



# LOESS HILLS MISSOURI RIVER REGION

MASTER PLAN



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## Plan Sponsors:

Harrison County Board of Supervisors  
Pottawattamie County Board of Supervisors  
Mills County Board of Supervisors  
Friends of Lake Manawa  
Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA)  
Golden Hills RC&D

We thank the State of Iowa and the Iowa Parks Foundation for partnering with our local sponsors to make this plan possible.

We acknowledge the many organizations and individuals who participated in this planning process:

Woodbine Main Street	City of Council Bluffs
Harrison County Soil and Water Conservation District	Macedonia Folk Arts Center
Harrison County Conservation Board	The Nature Conservancy
Loess Hills Young People's Farm	Harrison County Historical Village and Welcome Center
Carson Business Club	City of Emerson
Pottawattamie County Conservation Board	Indian Creek Museum
The Office of Senator Joni Ernst	Mills County Trails Board
The Office of Senator Chuck Grassley	Western Iowa Tourism
Mills County Conservation Board	Iowa West Foundation
Mills County Tourism	Loess Hills Preservation Society
Southwest Iowa Nature Trails	Harrison County Supervisor
Friends of Lake Manawa	City of Oakland
Iowa Department of Natural Resources	

## Consulting team supporting the effort:

RDG Planning & Design in partnership with Metro Area Planning Agency (MAPA)



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Vision and Mission

The Loess Hills Missouri River Region (LHMRR) Parks to People planning team works across jurisdictional, political, and physical boundaries to build community, connections and collaborations that support the vitality of economic, cultural and natural resources. Their strategic framework calls out the following vision and mission statements to guide their work:

## Vision:

An exceptional, preserved landscape framing communities that embrace and integrate culture, history, agriculture, nature, and recreation

## Mission:

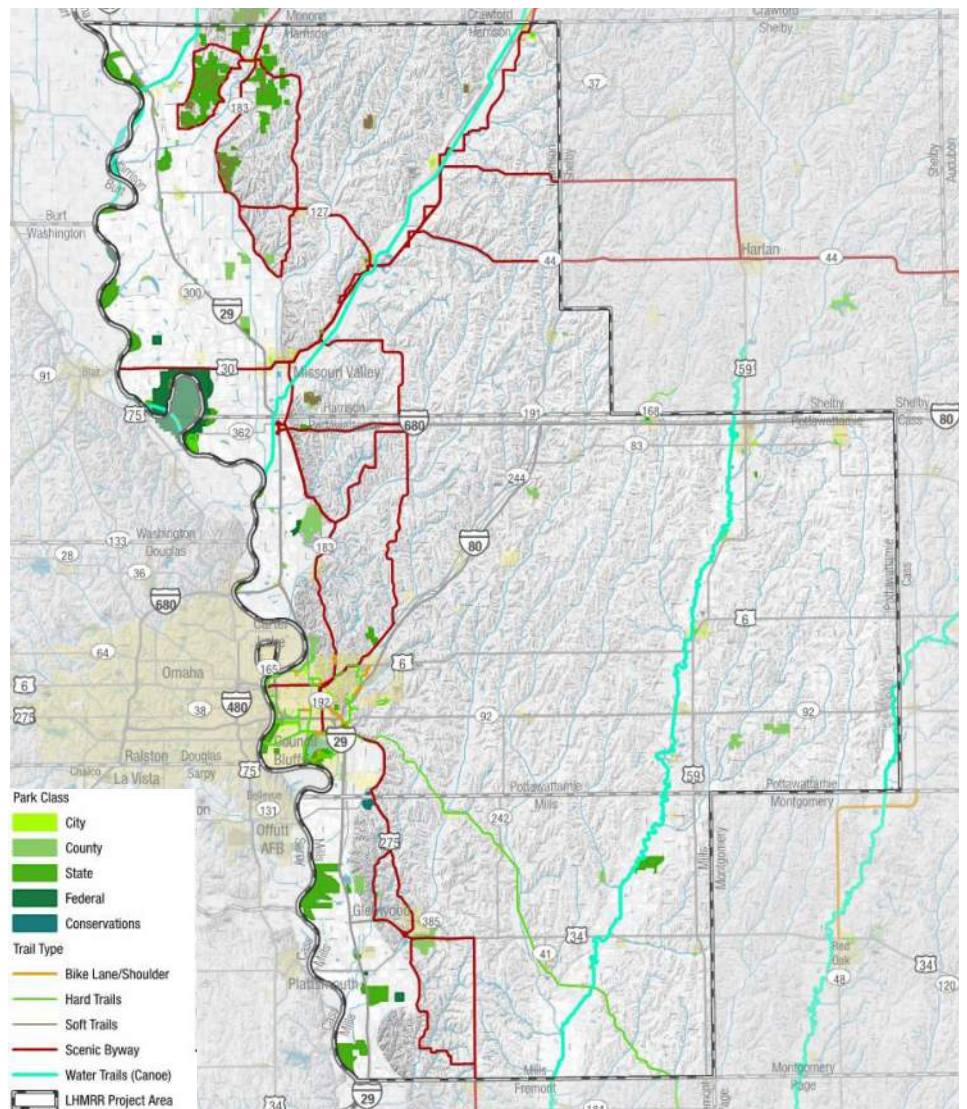
To create and promote enhanced connections and destinations of culture, nature and community for the betterment of all

# About the Region

The LHMRR includes Harrison, Pottawattamie and Mills counties in Western Iowa. On its Western edge, the region connects through the exceptional geographic features of the Loess Hills and the Missouri River. The Loess Hills are hard to pronounce and breathtaking to see—and so geologically unique the only landscape in the world similar to it is found in Shaanxi, China. The geographic features to the West defy description for character and beauty but the whole of the region is blessed throughout with:

- Towns re-inventing themselves
- Engaging systems of parks, trails, and habitat
- Artists and artisans creating one-of-a-kind experiences, often rooted in the region’s rich heritage.

The Wabash Trace—one of Iowa’s first and most recognized trails—diagonals through a large portion of the region and areas to the north harbor a series of protected





landscapes rich with opportunity for adventure. More than 120,000 residents live here, and growth is projected over the next 25 years, in a region bisected by the national connector of I-80 and hinged by the North-South I-29 adjacent to the Loess Hills.

Therefore, this region boasts a wealth of assets and opportunities for a collaborative effort to connect parks to people and places: unique and ancient land formations, nearly 42,000 acres of parks and open space (3.1% of the region’s lands), nearly 90 miles of existing

trails, more than 4,700 miles of waterways and innumerable cultural/arts events and facilities.

## About the Plan

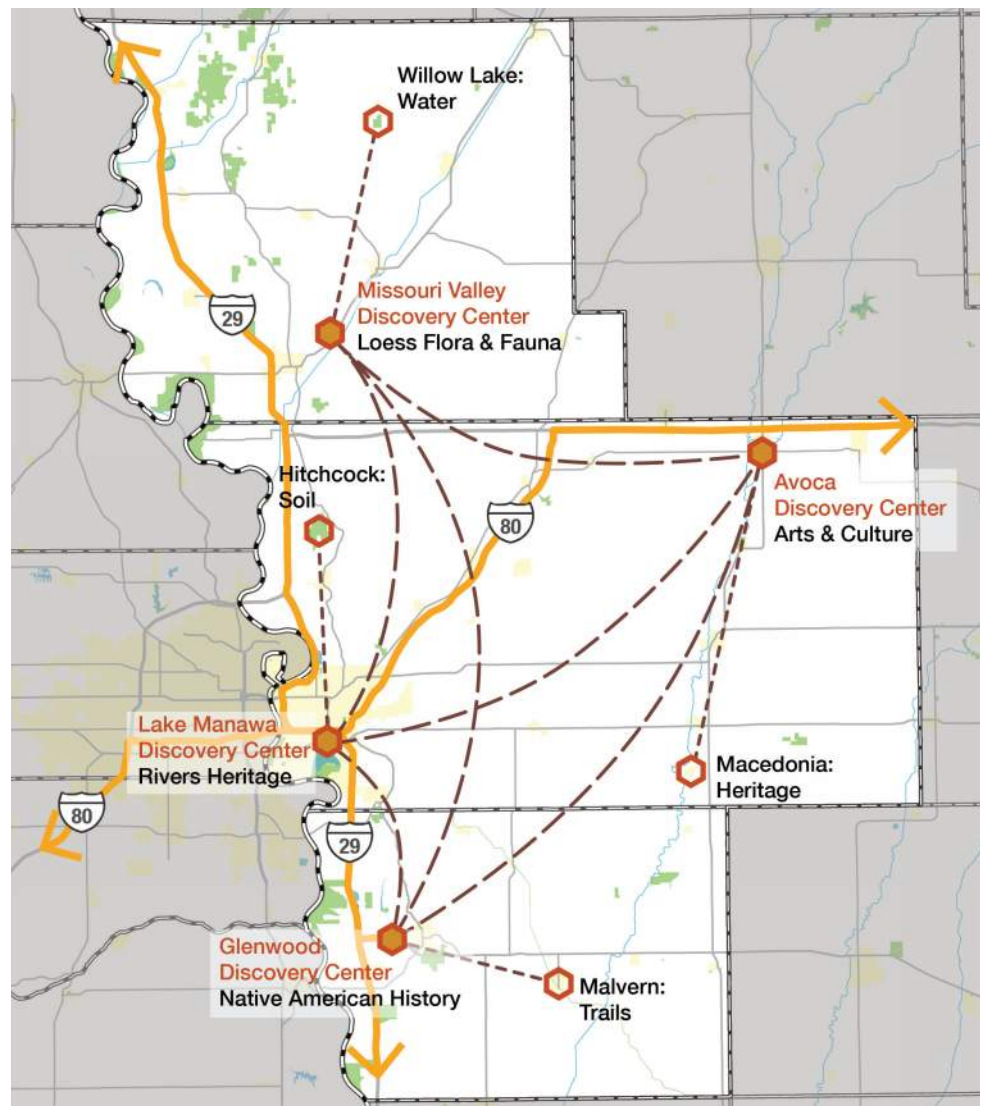
Through a series of focus groups, public engagement sessions and stakeholder workshops, many concepts to meet regional needs were developed and reviewed. In the end, five key initiatives surfaced as fundamental to the work of this plan over the next one to five years. Four of these efforts focus on enhancements of the built environment and/or natural resources protection. The fifth emphasizes the exceptional talent in the region. All of these efforts are underpinned by a strategic direction that calls for improving the overall brand/identity of the region, enhancing signage/way-finding, and making an ongoing effort to enrich program offerings and interpretation.

### 1. Loess Discovery Web— A welcoming network

The plan first calls out the need to do a better job of simply welcoming people to the region and orienting them to the rich heritage, habitats and experiences outings they can have experience here. This theme applies not just to visitors—but to residents. This region wants to meet that challenge in part through enhancing existing welcome/orientation portals and creating additional opportunities throughout the region.

Significant new/enhanced features of this plan include:

- Buffering protection of Lake Manawa
- Lake Manawa Discovery Center
- Harrison Nature Center and Welcome Portal at Willow Lake
- Glenwood Discovery Portal (TBD)
- Revamped Hitchcock Nature Center Entrance and Welcome Portal
- Welcome Portal at Avoca
- Enhanced way-finding



## 2. Frontier Iowa Trails— The region’s foundation

Trails are top-of-mind in this region. The Wabash Trace has delivered beyond expectations in terms of economic vitality and quality-of-life services. The partners in this region are dedicated to the expansion of a multi-use trails system as the foundation for the region’s overall success. This plan endorses county planning efforts, calls out expansion of the trails system to the north and further urges implementing the recommendations of the earlier Lewis & Clark Trails Study.

This plan proposes significant new/enhanced features of this plan included for the region:

- Nearly 400 miles of trail are proposed here (20+ miles in phase one)
- Extension of the Nishnabotna Water Trail as feasible
- Enhanced way-finding
- Additional trailheads throughout



Frontier Iowa Trails

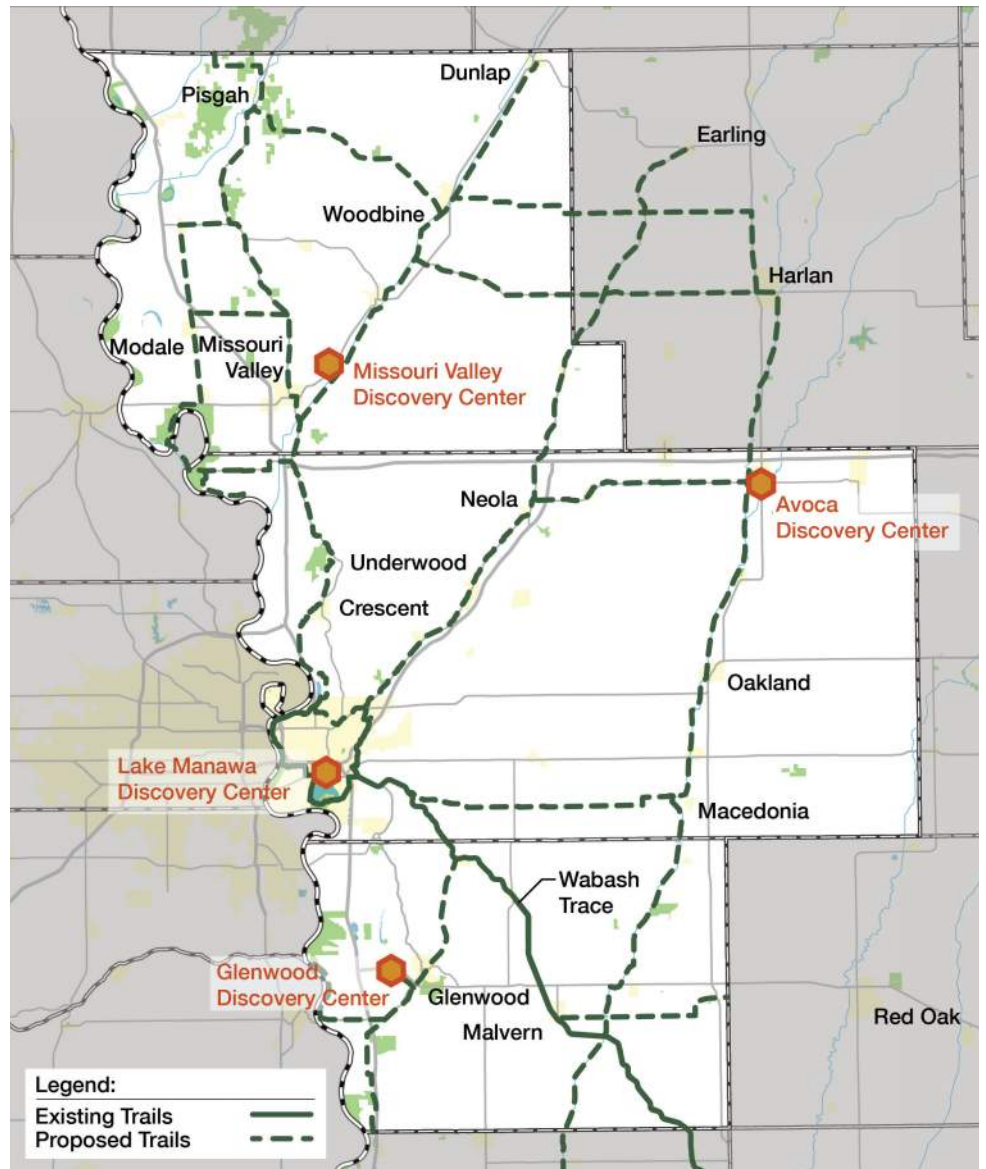
## 3. Ridges and Rivers: Explore! – Rugged accomplishments, serene adventure

The ridges and foothills of the region’s Northwest Territory won’t be tamed for the faint-hearted. Instead, through footpaths, exploration and orienteering, we aid the backpacker in a remote wilderness experience—ranging from the Loess Hills State Forest parcels and the Little Sioux Delta through Gleason-Hubel, Round Lake and the many wildlife sanctuaries along the Missouri including the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge

and Wilson Island Recreation Area. Protection and restoration of natural resources is particularly critical here.

