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Group pushes Loess Hills for Great Places

County Board endorses Oakland designation plan

By Bret Hayworth
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A western Iowa group is pushing to have the Loess Hills designated a Great Place in Iowa.

A new state initiative is looking to put the synergy of 18 state agencies to work for three Great Places pilot projects that would be improved and increasingly promoted. The Department of Cultural Affairs is leading the Great Places endeavor and held a June 9 forum in Sioux City to explain how projects will be selected.

At the meeting, representatives of Le Mars, Sioux Center, Onawa, Mapleton, Carroll and Manning attended, and at the close of the meeting a coalition of Sioux City groups announced it would push for downtown Sioux City to be a Great Place. Now the Golden Hills Resource Conservation and Development Group of Oakland, Iowa, is leading the charge to name the Loess Hills a Great Place.

On Tuesday, the Woodbury County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to give a letter of support for the Loess Hills project. Golden Hills secretary Gloria Lyman said Woodbury County joins the Monona County Supervisors and the Loess Hills Hospitality Association in Moorhead as entities who have thrown support to the endeavor.

Lyman said the unique geology, biology, archeology and rich cultural assets of the Loess Hills would make for a perfect Great Place. In 2000 the Loess Hills Scenic Byway was given national byway designation by the Federal Highway Administration.

The windblown loess soil exists only in seven western Iowa counties and in China. Lyman said she's enjoyed the hills since she was a child, and now hikes them as an adult with her family. Increasing promotion of the Loess Hills over the past 15 years has made them better known, she said, but being a Great Place would help the cause even more. "We are very hopeful," Lyman said.

Invitations of areas wanting to be considered for Great Place selection must be received by the state on July 1. Golden Hills organizers are asking all seven county boards of supervisors to back the endeavor, as well as large and small cities located in the Loess Hills, visitors bureaus and chambers of commerce. Those letters of support are being requested by Friday.

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