



2015-2020 Annual Plan

712 South Highway 6, Oakland, Iowa 51560

Our mission:

Golden Hills Resource Conservation and Development is dedicated to conserving the community, cultural and environmental assets of Southwest Iowa through grass-roots collaboration.

Our vision

- To sustainably protect the land, water, industries and communities in our region through partnerships and collaboration
- To ignite innovation, vibrancy and growth in our rural places through grass roots organizing and creative place making
- To develop and promote tourism corridors as a venue for recreation and rural development
- To promote stewardship, protection and pride in our region's resources
- To enhance a healthy, vibrant quality of life for residents

Our priorities

- Robust rural recreation and tourism
 - Byways interpretation, itineraries, way-finding, corridor planning
 - Water trails development and promotion
 - Support for county and regional trails development
 - Loess Hills Missouri River Region development and implementation
- Art, history and culture as a venue for rural economic development
 - Rural creative place-making
 - Public Art
 - Historic preservation
- Clean, healthy source water, rivers and streams
 - Community source water protection planning

- Water shed coalition work for the East and West Nishnabotna water sheds
- River stewardship engagement through events and education
- Local food system capacity-building and support
 - Southwest Iowa Food and Farm Initiative
 - Local Food Hub - Entrepreneur Center
 - Farm to School Initiative
 - Farmers Market and Local Food Guide
- Sustainable and diversified agricultural practices
 - Cover crops promotion
 - Small farms, specialty crops development
 - Buffers, prairie STRIPS, pollinator habitat
- Preservation and protection of the Loess Hills of Western Iowa
 - Low impact development
 - Cost share opportunities for land owners
 - Loess Hills Alliance capacity development and promotion

RC&D Area Overview:

The Golden Hills Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) is a not for profit 501(c)(3) organization authorized in 1981 that encompasses 3,016,320 acres or approximately 4,712 square miles. The RC&D area includes the southwest Iowa counties of Harrison, Shelby, Cass, Pottawattamie, Mills, Montgomery, Page and Fremont.

The Golden Hills website www.goldenhillsrcd.org serves as an informational source for the RC&D and the projects operated through Golden Hills or maintained cooperatively with organizations that serve the communities and citizens of western Iowa.

Organizational Capacity

Board Governance

Objective:

GHRCD will strategically prioritize projects and programs to fulfill its mission and vision while remaining responsive to current regional needs in conservation and rural development

Strategies:

1. Review proposed mission and vision statements and make adjustments as necessary.
2. Collectively develop a broad vision for the region and evaluate annually.
3. Develop an evaluation process and policy to determine whether a project or opportunity fits within our scope and is financially and/or programmatically feasible

Staff Development

Objective:

GHRCD will strive for collaborative staff and board leadership through cultivating relationships and improving internal communication

Strategies:

1. Hold an annual retreat to focus on team building and leadership; create networking opportunities between board and staff; hold monthly staff meetings
2. Revise the current employee handbook and review annually; create plans for staff succession and contingency;
3. Inventory staff and board skills as part of evaluation and annual review; facilitate opportunities for those skills to be used and/or developed; create job descriptions for all staff
4. Create a GH advisory council, with no decision making abilities, that will provide guidance on regional opportunities, needs and partnerships

Funding

Objective:

GH will diversify its funding sources to create long term sustainability

Strategies:

1. Kick off an annual campaign to coincide with the 35th anniversary in 2016
2. Develop a prospect database from current stakeholders, Board contacts and prospect research
3. Expand fee for service opportunities – fiscal management, grant writing, group facilitation, training, marketing
4. Maintain current grant funding levels to sustain projects and initiatives
5. Explore investment opportunities
6. Explore development of a revolving loan fund

Marketing and Outreach

Objective: To increase awareness of Golden Hills RC&D projects, resources and initiatives while cultivating partnership opportunities through a comprehensive branding and communications

Strategies:

1. Develop a comprehensive marketing plan, using frequent media outreach to highlight programs and organizational success;
2. Develop and promote the annual report; 35th anniversary promotion
3. Create visibility for staff in collaborative meetings and projects.
4. Actively engage other organizations and community groups in projects and initiatives.
5. Refine the mission and vision into a 3 minute “elevator speech”
6. Redesign our website and outreach materials;
7. Develop an annual community recognition event for stakeholders;
8. Consistent logo use

INITIATIVE PRIORITIES

Natural Resource Protection

Goal: Strengthen the rural economy through land and water conservation, protection and enhancement of unique areas

Objective 1) Assist and participate with the Loess Hills Development & Conservation Authority

Strategy A. Facilitate the Authority meetings, projects, communication, business and assist in audit preparations

Objective 2) Facilitate infrastructure protection, improve water quality and protect farmland through the Hungry Canyons Alliance

Strategy A. Assist the HCA with Project Director duties as necessary to maintain focus on Federal and State appropriations to track funding levels

Strategy B. Attend HCA quarterly meetings and executive Committee meetings

Strategy C. Facilitate and complete 5 county HCA structures per year as funding allows

Objective 3) Participate on watershed development and watershed Leadership Teams as requested. Offer services to watershed planning, grant writing and implementation- as requested/needed.