Significant new/enhanced features of this plan include:

- Ongoing natural resources protection
- Identification of additional land protection opportunities connecting the current natural resources destination

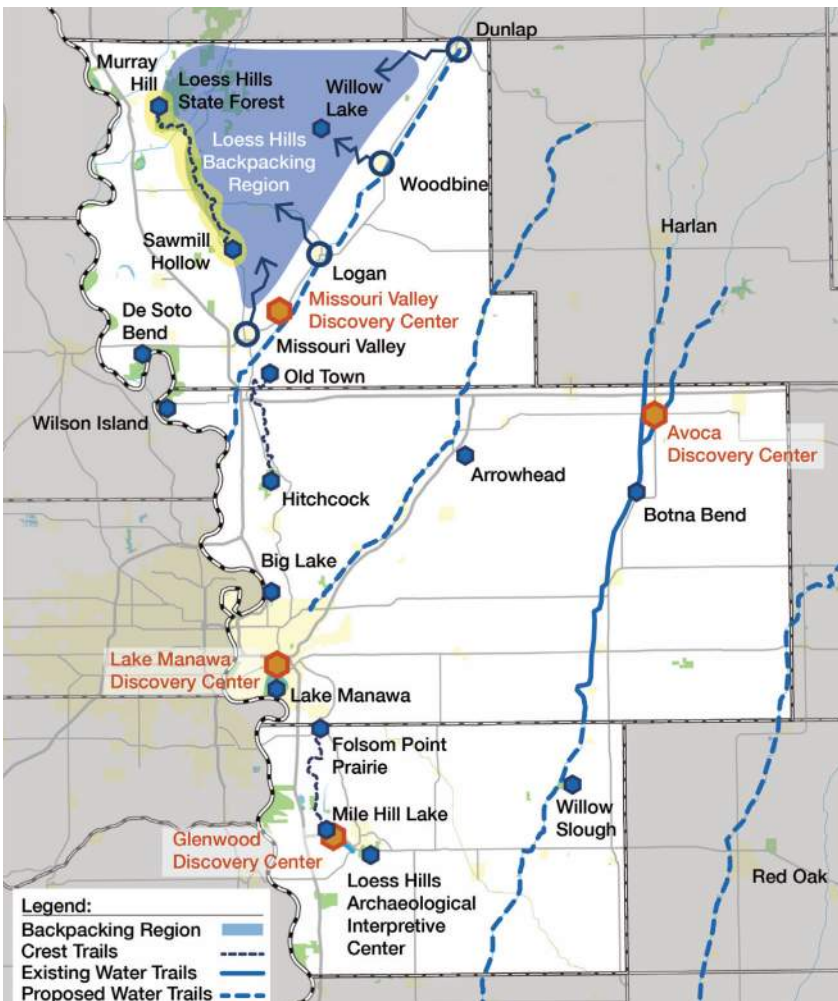


#### 4. The Loess Arts and Nature Loop—A figure 8 of experience

This initiative builds from the Scenic Byway and Living Loess tour route to the west and creates a double-looped driving tour to connect and celebrate our cultural parks and community arts. The route involves Highway 59 on its eastern edge and engages more than a dozen communities and 20 parks and wildlife areas via a network of highways and county roads. The loops will be anchored at Lake Manawa and the proposed Folk Arts Center near Macedonia. This initiative also includes expanding overnight stay within the region through enhanced/expanded camping experiences.



Loess Arts and Nature Loop



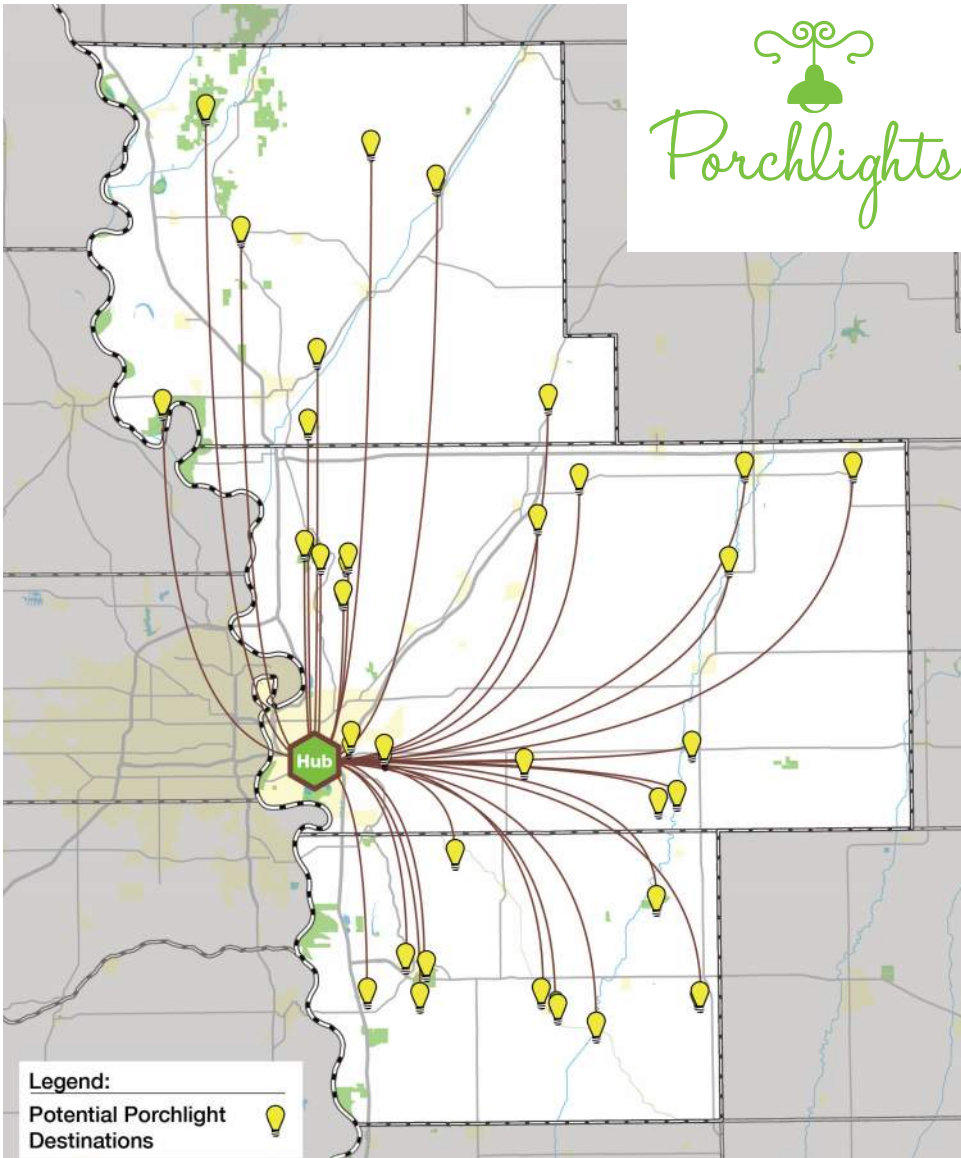
Ridges and Rivers: Explore!

Significant new/enhanced features of this plan include:

- Folk Arts Center construction and promotion
- Local community cultural institutions redevelopment/restoration
- Way-finding
- Park campground expansions—particularly Lake Manawa and Willow Lake “Glampgrounds” (glamorous camping)



Photo credit: Michael White



## 5. Porchlights—Nature and talent in the limelight

This initiative is modeled after the award-winning rural New York website Behold! New Lebanon. This plan proposes “Porchlights,” an online coordination of the talented artisans, naturalists, chefs, and performers of the region, creating an ongoing calendar of learning and entertainment opportunities for visitors and residents alike. Moreover, this proposal enhances the online presence through a new concept, “Table-at-Farm,” with featured chefs hosting dinners at regional-area farms, using that farm’s produce. The goals: to create unique experiences while promoting agri-tourism and rural-urban collaboration.

The system would use a centralized hub, envisioned at the new Lake Manawa Discovery Center, where Porchlight visitors would meet and be driven to the various destinations via The Loess Bus. This feature will ensure that access is easy, especially for visitors that are coming from the Omaha or Council Bluffs communities.

Significant new/enhanced features of this plan include:

- A robust website and interactive events calendar
- Equipped Table-at-Farm multi-purpose catering truck
- The Loess Bus

### Celebrating Parks 2020

The LHMRR intends to collaborate with overall statewide plans to celebrate the century anniversary of state parks. The region also plans to prepare for 2020 by inaugurating a “Loess Hills Heritage Week” in September 2017, and expanding the event as a landmark component of the 2020 celebration.

## Executing the Plan

This region has a distinct advantage: a strong RC&D already focused on the success of this tri-county region. The Golden Hills RC&D, under the leadership of Director Michelle Franks, has been key to the development of this plan with its many partners and the consulting team. The executive committee overseeing this plan has requested Golden Hills RC&D, as a viable and effective 501(c)(3) in the region, continue in its coordination/facilitation role. At this juncture, it appears Golden Hills will take on that responsibility. Throughout this plan, however, we also call out “champions” for the various initiatives—organizations with vested interests in providing the critical follow-through for the plan’s success.

## Advocating for the Plan

As will be seen in these pages, the natural resources, trails potential, community enthusiasm, cultural heritage, and economic potential here are rich. But no amount of planning will achieve the results desired if resources are not ultimately available. The logic behind these planning efforts calls for public-private partnerships to achieve meaningful goals. The vision must have sufficient public dollars available for effective leveraging of private resources. Iowa parks, trails, natural resources and cultural institutions have been historically underfunded. This trend must be reversed. This plan supports REAP, Iowa’s Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund, the Iowa Parks Foundation, and other state and public-private programs that can help this region and the state achieve the worthy initiatives included here.



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## How to Read This Plan

The Master Plan has three basic sections to address the context, the planning effort and its ongoing support. While the Table of Contents provides the plan’s overall outline, a little explanation is warranted:

### Part One: The Planning Context and Process

Here you learn a little about the history of the Iowa Parks Foundation, its granting effort that led to the plan and the process used to develop the plan. The emerging themes, derived from focused discussions, are included here as they underpin the work of the plan.

### Part Two: The Plan—Strategy and Fundamentals

This section includes the plan’s strategic framework, derived from stakeholder workshops, public engagement and focus groups, as well as the criteria used to develop the plan’s initiatives. It addresses the key initiatives, provides cost estimates and reviews possible longer-term initiatives (3+ years) that could later supplement our current effort.

### Part Three: Facilitating Success

This section discusses measurement, structure, fundraising and advocacy intended to support the short- and long-term success of this plan.

### Appendix

The Appendix contains a series of references that were created for/support this plan and were used through the process.





PART ONE:  
THE PLANNING PROCESS

# Plan Background

## Purpose of the Plan

The LHMRR Master Plan serves as a roadmap and living document for collaboration toward a shared vision within the region. It will work best when considered a guide for the sustaining stakeholders and a resource for residents and visitors. The Iowa Parks Foundation's strategic plan called for these regional initiatives in order to develop a park system for the 21st century that meets the needs of the people. They recognized one size would not fit all as Iowa grows and diversifies.

The Master Plan's purpose is to establish and implement an ambitious vision of connecting people to their communities and to each other through parks, trails, quality-of-life assets and healthy living programming. We consider not just natural resources, but also the built environment; not just economics, but also public health; not just social gathering spaces, but also cultural events. This document reflects these values through established strategic directions and identified priority initiatives.

It should also be noted that this plan is not intended to define land use, operating or capital improvement plans for any individual entity or facility.

## Plan History

As mentioned above, this plan is rooted in the strategic work of the Iowa Parks Foundation. IPF was founded in 2009, initially to support state park enhancements in preparation for the state system's centennial in 2020. While the 2020 celebrations remain a driving force in the work of the foundation (and in this planning effort), IPF realized the dearth of resources available to parks at all levels. They recognized we cannot look at parks in isolation. A 21st century park system involves public health, cultural and community vitality, natural resources protection/preservation

and economic vitality, as well as recreation. It includes state, county and city parks and trails. Toward that end, as we prepare our state parks to once again lead the nation in outdoor appreciation and stewardship, IPF called on regions to take a broad-based look at their many assets and create plans to achieve:

- Great places, great experiences
- Connected parks
- Community and cultural vitality
- Healthy people, healthy parks
- A lasting legacy (for parks, trails, culture and community)

The Governor and State Legislature awarded IPF initial dollars to pilot their vision for regional Parks to People plans. The Loess Hills Missouri River Region applied for a portion of those resources and secured a \$20,000 grant to be matched by the region. The region eventually designated an executive team to oversee the plan and funds, facilitated through Golden Hills RC&D. A Request for Proposals was issued and the consulting team of RDG Planning & Design and the Metro Area Planning Agency were awarded the contract. Work got underway in September of 2015 with a five-month timeline for plan completion.



Poster—Healthy People, Healthy Places



# ROAD MAP AND GREEN LIGHTS

A 21st Century Iowa Parks and Trails System requires a new era of cooperation and coordination among many players (public and private). At the Iowa Parks Foundation (IPF), we bring the partners together to identify their region's park needs, make joint plans (the road map), and support priority projects (the greenlights). This document describes that process.

**WHAT IS A GREEN RIBBON PARK?**  
 Successful communities, counties and states are often known for their great parks. An Iowa Green Ribbon Park System/Green Ribbon Park will provide a measure of greatness by providing recreation, open space, and natural beauty. These systems of parks build civic, county and state pride and have an economic impact on their communities as well as contribute to the overall health and quality of life.



## The Planning Process

The process for this plan is rooted in a community involvement effort. The concepts and projects have been developed by those who know and understand the region best—its residents, civic leaders and community organizations. Every resident that has a compelling interest in the enhancement or development of additional recreational opportunities had the opportunity to participate.

The public participation process included:

- **Steering Committee.** The committee met at key points during the planning process to review the progress of the plan and make revisions to the draft concepts.
- **Stakeholder Interviews.** At the beginning of the planning process, the planning team and Golden Hills RC&D sent invitations to key stakeholders within the study area, requesting their participation as representatives of culture, history, tourism, and recreation in the region. Small group interviews were done through a total of six scheduled meetings (two in each county). The interviews introduced participants to the process and asked for initial thoughts and ideas for the plan.
- **Public Open Houses** (see inset)

The process, described graphically, also starts with an initial overview of the region's facilities and assets—through a bus tour with the many partners (part of the initial application process for the IPF grant) and a series of informative maps. Many of the maps appear in the appendix of this report, and they served as the foundation for a number of the proposed initiatives that received consideration.

