



GOLDEN HILLS

RESOURCE CONSERVATION
& DEVELOPMENT

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW



PHOTO BY LANCE BRISBOIS

HISTORY

1981

FORMED AND OPENED
OFFICE IN OAKLAND

2000

BUILT GREEN BUILDING
(CURRENT LOCATION)

2011

ALL RC&DS WERE FEDERALLY
DEFUNDED, RESTRUCTURED
AS 501(C)(3) NON-PROFIT

2021

CELEBRATED 40 YEARS OF
IMPROVING QUALITY OF
LIFE IN SOUTHWEST IOWA



HISTORY

Planning for Golden Hills RC&D was started in 1978 at the suggestion of Ernie Aust, Area Conservationist. Golden Hills RC&D, Inc. opened their office in Oakland, Iowa in August, 1981 with Richard Bolli as Coordinator. Bob Smith of Sidney, Iowa was a member of the organizing committee to help start his RC&D in southwestern Iowa. Bob continued to be very active and was Secretary of the Golden Hills Executive Board from 1990 to 2013.

The Golden Hills RC&D area is comprised of Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Mills, Montgomery, Page, East Pottawattamie, West Pottawattamie, and Shelby counties and Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

In the 1980s most of the projects related to diversification of crops. In 1989, the RC&D Council re-examined its mission, and developed new goals aimed at:

- developing businesses based on the area's natural, cultural and other resources;
- working with local governments on projects to benefit the environment;
- filling gaps in services to people at risk;
- improving water quantity and quality.

This resulted in a growth and diversification of project activity. Projects dealt with a variety of issues, including rural water system development, tourism, small business and local economic development, diversified agriculture, human services referral, and protection of the Loess Hills landscape. These projects also worked to develop local leadership capacity, as hundreds of volunteers provided direction and their own resources to make project concepts become reality.

In 2011, all RC&Ds were federally defunded and Golden Hills was reformed as a non-profit. Primary funding for Golden Hills comes from grants, contracts, and fee for service work.



OUR MISSION

To collaboratively develop and lead community, conservation, and cultural initiatives to improve our quality of life in rural western Iowa.

OUR GOALS

- Develop industries in local communities that utilize local resources.
- Ensure healthy natural resources that meet the needs of agriculture, industry, private use, and recreational facilities.
- Promote and enhance art, culture and historic resources in rural communities
- Collaborate with local governments and organizations on projects that benefit the environment.
- Work on projects that fill gaps in community services to benefit people of southwest Iowa.

