



openspaces

Newsletter for Whiterock Conservancy

A Nonprofit Land Trust

Working At The Foundation

Land Trusts like Whiterock Conservancy impact their communities in profoundly positive ways because they protect land, the foundation of all human society and terrestrial ecosystems. All land trusts have positive ecological impacts on the land they steward. Some also provide broader social benefits. Very few provide sweeping regional benefits. Whiterock is one of these.

There are over 1,700 land trusts in the United States. Most of them are run entirely by volunteers who work to protect local natural lands from development. Some land trusts have a small professional staff to pursue their mission over a larger area. A few land trusts are large, working at the state, national, or international levels.

All land trusts work to protect natural lands and wildlife forever. They have a positive impact on the land they are protecting which extends to the environment over a larger area. But protected lands have a number of other benefits; they are wild and beautiful which tends to increase adjacent residential property values, and the community benefits from the increased aesthetics and tourism.

Whiterock Conservancy, however, serves the community in additional ways that most land trusts do not. Part of our mission is to welcome visitors our lands. We recognize that outdoor recreation and renewal is a fundamental human and societal need. In fact, Whiterock's trails, accommodations, and sporting equipment rentals encourage recreation. This increases the quality of life of visitors and residents of the community by giving them a wonderful place to go and things to do.

The next two years will see a substantial enhancement of that recreational offer as Whiterock aggressively moves forward in building the best mountain-bike trail system in the state. Other parts of this 35-mile trail will also serve equestrians, hikers, and the mobility-impaired. Of the \$2 million needed for this project over \$1.2 million has already been raised.



Studies show that even the smallest rural Iowa state parks, and our neighboring rural county park systems, attract at least 50,000 visitors a year. These visitors spend an estimated \$50 per visit.

State-of-the-art mountain-bike trails in rural Wisconsin and Minnesota, comparable to the one planned for Whiterock, are serving 25,000-50,000 visitors per year, because many mountain bike enthusiasts travel considerable distances to practice their sport on specialty trails. This means that Whiterock, with fewer than 5,000 visitors per year, can expect to host at least twice as many additional visitors once its trail system is completed. Whiterock's current million-dollar economic impact will very conservatively double, a boon to our local struggling economy. A healthy economy is a cornerstone of human society and very few other land trusts so positively impact the health of their regional economy.

Finally, not only does Whiterock protect natural lands, offer recreation, and indirectly stimulate the local economy, it also demonstrates innovative sustainable agriculture strategies. Many farmers, with businesses to run and families to support, don't necessarily have the flexibility to experiment with new farming techniques. That's why it's part of Whiterock's mission to test environmentally-friendly farming methods and share our findings. Farming sustains human society, and Whiterock's ability to positively influence the practice of this most fundamental human activity is truly remarkable.

For a number of years now Whiterock has been using no-till on all of our fields and experimenting with single species cover crops. A 5-6 inch rain this spring showcased a major cover crop benefit—soil losses were minimal in our cover crop fields. However, recent news out of NRCS is that multispecies cover crops can increase agricultural profits by improving soil health which reduces the need for commercial chemicals and increases water retention. Healthy soil contains ample organic material and cavities in the soil that harbor an abundant, well-fed, and healthy microbial ecosystem. Cultivation destroys these cavities. It can take up to five years of cover cropping and no-till farming for microorganisms to improve the soil enough to enjoy the full profits of multispecies cover crops. Whiterock will be testing these strategies and sharing the results.



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These combined agricultural methods may be revolutionary in their potential to improve farmers' profits by conserving moisture in the soil and decreasing the quantity of fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides needed. These strategies could also reduce the environmental impact of these chemicals, provide more wildlife habitat, reduce the loss of top soil, keep the Iowa landscape green year round, and immeasurably improve water quality. Clean water is a fundamental human and ecological need both here in Iowa and all the way downstream, including the communities and habitat in the Gulf of Mexico almost 1,000 miles away.

