



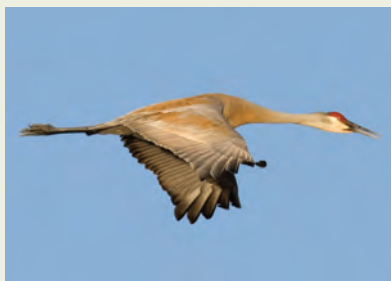
the Meadowlark

A PUBLICATION FROM THE BELWIN CONSERVANCY

SPRING/SUMMER 2018

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Fun Fact: All winter, we waited to hear the rolling chortle of the Sandhill Crane migrating back to the nesting grounds of the Midwest, hoping some would choose Belwin Conservancy. These birds are ancient, graceful creatures, one of many birds protected by the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Learn more about this important legislation at www.belwin.org.

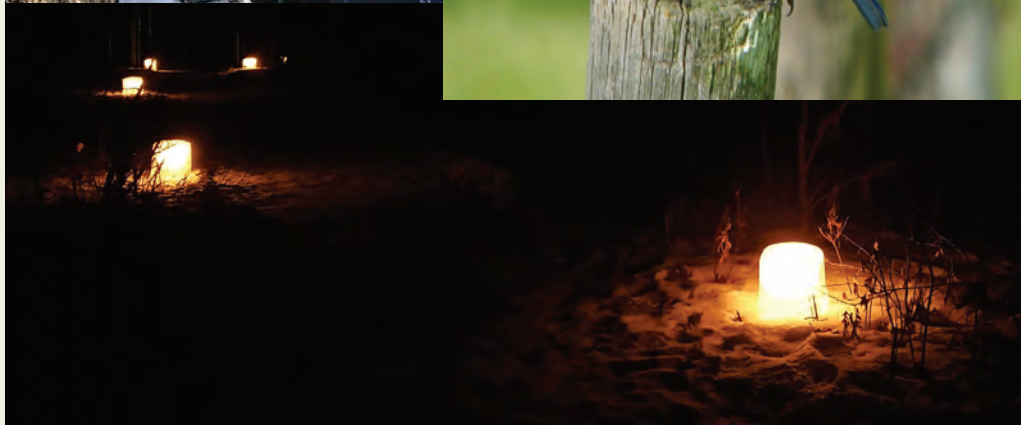


**BELWIN
CONSERVANCY**
Inspiring through Nature



Change and Growth in 2018

Learn how we are evolving to support the needs of members, the community and the land.





– Continuing Our Legacy – Expanding Our Reach

Leadership

The new year is bringing exciting change to Belwin. In 2018 we are **hiring a new director** to lead us into the future.

Former Executive Director Nancy Kafka served at Belwin for five years, leading our team in implementing our 21st Century Master & Strategic Plan, among other accomplishments. We are grateful for her time at Belwin and wish her the best in her new endeavors.

By the end of the second quarter of this year, we hope to have hired our new director. We look forward to introducing you to this person soon.

Celebrating the Bison

On May 19, we will celebrate the 10th anniversary of partnering with Northstar Bison to bring a herd to Belwin's prairie. The **2018 Bison Release** will include a 5K "Run with the Bison" Fun Trail Run at 10:00 a.m. in partnership with the YMCA of Woodbury, an EcoArt Fest from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., and, of course, the release of the bison at 12:00 p.m. Read more on page 8 and online at www.belwin.org.

Land Management

If you were near Belwin last winter, you likely noticed our two most recent land management projects: restoring the woodlands and savannas along Valley Creek's south branch and improvements at Stagecoach Prairie.

The Valley Creek project involves ridding the creek's banks of invasive buckthorn in order to help clean the creek's water as it flows to the St. Croix River. We are able to bring the buckthorn back under control through various techniques and in working with Prairie Restorations, Inc.



To see what it takes to restore a woodland, drive along Valley Creek Road near the intersection with Stagecoach Trail South and look to the south. The woods are transformed! More information about this project will be online and in the next issue of *The Meadowlark*.

