



# Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden Boardwalk

Cunningham Group - Landscape Architecture Studio

# Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden Boardwalk

Cunningham Group - Landscape Architecture Studio

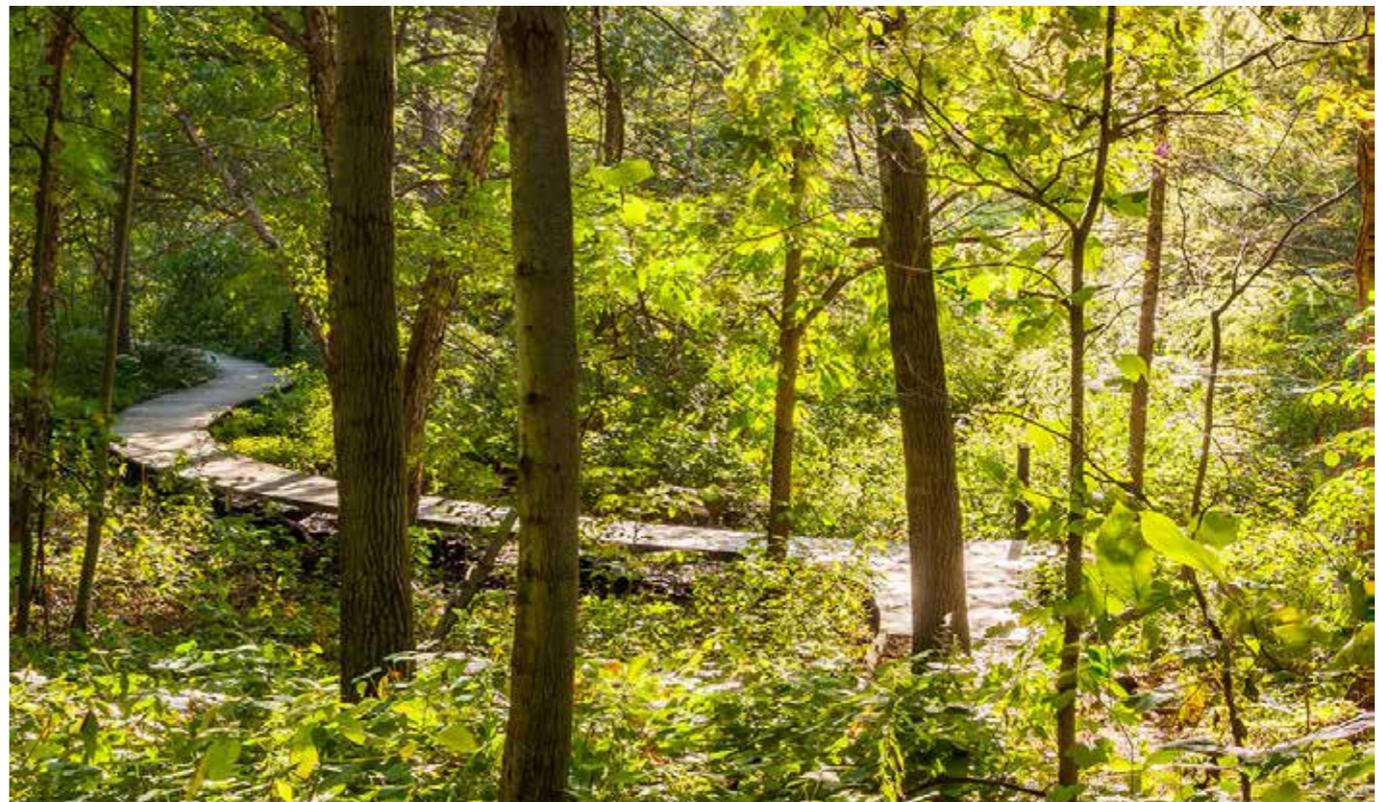
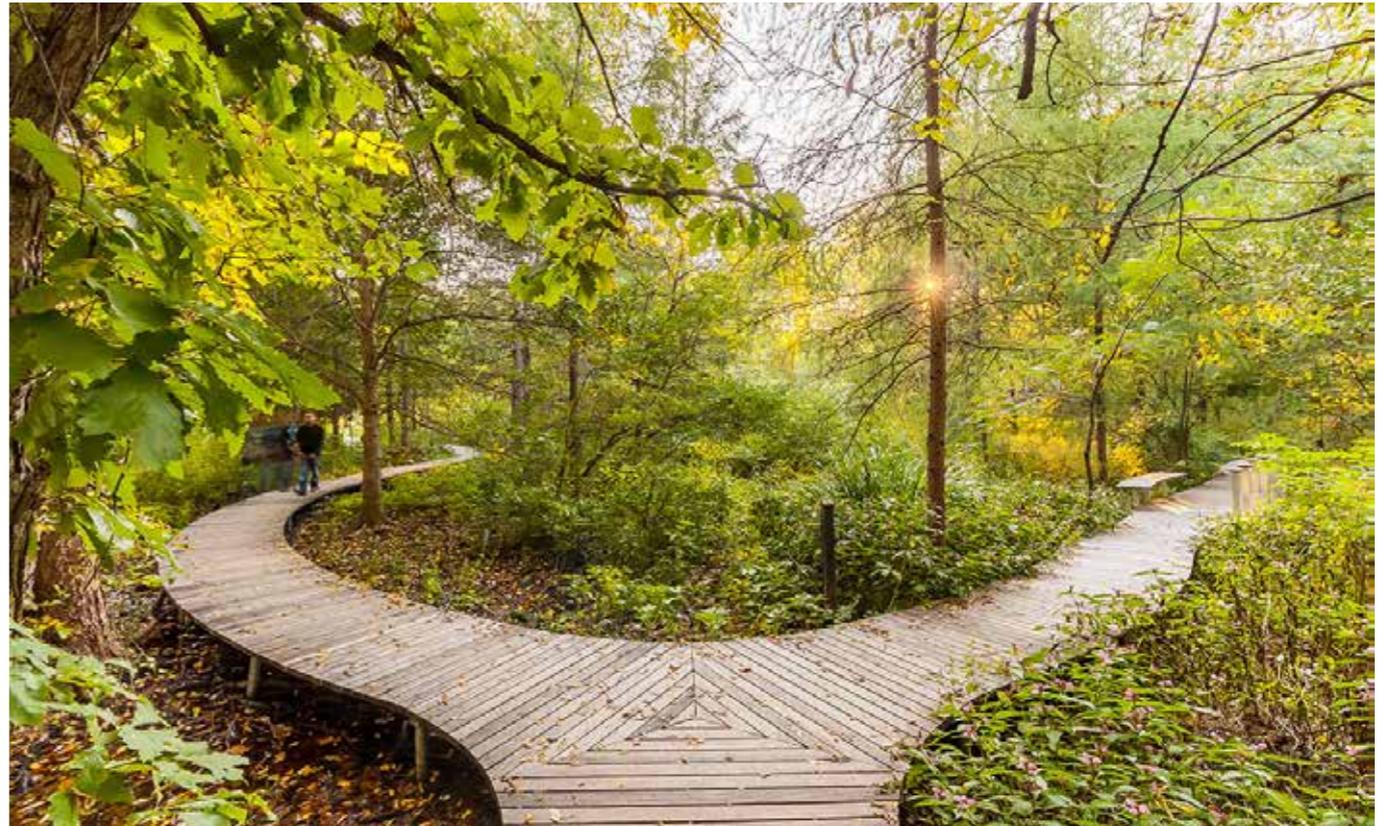
The Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, established in 1907, is the first and oldest public wildflower garden in the United States. The 15-acre garden is located within Theodore Wirth Regional Park in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The garden is home to more than 500 plant species and 130 bird species nestled within woodland, wetland, and prairie habitats. It receives 60,000 visitors each year.