Truly not many land trusts have this kind of scope and potential to positively and profoundly impact the foundations of our society and so many fundamental human and ecological needs. It is a great pleasure for us at Whiterock to be engaged in such meaningful and far reaching work with your support. *Thank you.*

WHY WE GIVE

Lynn Ford was raised on a farm five or six miles northwest of Coon Rapids. He went to Country School there and then to high school in Coon Rapids. One of his favorite pastimes as a boy and young man was hiking and hunting the timbered hills of what is now Whiterock Conservancy.

Yet as so frequently happens, growing up called Lynn away from his quiet boyhood forests and long rambling adventures in the hills. After graduation, he joined the Marine Corps serving in California, Okinawa, and Vietnam. Later he became a Trooper with the Iowa State Patrol and eventually ended up in suburbia, near urban Omaha, when he became Sheriff of Pottawattamie County. He and Patti, his wife of 33 years, reside in rural Council Bluffs.



Still Lynn has never forgotten his roots in the wilder forests, hills and pastures that was rural Iowa of his boyhood days. That is why he has always supported conservation. He served on the Pottawattamie County Conservation Board and as chair of the board he worked with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation to create the Hitchcock Nature Center near Crescent, Iowa.

Lynn has long supported other conservation efforts regionally and nationally but he and Patti have recently decided to prioritize supporting conservation locally, including Whiterock Conservancy's mission to protect and restore a precious and rare remnant of wild rural Iowa, a value close to Lynn's heart.

Now Lynn and Patti make it a point to come to Whiterock every few months. They stay in the Roswell Suite of the Garst Farmhouse and take their time enjoying the timbered hills, the prairies, the wildlife, and the quiet slow pace of country living that was such an important part of Lynn and Patti's youth and their lifelong values.

"It's a great place to decompress," says Lynn. "But more than that, I want to leave at least a small part of the earth the way I remember it from 50 years ago. That's why Patti and I support Whiterock."

Do you have horses?

The staff at Whiterock Conservancy is often asked this very question. Unfortunately, we do not have horses but we welcome horse owners to come ride on our property! Whiterock Conservancy offers 10+ miles of trails that meander through our varied landscapes. Our trail system is generally open year round and we welcome all trail users (hikers, bikers, and equestrians). We are approaching our busiest season for trail usage, autumn. Autumn is the most welcoming time for trail users in general because of its cooler temperatures and more notably the vast array of fall foliage. If you haven't experienced Whiterock during the autumn season, we suggest you take the time this year to do so.



We do charge a small fee of \$10 a day per horse. We also offer overnight primitive camping, open steel pens, and firewood for nominal fees. Campground and Day Users should check in at the main campground kiosk before heading out to explore the land. This is where you will find additional information about Whiterock and last minute notifications from staff. Self-check-in envelopes are also available here. The fees collected are used to support Whiterock Conservancy's mission of providing recreational opportunities to the general public including maintaining the campgrounds, trail mowing and maintenance. We also offer primitive cabin and modern overnight accommodations.

Check out our website, www.whiterockconservancy.org, to find out more information.

The 2013 Bio Blitz was a success!

Whiterock Conservancy thanks all who participated in this year's Bio Blitz. With over 60 people participating, and nine different professionals providing expertise in a variety of fields, the event was educational, scientifically important, and fun. Here is the first of nine briefings to come from our experts.

Whiterock Conservancy 2013 Bio Blitz: Birding Report

Weather and other conditions were nearly perfect for conducting bird inventories at the Whiterock Conservancy's 2013 Bio Blitz. On Friday evening a team explored habitats along the Raccoon River, downstream from River House to the ponds. Saturday morning another team searched the grasslands and ponds between the Garst home farm and the Visitor Center on Highway 141.

A total of 81 species were documented. Birds of woodlands, brush lands, savannas, and grasslands appeared most prominently, as might be expected in this great location. Included in this group were Summer and Scarlet Tanagers (the latter feeding a youngster), Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings. Eastern Towhees, Wood Thrushes, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, Whip-poor-wills, Gray Catbirds, Brown Thrashers, Eastern Wood Pewees, Eastern Phoebe, Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Red-eyed and Yellow-throated Vireos, Great-crested Flycatchers, a pair of rare Acadian Flycatchers, and five varieties of woodpeckers.

