



the Meadowlark

A PUBLICATION FROM THE BELWIN CONSERVANCY

SPRING/SUMMER 2017

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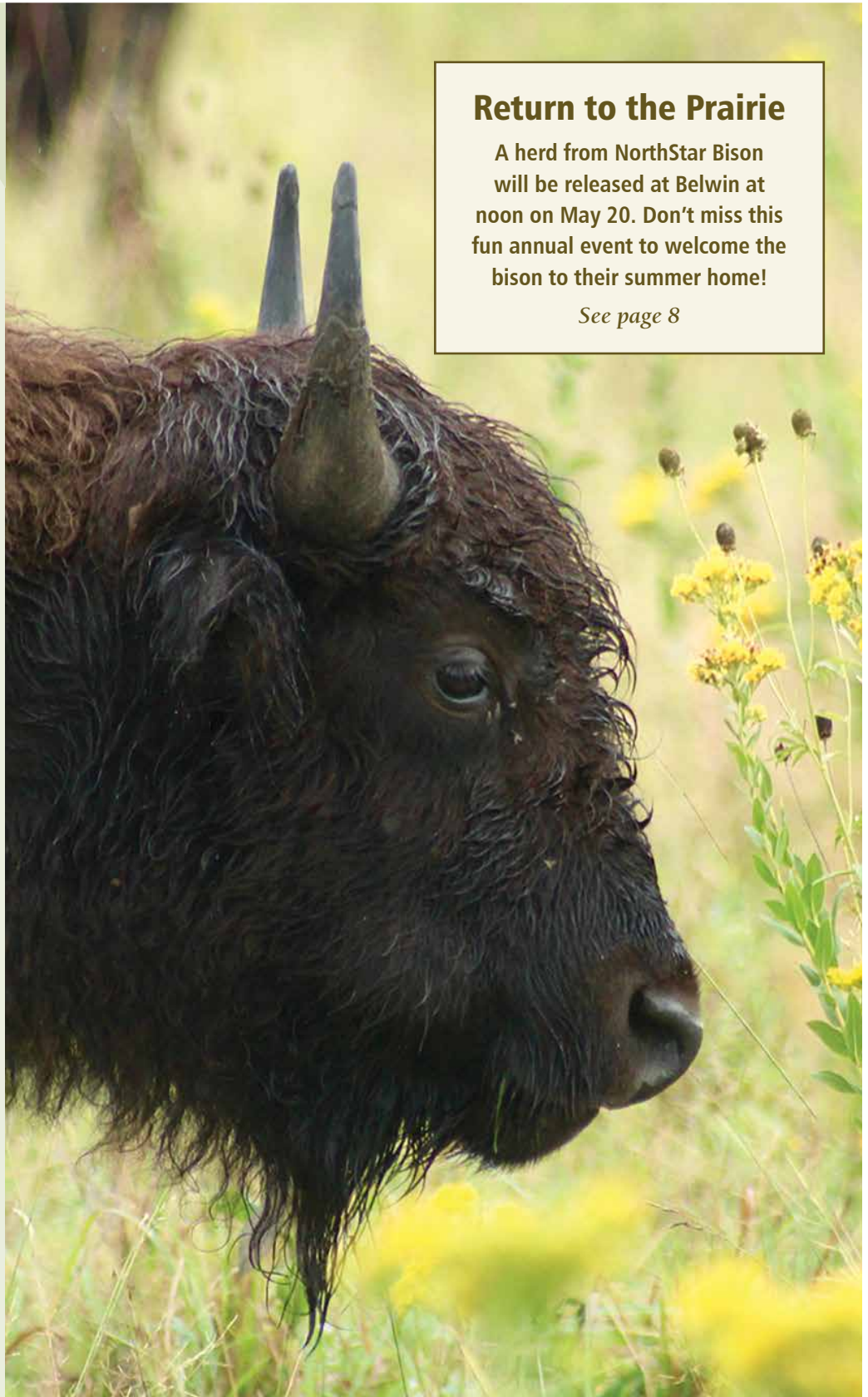
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By the middle of May, Baltimore orioles have returned to the Midwest after wintering in Central America. They mate and build hammock-like nests, which hang from high limbs. Babies are born in June and, by August, the birds are migrating south again.



