



the Meadowlark

A PUBLICATION FROM BELWIN CONSERVANCY

SPRING/SUMMER 2022



Fun Fact: DANCING CRANES

Each spring, Sandhill cranes (*Antigone canadensis*) return to Minnesota to breed with their life partners. Their courting dance involves bowing, jumping, and even throwing sticks or plants into the air. Sandhill cranes even dance outside of mating season! They mate for life and can live to be 20 years or older.

The Land We Are On

The land on which Belwin Conservancy exists is the ancestral home of the Wahpekute Dakota people, original stewards of this region. We recognize that despite government efforts to exterminate and diminish the Dakota, their connection to this land, water, history and lifeways perseveres today. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging.

To read more, visit
belwin.org/the-land-we-are-on



BELWIN



Open to Nature

A teacher once told me that birds are nature's perfect ambassadors. They said that when a bird lands on a feeder just outside of the Hilltop Classroom, students — full of excitement and anxiety after arriving on their first field trip to Belwin from Saint Paul — become quiet, curious, and still. After a few moments of observation, they erupt in questions, their worries forgotten, and they're ready to learn.

Birds provide an opening, inspiring curiosity that can lead to a lasting connection to nature. (It's such an important concept that we discussed it in the Fall 2021/Winter 2022 issue of *The Meadowlark*, page 3.)

Last fall, after having reflected on our first 50 years, we were excited to spend time looking toward Belwin's future. Our staff and board worked together to refresh our brand — what our supporters and the public see when they hike our trails, visit our website, or attend a program.

The new brand we just released does not signify a new direction for our organization, rather, it catches up to where we are. It communicates the direction we're already heading.

As Belwin grows, welcoming people to hike on newly protected land, expanding our partnerships, and bringing together art and nature, we want to communicate the hope and opportunity for the future. We want to show the excitement and energy we have for that growth, as well as our enduring commitment to care for the land and its habitats.

We are a conservation organization. But we don't stop at conservation because the human experience — connection between people and nature — is essential. Conservation, education,

and community engagement are all linked and necessary for holding up the bigger goal of shaping a world that values our natural spaces.

From growing our staff (read more on page 7) to opening new trails (page 3), Belwin is soaring. I'm glad you're by our side.