As maps were being developed, the consulting team met with the stakeholders as outlined above. Emerging themes related to needs and opportunities were derived from that series of conversations. Those themes, coupled with the regional maps and an overview of past planning efforts were compiled into a "Discovery Document." Much of the information that appeared in that Discovery Document is included in this plan or the appendix. The Discovery Document served as a tool for two stakeholder workshops. The first focused on:

- Enhancing the asset maps
- Understanding the region's needs
- Critiquing early strategic documents
- Establishing criteria for selecting initiatives
- Generating early ideas for desired initiatives

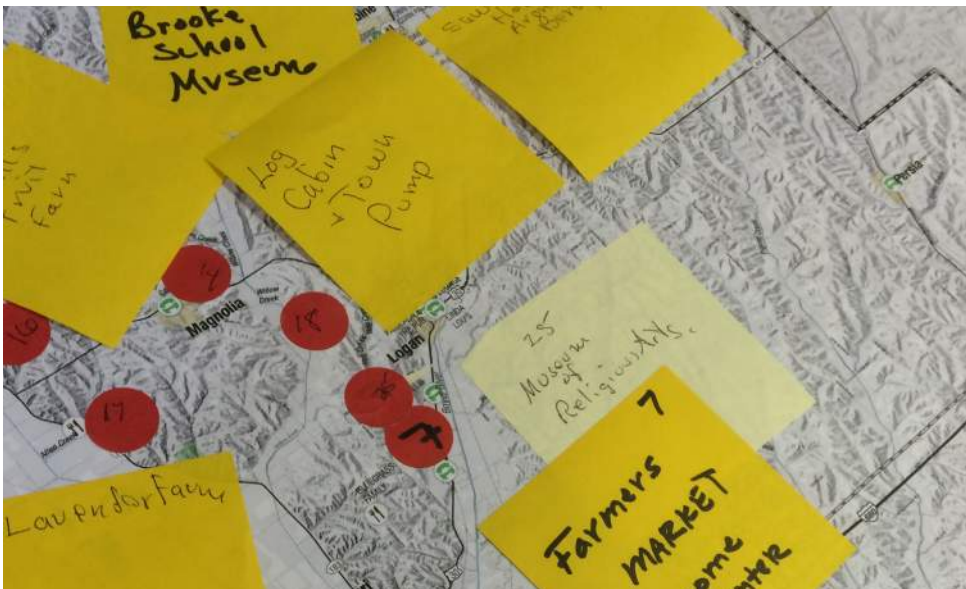
Between workshops, the strategic documents received some refinement and public open houses were held (described below) to gain additional insights into the region's needs and opportunities. At this juncture, the stakeholders were encouraged to develop proposals for review and prioritization at their next workshop. The consulting team also submitted proposals.

The second stakeholder workshop, an intense effort to set priorities, was a success. These priorities were further vetted during a subsequent steering committee meeting before forming the foundation for this plan.

## Public Open Houses

Public open houses were held on October 13, 15 and 19, 2015 at Willow Lake (Harrison County), Treynor Community Center (Pottawattamie County) and Malvern Public Library (Mills County). At the open houses members of the public reviewed and commented on proposed and ongoing projects within the region. Each open house also allowed for comment through the following ways:

- **Visual Listening**  
The public voted in favor of three and not in favor of two of 24 activity ideas and programs collected from projects throughout the country.
- **"Challenges" and "Opportunities" Maps**  
Included comments from Steering Committee meetings as well as Stakeholder interviews and asked "what are we missing?"
- **Public Opinion Survey**  
This survey was available in hard copy. The survey identified what goals are most important.
- **BIG Ideas**  
Participants were invited to sketch or write a big project idea that would be considered transformational for the region.





# Emerging Themes

The Loess Hills Missouri River Region Parks to People Plan started with a series of focus group meetings which served to set a conceptual framework for the project. Key project stakeholders, activists and volunteers were invited to share their thoughts, opportunities, concerns and dreams with the Golden Hills RC&D representatives and the consulting team.

Several key themes popped up over and over again in the focus group meetings; they are summarized here. Many of these ideas or challenges are shared by residents of all three

counties. These themes were used to help set priorities and initiatives in the final Parks to People plan.

## **The Greater Omaha market could be a driving economic force for the region, beyond what it is today.**

The Loess Hills Missouri River Region has the potential to be a vast playground for the growing Omaha metropolitan area. Matthew Henkes of the Iowa West Foundation thought of the region as the “backyard” of Omaha, adding,

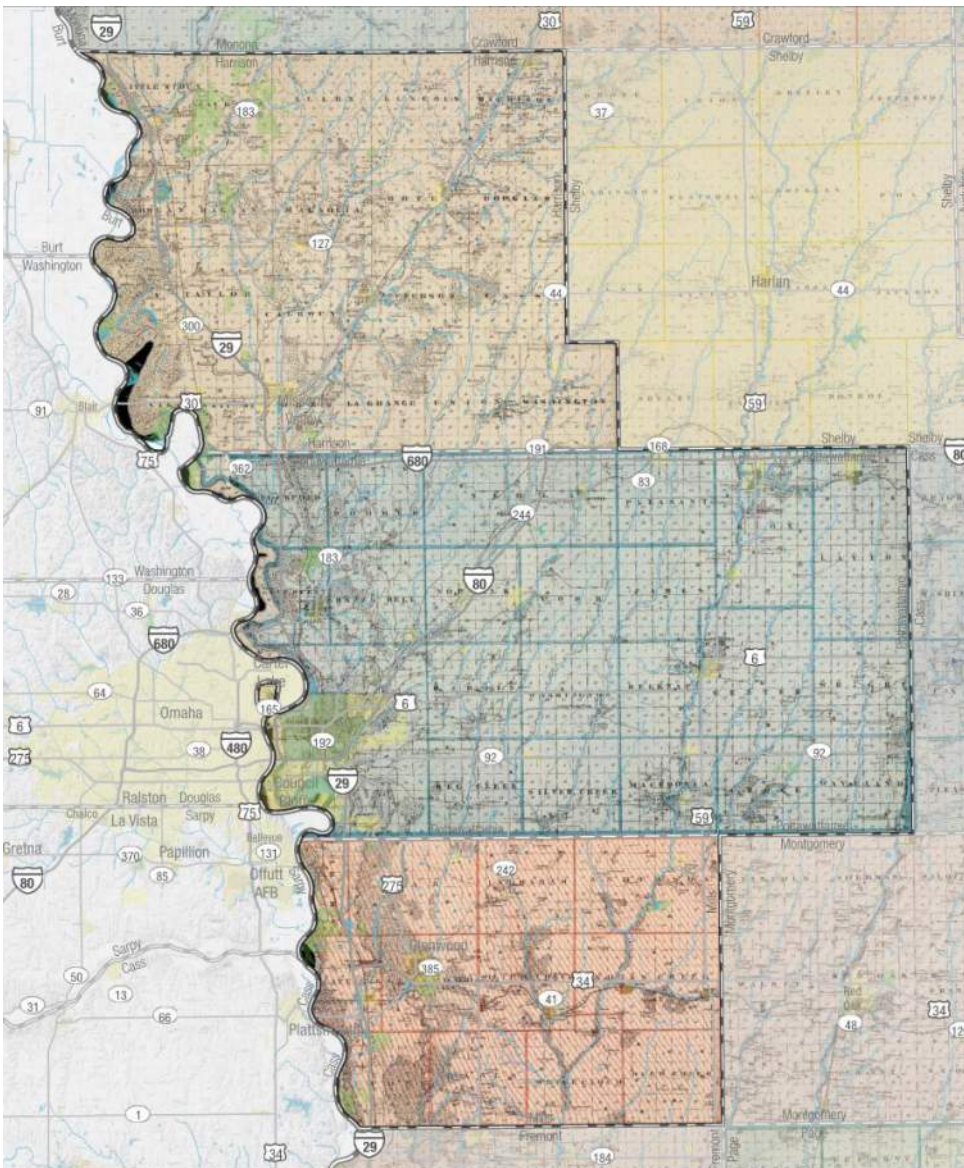
“It’s pretty unique to get from a heavy urban area to a heavy rural area in less than forty minutes.” Getting the Omaha public—as well as the thousands of tourists that visit Omaha every year—to visit the tri-county area could mean a sustainable source of money and energy for years to come.

Focus group participants see trails and the development of destination-attractions as key pieces of this potential economic resource. They see “crossing the river” as a subtle (almost psychological) barrier that needs to be overcome.

- » “Trails [in the LHMRR area] would pull a lot of people from the Omaha market.”
- » “They have so many new apartments and condos in downtown [Omaha] and they have high-dollar bikes on the balcony or in the closet. ... Let’s get Douglas County money over here.”
- » “We need restaurants and music—we can have trails for exercise, but we also need trails as transportation to get to something.”
- » “The whole region really is a crossroads—migration, rail history, the gold rush—the Glenwood Culture. It has always been a corridor of people and things going from one place to the other.”

## **Other populous communities could be attracted to the region for tourism, particularly Kansas City and Des Moines.**

Unified marketing efforts, aimed at cities within a three-hour radius, have the potential to greatly benefit the region. The Loess Hills offer a unique outdoor experience which, if marketed well, could be a regional outdoor and scenic destination.



Existing Tri-County Map

**The goals here extend beyond regional tourism—to expanding interest in living within the region through improved quality of life.**

While marketing efforts aimed at surrounding metropolitan areas may infuse the area with new tourists, the focus must remain on the quality of life of the residents in the area. Energizing and engaging the local residents will ensure that the amenities are well maintained, will continue developing, and will carry on for years to come.

- » “What if the Boyer River is something more than what we drive over? What if we respect it and start putting culture around it?”

**The region is blessed with wide-ranging and meaningful assets, poised for connection, branding and promotion.**

The Loess Hills Region is obviously blessed with the unique landforms that give the area its name. However, nestled in those hills and river bottoms are communities with stories to share and natural resources that offer visiting city-dwellers a chance to recharge from the urban environment. Throughout the focus group meeting process, the phrase “find the hidden gems” came up as a theme. Downtowns offer

places to eat, drink, and stroll; small farms offer places to see Iowa’s agricultural heritage in practice; parks offer places to engage and learn about the natural environment. While these gems are not often a stand-alone destination that would draw people off their path, their combination provides a distinctive experience that is not found in other areas.

- » “The key to this region is in opening this up—even the Boyer—getting along it for kayaking and rafting.”
- » “We need dollars and advertising of Loess Hill Loops. And one thing I don’t think we’re exploiting is the Lincoln Highway.”
- » “We need to document some of those better places. Do we have a good map that makes sense to a visitor on a bike?”
- » “If this is really a regional thing, it should be connected and there should be some kind of directional body that sits over there doing promotion and marketing and selling the thing as a whole: Here’s your day and you start in Logan and have breakfast, Woodbine for lunch, an ice cream cone in Dunlap ...”

**Current assets need support (e.g., overnight stay is underserved).**

One of the consistent themes expressed during the focus group meetings was a need for support facilities to help sustain and expand the existing facilities in the area. For example, the Wabash Trace has a few options

to eat and drink along its path—some are quite iconic. However, there are very limited lodging options, kid’s activities, and bike rental/outfitting options. This limits the length of rides people make, limits the time they stay on the trail, and—most importantly—limits the money they spend along their trip. The lack of lodging options specifically noted in Mills County and the eastern halves of Harrison and Pottawattamie counties.

- » “We don’t have parks that are big [RV] camp areas. My trailer is sitting in Onawa right now. Full hook-ups are there until it freezes and still they have 108 sites and only 8 are full hook-ups.”
- » “Hitchcock is full all of the time. Their campground could expand.”
- » “I must say Mills County does not have an acceptable overnight accommodation. We do not have a hotel and that’s one of our biggest challenges.”
- » “Right now we have six wedding venues in Mills County—we’re the Poconos of Iowa. You can get married here—but you can’t stay here.”

**Each of the region’s small towns has its character and assets.**

The small towns in the Loess Hills Missouri River Region may all appear the same at first glance, however each has a story to tell and a unique character that should be shared.



Deb Sprecker, program director for Woodbine Main Street, shared that she will try to give short tours for new residents of the town, just so they know some of the stories and destinations they may not know about. Sharing and interpreting this information to visitors will help reinforce and clarify the values of a community, sustain community heritage, and make those communities stand out as a destination.

- » “Woodbine has redone their town. They’re doing their own little statue walk. ... Trying to break out of the traditional small farm community.”
- » “Are they trying to turn into an artisan community? They had a glass blower, a culinary chef, and then they have craft beer...”
- » “The guy who owns the gun shop in Missouri Valley—he’s put some little murals and stuff on the side of his building...”
- » “Walnut did that with murals and Oakland is in process.”
- » “Take advantage of the old opera houses—music theater, whatever. Avoca—lots of towns—still have their own opera houses.”
- » “We’re trying to connect all of the important parts of our town and make them more walkable, and I think all small towns with a little money can do this if they just get to thinking right.”

**The region currently doesn’t fully leverage the Loess Hills potential—including as a tool for outdoor learning and engagement.**

One of the most obvious points of interpretive potential is the Loess Hills themselves. However, the Hills are not heavily promoted or shared in the region. In the focus group meetings, several people noted how the Hills have become so commonplace that locals forget that they live in a rare geologic landform. Rather than ignoring them, the Hills should be celebrated and shared as one of the few natural landforms that are left in the state of

Iowa.

- » “The Loess Hills are a one-of-a-kind destination. I think there’s a lot of opportunity for almost anything here. The more you can have to make it more of a destination—whether trails, main street, historical features—the more we can do for multiple reasons, the better off we’ll be.”
- » “There’s a lot of restoration going on around the Hills. People see it burned and they go ‘what’s going on up there?’ ... it goes back to education, because people don’t understand what they’re doing there.”
- » “We have some really neat, unique things ... deer hunting season, mushroom hunting, unique things to our area—and people come out and there’s some fun thing to do and I don’t think we capitalize on that as much as we should.”
- » “We send school children to the zoo—right past the Loess Hills. They don’t stop. They don’t learn. They don’t know what we have here.”
- » “I’d like to be able to educate every school child in this county about the treasure in their own back yard that they don’t know about.”
- » “People don’t bat an eyelash at driving to Yellowstone because it’s unique. People don’t even understand how unique the Loess Hills are ... it’s a big issue when our local kids don’t even realize what it is.”

**The Loess Hills region’s private ownership serves as both challenge and opportunity.**

In almost every focus group meeting, someone mentioned the challenge that surrounds private land ownership in a natural landform region. By ensuring that communication is open, that ideas come from the bottom up rather than top down, and that all improvements are truly tailored to both local residents and visitors alike, projects have a better chance of being sustainable in the future.

- » “People who own land in the Loess Hills—that land has been in their family for years and years and years. They have a strong visceral connection to that landscape—a will to protect the Hills. They’re not there to mine them and tear them down. How do you balance their rights and still let the public appreciate them?” “We need to help [farmers] with donating ground for trails.”
- » “It’s critical to be on the same page with agriculture.”
- » “People need to be brought in from the beginning, otherwise it has the appearance of being top-down—and even though we’re not trying to force anyone, it has that appearance.”



