?**



**CAN THE LANDSCAPE INSPIRE KINSHIP?**



**WEAVING CULTURE AND ECOLOGY TOGETHER FOR RESILIENT FUTURES**



**PLAN KEY**

- 01 Historic Fort Snelling
- 02 Wokiksuye, Place of Remembrance
- 03 Nelson Family River Overlook
- 04 Klas Overlook
- 05 Gale Family Foundation Terraces
- 06 Minnehaha Trail
- 07 Plank Museum + Visitor Center (formerly Building 18)
- 08 Ecolab River Walk
- 09 Hale Welcome Plaza
- 10 Drop Off
- 11 Parking Lot
- 12 Whisky the Horse Gravesite
- 13 Picnic Grove
- 14 Teaching Circle
- 15 1805 Treaty Feature and Gathering Lawn

**SITE PLAN**

Newly restored prairies, paths, gathering spaces, overlooks, and messaging features are perched on the bluffs above Bdote, creating a landscape experience that describes the site's history as Dakota Homeland and a former military fort, where stories of Indigenous people, trade, soldiers, veterans, enslaved people, and immigrants now co-exist.





## RIVER OVERLOOK

Historic Fort Snelling is a short distance to the Twin Cities downtown cores. The Klas Overlook is anchored into the foundations of the former visitor center and cantilevers over the edge of the bluff, providing sweeping views of the Mississippi River and the Minneapolis skyline.





## **CONNECTIONS TO THE RIVER**

Dakota have ancient and sacred relations with Bdote. Cultural connections to this place hold great importance to communities who weren't engaged in decisions about the site's use and treatment over the past century. Essential to the revitalization project was collaboration and co-design with the Dakota Community Council.





## LIMESTONE TERRACES

Limestone terraces create a small amphitheater, providing space for groups to gather for tours, performances, classes, and individual reflection. The terraces overlook the edge of the bluff with sweeping views of the Minneapolis skyline.





## MITAKUYE OWASIN

A central part of the Dakota worldview is Mitakuye Owasin (We are All Related), which honors the interconnectedness of all living beings.





## TEACHING LAWN

The western end of the site hosts a large teaching lawn, flanked by foraging plants such as chokecherry trees and wild strawberries, a stone fire slab for ceremonies, and picnic tables in a grove of honey locust trees.





### **WOKIKSUYE (PLACE OF REMEMBRANCE)**

The eastern end of the site, adjacent to the stone walls of the Historic Fort, is home to the Wokiksuye (Place of Remembrance), a circular memorial space embraced by two arching berms planted with healing and protector plants such as red-twig dogwood, sweetgrass, and white sage.



## 6. PLANT NATIONS

Mitakuye Owasin

Resiliency of Indigenous Ecological Communities

Cultural Significance of Plants: sensory, reflective, protector, forage

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD + CHOKECHERRY**



chokecherry  
forage

**MONARCH BUTTERFLY + MILKWEED**



milkweed  
sensory

**BEE + NARROW LEAVED CONEFLOWER**



narrow-leaved  
coneflower  
protector

**DEER + EARLY MEADOW RUE**

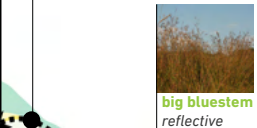


early meadow rue  
sensory

**EAGLE + COTTONWOOD**



cottonwood  
forage



big bluestem  
reflective



white sage  
protector



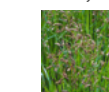
little bluestem  
protector



wild bergamot  
reflective



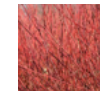
mountain mint  
sensory



sweet grass  
reflective



blue  
vervain  
protector



red-osier dogwood  
protector

## MESSAGING FEATURES



River Overlook



BdotE Map



1805 Treaty



Wokiksuye



Plant and Animal Nations



Collective Voices

## PLANT COMMUNITIES



Oak Savanna



Mesic Prairie



Woodlands

(Oak-Aspen, Oak-Basswood, Floodplain)

## 5. WOKIKSUYE

A Place to Remember  
Protect, Honor and Respect  
A Memorial to the Execution of  
Shakopee and Medicine Bottle

## 1. RIVER OVERLOOK

Changing Landscapes  
Deep Time

## 2. BDOT

Dakota Homeland  
Mni Sota Makoce

## 3. 1805 TREATY

Why Treaties Matter  
Exile and Loss  
Indigenous Sovereignty

## 4. COLLECTIVE VOICES

Human Histories Over Time  
HOPE: Peter Lengkeek  
IDENTITY: Sue Kato  
SERVICE: Clifford Brunzell  
SACRIFICE: Maurice Masterson  
PERSEVERANCE: Felix Battles  
PRIDE: Terri Winter

## WEAVING LANDSCAPE AND STORIES TOGETHER

As a symbol of colonialism and destruction for Native culture, it was essential that this landscape become a space where Dakota people can come and feel like they belong. In co-creation with Indigenous partners, Dakota knowledge is integrated into the narratives, experiences, and dynamic prairie landscape.





