



# the Meadowlark

A PUBLICATION FROM BELWIN CONSERVANCY

FALL 2018/WINTER 2019

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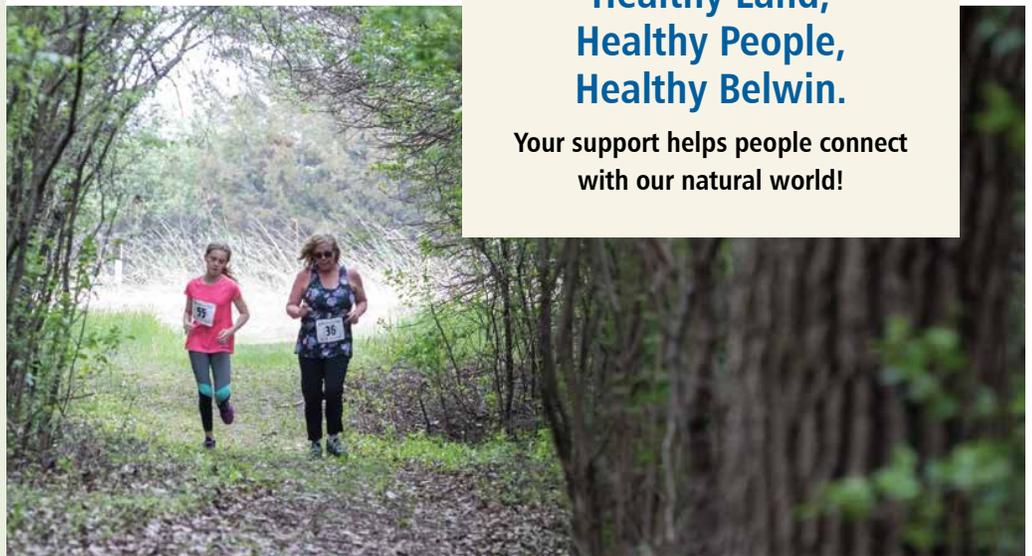
**Healthy Land,  
Healthy People,  
Healthy Belwin.**

Your support helps people connect  
with our natural world!



## Fun Fact:

On your next hike keep an eye out for ball-like growths on the Canada Goldenrod. These Galls are a cozy winter home for several kinds of insect larva. Chickadees and Downy Woodpeckers search these out for a tasty treat inside!



**BELWIN  
CONSERVANCY**  
*Inspiring through Nature*



# Making Connections, Inspiring Stewardship



## EACH MORNING WHEN I ARRIVE AT BELWIN, I step out of my car and pause.

I breathe in the morning air, feel the breeze, listen to the birds, and notice the position of the sun in relation to the pond. I feel some anticipation about the day as my mind ticks through the long to-do list. But this moment of pause helps me focus. It reminds me that human connections to nature inspire care for the land. It's why I'm at Belwin, and it's the mission I'm working toward. It gives me perspective, patience, and peace.

As I begin my tenure leading Belwin, I find myself searching for something I can point to, a story that inspired my own connection to nature. But I can't find it. There is no one moment, because nature has been all around me since my childhood: playing in the woods, skiing, riding horses, entire days spent outside wandering our neighborhood. I didn't realize what effect that constant presence of nature had on me until I was an adult. Now, one of my most central values is

caring for nature so I can pass it along to my children and others.

My story is a familiar one that you might hear from any number of people. My brother, two sisters and I grew up with fewer distractions and restrictions for our play. Today, in an age of technology, structured programming, and constant supervision, too few young people get those everyday, casual interactions with our natural world. We must now be more deliberate about inspiring a connection to nature. That's why Belwin becomes more important every year.

You'll read in this issue of *The Meadowlark* about the work Belwin is doing to restore the health of the Valley Creek watershed, the personal health benefits from being in nature, connecting to nature through the arts, the impact of our education partnership with Saint Paul Public Schools, and the many supporters of Belwin who make it all possible. We're already spreading that connection to nature, and you are part of it.

