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Newsletter for Whiterock Conservancy

A Nonprofit Land Trust

THE WAIT IS OVER!

Construction has begun

From truckloads of gravel being delivered to the flags marking trail routes, signs of trail construction are popping up all over Whiterock. In November, staff began creating a new, more sustainable, double track trail to replace the washed out lane approaching Long Creek. Under the careful supervision of volunteer foreman Mark Edwards, retired Department of Natural Resources trails coordinator, the new tractor and bobcat will work steadily until the ground freezes.



But not all the signs are so obvious. Whiterock Conservancy has awarded the contract to build sixteen miles of single track mountain bike trails and six miles of equestrian trails to Singletrack Trails out of Colorado. Singletrack Trails is known for their “light touch” on the land by employing the least impactful machine for each phase of the construction.

Singletrack Trails has worked in Iowa before, providing machine support for volunteer completed trails in Des Moines’ Ewing Park. Their spotlight projects include design and construction of the Curt Gowdy State Park Trail in Wyoming and Warner Mountain Bike Trail System in Nashville, TN. With years of experience and a great reputation, we are excited about the opportunity to work with them.

What does all this mean for next summer? Mobilization will start April 1 and you can expect to have new single track mountain bike, double track multi-use and equestrian trails opening throughout the summer with

most complete by July 31. Trail updates, including announcements of new trail sections opening, will be shared on our website and Facebook page regularly. Mark your calendars for an opening weekend of activities on August 7-9, 2015.

We are still in the process of raising funds for some of the trail amenities such as improved campgrounds, a shower house, wildlife viewing blinds, a boardwalk over a wetland seep, improved trail signage and more— so please consider using the enclosed envelope to celebrate this benchmark by making a gift to help Whiterock finish the trail construction and all of the amenities that can make your visit more enjoyable.



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A LIVING LEGACY: REMEMBERING MARY AND STEPHEN GARST

Whiterock Conservancy was founded in 2004, but the history of this land and the people that made Whiterock possible goes back much farther.

Roswell Garst made the family's name famous by founding the Garst and Thomas Seed Corn Company in 1930. A firm believer in the green revolution and importance of making every acre yield the most food, Roswell promoted his theories worldwide and hosted Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at his family farm in 1959.



Roswell's son Steve continued the tradition of agricultural innovation but was also an avid hunter and fisherman. He purchased extensive tracts of timber and pasture where he built and stocked dozens of ponds, was an early supporter of erosion control measures such as waterways and no-till farming, helped found the Carroll County Conservation Board, and was the leading force behind the Coon Rapids bike trail. Steve was a conservationist ahead of his time.

The family spent many Sundays in the woods along the Middle Raccoon River and came to cherish the land. Within a year of Stephen's death in 2004, Mary, together with her daughters and sister-in-law Tosh Lee, established Whiterock Conservancy. This spectacular gift, the largest land gift ever made in Iowa, created a living legacy, an expression of their values that will not only exist forever but also continue to have a profound impact on the people, community, land and wildlife of the area.

Mary, who passed away this fall, will be remembered for her friendship, kindness, many business accomplishments and work on non-profit boards. We are all better off for her commitment to this land and seeing through the vision of creating Whiterock Conservancy, a living legacy we can all continue to foster through our enjoyment of the land and support of the mission.

FLECKS OF GREEN IN THE FALL LANDSCAPE

Fall in the Midwest used to mean evenly tilled fields as far as the eye could see. Now there are no-till fields sprinkled in, but what is growing in that rare field that is green in the fall? Cover crops are most likely the cause of that green field. But why plant a crop in the fall, that cannot be harvested and will only be killed off in the spring to plant other crops?



Cover crops are beginning to become more common as concern for improved soil health and the need for nutrient reduction strategies has risen. Common cover crops such as rye grass can overwinter and continue growing in the spring, which means that there is living vegetation nearly year-round.

The constant growth of a crop and cover crop in succession improves soil health by not only increasing organic matter in the soil, but also by not disrupting the soil microbial communities. With conventional agriculture there is no living vegetation for approximately half of the year which means there is little or no food for microbes. Disrupting the soil microbial community means that nutrients are not cycled in the soil, which increases the rate at which nutrients build up in the soil rather than being retained in plant biomass. Nutrients that build up in the soil are "loose" and can easily run off the landscape in the large flush of water with snowmelt of spring rains. This

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS AT THE GARST FARMHOUSE



Ruth Cook celebrated her 60th year working in the historic Garst farmhouse this summer! Her adventurous career began with Roswell and Elizabeth Garst in 1954 and continues to this day with the Whiterock Conservancy. She has seen Roswell kick his dirty boots up on the couch, the circus that came to town with the Khrushchev visit in 1959, and the 50th anniversary of the Khrushchev visit in 2009.