Improvements to Stagecoach Prairie include wildlife-friendly fencing, signs noting that the prairie is open to everyone and a second entrance on Stagecoach Trail South. In contrast to the woodland entrance on 11th Street, the new entrance opens the prairie immediately to the walker. A new donation box, designed and built by staff members Justin Sykora and Eric Palmen, will be installed soon. Thank you for helping us maintain this prairie with your donations.

Open Third Saturdays

Bell Oak Savanna, the name given to Belwin's first land purchase, is the site of Belwin Outdoor Science, our 47-year partnership with Saint Paul Public Schools. The 300-acre site (located at 1553 Stagecoach Trail S.) is home to all four biomes found in the upper Midwest, making it a perfect spot for outdoor

education. Because this site is used by schools, however, it's generally closed to the public except for one Saturday each month.

We recently expanded Open Third Saturdays to allow more people to experience the beautiful topography.

- **Non-members can now attend Open Third Saturdays for free**
- **New one-hour Guided Experiences** are free for members and \$10.00 for non-members

Partners in the Community

Thank you to the Donald Weesner and Smikis Foundations. With their support, we purchased a much-needed new truck to maintain the property, which includes 4.5 miles of non-public roads.

We are partnering again with the Western Wisconsin Photo Club (WWPC) to display their photographs at Belwin's Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields (LWBAF). The Prairie Photo Exhibit will appear along the drives and on the buildings at LWBAF, at The Phipps Center for the Arts in Hudson, Wisc., and the Afton Historical Museum. The photo exhibit will launch at the Bison Release and highlights Belwin's landscapes and wildlife.

We're also excited to be partnering with the City of Woodbury Parks and Recreation department to host a number of upcoming events.

We Want Your Feedback

As we grow our programs and events, we are asking for more feedback to help us understand how best to open our lands to you in ecologically responsible ways. If you attend an event, watch for a survey via email, and please share your feedback.

You can also contact us anytime with comments and questions: 651-436-5189 and info@belwin.org.

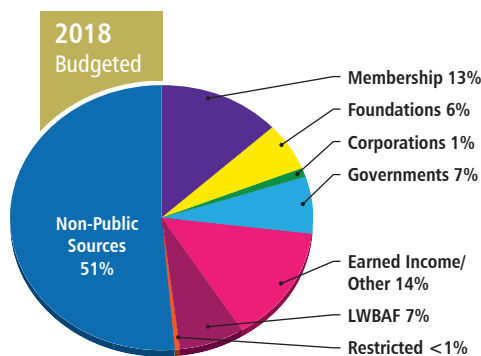
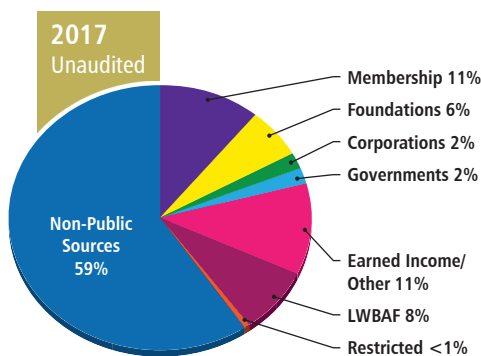
Thank you!
The Belwin Staff and Board



Belwin's location in the St. Croix River watershed is central to much of our work – including stewardship of Valley Creek, a tributary. We join our friends and partners up and down the river in 2018 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, which included the St. Croix as one of the first eight designated rivers. For more information about the anniversary and the year-long celebration, visit www.stcroixriverassociation.org.

