

PRESS RELEASE

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ANISHINABE
ACADEMY



BELWIN

Urban Indigenous School Partnership Receives Support to Expand Reach to More Indigenous Agencies and Schools

A \$668,000 state grant is making it possible for a partnership between Belwin Conservancy in Afton and Anishinabe Academy in Minneapolis to expand its reach dramatically and provide resources for other local Indigenous communities



Elder Kevin Smokyday educating Anishinabe Academy students during a recent visit. (June 2023).

(Afton, MN, July 28, 2023) – Phase two of the ‘Restoring Land, Reviving Heritage: Indigenous Conservation’ project received support from the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) last week when it was selected for inclusion in their annual recommendations to the Minnesota Legislature on how to allocate proceeds from the state’s Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. The project received \$668,000 in funding, which allows this partnership between Belwin Conservancy, a nonprofit nature center in Afton, and Anishinabe Academy to greatly expand its capabilities over the next few years

and provide resources for other urban Indigenous communities.

This partnership has been in place since 2019, offering traditional outdoor learning on 18.8 acres of restored prairie, wetland, and woodland edge for pre-K through 5th grade Indigenous students at Anishinabe Academy, a Minneapolis public school. Since its inception, the partnership has hosted



Anishinabe Academy students observe a bison herd on one of their visits to Belwin Conservancy. (June 2022)

over 300 visits to the site through field trips and family events. Among other things, students have studied keystone species such as bison, sampled soil to prepare for three sisters gardening, removed buckthorn, practiced identifying important bird and plant species, and participated in ongoing restoration projects.

This new funding will allow the program to host visits from other Indigenous-led organizations and schools, and expand current programming to accommodate visits from students up through 12th

grade, as well as alumni who visited the site before this expansion.

If approved by the 2024 Legislature and signed into law by the Governor, the second phase of this project would begin in July 2024.

“Many urban Indigenous communities have lost connections to nature and their food heritage, but Indigenous Peoples have never given up our sense of responsibility to one another and to the land. It is this relationship with the land that has sustained Native people and will continue to do so in the future,” says Cece Benimon, Engagement Specialist for MPS. “This collaboration between Belwin Conservancy and Anishinabe Academy continues this relationship with our younger generation, allowing students to have hands-on experience working with the land.”



With 18.8 acres of restored prairie, wetland, and woodland edge, students can do many cultural activities, such as raising tipis. (June 2022).

The project was one of 101 included in the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources' (LCCMR) recommendation following its 2024 Request for Proposals (RFP), which sought projects across several priority issue areas, including foundational data and information, water resources, environmental education, invasive species, renewable energy, methods to protect and restore habitat, and habitat protection and outdoor recreation. The LCCMR will meet on November 16, 2023, to finalize these recommendations.

In response to the RFP, LCCMR received 218 proposals requesting a total of approximately \$174 million. Members selected 102 proposals to invite in for a presentation before the LCCMR. From this reduced pool, 101 proposals received a recommendation to the Legislature for some portion of the \$79,644,000 available. Additional information on the LCCMR and its 2024 provisional recommendations process can be found online at www.lccmr.mn.gov.

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Belwin Conservancy is a nonprofit organization with a mission of inspiring connection and engagement with the natural world. At Belwin, we spark passion for wild places through a variety of innovative experiential programs that include the arts, astronomy, athletic fields, bison, education, and public access to our restored lands. Through land protection and habitat restoration, we revive threatened ecosystems so wildlife can thrive for generations to come. Located in Afton, Minnesota, on the ancestral home of the Wahpekute Dakota people, Belwin's 1,500 acres of permanently protected land includes woodland, prairie, oak savanna, ponds, streams, and wetlands.

Anishinabe Academy is a pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade Minneapolis Public School, which exists to engage urban Indigenous students by integrating and reclaiming Native American identities, cultures and languages through authentic academic experiences.

The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) is a permanent dedicated fund in the Minnesota state treasury that was established by 77% voter approval of a constitutional amendment in 1988. The amendment directs forty percent of the net proceeds of the Minnesota State Lottery into the ENRTF until the year 2025. Since 1991, approximately \$697 million from the ENRTF has been spent on over 1,700 projects that protect and enhance Minnesota's environment and natural resources in every county of the state.