



openspaces

Newsletter for Whiterock Conservancy

A Nonprofit Land Trust

BACKCOUNTRY TRAIL AND BUR OAK VISITOR CENTER UPDATE

The first part of Whiterock's big 2014 construction project began at the end of January. The Bur Oak Visitor Center is being renovated to allow Whiterock staff to more effectively attract visitors, engage them in our mission, and provide them with an outstanding recreational experience. The renovation will include the construction of offices for Whiterock's staff and a front desk area where visitors can begin their exploration of Whiterock and find all the assistance they need to enjoy their visit. With the significant increase in visitation that we expect to begin to see this season with the completion of 35 miles of new state of the art recreational trails, the visitor center renovation is a top priority.

The visitor center will also have improved facilities for community members, organizations and Whiterock to host meetings, educational programs and events. With the front section being transformed into offices and visitor services, the back open picnic pavilion area will be enclosed with large windows. Heating and cooling will be added and a large open wood burning stove will serve as an inviting gathering area. The size of this new four season meeting area will be significantly greater than the building's former capacity.



With this additional space Whiterock will be able to install interpretive displays to teach visitors about our unique mission, landscape, and history. We will also be able to also sell memberships, rent out recreational equipment, recruit volunteers, sell retail items such as Whiterock hats, t-shirts and books, and raise funds through a donation box for high priority projects.

As larger parks know, creating this kind of a nexus of activity creates synergy, powerful outreach, and ultimately increased support for the park. The renovated visitor center will be a central place where important Whiterock business partners, donors, volunteers, and guests relax and interact which allows new people to capture the energy and enthusiasm of long-time Whiterock supporters. This concept works especially well if a few key Whiterock enthusiasts can be recruited as volunteers to welcome, educate and assist visitors who stop in during peak hours and days. Are you interested in being one of those volunteers? Contact Barbra at 712-684-2697 Ext. 115 or email her at Barbra@whiterockconservancy.org to express your interest.

The renovations are funded by the Community Attractions and Tourism grant that Whiterock received from Vision Iowa a few months ago. Local contractor Brett Beyerink is doing the work which should be completed in May.

Work on the trail itself will start in April or May. We have already been working to engage with mountain bikers in the Midwest and we are encouraged by their keen interest and anticipation. We expect that Coon Rapids will start to see significantly more mountain bikers in midsummer as the trail sections are completed one after another. We

hope you will join us over the summer as the trail sections begin to open and for grand opening events during the first three weekends in September to help us celebrate this great milestone for Whiterock and this great new asset for Iowa.



1390 Highway 141
Coon Rapids, IA 50058
(712) 684-2697

www.whiterockconservancy.org

Phone extensions:

x111 Conrad Kramer, Executive Director

x112 Guest Services

x114 Chris Troendle, Land Manager

X115 Barbra Jotzke-Torrier, Director of
Development and Communications

x117 Kathy Klocke, Office Manager

Whiterock Conservancy extends a warm welcome to our newest staff member, Kathy Klocke. Kathy is working part time as Whiterock's Office Manager and Bookkeeper. She comes with extensive experience most recently working for Region XII Council of Governments.



WE GIVE FOR A COMMUNITY ASSET AND PERSONAL REJUVENATION



Charlie Nixon, editor of The Coon Rapids Enterprise and Laura Lake, a teacher, shared their thoughts on supporting Whiterock Conservancy.

Charlie writes: In our wildest dreams, could our community have come up with a better, more accessible outdoor classroom than Whiterock Conservancy? I doubt it. Coon Rapids has been gifted with a tremendous outdoor arena that would be the envy of thousands of communities all across America — and that's why Laura and I make annual contributions to Whiterock Conservancy. We are extremely excited to see how their efforts to expand and develop their lands will benefit more and more Iowans — and Coon Rapids.

In my past, I've really enjoyed spending time in Ledges State Park, Springbrook State Park and Lake Anita State Park. All three have their unique qualities and have provided Iowans an outdoor experience for more than 75 years. In comparison, Whiterock Conservancy is a much larger and diverse area and its potential is only beginning! I'm really excited to see the completion of their backcountry trail project that promises to bring more walkers, equestrians and mountain bikers to the area.

I'm also hopeful that additional campground facilities will continue to be developed at Whiterock. According to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Lake Anita State Park was one of Iowa's top ten camping destinations last year with more than 25,000 campers. I believe Whiterock Conservancy will one day join the top ten Iowa most popular camping destinations.