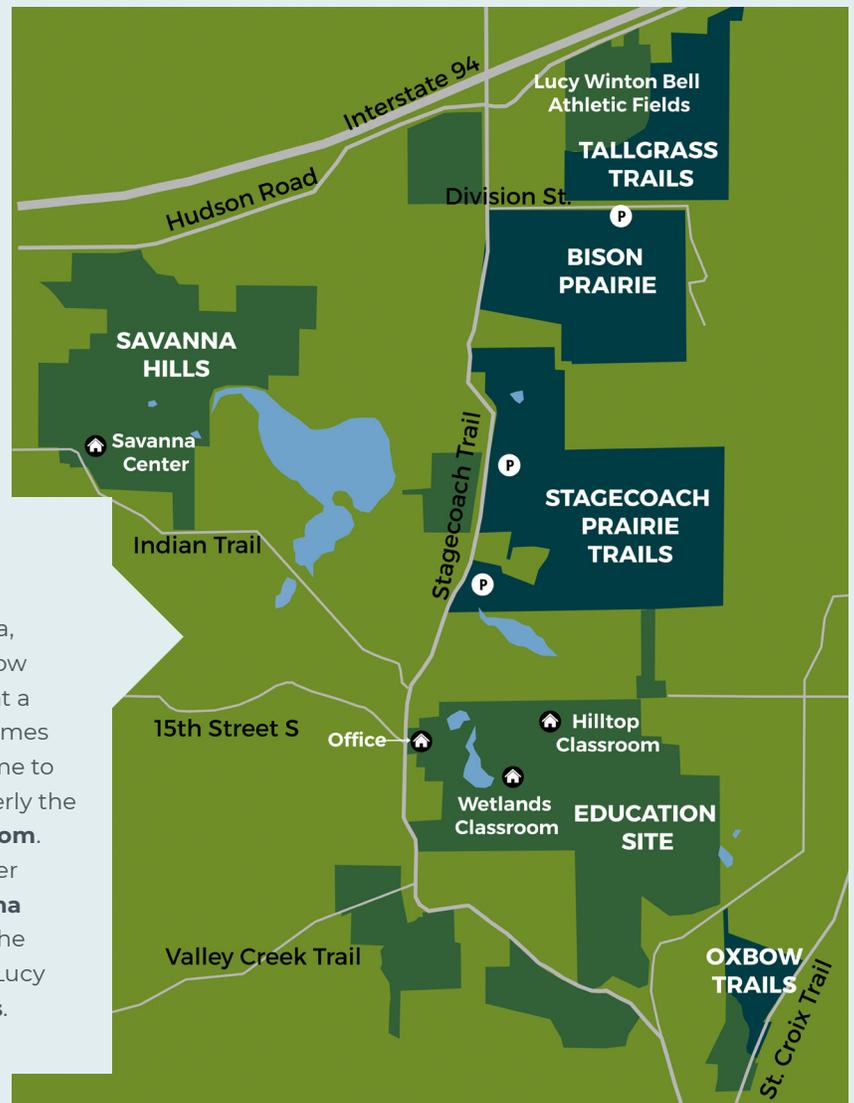
Katie Bloome

Katie Bloome

Executive Director, Belwin Conservancy

katie.bloome@belwin.org

Direct: 651-435-0848



And the Winner Is...

We asked for help naming our new hiking area, and you stepped up! The trophy goes to "Oxbow Trails." While we were at it, it became clear that a few other locations at Belwin needed fresh names too! Among them are the **Education Site**, home to Belwin's offices, the **Hilltop Classroom** (formerly the Education Center), and the **Wetlands Classroom**. The area formerly known as the Creative Center is now **Savanna Hills**, anchored by the **Savanna Center** buildings on Indian Trail. We dubbed the hiking trails that connect the Bison Prairie to Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields the **Tallgrass Trails**.



Preparing Belwin's Newest Preserve for the Public

By Greg & Kate Seitz
Belwin Conservancy Communications Partners

Belwin is hard at work developing the **Oxbow Trails** property, which will soon be open to the public. Our team reached a significant milestone this winter at our new property located along St. Croix Trail South and Valley Creek: completing the cutting of invasive species and unhealthy, hazardous trees.

“First, we want a simple trail system where people can easily park and go for a walk,” says Operations Director Justin Sykora. “After this initial stage of development, we can go from there, making plans to use the new infrastructure for guided hikes, events, and other programming.”

Partnering with the city of Afton, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Washington County, and others, Belwin has been working since 2020 to create this new nature preserve. The project is centered on a 30-acre parcel Belwin purchased from a willing seller with funding from Washington County’s Land and Water Legacy Program. The hiking area will also include 10 acres of city-owned land. It’s a one-of-a-kind project for a special space.

“Oxbow Trails will provide a unique view of Valley Creek as a meandering creek bed,” says Belwin Interpretive Naturalist and Restoration Specialist Lynette Anderson. “It will also showcase the importance of areas like this for flooding of the St. Croix, as this is a tributary and takes on lots of the flood waters every year.”

Restoration work is being supported by the DNR’s Conservation Partners Legacy program. The money has made it possible to hire contractors to complete the first phase: removing the invasive and diseased trees, then wood-chipping them on-site.

Belwin will take over ongoing management and plans to spread the chips on new paths around the property later this year. (If you’re interested in helping, email volunteers@belwin.org, and we’ll contact you to be part of the trail-building effort!)

The sky is the limit for the future, Sykora adds. Work is ongoing, and Belwin will open the property to the public by fall. What began as cherished private land populated with non-native plants will soon be a healthy ecosystem with wildlife habitat and opportunities for anyone to experience it — forever.



Belwin Facilities and Equipment Specialist Eric Palmén converted an old manure spreader to a woodchip spreader to speed up trail construction.

