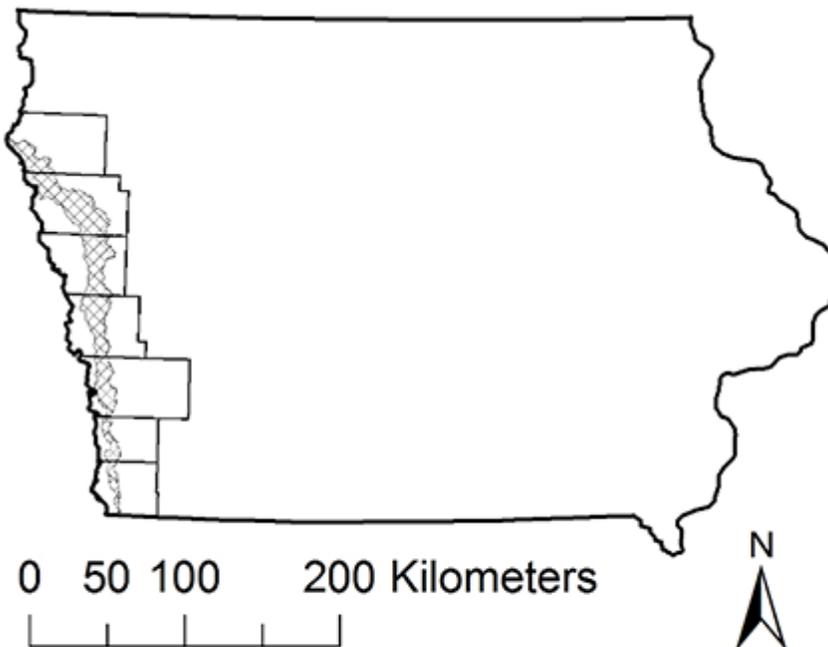


Project Home Characterizing and Comprehending Land Use Change in the Loess Hills Region

The Loess Hills region of Western Iowa and Northwestern Missouri are windblown silty soils that were deposited just east of the Missouri River floodplain. They form a narrow band of 1 to 15 miles that stretch about 200 miles. Prairie grass intermingled with hardwood forest had been the dominant flora, where flora and fauna typically found further west even in pre-settlement times have persisted along the hills. The region's ecosystem and its role in the larger river ecosystem are at risk from a variety of developments. Fire suppression activities have changed the nature of the grass/tree mix across the hills. Several invasive species have become established in the area. Development of proximate lands for agricultural purposes is also occurring. Perhaps the most pressing concern is nonagricultural development for commercial and residential purposes, leading to landscape fragmentation and consequently reduced ecosystem vitality. As with most human-influenced ecosystems, the ecosystem at the Loess Hills has emerged from interactions between natural resource endowments and human activities. It is critical that we understand the drivers behind the land use changes in the region in order for any conservation efforts to be most effective. The goal of this project is to generate the data and initiate an inquiry into the causes.



Loess Hills Ecoregion study area (cross hatched, 2,797 km²) and the seven counties in western Iowa that contain it.