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Newsletter for Whiterock Conservancy

A Nonprofit Land Trust

Spring 2014

GROUNDBREAKING

"We long dreamed this land would be open to the public, and this trail will make that happen." Elizabeth Garst

On a beautiful, sunny Earth Day, Whiterock Conservancy broke ground for the long anticipated \$4.8 million state-of-the-art Backcountry Trail system.

The 35 mile trail will wind through Whiterock's seven-square miles of oak savanna and prairie restoration areas, forests, pastures and sustainably farmed land in the Middle Raccoon River Valley. Including the trails already at Whiterock, walkers and runners will have 40 miles of trails to use. Of those, sixteen miles are designed specifically for mountain bikers, 7 miles are designed for equestrians and 12 miles are for use by all users including low powered vehicles for the mobility impaired to reach far into the landscape.

Construction on associated projects, such as the renovation of the visitor center has already begun and staff have moved into the new offices. The Visitor Center will be open to check into accommodations, rent recreational equipment or learn about the latest sites of interest from 9 am until 4 pm daily.

Trail construction begins this summer with significant portions expected to be completed by grand opening events this fall. The contractors are members of the Professional Trail Builders Association and are highly experienced in trail construction.

Fundraising for additional trail amenities, like a shower house or additional campsites, will continue. Hikers, equestrians, and mountain bikers will be invited to begin using sections of the trails once construction is completed. Visit Whiterock's Facebook page or website for the latest news.



Groundbreaking for Whiterock Conservancy's Backcountry Trail took place surrounded by community leaders. In front (l to r) are Ken Herring, Whiterock Conservancy Board President; James Host, Landscape Architect, Confluence; Elizabeth Garst, Project Manager and Whiterock Conservancy Board Treasurer; Conrad Kramer, Whiterock Conservancy Executive Director; Justin Roetman, President, Coon Rapids Economic Development Group; Chad Schreck, Executive Director, Midwest Partnership; Gary Haverman, Mayor of Bayard; and Gene Meiners, Carroll County Board of Supervisors.

--Photo courtesy of Natural Expression Photography



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Why is Whiterock planting corn by the Bur Oak Visitor Center? Wasn't that prairie?

This year, Whiterock will be using cropping to help restore a prairie. About 50 acres near the visitor center was planted to prairie a number of years ago, but weeds have taken over and the prairie is low quality. In order to kill off the weeds, Whiterock will plant one or two seasons of corn before reseeding with diverse high quality prairie seeds. The new prairie will need to be mowed for three years and then should grow into a prairie jewel.

REVITALIZING THE POND AT THE GARST HOME FARM

The pond was formed in 1955 when a small gravel and sand pit was dug next to the Garst farm during the construction of Highway 141 in the early 1950's and was then filled with water. The pond was a needed resource for both the city of Coon Rapids and the Garst family because in addition to being used for recreational fishing it served as a backup source of water for the local fire department and a source of water for agricultural irrigation.

In 2011 a partnership between Whiterock Conservancy spearheaded by land manager Chris Troendle, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and Timothy O. Lee came together to bring back the grandeur of this local resource. The process of bringing the pond back to its glory was a project that Tim envisioned not only for improving Whiterock Conservancy but also for the local community. After a study of the pond that year, it was clear the pond was not in good health and contained mostly common carp that can further degrade the water quality.



Work was started to improve the water quality and health of the pond including the installation of an aerator system in 2012. Like any self-sustaining ecosystem, a pecking order of fish that are feed and fish who feed is important. The pond was stocked appropriately with native Iowa fish over the last three years from smallest to largest. When complete, the pond will include a mix of Northern Pike, Walleye, Large Mouth Bass, Perch,

Bluegill, Catfish, Crappie and other species to help the sustainability of the pond. While the fish will not be big enough for fishing this year, in the years to come the pond will be a fully functioning ecosystem. After more than half a century of recreating and fishing, this pond will once again create many more fond memories for children with their parents and grandparents.

Whiterock Conservancy would like to thank the Roswell and Elizabeth Garst Foundation founded by the Lee family and Timothy Lee whose vision enabled these groups to come together to revitalize the pond.

