

Message from the Director

Thirty-one acres of restored oak savanna; 200 acres of restored prairie; 600 acres of prescribed burns; a new one-mile section of trail; a new fishing pier at the Home Farm pond; and a suite of new directional signs to get you oriented on the fabulous land we call *Whiterock*...2008 was quite a year of accomplishments.



Reflections on the past are important, and in 2009 WRC will spend time reflecting on a more distant past as we move forward. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Khrushchev visit at the Garst Home Farm, which was entrusted to WRC in the spring of 2007. This famous visit, covered by the world press, is one event that shall forever live with our staff, board of directors and supporters.

Countless messages stem from this event: changing agriculture, citizen diplomacy, and the importance of food on the world stage. The one that strikes me most is that it takes just one person with conviction and the will to act boldly to change the world, just as Roswell Garst did. Can you better summarize how we can successfully move forward to a more sustainable Iowa of tomorrow?

I hope this year that you will take the time to visit Whiterock Resort, the historic Garst Home Farm and the Whiterock landscape. While you are here, we hope you will take time to reflect on this important message of conviction and activism, in your life and in ours.

-Tolif Hunt
Executive Director

The Sun Shines Once Again Through WRC's Oak Savanna

This fall Whiterock Conservancy (WRC) hosted its first team of AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) volunteers as part of WRC's ongoing oak savanna and prairie restoration efforts. The NCCC crew worked at Whiterock for five weeks, removing eastern red cedar, honey locust and prickly ash trees from 31 acres of degraded oak savanna. During their stay the AmeriCorps team also assisted WRC staff, board members and volunteers with prescribed fires on nearly 600 acres of timber and prairie, and took advantage of a number of other community and project partner volunteer opportunities as well.

of land with a focus of restoration isn't as easy as one might think. "Where do you start if you've got a great crew, chain saws and enthusiasm, but just five weeks?" WRC Ecologist Elizabeth Hill asked jokingly. "It's actually not that difficult," she added. "You use environmental indicators, historical



Front: Sean Christensen (WRC), Elizabeth Hill (WRC), Brooke Ralston. Back: Zachary Dirig, Laura Lipinski, Charles Tumleson, Clifton Husk, Carrie Grishaber

WRC has been focused on restoring the once-abundant oak savanna habitat at Whiterock, in part because of our key role within the 54,000-acre Raccoon River Savanna Bird Conservation Area (BCA), and in part because WRC is stewarding nearly 1,000 acres of this state-endangered habitat. "Thanks to a history of conservation-based land management here at Whiterock by the Garst family, we have a head start in managing some of the BCA's most restorable oak savanna," noted WRC Executive Director Tolif Hunt.

But stewarding such a large tract

maps and old land descriptions to identify probable savanna restoration areas, and then you focus on where the sedges, gentians and orchids are still growing within these areas. Your priority has to be the savanna remnants with the highest conservation value; then you move out from there."

Having the NCCC crew at Whiterock was made possible by a three-way partnership between WRC, the Johnson County Heritage Trust (JCHT) *(continued on page 3)*

volunteer opportunities

This spring, you are invited to join Whiterock Conservancy's **NEW Volunteer Land Steward Program**. We are looking for additional eyes and ears to visit Whiterock a few times throughout the year to **observe and monitor changes on the landscape** relating to plant life, wildlife, storm damage and erosion. In turn, you'll have the unique opportunity to learn about Whiterock's landscape and ongoing programs, and to **make a difference in our conservation efforts!** Contact Emily Babin for more information at Emily@whiterockconservancy.org.



1390 Highway 141 Coon Rapids, IA 50058
(712) 684-2697
www.whiterockconservancy.org



ecologist's corner

Winter: Exposure to More than Just the Elements

The quiet time of winter has come to Whiterock valley: the chain saws have been put away, the cows are off the pasture and the number of visitors to the property has dwindled. Recent small snow-squalls have left more than a foot of snow on the ground, and tall drifts have been formed by the bellowing northwesterly winds. As I write this, the temperature (without the wind chill) is -18°F. This extreme weather doesn't beckon us, but on warm(er) and sunnier winter days, we can take advantage, venture outdoors and learn great things about our surroundings.



