

Message from the Director



On a recent visit to Whiterock, you may have noticed our many new infrastructure projects. The new trail, a visitor's center and fishing piers are difficult to miss, and they help to make our landscape more accessible. These changes fulfill one of the essential components of WRC's three-part mission: to engage the public with the environment.

What you may not have noticed are the changes taking place on an ecological level. Components of nature's infrastructure that we are working to enrich are cleaner water, greater species diversity, more habitat and overall ecosystem health and resilience.

I encourage you to use the man-made infrastructure in order to discover aspects of nature's infrastructure. It is our goal that this land be used as a way for people to connect with the environment and begin to foster a sustainable conservation ethic that they can use in their every day life.

Because this land was set aside to protect it from development or fragmentation, we must always keep in mind the integrity of the entire system as we look to make any kind of infrastructure improvements. And so, as with anything we do, we must consider the ecological consequences of our actions. Balancing the needs of both humans and the environment at WRC is both a challenge and an opportunity so that we can achieve development with a purpose.

-Tolif Hunt, Executive Director

CAT Grant Project Comes to Fruition Updates on visitor's center, fishing pier and trail extension



The new Bur Oak Visitor's Center located just off Highway 141 East of Coon Rapids will soon be completed. The center will serve as a meeting place as well as an educational tool for the public. Construction is expected to be finished by the end of September.

Whiterock's new visitor's center will soon join a long list of completed projects funded in part by a Community Attractiveness and Tourism (CAT) grant. The center, newly named the Bur Oak Visitor's Center, is expected to be completed by the end of September.

"We'll be populating the inside with signs and information this winter, to get it ready for a grand opening next spring," says Tolif

Hunt, Executive Director.

The new facility will include an indoor meeting hall, restrooms, covered outdoor picnic area and a patio overlooking wetlands and Riis Pond, the base of the Osprey Reintroduction Project. The indoor hall will have heat as well as fans installed, ensuring year-round use. The meeting hall will be available for rent in the future and WRC plans to hold meetings and educa-

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volunteer opportunities

Saturday, October 17—Oak Savanna Restoration Day

Help WRC combat invasive species to restore a white and bur oak savanna. Spend a day in the scenic Whiterock Valley and learn how restoration benefits the land and its inhabitants. Meet at 10 a.m. at the Betts Shop on Fig Avenue (.8 miles south of Hwy 141). Contact elizabeth@whiterockconservancy.org to RSVP.

No experience necessary. Please wear outdoor work appropriate clothing, sturdy boots, and bring leather gloves. Lunch and refreshments will be provided.



1390 Highway 141 Coon Rapids, IA 50058
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ecologist's corner

Monarch *Danaus plexippus*

This summer, as many in the past, I raised several monarch butterflies on my porch. After collecting caterpillars from common milkweed plants in the front yard, I eagerly watched as they transformed from caterpillar to chrysalis to adult in the span of weeks. If you haven't tried this, I would recommend you put it, or the rearing of any insect for that matter, on next summer's to-do list.

Even if you haven't raised a monarch, most everyone has had some type of experience with them: whether you've watched a small black-white-and-yellow striped caterpillar munch on sappy milkweed leaves, found a jade-green chrysalis hanging on a leaf in your garden, or followed the graceful flight of a monarch over a field. But many people don't know that the mysterious migration of the monarch was illuminated only 35 years ago, and that today, the monarch's breeding and overwintering habitat is diminishing, leaving one of our most conspicuous butterflies vulnerable.

Monarchs are members of the tropical family *Danainae* (milkweed butterflies), but depend on their host plants, the milkweeds, which are largely temperate species. Unlike milkweeds, monarchs have not evolved the ability to survive the harsh winters of the Upper Midwest, and instead they have developed one of the most nuanced and eye-catching migratory habits of any North American insect.



Cluster nectaring on ironweed
Photo by Scott Schmidt

In Iowa, you can begin to see monarchs in April, as the first migrants arrive and lay eggs on milkweed plants. Up to four generations of monarchs then successively hatch during the long Iowa summer. The last generation emerges in September and goes into reproductive *diapause*, waiting to mate or lay eggs until the following spring. It is thought that the butterflies are triggered by the shorter days to group together for the southward migration. Riding thermals and flying up to 200 miles per day, the delicate butterflies finally rest in the Oyamel fir forests in the mountains of the Transverse Neovolcanic Belt of central Mexico, a site discovered in 1975 by researchers previously unaware of their overwintering site.

