

St. Croix Valley Foundation Proposal Narrative Belwin Conservancy

I. Organization Overview

The Belwin Conservancy is located in Afton, Lakeland and West Lakeland Township, Minnesota in the St. Croix Valley. Belwin began in 1970 as a private family foundation started by Charles and Lucy Bell. In 2007, the Belwin Foundation became Belwin Conservancy. Belwin early on realized the importance of forming strategic partnerships that have become the basis for successful programming on Belwin's lands. The six partners include two school districts (Stillwater and Saint Paul), the Minnesota Astronomical Society, St. Croix Valley Athletic Association (VAA), Sporting St. Croix (SSC) and, most recently, The Phipps Center for the Arts. These partnerships introduce approximately 70,000 people to Belwin resources each year. In addition, Belwin has a small but growing base of members that participate in a variety of programs and events offered each year.

Belwin's 1,364 acres of permanently protected lands are unique and include woodlands and forest, restored and remnant prairies, oak savanna, ponds, streams, a floating bog, and a 50-acre athletic complex that serves youth from the St. Croix Valley. Belwin Conservancy works tirelessly to protect and restore these resources which serve as an ideal platform to provide an exciting experiential education opportunity to students, teachers and families.

Art and Nature

Belwin Conservancy's Art and Nature program mission is to inspire our connections to the natural world through the arts. The original idea for the Art and Nature program was given shape in 2013-14 through a strategic plan. The program began in January 2015 when Belwin formed a partnership with The Phipps Center for the Arts and joined Navigate, exploring the intersection of art and nature. The Art and Nature initiative grew when composer, conductor, and former artistic director Susan Haugh was hired in 2015 to fill a new, full-time position dedicated to advancing Belwin's arts programming. In addition to projects with The Phipps, programming includes a photography project with the Western Wisconsin Photo Club, performing and visual artist talks and workshops, and Belwin has had three Artists in Residence to date: sculptor and installation artist Tamsie Ringler, composer Steve Heitzeg, and poet Laurie Allmann.

II. Project Description

Belwin's exploration of Art and Nature will take a giant leap in 2018 with our first ever EcoArt Fest. The EcoArt Fest will take place at Belwin's Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields (LWBAF). With its eight soccer fields and four baseball diamonds, surrounded by 104 acres of restored prairie and woodlands, LWBAF is the perfect site for an arts festival in nature! We are excited to energize this site with the arts.

EcoArt Fest: As you enter the site, from the north off Hudson Road, you will immediately be stimulated by art, (photo or prairie installation). You proceed through this art, past wetlands (our irrigation pond and storm water drainage) and solar panels, and one large tent comes into view. The tent will feature at least 15 interactive, ecology based, art installations and activities, strolling musicians and storytellers. As you venture out to explore the surrounding prairie you'll meet musicians, dancers and musical storytellers. At noon, all will go to greet the bison at the annual Bison Release located a quarter mile to the south of the fields. After the release, the arts festivities resume until 2pm. Food trucks will be available .

Timeline 2018

- January: Secure community organizational participation: ArtReach and The Phipps.
- February: Secure contract for site needs; meet with regional consultants about ecologically based arts, art installations and festival planning; put out call for visual and performance artists.
- March: Convene art committee to determine artists and musicians; confirm all contracts.
- April: Belwin's biannual Newsletter sent highlighting EcoArt Fest, market event in regional monthly newsletters, post on web-based calendars and on social media.
- May: Market event in bi-monthly print media; press release to local news sources in the St. Croix Valley to, 1. Encourage them to write an article about the EcoArt Fest, and 2. Cover the event;
- May 19:
- 10am - 2pm EcoArt Fest: artists together in large tents and on prairie trails; food trucks on site
 - 10am – 11am "5K Run with the Bison" ends at the EcoArt Fest tent
 - 12 – 12:30pm Bison Release
 - 2pm Arts activities conclude.

What are the goals you hope to achieve?

- To create an annual, community, art and nature event that brings together, and inspires, people of all ages.
- To energize and support ecologically based artists in the St. Croix Valley.
- To engage audiences in thought provoking artistic experiences that are ecologically based.
- To impact 1,500 people through arts and nature interactions.

