

Photo by Dean Jackson

Message from the Director

Cutting down trees? Burning prairie? Cattle grazing on protected grasslands? Interpretive signs about drainage tile? Is this the work of a land trust dedicated to protecting the environment and helping people enjoy and understand Iowa's outdoors? It may seem strange, but for Whiterock Conservancy the answer is a resounding "yes."



The changing climate of agriculture and conservation in Iowa now requires the development of innovative strategies to protect the land while continuing to produce off of it—and the changes that we're making here at WRC are supporting both the resiliency of the landscape and of our organization. As we move forward with transforming how we manage our protected land, I encourage you to join us as we look at land management through a wider lens. Our whole picture includes the production of both food and wildlife, the conservation of soil, energy, and biodiversity, and the protection of scenic beauty on our working landscape.

Our new approaches will lead to a far more complete and environmentally beneficial means of protecting the beautiful land we call Whiterock. Seeing positive changes on our landscape not only takes open eyes, but also an open mind.

-Tolif Hunt, Executive Director



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Defining Managed Grazing in Iowa 2010 Project Seeks to Answer the Question of Sustainability

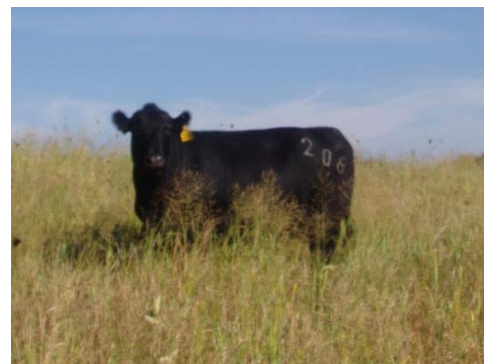
This year, Whiterock Conservancy (WRC) is embarking on a groundbreaking project designed to address a growing set of concerns involving the use of managed grazing on restored grasslands in Iowa.

The project, *Grazing as a Management Tool in Iowa*, will foster a collaborative approach to landscape level conservation by forming partnerships between landowners, farmers/producers, natural resource managers and scientists.

Research has shown that the conservation and restoration of perennial grasslands is necessary for the protection of biodiversity, water quality, and soil health in Iowa. Studies have also found that prescribed grazing is an acceptable tool for routine maintenance of native/restored grasslands. And with the added benefit of income with cattle grazing, many are turning to this option.

However, the absence of agronomic research and policy recommendations on how to

effectively use cattle as a management tool in restored grasslands puts landowners and producers in a precarious situation if and when they choose to graze prairie.



Cow grazing in a tallgrass prairie at Whiterock.

WRC's ongoing efforts to manage land using both economic and ecological principles has prompted us to begin exploring the use of cattle as a management tool in restored and reconstructed tallgrass prairie.

In order to meet this issue head-on, WRC has partnered with Professors Mary Wiedenhoef and John Tyndall from Iowa State University, ISU graduate students Maria Verburg and Mae Rose Petrehn, Joe Sellers from Iowa State Extension, Katy Reeder and

volunteer opportunities

Cont. on page 3

Saturday, March 13—Oak Savanna Restoration Day

Be a part of WRC's oak savanna restoration crew! Spend a day in the scenic Whiterock Valley, removing invasive trees and shrubs and learning how restoration benefits the land and its inhabitants. *Only 4.5 acres until WRC reaches its 100-acre goal!* Meet at 10 a.m. at the Betts Shop on Fig Ave (.8 miles south of Hwy 141).

Contact elizabeth@whiterockconservancy.org to RSVP.

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



ecologist's corner

Management of landscapes isn't always *pretty*, but it is necessary...

During 2009, numerous projects changed the face of the Whiterock Conservancy landscape: we **cut down** invasive species on 100 acres in order to **restore** oak savanna, we **burned** 2,033 acres in order to **improve** health and functionality of grasslands and woodlands, and we **killed off** 110 acres of brome grass in order to **replant** native prairie.

