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## Introduction

The Minnesota River Valley is a place of significant beauty, history and character and it has the very great potential to become a National Scenic Byway. As such, the Valley can be one of a select number of driving and travel experiences in the United States representing authenticity and a connection to both the past and future of a place. Byways offer the visitor an experience that meshes the past with the present, and the natural with the human-made. The Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway is a perfect example of that integration.

This corridor management plan is designed to first convey the Valley's potential and thus assist with attaining national designation through the Federal Highway Administration. Perhaps more importantly, this plan is also a blueprint to guide the organizing, marketing and interpretive development of the corridor. It defines the most important steps needed to protect the character and resources along the byway. It also recommends how to manage tourism to balance economic gain with the protection of community character. The ultimate objective of this plan is to strengthen Minnesota River Valley communities through both economic means (i.e., more visitors and tourism) and through a closer connection to the river and Valley's exceptional history (i.e., through investments in recreational facilities and interpretive programs.)

In the end, it is hoped that this plan will not only bring thousands of out-of-state visitors to our Valley, but also make residents of



*The Minnesota River Valley conveys its personality in a gentle and often humbling manner. Its history is largely one of peaceful existence—with the exception of the U.S.-Dakota Conflict of 1862, and even that war was full of acts of kindness on both sides of the struggle. The history of this place did not generate stories of wild adventure, but rather steady hard work and endurance resulting in one of the most productive agricultural systems in the world. The natural areas—river, prairies, forests, marshes and lakes—are gentle in topography, teeming with life, expansive, quiet and mysterious. Residents are settled and tied to the place. There is a sense of strength in the farming economy and in the qualities of the communities. The River Valley conveys calmness, sustainability and an enduring connection to the land.*



Minnesota more aware of this special part of the state. That awareness will naturally translate into more political support to solve the challenges we face as well as closer economic ties to urban economies of Minnesota. If we reach those objectives, the river and our local economies will all be healthier and more sustainable.

## Byway Corridor and Intrinsic Qualities Overview

The Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway was designated in 1995 and extended in 1996 to form the current 287 mile route. (See maps in Appendix.) The identified corridor encompasses 10 miles on each side of the river. This corridor has all of the intrinsic qualities identified by the National Scenic Byways Program: scenic, natural, cultural, historic, recreational and archeological.

The Byway is being marketed as the “River of Stories”. As the river flows along its 335 mile course from the headwaters near the Minnesota/South Dakota state line, the designated 287 byway route travels along the valley’s floor, revealing story after story of settlement patterns and lives of early traders and trappers, missionaries, settlers and the Dakota people. Along the route, travelers discover six state parks, one national wildlife refuge, five state historical society properties and many sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Together, this creates a highly well-preserved landscape of historic, cultural and natural resources that reveals its past and offers interpretive glimpses of its future.

History and culture are the two predominant intrinsic qualities of regional and national significance that link together each and every mile of this Byway. In addition, the natural intrinsic quality is a foundation theme that will run beneath and support the two primary themes. These themes are summarized below.

### Historical Theme: Struggles for a Home

The Minnesota River Valley has a national story to tell about the European settlement of the West as it relates to both the native people and the immigrants seeking to either keep or win a place on this land, a home. Within the Valley, the stories of Native American life, treaties and resistance mesh with the stories of EuroAmerican immigrant struggles, their conflicts with the Dakota, the concept of Manifest Density and the creation of one of the most productive agricultural cultures in the world. This story is particularly compelling due to the degree to which the Native

***Intrinsic qualities*** is the term used by the National Scenic Byways Program for the resources along a byway that provide inherent significance and value to the traveler. There are six intrinsic qualities: scenic, natural, recreational, historic, cultural and archeological. Demonstrating significance in any one category is a minimum requirement for National Scenic Byway designation.



Fort Renville represented the Euro-American’s determination to stay in the Valley. Resistance to the Fort expressed the Dakota’s love of this place.



American-EuroAmerican tensions resulted in national legislation accelerating the EuroAmerican westward migration.

### Cultural Theme: Food for a Nation

The Minnesota River Valley has a regional, national and international story to tell of the growth and development of the American system of agriculture: *Food for a Nation*. This story is evident through a number of key characters and topics: the prairie soils, the opening of the prairie to farming, the Homestead Act, the crops chosen, the development of agricultural and other cooperatives, the food processing companies and systems (including none other than Green Giant), and evolving production and land stewardship systems. In addition, there is an important story to tell of the international transportation and shipping systems created to bring these crops to market, using first the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, then the railroads and the Great Lakes and finally air.



