

Our Mission

The Loess Hills Alliance strives to protect special natural and cultural resources while ensuring the economic viability and private property rights of the region through the creation of a common vision for Iowa's Loess Hills.

A region where ...

- The unique land formation, culture and history of the hills are conserved for future generations
- Areas of special interest are protected from development, soil mining, soil erosion and other visually disruptive activities
- Awareness and educational opportunities are promoted about the unique nature of the region
- Vegetation is managed to encourage native plant and wildlife communities, such as prairie, savanna and oak woodlands
- Regional recreational opportunities and tourism attractions exist and public areas are expanded
- References and resources are available to landowners interested in protecting features on their land
- Local businesses and rural communities are supported

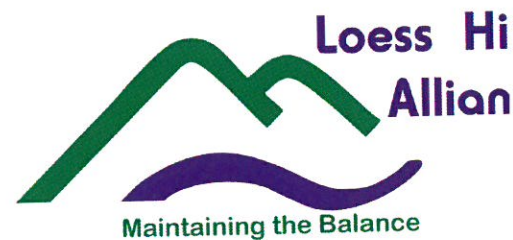


Iowa code 161D established the Loess Hills Alliance on March 15, 1999 as a part of the Loess Hills Development and Conservation Authority. The Hungry Canyons Alliance was also authorized under this authority. Funds are directed to both non-profit organizations through the Iowa legislature. State funds are used to match and fund projects under the discretion of each organization. Statutory responsibilities include:

- To apply for, accept, and expend public and private funds for planning and implementing projects, programs, and other components of the mission of the Loess Hills Alliance subject to approval of the Authority.
- To study different options for the protection and preservation of significant historic, scenic, geologic, and recreational areas of the Loess Hills including but not limited to a federal or state park, preserve, or monument designation, fee title acquisition, or restrictive easement.
- To develop and implement pilot projects for the protection of Loess Hills areas with the use of restrictive easements from willing sellers and fee title ownership from willing sellers, subject to approval of the Authority.

The Loess Hills Alliance encourages local and state collaboration and cooperation to collectively address conservation and promotion efforts for the region.

More than 10,000 state and private acres within the Loess Hills were declared a **National Natural Landmark** in 1986 by the National Park Service, identifying the area as one of the best examples of loess topography in the United States. Over 35,000 acres of warm season prairie grassland remain or have been restored throughout the Loess Hills region, representing 50-75% of Iowa's remaining prairie heritage.



Stewardship Activities

PRIVATE LANDS SUPPORT STAFF

Providing one-on-one conservation support to landowners in the Loess Hills is critical to protecting and supporting our unique geological region. In 2017, the Loess Hills Alliance Stewardship Committee provided partial support for two staff positions in partnership with Pheasants Forever, county Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. This unique partnership has resulted in resource sharing, outreach and technical support for private landowners in the Loess Hills as they implement conservation and sustainable agricultural practices within this fragile ecosystem.

Nic Salick and Jake Holt provide this important service in five of the seven Loess Hills Counties by helping landowners identify and plan appropriate conservation practices and navigate opportunities for cost share for private landowners. In 2017, their work positively resulted in 239 landowner contacts and over 1,085 acres in the Loess Hills. Both staff have provided numerous public outreach and educational opportunities for people and communities within the Loess Hills.

LOESS HILLS PRAIRIE SEMINAR & IOWA PRAIRIE CONFERENCE SPONSORSHIP

The Loess Hills Prairie Seminar is a long-standing annual event held in Monona County, which attracts naturalists, prairie enthusiasts and educators from throughout the United States. This 3-day event celebrated its 41st year in 2017 and is recognized as a premier stewardship and education gathering to promote Iowa's Loess Hills. Approximately 205 people attended. Interactive sessions included botanical and faunal surveys, an understanding of the soil resources in the hills, exploration of the region's cultural history, and discussions of challenges that landowners face in the Loess Hills.

The Loess Hills region hosted the 2017 Iowa Prairie Conference in Council Bluffs. This conference is held every other year in locations throughout Iowa. In addition to financial support, LHA committee members provided assistance during the field trips in highlighting successes from LHA efforts extending from Fremont County to Harrison County.



THE LOESS HILLS NATURE SCHOOL

Beginning in 2016, the Stewardship Committee provided support to pilot a citizen science initiative called The Loess Hills Nature School. The program is designed to provide educators and other key personnel in the Loess Hills with in-field, real-life training to understand and appreciate various Loess Hills ecosystems. This effort is enabling educators with understanding and skills to be stewards of the environment while appreciating interactions with agriculture and existing industry. The overall program includes saunters and walkabouts, dedicated citizen science programs for interested lay persons and educators, how to do biotic surveys, and evaluating situations, workshops on specific issues, and a Naturalist Certification Program. A dedicated core audience has grown within the Loess Hills of Iowa and adjacent areas in Nebraska.