Today, 217 square miles of the monarch's mountainous overwintering habitat are preserved in the *Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve*. Despite protection, the Oyamel forests are one of Mexico's most endangered ecosystems, being diminished by logging, much like Iowa's tallgrass prairie biome has been drastically reduced by agricultural practices. In our state, we can take steps to preserve a large segment of these enchanting creatures' life cycle. First, we can begin to view milkweed plants as an asset, instead of a pest, cultivate a butterfly garden at your home, or take part in observing and reporting on the migration. Visit www.monarchwatch.org for more information.

Check out Elizabeth's blog at:
<http://blog.whiterockconservancy.org>



Wet with early morning dew, monarchs must wait until the sun dries them to fly

News Briefs

WRC highlighted in *The Iowa Review*

In volume 39 number 2 of the University of Iowa's literary journal *The Iowa Review*, author Connie Mutel writes about Iowa's efforts to "recloak our landscape in perennial vegetation to hold both soil and water firmly in place." Calling WRC "one of Iowa's largest restoration efforts," she traces the history of the land from pre-settlement to the incredible vision of the Garst family to conserve 5,400 acres while blending a working landscape with native plant communities for the greater good.

Donate Your Unwanted Truck to Conservation

Are you looking to donate your unwanted truck to a good cause? WRC maintenance crew is in need of a 4WD ¾ ton pickup in working condition. This truck will haul water tanks for our prescribed fire program and machinery for trail and land maintenance. Contact emily@whiterockconservancy.org if you can help. We may be able to pick it up for you, and will accept trucks in need of minor repairs. All donations made to WRC are fully tax-deductible.

Job Opening at WRC Resort

WRC is seeking a full-time resort manager. Position requires strong customer service skills and willingness to work flexible and seasonal hours, including some weekends and evenings. Bachelor's degree, or minimum 4 years office management experience is required. Applicants may call Tolif Hunt, at 712-684-2697 x111 for more info or send resume to 1390 Highway 141, Coon Rapids, IA 50058.

Ales & Trails

For the second year in a row, Central Iowa Trails Association (CITA) held a lively Ales & Trails event at WRC on Saturday, September 19. The day began with a 45-mile mountain bike race on gravel roads, and the winner took home \$200. Later that evening, CITA members and friends enjoyed dinner and a barn dance, featuring Brother Trucker.

CITA creates and maintains unpaved, shared use trails in and around Des Moines, Iowa. www.CentrallowaTrails.com

Clouds Scatter as Night Sets in at Star Party

On an overcast Friday at the end of August, astronomers at the 7th annual Iowa Star Party waited in anticipation to see just how the night would unfold. That evening was scheduled to be the public viewing night, where anyone is invited to join these amateur astronomers to learn more about the night sky while viewing the stars through impres-

sive telescopes, some even homemade. However, with an obstructed view, many people decided to stay home. But at 7 p.m. an amazing thing happened... the pesky clouds just drifted off! In the end, over 100 stargazers gathered at Whiterock's Star Field to enjoy the beautifully clear night.

Wes Jackson Delivers Powerful Message

In a speech delivered at the recent Khrushchev celebration, the message was clear: we need to develop perennialized grain in order to ensure an adequate food supply for future generations.

On August 29, 2009, Dr. Wes Jackson of The Land Institute in Salina, KS, spoke at the Garst Home Farm. Drawing upon agricultural developments made fifty years ago to ensure that the world's people were fed, Dr. Jackson presented on the pressing need to protect our soils and perennialize the major crops so that we may eat for the next 50 years.

"Next year our earth is expected to feed seven billion people," Jackson explained. With soil erosion and other landscape degradations increasing globally, Jackson stressed that protecting productive soils should be our main concern. "Currently," he said, "we are poisoning our soils to save them."



Jackson speaks about the importance of perennialized agriculture at the Garst Home Farm.

Highlighting aspects of ecology and evolutionary biology, and both Russian and American thinkers and scientists who have advanced research on this subject, Jackson noted that nature's ecosystems feature perennials growing in mixtures. And further, that nature's sustainable way of operating should be

the standard against which we judge our agriculture.