CONTACT

Golden Hills RC&D

712 S. Highway 6

PO Box 189

Oakland, IA 51560

712-482-3029



www.goldenhillsrcd.org



info@goldenhillsrcd.org



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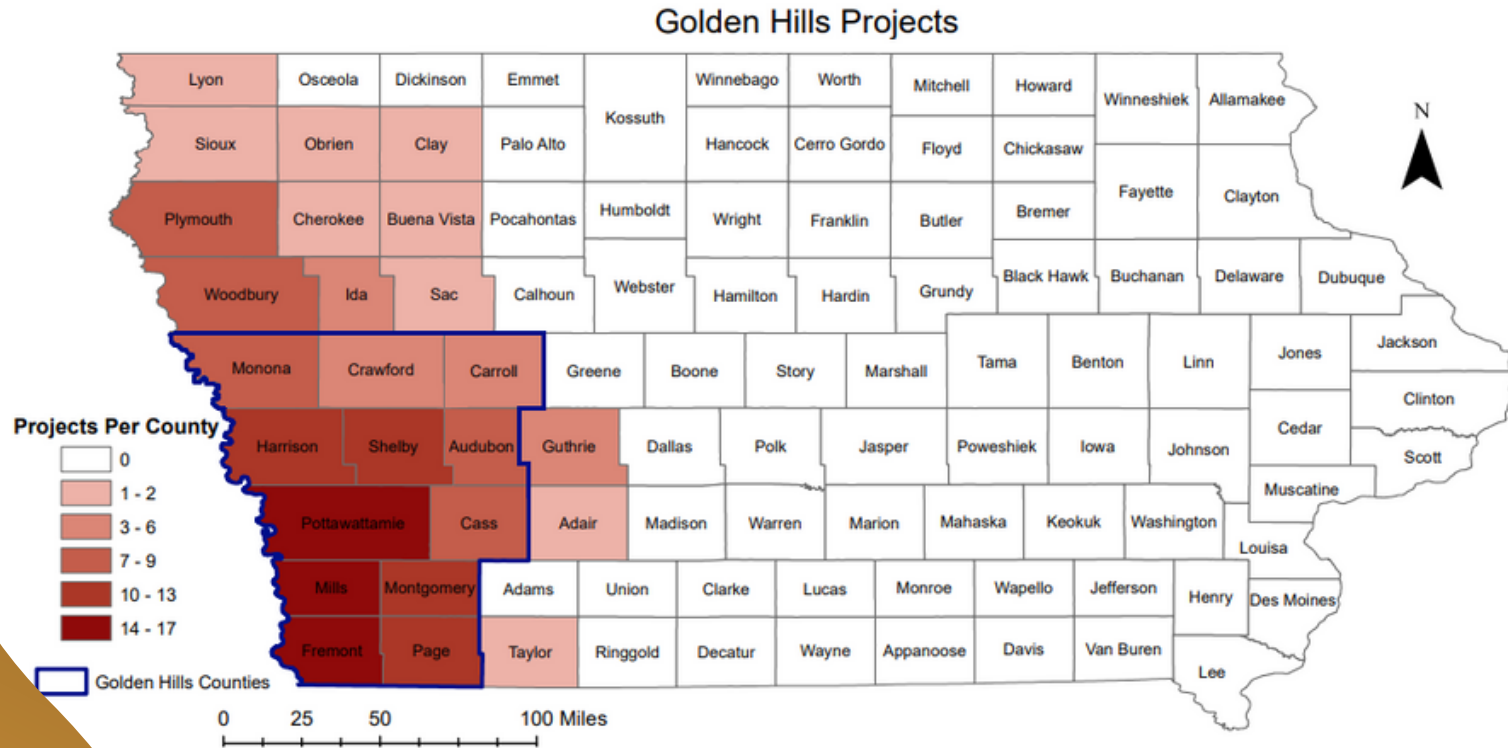
[@goldenhillsrcd](https://www.tiktok.com/@goldenhillsrcd)



WHO WE SERVE

WHO WE SERVE

As of 2023, our official footprint includes the following counties: Audubon, Carroll, Cass, Crawford, Fremont, Harrison, Mills, Monona, Montgomery, Page, Pottawattamie, and Shelby. Several of our projects, however, extend beyond these counties.



MEET OUR TEAM



CARA MORGAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
CARA.MORGAN@GOLDENHILLSRCD.ORG

Cara Marker-Morgan joined Golden Hills RC&D in 2017, working on watershed management projects. Cara and her husband Brandon have 3 children, Mavryc, Czandrya, and Cytara. She enjoys the outdoors and living in the Loess Hills, taking advantage of everything the hills have to offer.



LANCE BRISBOIS
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
LANCE.BRISBOIS@GOLDENHILLSRCD.ORG

Lance started in 2014 working on water trails and quickly moved into other outdoor recreation, land stewardship, and local foods projects. He currently helps lead those three program areas and assists with daily operations for the organization. Lance spends his free time exploring and learning about the great outdoors.



JACKIE JOHNSON
FISCAL MANAGER
JACKIE.JOHNSON@GOLDENHILLSRCD.ORG

Jackie is a native of Southwest Iowa, graduating from Riverside in Oakland. She attended Iowa Western Community College and worked at Riverside Community School District before joining the Golden Hills team. She currently resides in Harlan with her fiancé, Nate, their 4 daughters Carly, Brylei, Layla, and Brecklin; and their two dogs, Marv and Ella. In her free time, Jackie enjoys photography and singing.



DAWN HARDER
OFFICE ASSISTANT
DAWN.HARDER@GOLDENHILLSRCD.ORG

Dawn started with Golden Hills in 2006 working on the SIRE (Southwest Iowa Renewable Energy) project and has since been involved with various projects, including Iowa Byways.



MEET OUR TEAM



SHAUN AHERN
PROJECT COORDINATOR
SHAUN.AHERN@GOLDENHILLSRCD.ORG

Shaun joined Golden Hills in 2022 focusing on watershed projects. Having studied both community & regional planning and environmental studies in college and then serving with Conservation Corps Iowa, he's excited his work intersects with those areas. He enjoys volunteering at multiple preserves doing habitat restoration and exploring the Loess Hills.



SETH BROOKS
PROJECT COORDINATOR
SETH.BROOKS@GOLDENHILLSRCD.ORG

Seth joined Golden Hills RC&D in 2022 as a project coordinator focusing on scenic byways, local foods, and other projects. Fluent in Spanish, he also seeks ways Golden Hills can reach Spanish-speaking communities in rural western Iowa. Seth spends his free time writing hiking guidebooks and trying to keep up with his dog Jasper.