Popular among visitors, a vital pathway connecting trail segments in the heart of the garden, including a bridge structure, was in much need of enhancement. The scope of the project was to design a boardwalk plan for the wetland area that could easily be phased in as budget allowed. The newly designed enhancements were to be durable, safe, functional and integrate with the natural beauty and context of the garden.

In collaboration with the garden's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), multiple design charrettes and visioning sessions were held to gather a deep understanding for what type of story needed to be told with this boardwalk. What emerged was a need for simplicity. The garden was the star and needed to have opportunities for telling its story.

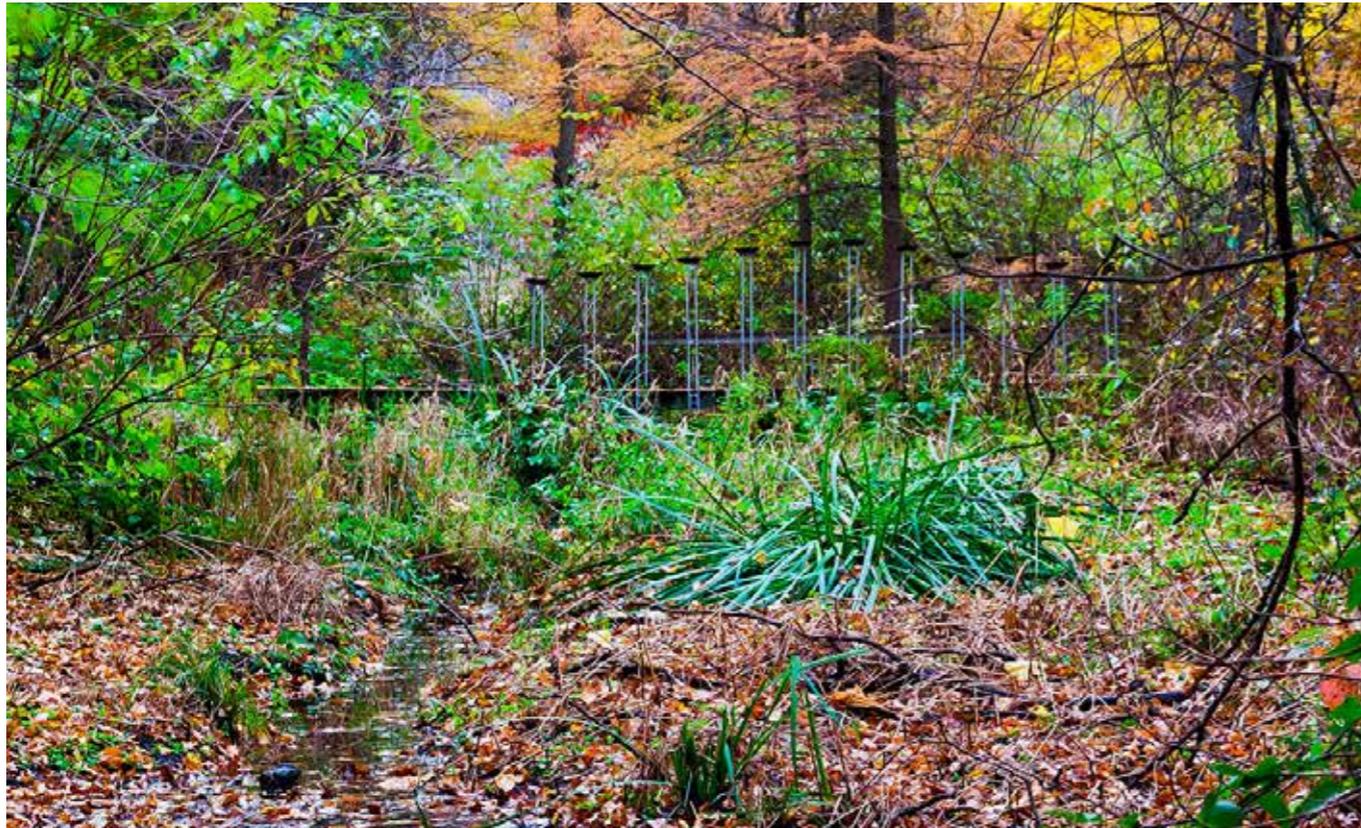
The boardwalk's program is clear and simple - to serve as a means for visitors to access, savor, and study the beauty and diversity of wetland flora and fauna found in the garden. The visioning sessions and existing policy spelled out the desire for a wood walkway with minimal detailing that remained as narrow as possible. Full-scale paper models were created and unrolled at meetings and along the existing trail, where TAC participants were encouraged to walk along the paper model, taking note of width and scale. Ease of fabrication and the ability to add future segments or decorative/educational elements without effort was essential. Gathering spaces along the boardwalk's path were also desired for garden tours.