Cottontail rabbit and whitetail deer tracks intersect

During the growing season, the paths of animals through the woodlands and grasslands can be traced by looking for tracks in mud, scat, signs of herbivory or trails through vegetation. Snow coverage during the winter months exposes what I call the "super-highways of the natural world" and shows us exactly where and how the animals that are still awake are traveling. Although it may seem that the extremely low temperatures would not be hospitable to any animal, there are certainly many organisms that have adapted to live through the cold.

Fur, feathers, stockpiling of food, putting on extra fat in the fall and shivering are common adaptations used by many animals, including humans (what is *your* coat made of?), but the ultimate responses to cold weather are hibernation and torpor. Squirrels, coyotes, foxes, deer, rabbits, and many birds are still out and about, leaving tracks, chattering in the bare trees or digging in the snow. Many other small mammals such as the opossum, woodchuck, bats, and some ground squirrels and mice have all been hibernating since October. Hibernation occurs when an animal's body temperature and heart rate drop drastically, and they are able to live off stored body fat while "sleeping." Other mammals, like the badger, striped skunk and raccoon go into torpor, or temporary hibernation, during the winter. These animals' body temperatures and heart rates drop only slightly and torpor lasts for short periods of time, unlike the winter-long hibernation of some species. You may see these animals out of their dens often, during warm spells or when food and water are readily available.

While we humans might like to go into torpor during the winter, it is actually a perfect time to explore outside. The landscape is serene and quiet, and you won't have to fight for a parking spot. Just don't forget your fur, feathers, extra layer of fat, and that natural shivering response.

Gray Squirrel



Opossum



Whitetail Deer



Eastern Cottontail



Badger



Course-sorting animal tracks

Two-toed: whitetail deer

Four-toed: rabbits, coyotes, foxes, bobcats

Four-toed (front) and five-toed (hind): mice, squirrels

Five-toed: opossums, raccoons, otters, beavers, skunks.

Hunt Named Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioner for Carroll County

In November 2008, Tolif Hunt, WRC Executive Director, was elected Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioner for Carroll County, along with Tom Buman and Roger Slater. The responsibility of commissioner is to work with the Natural Resources Con-

servation Service, the Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and the State Conservation Commission to help Iowa producers and land managers implement soil and water conservation practices at the county level. Congratulations, Tolif.

News Briefs

Garst Land Gift Reaches a Milestone

The Garst family and some of their long-time friends recently donated 251 acres to Whiterock Conservancy, bringing the total WRC land gifts to 2,450 acres. Thank you to the Garst family, on behalf of Iowa, for forever protecting another 251 acres.

NorthFace Founder Visits Whiterock Conservancy

In October, we had the privilege of hosting Doug Tompkins, founder of the North Face, Espirit and Conservation Land Trust. Tompkins' new projects are focused on preserving and restoring sensitive lands and farms in Patagonia, South America. He toured the WRC property and discussed restoration projects with WRC staff and Liz Garst.

Online Shopping Benefits Land Restoration Projects

Remember the saying "A penny saved is a penny earned"? Since we discovered iGive.com, that phrase really means something special to Whiterock Conservancy. And it will to you, too. Because when you shop online through iGive.com, Whiterock Conservancy will receive up to 25% of every purchase you make through one of their listed 600+ merchants (JCPenny's, Barnes&Noble.com, PETSMART, Lands' End, Amazon.com, etc.). And best of all, there's no obligation or cost to you! Check out the free shipping and other discounts that these merchants offer, and we'll make a penny when you save one.

We Want Your Photos!

