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GHOST BROTHERS
of Darkland County

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Volunteers, DNR officials complete work to repair damage along state's Knobstone Trail

By Carol Kugler

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The entire length of the Knobstone Trail, the longest trail in the state devoted exclusively to hikers, is finally open a year and a half after portions of it were devastated by the Henryville tornado of March 2012.

The official reopening of the full length of the 58-mile backcountry trail was celebrated Friday.

The same F4 tornado that killed 11 people in the Henryville area and did so much damage there on March 2, 2012, also destroyed two sections of the trail, first developed in 1980 by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to run mostly through state forests.

The path of the tornado was

about 0.4 miles wide, according to Rocky Brown, naturalist at Deam Lake, the south terminus for the trail, which winds up through Clark, Scott and Washington counties. The tornado damaged 7,500 acres of forest, including 1,300 acres in Clark State Forest, through which the Knobstone Trail passes a few miles north of its Deam Lake trailhead.

Brown, who was on duty when the twister struck, remembers that day.

"Here at Deam Lake we didn't have any structural damage at all," he said, although there was plenty of very large hail.

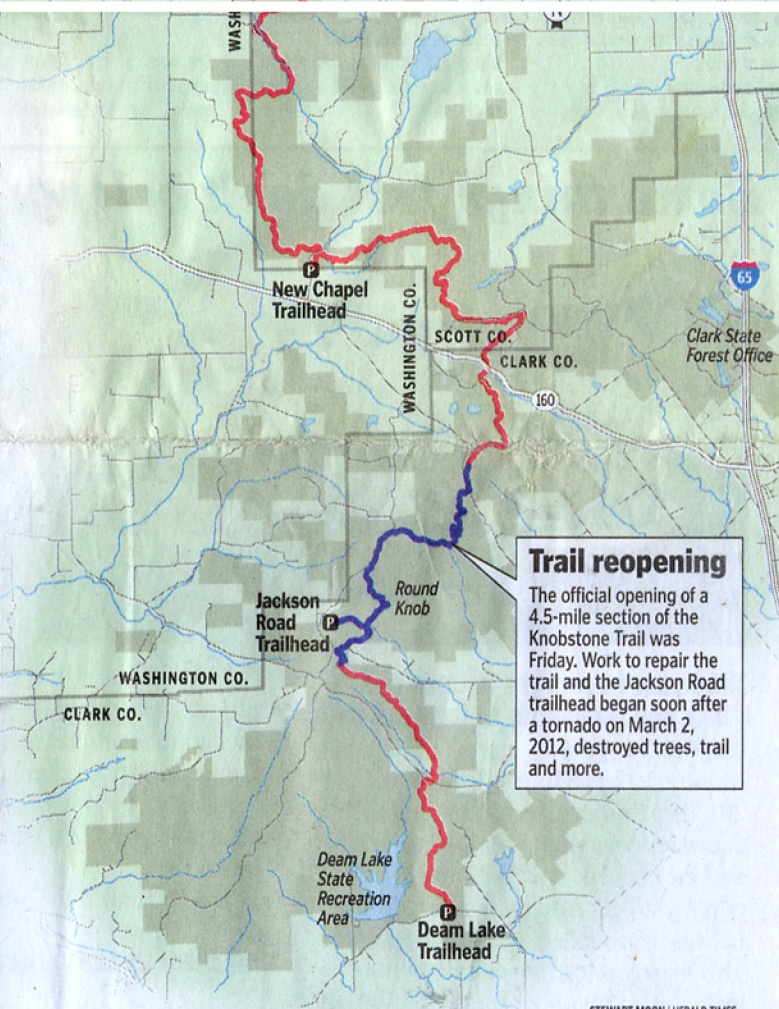
"I saw it forming to the north," he said, but didn't see or hear the actual

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JOHN MAXWELL | IDNR

This was the scene near Round Knob along the Knobstone Trail in Clark County after large swaths of Clark State Forest were destroyed by a tornado on March 2, 2012.