Creating a Forest Footpath

Creating a good forest footpath is a special challenge. On Belwin’s plentiful prairies, workers can basically mow a trail and it’s ready to walk. But the new trails planned for this hilly and wooded area take a bit more thinking and work.

“We base trails on focal points, like great places to admire a view, and to maximize use of the property,” says Operations Director Sykora.

But trails can’t just go point-to-point, they must be laid out to make it possible for the average visitor to easily travel. “We can’t have trails that go straight up and down steep slopes,” Sykora says. There won’t be as much prescribed fire on the property as on Belwin’s prairies, but planners still try to ensure trails will be usable as fire breaks in the future.

Deciding on the final route takes knowledge of land and good practices, but Sykora says the trails on this new hiking area will largely be based on Belwin staff’s experience with the land and their hopes for its future.

For information regarding all of Belwin trails, visit belwin.org/visit/#trails

Funding for this project was provided from the Outdoor Heritage Fund as part of the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment.



Building For Community

A new partnership with the American Indian Family Center



Justin Sykora, Susan Haugh, and Rich Antell in 2021 at a celebration for the partnership and sweat lodge.

When Rich Antell was hired by the American Indian Family Center (AIFC) in the middle of the pandemic as the Men’s Outreach Specialist, the program was challenged in trying to meet the cultural needs of the men who participate — young, old and many different tribal representations.

Support groups went virtual and opened with prayer, song, and presentations from Anishinaabe and Dakota perspectives, very common in Minnesota. “Working with men in the Native community is mainly to help them connect or reconnect with their cultural identity no matter what Indigenous heritage they come from,” Antell says. “This stems from a long-storied history of the original people of Turtle Island.”

As the men’s group maneuvered through the pandemic, Antell was thinking about the long-term viability of the program. He wondered, wouldn’t it be awesome if someone could donate land for a sweat lodge? “A sweat lodge opens a doorway for men to go and heal, and then for the rest of the AIFC community to go there and heal,” Antell says. “I envisioned a partnership that would blossom and make an impact for our community.”

Antell learned about Belwin on the Nextdoor app and called to explain his goal: to offer cultural programming and build a sweat lodge. Belwin said yes and the project began.

“We want to shape a world that values our natural spaces,” says Belwin Executive Director Katie Bloome.

“When Rich asked about a sweat lodge on our land, we were thrilled because AIFC’s values of connecting with the land meshed with Belwin’s. We saw this as an opportunity for this community to engage with the land in a way that supported them and expanded Belwin’s reach. If we can have a deep impact by working together, that’s a win for everyone.”

It took nine months for the project with Belwin to formalize and break ground. There were meetings and site visits, nurturing and enthusiasm as the partnership was built. Antell offered tobacco to AIFC Elder in Residence Nelda Goodman for guidance on the project.

“I appreciate Rich Antell’s traditional ways of the Anishinaabe people,” Goodman says. “He teaches the men in his circle about having respect for his elders. He teaches the Seven Grandfather Teachings of the Anishinaabe nation.”

Since the sweat lodge was built last fall, the men’s group and the women’s recovery group have used it. There have also been full moon ceremonies at the site and other youth programming.

“This partnership helps in its own way for our men to reconnect to cultural practices and ways of life. What the sweat lodge at Belwin means for the men’s program is a place to go in and take care of ourselves as men. A place to be. A place that we can call our own that’s tied with AIFC through the support of Belwin,” Antell says.

“So much of what we can do to reconnect from the sweat lodge and teachings around it — the things we’ll be able to develop from this partnership — can be unbelievable in healing, growth, and reconnecting opportunities for our men, our women, our families, our children, and our community,” he continued. “We are really grateful to Belwin for providing that to us.”

Visit aifcmn.org to learn more about AIFC.

An Experience for All Ages

The third rendition of **Music in the Trees will be held this August 13 & 14**. We will continue to celebrate the transition of the land to a healthy ecosystem through music.

NEW THIS YEAR:
Saturday, August 13 will be devoted to families with young children. The musicians selected will be experts at engaging younger audiences.

On both days, there will be myriad musical styles represented. We encourage the musicians to improvise with their surroundings and we invite attendees to sit, stand, walk, lie down, or string a hammock within the red pines.