Photo credit: Ryan Schmidt, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation

**Similarly, the Missouri River—perhaps due to the recent dramatic flooding—is often seen as much a liability as an asset.**

Dealing with the Missouri River is an undoubted challenge. The river provides for an impressive amount of life, vitality, and scenery for the area, and is quite literally the reason the Loess Hills and communities are located where they are. However, its unpredictability led to its channelization. While that makes the river predictable, it increased the flow speed and turbidity of the water, making it too challenging and unsafe for many forms of water recreation. The levees which line the river and the semi-frequent flooding add another access challenge to the resource. However, the Missouri River must be accessed, viewed, and appreciated for its life-giving and recreation qualities. To ignore it or to treat it only as a scenic amenity would be a disservice to its role in the region's cultural history.

- » “How neat it would be to have a trail going back to campsites we could reserve and be able to fish all night without having to worry about a landowner or the DNR chewing us out.”
- » “Missouri River—we’re just not sure where to go with it ... not easily accessed ...”
- » “It’s pretty turbulent, fairly dangerous water to boat or kayak—very different than the Mississippi. And it shifts a lot, moves around a lot ...”

**The western bank of the Missouri shows examples of leveraging the asset.**

The Nebraska side of the Missouri River has several examples of how the river can be accessed and utilized. Cottonwood Cove Marina north of Blair, Nebraska has been built up high enough to be out of the primary flood zone. It offers RV camping and concerts, directly adjacent to the river.



**With agriculture as context, agri-tourism holds potential for economic development.**

Agri-tourism has the potential to be a major theme in the Loess Hills Missouri River Region. The proximity between a large metropolitan population and a large and diverse agricultural economy means sharing of resources, food, ideas and energy. Day-trips to traditional local farms (raising corn, soybeans, livestock) can help educate urban residents on the agricultural heritage of the area. Less traditional agricultural farms, raising such diverse crops such as grapes, hops, table vegetables and lavender, can be tied together into unique small-farm tours. The same entrepreneurs can be reached via local farmers' markets and co-ops for long-term sustainable success. Combine these resources with local restaurants and a new food-to-table enterprise might take off. Combine the resources with local chefs, and the opportunity for table-to-farm ventures might make this region world-renown for experimental food.

- » “Imagine somebody getting to ride in a combine, or milk a cow, pet a cow, or see a pig in real life—or clip their teeth or tails.”
- » “I think there are some farms that have entertained the thought and maybe done a smatter—a petting zoo or growing pumpkins—but it didn’t work. So maybe we need to seek those people out for discussions ...”
- » “We have an Indian Creek museum which has a huge repository of vintage farm experience. We have this great resource ...”
- » “A dude ranch for farmers.”
- » “A farmer might allow someone to ride in his combine with him when he’s harvesting. There’s high liability and a lot of farmers aren’t interested, but it’s a possibility.”
- » “You feel at home when you see barns, and they’re fairly unique to Iowa ...”

Photo credit: The Path Less Pedaled



### Similarly, we have room to capitalize on the arts and artisans.

In a few small pockets in the Loess Hills region, artisans are finding new and exciting opportunities. Many of these opportunities are found out of sheer will—they are making great art and attracting people to them, rather than moving to an established arts community. For example, in Malvern, painter Zack Jones is working with local investors to turn Malvern into a destination, merely because it's the place where Zack grew up. In Woodbine, local residents have created a sculpture walk in their downtown because they wanted their downtown to be a destination. These are people who shook off apathy and opted to do something about their town—in return, other artists and businesses are reaping the benefits and are continuing to draw people to the area.

- » “Zack Jones was a local artist. He came back 5-6 years ago ... he's a struggling artist just getting in there—revitalizing the community and cleaning up a lot of the homes.”
- » “There are things you don't see [that have value]—like county courthouses. Things we're so used to ...”

- » “We have a project in Macedonia—a folk art center. Working to celebrate traditional arts and crafts from Southwest Iowa and the Northwest Region. As we're talking about trails, [we could have] an art trail that runs along highway 59—more of a driving experience ...”
- » “We just built an amphitheater three years ago and it gets used just twice a year. And Logan has the band shelter and it's great when there's a band playing in there ...”

### In addition to the Loess Hills and Missouri River, each county has its “natural opportunities.”

The natural resources in the Loess Hills Missouri River Region are inherently one of the biggest parts of this project. Each county within the region has its special features and parks such as Willow Lake in Harrison, Hitchcock Nature Area in Pottawattamie, and Willow Slough in Mills. Some features, such as the Missouri River and Loess Hills, connect all three counties together. Others only connect two of the three, such as the Boyer River (Harrison and Pottawattamie) and Nishnabotna River (Pottawattamie and Mills). Celebrating and preserving these resources will ensure the region thrives in the future.

- » “Ice fishing is great and we're getting more eagles. You can see an eagle's nest—so many hidden gems you don't know. When somebody comes from out of town, I have to show them this and they're enthralled.”
- » We're in tallgrass prairie country. And you think of how you manage and restore that—a culture that celebrates private lands burning.”
- » “Migratory birds and other migratory wildlife ... hook right up to the mouth of the Platte. It's the turning point for people going one direction or another.”

### We have exceptional trail amenities with potential to invigorate communities, beginning with the Wabash Trace.

The Wabash Trace is already a world-class rails-to-trails amenity. It is the backbone to dozens of annual local activities from the Taco Ride to the Wabash Marathon. However, with a little bit of focus and economic resources, the Trace can enliven the communities along its path. Adding additional facilities such as restrooms, parking, restaurants, kids' activities, and lodging, the Wabash Trace could anchor several more popular multi-day travel opportunities.

- » “Come down the Trace—down to the levees and all the way down to Hamburg. Make a loop out of it.”

### Existing trails plans attempt to demonstrate the value of loops and reaches from the Trace into the counties' eastern reaches.

The recently created trail master plans in Pottawattamie and Mills County were easily the most discussed opportunity in the focus group meetings. The master plans propose a series of hard and soft trail routes that propose to connect communities and resources in each county. Most importantly, they design loops so riders can start and end in the same location.



- » “For me, I want to see the trails hook up—and we have one of the best veins there is. Then to expand that North and South—heading North up into Harrison and Pottawattamie [Counties] and even on down to Fremont [County]...”

**At the same time, Harrison County struggles with little to no trail connectivity.**

Harrison County does not have a trails master plan, however it has plenty of good ideas where trails could go. Creating a trail master plan should be a high priority for the county to ensure that any potential funding for trails will go to the best locations. Further, the plan should mesh well with the Pottawattamie County master plan—and any other adjacent master plans as well—to prioritize connectivity to its neighbors.

- » “I know we’ve been hitting hard on trails but I see that as the connection to all of our communities that are such jewels—it extrapolates into all these other activities. I think they would generate a lot of heat ...”

**Cycling challenges don’t stop at the trails.**

We’re known for cycling in this state, but beyond some pockets of dense trails networks, Western Iowa is largely not bicycle friendly. State-wide policy changes for items such as ditch slopes are making trail development in the Loess Hills more difficult because there isn’t flat real estate to use. Instead of a cycling mecca, Iowa’s western edge indicates to cycling tourists: challenges ahead.

- » “I think it’s ironic that Iowa has the biggest bike ride but we have the worst conditions for people trying to ride a bike. It’s bad here, but freakin’ amazing elsewhere. We’re on the western edge and we get these poor people trying to ride their bikes across Iowa and they’ll say ‘I have been riding since Seattle and you’re the first state that doesn’t have paved shoulders.’”

**Education is needed at all levels—school kids (state history), residents (what assets we have and why they are cool), property owners (easements, land purchases, etc.), and visitors.**

Participants in these groups say the outdoor culture and appreciation of heritage/arts/history must begin with youth—but it can’t stop there. Without landowner engagement and residents who value the whole of who we are in this region and what we have to offer, we will short-change our potential. But they’re not simply referencing tourism and economic development. Without a rich education to appreciate the values/resources inherent to the region, the community vibrancy that comes with quality living is also undermined.

- » “Teach the kids. Start from the bottom up.”
- » “And there are so many opportunities for outdoor classrooms—educators would love to use them if they’re available.”
- » “We need to educate landowners.”



**Several “Big Ideas” were developed for the region, highlighting the fact that there is a lot to be excited about in the Loess Hills area.**

Several exciting ideas were created when the focus group members were asked to think big and pretend that money, time, property owners, political support, and volunteers are not an issue. Among them were ideas like a centralized tourist and education center, a healthy demonstration wetland, a crest trail through the Loess Hills, a series of pop-up events, a folk arts school, and an artist’s glampground. These big ideas are exactly what a plan like this envisions: thinking big to make the region a unique destination.

- » “Establish a Loess Hills Archaeological Interpretation Center.”
- » “Extend water trails to major destinations ...”
- » “Develop a Loess Hills Crest Trail ...”
- » “Build the Willow Lake Nature Center ...”
- » “The Loess Hills area is now an American Viticultural Area—we have a lot of wineries that have signed onto that.”

**Challenges stem from few accessed resources, volunteer burn-out, and concerns over change.**

Much like other areas of the state, the LHMRR region suffers from challenges related to resistance to change and lack of resources. In fact, the topic often led to laughs from the steering committee due to their frustrations in keeping projects and programs alive and active through periods of difficulty.

However, the executive team expressed resolve and commitment in pursuing that challenge - specifically by supporting the right change makers who are developing excitement and energy. Southwest Iowa has already seen several “wins” in the form of public/private partnerships and visionary independent leaders who are developing excitement and pride in their communities. By developing those leaders and committing to their success, the LHMRR can overcome resources challenges in the future.

- » “We’re going to need a strong partnership and communication with local governments. Citizens and main streets and schools can only do so much. That’s why we have to plan together and find out what are the priorities everyone shares and what we can do.”
- » “Let’s not get hung up on money—in that, ‘we need a lot of money to be successful’—you need leadership and vision.”

**The region will need ongoing mechanism(s) for implementation and monitoring, post-plan.**

This plan aims to set the goals and priorities for improvements in the Loess Hills Missouri River Region. Beyond those plans, additional organizations and mechanisms will be required to ensure the plan has energy and funding in the long term. Some of those possibilities include 28E and 501(c)(3) organizations. Ongoing monitoring will also be required to ensure that the implementation plans are consistently being followed and that money is being used efficiently.

- » “We need a tri-county Chamber of Commerce where people all get together and we all have our focus points ...”









PART TWO:  
THE PLAN

# Strategic Framework

The Strategic Framework outlined in this section was built from the emerging themes, reviewed by stakeholders and ultimately used to guide the development of the initial and longer-term project initiatives. While not all initiatives were specifically called-out in advance through this strategic approach, the initiatives that emerged from the plan deliver at some level on the approaches envisioned here.

## Vision:

An exceptional, preserved landscape framing communities that embrace and integrate culture, history, agriculture, nature, and recreation

## Mission:

To create and promote enhanced connections and destinations of culture, nature and community for the betterment of all

## Approaches

### Great Spaces, Great Experiences

- Enhance the overall sense of hospitality, interpretation, and learning about the region through improved facilities and programs; create appropriate facilities and tools (e.g., welcome portals and the Loess Bus) to engage the public
- Enhance local understanding of the Loess Hills, enhancing appreciation for their natural history and developing a sense of stewardship and local pride
- Develop river experiences and facilities that create exceptional destinations

- Enhance overnight stay within the region—from full hookups to glamping
- Create regional attractions through promotion of artist, artisan, and naturalist/parks programs throughout the region

### Connections

- Building from the reputation and history of the Wabash Trace, and plans for the Lewis & Clark Trail, dramatically lengthen the backbone of the region's trail network
- Establish a significant trails network throughout the region to connect

- communities from the region's eastern reaches and create weekend destination loops; build the Frontier Iowa Trails
- Connect parks to parks, parks to trails, parks to communities
- Extend the water trails network as much as is feasible
- Develop an interconnected series of events, attractions, and destinations which can be easily accessed through a centralized online framework





### Healthy Parks, Healthy People

- Wherever possible, utilize the most sustainable and conservation-minded best management practices
- Establish greenbelts along major waterways in order to improve water quality and provide space for trail networks
- Establish a whole sub-watershed within the region to serve as a focal point for intense restoration and a promising success story
- Underpin all work throughout the region with ongoing parks, forests, landscape/habitat restoration and protection
- Promote parks as “outdoor fitness centers” and build park-based outdoor health events (runs, hikes, rides, cross-country, etc.) into other promotional packages and events

### Community and Cultural Vitality

- Build on the talents of artists and artisans to integrate culture and the arts within communities, parks and along trails; develop a regional Folk Arts School
- Establish an agri-tourism component to the region’s destination mix, potentially emphasizing “table-at-farm” opportunities and/or hands-on farming experiences for urban visitors

### Lasting Legacy

- Create a region that serves as an attractor to outside interests—passersby from I-80 and nearby metropolitan areas (Omaha, Kansas City, Des Moines) and promote it
- Grow public, base-line support to ensure systems have ongoing maintenance and repair dollars
- Establish ongoing, private funding strategies using the IPF Grant Match requirement as the means for initiating and/or enhancing critical relationships
- Establish a mechanism for ongoing collaboration, coordination and shared responsibilities across the region
- Complete branding/promotion/marketing exercises to inform the region’s work and ensure success

# Priority Criteria

In order to set priorities during the second stakeholder workshop, we wanted to have general agreement in the room on the criteria used to make those assessments. Discussion at the first workshop touched on this and the second workshop provided a final review of criteria before launching into the priority exercises.

At its most basic level, priorities are often established by one or more of the following “generic” ways of looking at priorities:

- **Chronological Priorities**  
Some projects or processes need to be developed early in the plan because other plan elements rely on their completion.
- **Low-Hanging Fruit**  
Some initiatives have nominal impact but are simple to execute due to low cost, current political will, available resources, and/or technological ease of execution.
- **Big Impact**  
Some efforts may take a long time to accomplish, due to their cost or other challenges, but they will likely have a significant impact.
- **Personal Passion/Evident Leadership**  
Some projects have dedicated champions whose leadership and commitment will likely provide sufficient follow-through to achieve the desired result for the region.

The additional criteria of particular interest to the LHMRR are as follows:

## 1. Regional impact

Viable projects address the whole region directly (as do many of the touring initiatives, for example) or are easily replicable throughout the region.

## 2. Promotes regional culture and historical significance

The heritage features within this region are rich but unsung. Artists and artisans finding homes in the area are looking to join forces for regional impact and should be supported.



## 3. Educational

While educational features can certainly serve as tourism attractors, it is just as important to identify the means to help residents understand their region’s many unique assets.

## 4. Sustainable

As the natural resources of the region support the livelihoods of so many and prompt a long-term future in economic development and tourism, those resources’ value must be maintained through restoration or preservation and protection.

## 5. Marketable

Leverage the region’s location as a Midwestern hub, nestled among Des Moines and Omaha, Kansas City and Sioux City, and along I-80 and I-29. This criteria gets to the recognition of the tourism potential (external and internal) of the region.

## 6. Has community buy-in, public support, volunteerism

This region will only pursue efforts that have community support. We won’t be successful if residents aren’t willing to engage.