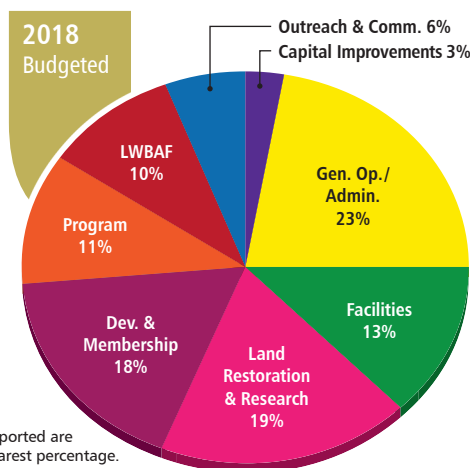
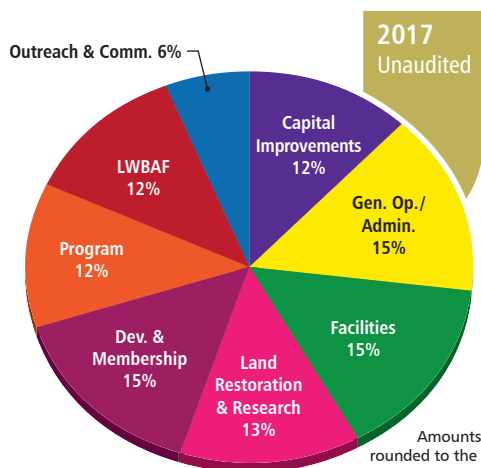
2017 ANNUAL REPORT

Income	2017 Unaudited	2018 Budgeted
Public Sources		
Membership and Donations	\$ 113,718	\$ 139,175
Foundations	57,549	69,600
Corporations (including in-kind)	15,000	15,144
Governments (grants and contracts)	22,861	76,302
Earned income/Other (rent, reimbursements, fee for service)	112,734	155,107
LWBAF Field Use Payment	77,950	77,800
Restricted (capital improvements)	8,425	5,400
Non-Public sources (including Belwin Supporting Fund)	580,838	564,752
Total Income	989,075	1,103,280



Expenses	2017 Unaudited	2018 Budgeted
General Operating/Administration	\$ 139,425	\$ 206,230
Facilities	135,860	116,860
Land Restoration and Research	116,658	174,794
Development and Membership Program	132,827	160,676
LWBAF Facility Management	106,169	92,647
Outreach and Communications	56,122	55,410
Capital Improvements	112,920	29,800*
Total Expenses	913,416	908,422
Net Surplus/Shortfall	75,659	194,858

*Contingent upon successful fundraising for capital items.



Amounts reported are rounded to the nearest percentage.

People Served*

Belwin Outdoor Science	12,482
Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields	150,000
Joseph J. Casby Observatory/ Minnesota Astronomical Society	329
Belwin Conservancy events	1,144
Belwin trail usage	3,504

Total People Served 167,459

*January 1, 2017 – December 31, 2017

Restoration Activities

Acres burned	95
Bison herd size	40
Hours of Integrated plant management (hand pulling, burning, mowing, herbicide control)	3,982
Number of invasive species managed	15

Bird Monitoring

Bird monitoring at Belwin Conservancy plays an important role in our management plans. If we know what is there and what those species need, we can better restore the habitat. One of our success stories is the Henslow's Sparrow, which is on the 2016 North American Bird Watch List and is a species of special concern in Minnesota. They require tracts of grassland of at least 200 acres, a deep litter layer and standing grass stems to sing from. You can hear Henslow's Sparrows sing at Stagecoach Prairie Natural Area.

Complete data for 2017 bird monitoring is still being entered and will be posted at www.belwin.org when it's complete.



Henslow's Sparrow by Andy Reago and Chrissy McClarren (<https://flic.kr/p/eJ8X4W>).



Photo by Greg Seitz.

I can't even describe how incorporating bison have enhanced the landscape here. The quality and maturation of our prairie has been improved by a factor of four. The balance and abundance of insects, wildlife, wildflowers and grasses here is truly special. Simultaneously, our management energy and costs have plummeted. All thanks to the bison.

— Justin Sykora, Operations Director, Belwin Conservancy

The Impact of Bison at Belwin Conservancy

By Sean Graese, Northstar Bison

NORTHSTAR BISON AND BELWIN JOINED FORCES IN 2008 in an effort to help improve the conservancy's degrading grasslands. At that time, the prairies were being managed solely through the common practice of rest, burning, mowing and herbicide treatment.