Return to the Prairie

A herd from NorthStar Bison will be released at Belwin at noon on May 20. Don't miss this fun annual event to welcome the bison to their summer home!

See page 8



How Do We Measure Success?



The Belwin team, photographed outside of our main office. From left: (back) Facilities and Equipment Specialist Eric Palmen, Program Manager Susan Haugh, Operations Associate Connor Sandhu, Executive Director Nancy Kafka, Development Manager Marta McCormack, Restoration Assistant Lynette Anderson; (front) Land and Facilities Manager Justin Sykora, Land Specialist Martin McGough.

ONE OF THE BENEFITS OF WORKING FOR BELWIN CONSERVANCY is unrestricted access to Belwin's nearly 1,400 acres of land. Truth be told, I don't get out all that often. Instead, I listen to the team share stories of what they've discovered: a newborn fawn scared up while mowing, deer sheds gathered while surveying boundaries, a family of five otters sliding effortlessly into Valley Creek (the wildlife camera caught this!), discovering the desire paths of the bison and the deer that radiate from the water trough.

We don't measure these experiences; however, they are the reason that Belwin exists: to inspire and help us discover our connections to the natural world.

We do measure other things and, as in past years, use a page in *The Meadowlark* to share what happened on Belwin lands in 2016. Pulling together numbers for this issue forces us to reflect on our work, on our members and on visitors who experienced Belwin on their own.

And guess what? We saw increases in every area of Belwin's reach: more students from public schools, more visitors to the Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields and more Belwin events. New events included a Winter Solstice Bonfire, Lake Edith member event, walks with eco composer Steve Heitzeg and environmental poet Laurie Allmann, and public events outside of Belwin.

When it comes to budgets, the adage is you can tell what's important to an organization

by where they allocate their resources. When you look at Belwin's 2017 budget, you will see an emphasis on facilities. We have quite a stash (51, to be exact) of buildings and structures that need attention.

2017 also marks the year to:

- *Initiate a wildlife-friendly fencing project at Stagecoach Prairies Natural Area*
- *Commence placement (and, in some cases, replacement) of approximately 350 signs and T-posts including interpretive property markers*
- *Make repairs to the bison towers, and various gates, roofs and roads (there are 4.5 miles of roads at Belwin)*
- *And much, much more. Every area of Belwin will see attention*

As we look to our future, we're also reflecting on staffing changes we experienced in 2016, which included two staff departures. After 9 years, Ned Phillips—many members knew Ned as the face of Belwin—took a job with the Minnesota Land Trust. Ned came to Belwin when we transitioned from the Belwin Foundation to Belwin Conservancy and his skills in mapping, working with researchers and members, organizing events, setting up and managing Belwin's office systems, serving as resident photographer and

de facto communications director, were all given with grace and goodwill.

We also lost Alexandra Yaeger to a full-time position at the Minnesota DNR Parks and Trails Division. Although Alex was part-time at Belwin, her hand was visible in all of Belwin's work, from accounting and property management to vehicle repair, welding, field work, burn crew, events and hand-drawn signs. We continue to be grateful to both Alex and Ned for their significant contributions to Belwin as you know it.

We also welcomed new members to our team, including hiring Marta McCormack as a full-time development manager. She brings a very different perspective to development and has a love for outdoor sports that includes downhill skiing. And we recently hired a new Operations Associate, Connor Sandhu. More about Connor as time goes by.

What remains a constant in Belwin's world is our membership; in other words, you! You are with us day in and day out. Your support was extraordinary last year. We hope you continue to value what Belwin does and gives back to you in the form of inspiration, discovery and meaningful experiences in our natural world!