Good grassland finds included Northern Bobwhite, Western Meadowlarks, Dickcissels, Bobolinks, plus Field, Vesper, Grasshopper, and uncommon Henslow's Sparrows. Raptorial species included Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Cooper's hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Turkey Vulture, and Barred Owl. Wetland birds were somewhat lacking this year, perhaps attributable to flash floods in June. Those floods appear to have wiped out the nests or nestlings of many water birds, resulting in their abandoning usual nesting areas. We did, however, manage to observe Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, Green Herons, and Killdeer.

In summary, this was a very good birding Bio Blitz, considering that by July the nesting season is well underway, birds are singing less, and they and their nests often are well-camouflaged, making many varieties more difficult to encounter. Anytime it's possible to record 81 species in a 24-hour period in mid-summer can be considered a very successful effort.

DOUG HARR

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A full listing of what we found is in blue on the right.



Acadian Flycatcher	Hairy Woodpecker
American Crow	Henslow's Sparrow
American Goldfinch	House Finch
American Kestrel	House Sparrow
American Redstart	House Wren
American Robin	Indigo Bunting
Bald Eagle	Killdeer
Baltimore Oriole	Mourning Dove
Bank Swallow	Northern Bobwhite
Barn Swallow	Northern Cardinal
Barred Owl	Northern Flicker
Belted Kingfisher	Northern Harrier
Black-capped Chickadee	Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Blue Jay	Orchard Oriole
Bobolink	Red-bellied Woodpecker
Brown Thrasher	Red-eyed Vireo
Brown-headed Cowbird	Red-headed Woodpecker
Canada Goose	Red-Tailed Hawk
Cedar Waxwing	Red-winged Blackbird
Chimney Swift	Ring-necked Pheasant
Chipping Sparrow	Rock Pigeon
Cliff Swallow	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Common Grackle	Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Common Nighthawk	Scarlet Tanager
Common Yellowthroat	Sedge Wren
Cooper's Hawk	Song Sparrow
Dickcissel	Summer Tanager
Downy Woodpecker	Tree Swallow
Eastern Bluebird	Turkey Vulture
Eastern Kingbird	Vesper Sparrow
Eastern Phoebe	Warbling Vireo
Eastern Towhee	Western Meadowlark
Eastern Towhee	White-breasted Nuthatch
Eastern Whip-poor-will	Wild Turkey
Eastern Wood-Pewee	Willow Flycatcher
European Starling	Wood Thrush
Field Sparrow	Yellow Warbler
Grasshopper Sparrow	Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Gray Catbird	Yellow-throated Vireo
Great Blue Heron	
Great Crested Flycatcher	
Great Egret	
Green Heron	



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Late Summer 2013

Upcoming Events

August 29-September 2 — Annual Star Party
August 30 — Star Party Public Viewing Night
October 24 — Fall Family Hayrack Ride

Come and see our newest arrival!



Whiterock Conservancy is pleased to announce its newest arrival to our American Bison herd. She was born in July and is doing very well. We currently have 12 bison.

For more event details, and weather related announcements as they affect outdoor programs, check our website and FB pages:

<http://www.whiterockconservancy.org>

<http://www.facebook.com/whiterock.conservancy>

You Make the Difference!

Whiterock Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit land trust established to protect and steward more than 5,000 acres of irreplaceable Iowa river-valley land. Your gift is extremely important to Whiterock because it provides resources that make an immediate impact. Whether you make an annual, monthly, tribute or memorial contribution - your gift supports Whiterock's efforts to create a rich natural and farmed landscape to be enjoyed by both nature and people along the Middle Raccoon River Valley.

Tax-deductible donations can be made on-line at

<http://www.whiterockconservancy.org>



(look for the blue Donate Now button) or mailed to Whiterock Conservancy, 1390 Hwy 141, Coon Rapids, IA 50058.

Thank You for Your Support!

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