

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
2010 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

LCCMR ID: 100-C

Project Title:

Valley Creek Protection Initiative

LCCMR 2010 Funding Priority:

C. Habitat Restoration, Enhancement, and Acquisition

Total Project Budget: \$ \$1,058,000

Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested: 2 years, 2010 - 2012

Other Non-State Funds: \$ \$1,015,000

Summary:

The Valley Creek Protection Initiative will purchase, permanently protect and restore 60 acres of land along Valley Creek, one of the most productive trout streams in the area.

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Sponsoring Organization: Belwin Conservancy

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Location:

Region: Metro

County Name: Washington

City / Township: Afton, MN

_____ Knowledge Base	_____ Broad App.	_____ Innovation
_____ Leverage	_____ Outcomes	
_____ Partnerships	_____ Urgency	_____ TOTAL

MAIN PROPOSAL

PROJECT TITLE: Valley Creek Protection Initiative

I. PROJECT STATEMENT

The Valley Creek watershed is located on the eastern edge of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and covers approximately 65 square miles that gathers the water eventually giving it to the St Croix River. Valley Creek is a small (approximately 4.5 miles) but significant stream because it is one of the few remaining high quality trout streams in the Twin Cities Metro Area. Brown, brook and rainbow trout all are found in Valley Creek. This outstanding quality led the DNR to list Valley Creek as a state-designated trout stream. The Valley Creek watershed also is home to more than 20 endangered, threatened, and special concern species, including the American brook lamprey, the Hooded Warbler, and Blanding's turtle. The exceptional habitat value of Valley Creek has been identified in Minnesota's State Wildlife Action Plan, which identifies Valley Creek as a "Key River Reach."

In addition to what currently is known about Valley Creek, the Creek also appears to be home to a species of crane fly (genus *Phantolabis*) previously undescribed by science. Scientists from the University of Minnesota are in the process of publishing their findings.

The St. Croix River provides one of the premier mussel habitats in the world; approximately 38 mussel species live in the St. Croix watershed. Additionally, the watershed is home to many Midwestern species such as wolf, Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, and Karner blue butterfly, all of which are on the Federal list of threatened and endangered species. Unfortunately, the St. Croix River was just named one of the Ten Most Endangered Rivers in the United States by American Rivers.

The Valley Creek Protection Initiative is comprised of the Belwin Conservancy, the Minnesota Land Trust, the Conservation Fund, the Valley Branch Watershed District and Washington County. The goal of this collaboration is to protect and restore scientifically targeted sites (approximately 900 acres) that will ensure the long-term ecological stability of this riparian system. In the past year that this partnership has existed, it has protected and restored more than 120 acres of critical habitat including the recent purchase by the Belwin Conservancy of the headwaters of Valley Creek.

We now have the opportunity to protect and restore another 60 acres of land that will enable a continuous protected corridor along 70% of Valley Creek. The partners propose that the Belwin Conservancy (which owns nearly 1,400 acres adjacent to the targeted parcel) buy this land in fee and use its considerable land management resources to restore the riparian forests that line the banks of Valley Creek.

II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT RESULTS

Result 1: Purchase 60 acres (Johnson Tract)

Budget: \$ 1,000,000

An appraisal is in hand for most of property and landowner has expressed willingness to sell at or below the appraised value. The Belwin Conservancy is handling the negotiations and will update the appraisal and will either exercise its option (if one can be obtained now) or enter into a purchase agreement once we are certain funding will be available. Closing will conclude before the end of the year allowing the Belwin Conservancy to fundraise for any needed additional purchase or stewardship funds.

Deliverable

1. Updated Appraisal Information
2. Signed Purchase Agreement (exercise option if applicable)
3. Complete Purchase
4. Conservation Easement donated to the Minnesota Land Trust

Completion Date

July 30, 2010
August 30, 2010
December 30, 2010
February, 2011

Result 2: Restore 60 acres on Johnson Tract

Budget: \$ 58,000

The Valley Branch Watershed District has already spent approximately \$450,000 to restore the hydrology and the vegetation immediately adjacent to the stream at this site. The Belwin Conservancy has completed a management plan for the stream and the adjacent property targeted for purchase by this grant. Once the Belwin Conservancy assumes ownership, it will begin a winter restoration project (using equipment on frozen ground to lessen the impact to the soils and seed bed). This project will be quite similar to the very successful project the Belwin Conservancy recently completed at a nearby site with the assistance of a \$100,000 grant from DNR. Once we have cut and sprayed the buckthorn and other invasive species as necessary, we will undertake a planting and management program to restore the native understory.