To some, these projects might sound confusing -- or the bolded words might seem contradictory: why cut down trees to restore savanna and why burn prairie to improve its health? Well, sometimes the adage, "let nature take its course," isn't exactly on the mark. That is, our false perception that nature is a self-renewing system often leads us to form miscalculated ideas about land management.

Many people think wild land and should be "left wild," or that the "best form of management is no management," implying that all human management of wildlands is negative. In fact, here in Iowa, the opposite is true. In the last 50 years, the landscape and ecosystem processes that have been so thoroughly altered that human management of

our small fragments of prairie, wetland and woodland is actually necessary, and not managing them could actually be considered neglect.

For example, here at WRC, the trees that we cut down this fall were invasive species that were choking out the oak savanna they were growing in, increasing soil erosion. Similarly, the managed prairie fires that we lit also reduced the presence of invasive species, allowing for more wildflowers to flourish and thus enhancing bio-diversity. Since these lands haven't been managed with grazing or

prescribed fire in many years, they necessitate an aggressive first round of restoration. But keep checking back to these areas, because they will be flourishing with diversity before you know it. The world around us is constantly changing, as is our collective understanding of ecosystem health and function—and each of us needs be willing to change our own minds, management prescriptions, and actions along with the times. We also need to look a little harder, for sometimes when we see what appears to be a destructive force, it's actually a natural form of rebirth.



If you think of land management as gardening, then a chain saw is just a big, mechanized hoe.



You may think of prescribed fire on a tallgrass prairie as destructive, but only in the short term.

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

More Prairie Acres Seeded at Whiterock

One hundred ten acres of WRC property were seeded to tallgrass prairie this past fall. Jon Judson of Diversity Farms in Dedham frost seeded the acres, which include 50 acres of bison pasture, 17 acres along the new Garst Farm trail, 23 acres around the old manure lagoons and along Highway 141, and 20 acres surrounding WRC's public fishing ponds.

The project was funded by a Vision Iowa/CAT grant and the generous support of our donors. In total, there are 815 acres of reconstructed prairie at Whiterock and 27 acres of native prairie remnants. In the future, the size of remnants will expand as we continue to remove invasive species and re-introduce fire onto the landscape.

News Briefs

Welcome Trent

As we kick start the new year, we welcome our new Resort Manager, Trent Milam. Trent and his wife Rejoyce and their son Shailoh moved from West Virginia, where Trent just received his M.S. in Recreation, Parks and Tourism Resource Management from WVU. Prior to his studies, Trent served in the Peace Corps in Kyrgyzstan. Trent will be responsible for guest services, marketing, and special event coordination. On your next visit, please give him a warm welcome!

Bur Oak Grand Opening

On Saturday, April 17, Whiterock Conservancy will celebrate the completion and grand opening of its new Bur Oak Visitor's Center. Join us for an afternoon of nature hikes, refreshments, and fun. **Live music by Iowa folk musician, Dave Moore.** *More info to come.*

Note: If you are interested in receiving updates on WRC events please email Whiterock@whiterockconservancy.org (we do not share or sell email addresses with third parties).

Yoga Under the Oaks

Ground yourself with movement and meditation in the Whiterock Valley June 18-20, 2010. This comprehensive yoga retreat will present opportunities for various forms of yoga, meditation and self-renewal. This summer, give yourself the break you need to nourish your body and soul in a beautiful natural setting. Led by Lynn DuBord of Illuminate Yoga, the event is opened to new and experienced yogis. Price is \$195, includes meals. Register before May 1 to receive \$40 off. Call Emily for more info (712) 684-2697.