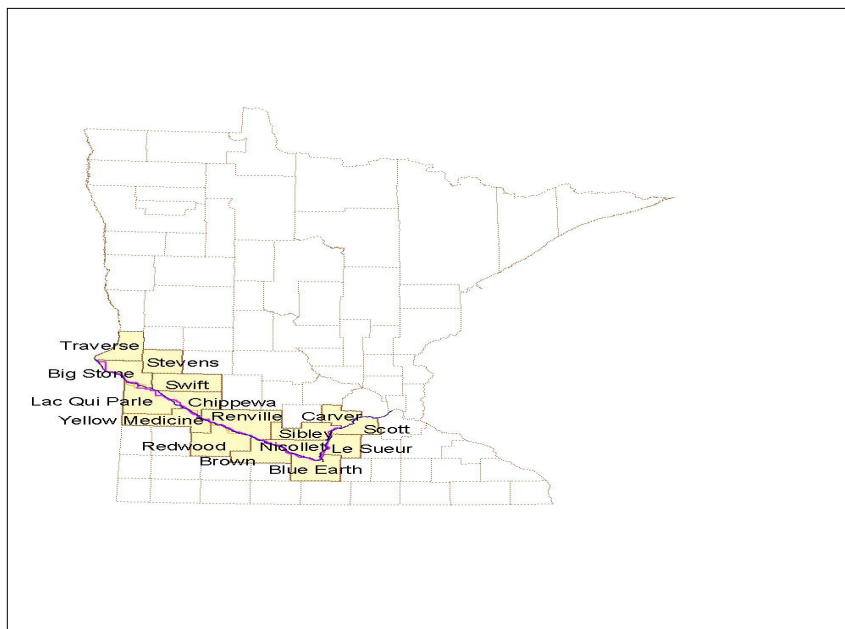
*Minnesota River Valley farms are among the most productive in the nation. This is an important story for us to tell.*

### Natural Theme: The Evolution of a River Valley

From the Minnesota River's beginnings in the plains to the west to its entry into the Mississippi River, the river and its valley tell interesting tales of the ancient history and rich ecological diversity of the Midwest. All aspects of the above cultural and historical themes hinge on the underlying existence of such a rich and fertile land. The interplay between water, soil, natural systems and people results in a fascinating number of interpretive opportunities.



*Outcroppings of gneiss are among the world's oldest known rocks.*



*The Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway Corridor*



## Goals of the Plan

This corridor management plan is a community-based strategy for balancing the management and conservation of the Byway's intrinsic qualities with public use and enjoyment of those resources. Planning allows communities to identify and evaluate all the ways they want to use these resources, and more importantly, share these resources with the world. The ultimate goal is to create a balance between preservation and promotion in a manner that maintains the integrity and value of the Byway's intrinsic qualities.

The goals for this strategy are the following:

*"From the air, you see the river as a silver sash laid across an emerald forest. From its banks, you watch it flow by granite cliffs that are 3.5 billion years old, some of the oldest exposed rock on the planet. Tramping in the river valley, you find some of the last stands of native prairie in the state, some of the last prairie marshland and an uninterrupted greenway of deciduous forest.*

*As a measure of its diversity, there are 156 species of birds in the Minnesota River Valley. The entire state has about 240."*

*Chris Welsch, Star Tribune, 12/12/99, p.R9.*

1. Balance economic promotion and character protection throughout the corridor and in alignment with the desires of local communities.
2. Strengthen the municipal finances of our communities through growing property values and more business development.
3. Support existing businesses and encourage new businesses that are complementary to the area.
4. Work to protect and improve the environmental health of the River and its Valley.
5. Market our region more assertively so that people in and out of the state know of the Valley as a good place to live, retire to, visit, operate a business, and manage a farm.
6. Develop interpretive strategies that benefit the traveler and increase our residents' understanding of local history and culture.
7. Improve the recreational facilities and amenities of the Valley.
8. Assure safe travel along the Byway route for the visiting public.
9. Encourage community participation throughout the planning and implementation of this strategy.
10. Attain National Scenic Byway Designation to help achieve the above goals.



## Our Vision

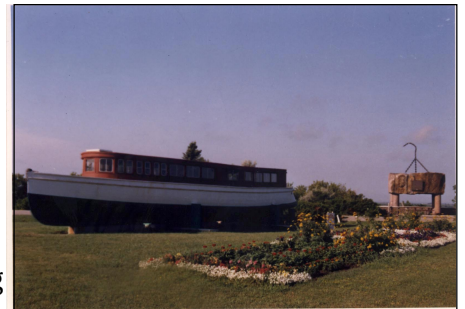
The Minnesota River Valley has a concentration of historic, cultural and natural resources that can make the byway a major destination within Minnesota and one of the highlighted driving experiences in the nation through the National Scenic Byways Program. Although few visitors will travel the 287 miles from one end to the other in one trip, the compelling stories and interesting resources and experiences along the route will encourage return visits along different segments of the route. The result of increased tourism will be stronger local economies, stronger municipal tax bases, a greater awareness of the region within the state and the nation with a resulting increase in general business development as the region's image and positive qualities are known by more people.

Visitors will follow well-signed roadways, enjoy informative stops at visitor centers in each community, and enjoy a variety of interpretive sites. They will come for weekends to participate in organized events including guided tours, craft fairs, and community celebrations that include ethnic and homestyle cooking you can't find at the shopping malls or chain restaurants. Visitors will enjoy staying in the quaint bed and breakfasts, various motels and the wonderful campsites in the byway's many State Parks.