Rural Place Making & Economic Development

Objective: 1) Assist the Loess Hills National Scenic Byway Council in implementation of four action items from the revised Corridor Management Plan.

Strategy A. Continual updates of the Corridor Management Plan – Revised 2016

Strategy B. Assist with funding and coordination assistance as requested, to pursue development of an interpretive and research center for archeological resources specific to the Glenwood Paleo-Indian culture within the Loess Hills

Strategy C. Complete 3 items from the Marketing Plan for the Loess Hills National Scenic Byway each year

Strategy D. Fund, design and create interpretive information for the public based on the 2015 Interpretive Master Plan

Strategy E. Apply and receive two National Historic Landmark designations for archaeological or historic sites in the Loess Hills.

Strategy F. Create, fund and maintain the Loess Hills Scenic Byway website with photos and stories

Strategy G. Participate in all Iowa's Byways Sustainability Project training opportunities and conferences by the Byway Council and the Program Director

Strategy H. Conduct LHNSB tour or plan and hold a Byway engagement event each year

Objective: 2) Assist the Western Skies Scenic Byway Council in implementation of four action items based on the Corridor Management Plan

Strategy A. Continual updates of the Corridor Management Plan – Completed 2016

Strategy B. Assist with funding and coordination assistance as requested, to pursue development of interpretive signage and amenity development within the byway corridor

Strategy C. Complete 3 items from the Marketing Plan for the Western Skies Scenic Byway each year

Strategy D. Fund, design and create interpretive information for the public based on the 2015 Interpretive Master Plan

Strategy E. Apply and receive two National Historic Landmark designations for archaeological or historic sites in the WSSB Corridor

Strategy F. Create, fund and maintain the Western Skies Scenic Byway website with photos and stories

Strategy G. Participate in all Iowa's Byways Sustainability Project training opportunities and conferences by the Byway Council and the Program Director

Strategy H. Conduct WSSB tour or plan and hold a Byway engagement event each year

Objective 5) Manage the Iowa's Byways program for the IDOT - through Spring 2017

Strategy A. Continue the lead role for the Iowa's Byways program to manage and enhance the state byways in conjunction with the other Iowa RC&D's. Create reporting system, training schedules and topics, cooperative grant opportunities, reimbursement schedules and direct general communications 2014- 2017

Strategy B. Develop and document the Western Skies Scenic Byway Council from the stakeholders group

Strategy C. Develop newsletters, inventory assets, create websites and brochures for the Western Skies Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan (2016)

Strategy D. Attend regional, state and national training opportunities with the Byway Councils

Strategy E. Plan and conduct a regional training event for the Midwest Region Byways – 2016

Goal: Protect the cultural resources and educate the general public on the cultural assets of the region

Objective 1) Implement cultural resources recommendations for region

Strategy A. Work with the citizens from two counties per year on educational events to highlight the cultural resources

Strategy B. Work with the Cultural groups to enhance awareness of the significant cultural resources of the Glenwood Locality and the Mill Creek Culture by conducting a tour or education opportunity for archaeology – one each year

Strategy C. Develop and facilitate a Regional Cultural Council in partnership with the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs and the University of Iowa

Objective 2) Plan and conduct public workshops in conjunction with the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, the University of Iowa, and County Historical Societies/Preservation Commissions to educate, promote and interpret the cultural and historic resources of the region

Objective 3) Assist local museums and interpretive centers with education/interpretation displays by coordinating and funding plans, design, construction and completion.

Objective 4) Support development of a Southwest Iowa Regional Cultural Council and/or allied community-led groups to enhance the cultural amenities within the region.

Conservation Stewardship

Goal: Promote best management practices for wise land use and water quality improvement

Objective: 1) Assist with the development and implementation of water quality plans through watershed planning or Source Water Planning teams within the eight county RC&D area

Strategy A. Lead the Source Water Protection team for a Phase II Plan for the cities of Malvern and Hastings in Mills County.

Strategy B. Assist the DNR with Phase I investigation and begin planning for Phase II Source Water Protection team.

Strategy C. Assist DNR with coordinating regional landowner, farm managers, county officials and county water manager training sessions on cover crop use and nutrient reduction strategies. 2015 and ongoing

Objective 2) Assist the Loess Hills Alliance to meet the objectives and priorities of the 2011 Comprehensive Plan.

Strategy A. Participate with the LHA Committees and provide technical and coordination support

Strategy B. Manage fiscal work of the Loess Hills Alliance.