We can’t wait to share the full performance schedule with you closer to the event dates.

belwin.org/events/music-in-the-trees-2022



PHOTOS: Page 5, courtesy Belwin Outdoor Science.



Art in the 4Ground

By Susan Haugh,
Belwin Conservancy Program Director

We are participating in a brand-new endeavor this summer, **4Ground: Midwest Land Art Biennial**.

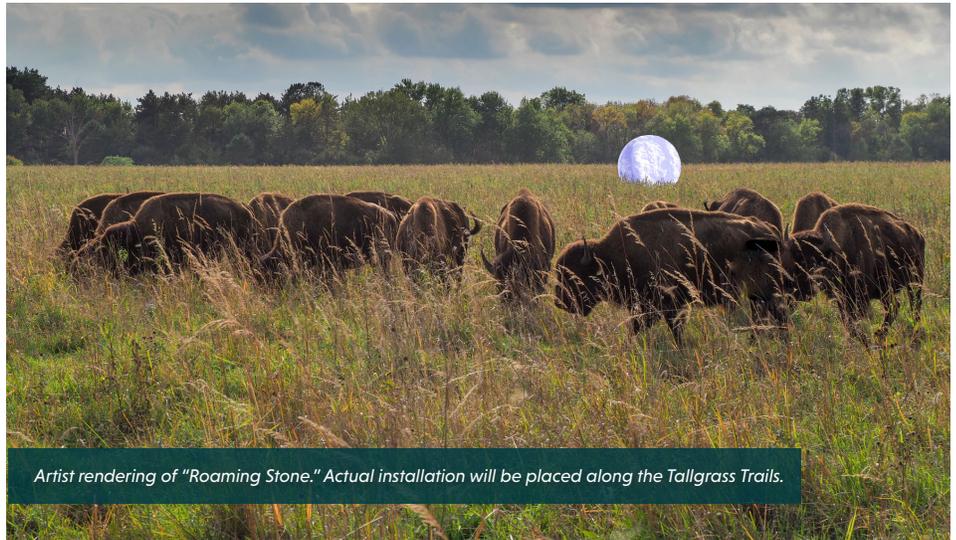
From June through August, in collaboration with Franconia Sculpture Park, Arts Midwest and 22 partners across Minnesota, Wisconsin, South and North Dakota, and tribal lands of the Upper Midwest, 4Ground is designed to boost tourism of the region through suggested road trips to experience site-specific land art created by renowned contemporary artists and community-based collectives.

As one of the host sites for this inaugural event, Belwin will welcome three artists to create and perform on our lands, with an emphasis on prairie and the impact of bison on a restored ecosystem.

David Sprecher

On the Tallgrass Trails (between Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields and the Bison Prairie), artist and educator David Sprecher will create "Roaming Stone."

The Chicago-based artist "will take an impression of the land at Belwin that bears the signature (i.e., tracks) of the prairie's most skilled caretakers, the American bison, then translate the impression onto the surface of a



Artist rendering of "Roaming Stone." Actual installation will be placed along the Tallgrass Trails.

large sphere. The work will be a spherical seal, a fingerprint, a memory of the prairie in the late spring of 2022."

Sprecher's long-term installation will be constructed on-site this June and will be officially **unveiled on July 31**.

Taiquaa//Ambe Omaa (come here)

Taiquaa//Ambe Omaa (come here) is a multidisciplinary collaboration of **nibiwakamigkwe** and **Anastasia Adams**. They combine Yup'ik, Métis, and Anishinaabe lifeways through Pic-eine'rkin throat singing, textile, storytelling, and visual symbol. They draw on survival tools of Indigenous existence and relationship to land, community, culture, and resilience as audiences deepen their understanding of place. **Experience their work on July 31**.

Rachel Frank

On August 21, Rachel Frank will present "Rewilding Valley Creek at Belwin Conservancy," highlighting Belwin's restoration of the landscape and on-going stewardship of the land. Participants will be invited to give a water offering with ceramic rhyton vessels, gestures that connect to Belwin and the surrounding community's commitment to the rewilding of Valley Creek. Frank will be joined by Leslie Thomas from the Afton Historical Society and others, who will present on the history of Valley Creek.