## 7. Has access to resources/funding

Assessment of initiatives includes likely access to resources to make a project happen.

## 8. Positively impacts diverse users

This reflects the increasing diversity of the region and the capacity for successful tourism with improved understanding of the needs of diverse audiences.

## 9. Enhances current facilities and programs

Developed programs and facilities are working in concert with the existing infrastructure and amenities that the region already employs.

## 10. Celebrates our public park system

All projects focus on getting people connected with their environment through the existing network of state, county, and city parks.



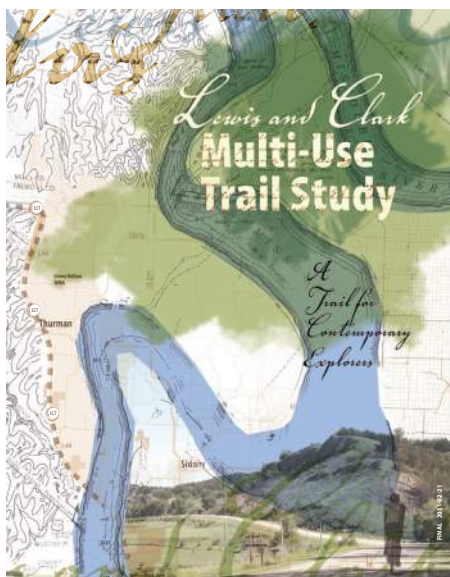
# Building the Regional Collaborative

Four entities came together to put forth a proposal for regional recreation in Southwest Iowa for the Parks to People initiative. With the assistance of the Golden Hills RC&D, Harrison, Mills, and Pottawattamie Counties in partnership with the Friends of Lake Manawa created a regional collaborative. It is suggested that this collaborative be continued through implementation of the plan, with Golden Hills RC&D as the prime facilitator of the plan.

Some challenges and opportunities are too big to take on alone. This region acknowledged that and began working collaboratively to identify needs and priorities several years ago. Working regionally creates efficiencies, eliminates redundancies, and ties together local goals and projects. The Parks to People initiative builds on existing processes, priorities and public input. Past efforts are documented in the following existing plans:

## Lewis and Clark Multi-Use Trail Study (2011)

A plan extending trails from Sioux City to Hamburg and one of five Iowa Department of Transportation's Trails of Statewide Significance. This document lays out a plan to make the landscapes and natural and human



history of the Missouri River Valley and Loess Hills more accessible to a wide variety of users for recreational, transportation, educational and economic development purposes.

## The Immense Journey: Loess Hills Cultural Resources Study (2011)

This plan notes important new discoveries that demonstrate the national significance of many sites. A partnership among local communities, landowners and the public created plans for the ongoing protection, preservation and interpretation of these resources. The plan discusses prehistoric archaeology that includes over 1,500 known sites found across seven counties and spanning more than 12,000 years of human history.

## Loess Hills National Scenic Byway Interpretive Master Plan (2015)

The plan route runs from Akron to Hamburg, includes numerous loops, and is one of ten Iowa byways to develop an interpretive master plan. Plan includes background on travelers that use the Byway; inventory and analysis of Byway resources, themes and messages; and Interpretive Media. Interpretive media outlines a brand to unify the experience, identifies diverse delivery techniques and notes how the communication will be accessible.



## Heartland 2050 Vision (2014)

Based on the projection that the eight-county Omaha-Council Bluffs metropolitan region that includes Harrison, Mills and Pottawattamie Counties is expected to grow by 400,000 people by 2050, a vision was developed to provide a long-term strategy to maximize public investments and promote economic development while focusing on what keeps people here and what draws new residents. The regional planning effort noted how citizens and institutions are all part of a larger, interconnected system.

## Loess Hills of Western Iowa—Common Vision and Comprehensive Plan (2011)

The common vision for the future of the region developed through this plan builds on the existing local, state and national recognition. It attempts to balance the fragility and significance of the resources present with conservation, enjoyment and active use of the land. It identifies significant areas and prairie habitats which are now permanently conserved while advocating for low-impact design in construction and agriculture practices.

## Loess Hills Guide

A guide for traveling the Loess Hills National Scenic Byway and associated excursion loops running from Plymouth to Fremont Counties. Includes description of the route, scenic areas and lookouts as well as Byway and area attractions by county.

## Other local plans of significance include:

- Council Bluffs Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update
- Council Bluffs Trails Plan
- Avoca Trails Plan
- Playland Park Master Plan
- Pottawattamie County Comprehensive Plan
- Mills County Comprehensive Plan

## The Plan and Early Implementation

The following priority initiatives were selected as the kick-off to implementation of the Master Plan because of the close match to strategic directions and criteria. Each of the initiatives in this section was developed as a regional effort consisting of existing and planned local projects, connectors, upgrades to current facilities and assets, and major projects needed to meet the region's overarching goals.

Each of these initiatives has an identified Lead Coordinator and a "Let's Get Started" checklist to prompt the work supporting that initiative. The Lead Coordinator will join forces with the Early Champions and other partners to organize the initiative, planning for the initiative's overall coordination and fundraising. To further backstop these efforts, the Golden Hills RC&D has agreed to support the overall plan, by convening the executive committee and lead coordinators at least quarterly to report on progress and provide technical assistance and other supports. The Metro Area Planning Association has also committed to assistance through grants development, regional promotion, and ongoing coordination with other planning efforts throughout the region.

### Loess Discovery Web— A welcoming network

**Order of Magnitude Cost Estimate: \$2.4m**  
**Additional Willow Lake Construction: \$4.0m**  
**Additional Lake Manawa Site Improvements: \$13.6m**

A mix of physical sites and robust online experiences connect residents and the public to the region through exceptional orientation. Building from the existing Missouri Valley Loess Hills interpretive center, this initiative tells the story of Native American history at Glenwood, rivers at Lake Manawa State Park, and arts at Avoca. These primary nodes of the web lead



the public to other interpretive sites including waters education at Willow Lake's Nature Center in Harrison County (to be built); Loess Hills at Hitchcock Nature Center (Pottawattamie County); trails understanding at Malvern; and pioneer heritage and folk arts through the planned Folk Arts Center at Macedonia.

#### Significant new/enhanced features of this plan include:

- Buffering protection of Lake Manawa
- Lake Manawa Discovery Center
- Harrison Nature Center and Welcome Portal at Willow Lake
- Glenwood Discovery Portal (TBD)
- Revamped Hitchcock Nature Center Entrance and Welcome Portal
- Enhanced way-finding

#### Early Champions:

Harrison County Conservation Board  
Pottawattamie County Conservation Board  
Mills County Conservation Board  
Friends of Lake Manawa  
Loess Hills Archaeological Interpretive Center  
Iowa DNR

**Lead Coordinator: Golden Hills RC&D**

#### Let's Get Started!

- Convene task force for coordinated welcome/way-finding signs and messages
- Develop coordinated interpretive program among the four Discovery Centers
- Revamp Hitchcock Nature Center (HNC) main entrance for safety and enhanced welcome
- Expand support of HNC ecological restoration efforts to maintain Loess Hills' ecological significance
- Identify welcome portal site and design at Lake Manawa; secure additional footprint/buffer for Lake Manawa
- Incorporate welcome portal into Harrison County design and support new center development
- Pursue site options for Glenwood Discovery Gateway
- Leverage already-existing welcome portals using signs, brochures, QR codes, and online/app options

**Frontier Iowa Trails—  
The region’s foundation**

**Order of Magnitude Cost Estimate for  
Trailheads and Signage: \$1.6m  
Trails Only, Phase 1: \$7.2m**

This multi-use trails system serves as the foundation for the region’s overall success in terms of connection, promotion of public health, economic development and tourism. This initiative builds from an existing paved trails and footpaths network, the existing portion of the Nishnabotna Water Trail, the earlier Lewis & Clark Trails Study and priority trails systems pre-identified through Pottawattamie and Mills Counties. We further identify priority links in Harrison County to the whole of the network and achieve loops, day trips and mini-RAGBRAI experiences for a mix of users, but with some emphasis on cycling. As this network continues to build out (with priority segments highlighted in this plan), the region works collaboratively to sign and promote the Frontier Iowa Trails (FIT) network already in play.

FIT Feature—Integrate arts and character throughout the trail system. Include a “Starry night” connection as a focal-point within the system.



Highlighted priority connections include:

- Extension of the Nishnabotna Water Trail to Wabash Trace (supporting eventual development of the Nish Greenway)
- The Loess Crest & Valleys Walk (see below) Hitchcock-to-Old Town and Sawmill Hollow to Loess Hills State Forest
- Woodbine to Willow Lake (Harrison County)
- Willow Lake to Loess Hills State Forest (Harrison County)
- Boyer River Levee Trail (Harrison County)
- Mineola to Bartlett via Glenwood and Pacific Junction (Mills County)
- Keg Creek, NE Levee Connection to Pacific Junction (using the 34 Bridge, Mills County)
- Council Bluffs to Hitchcock Nature Center (Pottawattamie County)
- Council Bluffs to Avoca (Pottawattamie County)
- Wabash Trace to Macedonia on Pioneer Trail (Pottawattamie County)

2nd Tier—Glenwood to Malvern connection (direct) that would lead to a 26 mile (marathon) loop

**Significant new/enhanced features of this plan include:**

- Nearly 400 miles of trail are proposed here

- Extension of the Nishnabotna Water Trail as feasible
- Enhanced way-finding
- Additional trailheads throughout

**Early Champions:**

- Frontier Iowa Trails (FIT) Regional Planning Committee
- County Conservation Boards and Trails Task Forces

**Lead Coordinator: FIT Regional Trails Planning Committee**

The Frontier Iowa Trails Regional Planning Committee was first convened by the National Park Service in 2011. Representatives from each county have been meeting regularly and sharing plans across counties. The overall system will eventually expand beyond the three counties of the LHMRR. Meanwhile, as FIT continues to plan and identify priority projects, connecting Harrison County to the overall system also becomes a strategic priority. Early projects for implementation (at or near shovel-ready) include the 7.5-mile Keg Creek and 14.5-mile Levee Trail in Mills County and a segment in Pottawattamie County from Council Bluffs to Weston, Iowa.

**Let’s Get Started!**

- Engage with the Iowa DOT and local transportation coordinating agencies for catalyst resources
- Fund and break ground on shovel-ready priority connectors
- Create a Harrison County Trails Task Force to provide important oversight/additional input
- Celebrate all trail stretches or connections to build awareness—groundbreaking and completion
- Prepare collaborative regional marketing materials in support of FIT

## Porchlights—Nature and talent in the limelight

### Order of Magnitude Cost Estimate: \$0.5m

Online coordination of the talented artisans, naturalists, chefs and performers of the region translates into an exceptional events calendar to deliver education, recreation, local food experiences, arts and entertainment. Models of this robust web/app-based coordination have been dubbed “museum without walls.” As a virtual portal to the region, [www.porchlights.net](http://www.porchlights.net) imparts a sense of welcome. It engages visitors and residents in countless ways: want a sewing lesson? Check for an option via Porchlights. Where are the local musicians performing? Porchlights lets you know. Naturalists leading a birdwatching tour south of Glenwood? Get the meet-point on Porchlights. Planning your spring weekend in the region? Get a listing of all the options from Porchlights.

Take a poetry workshop in Woodbine, snowshoe at Hitchcock or dine at a Table-at-Farm dinner in Treynor. These are the types of planning options Porchlights makes possible.



Photo credit: Local Milk



Agri-tourism, arts, culture, heritage, parks programming, organized trail rides, adventure, community events and ongoing parks programming all converge here. Porchlights will daily demonstrate the power of the region to deliver exceptional experiences to all.

The system uses a centralized hub, envisioned at the new Lake Manawa Discovery Center, where Porch Light visitors can meet and would be driven out to the various destinations via The Loess Bus. This feature will ensure that access is easy, especially for visitors that are coming from the Omaha or Council Bluffs communities.

### Table-at-Farm

We're all familiar with local food sourcing, and that's a valuable concept. But we want the public to connect more directly to the farm and farmers. In partnership with the region's chefs and the growing agri-tourism movement, we propose a small catering truck to facilitate chefs arriving at local farms or nearby parks and preparing dinners while quite directly sourcing local foods. We'll use the Porchlights portal for planning/coordination and reservations. The truck itself (appropriately wrapped) will help promote Porchlights, parks, agri-tourism and the Loess Hills Missouri River Region as a whole.

### Significant new/enhanced features of this plan include:

- A robust website and interactive events calendar
- Equipped Table-at-Farm multi-purpose catering truck
- Loess Bus

### Early Champions:

Porchlights Development Committee  
Golden Hills RC&D

Southwest Iowa Food & Farm Initiative

### Lead Coordinator: Golden Hills RC&D

### Southwest Iowa Food & Farm Initiative (SWIFFI)

The Southwest Iowa Food and Farm Initiative is a network for food producers and consumers working to develop a healthy local food system. SWIFFI works to build a sustainable regional food system that links production, processing, distribution and consumption; for better health, food security, stronger communities and economic development. SWIFFI is a multi-county coalition of individuals and organizations working together with Golden Hills Resource Conservation and Development. They are a part of the Regional Food System Working Group network at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. SWIFFI works in Harrison, Shelby, Audubon, Pottawattamie, Cass, Mills, Montgomery, Fremont and Page Counties.

### Let's Get Started!

- ✓ Reserve the [www.porchlights.net](http://www.porchlights.net) web address
- ❑ Further develop the brand and budget
- ❑ Invite the founding director of Behold! New Lebanon (the model for this initiative) to the region for presentation and counsel
- ❑ Approach university talent for assistance with promotion and web/calendar/app development
- ❑ Leverage contacts through this planning process to develop a robust first calendar of programs
- ❑ Launch an early calendar, locally promoted, tracking use and growth

## The Loess Arts and Nature Loop —A figure 8 of experience

**Order of Magnitude Cost Estimate: \$6.1 m**  
**Macedonia Folk Arts Center: \$5.0m**

Building from the awareness and traction of the Scenic Byway and Living Loess Tour route to the west, we create a double-looped driving tour to connect and celebrate our cultural parks and community arts. The route involves Highway 59 on its eastern edge and engages more than a dozen communities and 20 parks and wildlife areas via highways 34, Railroad Avenue/L34, and the scenic, paved F32.

The Figure 8 Loop anchors at Lake Manawa and at the proposed Folk Arts Center (near Macedonia) where artisans-at-work will connect the public to their pioneer culture and folk art heritage. Artist-enhanced camping facilities provide much-needed affordable, signature overnight stay through glampgrounds. Glampgrounds launch at Willow Lake County Park and Lake Manawa State Park. (“Glamping” stands for “glamorous camping”—camping with amenities, a gateway experience for camping novices)

### The Folk Arts Center

This system hub showcases the exceptional talents of artists and artisans of the region—and will serve as an attractor for new talent and energy while providing powerful education and recreational experiences for residents and visitors alike. The Folk Arts Center delivers hands-on engagement rooted in agriculture, the delights of nature and historic crafts.

The Hamilton-Macedonia Foundation and the Golden Hills RC&D are working to develop the Folk Art Center concept in partnership with the University of Iowa. Implementation anticipates the development of a Regional Cultural Council as an outgrowth of the work here with that Council eventually overseeing the elements of the Loess Arts and Nature Loop.