Laura adds: I've always sought outdoor spaces. Whether it's in the surrounds of places where I've lived or in the locations of my travels, having a place to go that's away from the noise of the city has been important to my well-being. Living in Coon Rapids has provided me with one of the most beautiful and soul satisfying outdoor spaces around. Maybe it's because I've spent so much time at Whiterock Conservancy that I can rightfully say that. I love WRC for so many reasons. It's the very best place to go for a daily walk with my dog. It's the place to go for the peaceful sounds of nature; the wind in the trees, the brushing of the grasses, the calls of birds. It's the place to go to unwind from daily stresses, to feel the breeze and sunshine on my face, to meditate, and to decompress from work.

SO IT'S WINTERTIME: COME OUT AND EXPLORE!

There's no better place for strapping on those snowshoes and exploring the winter wonders than here at Whiterock. The same trails that are open in the summer look quite different with snow cover that sparkles in the sun. The campgrounds offer easy access during the winter and the limestone bluffs show off their colors. Just remember to layer warm clothes, bring your snacks and drinks, and let a friend know where you're headed and when to expect you back (this is good advice no matter the season!).

Cross country skiing is also a favorite during this time of year. You can cover lots of ground in a short amount of time.



SHEEP FOR SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT

By Kolby Burch, Burch Livestock, Coon Rapids, IA

Moving to Iowa from Wyoming was a dramatic change in scenery – from a landscape with little manipulation to one that is seemingly 90% row crop. This is, of course, directly related to the productivity of the land and one of many reasons my wife Micky and I love Iowa. At the same time, we still enjoy seeing green pastures with grazing livestock, and we're especially proud to raise a species that, according to researchers and even Oprah, are the friendliest meat animal to the ecology of the land.



This praise from Oprah isn't unfounded – sheep serve as little, one-inch wide lawn mowers. They tend to eat undesirable weed species before the more desirable blade of grass. In turn, we reduce our use of herbicide and fuel, and increase the desired plant species in those pastures that have been grazed by sheep. In essence, livestock grazing has many sustainable environmental benefits, like helping to control plant growth to minimize wildfire risks, promote wildlife habitat and prevent noxious weed overgrowth. We partner with Whiterock Conservancy to pasture some of our sheep from time to time in order to provide the sheep with increased access to larger pasture systems while providing Whiterock with land management benefits.



Beyond this, Micky and I raise sheep for youth projects because we whole heartedly believe in the merit of raising a new generation of youth with livestock. Whiterock Conservancy has the same belief and has partnered with Coon Rapids FFA to provide space for these youth projects. I have had the opportunity to judge shows around the country, and I know the program is working based on the number of handshakes and "Thank you, sirs" I receive at the conclusion of each.

We are thankful for the partnership with Whiterock Conservancy, and we look forward to continue working with Whiterock well into the future. Next time you visit, know the sheep, and their protection Llama, are working hard to help improve the quality of Whiterock's pastures.

SO IT'S WINTERTIME (CONT.)

For families with children, head to the historic farm and pond areas. The trails are easy to walk and the wildlife are evident. The snow captures the tracks of deer, rabbits, birds, field mice, waterfowl, and more. Spend a fun and family friendly afternoon locating and identifying as many different tracks as possible. See you soon!



SBG



1390 Highway 141
Coon Rapids, IA 50058



openspaces

Winter 2014

SAVE THE DATE

Look for more information and stay up to date on our Events page at www.whiterockconservancy.org.

- | | |
|--|--|
| April 22, Earth Day, Backcountry Trail Groundbreaking and Visitor Center Tree Planting | September Backcountry Trail Grand Opening Events |
| May 17, Volunteer Work Day at Whiterock | Sept. 5, Ribbon Cutting |
| June 6-8, Iowa DNR Free Fishing Days, no license needed | Sept. 5-7, Walking, Running & John Deere Gator® Trail Events |
| June 20-22, Bio-Blitz (tentative) | Sept. 12-14, Mountain Bike Trail Events |
| July 13, Carroll County Fair Tractor Ride | Sept. 19-21, Equestrian Trail Events |
| July 11-13, Bio-Blitz (tentative) | |
| August 22, Star Party Public Viewing Night | |

YOU MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

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 seven square miles of land along the scenic Middle Raccoon River Valley, 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.