

Executive Summary of Success Loess Hills Missouri River Region

October 25, 2019

On January 19, 2018, the **Loess Hills Missouri River Region** partners, along with Governor Reynolds and the **Iowa Parks Foundation**, launched the second Parks to People region in the state of Iowa. Our task was to activate an ambitious and collaborative master plan, developed with RDG Planning, to increase outdoor recreation amenities and use, celebrate the rural communities in our region, and connect the public to the tremendous natural beauty of the Loess Hills.

Through the generous support of the **MidAmerican Energy Foundation**, the Loess Hills Missouri River Region Board of Directors has leveraged a \$500,000 challenge grant to support more than \$13 million in completed, planned and allied projects throughout Harrison, Pottawattamie and Mills counties through 2020.

Our first supported project (2018) was the **Dream Playground** at Lake Manawa State Park. This sprawling ADA accessible playground was designed by local children and built through herculean volunteer efforts in the community. The playground features a playscape that highlights the local Council Bluffs and Lake Manawa history, interpreted for children and families.

In the summer of 2019, one of our key ideas—an Appalachian style hiking trail along the scenic ridgetops of the Loess Hills—came to fruition. Through a partnership between the Loess Hills State Forest and the Harrison County Conservation Board, **Brent's Trail** was opened to the public. This 8 mile hiking trail through remnant Loess Hills prairie and oak savannas welcomed nearly 200 hikers on its first day.

In 2019, we also launched the **WanderLoess** brand and website to serve as a public web portal supporting public engagement with our parks, trails, culture, and recreational opportunities.

Finally, this year the three County Conservation Boards joined forces to pilot the tri-county **Cabin Initiative** by collaboratively building nine new cabins in the region and partnering through grant funding from the **Iowa West Foundation**. The cabins are slated to open to the public in summer 2020.

Perhaps as exciting as the new projects built and underway, is the incredible partnership and collaboration of the Loess Hills Missouri River Region Board of Directors. This 13-member board has guided and shaped our effort and its members represent diverse expertise in conservation, economic development, and tourism. In October 2019, the board received a Regional Service Award from the Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA) in recognition of their outstanding work.

After two years of growing success, we are eager to continue the momentum and make the Loess Hills Missouri River Parks to People region a vibrant destination to play, explore, and celebrate our parks.

Shawn Koehler, Chair, Loess Hills Missouri River Region

Michelle Wodtke Franks, Executive Director, Golden Hills RC&D



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