



## 2009 RIVER TOWN OF THE YEAR COON RAPIDS, IOWA

In 2005 Governor Vilsack designated Coon Rapids and our partner Whiterock Conservancy as one of Iowa's three pilot Great Places. With this designation our "Great Place" received a state appropriation of \$1,000,000 to support the great place projects defined in our vision and plan. The primary component of our great place is the Whiterock Conservancy's 4000 plus acres of multi-use land stretching from Coon Rapids seven miles southeast along the Middle Raccoon River. Many Great Place and follow-on projects focus on improving access to and increasing the use of our natural resources including the river and the land surrounding it.

Specific projects and activities supporting our vision of the Middle Raccoon providing a healthful, exciting, and engaging experience for residents and visitors alike include:

- Promote commerce that accommodates river enthusiasts along the river.
  - Coon Rapids and Whiterock advertise in the Des Moines Register, Iowa and regional tourism publications, area guides and hand-outs, two websites [www.coonrapidsiowa.com](http://www.coonrapidsiowa.com) and [www.whiterockconservancy.org](http://www.whiterockconservancy.org), and by special events including the Raccoon River Art Fair.
- Targeted River Tourism efforts
  - Whiterock Resort (part of the Conservancy) includes a bed and breakfast, a campground on the river at Whiterock bluff, canoe and tube rentals, and over 30 miles of hiking and biking trails.
  - With help from the Carroll County Conservation board we upgraded the Raccoon River Park RV camp with restrooms, showers and a dump site. Use of facility doubled in 2008.
  - A great place project includes establishing a 7-mile paddlers trail between Riverside Park and the Whiterock Bluff. Signs designating the trail have been placed at river access points.
  - The City worked with the Guthrie County Conservation board to install a large bird viewing platform at Roadside Park. The platform provides a clear view of the river and the wetlands beyond it.
  - The City, Whiterock and other organizations have worked with Save Our Avian Resources on an osprey reintroduction project. In two years 9 osprey chicks have been raised and released from a hawk tower located along the river just south of town. This project has received Iowa-wide attention.
- Efforts to protect greenbelts and/or ecosystems
  - Part of Whiterock's mission is natural habitat restoration. This includes restoration of the oak savanna and natural prairies located in Raccoon River drainage area.
  - This year Whiterock Conservancy initiated a land steward program covering 100 of acres of land along the river.
    - Each land steward is responsible for monitoring a portion of Whiterock Conservancy's land in order to help better protect and manage this ecologically valuable part of the Iowa landscape.

- Education and Advocacy by local river/watershed groups
  - Whiterock's Elizabeth Hill, is full time ecologist. She organizes educational events and tours. Events include two bioblitzes that focused on discovery and cataloging resident flora and fauna.
  - Presentation have been provided to a wide variety of local and state organizations including the Sera club, trail clubs and organizations, birders, and organizations focused on natural resource improvement.
  - Ms. Hill is a member of several watershed and river improvement groups.
  
- Annual/Seasonal river clean-up
  - Since 2005, each year the City of Coon Rapids and/or Whiterock have sponsored a river cleanup event. The river, from several miles north of Coon Rapids all the way to Springbrook State park has benefited from these annual events. In 2007 over 200 Project Aware volunteers camped at Whiterock and spent two days cleaning up the river.
  
- Innovative storm water controls/river protection
  - The city makes use of an extensive wetland constructed on Whiterock Conservancy property to filter all outflow from the city sewage lagoon.
  - Water from the lagoon seldom reaches the river.
  - This year the city initiated a project to video tape all sewer lines to identify defects requiring immediate repair and assist the municipal utilities in defining a long term maintenance and replacement program.
  
- Provide walking trails along the river
  - The city has used 5 REAP grants to build and extend the river trail along the east side of town. Great Places and DOT funding is now allowing us to extend it further along the river and loop through the northern portion of Whiterock.
  
- Participated with river trails programs
  - Working with the Carroll County Conservation Board and DNR a 7-mile paddlers trail has been implemented. This year additional interpretative signage will be installed along the trail.
  
- Other information
  - Our city fully supports good stewardship and water quality maintenance practices. Our I&I correction program has been in place for several years. Working to control storm runoff is ongoing. We have had no compliance violations in the past three years.
  - As we work to become a major rural tourism destination our relationship and respect for the natural environment of our river valley continues to grow. It is the key component of our vision and plans for the future.