

Executive Summary

Bird- and Wildlife-Friendly Recommendations for the Proposed Vantage Data Centers Development – Port Washington, WI

Introduction

The proposed Vantage Data Centers project is located within the Lake Michigan flyway, a vital link in the Western Hemisphere migration system. This corridor supports millions of birds traveling north to breeding grounds and south to wintering areas. While the current site is agricultural land with limited habitat value, the project offers an opportunity to improve conditions for birds and wildlife if designed thoughtfully. Without careful planning, however, the development could negatively impact migratory and resident bird populations. Vantage's commitments—wetlands, native plants, thousands of trees, bird-friendly glass, LEED certification, and downlighting—create a strong foundation to build upon.

Key Focus Areas

Vegetation Restoration and Management

- Establish a 5+ year vegetative maintenance program led by a qualified environmental contractor, with flexibility to adapt practices as site conditions and climate change.
- Use native species across canopy, understory, and groundcover layers, with at least 10% climate-resilient plantings.
- Integrate a comprehensive invasive species plan targeting buckthorn, honeysuckle, reed canary grass, phragmites, purple loosestrife, multiflora rose, and autumn olive.

Wetlands

- Design wetlands for both stormwater management and migratory bird habitat.
- Incorporate control structures for shallow water/mudflat creation during migration.
- Use diverse vegetation for nesting, foraging, and brood-rearing.
- Enhance water quality using green infrastructure such as rain gardens, bioswales, filter strips, porous pavement, and native wetland plants.

Tree Planting

- Plant diverse native trees and shrubs with companion understory species to mimic Wisconsin plant communities.
- Incorporate design elements like clustering, feathered edges, hedgerows, and oak openings.
- Ensure long-term stewardship, integrating green infrastructure features (e.g., bioswales, rain gardens) where feasible.

Building Design: Glass and Lighting

- Apply bird-friendly glass and downlighting throughout.
- Use guidance from ABC experts to implement the most effective collision deterrence

strategies.

- Exceed LEED Bird Collision Deterrence credit requirements so that all glass and lighting meet bird-friendly standards.

Habitat Connectivity

- Place wetlands, tree clusters, and plantings to enhance connectivity as stepping-stone habitats.
- Provide opportunities for monitoring and research with Lake Michigan Bird Observatory, universities, and conservation partners.

Leveraging Environmental Investment

- Use Vantage's environmental commitments as in-kind match for conservation grants.
- Potentially leverage millions in additional funding for restoration projects and partnerships with NRCS, USFWS, and local groups.

Partnership and Community Engagement

- Partner with regional nonprofits advancing bird and wildlife conservation.
- Provide opportunities for community education, volunteer events, nest box monitoring, and bird banding.
- Consider a bird-friendly neurodiversity nature trail with ADA-compliant features and partnerships with Balance Inc. and Portal Industries.
- Add employee wellness features such as outdoor seating, walking paths, and nature-viewing areas to benefit health, retention, and morale.