Last time you were at Whiterock, did you take a striking photo of the bluffs? Capture a playful otter on film? Maybe you took pictures of your family barbeque at 805 River Cabin? If you have any great shots of the landscape, wildlife or people on it, we would love to see them!

Submit your photos to Emily Babin: emily@whiterockconservancy.org

To view our current photos, check out www.whiterockconservancy.org and click on the Flickr link.

Native Prairie Seed Project Takes Root

December marked a major step in WRC's effort to transition brome-dominated grassland to native prairie. WRC staff, with assistance from Diversity Farms of Dedham, Iowa, planted 160 acres of 244 acres brome grassland with a seed mix featuring 58 native forbe and grass species.

Many of the seeds were gathered from local native prairie plantings and were augmented with seeds from Allendan Seed in Madison County and from Bill Buman in Shelby County. The seed mix was broadcast planted except for the more conservative species, such as prairie rose, downy gentian and prairie violet, which were inter-seeded by hand in areas in which they will be sure to thrive.

"Of the fourteen-hundred acres of grassland on the property, these two hundred and forty-four acres will be our most species-rich prairies," said Elizabeth Hill, WRC's ecologist.

Funding for these flagship acres in WRC's *Brome-to-Prairie Transition* project was made possible by working with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to enroll the land in the

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) under the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) practice. Additional cost-share assistance also came from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, which helped expand the number of species in the WRC prairie seed mix.



"Transitioning one thousand acres of low-diversity grasslands to a diverse prairie is a long-term project," said Hill. "So our management plans are also long-term."

WRC will begin by mowing the prairies to give the new plants a competitive advantage against invasive weeds. Prescribed

fire and periodic grazing will also play a role in establishing and maintaining the reconstructed prairies. The use of fire and grazing will mimic the historical disturbance regimes on these native prairies.

"It will take a few years for the diverse prairie to establish itself," said Hill. "But before you know it, compass plants, big bluestem and Illinois tick-trefoil will be towering over your head and prairie phlox, larkspur and rough dropseed will be blooming."

(for more on this project see our Fall 2008 Newsletter)

AmeriCorps (continued)

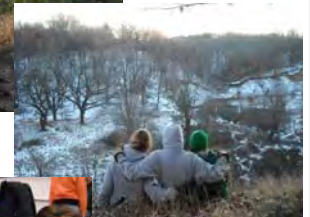
and the Polk County Soil and Water Conservation District. Led by Hill, the partnership submitted a joint application for the NCCC crew, and once approved, the crew started their eight-week long assignment with JCHT staff and volunteers and then worked for a week in the urban sections of Polk County's Four Mile Creek watershed before arriving at Whiterock.

Although most of the NCCC crew's days were spent running chainsaws, they did find time during a particularly rainy day to volunteer in and around Coon Rapids, where they made community presentations and helped organizations like Saving Our Avian Resources. "An important part of being an NCCC crew host is offering diversity in volunteer opportunities," noted Hill. "But the main focus of our efforts here on WRC-managed land was to restore one of Iowa's endangered plant communities, the oak savanna."

"We sure did learn how to use chainsaws and pull thorns out of our hands," said Brooke Ralston, NCCC team leader. "But we also got to help out with this amazing project at Whiterock, a breathtaking piece of land. The work was exhausting, but at the end of the day, when the sun was shining through the big oak trees, we knew all of the hard work was worth it."



Left: Cedar removal on Long Farm prairie remnant.



Above: Carrie, Laura, and Brooke enjoy the beauty of a newly uncovered prairie remnant. Left: Carrie and Brooke de-husk and clean cream wild indigo seeds.

Come Visit the Historic Garst Home Farm at Whiterock Resort



Roswell & Elizabeth Garst at the Home Farm

Whiterock Resort in Coon Rapids, Iowa offers a family-friendly getaway in the scenic Middle Raccoon River Valley.