We are now poised to grow and build on that success. In the coming months and years, you'll hear that we're working to expand our reach, inviting more people to visit Belwin, and intentionally becoming more accessible. We provide the opportunity for a connection that's unique – one that touches the heart, feeds the soul, and fosters an appreciation for something bigger than ourselves. We have the potential to spread the value of environmental stewardship globally, locally, and personally.

I hope you'll join me in sharing Belwin with others.



*Katie Bloome*

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# The St. Croix Connection

*Belwin's work to protect the prized Valley Creek has big benefits downstream in the Wild & Scenic River it joins.*

By Greg Seitz

**VALLEY CREEK IS CLEAN AND HEALTHY**, but it really shouldn't be...

The headwaters of the cold and crystal-clear stream are found at the edge of the Twin Cities urban core. The surrounding landscape is developed in ways that often cause excessive sediment and nutrients in such waters.

Yet, Valley Creek is one of the healthiest trout streams in the state, maybe the country. It's like Serena Williams living in a house with McDonald's on one side and Taco Bell on the other.

The creek is home to native brook trout, as well as introduced rainbow and brown trout. The fish reproduce naturally, requiring no stocking, a rare feat for a fragile, spring-fed stream where too much silt could bury riffles required for eggs, where groundwater changes can reduce flows or raise temperatures.

Along Valley Creek, a complex web of life that is highly sensitive to small changes has been in Belwin's stewardship since 1958, when the Bell family first acquired property along the creek.



Photo by Greg Seitz.

## Perpetual protection

One day last August, Belwin's operations director Justin Sykora walked along the banks of the creek, as a crew from Prairie Restorations worked to control invasive buckthorn nearby.

The area had been choked with the non-native brush until January 2018, when 30 acres were cleared. Now, herbicides were being used to suppress regrowth, giving native species a chance to take hold.

The crew was using a special chemical approved by the Environmental Protection Agency for use near water. While the restoration is intended to help Valley Creek, steps were also needed to prevent the work from contaminating the stream.

"Valley Creek is really a treasure to have on our property at Belwin, and we work hard to protect it and preserve it all the way down to the St. Croix River," Justin says. "By getting rid of the buckthorn and everything else in here, we're trying to improve the water quality that eventually ends up in the St. Croix."

Justin pointed to the bank near a bend in the creek, where bright red flowers jutted up on tall stems. It was cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), a beautiful native plant that only grows as far west as the St. Croix Valley and its tributaries, like Valley Creek.

Belwin had no idea cardinal flower grew along the creek until the buckthorn was removed. That was a symptom of the larger problem: the brush shaded out flowers and grasses that normally would grow along the creek, holding soil in place. Buckthorn made it much easier for the banks to erode into the creek.

Read an extended version of this article online at [belwin.org](http://belwin.org).

Belwin would like to thank the Conservation Partners Legacy Grant Program for funding our work on the Valley Creek woodland restoration project. This work would not have been possible without their support.



## Give to the Max this November!

Belwin relies on your generous support to protect land, restore habitat, care for threatened species, and teach about the importance of nature. Give to the Max Day is your chance to have a big impact on our work.

Belwin's Board of Directors will match all gifts during Give to the Max, doubling the impact of your contribution. Join, renew, or give an additional gift and see your dollars protect habitat and wildlife.

**give TO THE MAX**  
NOV. 15, 2018

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <b>What</b>  | Give to the Max  |
| <b>When</b>  | November 1–15, 2018  |
| <b>How</b>   | Donate online at <a href="http://belwin.org/support">belwin.org/support</a> or mail a check to 1553 Stagecoach Trail S., Afton, MN 55001 |
| <b>Why</b>   | To help Belwin restore and preserve important habitat.   |
| <b>Bonus</b> | Your donation will be matched, doubling your impact!   |



# Healing & the Natural World

By Lynette Anderson, *Interpretive Naturalist*

“Wilderness is a spiritual necessity, an antidote to the high pressure modern life, a means of regaining serenity and equilibrium.”

– Sigurd Olson



Photos by Greg Seitz.