Nancy Kafka
Executive Director, Belwin Conservancy
(651) 436-5189
nancy.kafka@belwin.org

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

Income	2016 Unaudited	2017 Budgeted
Public Sources		
Membership	\$ 87,027	\$ 115,000
Foundations	31,050	91,050
Corporations (including in-kind)	10,100	15,144
Governments (grants and contracts)	28,732	15,950
Earned Income/Other (rent, reimbursements, fee for service)	68,088	78,506
Donations: Restricted	200	26,300
Donations: Unrestricted	4,215	
LWBAF Field Use Payment	77,950	77,800
Restricted (capital improvements)	8,425	5,400
Non-Public Sources (including Belwin Supporting Fund)	639,333	580,277
Total Income	955,120	1,005,427

People Served*

Belwin Outdoor Science	11,169
Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields	150,000
Joseph J. Casby Observatory/ Minnesota Astronomical Society	239
Belwin Conservancy events	1,742
Belwin Trail usage	3,504
Total People Served	166,654

*January 1, 2016 – December 31, 2016

Restoration Activities

Acres ongoing restoration	1,015
Acres burned	140
Bison herd size	40
Hours of integrated plant management (hand pulling, tractor mowing, chemical control)	2,177
Acres managed for woodland invasive species	70
Number of invasive species managed	15

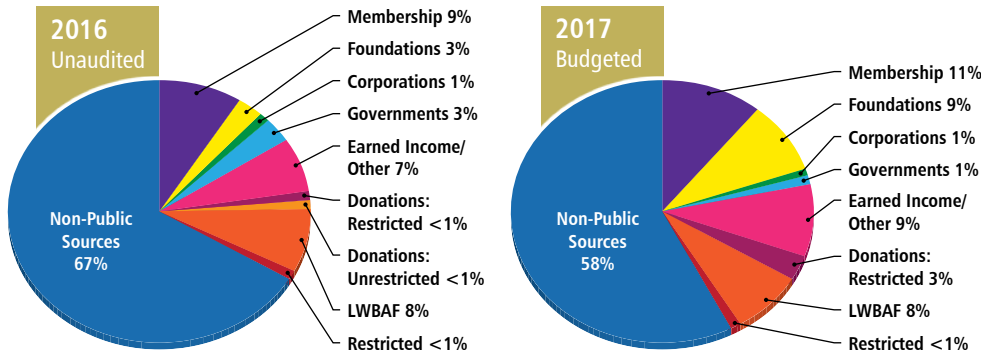
Bird Monitoring

Afton Hills	46
Bell Oak Savanna	68
Lake Edith	64
Valley Creek	47
Stagecoach Prairies	52

Notable species from 2016: Alder Flycatcher, Hooded Warbler nesting pair, Golden-winged Warbler pair (using Belwin as stopover habitat on their way to northern Minnesota and Canada), Sandhill Cranes at Lake Edith that successfully fledged two colts (young).