Deliverable

1. Remove buckthorn and undesirable understory
2. Plant with native species of local genotype
3. Evaluate success and adjust management plan accordingly

Completion Date

March 30, 2011
 May 30, 2011
 September 30, 2011

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

A. Project Team/Partners

The Valley Creek Protection Initiative was formed one year ago by combining the strengths and talents of the Belwin Conservancy, the Minnesota Land Trust, the Conservation Fund, the Valley Branch Watershed District and Washington County. Each partner plays a key but varying role depending upon the particular project.

With this particular project, the Belwin Conservancy will take the lead in negotiating the purchase. The Minnesota Land Trust will write and subsequently hold the conservation easement for an added layer of protection over the site. The Valley Branch Watershed District will continue to monitor their restoration project and adapt their management of this stream reach to maximize the habitat benefits. The Belwin Conservancy will implement the management plan it has already drafted for the site and will assume long-term responsibility for restoration management as well as developing programs for responsible ecologically responsible visitation.

B. Timeline Requirements

Acquisition will be completed as soon as funds are in hand. The project will be structured such that the purchase is completed in time to allow for removing buckthorn while the ground is frozen. This will enable us to plant the succeeding spring.

C. Long-Term Strategy

As mentioned previously, the project is part of a much larger effort to protect the key sites within the Valley Creek Watershed. We have a strong partnership and a clear vision of what it will take to protect one of the most important tributaries of the St. Croix River. We have closely examined the land ownership patterns and local sentiment regarding conservation and we strongly believe that we have a unique opportunity to sustain the protection and restoration work that we have begun. We have already come a long way toward protecting most of the key tracts within the watershed in the past 20 years that many of these partners have been working on their own initiatives in the region. Now, by combining all our strengths in a coordinated fashion, we have no doubt we can be successful if given the financial resources needed.

Project Budget

IV. TOTAL PROJECT REQUEST BUDGET (1 year)

<u>BUDGET ITEM</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>	
Acquisition (Fee Title and Permanent Easements): 60 acres to be purchased in fee title and held by the Belwin Conservancy with an overlying conservation easement held by the Minnesota Land Trust	\$	1,000,000
Contracts: Funds needed for updated appraisal (Walker Appraisals) and legal fees (Fredrikson & Byron)	\$	8,000
Contracts: Money will be used to hire MCC and other similar contractors to mechanically clear invasive species and apply herbicide as necessary	\$	50,000
TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET REQUEST TO LCCMR	\$	1,058,000

V. OTHER FUNDS

<u>SOURCE OF FUNDS</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>	<u>Status</u>
Other Non-State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period: Matching funds from James Ford Bell Foundation and other private sources for fee title acquisition. \$15,000 from existing private sources will be used for the stewardship endowment needed by the Minnesota Land Trust.	\$	1,015,000
In-kind Services During Project Period: Belwin Conservancy personnel will conduct restoration activities including planting native species of the local genotype. These funds will be used to purchase plant material (\$7,000), purchase herbicide (\$3,000), and Belwin Conservancy staff time (approximately \$15,000) that will obviate the need to hire additional contract support. An additional \$8,000 worth of staff time will be supplied by the Minnesota Land Trust to draft the conservation easement and supporting documents. These funds will augment the \$50,000 received from LCCMR.	\$	33,000
Funding History: As part of the Valley Creek Protection Initiative the following has been spent: \$100,000 from DNR for woody debris removal project in 2008; \$250,000 from Doris Duke Foundation for purchase of Valley Creek Headwaters in 2008; \$280,000 from the James Ford Bell Foundation in 2008 that matched other private donations for purchase of Valley Creek Headwaters; \$450,000 from the Valley Branch Watershed District on restoration efforts on this property from 2007-2008.	\$	1,080,000
TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET NON LCCMR	\$	2,128,000