I BELIEVE IT IS A COMMON THING for many of us to seek the wild places when we are stressed, hoping to find relief, respite, or a sense of inner peace.

What is it about the natural world that helps us to find this calmer state of being?

Perhaps it is the science, that tells us we are made of the same stuff as nature and therefore co-evolved. Perhaps it is the spiritual because we are close to the works of the Divine. Perhaps it is a bit of both.

Even without all of the testimonials and published science, we know that what our own bodies tell us is true: time spent in nature reduces stress and lowers blood pressure, heart rate and muscle tension, lifts the spirit, increases energy, and adds to a sense of grounding and well-being.

Other cultures have long had traditions of being in nature for health and healing. In India, yoga can be practiced out of doors to accentuate the healing from the postures. In China, Tai Chi is practiced by large groups in beautiful parks. From Japan, *Shinrin-yoku*, or the art of forest bathing, is now a growing trend in the United States as a way to connect with the natural world and regain some peace of mind.

While the business of everyday life can be depleting, nature is replenishing. The woods, prairies, and waters don't force us to direct our attention to specific tasks. We are, instead, free to let our minds wander unhindered by the onslaught of paying attention that our current world demands.

Belwin Conservancy offers many opportunities to be inspired and restored by nature. Please join us.

Visit [belwin.org/events](http://belwin.org/events) to see all upcoming events.

## Science Comes to Life at Belwin

A 47-year partnership with Saint Paul Public Schools helps students connect with nature.

By Kate Seitz

MAY VANG VISITED BELWIN for the first time in fourth grade. She was awed by the silence, the wildness, and the view from the observation tower. Although she often fished with her dad and brother as a child, the sounds of cars and the city were always nearby. Until she visited Belwin, the woods were a concept that only lived on paper. It left such an impression on her that she kept trying to make her way back.

In 2010, May was hired as a teacher with Belwin Outdoor Science, a 47-year partnership between Belwin Conservancy and Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS). For May, being with the students when they take their first steps into the woods is like coming full circle.

The awe that she felt at Belwin during her first visit is the same felt by students today. They wonder if the woods house monsters, if it's safe to walk the paths. They are especially surprised when May tells them she walks the paths alone.



May Vang in 2017, with a student from Nokomis South Montessori. Photo courtesy of Belwin Outdoor Science.

“No monsters here,” she says, guiding them one step at a time into the woods by showing them an interesting plant, inviting them to touch moss or pausing to listen for birds.

“Experiencing nature is important in teaching science,” May says.

“Kids can learn in a book but, if they don't actually see an object, they don't understand what it is. For example, we need them to see and touch and spend time around a wetland to really understand why it's important.”

25 years after her first visit, May is still enamored with the power of Belwin to change kids' lives. She dreams of more programming and opportunities to teach students in this natural setting.

“At the end of their day at Belwin,” she says, “the kids always say today was their best day ever.”

## Don't miss what's happening at Belwin!

### Winter Solstice Bonfire

Thursday, December 20

6:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Featuring musical theater troupe Impossible Salt, night hikes, warm drinks, and a huge bonfire. *Belwin Conservancy, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S., Afton.*  
RSVP requested: [info@belwin.org](mailto:info@belwin.org). Open to everyone. Suggested donation \$5/car.

### Open House with Special Guest Kinji Akagawa

Saturday, February 16

6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.; artist talk at 7:00 p.m.

Star gazing, woodland walks, campfire with s'mores, and a talk by artist Kinji Akagawa. *Belwin Conservancy Education Center, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S., Afton.* Free and open to everyone.

## NEW in 2019

### Women Walking

March 20, June 21,

September 23, December 22

6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Come to one or all four events

Celebrate the seasonal changes through walking meditations and experiences in the natural world. Includes some easy yoga and centering exercises. *Belwin Creative Center, 795 Indian Trail S., Afton.* Space limited to 20 participants. RSVP required to [info@belwin.org](mailto:info@belwin.org). Open to everyone. \$10/person.