Strategy C. Provide Board capacity building, outreach and organizational assistance to the LHA membership and executive committee

Objective 3) Adopt strategies and seek funding to implement projects for enhancement or protection of natural resources in the Loess Hills

Goal: Improve the quality and increase acres of wildlife habitat

Objective 1) Work with interested organizations to increase/improve wetlands – SWP Communities, PF and USFWS

Strategy A. Locate landowners wishing to improve their wetland habitat and expend funds provided by USFWS or other organizations

Objective 2) Facilitate the implementation of invasive species control & habitat management

Strategy A. Through partnerships, retain a prescribed fire practitioner in the Loess Hills

Strategy B. Explore and acquire additional cost share or other means for landowners in the Loess Hills to control invasive species and promote reclamation or protection of prairies, oak savannahs and pollinator habitat

Objective 3) Assist in acquisition of parcels to add to the Loess Hills State Forest or other state owned properties: Partners- DNR, TNC, CCB's, Archaeology Conservancy

Strategy A. Explore other acquisition opportunities in the Loess Hills through the National Scenic Byway Program and other funding sources: Partner - Federal Highway Administration

Rural Entrepreneurial Development

Goal: Work with local communities and organizations to plan, develop and market resources, facilities and amenities

Objective 1) Assist the Western Iowa Grape Growers Association (WeiGGA) and the Western Iowa Wine Trail with organizational and education needs as requested

Strategy A. Promote the American Viticulture Area for the WIWT and WeiGGA to encourage use of local grapes in locally produced wine

Strategy B. Facilitate or assist WeiGGA members with public education events as requested

Strategy C. Assist in development of marketing and outreach efforts through web based media, brand development, user guides, retail materials and community events to promote American Viticulture Area designation.

Objective 2) Assist potential entrepreneurs with business planning, marketing, networking and general start-up challenges

Strategy A. Assist with business document development, applications and funding requests, IEDA project forms and other financial or grant source investigations

Strategy B. Explore funding opportunities and connect partner organizations

Objective 3) Work with Western Iowa Tourism Region and local tourism groups to plan, develop and secure funds for needed cultural, recreation and tourism facilities 1 each year

Strategy A. Attend WITR meetings and events to keep current on needs and opportunities

Strategy B. Assist one facility per year with improvements or upgrade of amenities.

Strategy C. Develop marketing materials to benefit amenities and facilities within the region and along designated Byways.

Objective 4) Support development of recreation trails and amenities in rural Iowa between IDNR, IDOT, the CCB's and other NGO's. Complete 3 by 2017

Strategy A. Convene recreation project teams consisting of the CCB's, TNC, DNR, USFWS, IDOT, and other NGO's to develop plans for additional recreation facilities and regional plans

Strategy B. Begin seeking funding and move to the implementation phase as money is secured to construct trails and amenities 2016 to 2020

Objective 5) Support the County Conservation Boards and small, rural cities with development of recreational facilities

Strategy A. Investigate funding opportunities for a Page County Nature Center and/or water trail

Strategy B. Seek funding for interpretive panels for city parks and other public places on the resources of the area

Strategy C. Assist CCB's along the West Nishnabotna Water Trail with river access development.

Objective 6) Participate with the DNR to enhance state park facilities, trails and amenities for public use – as requested or funded

Strategy A. Provide coordination support to the Loess Hills Missouri River Region Parks to People initiative for Harrison, Pottawattamie and Mills counties

Goal: Provide a conduit for development of small-scale farming and local food in western Iowa

Objective 1) Facilitate and incubate producer-owned, sustainable businesses in the Golden Hills RC&D region

Strategy A. Assist local food producers with training opportunities, classes, marketing, networking, agreements and technical information as needed

Objective 2) Support through planning, facilitation, technical assistance, grant writing and general office support for micro-farming businesses or other sustainable business opportunities

Strategy A. Assist the local food community to further develop and sustain a grower network to aggregate products through a regional business model with possible funding sources to begin projects

Objective 3) Support the marketing, development, processing, and use of local value added and sustainable use crops and agricultural products

Strategy A. Assist producers to secure funding or business planning resources to add value to their agricultural product

Objective 4) Work with the Southwest Iowa Farm to Food Initiative to increase local food production, marketing and use by local consumers

Strategy A. Work with five Counties to adopt a local foods resolution and/or a local foods council

Strategy B. Coordinate regional efforts to secure funding, advertise, hire and train for individual, county-based sustainable local foods positions

Strategy C. Coordinate and lead the Buy Fresh Buy Local Campaign Southwest Iowa program

Strategy D. Share organization documents and training opportunities between new and established local food movements

Strategy E. Develop a growers' mentoring program to encourage new local foods producers

Strategy F. Acquire funding and develop plans to create a food and/or small-scale agriculture hub to assist new growers with technical assistance and mentoring, land acquisition and equipment.