Johnson Tract Valley Creek Afton, Minnesota

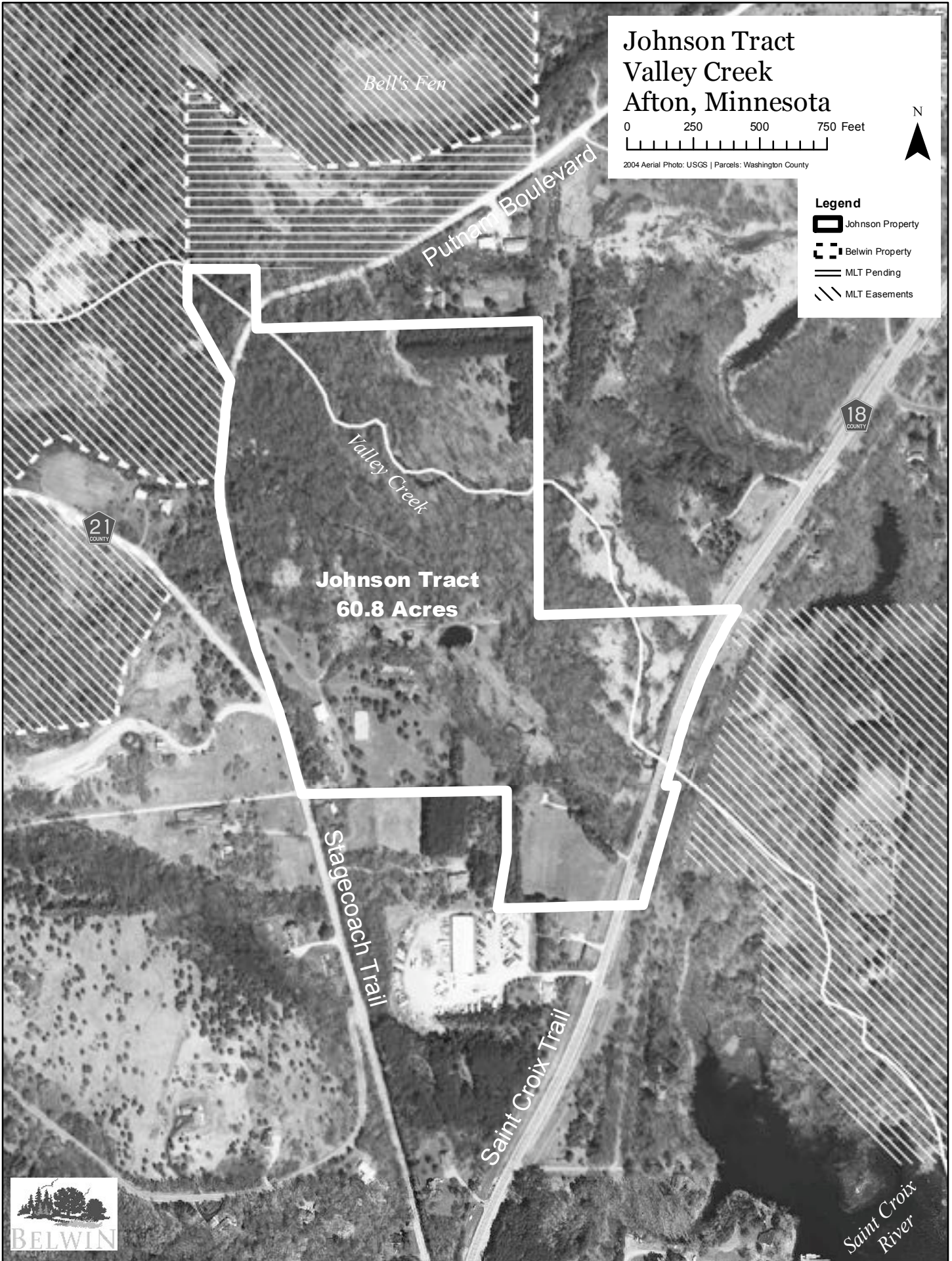
0 250 500 750 Feet

2004 Aerial Photo: USGS | Parcels: Washington County



Legend

- Johnson Property
- Belwin Property
- MLT Pending
- MLT Easements



Project Manager Qualifications

Belwin Conservancy is one of the largest remaining undeveloped tracts of land in the Twin Cities. Covering nearly 1,400 acres, this nature preserve contains some of the largest and oldest restored prairie in the region. In addition to the active restoration and research programs of the Belwin Conservancy, the Belwin Conservancy hosts more than 10,000 St. Paul School District students each year at its Valley Branch Educational Center which is staffed by St. Paul School District instructors. The Belwin Conservancy also offers trails that are open to the public and has recently completed an observation tower that allows visitors to observe our bison herd.

Steve Hobbs has been involved in conservation work for nearly 25 years throughout the country. He was the principle architect of large-scale sustainable conservation efforts in Virginia and Nevada while working for The Nature Conservancy. When Steve was the administrator for the Rice Creek Watershed District he played a key role in reshaping state and federal wetland conservation procedures. Most recently Steve was heavily involved in developing the constitutional amendment that passed in November 2008 that dedicates sales tax revenue for conservation. Since 2007, Steve has been the Executive Director of the Belwin Conservancy.