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Public Participation Plan

Introduction

This chapter reviews the methods used to engage the public during the preparation of this Corridor Management Plan as well as the ways in which the public will be encouraged to participate during implementation.

Alliance Promotes Participation During Planning

The Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway Alliance has worked hard to develop an open public participation strategy since its inception in 1997. It holds at least monthly meetings, maintains a mailing list of over 80 partners, and is the leader for public participation efforts. It also hosts a variety of special meetings and workshops that relate to Byway activities, such as marketing workshops and workshops on the importance of watchable wildlife in Minnesota. News releases, emails, telephone and mailings have been used to inform the public of Byway activities.

This corridor management plan is the product of two planning efforts. The first effort focused on the central portion of the byway; that planning work occurred during 1998 and 1999. The second planning process extended from early 2000 to early 2001, and concentrated on the western and eastern end of the byway. Those two efforts were woven into this comprehensive corridor management plan.

During the 1998-1999 planning work, there were two byway



Organization among Valley residents has always been a hallmark of our culture.



groups involved. The first was a Scenic Byway Partnership Group which focused on the preparation of the Phase 1 plan. The Alliance served in a broader advisory role during that effort. After the first phase of planning, the Alliance and Partnership merged to be the one Byway Alliance organization which guided the preparation of the Phase 2 plan.

During both phases of this plan's preparation, public meetings were organized in communities along the Byway to provide for public input and review. A series of public information announcements and news releases were also prepared and distributed. During Phases 1 and 2, a total of 16 public workshops were held to provide for public input and review. In all, over 300 citizens attended these meetings. In addition, all drafts of the plan were circulated among the 80+ partners and over 500 copies of executive summaries were sent to elected officials and business leaders along the byway.

Prior to the public meetings, a series of on-site assessments were conducted by the consultant team and the results were presented in the form of inventory sheets highlighting the following elements of the Byway:

- Threats and opportunities
- Existing interpretation and proposed strategies
- Signage needs
- Current commercial activities as they relate to tourism
- First impressions at community gateways
- Assessment of visitor services (restaurants, lodging, shopping)
- Marketing efforts
- Visitor centers and informational dissemination
- Assessment of tourism resources
- Identification of intrinsic qualities along Byway

These initial reports became the foundation for the segment plans, which are found in the implementation section of this plan.

At the meetings, additional forms were distributed and through a series of small group and large group activities, local residents, leadership and stakeholders were provided the opportunities to review, advise and provide comment and input regarding the initial assessments.



Future Participation

In moving forward with implementation, the Alliance envisions a variety of ways in which the public will be encouraged to participate. As noted in the organizational chapter above, the inclusion of various partners and private sector entities will be important as well as periodic conferences that draw the byway together. The actions below indicate plans for future participation.

Action Summary

Future participation in the byway needs to be tangible, productive and fun. Here are some of the ways that the Alliance will encourage more participation.

Action 9: Create a River Guides Program to Encourage Participation

The Alliance will work in a coordinative manner with local governments and other partners to offer ways for community members to become involved in the byway. A new program name, such as *River Guides*, should be established. Annual awards should be given. Schools and civic groups should be involved. Examples of potential River Guide projects include:

- volunteers to host visitor centers, interpretive sites, and provide guided tours;
- adopt a segment of the Byway for cleanup and maintenance of facilities;
- landscaping and community beautification projects such as gateways, visitor centers, and downtown improvements;
- construction of 24-hour outdoor visitor center kiosks in individual communities along the Byway;
- use of foreign language classes from nearby schools and universities for translation of interpretive brochures.

RiverGuides: Work with the schools and with community residents.

Action 10: Hold period conferences and seminars on topics of interest

The Alliance will continue to sponsor events that encourage education and awareness. Small business development, marketing, promotion, interpretation and resource management will all be potential topics.

The Alliance should be a provider of information.



Hit the road with information and enthusiasm.

Action 11: Create a roadshow on the byway

Based on material from this plan, a slide show and script should be created that will allow Alliance members to give presentations to the public, elected officials, schools and civic organizations. It should be simple and easy to give. A periodic training session should be offered by UMRDC to people interested in giving the slide show in order to have a consistently high quality representation of the byway to the general public. A part of the roadshow should be clear opportunities for the public to then volunteer and become active with the byway effort.