What public service activity will you provide and where will that activity be conducted?

The EcoArt Fest is free and open to the public. It will take place at Belwin's Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields, a highly trafficked and well known, regional site for youth athletics. We are proud to support the St. Croix Valley arts community and excited for this opportunity to provide a festival that explores the intersection of art and nature.

How will people find out about your project and/or what will you do to get your project to them?

We are confident that we will be able to attract people to the event for three reasons.

1. Belwin's annual Bison Release will be held on the same day in the middle of the EcoArt Fest. The Bison Release alone attracts close to 1,000 people. The bison prairie is just south of the athletic fields and we have used LWBAF for event parking each year. We will capitalize on this successful event.
2. On the morning of the EcoArt Fest we are holding a "5K Run with the Bison" in partnership with the YMCA of Woodbury. The run will end at the EcoArt Fest. We hope to have both Woodbury and Hudson YMCA helping to advertise the run which will draw audiences to the EcoArt Fest.
3. There are several thousand sports families who use Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields each year. We will work with Sporting St. Croix Soccer and the St. Croix Valley Athletic Association to advertise the Eco Art Fest to their members.

Who is involved in this project (leadership/consultants/volunteers/artists)?

Susan Haugh is program director for the Belwin Conservancy. Susan joined Belwin in November 2015 and her previous experience includes founding Dreams of Hope, a creative and youth performing arts organization, and the Renaissance City Women's Choir, both located in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. Susan has a BFA in music composition from Carnegie Mellon University. Susan has extensive experience in program development, multidisciplinary arts performance, musical composition and conducting, and working with youth through public school teaching.

Regional Consultants: Heather Rutledge, ArtReach; Carolyn Payne, SOO Visual Arts Center; Steve Dietz of Northern Lights MN and I are meeting March 5th to discuss the event and his availability.

Visual Artists

Confirmed (as of February 4): Anastasia Shartin, photo installation curator; What We Need Is Here sponsored by The Phipps Center for the Arts; ArtReach Mobile Art Gallery.

Individual eco-based, installation artists will be chosen by a committee of Belwin staff and our arts consultants.

Performance Artists

Confirmed: Impossible Salt, musical storytellers.

Individuals musicians found in consultation with teachers at Schuster's Music in Hudson.

Youth Performers – In January I began discussions with instructors at The Phipps youth theater and dance and have a meeting with Stillwater High School teachers in February to discuss their involvement.

III. *Need, Impact, Evaluation*

Why is this project needed?

Belwin is creating the EcoArt Fest for two main reasons.

1. There are few places where artists, interested in the intersection of art and nature, can work with audiences directly on restored prairies, woodlands and wetlands. Belwin provides a venue for this interaction.
2. The threat to our environment, locally and globally, is real. Belwin is committed to seeking new and meaningful ways to create change by communicating ecologically sound science. The arts provide unique opportunities for experiential learning, which creates connections for participants, deepens their understanding, and encourages action.

What artistic benefit will result from your activities?

Belwin is benefitting the arts in three primary ways.

1. Belwin is paying the artists and musicians, helping to support their important work.
2. Belwin is opening up its land to artists for exploration and interpretation which will benefit the artists' work as they explore and interpret ecologically sound principles.
3. Belwin is bringing artists from different disciplines together, literally under one tent. The interactions between artists will be exciting and inspiring to the artists as well as to audiences.

How will the participants and the larger community benefit from the project activities?

Individual participants will be engaged in discovery and art making that creates connections with the natural world. In combination with the 5K Fun Run with the Bison and the Bison Release we hope to attract audiences that do not normally attend arts festivals. In this way we hope to reach new audiences and inspire them, deepening their connection to the natural world through the arts.

The larger community will benefit from the EcoArt Fest because it will bring people of all ages together around a shared experience and attract new audiences to the St. Croix Valley. This event will become an annual, growing festival that inspires audiences to support both the arts and the wild and scenic spaces found in the St. Croix Valley.

What methods will you use to determine whether you have met your project goals?

Belwin will have two surveys.

1. One for artists regarding their experience, and their thoughts on the impact on their art making and their impact on the audience.
2. One for audience members. We will collect audience emails and send out an electronic survey to gather their comments.