**PROJECT TITLE:** Restoring Land, Reviving Heritage: Conservation Through Indigenous Culture

**I. PROJECT STATEMENT**

By linking natural resource management, cultural heritage, and environmental education, Belwin Conservancy and Anishinabe Academy aim to restore an ecologically significant area of land, while fostering multi-generational environmental stewardship and restoration of Indigenous culture. With this project, we seek to:

* Improve habitat quality in the Valley Creek watershed
* Foster a multi-generational and action-based conservation ethic in urban Indigenous families
* Create a deeper understanding of cultural heritage through a Native garden site

Belwin owns and protects 1,400 acres of land in the Valley Creek and St. Croix River watersheds. While Belwin has an abundance of land, many urban Native American communities have lost their connection to the environment and their food heritage. This project aims to deepen both organizations’ knowledge of land restoration while recovering access to nature and a place to grow culturally significant food and medicine.

To accomplish these goals, we will bring together land restoration experts and the school community to design and implement our restoration project. These efforts will be paired with field trips where students and their families can take part in restoration, study ecology, and cultivate significant Indigenous foods and medicines. This partnership approach to land restoration and cultural revival will instill a multi-generational and action-based environmental stewardship ethic in a community that is seeking to recover their connection to the land.

**II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES**

|  |
| --- |
| **Activity 1 Title: Woodland and Prairie Restoration****Description:**The 17-acre parcel of land we will restore is situated along a stretch of Valley Creek, a regionally important stream with spawning brown, rainbow, and brook trout. This land is severely degraded with a high density of buckthorn and other invasive species. Restoring the land to tallgrass prairie and floodplain forest will promote species diversity and reduce erosion and runoff into Valley Creek and the downstream St. Croix River. We will begin by removing 100% of non-desirable species. Then, we will plant and seed native species and provide management to keep invasive species from returning. We will evaluate restoration areas with photo points, plant diversity and density measurements, and soil and water sampling. We will take a partnership approach to restoration that follows modern scientific standards as well as traditional ecological knowledge. We anticipate both Belwin and the school community will learn about and improve practices.**ENRTF BUDGET: $303,525** |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. 100% reduction in buckthorn/undesirable trees and woody shrubs* | *June 2021* |
| *2. Prairie site prep and restoration* | *June 2021* |
| *3. Reintroduce native species in the woodland area (250 plants per acre) and reduce invasive growth to maintain >25% woody and >10% herbaceous invasive cover* | *June of 2023* |
| *4. Follow up prairie establishment and invasive species removal* | *June 2023* |
| *5. Build a system of restoration supportive of traditional Indigenous ways* | *June 2023* |

|  |
| --- |
| **Activity 2 Title: Valley Creek Stream Restoration Assessment****Description:**The stretch of Valley Creek that runs through the site is degraded, with consequences for downstream water quality and flowage into the St. Croix River. Before embarking on larger stream restoration efforts, we will contract with an environmental engineering firm to do a full assessment of stream stability, agency requirements, permitting needs, and environmental review needs. **ENRTF BUDGET: $15,000** |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Stream restoration evaluation and assessment complete* | *Fall of 2020* |

|  |
| --- |
| **Activity 3 Title: Anishinabe Academy Education Partnership****Description:** Students and families from Anishinabe Academy will participate in field trips to Belwin to learn about ecology, participate in land restoration, connect to the land through a Native cultural lens, and cultivate a Native garden site. During field trips, participants will learn about Native garden principles, astronomy, ecology, scientific measurements, Indigenous traditions, and land-management principles, all with the help of Ojibwe and Dakota language experts. One example of this is a lesson based on the herd of bison that grazes Belwin’s prairie each summer. Families will connect the cultural significance of the animals to the ecological benefits they give to the prairie ecosystem. Another example is the assessment of the health of the soil and water before establishing a Native garden site. Curriculum experts and teachers at Anishinabe Academy will tie these lessons to MN state science standards and incorporate them into yearly curriculum in the classroom. We will measure outcomes through teacher assessment of students, tracking participation numbers in family field trips, and through talking circles that explore Tribal history, culture, values, and practices. **ENRTF BUDGET: $288,360** |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Each 5th grade class will demonstrate understanding of land restoration principles, including concepts of native vs. invasive species, soil and water quality, and biodiversity* | *June 2021, 2022, and 2023* |
| *2. Anishinabe Academy families will show a commitment to environmental stewardship*  | *June 2023* |
| *3. The Anishinabe Academy community will gain deeper insight of cultural heritage* | *June 2023* |

**III. PROJECT PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS:**

Anishinabe Academy is a Minneapolis Pubic School that serves primarily Dakota and Ojibwe students. They exist to engage urban Indigenous students by integrating and reclaiming Native American identities, cultures and languages through authentic academic experiences.Belwin’s partnership with Anishinabe Academy began in the fall of 2018 and we look forward to expanding the partnership further if granted funding.

**IV. LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING:**

Together with Anishinabe Academy, Belwin will continue to manage the restored land to maintain appropriate plant diversity and low occurrence of invasive species. These costs will be absorbed into Belwin’s annual budget.

**V. SEE ADDITIONAL PROPOSAL COMPONENTS:**

A. Proposal Budget Spreadsheet; B. Visual Component or Map; C. Parcel List Spreadsheet; D. Acquisition, Easements, and Restoration Requirements; F. Project Manager Qualifications and Organization Description; G. Letter or Resolution; H. Financial Capacity