Ruth began working for Elizabeth and Roswell Garst when she was 26 years old and was asked by John Parker to help Elisabeth for a day. Little did she know that a “little help” was preparing and serving 35 guests from Japan for lunch. After the initial shock of such large groups, Ruth became a permanent helper for the Garsts. Nonetheless, the surprises continued to mount. Ruth recalls being asked to mow the yard with the garden tractor to get the house ready for some visitors and was surprised when she was suddenly surrounded by 25 visiting Nigerians taking photos of her on the lawn tractor. The visitors had never seen a woman on a tractor before and wanted a memento of the occasion. Roswell, who loved surprises, just stood back and chuckled at bridging a cultural divide.

The biggest shift in her 60 years at the Garst farmhouse occurred in 1997 when Liz Garst started the Garst Farm Resorts. Days of cooking lunch for 20 with minutes to spare were past, replaced by caring for overnight guests at the farmhouse bed and breakfast. Ruth remembers these changes brought an open feel to the house as anyone was welcome and you never knew which tour group might arrive next.

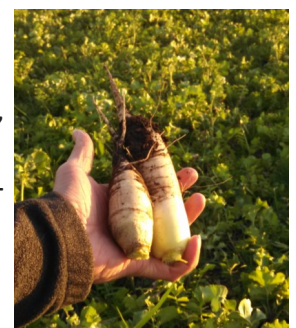
The change from Garst Farm Resorts to the Whiterock Conservancy passed by quietly, except for the return of muddy boots! The bustling staff working out of the basement until the recent move to the visitor’s center brought more life the Garst farmhouse, and more mud.

Ruth works less hours now and takes Wednesday’s off to take care of her great-grandkids, but she is still an invaluable asset in making the Garst farmhouse function. We are indebted to Ruth’s service as the head housekeeper for Whiterock and her years of dedicated service.

reduces the nutrients available for corn and soybeans the next year and leads to requiring additional fertilizer inputs. This pulse of nutrients in runoff frequently leads to the high nitrate and phosphorus levels in streams and lakes and can lead to increased algae growth and ultimately can lead to the ecological disasters such as the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

The importance of cover crops has continued to gain support at all levels of government over the past decade. Federal assistance is available regionally and the state of Iowa made 1.4 million dollars available this year for farmers to try cover crops, even extending the planting deadline due to the late harvest. As a result, more cover crops are being planted in Iowa.

Whiterock has been planting cover crops for the past five years and we currently grow our own rye on a small number of acres to use for cover crops. In addition, in the past two years Darwin Pierce, Farm Manager, has led the implementation of multi-species cover crops (e.g., winter peas, radishes, clover, etc.) that help break up soil compaction that is an issue for no-till farmers. These multi-species cover crops also serve as an excellent food plot for wildlife – a win-win scenario! Whiterock looks forward to expanding cover crops and enjoying all the benefits that they have on our environment and bottom line, the benefits increasing with time.





1390 Highway 141
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Watch www.whiterockconservancy.org
and our Facebook page for upcoming
events and announcements.



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IMPORTANT DATES

April 1—Singletrack Construction
mobilization begins

May 25—Kids Fishing Derby

July 24-25—Bio-Blitz

August 7-9—Trail Grand Opening
Celebrations



Whiterock's staff looks forward to seeing you in 2015. Happy New Year!!
Front: Sheri Anthofer, Ruth Cook, Jodi Bonney Back: Lucas Sisson, Darwin Pierce,
Eric Elliott, Jason Schultes, Conrad Kramer, Barbra Jotzke-Torrier, Jacob Hurd,
Paige Huntley, Gary Olsen, LeeRoy Wagner, Matt Reiling, Jon Carter, Rob Davis

YOU MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

Whiterock Conservancy is a non-profit land trust that relies on the support of individuals to meet our mission— to protect and steward this beautiful land, demonstrate sustainable agriculture, and provide the public with opportunities for outdoor recreation.

In addition to making a donation to support the general operations of Whiterock, consider a special gift restricted to trail construction. Just indicate how you would like your gift to be used on the enclosed gift envelope.

December 2014