Trail reopening

The official opening of a 4.5-mile section of the Knobstone Trail was Friday. Work to repair the trail and the Jackson Road trailhead began soon after a tornado on March 2, 2012, destroyed trees, trail and more.

STEWART MOON | HERALD-TIMES

Knobstone

State's longest hiking trail opens

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tornado after it formed. At that point, Brown was standing outside a storm shelter directing people to enter and stay inside.

Brown said there were 22 miles of trail in Clark State Forest and adjoining areas that were "impacted" by the tornado. That includes 4.5 miles of the Knobstone, along with other hiking and horseback riding trails. The damage ranged from "total destruction to just a few things knocked down," Brown said.

The damage included 15 miles of horse trails in Clark State Forest that are still being restored. Those repairs are expected to be completed by the end of the year, according to Department of Natural Resources officials.

The trails are in some of Indiana's most rugged and hilly country, and the terrain is one reason why the restoration project has taken so long, Brown noted.

Two part-time employees with the Department of Natural Resources Division of Outdoor Recreation, known as the Knobstone Trail Crew, were joined by volunteers with the Hoosier Hikers Council, students from Burriss Laboratory School in Muncie, and others from Ball State University and Wilderness Outreach, on the restora-

tion work.

On the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Web page about the trail, the description says, "The trail traverses land with extreme relief distinguished by narrow, relatively flat-topped ridges typical of the Knobstone Escarpment ... The Knobstone Escarpment is one of Indiana's most scenic areas, rising more than 300 feet above low-lying farmland in some areas as it snakes northward from near the Ohio River to just south of Martinsville."

Hiking groups and others are hoping to eventually link the trail to others in Indiana to create a hiking trail of more than 100 miles, stretching most of the way across Indiana from the south into south-central parts of the state and northward.

Anyone interested in hiking the portion of the Knobstone that has been restored is invited to join Brown on some guided hikes he will lead. The first will be Oct. 18 and then every Saturday in November before Thanksgiving week, with each starting in the early afternoon. The two- to three-hour hikes will cost \$10 per person and will include a lunch. Participants are encouraged to wear sturdy shoes and bring water. The hikes will begin at Deam Lake.

"We'll go through and survey the area and see what was done to fix up and reroute the trails," Brown said.

About the cleanup

Nila Armstrong, a streams and trail specialist with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Outdoor Recreation, provided the following information about the Knobstone Trail restoration:

- Approximately 4.5 miles of the Knobstone Trail in two locations were damaged by the Henryville tornado;

- From March 11-16, two volunteer groups (Wilderness Outreach and Hoosier Hikers Council) donated 204 hours to clear trees and other debris from a half-mile of the Knobstone Trail;

- May 28-30, 36 students and three adults from Burriss Laboratory School in Muncie gave about 500 hours to the clean-up project. For those three days, the average was 13 hours per person;

- Members of the Hoosier Hikers Council also worked many additional days, and countless hours, throughout the project, but those hours have not been calculated;

- Salvage and recovery of nearly 4 million board feet of timber will be completed in November.

About the trail

- The Knobstone Trail is 58 miles long and is Indiana's longest footpath.

- On the ground the trail is marked by 2-inch-by-6-inch white blazes painted near eye level on trees.

- In the area that was restored, the KT signs have been replaced with bright orange posts for trail markers.

- Only hikers are allowed on the trail; no mountain bikes, horses or motorized vehicles.

- There are many steep climbs and descents

along the trail, so the trail is considered rugged and difficult.

- Structures along the trail are limited to primitive steps and waterbars.

- There are eight trailheads along the Knobstone, providing parking and direct access.

- The state forests the trail traverses are open for public hunting during the state seasons.

- Timber is harvested along the trail.

- For more on the trail, go to www.in.gov/dnr/outdoor/4275.htm.