In conclusion, Jackson proposed that Russia and the U.S. undertake a massive breeding program devoted to perennializing the major crops,

while at the same time pursuing joint ecological studies of the agricultural landscape. By enhancing our food producing system, we can ensure that agriculture moves from an extractive to a renewable economy.

To learn more about perennialization, or to read Wes' entire speech, log onto www.landinstitute.org.

CAT Grant (cont.)

tional opportunities of their own in the center. "It will be a public asset," Hunt said.

The Bur Oak Visitor's Center is only one new feature funded in part by the CAT grant. A handicapped-accessible fishing pier and trail looping around the Home Farm Pond was also part of the project and has been completed. Also, a 3.5 mile extension to the existing Coon Rapids trails has been finished, connecting the town to WRC lands. Access to the new trail as well as the Home Farm Pond loop trail can be reached from the trailhead at Whiterock Conservancy headquarters at the Garst Home Farm.

This fall, also as part of the CAT grant project, numerous new signs will appear on Whiterock Conservancy's property. Signs will denote trailheads, mark the 27.4 miles of trails open to the public, and interpret the ecology of the area, altogether helping visitors navigate and understand the land. The entire budget for all of these great new additions to Whiterock Conservancy was \$6.5 million. \$1.7 million of that was funded by the CAT grant, and the remainder was secured through private, city, county and state monies.

To learn more about Whiterock Conservancy, or to print out an updated trail map, visit www.whiterockconservancy.org.

Results for Visitor's Center Naming Contest

After pouring through dozens of clever and inspirational suggestions for Whiterock's new Visitor's Center, a name has finally been chosen—The Bur Oak Visitor's Center.

Interestingly, the name was submitted by both Megan Volp of West Des Moines and Doug Carpenter of Coon Rapids, who will each enjoy a Whiterock Resort package for their winning name.

The name "Bur Oak" struck a chord with WRC staff. As the state tree of Iowa, this species plays a key role in ecosystem health. At Whiterock, we are working to restore the bur oak savanna to improve soil and water quality and create diverse habitat.



The Bur Oak Visitor's Center is on Hwy 141, just east of Coon Rapids and WRC's Home Farm.

In her email, Volp wrote this about the Bur Oak:

"It has beauty in presence and branching pattern. Known for longevity, strength and ability to provide shelter, food, and nesting for wildlife, the bur oak is also rich with historical importance as lumber for furniture, construction, and railroad ties."

Thanks to...

Vision Iowa Community Attractions and Tourism Program

Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs Great Places Program

The Garst Family

Community of Coon Rapids

New Addition to the Herd Named “Sergei”



Four day old Sergei is sticking close to mama.

A surprise showed up at Whiterock Conservancy during the recent Khrushchev in Iowa celebration – a baby bison was born.

Matt Reiling, WRC Grounds Manager and primary bison care-giver discovered the calf shortly after the close of the August 29 event. The calf was promptly named “Sergei” in honor of Nikita Khrushchev’s son who was present in Coon Rapids for the day’s festivities, as well as during the

Soviet Premier’s visit fifty years ago in 1959.

The recent addition of “Sergei” will bring the herd up to a total of seven bison including one bull and two adolescents. Bison, also commonly referred to as buffalo, have been raised here as part of the Garst farm since the early 1980s. In 2007, when the historic Garst Farmstead was donated to Whiterock Conservancy, the bison were included in that gift. These large, beautiful creatures are currently grazing on 15 acres of land, though a total of 50 acres are available to the herd as part of a bison pasture system.

This fall, all 50 acres of the bison pasture will be seeded to prairie. The project will begin when the pasture is mowed and sprayed to make way for planting diverse mid-grass prairie during the winter. It is anticipated that by midsummer 2010, the bison will be dining on the

newly established prairie grasses.

“The prairie plants that we’re seeding are the forage that native bison have eaten here in Iowa for thousands of years,” says Elizabeth Hill, WRC Ecologist. “Although these particular bison are more domesticated than their ancestors, they give us the incredibly unique opportunity to witness bison existing on their native landscape.”

More facts on the American Bison can be found at <http://www.nature.org/animals/mammals/animals/bison.html>

Want to Visit Sergei?

Visitors can view Sergei and the entire herd by stopping by WRC’s Home Farm, just east of Coon Rapids on Highway 141.

Hop on the new town loop walking and biking trail (just at the entrance of the Home Farm) and proceed southeast, up the hill and the buffalo pasture will be on your right.

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



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