### Lake Manawa

Lake Manawa has the greatest geographic reach of any Iowa State Park, with a median travel distance to the park of 117 miles and 1.3 million-plus annual visitors. The plan calls for park buffering, expanded/enhanced overnight stay, additional information/welcome features and potentially revamped entrance/circulation.

The Loess Loop will connect these arts features (just to name a few):

- Indian Creek Museum, Emerson
- Sweet Vale of Avoca Museum
- Nishna Heritage Museum, Oakland
- Macedonia Historical Museum
- Stempel Bird Collection

A number of other features will also link here—from wildlife areas to wineries, antique stores to trail hubs. When coupled with [www.porchlights.net](http://www.porchlights.net), this physical route embraces the whole of the region in incomparable programming, access and memorable experiences.

Additional Highlight: The Loess Bus—Due to the magnitude and breathtaking nature of this loop, we propose using Porchlight’s Loess Bus to allow for chartered group tours along the route.

### Significant features of this plan include:

- Folk Arts Center construction and promotion
- Local community cultural institutions redevelopment/restoration
- Way-finding
- Park campground expansions—particularly Lake Manawa and Willow Lake “Glampgrounds”

### Early Champions:

Arts 59 Committee and Partners, Folk Arts Center Board of Directors, Department of Cultural Affairs, Iowa Tourism

### Lead Coordinators:

**Loop—Arts 59 Committee**

**Folks Arts Center Board of Directors**

### Convener: Golden Hills RC&D

#### Let's Get Started!

- Convene coordinating team through RC&D with Arts 59 Committee
- Secure way-finding/directional signage and branding studies
- Create route maps-and-stops collateral—coordinate distribution with Iowa DOT/Loess Discovery Welcome and Porchlights
- Plan launch event—expanding past Arts 59 Corridor program

## Ridges and Rivers: Explore!— Rugged accomplishments, serene adventure

### Order of Magnitude Cost Estimate: \$1.8m

The ridges and foothills of the region's Northwest Territory won't be tamed for the faint-hearted. Instead, through footpaths, exploration and orienteering, we aid the backpacker in a remote wilderness experience—ranging from the Loess Hills State Forest parcels and the Little Sioux Delta through Gleason-Hubel, Round Lake and the many wildlife sanctuaries along the Missouri including the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge.

With careful planning and partnership of key agencies including public hunting proponents, we provide tools, adventure camping sites, and landscape-sensitive facilities to support crest-and-valley wilderness hikes, just-a-bedroll-required overnight stay, and true off-the-grid adventure. We anticipate early routes in

Northwest Harrison County and expansion to all counties in the region over time.

### Early Champions:

Loess Hills State Forest  
Iowa DNR/State Forests  
Federal Agencies  
Iowa Explorers Club  
Iowa Outdoors Unlimited

### Significant new/enhanced features of this plan include:

- Ongoing natural resources protection
- Identification of additional land protection opportunities connecting the current natural resources destinations
- Identification of additional public hunting lands

### Lead Coordinator: Harrison County Conservation Board

Harrison County Conservation Board, as lead coordinator, will work with the early champions

and the Protection Committee of the Loess Hills Alliance to appropriately reach out to landowners in the area as Ridges and Rivers takes shape. Harrison County will take the lead on initiating the kick-off project with the Loess Hills State Forest – a Ridges and Rivers stretch from Murray Hill to Saw Mill Hollow in Harrison County (see Map). Facilitated leadership will grow for this initiative as the network of trails expands to the more southern reaches of the region.

### Let's Get Started!

- ✓ Convene the partners for route and camping site discussions
- Develop brand and way-finding; research app potential/requirements
- Establish maps and identify adventure camping needs
- Identifying priority projects for launch



## Supporting Initiatives

The proposals described above require a series of supporting features including:

- Branding and identity study for the region
- Marketing and promotion planning
- A multi-layered way-finding plan
- Prioritized habitat restoration/climate preparation planning
- Interpretive app study and development

## Longer-Term Initiatives

One of the core missions of the LHMRR Parks to People initiative is to create long-term collaboration and support for all regional parks, recreation and cultural projects. To this end, the region's work does not stop with the successful implementation of the Priority Initiatives. Longer-term initiatives that further support the strategic directions are worthy of support as sufficient progress is made with the initiatives outlined above. The broad description of the longer-term initiatives is specifically meant to allow flexibility to changing needs, resources and opportunities.

### City and County Park Improvements

While this plan focuses on a few key priority properties and their connections, the region places a high value on all of our parkland and green spaces. That is why this plan highlights "City and County Park improvements" as a longer-term initiative. Throughout the planning process, it was clear that there is more demand than current resources can support.

### Glenwood Environmental Education Center

This project has been under consideration for some time and work on this effort continues within the region. The scope of this project is still under discussion. Proposed here as a short-term initiative is an associated welcome portal. This project will provide notable opportunities for archaeological science,

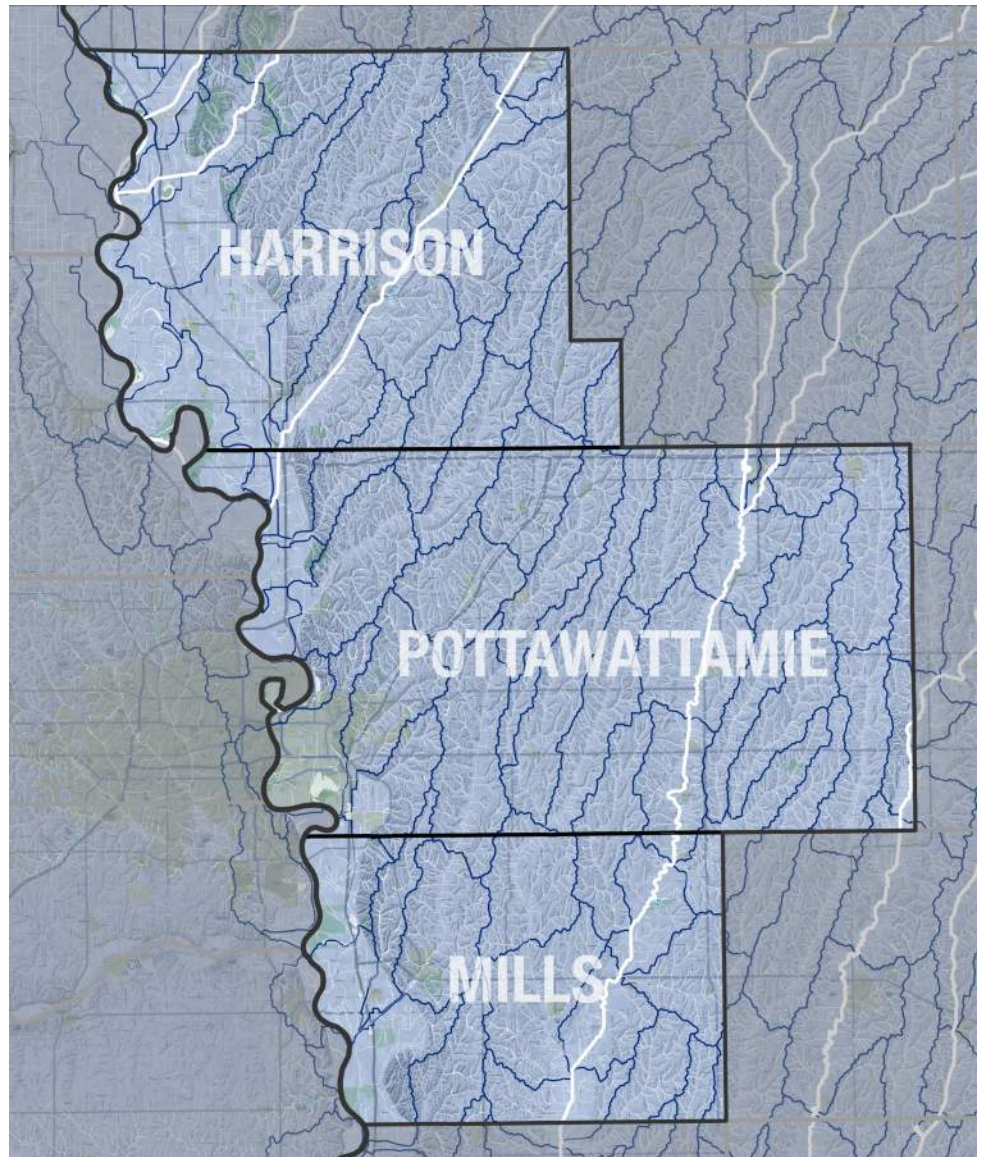
heritage studies and historical tourism. Few sites exist as rich with historical significance as the Glenwood property.

### Sub-watershed Demonstration

A location is not specified in this plan, but the sensitive nature of the Loess soils prompts this region to pay particular heed to the complex interrelationships among soil, water health, flooding and agricultural and urban practices. Isolating a sub-watershed for full control for experimentation and demonstration fits the unique geological features of this region.

### Improved Public Hunting and Fishing

As explained a little later in this document, public hunting lands in the LHMRR region are a scarce resource. By increasing not only the quantity of public hunting and fishing lands but the quality as well, the entire region will have even more opportunities to get out and experience the great outdoors.



*Watersheds in the Loess Hills Missouri River Region*



### Improved Public/Private Partnerships

The area has quite a few great examples of how the private sector is supporting outdoor exploration. One example is the Mt. Crescent Ski Area, where the winter months bring the expected skiing and snowboarding opportunities. However, the summer months bring adventure park experiences - ziplines and zorbing. Using these existing partnerships as examples can help the region foster more unique partnerships and start to bring private investment into our parks.

### Year-round Outdoor Programming

Perhaps coupled with adventure activities, the region anticipates the need for its overall success to have outdoor experiences available year-round. Snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, downhill, and tracking/snow shoeing are among the outdoor sports mentioned, but this feature could involve any number of programs—even interactive arts activities (e.g., snow or ice sculpting).

### Conservation/Habitat Restoration

Achieving the LHMRR strategic directions depends on effective conservation and habitat restoration throughout the region. The region intends to incorporate the protection and enhancement of natural resources in all projects implemented under this plan. The region will partner with Watershed Management Authorities, conservation districts, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services and other key stakeholders in conservation to protect our natural assets.

The region holds no shortage of landscape restoration opportunities—in existing parks at all levels, along stream corridors and in lands not yet identified for their potential. As this plan maps soils, slopes, wetlands and species richness, additional focal points within the region surface for restoration potential. Through implementing this plan, the LHMRR intends to support individual organizations' restoration projects and identify projects for which the Region can lead the charge.

The potential for protecting floodways and wetlands, while at the same time increasing wildlife viewing opportunities, is especially great—most obviously near the Missouri River, but throughout the region as well, from the Boyer River in Harrison County to the north through the length of the Nishnabotna, east and south.

### Signature Art Trail/Bridges Series

The success of the High Trestle Trail Bridge art feature and similar installations around the country prompts serious interest in improved integration of art and/or signature bridges—particularly in a region where these features are well-started.





## **Celebrate 2020**

Iowa led the nation in the establishment of a state park system. We now approach the century anniversary of that system. The Iowa Parks Foundation was formed in part to celebrate that milestone. The IPF, in partnership with friends groups, park systems at all levels, and these regional planning collaborators, continues to focus on preparing our parks system through facilities, programming, and ongoing support for a significant 2020 Century of Parks Celebration.

The LHMRR intends to support that significant accomplishment by collaborating with all state park celebration plans and by establishing a significant celebratory event of its own. The Loess Hills and Heritage Week kicks off in September of 2017 with the intent of perfecting and growing the event for a significant celebration in September of 2020, in honor of the park system anniversary.

## **Wilson Island State Recreation Area: Iowa DNR Regional Park Concept**

As a popular natural setting for recreation, Wilson Island leads to memory-making and great adventures. The Iowa DNR operates Wilson Island as a State Recreation Area. Eleven miles southwest of Missouri Valley, the 544 acre area offers 125 campsites (82 with electricity), shower and restroom facilities, RV dump stations, playground, two shelters, picnic area and boat ramps onto the Missouri River. The area also has 5.5 miles of multi-use trails and is a public hunting area. The hunting aspect is the difference between a state park (a refuge) and recreation area.

The flood of 2011 severely damaged Wilson Island. Therefore, much of its infrastructure is new. Redevelopment considered future flooding, infrastructure protection and timely, cost-effective evacuation if required.

The area draws visitors locally and internationally. Many area users are from the Council Bluffs/ Omaha metro area, but with proximity to Interstates 29 and 680, Wilson Island routinely hosts travelers from across the U.S. and other countries.

The area fills several important niches:

- Close enough to a metro area so weekend trips are feasible, yet it still feels like getting away.
- One of the few camping areas along the Missouri River, drawing recreational boaters.
- Angler appeal.
- Cycling popular given flat topography and asphalt road system.
- Flat, spacious campsites available.
- A great “base camp” for campers wanting to experience the Loess Hills, DeSoto Refuge and the various amenities in Omaha and Council Bluffs.

### **Wilson Island Goals:**

#### **Increase day use.**

In the last year, Wilson Island has partnered with the Missouri Valley chamber of commerce, Missouri Valley Fire Department and the Friends of Wilson Island to host two trail runs and a car show.

#### **Expand recreation, skills-building and river interface.**

Install archery range, primitive campsites for river kayakers and canoers, riverside fish cleaning.