Belwin was losing the battle: Losing soil due to receding vegetation, losing native plant, wildlife, and insect species diversity, losing the luxury of low-impact treatment as invasive species demanded chemical control, and the list goes on.

Something had to change.

That's when Belwin and Northstar worked out the first plan to bring bison back to the prairie, under the management of former Belwin executive director Steve Hobbs.

The first herd was slated for delivery in June. Justin Sykora, who was working at a local land design, restoration and management firm at the time, was initially skeptical of the plan. "I couldn't imagine then the positive, powerful influence of the bison on Belwin's prairies," said Sykora.

Justin, admittedly thankful today, couldn't have been more wrong. Bison have brought

prairies back to better health than we could have imagined. The bison's positive interaction with the landscape is now being supported by science (imagine that).

The relationship between mycorrhizal fungi and plants is much better understood today. These fungi essentially act like a "nutrient subway station" in the soil, forming vast webs that transfer nutrients for miles to plants that need it, when they need it.

Due to our ignorance of these fungi, humans have disrupted their functions with plows and chemicals. But bison have a bacteria ingredient in their saliva that "plants" mycorrhizal fungi as they graze.

The connections between bison and prairie health are powerful.

Today, the insect chorus resonating from Belwin's bison pasture drowns out the hum of I-94 just a quarter-mile north. Wildflowers are prolific. Hawks, owls, coyotes, foxes and other predators hunt rodents the bison herd stirs up. Songbirds perch on the backs of the bison, picking off insects buzzing by. Eastern meadowlarks, ground-nesting birds which depend on large grasslands and are

in a worrying population decline around the United States, still sing their flutelike songs here.

And the bison? They're feasting on the diverse salad bar, packing on pounds of muscle mass and bone density, in turn providing people with the most nourishing food on the planet.

That's the cycle of life on the prairie. It all starts with the bison and ends with the bison, but if we don't consume the bison, they don't have an economic provision to outcompete the cornfield across the fence at Belwin.

Our partnership has big benefits not just for bison and prairie, but for people.

Northstar's customers relay remarkable impacts from incorporating grass-fed bison into their diet. Sometimes it's enough to choke-up a grown man. The impacts are life-changing as lifelong ailments seem to disappear.

To be able to positively impact your own health, while also supporting this magnitude of environmental impact in places like Belwin's prairie, creates a strong connection between people and the land. It is incredible to see.



Catching Up with Marta McCormack, Belwin Development Manager

As word of Belwin grows among the residents of the St. Croix Valley, membership is growing too. Development Manager Marta McCormack talks about the reasons more families are joining and shares the details of an exciting \$50,000 matching grant for 2018.

In what new and interesting ways has the Belwin member base been changing over the past few years?

I see a lot more support coming from the surrounding communities, such as Woodbury, Stillwater and Hudson. I also see a trend in more family memberships versus individual memberships. As more people realize the importance of getting outside, Belwin is an obvious choice with our spectacular trail system and variety of environments in which to connect with nature.

What do you feel is the most rewarding part of supporting Belwin?

Knowing that you are a part of protecting the land, providing open spaces for all to enjoy, and giving critters a safe place to call home.

What fundraising goals are you working toward in 2018?

We're currently working to meet an anonymous \$50,000 matching grant with a specific set of criteria. For example, if a new member supports Belwin with a donation of \$100, we'll receive a \$100 match. And if a former member rejoins, we'll receive a match in the amount that is given. The hurdle is that we must first raise the \$50,000 before any match is received, and we have to do it in 2018.

Why does Belwin fundraise?

Fundraising enables us to grow in our ability to protect, restore and maintain our nearly 1,400 acres of land. The funds also help us do more to connect our neighbors in the Valley with an experience in nature that inspires and motivates them to care for our environment.

One way we're connecting with new audiences is through the arts. Program Director Susan Haugh is coming up with many creative ways to bring people to Belwin, such as the Arctic Circle artist explorers at the February Open House, and the upcoming EcoArt Fest as part of the Bison Release in May. Member dollars help us come up with unique programs and opportunities for everyone to be immersed in nature.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Meet BFFs Bonnie Wheeler and Connie Hess

BONNIE AND CONNIE WANT TO BE YOUR BFF'S:
BELWIN FRIENDS FOREVER!