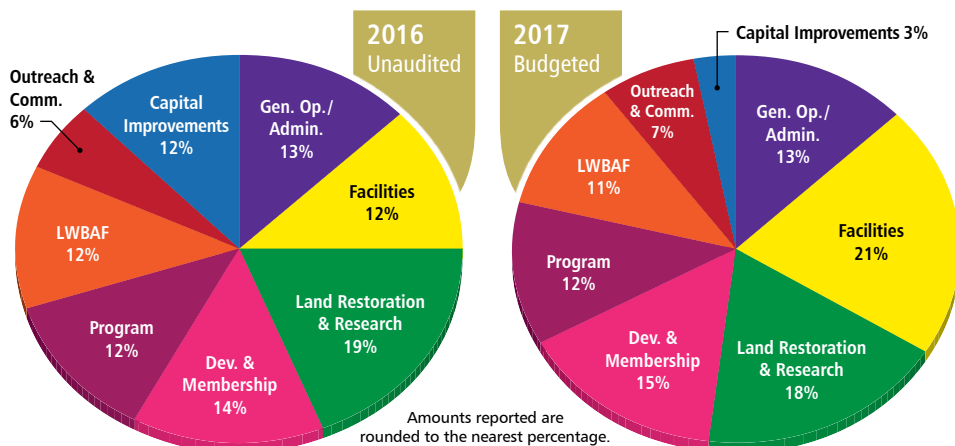


Sandhill Cranes



Expenses	2016 Unaudited	2017 Budgeted
General Operating/Administration	\$ 125,514	\$ 129,463
Facilities	118,705	212,064
Land Restoration and Research	178,610	189,628
Development and Membership Program	137,447	155,629
LWBAF Facility Management	114,329	112,928
Outreach and Communications	56,709	73,932
Capital Improvements	112,920	29,800*
Total Expenses	963,011	1,028,139
Net Surplus/Shortfall	-7,891	-22,712

*Contingent upon successful fundraising for capital items.



Contemplating Our Place in the Universe

By Kate Seitz, Belwin Communications Partner

“It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we’ve ever known.”

—Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot*, 1994

THE TIME WAS THE 1970S and space exploration had fully captured the public imagination. With the first moon landing in 1969, children and adults alike were inspired to pursue astronomy by a new sense of possibility regarding what might exist within and beyond our solar system.

Andy Fraser was one of those captivated by outer space. Fraser, who grew up in Western Michigan and now lives in Afton, recalls learning constellations from his father while they were night sledding. While Fraser intended to pursue a career in astrophysics or aerospace engineering, the close of the manned lunar program led him to a more conventional career. Only recently, at the age of 67, did he earn a Master of Science in Astronomy.

“The study of astronomy for me affords a nearly religious experience, as we contemplate the scale of it all,” Fraser says. “To quote another native of Western Michigan and a renowned astronomer, Heber D. Curtis, ‘The undevout astronomer is mad’ and ‘The more I know of astronomy, the more I believe in God.’”

Fraser is vice president of the Minnesota Astronomical Society (www.mnastro.org) and was one of the founding members of the club in the early 1970s. Today, MAS boasts nearly 500 members, both professional and amateur astronomers, and is one of the largest and most active such clubs in the country.

MAS has multiple astronomical viewing sites throughout the Twin Cities, including several at Belwin. The Joseph J. Casby Observatory is a permanent building located near the Belwin Outdoor Science Education Center. It was constructed in 2009 using funds donated by the mother of MAS member Sylvia Casby, in honor of her late husband, Joseph.

“The observatory affords adequately trained MAS members access to a very sophisticated astronomical instrument, under relatively



This image of Earth is one of 60 frames taken by the Voyager 1 spacecraft from a distance of more than 6 billion kilometers and about 32 degrees above the ecliptic plane. In the image the Earth is a mere point of light, a crescent only 0.12 pixel in size. Photo courtesy NASA.

good observing conditions within proximity of the Twin Cities,” Fraser says.

The observatory houses an eight foot long, 10 inch TMB Apochromatic Refracting telescope, one of the largest amateur society owned and operated refracting telescopes in the U.S. “The facility and its instruments are extremely well equipped, including guide scopes, eyepieces, filters and solar instrumentation,” Fraser says.

Other astronomical viewing sites on Belwin are located at the Metcalf Observation

Site, which contains a number of telescope piers and concrete pads, and a warming hut. The site is named for Father George Metcalf and his wife, Mary, who owned 126 acres of woodlands and wetlands in Afton. The Metcalfs donated most of the land to the Science Museum of Minnesota in the 1970s. At a museum-sponsored event, they met members of the MAS, who were looking for a permanent place to conduct their observations. Father Metcalf offered MAS a portion of the property to use and, when Belwin acquired the land from the Science Museum in the late 1990s, the partnership with MAS continued.

While most events at the observatory are for MAS members only, Belwin members have been invited to participate in activities like sun- and star-gazing on Open Third Saturdays and at special events.

More events are planned for the spring and summer as Belwin seeks to promote the unique partnership that we share with the club, as well as encourage more people to interact with and be inspired by nature.