LOESS HILLS FIRE PARTNERS COOPERATIVE BURN WEEK

Continuing an established program, the Loess Hills Cooperative Burn Week is an opportunity for partners in the region to implement prescribed fire in areas where extra resources are needed to accomplish prescribed prairie burns at scale. It is also an opportunity for partners to collaborate, develop fire line leadership, build professional relationships, and improve fire line skills. LHA funding was used to hire a Conservation Corp of Iowa (CCI) crew to assist local DNR staff pre- and post-event and to provide adequate food and supplies for participants. The grant consisted of two components:

- Spring prescriptive burn workshop expenses (in the southern Loess Hills)
- CCI crew post workshop to control the emergence of invasive plant species in the managed areas.



LITTLE SIOUX BOY SCOUT RANCH POLLINATOR PLANTING AND EDUCATION

The Stewardship Committee provided partial funding and also volunteer staff support for the establishment of pollinator habitat and on-site educational materials at the Little Sioux Boy Scout Ranch. This habitat area is a resource to broaden educational experiences for youth attending camp and program activities at the Ranch. The Little Sioux Ranch is a camp destination for Boy Scouts and youth in the eastern Great Plains area, particularly Iowa and Nebraska. This project has been a great example of partnering with different groups to support a special resource in our region.



Protection Activities

The Protection Committee expended \$32,000 in 2017 for the successfully completed "Rosie Hall" land acquisition by the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. The project was the successful applicant in the 2015 Request for Proposals that went out to the general public in August. Funding for the project was appropriated in 2015. The project is located in Fremont County and will permanently protect some of the best native prairie in the southern Loess Hills. The protection of the property prevents commercial or industrial development on a property located within the Waubonsie Special Landscape Area. The protected ground is visible from the Loess Hills Scenic Byway. A final report was received in July 2017.

The Protection Committee has one grant outstanding for The Nature Conservancy's Muller conservation easement in Monona County. The Muller conservation easement was the successful applicant in the 2016 Request for Proposals that went out to the general public in August. LHA funding is anticipated to be leveraged 11:1 for the project. The property, which will remain in private ownership, is located within the Grant Center Special

The Loess Hills region includes some of Iowa's most precious cultural, historic and natural resources. Since the 1980's, *two nationally significant intrinsic qualities have been verified in the region— natural areas and Prehistoric cultural resources.* The unique geological and topographic features of the hills, the extensive natural and semi-natural grasslands and forests and the many archaeological sites found in this one geologic landform create a treasure for the region. *More than 32,500 acres of land are either in public ownership or public protection.*

Economic Development Activities

The Loess Hills National Scenic Byway provides an important corridor for economic development and tourism. Within the seven county region of the Loess Hills, there are four State welcome centers. The Economic Development Committee worked collaboratively this year to enhance the economy of the Loess Hills region by:

- Providing assistance and resources for small businesses and community attractions.
- Increasing visitor traffic at recreation facilities, events and area attractions.
- Offering education and technical assistance to business and government agencies. To promote economic development opportunities.

The committee places a high priority on advertising the Loess Hills and promoting its many businesses and attractions. Cooperative advertising was placed in numerous publications in neighboring states as well as here in Iowa.

The committee continues to distribute the Loess Hills National Scenic Byway Guidebook. These promotional travel guides are distributed to welcome centers throughout the state and to area attractions and visitors centers. The Loess Hills Alliance has distributed nearly 60,000 guides to travelers and Loess Hills visitors since 2014.

Advertising was distributed to 549,000 homes as a newspaper insert in MN, SD, NE, KS, MO and Iowa. Online advertising accompanied the ad

Landscape Area and will protect over 500 acres of remnant prairie including a number of rare native plant species. The conservation easement is expected to close in the spring of 2018, at which time a request for the funding will be made and a final report submitted and presentation given to the Loess Hills Alliance.

The Protection Committee was obligated \$12,000 in FY17 and released a Request for Proposals in August. In light of reduced appropriations from the Iowa legislature the Protection Committee made an increased, concentrated effort to solicit proposals from non-traditional partners, including municipalities within the Loess Hills landform. Protection Committee funding is open to applicants considering projects that will protect land within the Loess Hills landform and encourages prospective applicants to keep an eye on the LHA website and email announcements for subsequent Requests for Proposals (RFP).