The friends and former educators visited Belwin Conservancy in 2017 and almost immediately became active volunteers and ambassadors of Belwin. They want to help spread the word about a place where they feel a special kinship.

At last September's Night in Nature event, Connie was moved by the natural beauty just eight miles from her home. "I was riding with Bonnie and we drove up the hill [toward the Education Center] through the trees, and it felt just like the Boundary Waters," she said. "I took a deep breath and thought, oh my gosh! The whole evening was kind of mystical and magical. The place was speaking to me."

They are in their element and having a blast being volunteers here. Their hope is to turn visitors into members of Belwin. Look for them at the Bison Release and most activities that Belwin has to offer. Both are approachable and looking like they are having a good time.



Belwin Development Manager Marta McCormack (center) flanked by her happy volunteers, Bonnie (left) and Connie (right), at the February Open House.

"We want people to know that Belwin is here to enjoy, to learn about, and to partake in events," Bonnie said. "As we bring in all these people who have never heard of Belwin, they can take ownership, and they will talk about it with others. Awareness will spread very quickly."

"If you're a volunteer, you get more than you give," Bonnie continued. "Belwin is a special place."

Look forward to the continuing comments of Bonnie and Connie online at www.belwin.org.



Meet Jim Rue



Belwin Conservancy was in its infancy when Jim Rue first experienced Belwin, as a high school senior in 1972. Since that first memorable experience, he's been a summer volunteer, then the Belwin Outdoor Science special education teacher and coordinator, and now a Belwin Conservancy special programs leader.

Last summer, Jim taught fly fishing on Valley Creek and this past winter he led groups on the popular nighttime owl prowls. He also helped Belwin staff conduct the annual spring bird survey and is finishing a study on the Blanding's Turtle population.

After spending more than 40 years on Belwin lands, he's still enamored with the conservancy. "I love how you can go out day after day, on the same trail, and still be surprised by what you find here," he said.

"What keeps me committed to Belwin is its mission. I feel we're doing great work. The conservation and restoration

efforts are helping to bring diversity back to the land. The ongoing research being conducted gives us in-depth knowledge of the health and quality of the ecosystem. The education programs are touching the lives of thousands of young people and adults, and giving them reasons to care about the planet."

And, as much as the land pulls him back, the Belwin staff are another reason Jim continues to be involved. "The people are an extremely talented and dedicated group of nature nerds that are also very easy to get along with. I learn something new every time I am around them."

Look for Jim at the Bison Release in May and on various bird and frog hikes throughout the spring and summer. He's also helping to launch a Wetlands pilot program with the City of Woodbury Parks and Recreation department, for students with special needs.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Friday, April 13 (Rain date April 14)

Spring Galaxy Party 8:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.

Did you know spring is a good time to view other distant galaxies? This is because in our rotation around the sun, our Milky Way Galaxy is at or below the horizon, giving us an unobstructed view of intergalactic space. Join Minnesota Astronomical Society members to view galaxy superclusters like Markarian's Chain in the Virgo, Leo, and Coma Berenices constellations. Please bring a chair and blanket for sitting under the stars. Joseph J. Casby Observatory, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S., Afton. Free for members, non-members \$10.

Saturday, May 5

Bison Exhibit and Talk Time: 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.; Talk at 11:00 a.m.

Join Belwin Naturalist, Lynette Anderson, at Woodbury's Central Park as she talks about bison and their relationship with the prairie. This talk and bison exhibit are in partnership with the City of Woodbury Parks and Recreation Department. Central Park, 8595 Central Park Place, Woodbury. Free and open to everyone.

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

Once a month (on the third Saturday of the month), we open the Belwin Outdoor Science Education Center and Bell Oak Savanna lands. Come explore the trails, participate in programs, meet Belwin staff, and connect with nature. Open Third Saturdays include one-hour Guided Experiences at 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. No RSVP necessary. Belwin Outdoor Science Education Center, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S. Open to everyone; Guided Experiences \$10 for non-members.

