MINNESOTA VALLEY TRUST
Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc.

NEWS RELEASE

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Environmental Education Center Wins Federal Energy Award

Carver, MN **–** The new Environmental Education and Visitor Center built along the Minnesota River near the Cities of Carver and Jordan has been recognized for federal leadership in sustainable design. The US Department of the Interior recently awarded the design and construction team a Federal Energy and Water Management Award at an event in Washington, DC. The building was just one of five to receive the award for sustainable design and high performance buildings in its category.

The Rapids Lake Education and Visitor Center is located on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge in Carver County, and operated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. It was opened to the public in October 2007.

Actual performance measurement of the building shows that it is using 60% less energy and has a "carbon footprint" that is 60% below a similar building constructed to meet energy code. The building also uses 57% less water than comparable facilities.

Total energy cost savings during the 12 months of 2008 were $10,398. The ground-source geothermal heating and cooling system alone will save over $1 million in energy costs over the expected life of the equipment.

The building was constructed by the Minnesota Valley Trust, Inc., a nonprofit organization, for the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Charlie Blair, manager of the refuge, said "This building's design and performance has substantially exceeded Federal energy performance requirements, and Minnesota's Energy Code. It does twice as well as the as the 2005 Energy Policy Act, and four times as well as a typical Minnesota building."

The Minneapolis architecture firm of Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle, Ltd (MS&R) led the design team for the 12,117 square foot building. MS&R founding principal, Tom Meyer said, "The design team really focused on working with the unique environmental ecological characteristics of the site. The site design incorporates five large rainwater gardens to address stormwater runoff from the road, parking areas, and the building. And the engineering team worked hard to make sure no soils were imported or exported to the site for construction."

Buffalo Grass was installed around the building because it requires very little watering and maintenance. A wetland, upland prairie and oak savannah are all being restored on the site, creating high quality wildlife habitat and on-site education and demonstration opportunities for the public.

"It was clear that the USFWS and the Trust were interested in developing a building that not only fit into the natural context of the site, but there was a sincere commitment to reduce the energy and carbon footprint of the project," says Sean Wagner, MS&R's Director of Sustainable Design. "The Center has passive low energy design features, including natural day-lighting and thermal mass storage in the 12-inch thick concrete floor slabs. The attitude about reducing 'consumption' in the building also helped us aggressively reduce water consumption. The building is equipped throughout with dual-flush toilets, waterless urinals, and ultra-low flow faucets and showerheads, saving nearly 33,000 gallons of water per year."

Other energy-saving features include a ground-source heat pump, energy recovery outside air system, radiant fin tube heating at windows to supplement building heat, demand-based tankless domestic water heaters, super insulation, building automation controls such as programmable thermostats and occupancy sensors, energy-efficient lighting (T-8 "green tip" lamps and electronic ballasts, LED exit and exterior pathway lighting), indirect office lighting with user operated task lighting, timers for night set-back operation, and spectrally selective low "E" glazing.

Project team members also included the local firms of Gunderson Construction (general contractor), Nelson, Tietz & Hoye (owner's representative), Karges-Falconbridge (mechanical engineering) and Close Landscape Architecture and Barr Engineering (site design).