Visit belwin.org/events for current information about 4Ground activities at Belwin. Visit 4groundbiennial.org for all activities this June-August.

Back to Our Roots

After several years of experimenting with open hiking at the **Education Site** (1553 Stagecoach Trail S.), we've decided to return it to its original purpose: a site reserved for education, research, and partnership programming.

As we look ahead, this allows us to focus on better maintenance of existing public hiking areas like Stagecoach Prairie as well as to open new hiking areas. It also gives our partners, including Saint Paul Public Schools and American Indian Family Center, the space they need to carry out their programming.

Though the Education Site will be closed to public hiking, there will continue to be special events, guided hikes, and partner programming that will invite you to experience this part of Belwin.





MAJOR EVENTS

BELWIN BISON FESTIVAL

May 21, 2022 | 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

Experience a spring day on the prairie, filled with fun activities for all ages, including the release of the 2022 Bison Herd from NorthStar Bison. Enjoy live music, interactive eco-arts, prairie activities, native plant sales at the event tent, as well as food trucks. Performing artists include the Riddle Brothers, and Sarah Greer and Dean Magraw.

Belwin's Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields, 15601 Hudson Rd. N., Lakeland. \$10 per car.



4GROUND: MIDWEST LAND ART BIENNIAL

Throughout Summer 2022;

Special Events July 31 & August 21

(see Upcoming Events, right)

More than 20 sites across the upper Midwest are participating in this inaugural event. Each site will host land art created by renowned contemporary artists — including Taiquaa//Ambe Omaa (come here), pictured— and community-based collectives. As one of the host sites, Belwin will welcome three artists to create and perform on our lands, with an emphasis on prairie and the impact of bison.

FREE! Read page 5 for more details and visit belwin.org/events.

MUSIC IN THE TREES

August 13 & August 14 | 10:00 am – 3:00 pm

A diverse group of instrumentalists and vocalists will perform among Belwin's red-pine restoration at this two-day outdoor event. Featuring dozens of musicians collaborating and improvising over the course of two days with Saturday dedicated to children's programming. A fully-accessible hour-long performance will be held each day.

Belwin's Education Site, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S., Afton. \$10 per car.

CELEBRATING YOUR WILD VOICE

September 24 & October 15

9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Join Belwin Conservancy's naturalist **Lynette Anderson** and vocal coach/song leader extraordinaire **Barbara McAfee** for a day exploring your unique and wild voice outdoors. Includes conversation, playfully opening up your voice, community singing, gentle stretching, mindful walking (or sitting) on Belwin's trails, and vocal improv games. No singing experience or talent required.

Belwin's Education Site, 1553 Stagecoach Tr. S., Afton. Sliding-scale fee.

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 12	"We Belong to the Earth" Talk
May 14	Evening Wetland Walk
May 15	Be a Better Birder
May 21	Belwin Bison Festival
June 17 & 18	Women Walking
July 15 & 23	Saturdays on the Savanna Donor Event
July 26	FamilyMeans Nature Memories Open House
July 31	4Ground — Unveiling & Performance
Aug. 13 & 14	Music in the Trees
Aug. 20	Amphibians and Reptiles of Minnesota
Aug. 21	4Ground — "Rewilding Valley Creek"
Aug. 24	Walk on the Wildside
Sept. 16 & 17	Women Walking
Sept. 22	Night in Nature Donor Event
Sept. 24	Celebrating Your Wild Voice
Oct. 15	Celebrating Your Wild Voice

Belwin Conservancy Board of Directors

David Hartwell, President	Cindy Gehrig
Doug Johnson, Vice President	Kris Hansen
Jill Koosmann, Treasurer	Jessica Manivasager
John Satorius, Secretary	Irene Qualters
Jerry Allan	

Please visit our website for complete event details:
belwin.org/events



NEW STAFF, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

By Angie Eckel, *Development & Communications Director*



The Belwin staff: (from left) Cooper Crose, Justin Sykora, Laura Sherar, Marggie Ogas, Susan Haugh, Katie Bloome, Angie Eckel, Haley Kutzler, Lynette Anderson, Hannah Smith. Not pictured: Facilities & Equipment Specialist Eric Palmen.

