



LHA Stewardship Committee: 2016 End of Year Report

The Stewardship Committee had a strong year in 2016, with brief highlighted activity summaries below.

Loess Hills Prairie Seminar Support/Sponsorship

The Stewardship Committee agreed to provide support for the ongoing Loess Hills Prairie Seminar, this year celebrating its 40th year. The Seminar is a 3-day event held the first week of June annually in Monona County, and is one of the premier educational events that promotes stewardship and awareness of the unique resources presented in Iowa's loess hills. Approximately 200 people attended, including biologists, land owners and other interested visitors. Sessions ranged from botanical and faunal surveys, an understanding of the soil resources in the hills, cultural history, and discussions of challenges landowners face in the hills. The Seminar is undergoing some staffing changes, and has been restructuring the support agencies, which contributed to the LHA Stewardship Committee bridge support for this year.

LHA Stewardship sponsorship effectively levers funding with Loess Hills County Conservation Boards, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, the Iowa Prairie Network, Izaak Walton League, NW Iowa Audubon Society, and the Iowa DNR, among others in support of promoting stewardship in the Loess Hills landform.

Private Lands Positions

These positions are providing outreach and technical assistance to private landowners on conservation planning and implementation and are housed in County soil and water conservation district offices.

In late 2015, the Stewardship Committee voted to provide support for 2 private lands positions in partnership with the Iowa DNR, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, National and local Pheasants Forever and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Nic Salick is housed in Logan, covering Harrison, West Pottawattamie and Monona Counties and Jake Holt is housed in Sidney to work in Fremont and Mills Counties (this biologist will do some work additionally in Montgomery and Page Counties, but LHA funding is used to support work in the two loess hills counties). The Farm Bill Biologists hired have assisted landowners and the public as follows in 2016 (through August 1 – conservative estimates):

- Iowa Habitat and Access Program, 1570 acres
- Various program assistance for critical environments (wetland restoration, habitat buffers, pollinator habitat, etc.), 420 acres
- Phone calls, in-office meetings and on-site visits with clients, 95 contacts

Also, around 20 public programs and radio interviews for the mass public have been conducted this year to date.

Cooperative Burn "week"

Loess Hills Fire Partners Cooperative Burn Week

The Cooperative Burn Week is an opportunity for partners in the Loess Hills to achieve fire management in an area where extra resources are needed to accomplish work at scale. It is also an opportunity for partners to collaborate, develop fire line leadership, build professional relationships, and improve fire line skills. LHA funding to be used to hire Conservation Corp of Iowa (CCI) crew to assist local DNR staff pre- and post-event and to provide adequate food and supplies for participants. The grant consists of two components:

- First project component - Spring burn workshop expenses (in the southern Loess Hills)
- Second project component - CCI crew post workshop invasive species treatment (coordinating burn follow up with partner groups to control the emergence of invasive plant species in the managed areas.

Support for early development of the Naturalist School in conjunction with the Pottawattamie County Conservation Board and the New Tree School (based at Hitchcock Nature Center near Crescent)

At the Stewardship Committee August 2016 meeting we discussed and preliminarily approved support in establishment of the Naturalist School. This training effort is designed to provide educators and other key personnel in the Loess Hills with in-field, real-life training to truly understand how various ecosystems work. This effort will enable educators with understanding and skills to be stewards of the environment while appreciating interactions with agriculture and existing industry. The key goal is to enable a population of citizen scientists within the public to focus management and restoration efforts in critical environments that are particularly special in the loess hills landform. The overall program will include walkabouts, citizen science (how to do biotic surveys, and evaluating situations), workshops on specific issues, and a Naturalist Certification Program.

We are joining in the second year of the Naturalist School, which has found a dedicated core audience to date primarily in the loess hills area of Iowa and adjacent areas in Nebraska.

Respectfully submitted by
Rich Pope and Glenn Pollock – LHA Stewardship Committee Co-Chairs