### Winter Fun at the Creative Center

January 27, February 24

1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Explore Belwin's Creative Center this winter by hiking, sledding, snowshoeing or cross-country skiing our ungroomed trails. *Belwin Creative Center, 795 Indian Trail S., Afton.* Warm drinks provided. Free and open to the public.

## Outside Voices

Speakers at Belwin

DEC  
6

**Photographer  
Craig Blacklock**  
on the St. Croix and  
Namekagon Rivers

6:30 p.m.



Photo courtesy of  
Craig Blacklock.

FEB  
16

**Artist Kinji Akagawa**  
on integrating nature with public art

6:30 p.m.

MAR  
14

**International Wolf Center  
Co-Founder Nancy Gibson**

6:30 p.m.

Complete event details at [belwin.org/events](http://belwin.org/events).

## EVENTS INFO

Call: 651-436-5189

Email: [info@belwin.org](mailto:info@belwin.org)

Visit: [belwin.org/events](http://belwin.org/events)



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## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

# Fun and Community at Belwin

The public is invited to Belwin to connect with nature and with others.

By Bonnie Wheeler and Connie Hess, *Belwin Volunteers*

Wow, what a year! As new members and volunteers at Belwin, it's been exciting, surprising, and super rewarding.

We have attended wonderful guided hikes where we've been exposed to animals, fungi, insects, birds, grasses, and flowers. We've learned the history of the restoration work and plans for future development at Belwin. And although we've hiked the same trails repeatedly, Belwin's naturalists teach us more each time. Plus, at each program we meet and connect with other BFFs (Belwin Friends Forever).

Highlights in 2018 include the Bison Release in May, Winter Solstice Bonfire in December, and Belwin's Open House in February – all free and open to the public. At these events we met with new and old members, shared Belwin's mission of inspiring connections to the natural world, and helped to thank Belwin's supporters.

As volunteers, we do anything that needs a helping hand, just like with a group of friends.

Events and programs aren't the only way to experience nature at Belwin. At **Stagecoach Prairie Natural Area** and the **Lucy Winton**

**Bell Athletic Fields**, every day of the year is an opportunity to get into nature and to leave behind the craziness that often overtakes our lives. More than seven miles of trails at these two Belwin properties are free and open to everyone for walking, hiking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.

Whether as a volunteer or a visitor, we encourage everyone to come to Belwin: bring a friend, bring your dog, bring the family, or come alone. Belwin is here to welcome, refresh, and restore.



Photo by Connie Hess.



# At the Intersection of Arts & Athletics

By Susan Haugh, Belwin Program Director

**HAVE YOU NOTICED THE SIGNS OF CHANGE** at Belwin Conservancy's Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields (LWBAF)? They're seven feet tall and placed to draw attention to the natural beauty of the land and its species: A sparrow by the trees doing a split, a monarch butterfly pollinating a blazing star by the irrigation pond, and Belwin's bison prairie with picturesque clouds floating in a pristine blue sky juxtaposed with athletic field #1.



These are large-scale photos taken by the Western Wisconsin Photo Club and curated by Anastasia Shartin. Framed in steel that was designed and built by artist Andrew MacGuffie, the photos were installed last spring by Belwin staff.

Three photo frames along the entrance to the fields immediately give the 150,000 visitors each year an indication that these are not like other athletic fields. Belwin's mission of connecting through nature is now front and center at this 120-acre site.



Once down the drive, athletes and their families can experience the Prairie Photo Exhibit on the walls of the two athletic buildings. Local species are highlighted in these photos.

The Prairie Photo Exhibit opened at the 10th Anniversary Bison Release last May as one of several enhancements to this annual community festival.

We also held the inaugural 5K "Run with the Bison" Fun Trail Run. Prior to the bison being released, 60 youth and adult trail runners wound through the bison prairie in this untimed event.

Running concurrently was the premiere EcoArt Fest, which included five interactive ephemeral art experiences designed to engage youth and adults in everything from dirt sculpture to haiku. There was also a history of the land at LWBAF, hosted by Leslie Thomas of the Afton Historical Society.