Saturday, May 19

10th Annual Bison Release

10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. EcoArt Fest;

10:00 a.m. 5K "Run with the Bison" Fun Trail Run, 12:00 p.m. Bison Release

In partnership with NorthStar Bison and the YMCA of Woodbury, come and welcome a herd of juvenile male bison from Northstar Bison to their summer home. This event celebrates the bison's critical role in helping Belwin maintain and improve our restored prairie. New events scheduled for the day of the release include a 5K "Run with the Bison" Fun Trail Run at 10:00 a.m. prior to the bison release. A small registration fee will go toward maintaining the prairie for the bison and you. An EcoArt Fest will run from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. with interactive arts. Food trucks will be on site. Bring a chair or picnic blanket, and carpool when possible. Belwin's Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields, 15601 Hudson Road, West Lakeland. Free and open to everyone.

NIGHT IN NATURE

Thursday, September 13

Please join us for an extraordinary experience this year! Be immersed in music from the treetops as we gather to thank members and volunteers, and welcome those new to Belwin. This annual event is sure to inspire, educate and inform all participants about the natural world and the work Belwin is doing to restore and preserve it. Members, please bring a guest who is not familiar with Belwin. Belwin Outdoor Science Education Center, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S., Afton. Free and open to everyone.

SUNSET PRAIRIE HIKES AT THE BELWIN CREATIVE CENTER

One evening/month (time will change throughout the seasons)

Sunset Prairie Hikes in 2018 will take place at the Belwin Creative Center located on Indian Trail South. This property is currently closed to the public except for special programs. Join us for a unique opportunity to see this impressive oak savanna and associated wetlands and prairies. Belwin Creative Center, 795 Indian Trail S., Afton. Free for members, \$10 for non-members.

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

Questions or comments? Contact us 651-436-5189 or info@belwin.org.

MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS (continued from page 5)

WE CLOSED OUT 2017 STRONG AND ARE OFF TO A GREAT START WITH 2018 GIVING.

This is due to our committed members, new members who have discovered the beauty and importance of Belwin, community partners, companies and other organizations that value our work. With this diverse base of support, we have increased the acreage of land we protect and preserve, the number of programs we offer, and our outreach and educational efforts.

*Thank you for
your generous
support!*

Individual Donors

Ines Alonso & Clayton Lindsey	Frederick & Carol Entwistle	Elizabeth Hixson	Charlie & Becky Lyon	Debbie & Richard Palmen	Jennifer Sobiech-Pariseau
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Diane & Allan Dettmann	Mary Headrick	Rhys Ledger	George Niehaus	Richard Schultz	Mary Williams
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Businesses

Bell Bank Mortgage
Creative Integration & Design
Epic Provisions, LLC
Holz Real Estate Group

Organizational Membership

Hamline University
University of St. Thomas

Foundations & Grants

Baillon Family Foundation
Ed & Karen Manor Foundation
HRK Foundation
James Ford Bell Foundation
Open Door Foundation

Smikis Foundation
Ted & Lorraine Glasrud
Family Foundation
USDA/NRCS

Belwin would like to thank the
Conservation Partners Legacy Grant Program
for funding our work on the Valley Creek woodland
restoration project. This work would not have
been possible without their support.



BELWIN CONSERVANCY

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

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Inspiring through Nature

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

10TH ANNUAL BISON RELEASE

Saturday, May 19, 2018
10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

5K Run with
the Bison

EcoArt
Fest

THE OFFICIAL RELEASE OF THE BISON
TAKES PLACE AT 12:00 P.M.

Expanded Bison Release activities include:

- **5K Fun Trail Run prior to the release** (All proceeds go toward maintaining the prairie for the bison and you!)
- **EcoArt Fest, with interactive visual & performance art** (Free!)

Information

www.belwin.org



@belwinconservancy



@belwin_org

Parking

Belwin Conservancy's
Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields
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