JAMIE FOWLER
LOCAL FOODS COORDINATOR
JAMIE.FOWLER@GOLDENHILLSRCD.ORG

Jamie joined as Local Foods Coordinator in 2022. Having grown up in a family that operates a nursery and produce stand, she is passionate about how small business and local food benefits rural communities. Jamie with her husband JP, and their young daughter, spend hours in their garden growing and sharing produce with friends and neighbors.



RONDA MCCREEDY
OFFICE ASSISTANT
RONDA.MCCREEDY@GOLDENHILLSRCD.ORG

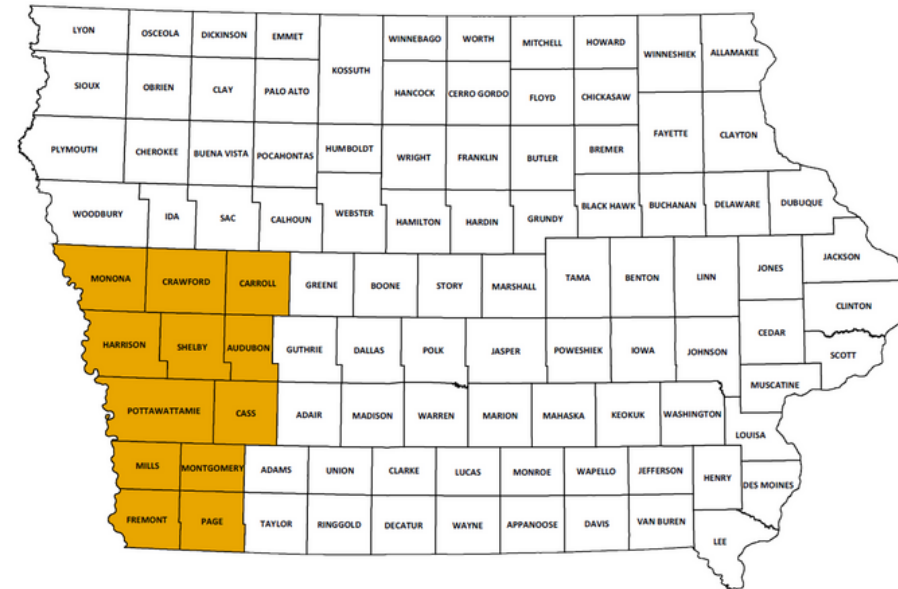
Ronda is a native of southwest Iowa. She graduated from Carson-Macedonia High School in Carson. Ronda attended Nebraska College of Business, and worked for the past 35 years at Mutual of Omaha. She currently resides in Carson with her husband Brien and dog Stella. They have three grown children: Jared, Kylie, and Bailey, and three grandchildren: Cora, Cam, and Jace. In their free time, Ronda and Brien enjoy traveling, attending Creighton basketball games, and spending time with the grandkids.

Golden Hills is governed by a Board of Directors representing our service area. Each county has one director, with Pottawattamie having two due its large size. Additionally, we have two at-large board members. We are currently in the process of selecting new board members due to our 2023 expansion adding four new counties, as well as board members reaching term limits.

Current board members are:

- Steve Baier, Chair
- Kathy Fiscus, Vice Chair
- Sheryl Sanders, Secretary
- Susan Miller, Treasurer
- Brian Rife
- Beau Boeye
- Seth Watkins
- Carol Vinton
- Peter Johnson

Golden Hills Counties



More information and brief bios about each of our board members can be found at goldenhillsrcd.org/board



LAND STEWARDSHIP

Our work helps restore and reconstruct prairies in the Loess Hills and beyond, which provides benefits such as wildlife habitat, water quality improvement, erosion reduction, and improved scenery.



OUTDOOR RECREATION AND TOURISM

Golden Hills has worked for decades to expand and improve upon low-impact recreational opportunities in western Iowa such as hiking, bicycling, birding, wildlife viewing, hunting, fishing, and paddling.



WATER RESOURCES

We partner with Hungry Canyons Alliance to implement grade and streambank stabilization projects and coordinate the East and West Nishnabotna Watershed Coalitions to improve water quality and flood resiliency.



LOCAL FOODS

Golden Hills works with the Southwest Iowa Food and Farm Initiative (SWIFFI), a multi-county coalition of individuals and organizations that value and work within the local food system.



ARTS & CULTURE

Golden Hills understands the value that arts and culture bring to southwest Iowa, from both a quality of life and a tourism perspective. We coordinate events and help find funding for a variety of projects.



