

Embracing the Rise

PROTECTING the LOESS HILLS FOR PEOPLE AND NATURE

THE LOESS HILLS NEED TO BE PROTECTED FOR THE BENEFIT OF PEOPLE AND WILD NATURE.

The Loess Hills is a beautiful and important landform that sets this region apart from the surrounding areas. Protecting this special landscape will benefit local communities through improved soil and water quality, access to wild nature, increases in ecotourism, and better overall ecosystem health.



THE FORMATION OF THE HILLS

The Loess Hills stretch for over 200 miles along the Nebraska-Iowa border, next to the Missouri River. The unique hills of this region were formed when fine particles from the last glaciation were blown up by winds out of the west. The super fine particles traveled far, but the heavier ones dropped down closer to the Missouri River. Over thousands of years, these deposits built up, forming large hills. Notably, the Loess Hills represent the second largest type of this formation in the world, surpassed in size only by the Loess Plateau in north-central China.

THREATS TO THEIR EXISTENCE

Due to their steep slopes and high erodibility, the Loess Hills was one of the last places in the region to undergo land conversion. However, they are increasingly under threat of subdivision, home development, and conversion to farmland. The forests, prairies, and creeks of this unique landform are quickly disappearing.

PROTECTING STEEP SLOPES

Loess soil is made up of very fine particles, it is what allowed the soil to be blown over the Missouri River and caught in the first place. However, loess soil is also highly susceptible to erosion. This erodibility, combined with the steep slopes found throughout the Hills makes this region one of the most susceptible to soil loss. According to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), the Loess Hills has one of the highest rates of erosion in the United States at around 40 tons/acre/year.

The soil that comes off the hills gets caught in the streams and drainage ditches throughout the region. Killing fish, insects, and plants, and posing a financial burden to local communities and landowners. It also increases the burden placed on local farmers, removing valuable soil they need to grow crops and raise livestock on. Protecting steep slopes from land conversion decreases the risk of erosion and improves soil and water quality, reduces the burden placed on local communities, landowners, and



producers, and improves the quality of life in the region.

RECONNECTING AND REWILDING

The Loess Hills have served as an important region for wildlife for millions of years. Situated along the Missouri River it has acted as critical migratory habitat for countless birds as they fly to their summer breeding grounds. Waterbirds such as snow geese, blue-winged teal, and sandhill cranes need the grasslands and floodplains of the Loess Hills to help them survive their long journeys. Deer, foxes, and badgers roam the Hills, finding food and space to raise their young. Elk and other species have even been seen returning to the region.

Protecting, restoring, and reconnecting wild spaces throughout the Loess Hills is vital to their continued existence. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources recognizes the Loess Hills as one of the most important areas for wildlife, with more state-listed species of conservation concern in the region than any other across Iowa. Reconnecting and protecting habitat throughout the Hills will protect these species, increase ecotourism opportunities in the region, and improve ecosystem health and diversity.

TAKE ACTION

You can help protect the Loess Hills by taking the following actions:

- Learn more about the Loess Hills and share that information with your friends and family
- Protect slopes steeper than 9% and hilltops from development
- Retire farmland that is on a slope steeper than 9%
- Plant native grasses, wildflowers, shrubs, and trees on slopes to protect them from erosion
- Practice non-lethal human-wildlife coexistence to share space with wild nature
- Support the work of organizations like Heartland Rewilding, Practical Farmers of Iowa, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Golden Hills R&D, The Nature Conservancy, and your local County Conservation Boards

YOU CAN PROTECT THE LOESS HILLS! LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS SPECIAL REGION AND TAKE ACTION TO PRESERVE IT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.



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