The festival culminated with a blessing for the bison by Sharon Day, Ojibwe Elder and Water Walker, and the release of majestic bison onto Belwin's prairie.

Mark your calendar now for next year: Saturday, May 18.

We're looking for a photo club to partner with us for the 2020 LWBAF show. If interested, please contact Susan Haugh: [susan.haugh@belwin.org](mailto:susan.haugh@belwin.org) or 651-436-5189, ext. 11.

## By the Numbers:

### 2018 Bison Release

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| 10  | Years of bison summering at Belwin, in partnership with NorthStar Bison                                  |
| 45  | Bison grazing the tallgrass prairie  |
| 668 | People who attended Bison Release festival on May 19   |
| 60  | Participants in the first-ever 5K "Run with the Bison" Fun Trail Run at Belwin                           |
| 46  | Festival volunteers  |
| 3   | Performance Ensembles (The Riddle Brothers, Impossible Salt, and Crow Bellecourt and Thomas Butcher Jr.) |
| 5   | Nature-based interactive artists   |
| 4   | Food and coffee trucks   |

Want to read more about the 2018 Bison Release Festival? Visit <http://bit.ly/2018BisonRelease>

## MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

GENEROUS SUPPORT OF INDIVIDUALS, BUSINESSES, AND FOUNDATIONS makes it possible for Belwin to inspire connections to the natural world. We care for the land and wilderness, foster research, teach young people about science and the environment, and provide a place where anyone can come to walk our trails, see the bison, and explore native habitats. Thank you to the members and supporters who make this work possible!

*Your support  
makes a difference  
– Thank you!*

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# BELWIN CONSERVANCY

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## Inspiring through Nature

The mission of Belwin Conservancy is inspiring our connection to the natural world.

### Connect. Inspire. Celebrate!

The strings of Robert Everest’s classical guitar had barely been struck when the crowd began arriving at Belwin’s annual member appreciation event, **Night in Nature**. The promise of meeting friends old and new drew about 140 people to Belwin last September.



Photo by Greg Seitz.

Many came to meet new executive director, Katie Bloome, who joined Belwin in mid-July. Bloome spoke to the crowd about her hopes

for the organization. “I’m inspired by the great potential at Belwin and want to share it with more people. I look forward to meeting all of you, answering your questions, and showing you around – or having you show me around!” she said with a laugh, referencing how much of Belwin she still has to discover.

Lynette Anderson, Belwin’s interpretive naturalist, spoke of the importance of Belwin for species of concern.

Jim Rue, a retired Belwin Outdoor Science instructor and current volunteer, talked about Belwin’s positive impact on children and young adults he’s worked with over his nearly 40 years as an educator. “A fifth grader told me once, at the end of our day at Belwin, that this place is a sanctuary.”

As the sun set, attendees followed strands of lights to the Joseph J. Casby Observatory, where members of the Minnesota Astronomical Society guided them in viewing the solar system through high-powered telescopes.

As the final notes of Everest’s guitar were struck, guests reluctantly said goodbye to this special place . . . until next time.

### Upcoming Events

- 11/15: Give to the Max Day
- 12/6: Speaker Craig Blacklock
- 12/15: Open Third Saturday with Guided Experiences
- 12/20: Winter Solstice Bonfire
- 1/18: Owl Prowl
- 1/19: Owl Prowl
- 1/19: Open Third Saturday with Guided Experiences
- 1/27: Winter Fun at the Creative Center
- 2/15: Owl Prowl
- 2/16: Open Third Saturday with Guided Experiences
- 2/16: Annual Open House with speaker Kinji Akagawa
- 2/24: Winter Fun at the Creative Center
- 3/14: Speaker Nancy Gibson
- 3/16: Open Third Saturday with Guided Experiences
- 3/20: Women Walking
- 4/16: Twilight Hike at Creative Center
- 4/20: Early Morning Bird Hike
- 4/20: Open Third Saturday with Guided Experiences
- 4/24: Frog Walk at Bulrush Slough

Visit [belwin.org/events](http://belwin.org/events) for more info.