## **PATHWAYS**

The design team worked to reshape the experience of this landscape, drawing from oral history of human movement throughout the river valleys, and create a new system of woven pathways that dance along the bluff edge – moving to the river, back through the prairie, and to the river again.





*Solidago rigida*, Stiff Goldenrod



*Schyzachyrium scoparium*, Little Bluestem



*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*, New England Aster



*Cornus sericea*, Red-osier Dogwood



*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*, Aromatic Aster



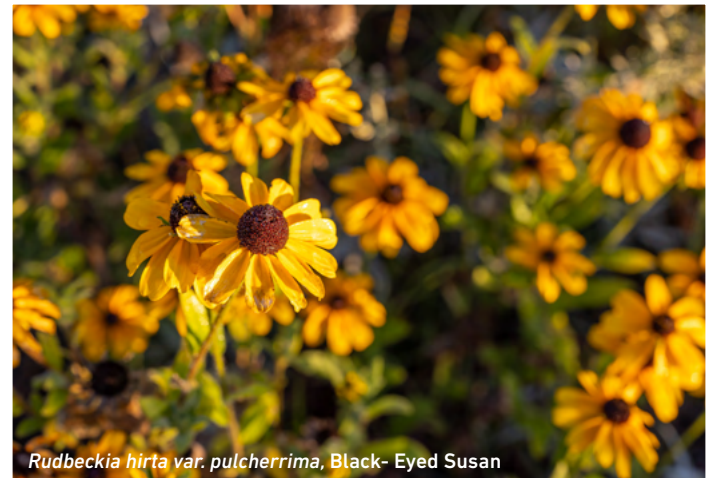
*Artemisia ludoviciana*, White Sage



*Hierochloa odorata*, Sweet Grass



*Symphyotrichum shortii*, Short's Aster



*Rudbeckia hirta* var. *pulcherrima*, Black-Eyed Susan

## THE PRAIRIE

A resilient plant palette for the prairie restoration was created using three tools: historic inventories of plants from the 19th century, culturally significant plant lists from Dakota elders, and research showing how the hardiness zones within the river valley is shifting over time due to climate change.



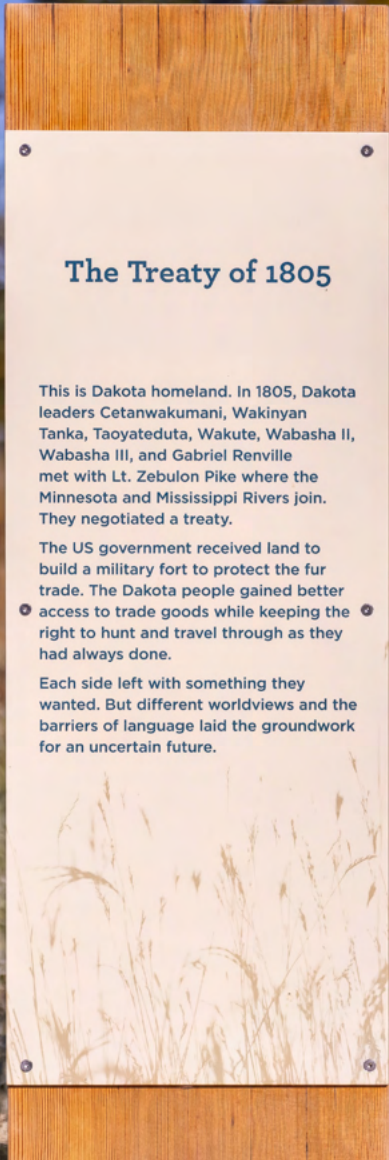
THE UNITED STATES **PROMISES** ON THEIR PART **TO PERMIT** THE SIOUX **TO PASS AND REPASS, HUNT**  
OR MAKE OTHER USES OF THE SAID DISTRICTS **AS THEY HAVE FORMERLY DONE**



**THE 1805 TREATY: DO YOU KNOW YOUR TREATY RIGHTS?**

The 1805 Treaty feature explores how treaties laid the groundwork for an uncertain future between settlers and the Dakota people, and fundamentally severed their access to and relationship with their homelands.





## MESSAGING FEATURES

Through engagement and co-development, messaging features do not hide or ignore the tensions and discomfort that exists here. The goal for messaging is to inspire a better future by providing a place to learn, share, and connect to all the complex stories that shape history in Minnesota.





## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND HEALING**

The restored landscape now offers informed, honest, and respectful accounts of a difficult past and provides spaces for reflection and healing. Extensive prairie restoration and culturally significant plantings offer an immersive sensory experience that is dynamic across the seasons.