

**MEDIA CONTACT**

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**BELWIN**

# BELWIN BISON FESTIVAL

## **BISON ARE BACK AT BELWIN CONSERVANCY**

*On May 18th, Belwin Conservancy will Hold its Annual Belwin Bison Festival*

**Afton, Minn.** — On **Saturday, May 18th**, Belwin Conservancy will hold its annual **Belwin Bison Festival**. This beloved festival marks the **release of the 2024 NorthStar bison herd** onto the Bison Prairie. In addition to the release, the event will feature food trucks, live music, a 5k “Run with the Bison” Fun Run, eco-arts, and more. The festival has an entrance fee of \$10 per car and will be held at the **Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields (15601 Hudson Road N., Lakeland, MN 55082) from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. Fun Run check-in begins at 9:00 am.**



The release of the bison has been a staple of Belwin’s restoration efforts since 2008, when NorthStar Bison first partnered with us to bring these animals back to their native prairie habitat. Each year, the spring release of the bison herd onto Belwin’s 130-acre Bison Prairie has been witnessed and celebrated by hundreds of people from across the Twin Cities and eastern Wisconsin.

The bison release won't be the only attraction. This festival also features several interactive activities including a soil demonstration from Washington Conservation District and interactive eco-arts from Paper Plains and Jerry Carlson, who will have a rainbow loom woven with grasses on display. An interactive soil demonstration from Washington Conservation District will also be returning as will Imnizaska Dakota Drum Group who will perform to welcome the bison prior to the release.

Other musical performances include Hannah Lou Woods (who guests may remember from Belwin's 2023 Music in the Trees event) and roots-rock group The Bad Companions. These will both occur in the Festival Tent, as well as Carpenter Nature Center will also present the "Animals of the St. Croix," introducing guests to some local critters! Throughout the day, American Indian Family Center will have an interactive tipi, as well as ArtReach St. Croix's mobile art gallery, and much more! Food will also be available from Youniverse Foodie, Twin Cities Pita, and Pete's Potato Blossom.

In the morning, we'll also host a **5k "Run with the Bison Fun Run"** for joggers who want to run on the Bison Prairie before the festival begins. Check-in for the Fun Run is at 9:00 am and the run will start at 10:00 am. Registrations for this run are now active and can be found [here](#).

We want to thank Pioneer Press, who is sponsoring the Festival alongside Midwest Exteriors MN, who is sponsoring all of our major events in 2024.

For a schedule of the day's events, see the end of this press release.

### **Partnership with NorthStar**

"Our relationship with Belwin is really the heartbeat of NorthStar and what bison, as a species, is all about: restoration and regeneration." said Sean Graese of NorthStar Bison. "Restoring healthy ecosystems, healthy people and, ultimately, a healthy, thriving species. When you have that, everyone wins."

Belwin staff has witnessed firsthand just how effective the bison can be at restoring natural habitats. "Since I joined Belwin, I've seen that the bison actually do a better job managing the prairie than anything we humans can do," said Belwin Conservancy Operations Director Justin Sykora. "The diversity of the prairie has greatly improved since the bison have been coming. They are modifying our management strategy."

We invite guests of all ages to join us for the annual release of the bison at the Belwin Bison Festival on Saturday, May 18th, 10:00 am to 2:00 pm at Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields (15601 Hudson Road N., Lakeland, MN 55082).

## **Schedule**

### **9:00 am: 5k "Run with the Bison" Fun Run Check-In Begins**

### **10:00 am: 5k "Run with the Bison" Fun Run**

Before the bison take to the prairie, have a fun run through it! (Pre-registration required. Runners may arrive for check-in starting at 9:00 am; there is a 10-minute walk to the starting line.) \$20 registration through May 17; \$25 same-day registration.

### **10:00 am – 12:00 pm: Live Music, Activities in the Tent, Food Trucks**

- **Hannah Lou Woods: 10:00 am - 10:50 am**
- **Carpenter Nature Center, "Animals of the St. Croix:" 11 am - 11:40 am**

### **12:00 pm: Arrival of the Bison Herd**

The bison will arrive at noon and be released shortly after. All who want to see the release should arrive by noon. Imnizaska Dakota Drum Group will perform to welcome the bison prior to the release.

### **1:00 pm – 2:00 pm: Live Music, Activities in the Tent, Food Trucks**

- **The Bad Companions: 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm**

## **Interesting facts about bison:**

- As much as 99% of a bison's diet is grass, with an adult bison consuming up to 30 lb. of grass in a single day. The herd of juvenile males from NorthStar Bison will summer on Belwin's 130-acre northern prairie, or Bison Prairie, eating the native grasses that we have worked to restore on this former cropland.
- Bison bulls range in height from 5.5 to 7 feet at the shoulder; bulls can weigh up to 2,000 lb.
- Estimates are that 30 to 60 million bison may have roamed North America prior to 1600. Though they ranged across the continent, the majority lived on the Great Plains. Less than 1,000 bison remained before restoration efforts were undertaken beginning in the late 1800s.

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## **INFORMATION**

*Please note: No dogs allowed at any Belwin event.*

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## **ABOUT BELWIN CONSERVANCY**

[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.