

BRAGGING ABOUT LOESS HILLS



Josh Gutttau introduced Chad Graeve from the Hitchcock Nature Center. There are only two other places in the world similar to the Loess Hills, one in Germany and one in the Black Hills.

Loess is a German word for “loose”. The Loess Hills is a landform that extends from South Dakota into two counties in Missouri. It was created about 16,000 years ago from blowing dirt. Since then erosion has sculptured the hills. It was made from a glacial product called Glacial Flour from winds blowing to the East.

The Loess Hills dirt is very stable when dry and very unstable when wet. It is better to leave vertical cuts because the ground does not get saturated easily.

Lewis and Clark found very few trees in the Loess Hills in the late 1700s. 80-85% of Iowa was grass in 1832 to 1859 when the state was settled. Now Iowa is the most altered state in the nation. Only about 0.1% of the native prairie is still remaining in Iowa.

Before settlement, the fire interval in the Loess Hills was every 3-5 years. That kept the trees out. In the last 30 years red cedar trees have become a problem. They burn easily and die, but thrive without fires.

The Hitchcock Nature Center is a county park. It was a YMCA camp in the 1960s-1980. Then it was sold to a private developer as a land fill. Many people objected and the County bought the site with 508 acres in 1991 in a Sheriff's sale.

The mission of the Hitchcock Nature Center is ecological integrity, environmental education, and low impact public recreation. They are ten years into a 50 year restoration. After 150 years of degradation, they try to expand the natural grasses at a rate of 4% per year.

The Hitchcock Nature Center consists of 1000 acres with plans to increase to 2100 acres. It has seven miles of hiking and cross country ski trails and that is being expanded.

Mr. Graeve issued a challenge:

1. Visit Hitchcock Nature Center
2. Support Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP)
3. Support Sustainable Conservation Funding (www.iowadnr.com)

More information about Pottawattamie County parks is available at www.pottcoconservation.com.