

# Washington County, Minnesota

## Board of Commissioners - Actions

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### Actions at the Tuesday, November 8, 2011 Board Meeting

This page is a brief view of the actions taken by the Washington County Board of Commissioners. For further information, please telephone 651-430-6001.

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*Washington County's mission is to provide quality public services in a cost-effective manner through innovation, leadership, and the cooperation of dedicated people.*

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### **Grant money will be transferred to Belwin Conservancy for Valley Creek property**

Belwin Conservancy in Afton will receive funds from two grants received by Washington County to protect habitat along Valley Creek.

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved an agreement between the county and Belwin Conservancy Nov. 8, which will allow the conservancy to acquire interests in property along Valley Creek in Afton.

Washington County received two grants for a total of \$435,533 from the state to protect habitat along Valley Creek by acquiring a permanent conservation easement over 50 acres of upland and riverine habitat. The two grantors have agreed to allow Washington County to subcontract with the Belwin Conservancy to acquire the conservation easement from the landowner using the grant funds. The state funds will flow through Washington County; however, no county funds will be used for the acquisition and Washington County will not be a party to the conservation easement.

The Belwin Conservancy will be responsible for providing all matching funds.

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### **Land transferred to City of Cottage Grove for city hall, public safety building**

Land will be transferred from Washington County to the City of Cottage Grove to allow that city to replace land it took out of the Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park to build its facility.

The Washington County Board of Commissioners agreed to the land transfer at its Nov. 8 meeting.

In December 2004, the Metropolitan Council approved the removal of land from the Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park to be used for the South Washington County Service Center and the City of Cottage Grove's public safety building and city hall with the condition that the lands be replaced acre for acre by Dec. 31, 2015.

In May 2005, Washington County entered into a joint powers agreement with Cottage Grove to coordinate the planning and phasing of the construction of the Washington County South Service Center and the City of Cottage Grove's facility within the Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park. This culminated in a 2006 agreement between Washington County and Cottage Grove to allocate costs and responsibilities related to the construction of roads and utilities to serve the new South Service Center, which opened in 2007.

In June 2011, the county and city agreed to work together to replace the land in the Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park for the public safety and city hall building. Washington County will convey up to 11.64 acres of land to the city, and keep its interest in the land until the city completes the conveyance to the county of all the replacement land under the agreement.

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## **County will convey St. Croix River islands to National Park Service**

Five islands in the St. Croix River will become property of the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) after the Washington County Board of Commissioners agreed to the conveyance Nov. 8.

The islands, which are adjacent to Scandia and May Township, were tax forfeited to the county from 1928 through 1952. In total, the five parcels include 130 acres, although much of this land is underwater. By law, counties are charged with the management of tax forfeited land on behalf of the state.

The NPS is the owner of similar types of parcels within the river in this part of the county. The park service asked that the county complete the necessary steps for the parcels to be conveyed into its ownership.

Minnesota law requires that any tax forfeited property that has more than 150 feet of land bordering a public water body must be withheld from any sale until legislative authority is granted for that sale or conveyance. The provision was introduced in a bill in 2011, and became law. This legislation gives the board the authority to either sell or convey the parcels free of charge only to the NPS. Conveying the land to the NPS means that the county is no longer responsible for maintenance or liability of the land.

The Wild and Scenic River Act holds that the federal government cannot acquire any land by purchase, but can acquire it either through a donation or land exchange.

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## **Land in St. Paul Park available for sale to adjacent property owners**

Land at the entrance to the JAR Bridge on the Washington County side of the Mississippi River, which is tax forfeited, will be available for sale to adjacent property owners.

The Washington County Board of Commissioners set the date of the sale for Dec. 16 at its meeting Nov. 8. The minimum sale price for the land will be \$31,900.

The land was forfeited for the non-payment of property taxes July 21, 2003. The land in St. Paul Park served as the entrance to the JAR Bridge on the Washington County side of the Mississippi River. The bridge was demolished on the Washington County side of the river in 2010 and 2011.

The JAR Bridge was authorized by Congress in 1890 and opened for rail traffic in 1895. In 1982 the bridge was closed to rail traffic by the Chicago Rock Island and Pacific Railroad, and the JAR corporation continued to operate the toll bridge for vehicles until closed by the Minnesota Department of Transportation in 1999 for safety reasons. JAR stopped paying property taxes on the bridge and the parcels serving as the approach to the bridge in 1999. The Coast Guard ordered removal of the bridge in 2001 and after the property went into forfeiture in 2003, the counties of Dakota and Washington coordinated the removal of the bridge.

With the removal of the bridge on the Washington County side, the final step in the management of this tax forfeited parcel will be complete.

The county received approval from the city and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to sell the parcel in 2004. However, no parties would have been interested in acquiring the property until the bridge was removed. The property will be sold at a private sale to adjacent owners. The minimum sale price of \$31,900 reflects the value as assigned by the County Assessor's Office and is similar to the value of similar property under the ownership of the Northern Tier Energy refinery in this area.

Letters will be mailed to the adjacent landowners notifying them of the sale, the minimum sale price, and sale terms.