Blooms aren't the only new things you might have seen recently at Belwin. We also have five new team members — with more on the way!

Since last summer, we have been fortunate to hire some very talented people in support of our land management, programming, and development teams. With their additional support comes the ability to do more strategic and big thinking. It also provides our entire team with new energy as we learn more about one another and bring our various gifts to the table.

Cooper Crose
Natural Resources Specialist

"Following birds is what got me into working with natural resources. Before Belwin, I spent three seasons monitoring shorebird and seabird populations on Lake Superior, Cape Cod, and Central Oregon near the Columbia River."

Haley Kutzler
Land-Use Coordinator

"I grew up in the country, playing in the woods, working on the family tree farm, and hunting and fishing. For the last 12 years, I've coached for the River Falls Volleyball Club and served on their board for the last six years."

Marggie Ogas
Development Assistant

"Outside of Belwin, I'm a professional dance artist. I actually first learned about Belwin through a dance residency last summer! I also love to teach and currently teach modern and creative movement classes to youth at Young Dance and Zenon Dance School in Minneapolis."

Laura Sherar
Event & Office Coordinator

"I am passionate about sustainable food systems, from the local to global level. Each year, I enjoy experimenting in my vegetable garden to try new growing methods."

Hannah Smith
Program Coordinator, Anishinabe Academy partnership

"My love of adventure, nature, languages, art, and lifelong learning has allowed me to call many parts of the world 'home,' including my most recent experience living with and learning from an Indigenous community in the mountains of central Mexico."

A Summer of Stewardship

Each summer, two people join our team of dedicated conservation professionals during the most critical months. This spring, we asked you to help us bring on even more seasonal staff as we improve existing trails and help prepare a new public hiking area on St. Croix Trail. You responded—we raised over \$30,000 to expand our land team and bring more care to the land during this busy season! Thank you for making our public spaces bigger, healthier, and more accessible!





BELWIN

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

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

INSPIRING THROUGH NATURE

*The mission of Belwin Conservancy is
inspiring connection and engagement
with the natural world.*

BELWIN BISON FESTIVAL

**Saturday, May 21, 2022
10 AM – 2 PM**

featuring
Bison Release, Eco-Arts, Live
Music, 5K "Run with the
Bison" Fun Run, Food Trucks



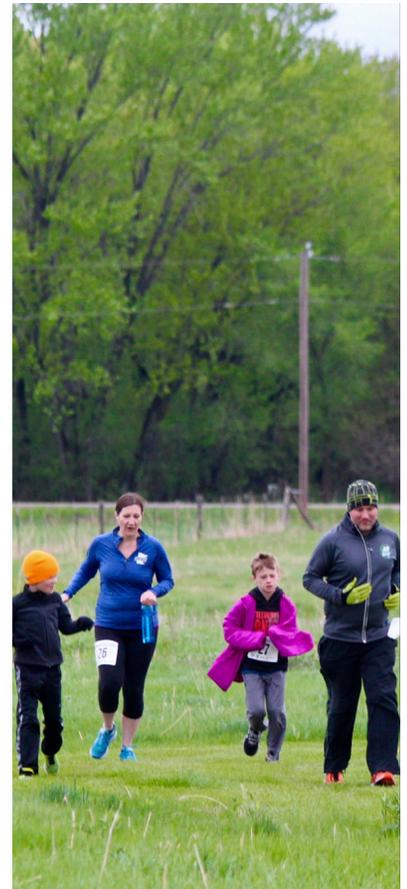
**\$10 per car
separate entrance fee for 5K**

belwin.org | 651-436-5189

SPONSORS



PARTNERS



This newsletter uses SFI Certified Sourcing paper and agri-based inks made in Minnesota. When you're done reading it, please share it with a friend!

Stay connected with Belwin online!