A Call for Whiterock Photos

Do you have an eye for stunning photos? Want your work to be displayed in the Bur Oak Visitor's Center? WRC is looking for photos that show the array of life and beauty here at Whiterock. If your photo is chosen, you will be given a print. To submit your photos email Whiterock@whiterockconservancy.org or you may download them at www.flickr.com/groups/115309@N20/pool. *Be sure to include your name, email address and a title.*

Oak Savanna Restoration: *Clearly* a Success

This fall, with the assistance of grant funding and an AmeriCorps/NCCC crew, WRC was able to tackle our most ambitious restoration project to date. A total of 100 acres of oak savanna restoration is set to be completed by summer.

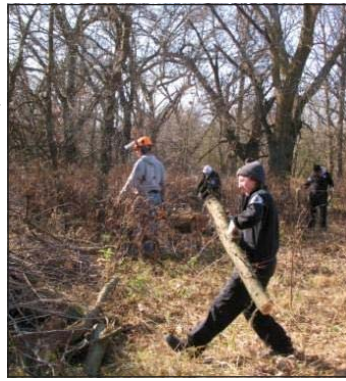
This year's AmeriCorps crew restored 23.5 acres in a mere 17 days of work. Due to inclement weather, this total was just 1.5 acres shy of the 25-acre goal.

"We wanted to make a difference in a tangible and meaningful way," said Anne Rettof, an AmeriCorps volunteer.

"We knew we were achieving this when we'd see huge wood piles growing on a daily basis!"

It is estimated that 1,800-2,000 trees were cut down during this project.

The work provided by AmeriCorps is being matched with 75 acres funded by the Landowners Incentive Program, a private lands restoration cost-share program offered by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. WRC-hired



Anne Rettof piles felled trees.

contractor, Mike Anderson, and his crew were scheduled to complete the 75 acres by the end of 2009. But with the blizzards and ice storm, the crew was only able to finish 72 acres. An extension until June 30 has been offered by the DNR for Anderson and WRC to complete the combined unfinished 4.5 acres.

"The project mostly focuses on removal of honey locust and Eastern red cedar trees," said Hill. "Opening up the canopy will allow sunlight in, helping the grasses, sedges and wildflowers to grow."

Rettof said her crew is glad their work will have a lasting effect on Iowa's ecosystem.

So when spring fever begins to itch, take a hike on WRC's newly restored Long Farm and see what a difference a little sun can make!

Read the AmeriCorps' blog at <http://blog.whiterockconservancy.org/>

See page 1 for more info on the upcoming Oak Restoration Work Day on March 13.

Grazing (cont.)

members of the Iowa Wildlife Action Plan Implementation Team, and our tenant graziers Erin and Dan Hanrahan and Jim Bradford of Brad-Z Ranch in Guthrie Center.

WRC and our partners will conduct on-farm research on the nutritional quality and quantity of restored and reconstructed tallgrass prairie and restored oak savanna, and the benefits of using cattle as a management tool in these ecosystems during different times of the year.

A stakeholders' summit, *Grazing as a Management Tool*, will be held in July to develop recommendations on this subject for natural resource managers, landowners, and producers.

Funding sources for this project include grants from Resource Enhancement and Protection Conservation Education Program (REAP CEP) and the Grass-based Livestock Working Group.

WRC is currently seeking funding from other sources including Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture to conduct *Defining the grazing season of restored natural landscapes*, an agronomic, on-farm study that quantifies the nutritional quality of native grassland forages.

Grassland management and its intersection with grazing livestock systems will play an important role in Iowa's ecological and economic future. The success of *Grazing as a Management Tool* in Iowa will serve as a benefit to interested landowners, natural resource managers, private landowners, and producers and the overall ecologic and agricultural sustainability of the state of Iowa.

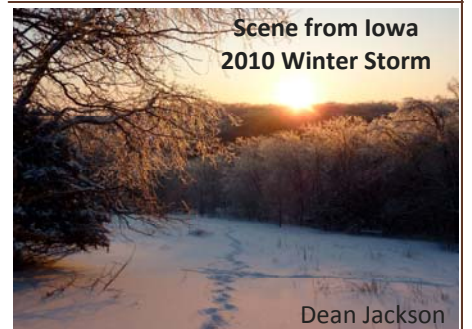
Volunteer Profile: Jim Klocke

The stars may have aligned last spring when Jim Klocke of Templeton, IA, was first introduced to Whiterock Conservancy. He had just finished the Master Gardener Program in Carroll and was looking for a volunteer position that he could really dig into. When he learned of WRC's volunteer gardening work day, he jumped at the opportunity. "Things have a funny way of opening up for you," said Klocke.