Raymond Muller Family Trust property, Grant Center SLA

insert and directed visitors to web based resources. The Western Iowa Tourism Region (WITR) receives and fulfills requests for information about the Loess Hills and the Alliance. For the fiscal year running July 2016-June 2017 fulfillment pieces mailed on behalf of the Alliance continues to show increased demand for information based on advertising efforts. WITR reports that they are now receiving daily requests for Loess Hills information. Literally thousands of Loess Hills Visitors Guides have been placed and mailed as well as supporting information about attractions, byway info and the three brochures for Birding, RVing and Motorcycling.

- Advertising was placed in the *Omaha World Herald* (June, July & August inserts). Distribution goes to 250,000 households in Iowa and Nebraska. Monthly e-mail was sent to 100,000+ on line subscribers. A full time front page interactive website ad ran June 1st – September 1st as well on the *Omaha.com* website. It generates over 14,000,000 impressions per month for the entire *Omaha World Herald* website.
- Advertising was also placed in the *Iowa National Guard Post* magazine. This magazine reaches 17,000 enlisted men, women and officers. We also continue to have a presence on *mycountyparks.com* through the Loess Hills counties that have participated with that website. We also continued our regular advertising in the Sioux City Visitors Guide, the Council Bluffs Visitors Guide, and *Our Iowa*.
- In the May/June 2017 issues of the *Iowan* and *Iowa Outdoors* advertising was run in conjunction with the cooperative ad program with IEDA. It went to over 60, 250 homes in Iowa alone.

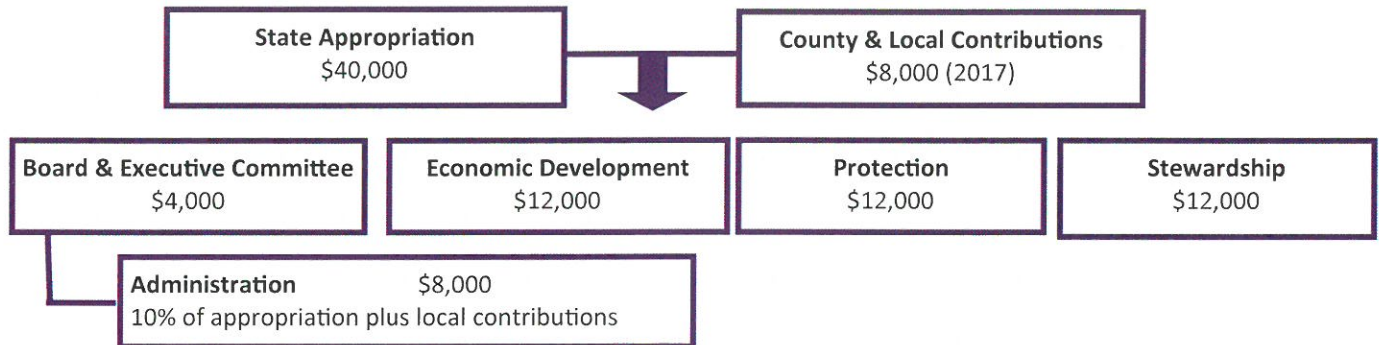
- *Minnesota Monthly, Missouri Life & Nebraska Life* went to over 288,000 recipients and was distributed in Missouri in March/April, Nebraska in May/June and Minnesota in April.
- A full page ad was placed in the *Iowa Travel Guide*
- A 53 foot semi-truck is traveling around Iowa for two years showcasing the Loess Hills. This is a partnership with the Iowa Tourism Office and the Iowa Alcohol Beverages Division.

Executive Committee Summary

The Loess Hills Alliance Executive Committee provides leadership to the Board of Directors and ensures that funds appropriated through state funding are leveraged with other sources and used wisely. The most successful use of those funds has included partnering with other organizations, farmers and private land owners to leverage the dollars for the best possible, mutually beneficial outcome within the Loess Hills.

In 2017, the State appropriation to the Loess Hills Alliance was significantly decreased from an historical annual award of \$150,000 to \$40,000. This decrease has significantly impacted the collective ability to support our three objective areas of stewardship, protection and economic development for the region.

The 2017 funds were distributed as follows:



The Loess Hills Alliance has matched state appropriated funds for projects at rates from 3:1 to 35:1. Since SFY2013, the Alliance has supported and leveraged more than \$3 million in projects and resources toward the Loess Hills Region.

Executive Committee

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Robert Benton, Vice Chair

Patty McCall, Secretary
Renea Anderson, Treasurer

Terry Lewis, At Large
Linda Herman, At Large

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LHCA Appointees

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Renea Anderson, Western Iowa Tourism Region
Graham McGaffin, The Nature Conservancy
Jeff Seago, Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Whitney Reimers, Iowa Bankers Association
Michelle Wodtke Franks, Golden Hills RC&D
Ed Cambridge, Iowa Realtors Association



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