Communities along the Byway will grow in size each weekend as travelers come from nearby metropolitan areas to participate in weekend events held year-round. Spring events like Syttende Mai, canoeing during high water spring run-off, birding festivals celebrating spring migration and opening of fishing season will fill motels and keep the downtowns bustling as guests shop for locally-made crafts.

Summers will provide a constant, but not overwhelming level of visitation as guests return for their annual trip to explore another segment of the Byway. Many guests will stay in one community and take day trips throughout the corridor, while others will return for annual family visits that coincide with annual festivals and community celebrations. More and more casino guests will come back to not only game, but also explore the other facets of the byway. The region will become more and more popular as a biking and horseback riding destination, providing extended trail rides and quiet, safe country roads for touring.

Each fall and winter, groups of hunting and snowmobiling enthusiasts will return to their favorite spots and trails to enjoy the serenity of the cooler seasons. Cross country ski groups will enjoy the quiet trails used by hikers and bikers in the summer. Out-of-town visitors from warmer climates will experience their first snowmobile trail ride and ice-fishing experience through packages



*This byway strategy should offer up the Valley's beauty and bounty to people from around the world and from within the state.*



offered by local chamber offices.

Marketing efforts will promote the Byway's outstanding historical and cultural resources, including the dramatic events recorded by history of the relationships between the Dakota Indians and European settlers, as well as the Dakota Conflict between the Dakota and the U.S. government. In addition, the byway's interpretive efforts under the theme of *Taking Food to a Nation* will generate numerous experiences related to agriculture. The region's outstanding recreational and natural resources will provide a variety of opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors. Bicycling, canoeing and bird-watching enthusiasts will begin to make the Byway an annual destination as more and more sites, trails and events will be developed to host these groups. The charm of small towns and hospitality of residents along the Byway will allow visitors to enjoy a slice of *real America*.



Attractions such as the *Traverse de Sioux* event must be re-borne. More visitors facilities such as this one in *St Peter* must be provided for visitors.

The increased amount of tourism visitations will not destroy the quality of life, as visitors will be spread out along the byway's full 287 mile length. This cooperative effort among communities will improve the image of the region, enhance community pride, and provide new diversity to the local economies.

## Action Summary

This plan is not a regulation or a law, it is a blueprint. It is a flexible guidance document. Just as any architect lays out a plan well before the builder picks up a hammer, this corridor management plan provides the structure and direction for the development of this byway. After the plan, residents, communities, elected officials and private businessowners will pick up the hammers of marketing, interpretation, resource management, recreation investment and tourism product development to implement this blueprint.

Each chapter of this plan concludes with a summary of the most important actions that should flow from the chapter's discussions. Turn to this section to see the "bottom line" for each chapter. Please note that actions are sequential from chapter to chapter to reinforce the integration of the plan.

While this introductory chapter provides the overview of the document and the vision and is thus somewhat more general in nature, there is, nonetheless, one important action to note.



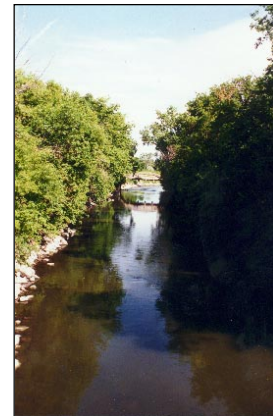
## Action 1: Carry Out a Public Relations Effort

It is critical that the Alliance consistently conveys to the public and to officials how a National Scenic Byway will attract tourists and protect natural resources. This integrated strategy will benefit municipal coffers, attract new residents and retirees, attract new business investment and elevate the level of public awareness of the River Valley in the minds of Minnesota politicians and residents. Together, this type of full-spectrum community development thinking will make the byway a partner with many other public and private sector efforts.

***There must be a consistent and solid outreach effort to the public that covers all facets of the byway program.***

Specific steps to accomplish this action are the following:

- Involve tourism and non-tourism entities in the Alliance. Specifically, reach out to realtors -- both commercial and residential-- and to other public sector economic development organizations. Define ways that the marketing, promotion and development of the byway can assist these other entities.
- Publish a periodic one page blast-fax that highlights the activities and accomplishments of the byway with an emphasis on the integrated nature of the Alliance's activities. Define some of the specific messages based on the partnerships created in the above action. A blast-fax is recommended over a newsletter for the following reasons: 1) newsletters take a lot of time to prepare, 2) they often contain "filler" material just to attain the targeted length, and 3) well designed faxes are short, to the point and suggest an emphasis on efficiency and action that reflects well on the organization. Once a year, a more formal, printed annual report or newsletter could go out with more information.
- Create sections in the byway's web site that emphasize the integrated nature of the byway effort. Create links to realtors and other community development and economic development entities.
- Carry out an ongoing process to measure the impacts of the byway's marketing and promotion work and then communicate those results. Along with lodging tax and tourism expenditures, periodic surveys should be taken of new residents and new businesses to identify the degree to which the amenities and overall promotion of the region are important to their locational decisions (i.e., their decisions on where to buy a house or a business.)



*The river has hidden beauty along its entire length. We need to demonstrate the ways in which the Valley can enrich visitors' lives and enhance the health of the river.*