From the selection of materials, to the width and detailing of the integral benches and camera posts, no decision or detail was taken for granted. Cunningham Group and the Technical Advisory Group took into consideration that any built work in this setting, a garden so cherished by the community, would be viewed under a close lens. The design that emerged was a unique curved modular system of 4-foot wide boardwalk segments which allowed for ease of assembly and for quick directional changes, simply by flipping segments. The bridge segment and its railings were designed to recede into the surrounding landscape – reinforcing the designer's intention of a minimalist approach.



# Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden Boardwalk

Cunningham Group - Landscape Architecture Studio



In order to preserve historical growth, the boardwalk was sited to follow the existing 'Lady's Slipper Lane' as closely as possible. One new deviation in the path was added to protect sensitive plants. This new path segment winds out and through a grove of trees, adding a gentle curve and sense of mystery to the boardwalk's trajectory. Three-inch diameter galvanized steel poles, driven to resistance, hold up each boardwalk segment, guaranteeing that the actual area of structure touching the ground is very minimal. The flexibility of the deck's frame allows for easy adjustment of deck panels should they shift.

The landscape architect and team added to the unique story of the garden by using reclaimed ash wood from the Park Board in each curve segment. Local mills were used to create the lumber. A company from Duluth, Minnesota that thermally modifies the molecular structure of wood to make it highly resistant to water was able to continue the transformation into finished decking for the boardwalk.

Due to the sensitive plant communities present, installation was accomplished within the 4-foot wide space of the existing path. Where new alignment occurred, installers took care so as not to inadvertently destroy existing plant communities. This need for care meant no motorized equipment could be used. All boardwalk segments were carried in by hand. As each segment was installed, the crew then used the newly created boardwalk to traverse the space and put the next consecutive segment into place.



Eloise Butler was the garden's first curator and tended it until her death in 1933. The boardwalk bridge, designed collaboratively with the client and the TAC, is dedicated to the fourth curator, Cary George. As the first phase of this project was completed, a ribbon cutting and dedication ceremony was held to celebrate Mr. George.

Since its opening the boardwalk has garnered high praise for its appropriate response to the stunning surroundings it sits within. It melds with the environment magically, offering new generations of visitors a chance to discover the wild mysteries along its gentle curves

# Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden Boardwalk

Cunningham Group - Landscape Architecture Studio



## ELOISE BUTLER WILDFLOWER GARDEN + BIRD SANCTUARY - WETLAND BOARDWALK MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA, USA

Design Firm | Cunningham Group Architecture, Inc. - Landscape Architecture Studio  
David Motzenbecker, James Robin, Bret Wieseler  
Consultants  
Wickcraft Company, Madison, Wisconsin (Boardwalk Fabricator)  
Trail Source, Rosemount, Minnesota (Boardwalk Installer)  
Conservation Corps Minnesota and Iowa, Saint Paul, Minnesota (Installation (w/Trail Source))  
Meyer Borgman and Johnson, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota (Structural Engineers)  
Pierce Pini & Associates, Inc., Blaine, Minnesota (Civil Engineering)  
Arbor Wood, Duluth, Minnesota (Thermally Treated Wood Provider)  
Intectural, Duluth, Minnesota (Sales Rep for Arbor Wood)  
Hillside Harvest, LLC., Brooklyn Park, Minnesota (Lumber Milling)  
Scheffel Construction, Minneapolis, Minnesota (Lumber Milling)  
Project Technical Advisory Committee, Minneapolis, Minnesota (Project Advisory Participants)  
Friends of the Wild Flower Garden, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota (Project Advisory Participants and Donors)

Client | Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board  
Andrea Weber, Project Manager  
Susan Wilkins, Garden Curator

Photographer | Cunningham Group Architecture, Inc.

