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'Where Rivers Run Wild' name...»

## 'Where the Rivers Run Wild'

**Committee touts advantages to Iowa Great Places advisory board**

September 22, 2010 - By SANDY MICKELSON Messenger staff writer

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Designating the Webster and Hamilton counties "Where the Rivers Run Wild" partnership as a 2010 Iowa Great Places program will open the doors for future grants and resources for the area, said Webster City Mayor Janet Adams.

"It's a partnership with Webster and Hamilton counties that will enhance our outdoor opportunities, cultural opportunities and business and main street possibilities," she said as she and more than 50 others from the two counties gathered Tuesday morning at Willow Ridge north of Fort Dodge to detail plans for members of the citizen advisory board who are making the decision.

A final decision is expected to be announced today in Des Moines.

Other communities in the running are Albia, Elk Horn, Lamoni, Manchester and Vinton.

"We're the only regional application," said Stephanie Houk Sheetz, a senior planner for Fort Dodge and a member of the local committee. "That is something they really look at."

In its sixth year, Iowa Great Places encourages communities to work together to achieve a better quality of life for their citizens. The program combines state resources with local assets to help these communities cultivate their unique and authentic qualities.

Where the Rivers Run Wild projects include:

- **Fort Dodge Trails and Riverfront, the Gypsum City Off-Highway Vehicle Park expansion and the Fort Dodge Downtown Plaza. These were described to the Great Places advisory board by Houk Sheetz, who said land donations and long-term leases for the off-highway vehicle park had to be created before any work could go on.**

"We've had a lot of demand" for a camping area at the off-highway vehicle park, she said. Riders out there ask why there isn't any place for them to camp.

The Downtown Plaza, Houk Sheetz said, is an "attempt to revitalize downtown, a public gathering place with a focus for redevelopment."

- **Briggs Woods Outdoor Convention Center. Mike Brandup of Hamilton County Conservation said this new center would provide room for 400 people for what he called recreational learning. Not to earn credits, but for the fun stuff.**

"The center would be an adult learning center, for natural resources to cultural events," he said. People could stay for one to three days. There is nothing like this in the state, Brandup said. The closest is in northern Minnesota.

He said the proposed center would "bring people here for meetings, and they will stay and use our natural resources." It will promote a "new and diversified economy that supports agriculture but is



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Janet Adams, left, mayor of Webster City, and Cheryl...

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building natural resources."

- **Regional Environmental Learning Center. Matt Cosgrove, Webster County Conservation Director, called the Brushy Creek learning center a shared facility for the state, county and region, with the focus on environmental education.**

He said today's children may be better at building a website than building a treehouse. "We want to reconnect people with the natural world," he said. "To teach kids how to play outside. It's OK to get dirty. We'll bring them inside to educate, then get them outside to participate, get them outside on the land."

- **Going green. Retired Iowa Central Community College teacher Bill McAnally told the advisory board that helping students understand and sustain going green is looking at the future, where people can "get away from pushing buttons and get out there enjoying nature."**

Mark Ginsberg, of Iowa City, a member of the advisory board, said he liked to hear that these projects are intended to have free-market, private control, adding, "I applaud that."

He said the board was looking for projects that would not only enhance communities but would be sustainable and exportable to other areas of the state.

Adams called the work done by the two-county Where the Rivers Run Wild committee "an old-fashioned can-do attitude" that "adds great dimensions and opportunity to our region. We want a future where work and play connect to the land."

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