NESTING EAGLES

For the first time in recent history, a pair of bald eagles has chosen Whiterock for their home. Standing in the lower parking lot of the Visitor Center you can see their massive nest close to the river. Eaglets have not been spotted yet this year, but the Eagles are acting as if they have little ones in the nest.

To protect the birds, federal regulations require people to stay at least 330 feet away from the nest. Eagles waste valuable energy flying away from humans and if they abandon the nest or are gone too long the eggs or eaglets will die. You can view the nest from the Bur Oak Visitor Center parking lot or from the Garst Farm Trail with binoculars.



TREE PLANTING

Nearly 60 seventh and eighth grade students from Coon Rapids-Bayard Middle School joined staff to plant over 100 trees on Earth Day. The trees will create shade for the parking lot and a new picnic area at the Bur Oak Visitors Center.



English teacher and student council advisor Paula Davis said, "We are always looking for service projects and being someone who uses the trails at Whiterock all the time, this was a good fit."

Eight graders Savannah Kolars and Natalee Hart (left) took a break from hauling mulch to say, "this is an awesome opportunity to do something we don't often get to do." Natalee went on to say "It's going to make our earth a better place."



Mandy Jurgens, Annah Heck,
Jada Thompson.



Tyson Byerly, Ben Obert,
Whiterock staff member
Gary Olsen



Jared Smouse, Caitlin Schultes,
Jacob Mere, Taylor Pevestorf,
Kaleb Shirbroun

WELCOME AMANDA

Whiterock Conservancy welcome's our newest staff member, Amanda Grade, as the full time guest services manager. In this role Amanda coordinates wedding and special events, overnight guest stays, building maintenance, recreational equipment rentals and ensures that visitors have a wonderful outdoor adventure at Whiterock. Amanda is from Glidden, Iowa and graduated from Creighton University. Most recently she worked in Colorado and has returned to Iowa to rediscover her roots. "I am so happy to be here where I can enjoy the beautiful outdoors, learn more about the history right outside my back door, and help people realize how wonderful Iowa really is."



BRIDGE DETOURS

This summer, two bridges along Highway 141 will be closed for repairs. One is located just West of Bayard and will effect guests arriving from Des Moines. The other is over the Middle Raccoon River between the Garst Farmhouse and Visitor Center. Both detours are marked and use 330th Street just north of Highway 141. To reach the Garst farmhouse, and Hollyhock Cottage continue on 330th into Coon Rapids. To reach all other Whiterock Locations, take Grant Ave/A Ave/Apple Ave south from 330th to Highway 141. Visit our website for the latest details and an interactive map.



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SAVE THE DATE

June 20-21 Join us for BioBlitz 2014, designed to bring natural science experts and the public together to explore this landscape and identify the diversity of species found in it. We'll have sessions to explore soil fungi, water quality, butterflies, bats, bobcats and so much more. Registration is \$25 for the entire event, partial day is \$15. You can find more details at www.whiterockconservancy.org or by calling our office.

June 28 Volunteer River Cleanup
July 11 Free Canoe Rental

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Still Lots to do during Construction

Don't let the thought of trail construction stop you from visiting this summer as there is plenty to do and still avoid the construction. Just a few of the activities open to you and your family at Whiterock are:

- fishing in one of many ponds
- canoeing down the river
- looking for bird or frog species
- watching the bison roam the hills
- hiking to the Whiterock bluffs
- sitting around the campfire.

Come for the day, weekend or whole week. We have accommodations from single rooms in the Garst Farmhouse to house cottages, campgrounds and more.

BE PART OF SOMETHING BIG

Whiterock Conservancy is a nonprofit land trust that relies on the support of individuals to continue to operate and grow. **Your donation** makes it possible for Whiterock to protect and steward this beautiful land, demonstrate sustainable agriculture, and provide opportunities to the public for outdoor recreation and education. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation today online at www.whiterockconservancy.org or through the mail at 1390 Hwy 141, Coon Rapids, IA 50058.

If you prefer to receive your newsletter electronically, please let us know at barbra@whiterockconservancy.org.