For Belwin Conservancy and our members, the revelations of the cosmos help strengthen our love of Earth’s natural resources. While our knowledge of the universe has exploded since the moon landing in 1969, it also has revealed to us that our planet is one of a kind. Because of Earth’s unique ability to host life, we are motivated to protect and cherish what we have.

As Carl Sagan wrote in his novel *Pale Blue Dot*, “Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will

come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves. ... Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand.”

For more information about Minnesota Astronomical Society events at Belwin, visit www.belwin.org/events

Marrying Art and the Land at the Lake Edith Site

WE ARE EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE that we've moved a step closer to the creation of the "Creative Center" (working title) at our Lake Edith site. This project was set as a strategic goal in 2005 and is part of our 21c Master and Strategic Plan 2014-2021.



In February, we invited landscape architects to bid on developing a conceptual site plan for the 300-acre site, and 15 firms responded by attending a required pre-bid tour of the land. (Their proposals were received after press time for *The Meadowlark*, so watch for

updates online about which firm won the bid and more information about the project.)

Susan Haugh, Belwin program manager, describes the Creative Center as an area where both art and the land are the draw and medium to involve people in a natural experience. "The conceptual site plan will locate points of public access, parking, trails—both hiking and art opportunities—and interpretation, and establish meaningful connections between the north and south sides of the property," she says, explaining that the north side of the property is primarily in a natural state while the south side of the property contains a residential complex comprised of four existing structures.

Previously referred to as the Metcalf Property, the south side of the Lake Edith site formerly served as a spiritual retreat founded by Father George Metcalf and his wife, Mary. The couple sold the land to the Science Museum in the 1970s and Belwin acquired the final portion of the land in 2010. The acquisition included the buildings on the site and brought the total Lake Edith site acreage to about 300 acres.

"What makes it so special is both the beauty and the diverse ecology: oak savanna, flat

prairie and wetlands, all at the northern edge of the bluffs landscape. From parts of the property, there are stunning views down the St. Croix Valley. It's an incredible space and there is a nearly limitless opportunity to engage and inspire people," Haugh says.

Before this stage of the project, Belwin's stakeholders were interviewed, including members and organizations in the St. Croix Valley. Development of the Creative Center conceptual site plan is step three, taking the place of the Artists in Residence program in 2017. The site plan will be followed by a detailed landscape design and finally implementation of the design, intended to be complete by approximately 2020.

"Now that we've done significant restoration and have a Master Plan to guide us, we are ready to work with whomever we select as our landscape architect to create experiences that engage people with nature through art and discovery," says Haugh. "Our goal for the programs and facilities at the Creative Center is to connect people emotionally with nature. If connections are formed then attitudes will change and people will take action toward protecting the environment."

Take Me Out to the Photo Exhibit

IN 2016, BELWIN AND THE PHIPPS CENTER FOR THE ARTS partnered to bring The Prairie Photo Exhibit to life. Photographs taken by youth participating in Phipps' photo classes were displayed at the Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields during the summer and at The Phipps in the winter.

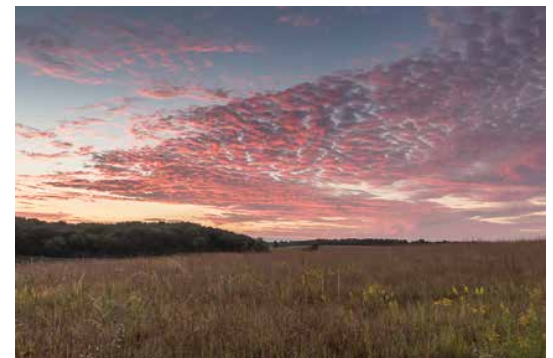
This year, a third partner is joining the project: The Western Wisconsin Photography Club. WWPC members are participating in a project called "Capture the Western Prairie" to build a collection of photos depicting prairie landscapes including those at Belwin, says Lori Moilanen, WWPC program coordinator and club project manager. Their photos will be on display this summer at LWBAF

WWPC members hope that their photos invite viewers to take a closer look at the local prairie landscape and be moved to support it as well as celebrate it, says Moilanen. "Many of the participating photographers have remarked that the prairie photo project has opened their eyes to the beauty in our local landscape that they had not previously appreciated."

