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NONPROFITS SECURE RARE PRAIRIE AND WOODLAND ECOSYSTEMS ALONG MISSISSIPPI RIVER BLUFFS

**** Acquisition Nearly Triples Size of Popular Hiking Destination in St. Louis Metro while Protecting Threatened and Endangered Species ****

(Valmeyer, IL – May 4, 2026) Nature lovers, wildlife advocates, and outdoor enthusiasts can look forward to a future **expansion of White Rock Nature Preserve** in Monroe County, Illinois. Three conservation nonprofits—Clifftop NFP, The Conservation Fund, and Illinois Audubon Society—have partnered to purchase **965 acres of high-quality habitat** adjacent to the preserve to nearly triple the size of the popular hiking destination while creating a vast corridor of protected habitat. The acquisition closed on Tuesday, April 28 and was announced on Saturday, May 2 at a private reception hosted by Illinois Audubon Society in Moline, Illinois.

The Conservation Fund purchased the **multi-million dollar property** from a private seller and will retain ownership before donating the land to **Clifftop** in 2027. Clifftop owns and maintains White Rock Nature Preserve and will be the long-term stewards of the land, responsible for managing the property for the public in perpetuity. Initial funding for the acquisition is being provided by **Illinois Audubon Society** and The Conservation Fund, with additional funding from Clifftop, Mysun Charitable Foundation, Prairie State Conservation Coalition, and South Bow Cares. Fundraising efforts to cover the acquisition costs and to support stewardship of the property are ongoing.

“This expansion of White Rock further endows our community’s legacy of conservation and begins a new chapter for our organization as we mark our 20th anniversary this year,” said **Bob Weck, President of Clifftop**. “These blufflands are not only rich in biodiversity but have been significant to Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. We are grateful for the support and leadership from our partners at The Conservation Fund and Illinois Audubon Society in helping to conserve this landscape for our community’s appreciation and enjoyment.”

As of 2025, **19 federal- and state-listed threatened and endangered species** have been documented on the property, including the Indiana bat, northern long-eared bat, climbing milkweed, timber rattlesnake, cerulean warbler, and crested coralroot orchid. The property features 16 loess hill prairies and limestone glades. Hill prairies are unique ecosystems created by fine wind-blown soils and millennia of fires on the blufftop that are home to rare plant species found nowhere else in Illinois. Additionally, the preserve offers prime nesting and breeding habitat in mature woodlands for bird species along the Mississippi Flyway, one of the most significant migratory routes in North America.

“The project will benefit critical wildlife throughout the Illinois Ozarks, and ensure this beautiful area is one day made public for everyone to enjoy,” said **Jim Johannsen, Illinois State Director with The Conservation Fund**. “We’re thrilled to have saved this land in southwest Illinois that will have such a large conservation impact.”

This acquisition is one of the largest recent private land protection projects in southwest Illinois. It will connect existing high-quality natural areas at White Rock, the nearby Salt Lick Point Land and Water Reserve, and several private preserves, creating a **2,300-acre corridor of protected habitat**. These sites are enrolled in the Illinois Nature Preserve System, which recognizes and affords added legal protections to the highest quality natural areas in the state. Additionally, the White Rock-Salt Lick Point corridor is now one of the largest areas of protected Mississippi blufflands in Illinois.

“This is one of the largest conservation acquisitions in the region, one of the largest connected habitats in southwest Illinois, and one of the largest projects our organization has ever completed. For these and so many more reasons, this is a project full of milestones,” said **Jo Fessett, Executive Director of Illinois Audubon Society**. “This acquisition is the culmination of decades of visioning not only to secure this vital corridor between White Rock and Salt Lick Point, but also to guarantee habitat for migratory wildlife from the Gulf Coast to the Ozarks to the Mississippi River and beyond to the Great Lakes. That scale is only possible thanks to partnerships like this.”

The new acreage will remain closed to the public while Clifftop prepares the property for safe visitation, establishes recreational trails, and conducts stewardship activities. Those wishing to experience the habitats and ecosystems of the property are encouraged to visit the existing White Rock Nature Preserve, which is open to the public year-round. Additionally, Clifftop invites volunteers to assist in its restoration efforts at the property and encourages donations to the project. More information on visiting White Rock, volunteering, and donating is available on Clifftop’s [website](#).

Site photos, project maps, and b-roll are available [here](#) (for media use only; photo credits are included in file names).

ABOUT WHITE ROCK NATURE PRESERVE

White Rock Nature Preserve offers visitors a serene opportunity to experience nature in the Illinois Ozarks region. The property features an approximately 2-mile trail that affords sweeping views of the Mississippi River Valley while climbing up blufflands and through a mosaic of gladed prairies and woodlands. Added in 2024, Spicebush Trail is a two-mile interior woodland trail with a short loop at the far end. White Rock Nature Preserve is located at 6438 Bluff Road in Valmeyer, IL. The preserve is open daily from sunrise to sunset and is owned by Clifftop NFP.

ABOUT CLIFFTOP NFP

Clifftop NFP's mission is to promote the conservation, preservation, and protection of the Mississippi River bluffs corridor in Monroe, Randolph, and St. Clair Counties through public outreach, direct hands-on land stewardship, and land protection projects. All Clifftop programs and operations are funded by grants, donations, and the ongoing support provided by our members. Clifftop is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization, incorporated in the State of Illinois; gifts to the organization are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. For more information, visit clifftopalliance.org.

ABOUT THE CONSERVATION FUND

The Conservation Fund protects the land that sustains us all. We are in the business of conservation, creating innovative solutions that drive nature-based action in all 50 states for climate protection, vibrant communities, and sustainable economies. We apply effective strategies, efficient financing approaches, and enduring government, community, and private partnerships to protect millions of acres of America's natural land, cultural sites, recreation areas, and working forests and farms. To learn more, visit conservationfund.org.

ABOUT ILLINOIS AUDUBON SOCIETY

The mission of the Illinois Audubon Society is to promote the perpetuation and appreciation of native flora and fauna and the habitats that support them. The Society is an independent, statewide, member supported, nonprofit organization. Founded in 1897, the Society is Illinois' oldest private conservation organization. To date, the Society has protected 7,400 acres by investing \$21 million to protect land and water throughout Illinois. Find out more at illinoisaudubon.org.