#### **Create hard-surface trail connections.**

Within 11 miles are two national wildlife refuges, two county conservation board areas, four DNR wildlife areas, a state historical site as well as a scenic byway. This does not include city parks available in Missouri Valley and Blair, Ne. The intimacy provided by bicycle travel would prove a great way to experience all of these areas as well as the rivers, agriculture

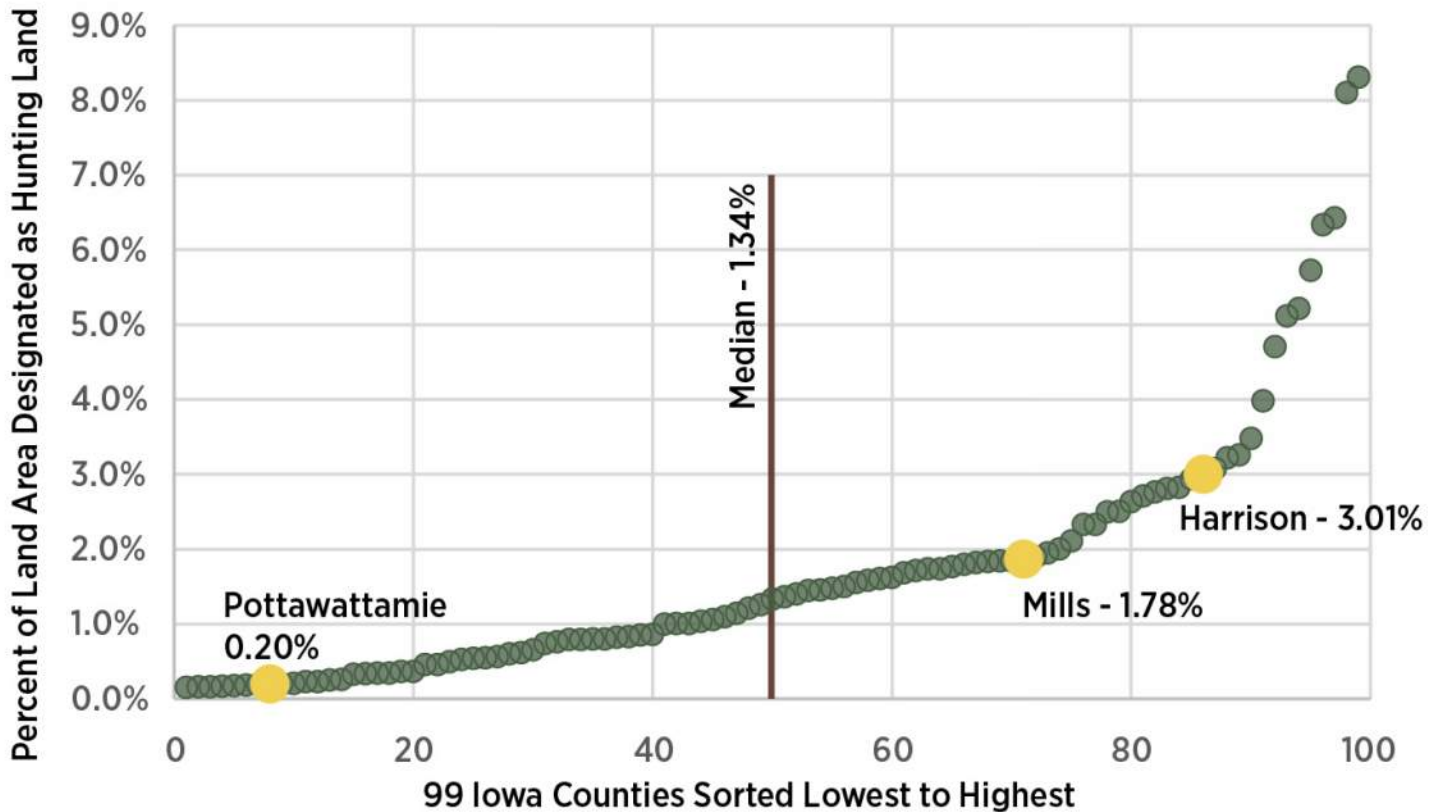
and unique topography of the Missouri River Valley and Loess Hills along the way.

#### **Enhance programs and partnerships.**

Concepts of interest include sharing naturalists, using technology for interpretation/information access and introducing tent-camping to those with little to no exposure, potentially partnering with schools and other parks programs.

Overall, Wilson Island personnel place high value on partnering through this regional planning process.

## Percent of Hunting Land in Iowa by County



### The Future of Hunting

Access to hunting lands provides rich opportunities for habitat protection, recreation in the great outdoors, and also serves as a healthy food source for many Iowans. Overall, Iowa ranks 49th out of 50 states in public hunting grounds, despite a relatively strong hunting culture. In terms of in-state rankings, hunting access in the LHMRR is not robust. As a percentage of the county's total land mass available for public hunting, a case can be made that all three counties have room for some improvement, with Pottawattamie County in particular need. Only 0.2% of Pottawattamie County's lands are available for public hunting, giving it a rank of 92nd of the 99 counties. Mills ranks 29th with 1.9% and Harrison ranks 14th with 3.0% of its lands available for public hunting.

The median for public hunting lands (as a percent of total county lands) is 1.34% and the mean (average) is 1.7% - leaving Mills slightly above average, Harrison nicely above average and Pottawattamie County well below.

This plan encourages the development of partnerships with the many strong habitat and conservation organizations, including Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, and Wild Turkey Federation, among many more.

Additionally, this plan proposes all three counties work to identify private land owners willing to participate in the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' Iowa Habitat and Access Program (IHAP). Landowners who participate in this program receive funding and expertise for habitat improvements when they enroll and allow public access to their land for hunting. IHAP tracts are available for hunting between

September 1 and May 31st. Designated IHAP areas are posted with signs and are regularly patrolled by Iowa DNR conservation officers.



## Strategic Direction

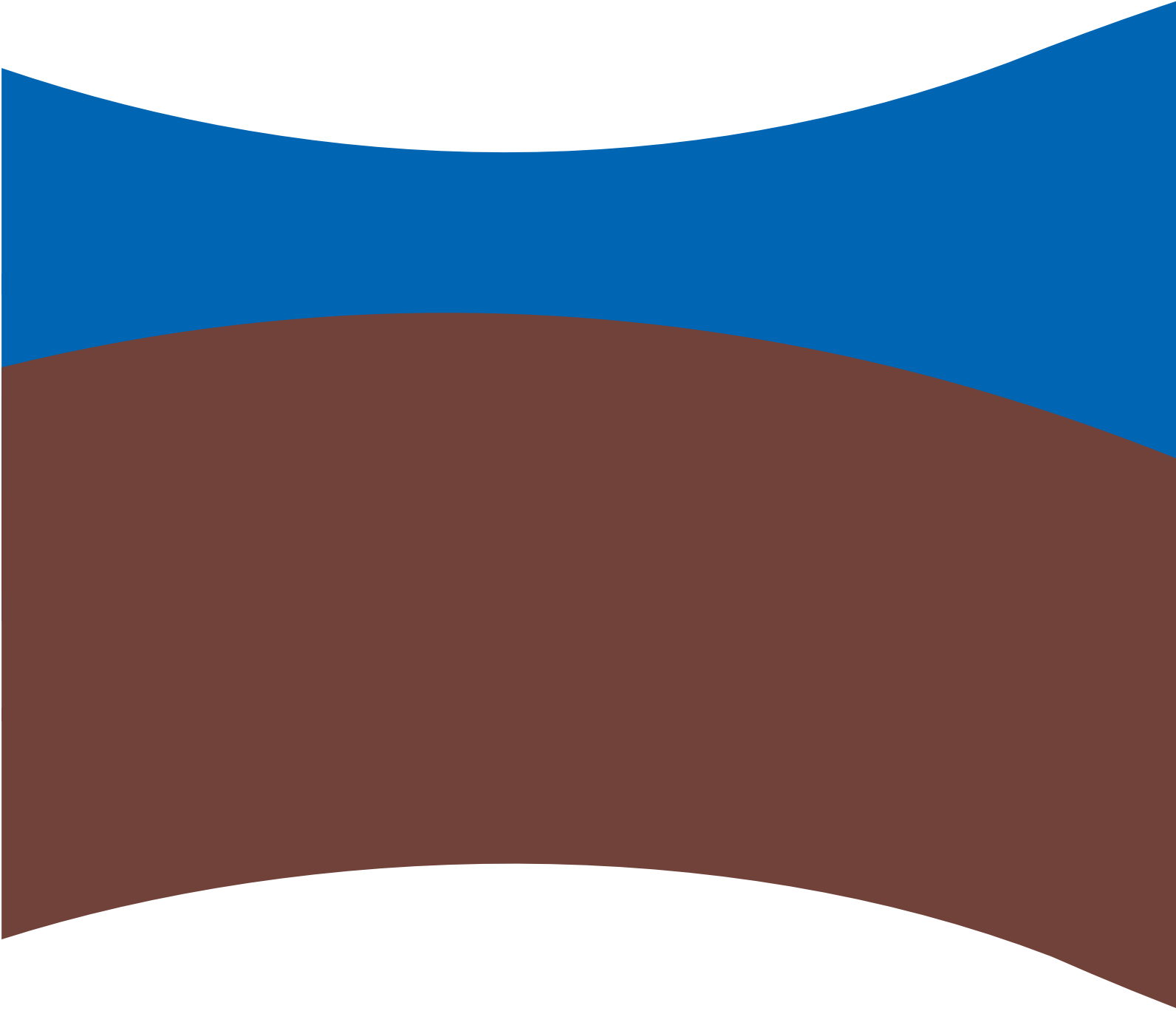
Longer-Term Initiative	Great Spaces, Great Experiences	Connected Parks, People & Pathways	Healthy Parks, Healthy People	Community & Cultural Vitality	Lasting Legacy
<b>City and County Park Improvements</b>	●	●	●	●	●
<b>Glenwood Discovery Center</b>	●	●	●	●	
<b>Year Round Outdoor Programming</b>	●	●	●	●	●
<b>Signature Art Trail/Bridge Series</b>	●	●	●	●	●
<b>Conservation/Habitat Restoration</b>	●		●		●

## Fundraising Strategy

The LHMRR intends to focus some level of fundraising on a project by project basis while at the same time marketing for the whole of the scope involved in each of these initiatives. Foundation support for projects will be aggressively pursued by project leads and partners. These project teams will further pursue private individual contributions, ongoing grantsmanship (public-private), and leveraging of any support directed toward the region's efforts. The region intends to establish a marketing fund to promote collaborative promotion of projects as they develop and to fundraise within the regional context.

Through the Southwest Iowa Nature Trails Board and other structures in play to support RAGBRAI 2016, the executive team and region intend to expand RAGBRAI fundraising and partnerships into broader, ongoing community support for the whole of the Loess Hills Missouri River Region.







PART THREE:  
FACILITATING SUCCESS

## Advocacy and Economic Impact

Understanding the economic impacts of this plan will be an ongoing challenge and opportunity. This early assessment, based on the work of ISU's Dan Otto, offers insight into the potential. As this plan moves forward, increasing the understanding of economic impacts of the whole of this plan will dramatically help support it.

### The Economic Value of Outdoor Recreation

According to the Economic Value of Outdoor Activities in Iowa report which was completed in 2012:

“Accessing outdoor recreation opportunities and improving the quality of the natural resource environment that support recreation are important to Iowans. Our current report documents continued increase in the utilization of Iowa’s outdoor recreational resources since a benchmark study in 2007. Along with the increased utilization is an increased economic impact as Iowans spend on equipment, travel, and supplies to enjoy Iowa’s parks, lakes, rivers, and trails. The growth in outdoor recreation participation occurs alongside production agriculture in

many parts of Iowa. The co-existence of these two major resource based industries presents a challenge for successfully encouraging the growth of both industries in Iowa. In examining the magnitude and growth of outdoor recreation activities in Iowa, our report underscores several major points:” “Outdoor recreation opportunities are increasingly important to Iowans.”

- “Outdoor recreation spending is a big business in Iowa.”
- “Considerable attention is being paid and substantial effort has gone into improving water quality in the state.”
- “Studies have shown that recreational amenities and quality of life opportunities are important to attracting business and entrepreneurs.”

- “Increased access to outdoor parks and recreation amenities can contribute to lower health care costs for Iowans by increasing participation in outdoor physical activity.”

Estimated spending values noted in this study:

**State Parks:** \$45.53 per party for camping and \$41.77 per part for day trips

**County Parks:** \$25.37 per person

**Lakes:** \$110.31 at Lake Manawa per visitor party

**Rivers and Streams:** \$34.75 per/person for interior rivers and \$46.56 per/person for Missouri and Mississippi Rivers

### Summary of Visits and Economic Impacts of Outdoor Recreation Activities in Iowa (2011)

\$mm	Visits	Spending	Value Added	Income	Jobs (000s)
State Parks	3.7	785.9	376.4	216.2	7.5
County Parks	24.0	608.9	291.6	167.5	5.8
Trails	1.9	22.1	8.5	4.9	0.2
Lakes	12.0	1,210.0	394.8	302.2	14.8
Rivers	18.8	823.5	268.8	130.0	6.4
Total	60.3	3,450.8	1,340.3	820.8	34.5
Duplicates from lakes located in parks	3.8	376.9	180.5	103.7	3.6
<b>Net Total</b>	<b>56.6</b>	<b>3,073.9</b>	<b>1,159.7</b>	<b>717.1</b>	<b>31.0</b>

## 2014 County Impact

County	Expenditures (\$MM)	Payroll (\$MM)	Employment (\$000)	State Tax Receipts (\$MM)	Local Tax Receipts (\$MM)
<b>Harrison</b>	<b>27.92</b>	<b>3.37</b>	<b>0.22</b>	<b>1.45</b>	<b>0.19</b>
<b>Mills</b>	<b>8.09</b>	<b>0.92</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>0.59</b>	<b>0.07</b>
<b>Pottawattamie</b>	<b>304.79</b>	<b>52.86</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>16.86</b>	<b>4.48</b>
<b>Iowa</b>	<b>8,059.21</b>	<b>1,228.57</b>	<b>66.47</b>	<b>374.73</b>	<b>111.33</b>

## Monitoring Success

Strategic Directions	Indicators of Success/Measures	Early Outcomes (Demonstrating Progress)
<b>Great Spaces, Great Experiences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth in tourism</li> <li>• Growth in use/attendance of parks, trails, cultural features</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion of overnight stay (facilities and use)</li> <li>• Construction of at least two Discovery Web Portals in the next two years</li> <li>• Launch of branding and marketing plans</li> </ul>
<b>Connections</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth in trail miles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convening a Harrison County trails planning task force</li> <li>• Building 37 miles of connecting trail over three years</li> <li>• Extension of Nishnabotna water trail</li> </ul>
<b>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved public health rankings for Harrison, Pottawattamie and Mills Counties</li> <li>• Growth in acres of restored landscape</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch of Ridges &amp; Rivers: Explore!</li> <li>• Buffering of Lake Manawa</li> </ul>
<b>Community &amp; Cultural Vitality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population stasis or growth</li> <li>• Growth in programs and facilities in arts, recreation, nature and tourism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch of Porchlights</li> <li>• Launch of Arts and Nature Loop including way-finding and mapping</li> <li>• Folk Arts Center designed</li> </ul>
<b>Lasting Legacy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth in partnerships with local and state decision-makers</li> <li>• Growth in volunteerism and advocacy</li> <li>• Growth in private dollars dedicated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passage of sustainable/ongoing funding for parks, trails, arts, heritage and/or community revitalization</li> <li>• Increased support for REAP</li> <li>• Public-private funding of initiatives outlined here</li> </ul>

### Building a Lasting Legacy

Just as efforts to establish and support a formal regional collaborative are a necessary precursor to successful implementation of the priority initiatives, so too is it imperative to maintain the assets built and developed through these initiatives. Sustainable and predictable funding sources are necessary for the long-term survival of our natural, cultural and recreational resources.

The LHMRR region is particularly concerned about the ever-increasing reduction in funding for necessary facilities maintenance, operation and support of the State Parks system. As laid out in the Green Ribbon Commission's Vision: Parks to People Plan, the number one "to-do" is to grow basic agency support and build a strong parks system on a base of dependable

funding for basic park infrastructure and operations.

In honoring that vision, the LHMRR region challenges our stakeholders, partners, private entities and the people of Iowa to demand resources to restore our parks to a baseline level of quality. Only then can we work as a state to enhance our exceptional places and experiences. The LHMRR proposed to do this through the following activities:

- Support Iowa's Water and Land Legacy (IWILL) by advocating for full funding for the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund
- Develop the LHMRR organization into a sustainable entity advocating for parks funding
- Include operating and maintenance support in all project budgets
- Develop working relationships with state parks staff, decision-makers and legislators
- Celebrate successes and build public support for parks, natural resources, public health and culture
- Articulate and continue to quantify the economic benefits of this and other regional Parks to People plans (see first two pages of this section for early benefit highlights)
- Identify funding opportunities for key projects, necessary upgrades and operating support



### Let's Make it Last

The Loess Hills Missouri River Region has laid out an aggressive plan to begin implementing the shared vision; but this is only a rough roadmap to get us started. While the vision remains the same, the plan, and the region, will continue to evolve. The tremendous work that

will come out of this plan will not have been possible without the dedication and input of the partners, Stakeholder Group, Leadership Team, and the citizens of the region. As a collaborative region, honest evaluation of our successes, failures and opportunities will allow us to adjust the plan as needed to productively meet our Strategic Directions and to fulfill

our shared vision. The region will continue to advocate for baseline sustainable funding for our parks system, stewardship of our natural and cultural resources, and inclusion of healthy parks and healthy people in infrastructure development.