Klocke, who is an overnight caretaker at New Hope Village in Carroll, is enthusiastic about Whiterock Conservancy—to put it mildly. In 2009, Klocke dedicated nearly 150 hours of volunteer service though gardening, landscaping, prescribed burning, and even served lunch at the Khrushchev 50th anniversary. Jim also volunteers his time as a WRC Land Steward, monitoring a tract of land for environmental changes.

"There is so much to learn," he says, "but it is the beauty and serenity of this place that benefits me." Always smiling and full of life, you can usually find Jim in the Home Farm yard or out walking the trails on his days off.

If you would like to become a WRC volunteer, please email emily@whiterockconservancy.org



Scene from Iowa 2010 Winter Storm

Dean Jackson

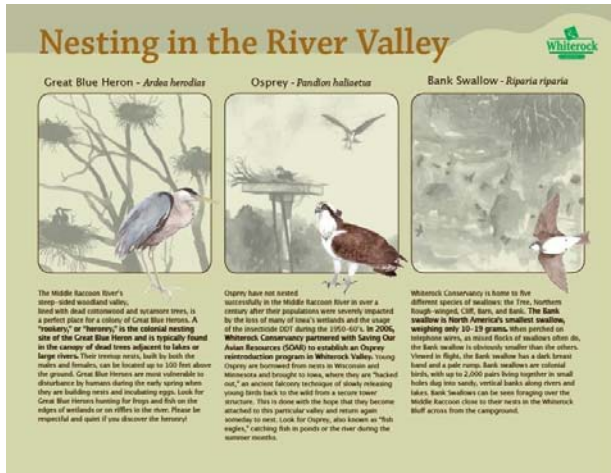
All Signs Lead to Outdoor Learning

Spring will bring a new addition to the Whiterock landscape—signs. Nearly 830 new signs will demarcate trails, trailheads and boundaries and showcase interesting ecological and cultural history of the land.

Funded by a Vision Iowa-CAT grant, these signs are a part of a larger project aimed to develop Whiterock and Coon Rapids as a regional attraction.

Visitors can now learn more about the local flora and fauna, among other topics, by checking out the 29 attractive interpretive signs distributed along the trail system. Directional signage will guide guests on all 27 miles of trails, which have been newly named and color-coded.

“Some guests have had concerns about losing their way on a hike or not knowing if they were still on the property,” said Emily



Nesting in the River Valley is just one of 29 new interpretive signs that will be installed at WRC this spring.

Babin, WRC Outreach and Development Coordinator. “The signs will ease the difficulty of navigating the vast 4,300-acre property.”

WRC staff wrote text for the 29 interpretive signs aimed to educate visitors on the

landscape, its history, inhabitants and conservation practices. The design and layout was completed by 2009 WRC intern and artist, Tara Lange, who used line drawings, watercolor and photographs to illustrate the sign’s subject matter.

The Whiterock landscape is open to the public year-round. Visitors can use the trails for non-motorized purposes such as hiking, biking and horseback riding. With the addition of the new interpretive signs, the trail has a network of neat, outdoor destinations.

You can check out the new trail map detailing 13 trailheads, canoe access points, public restrooms and fishing ponds by visiting the website. You may also pick up a brochure on your next visit at the campgrounds or Bur Oak Visitor’s Center.

www.whiterockconservancy.org

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



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Also, a huge thanks to everyone who helped to make the Khrushchev in Iowa 50th Anniversary Celebration a great success. Names of all involved are just too numerous to mention here.