Spend a night in the **comfortable bed & breakfast**, historic home of Roswell and Elizabeth Garst and site of the famous 1959 visit from former Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. Or bring your friends to stay in a **cozy cottage**, **remote 3-season cabin** on the banks of the Middle Raccoon, or enjoy one of our **low-impact campgrounds**.

More than 30 Miles of Trails... Hike, Bike, or Bring your Horse Canoeing – Fishing – Gator Rentals

For more information, visit www.whiterockconservancy.org. To make a reservation, call Jeana at 712-684-2964 x112 or email jeana@whiterockconservancy.org

New Friends to Whiterock Invest More Than \$15,000

Whiterock Conservancy (WRC) and founding supporter Mary Garst of Coon Rapids hosted a small group of WRC supporters in October for a tour of some of the land's more remarkable places. After visiting a portion of the Whiterock-managed 4,000+ acres and seeing first-hand the many land restoration and preservation projects underway, 100 percent of the guests became donors.

"I was thrilled to see the work that Whiterock Conservancy has completed on the landscape," said Sara Hill of Des Moines, who attended the tour with her husband Luther and sister Nancy Hewitt. "The potential of the project and what awaits the public is mind-blowing, really."

After a hearty soup lunch at the home of Mary Garst, the group

headed out on four-wheel drive vehicles for a guided tour of the landscape with WRC Executive Director Tolif Hunt and WRC Ecologist Elizabeth Hill.

"We showed them several of the agro-ecological projects that we've been working on, discussed the many challenges for accomplishing our project goals and shared our vision for the future. They were intrigued and excited," said Hunt.

"As a small organization with big plans, we were thrilled to receive the philosophical and financial support of the group," said Emily Babin, WRC's Outreach & Development Coordinator. "The Garst family has donated



Left to Right: Neil Hamilton, Nancy Hewitt, Khanh Hamilton, Elizabeth Hill, Ann Fleming, Tolif Hunt, Winifred Kelley, Mary Garst, Luther and Sara Hill.

the land to WRC, and it is exciting to see that there are many others who are eager to financially support us. These investments are vital to the success of WRC and our programs."

"Whiterock is ever so special," said Sara Hill. "Our hats are off to everyone at WRC."

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



1390 Highway 141
Coon Rapids, IA 50058

Supporters

Whiterock Conservancy wishes to acknowledge all of the generous support received in 2008.

\$10,000+

Anonymous
INHF
Luther & Sara Hill
Mary Garst

\$5,000--\$9,999

Elizabeth Garst
Sarah Garst
The TASS Corporation

\$1,000--\$4,999

CoBank
Ann Fleming
Kate Garst
Winifred Kelley
Karl & Carol Nolin
Robert & Kay Riley

\$500--\$999

Mark & Susan Ackelson
Fred & Charlotte Hubbell
Foundation
William Lozier

\$100--\$499

Emily Babin
Margaret Brennan
John Centala
Sarah & Dan Christensen
Des Moines Founders Garden
Club
Mike Dvorak

Allan & Harriet Fox
Mary Garst
Rachel Garst
Khanh & Neil Hamilton
Will & Fran Irwin
Rudolf & Helen Jensen
Fred Kirschenmann
Antonia Lee
Caroline Levine
David & Joan Oesper
E.N. Partridge Blessington
Ron Pomeroy
Gregory Socha
Dawn Taylor

\$50--\$99

Lyle & Charlotte Asell
Nancy Brutsche
Kent & Nancy Cornish
The Chubb Corporation
Dale Engelken
Michael & Denise Gripp
Tolif & Tanya Hunt
Steven & Kathryn Miura
Matt Mutel
Charles Nixon & Laura Lake
Martin & Rosemary Paulsen
Robert & Roslea Johnson
Jerry & Gail Peckumn
Marilyn Bukoff Priddy & David
Priddy
James Richardson