APX

APPENDIX



## Opinion of Probable Cost

Description	Qty	Unit	Unit Cost	Subtotal
<b>RIDGES &amp; RIVERS: EXPLORE!</b>				
Murray Hill - Sawmill Hollow Crest Trail	14.9	MI	\$33,700	\$502,200
Murray Hill - Sawmill Hollow Crest Trailheads	2	EA	\$35,000	\$70,000
Old Town - Hitchcock Crest Trail	10.7	MI	\$33,700	\$360,600
Old Town - Hitchcock Crest Trailheads	2	EA	\$35,000	\$70,000
Folsom Point - Mile Hill Lake Crest Trail	9.1	MI	\$33,700	\$306,700
Folsom Point - Mile Hill Lake Crest Trailheads	2	EA	\$35,000	\$70,000
Backpacking Destinations	20	EA	\$10,500	\$210,000
Boyer River Paddle Route	33.3	MI	\$2,588	\$86,200
Mosquito Creek Paddle Route	27.9	MI	\$2,588	\$72,200
West Nish Paddle Route	20.2	MI	\$2,588	\$52,300
East Nish Paddle Route	6.9	MI	\$2,588	\$17,900
Roadway Directional Signage (40 signs per county)	1	LS	\$30,000	\$30,000
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,848,100</b>
<b>LOESS DISCOVERY WEB</b>				
Missouri Valley Discovery Center Kiosk & Signage	1	LS	\$20,000	\$20,000
Avoca Discovery Center Kiosk & Signage	1	LS	\$20,000	\$20,000
Lake Manawa Discovery Center	1	LS	\$575,000	\$575,000
Glenwood Discovery Center	1	LS	\$575,000	\$575,000
Willow Lake Interpretation	1	LS	\$500,000	\$500,000
Overlook Tower @ Mile Hill Lake near Glenwood	1	LS	\$150,000	\$150,000
Macedonia Improvements and Interpretation	1	LS	\$50,000	\$50,000
Hitchcock Improvements	1	LS	\$250,000	\$250,000
Hitchcock Interpretation	1	LS	\$50,000	\$50,000
Malvern Improvements and Interpretation	1	LS	\$50,000	\$50,000
LHMRR Tourism Website Development and Tech Assistance	1	LS	\$80,000	\$80,000
Interstate Signage (assume 10 signs)	1	LS	\$10,000	\$10,000
Roadway Directional Signage (40 signs per county)	1	LS	\$30,000	\$30,000
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$2,360,000</b>
<b>PORCHLIGHTS</b>				
Porchlights Website Development and Tech Assistance	1	LS	\$100,000	\$100,000
Loess Bus (capital costs)	1	ALLOW	\$70,000	\$70,000
Table-at-Farm Food Truck	1	ALLOW	\$120,000	\$120,000
Event signage	1	LS	\$3,000	\$3,000
Marketing	1	LS	\$10,000	\$10,000
Start-up Costs (office space, office equipment)	1	LS	\$7,500	\$7,500
Event materials (tables, chairs, tent, lights)	1	LS	\$10,000	\$10,000
3-year Operation Costs/Coordination	3	YR	\$40,000	\$120,000
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$440,500</b>

**Opinion of Probable Cost**

Description	Qty	Unit	Unit Cost	Subtotal
<b>LOESS ARTS &amp; NATURE LOOP</b>				
Directional Signage	195	MI	\$475	\$92,700
Lake Manawa State Park Expansion & Buffer	1	LS	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000
Lake Manawa Glampground (assumes 30 shelters)	1	LS	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Interpretive Signage at Each Destination Town	7	LS	\$8,000	\$56,000
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$6,148,700</b>
<b>FRONTIER IOWA TRAILS (TRAILHEAD &amp; SIGNAGE ONLY)</b>				
Harrison County Trailheads	120	MI	\$4,700	\$564,000
Harrison County Directional Signage	120	MI	\$675	\$81,000
Pottawattamie County Trailheads	116	MI	\$4,700	\$545,200
Pottawattamie County Directional Signage	116	MI	\$675	\$78,300
Mills County Trailheads	60	MI	\$4,700	\$282,000
Mills County Directional Signage	60	MI	\$675	\$40,500
Wabash Trace Interpretive Signs	1	LS	\$25,000	\$25,000
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,616,000</b>
			<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>\$12,413,300</b>
			<b>CONTINGENCY (10%)</b>	<b>\$1,241,330</b>
			<b>TOTAL COST</b>	<b>\$13,654,630</b>

<b>Significant Capital Investments</b>				
<b>FRONTIER IOWA TRAILS (TRAILS ONLY)</b>				
Harrison County Trails	120	MI	\$350,000	\$42,000,000
Pottawattamie County Trails	116	MI	\$350,000	\$40,600,000
Mills County Trails	60	MI	\$350,000	\$21,000,000
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$103,600,000</b>
<b>SIGNIFICANT CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS (PRIMARY VERTICAL INFRASTRUCTURE)</b>				
Willow Lake Nature Center	1	LS	\$4,000,000	\$4,000,000
Lake Manawa Site Improvements (landscape, drives, etc.)	1	LS	\$13,600,000	\$13,600,000
Loess Hills Archaeological Interpretive Center	1	LS	\$8,000,000	\$8,000,000
Macedonia Folk Arts Center	1	LS	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000
Mills County Environmental Education Center	1	LS	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000
Pony Creek Expansion	1	LS	\$265,000	\$265,000
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$32,365,000</b>
			<b>SUB-TOTAL</b>	<b>\$135,965,000</b>
<b>EARLY POTENTIAL MATCH (LAKE MANAWA PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT)</b>				<b>\$31,000,000</b>
			<b>CONTINGENCY (10%)</b>	<b>\$16,696,500</b>
			<b>TOTAL PROJECT COST</b>	<b>\$195,347,130</b>

### Opinion of Probable Cost (cont'd)

Description	Qty	Unit	Unit Cost	Subtotal
<b>PLANNED TRAIL PHASING</b>				
Harrison County Trails				TBD
Pottawattamie County Trails				
Phase 1 Trails (Council Bluffs to Neola, Underwood)	1	LS	\$5,550,000	\$5,550,000
Phase 2 Trails (Council Bluffs to Hitchcock, Crescent)	1	LS	\$4,850,000	\$4,850,000
Phase 3 Trails (Oakland to Hancock)	1	LS	\$1,400,000	\$1,400,000
Mills County Trails				
Phase 1 Trails (Glenwood trail and bridge relocation)	1	LS	\$1,600,000	\$1,600,000
Phase 2 Trails (Glenwood to Mineola)	1	LS	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000
Phase 3 Trails (Glenwood to Nebraska on Levees)	1	LS	\$4,500,000	\$4,500,000
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$11,800,000</b>

### Opinion of Probable Cost - By Phase

Description	Qty	Unit	Unit Cost	Subtotal
<b>Phase One: 1-3 years</b>				
Murray Hill - Sawmill Hollow Crest Trail	14.9	MI	\$33,700	\$502,200
Murray Hill - Sawmill Hollow Crest Trailheads	2	EA	\$35,000	\$70,000
Water Trail Roadway Directional Signage (40 signs per county)	1	LS	\$30,000	\$30,000
Porchlights Website Development and Tech Assistance	1	LS	\$100,000	\$100,000
Loess Bus (capital costs)	1	ALLOW	\$70,000	\$70,000
Porchlights Table-at-Farm Food Truck	1	ALLOW	\$120,000	\$120,000
Porchlights Event signage	1	LS	\$3,000	\$3,000
Porchlights Marketing	1	LS	\$10,000	\$10,000
Porchlights Start-up Costs (office space, office equipment)	1	LS	\$7,500	\$7,500
Porchlights Event materials (tables, chairs, tent, lights)	1	LS	\$10,000	\$10,000
3-year Operation Costs/Coordination	3	YR	\$40,000	\$120,000
Loess Arts & Nature Loop Directional Signage	195	MI	\$475	\$92,700
Mills County Environmental Education Center	1.0	LS	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000
Wabash Trace Interpretive Signs	1	LS	\$25,000	\$25,000
Pony Creek Expansion	1.0	LS	\$265,000	\$265,000
Pottawattamie County Trails - Phase One	1	LS	\$5,550,000	\$5,550,000
Mills County Trails - Phase One	1.0	LS	\$1,600,000	\$1,600,000
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$10,075,400</b>

**Opinion of Probable Cost - By Phase (cont'd)**

Description	Qty	Unit	Unit Cost	Subtotal
<b>Phase Two: 3-5 years</b>				
Backpacking Destinations	20	EA	\$10,500	\$210,000
Missouri Valley Discovery Center Kiosk & Signage	1	LS	\$20,000	\$20,000
Willow Lake Interpretation	1	LS	\$500,000	\$500,000
Hitchcock Recreation Area Improvements	1	LS	\$250,000	\$250,000
Lake Manawa State Park Expansion & Buffer	1	LS	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000
Interpretive Signage at Each Destination Town	7	LS	\$8,000	\$56,000
Pottawattamie County Trailheads	40	MI	\$4,700	\$188,000
Pottawattamie County Trail Directional Signage	40	MI	\$675	\$27,000
Mills County Trailheads	39.0	MI	\$4,700	\$183,300
Mills County Trail Directional Signage	39.0	MI	\$675	\$26,400
Harrison County Trailheads	20.0	MI	\$4,700	\$94,000
Harrison County Trail Directional Signage	20.0	MI	\$675	\$13,500
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$6,568,200</b>
<b>Phase Three: 5-10 years</b>				
Old Town - Hitchcock Crest Trail	10.7	MI	\$33,700	\$360,600
Old Town - Hitchcock Crest Trailheads	2	EA	\$35,000	\$70,000
Folsom Point - Mile Hill Lake Crest Trail	9.1	MI	\$33,700	\$306,700
Folsom Point - Mile Hill Lake Crest Trailheads	2	EA	\$35,000	\$70,000
West Nish Water Trail	20.2	MI	\$2,588	\$52,300
Avoca Discovery Center Kiosk & Signage	1	LS	\$20,000	\$20,000
Lake Manawa Discovery Center Building	1	LS	\$575,000	\$575,000
Glenwood Discovery Center	1	LS	\$575,000	\$575,000
Macedonia Improvements and Interpretation	1	LS	\$50,000	\$50,000
Hitchcock Interpretation	1	LS	\$50,000	\$50,000
Malvern Improvements and Interpretation	1	LS	\$50,000	\$50,000
LHMRR Tourism Website Development and Tech Assistance	1	LS	\$80,000	\$80,000
Interstate Signage (assume 10 signs)	1	LS	\$10,000	\$10,000
Roadway Directional Signage (40 signs per county)	1	LS	\$30,000	\$30,000
Willow Lake Nature Center	1	LS	\$4,000,000	\$4,000,000
Loess Hills Archaeological Intepretive Center	1	LS	\$8,000,000	\$8,000,000
Macedonia Folk Arts Center	1	LS	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000
Pottawattamie County Trails - Phase Two	1	LS	\$6,850,000	\$6,850,000
Mills County Trails - Phase Two	1.0	LS	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000
Pottawattamie County Trailheads	40	MI	\$4,700	\$188,000
Pottawattamie County Trail Directional Signage	40	MI	\$675	\$27,000
Mills County Trailheads	39.0	MI	\$4,700	\$183,300
Mills County Trail Directional Signage	39.0	MI	\$675	\$26,400
Harrison County Trailheads	20.0	MI	\$4,700	\$94,000
Harrison County Trail Directional Signage	20.0	MI	\$675	\$13,500
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$29,681,800</b>

## Opinion of Probable Cost - By Phase (cont'd)

Description	Qty	Unit	Unit Cost	Subtotal
<b>Phase Four: 10-15 years</b>				
Boyer River Water Trail	33.3	MI	\$2,588	\$86,200
Mosquito Creek Water Trail	27.9	MI	\$2,588	\$72,300
East Nish Water Trail	6.9	MI	\$2,588	\$17,900
Overlook Tower @ Mile Hill Lake near Glenwood	1	LS	\$150,000	\$150,000
Lake Manawa Glampground (assumes 30 shelters)	1	LS	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Lake Manawa Site Improvements (landscape, drives, etc.)	1	LS	\$13,600,000	\$13,600,000
Pottawattamie County Trails - Phase Three	1	LS	\$1,400,000	\$1,400,000
Mills County Trails - Phase Three	1.0	LS	\$4,500,000	\$4,500,000
Pottawattamie County Trailheads	40	MI	\$4,700	\$188,000
Pottawattamie County Trail Directional Signage	40	MI	\$675	\$27,000
Mills County Trailheads	39.0	MI	\$4,700	\$183,300
Mills County Trail Directional Signage	39.0	MI	\$675	\$26,400
Harrison County Trailheads	20.0	MI	\$4,700	\$94,000
Harrison County Trail Directional Signage	20.0	MI	\$675	\$13,500
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$21,358,600</b>

## Region: By the Numbers

### Streams

1,057 miles of named streams – That’s nearly the distance to fly to Washington DC!

3,645 miles of tributaries (unnamed streams, ditches, intermittent streams) – That’s nearly the distance to fly to Hawaii!

All water flows generally west to the Missouri river.

Source: National Hydrology Dataset

### Canoe Routes

Nearly 50 (49.6) miles of canoe routes across 5 waterways (Missouri River, West Nishnabotna River, Nishnabota River, Boyer River, and Little Sioux River)

Source: IA DNR

### Wetlands

	Spots	Acres
Freshwater Emergent	3,455	7,040.7
Freshwater forested/Scrub	2,101	7,482.5
Freshwater pond	3,031	3,272.1
Lake	35	2,595.7
Riverine	285	6,391.3

26,782.3 acres (1.99%) of LHMRR area

Source: IA DNR & National Wetlands Inventory

### Species Richness

170 Bird Species
21 Amphibian Species
43 Reptile Species

Source: IA DNR GAP Analysis

### Trails

Proposed Soft trails:	485.3 miles
Proposed Hard Trails:	703.7 miles
Existing Trails:	
Nature Trail	19.7 miles
Bike Lane	6.6 miles
Paved Trail	14.3 miles

Source: County plans, IA DNR

### Points of Interest

Attractions	45
Food	172
Lodging	71
Recreation	73
Historic	50
Museums	16
Cemetery	168
Church	162

### Parks

	Number	Acres
City	71	805.6
County	52	6,510.8
State	49	24,234.6
TNC	2	275.7
Federal	17	10,142.9

41,969.7 acres (3.12%) of LHMRR area

### Elevation

Low: 917.4 ft. asl  
High: 1,447.1 ft. asl  
529.7 ft. elevation change