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Our talented staff can offer a wide variety of services on a contractual, fee-for-service basis, such as grant writing, project management, strategic planning, visioning, meeting facilitation, and much more.

PROGRAM AREAS



LAND STEWARDSHIP



At one time the vast majority of western Iowa was blanketed in tallgrass prairies. Today, more than 99.9% of Iowa's prairies have been removed from the landscape. The Loess Hills and upper Little Sioux River valley include the majority of the remaining prairies, including the largest intact prairies in Iowa. Our work helps restore and reconstruct these prairies, which provides uncountable benefits such as wildlife habitat, water quality improvement, erosion reduction, and improved scenery.

The deep loess soils provide unique challenges with gully and streambank erosion, which Hungry Canyons Alliance has helped reduce for more than 20 years. Education is a core value of Golden Hills, and informing the public about stewarding our precious soils, waterways, and wildlife is an integral part of our work.

PHOTO BY LANCE BRISBOIS





OUTDOOR RECREATION & TOURISM

Our region is an outdoor destination for people from across Iowa, Nebraska, and beyond. The unique Loess Hills offer parks and wildlife areas unlike anything else on the continent for hiking, birding, wildlife viewing, and hunting. Rivers, streams, and lakes also offer incredible opportunities for fishing and paddling. Golden Hills has worked for decades to expand and improve upon all of these activities in western Iowa.

Recreational trails are consistently near the top of the list of amenities that people are seeking in local communities. Golden Hills has played a role in most of the bicycling, paddling, and multi-use trails in rural western Iowa. We coordinate the Frontier Iowa Trails network, which includes more than a dozen groups working across county lines to link our communities and parks. Golden Hills has also created an online Loess Hills Hiking Guide for outdoor enthusiasts to reference.

Outdoor recreation and tourism are inextricably linked and our rural communities benefit from visitors to the region's three scenic byways, which are scenic driving routes connecting small towns, parks, attractions, and other amenities.



PHOTO BY LANCE BRISBOIS



PHOTO BY LANCE BRISBOLLS

WATER RESOURCES



Flooding and water quality are significant topics of concern within Iowa. Since most waterways in western Iowa flow into the Missouri and then the Mississippi River, the actions we take in our local communities regarding water resources impact both local communities and those downstream. Various land uses and practices affect water quality and flood resiliency. With more frequent and severe major flooding events recently, this is especially important in southwest Iowa. Unprecedented flooding affected life, property, and critical infrastructure in our region in both 2011 and 2019. The Golden Hills water resource team brings together local producers, landowners, conservation entities, and local governments to improve water quality, increase flood resiliency, and protect local infrastructure. The East and West Nishnabotna River Watershed Management Coalitions were formed in 2017 through 28E agreements between nine counties, nine soil and water conservation districts, and fourteen communities in southwest Iowa. Together with partners throughout Iowa and beyond, the Golden Hills water resource team coordinates programs that address specific local environmental challenges and work collaboratively towards implementing sustainable solutions.





LOCAL FOODS

Iowans are surrounded by fertile farmland, yet most of the food consumed in the state travels an average of 1,500 miles before landing on a dinner plate. Golden Hills strives to improve the southwest Iowa foodshed by building and maintaining alliances between regional producers and consumers. These alliances are further supported by raising awareness among southwest Iowans about the food that is available in this region.

Golden Hills convenes the Southwest Iowa Food and Farm Initiative (SWIFFI), a multi-county coalition of individuals and organizations within the local food system. Golden Hills provides training, assists in navigating regulations, helps with grant writing, and offers other forms of support. The assistance provided by Golden Hills helps make local food more accessible to those living in southwest Iowa. The benefits of an active and local foodshed are felt by all involved. Revitalization of rural communities by boosting local economic development and improving the health of its citizens are just a few examples of the benefits of an active local foods system.



PHOTO BY LANCE BRISBOIS

ARTS & CULTURE



Golden Hills understands the value that arts and culture bring to southwest Iowa, from both a quality of life perspective and a tourism perspective. Golden Hills coordinates the Southwest Iowa Art Tour, an annual self-guided tour through nearly a dozen communities and more than 15 artist Gathering Places. Golden Hills also worked with Waubonsie State Park staff to create the first Artist in Residence program at any state park in Iowa. During COVID-19, Golden Hills participated in a series of videos focusing on our rural museums. Golden Hills also helps with a variety of public art projects and offers grant writing assistance and capacity support for organizations and individual artists. We also work with statewide and local partners to bring archaeology and history programs to our rural communities.





COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Our talented staff can offer a wide variety of services on a contractual, fee-for-service basis as it fits within our mission. Contact us for support with any of the activities listed below.

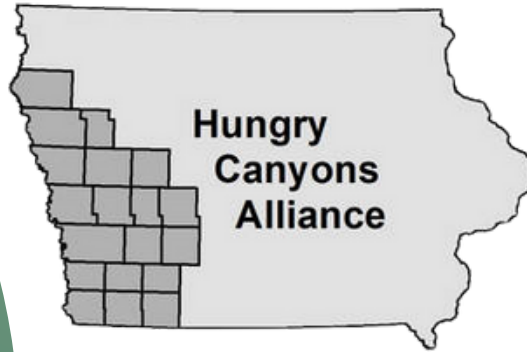
- Grant writing
- Grant administration
- Fiscal management
- Mission-related event planning
- Meeting Facilitation
- Capacity Building
- Visioning
- Strategic Planning
- Graphic design
- Marketing and promotions
- GIS mapping
- Website development
- Social media
- Event presenters
- Printing brochures, maps, etc.
- and more!

If you have questions about how we might be able to help your project or community, let us know.



PHOTO BY LANCE BRISBOIS





Left: A typical gully in western Iowa. Right: To replace an erosive gully, a gabion basket chute was built with cost share from the HCA's landowners structure program

THE PROBLEM

The Hungry Canyons Alliance (HCA) was formed locally to research and implement solutions to the problem of stream channel erosion and degradation in a 23 county area of the deep loess soils region of western Iowa. Channelization of streams and land use changes during the first half of the 1900's caused stream channels to erode, causing an estimated \$1.1 billion in damages to public and private infrastructure (bridges, culverts, utility lines, etc.), loss of farmland, and increased sediment loads.

A survey of western Iowa bridges in 2000 revealed that 404 were endangered due to stream channel degradation. Golden Hills RC&D in Oakland, Iowa helped to form and currently provides office space and administrative assistance to the Hungry Canyons Alliance.

THE SOLUTION

An affordable solution to this problem is to build grade control structures in streams. Streambed stabilization is the key to preventing further erosion and protecting infrastructure. Grade control structures at regular intervals will help streams stabilize by changing their profile from an erosive steep incline to a stable stair-step pattern. Structures, which normally have a raised weir section and are constructed with steel sheet pile, riprap, and concrete grout, allow the stream elevation to drop in a controlled setting, while preventing further degradation, and create a calm backwater condition that allows silt to settle out upstream, decreasing sediment loads and turbidity, and increasing water quality.



JOHN THOMAS

HUNGRY CANYONS PROGRAM DIRECTOR

JOHN.THOMAS@GOLDENHILLSRCD.ORG

John has led the Hungry Canyons Alliance since 2000. His work revolves around stream channel instability, gully erosion, and grade control. He has a B.S. in geology and environmental sciences from Cornell College, a master's degree in geology and water resources from Iowa State University, and a master's degree in civil engineering (hydraulics) from the University of Iowa. In his spare time, he is very active in his church and coaches his kids in their sports (soccer and wrestling). John lives in Council Bluffs and enjoys time with his wife Angie and their four children.

OUR PROJECTS



WATER RESOURCES

PRAIRIE SEED HARVEST SMALL TOWNS

LOCAL FOODS NATIVE PLANTS

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE PRAIRIE WALKS WESTERN SKIES SCENIC BYWAY

TRAILS RURAL LOESS HILLS MISSOURI RIVER REGION RESILIENCE

LAND STEWARDSHIP WATERSHED HISTORY

FRONTIER IOWA TRAILS NETWORK EDUCATION LOHI TREK

WATER QUALITY SOUTHWEST IOWA ART TOUR LOCAL FOOD GUIDE

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

HUNGRY CANYONS ALLIANCE GRANT WRITING LOESS HILLS HIKING GUIDE

LOESS HILLS NATIONAL SCENIC BYWAY REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

QUALITY OF LIFE

ARTS & CULTURE

WANDERLOESS BOTANY & ECOLOGY CLASSES BIKE ROUTES & RIDES

OUTDOOR RECREATION COLLABORATION

SOUTHWEST IOWA FOOD & FARM INITIATIVE CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

TOURISM ARCHAEOLOGY GLACIAL TRAIL SCENIC BYWAY



IMPROVING WESTERN IOWA... #GOLDENHILLSDOESTHAT!