As the third partner in the project, The Phipps will help curate the photographs. "We'll be looking for what images really speak to the message of being out in the prairie, exploring the natural environment and connecting with it," says Phipps Visual Arts Director Anastasia Shartin.

Susan Haugh, Belwin program manager, estimates that 150,000 people visit the ball fields each season. The goal is for the pictures to inspire those who see them to get away from the sports fields and walk the surrounding restored prairies.

"Until last summer, the buildings at the LWBAF complex were bare and did not reflect any of the beauty of the surrounding prairies," Haugh says. "In 2016, people became engaged with their surrounding in a new way through the Prairie Photo Exhibit. For the first time, the surrounding prairie became a focus amid athletic fields."



"Belwin Sunrise" by Lori Moilanen is one of many photos taken by the Western Wisconsin Photography Club as part of its Capture the Western Prairie project, which will be showcased at the Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields this summer.

What

Prairie Photo Exhibit featuring photos by the Western Wisconsin Photography Club

Where & When

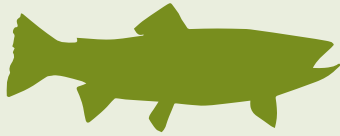
Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields
June – Oct. 2017

The Phipps Center for the Arts
Dec. 8, 2017 – Feb. 25, 2018

Information

<http://wiphotoclub.com/club-project/>

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



SPECIAL SERIES:

Guided Trout Fishing for Families on Valley Creek

- Saturday, June 17
- Saturday, July 15
- Saturday, August 19
- Saturday, September 16

From 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Space is limited.

RSVP at www.belwin.org or by calling our office.

Saturday, April 8

Nature Sketchbook Workshop:
10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

With Belwin Naturalist Lynette Anderson and artist Pam Leur. \$75.

Register at www.thehippys.org.

Tuesday, April 11

Sunset Prairie Hike: 6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

First of monthly series through October hosted by Belwin Naturalist Lynette Anderson. Learn about the changing prairie. Meet at Stagecoach Prairies parking lot on 11th Street.

Saturday, April 15

Early Morning Bird Hike: 7:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.
Meet at Belwin Conservancy office, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S. Space is limited, RSVP online.

Open Third Saturday: 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Be a Better Birder: 1:00 p.m.

Meet at Belwin Outdoor Science Education Center, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S.

Tuesday, April 25

Frog Frolic and Woodcock Walk:
7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Meet at Belwin Conservancy office, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S. Space is limited, RSVP online.

Saturday, April 29

Invasive Species Workshop for Neighbors and Abutters: 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Meet at Belwin Conservancy office, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S. Space is limited, RSVP online.

Saturday, May 6

World Labyrinth Day Event:

12:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.; 1:00 p.m. gathering
Special guest Sue Swanson. Meet at the Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields Luna Blue Labyrinth, 15601 Hudson Road, West Lakeland. Open to the public.

Sunday, May 14

Mother's Day Bird Hike: 7:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

In partnership with Tropical Wings. Meet at Belwin Conservancy office, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S. Open to the public.

Tuesday, May 16

Sunset Prairie Hike: 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Meet at Stagecoach Prairies parking lot on 11th Street.

Friday, May 19

Frog Frolic: 8:00 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.

Meet at Belwin Conservancy office, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S. Space is limited, RSVP online.

Saturday, May 20

Bison Release: 11:00 a.m. open, 12:00 p.m. release.

No Open Third Saturday.

Bison Observation Platform.

Park at Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields, 15601 Hudson Road, West Lakeland. Open to the public. Bison Buggy rides for members available June – September on Open Third Saturdays from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. on a first come, first served basis.

Tuesday, June 13

Sunset Prairie Hike: 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Meet at Stagecoach Prairies parking lot on 11th Street.