Jason & Heather Starr
Trelen Wilson & Linda Bender

\$49 or Less

Michael & Jaxine Corum
Dan Kopatich, *in memory of Bill
Kopatich*
Robert & Ellen Henak, *in
memory of Bob Henak*
Lloyd & Betty Nees
Donald Propst
Robert & Linda Scarth

Gifts of Land

Keith Dorpinghaus
Elizabeth Garst
Jennifer Garst
Kate Garst
Mary Garst
Rachel Garst
Sarah Garst
Antonia Lee
Bob Riley

Donations of Goods & Services

Beth Henning
Henning Sisters Limited
Partnership
Elizabeth Garst

Volunteers in 2008

Our sincere appreciation to everyone who helped make Whiterock Conservancy's programs a success!

Allison Drury-Aldrich	Liz Garst	Kurt Kuecker	Harlan Ratcliff
Shari Addy	Kate Garst	Charles Nixon and Laura Lake	Justin Rice
Lyle Asell	Jennifer Garst	Mike Lambert	Robert Riley
Jim and Carolyn Ashbaugh	Mary Garst	Tom Lawson	Tom Rosburg
Mark Asmus	Brian Golay	Steve Libbey	Jim Russell
Jon Bahrenfus	Mike and Sarah Green	Laura Lipinski	Manilla Saddle Club
Rich Baker	Carrie Grishaber	Devan McGranahan	Robert and Linda Scarth
Adrienne Baughman	Jason Hart	Brent and Linda McManus	Jack Schmeiser
Mike Birmingham	M.J. Hatfield	Danielle McManus	Dean Schoeppner
Gordon Brand	Julia Hayne	Ray and Susan Meylor	Jason Schultes
Justin Breitbach	Roseanne Healy	Eileen Miller	Leland Searles
David Burmeister	Richard and Susan Heathcote	Sarah Moskowitz	Tony Seeman
Jeff Callison	Beth Henning	Erik and Larissa Mottl	Kay Snopeke
Doug Carpenter	Ken Herring	Mark Mullaney	Virginia Solberg
Charles Carpenter	Bobby Hofbauer	Kay Neumann	Mike Stoudt
Bill Clark	Darryl Howell	Scott Newbury	Keith Summerville
Jim Colbert	Steve Hummel	Tasha Newbury	Kurt Tatami
Jerry Cook	Tanya Hunt	Scott Olson	Sandy Thompson
Kate Corcoran	Taylor Hunt	Shauna Olson	David Tousain
Dave Correll	Dylan Hunt	Jenny O'Neill	Dan Towers
Lloyd Crim	Mike Hurst	Jeff Parmelee	Nora Trampe
Stan Crull	Clifton Husk	Marty Paulsen	Owen Trampe
Steve Curtis	Cory Janssen	John Pearson	Charles Tumleson
Heather Daskal	Teresa Jensen	Jerry Peckumn	Hank Vogel
Jessica Davis	Roslea Johnson	Dwight Pierce	Victor Webber
Josh DeMarree	Al Johnson	Darwin Pierce	Kristen Wehrmeyer
Zachary Dirig	Chris Jones	Glenn Pollock	Kristin Weigman
Bruce and Marlene Ehresman	Jon Judson	Aimee Ponteri	Rachel Wergin
Dusty Farnsworth	Savanna Judson	Camilo Pool	Matt Wetrich
Jen Filipiak	Ian Judson	Kelly Poole	Ashley Wick
Stefan Gailans	Annique Kiel	Mark Pote	Luke Wright
Ana Garst	Adam Kiel	Donald Propst	Cassandra Wright
Helen Garst	Fred Kirschenmann	Brooke Ralston	Joe and Erica Zito
Quique Garst	Mary Ann Koch	Doug Ramsey	
Rachel Garst	Mindy Kralicek	Steve Rassler	

We would also like to remember our friend and mentor, Jim Nedtwig, who generously donated his time and energy to many Whiterock Conservancy projects.