Saturday, June 17

Open Third Saturday: 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Prairie Walk: 11:00 a.m.

Tuesday, July 11

Sunset Prairie Hike: 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Meet at Stagecoach Prairies parking lot on 11th Street.

Saturday, July 15

Open Third Saturday: 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Tuesday, August 15

Sunset Prairie Hike: 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Meet at Stagecoach Prairies parking lot on 11th Street.

Saturday, August 19

Open Third Saturday: 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Tuesday, September 12

Sunset Prairie Hike: 7:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Meet at Stagecoach Prairies parking lot on 11th Street.

Saturday, September 16

Early Morning Bird Hike: 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.
Meet at Belwin Conservancy office, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S. Space is limited, RSVP online.

Open Third Saturday: 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Invasive Species Workshop: 1:00 p.m.

Meet at Belwin Outdoor Science Education Center, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S.

About Open Third Saturdays

Trails open 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

at Belwin Outdoor Science Education Center, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S.

Participate in programs, meet Belwin staff, explore the trails and connect with nature.

All Belwin members are invited to participate for free in any of the events listed.

Some events require pre-registration or have limited space. Check website for most up-to-date information.

Visit www.belwin.org/events for the complete list of events and to register.

Stay connected with Belwin online!



Like @belwinconservancy



Follow @belwin_org



Follow @belwinconservancy



Because of you, Belwin Conservancy exceeded our membership goal in 2016.

THANK YOU FOR MAKING THAT POSSIBLE!

Your continued support ensures that students have a place to learn and be inspired about the natural world.



Individual Donors

- | | | | | | |
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Bridge Over Bulrush Slough

As of press time, and thanks to our members we have raised more than 84% of the \$17,000 needed to replace the bridge that crosses Bulrush Slough outside the Belwin Outdoor Science Lower Classroom. The bridge serves special needs students from Saint Paul Public Schools. A substantial donation by the mother of BOS Special Education Teacher Cathy Smith helped jumpstart the campaign. For an update on fundraising progress or to make a donation, visit www.givemn.org/organization/belwin-conservancy.

Companies, Foundations & Organizations

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Anonymous | James Ford Bell Foundation |
| Baillon Family Foundation | Salesforce |
| Creative Integration & Design | Smikis Foundation |
| HRK Foundation | University of St. Thomas |

In-Kind Donations

- Larry Carlson (3 ounces Lupine seeds, 20 lupine seedlings)
William Tyra (12 bat houses)



BELWIN CONSERVANCY

1553 Stagecoach Trail South
Afton, Minnesota 55001-9703
P: (651) 436-5189 F: (651) 436-2899
www.belwin.org

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Afton, MN
Permit No. 2

Inspiring through Nature

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

National Mammal on Belwin Prairie

Last year, President Obama signed the National Bison Legacy Act into law, officially making the American bison the national mammal of the United States. Thanks to a partnership with NorthStar Bison, Belwin Conservancy is pleased to host a herd of these majestic animals on part of our land.

Each spring since 2008, Belwin has hosted approximately 40 bison on our northern prairie. We host a Bison Release event, and invite the public to attend and officially welcome the herd to their summer home.

The bison live at Belwin throughout the summer and return to NorthStar Bison in the fall. While the bison are at Belwin, you can visit from dawn to dusk via the Bison Observation Tower. This 20-foot tall observation platform was built in 2009 and offers a panoramic view of the prairie where the bison live.

Bison play an important role in Belwin's prairie restoration work. Their hooves work the landscape, they forage out unwanted plants and spread seeds in a way that our machines cannot. This form of agriculture is one of the most sustainable, as bison need very little from us yet they naturally help many native wildflowers and birds that depend on the prairie to thrive.



Save the Date

This year, the Bison Release will be held at noon on Saturday, May 20. Come at 11:00 a.m. for family-friendly activities, including a Pop-Up Art event hosted by The Phipps Center for the Arts. Parking is available at the Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields, 15601 Hudson Road, West Lakeland.