

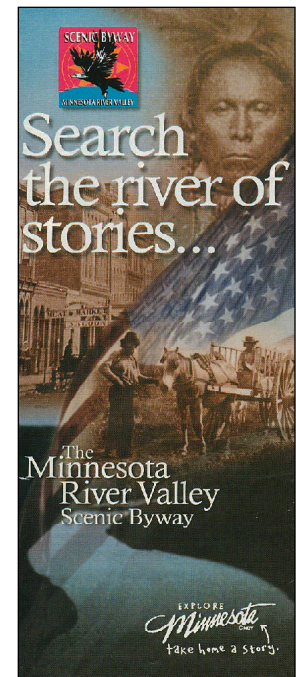
# 10

## Implementation of the RiverStories Byway Initiative

### Introduction

This chapter is the work plan for the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway -- the RiverStories Byway Initiative. The chapter is divided into two broad sections. This chapter before you presents region-wide actions; in most cases these actions must be carried out by the Scenic Byway Alliance or by other regional entities such as regional development commissions or multi-county tourism organizations.

The other part of the implementation plan consists of four corridor segment programs. These mini-strategies describe the specific actions that should be taken along these geographically-focused portions of the byway. They cite specific objectives and threats and identify actions for targeted locations. Together, these two sections provide both the *macro-management perspective* (i.e., what is it that we need to do as a unified byway group?) and the *site-specific management perspective* (i.e., what is it that must be done along each segment by the various local groups that have an interest in their portion of the byway?).



The material that follows in this chapter is a reorganization of the 44 actions presented in Chapters 1 through 9 of this report. For the sake of consistency and the ability to refer back to the origin of action recommendations, the numbering sequence laid out in the body of the plan is maintained here with the addition of the action's page number in parentheses (i.e., Action 4 (pg 2-4) means that the more detailed description of Action 4 can be found in Chapter 2 on page 4).

Since the focus in this final section of the plan is on implementation, a structure is recommended that consists of an eight point program, The RiverStories Byway Initiative. The eight components of the RiverStories structure integrate the 44 priority regional actions into an easier to understand and easier to implement program.

The eight components of the program are:

1. Organizational Structure
2. Resource Management
3. National Marketing
4. Tourism Product Development
5. RiverStories Interpretive Program
6. The Valley Ventures Business Development Fund
7. Transportation Improvements
8. Recreation Investments

Each of the specific required actions is noted and estimated budgets and targeted management entities are identified.

It is envisioned that the Alliance will largely direct its work from this portion of this chapter, while local governments and other local groups will take direction from their segment-specific strategies.

Please note, that before presenting the implementation recommendations, the organizational recommendations for the byway are reviewed.



## 1. Organizational Structure Actions

Action 2 (pg 2-4): Maintain UMVRDC in the Staff Support Role to the Alliance

Action 3 (pg 2-5): Seek Funding to Support a Regional Marketing Position at UMVRDC

Action 4 (pg 2-5): Seek Commitments from Other Regional Entities to Devote Part-time Staff to Byway Efforts

Action 5 (pg 2-6): Coordinate funding strategies for the byway

Action 6 (pg 2-6): Provide input on important planning documents relating to economic development, environment, development and preservation.

Action 7 (pg 2-6): Recommend or promote specific projects, or initiate projects where one or more local sponsors might step forward to sponsor, manage or fund projects on behalf of the Alliance

Action 8 (pg 2-6): Convene the partners and public-at-large on a regular basis to insure involvement, investment, ownership and community pride

Action 9 (pg 3-3): Create a *RiverGuides* Program to Encourage Participation

Action 10 (pg 3-3): Hold periodic conferences and seminars on topics of interest

Action 11 (pg 3-4): Create a roadshow on the byway program and its approaches

***Remember! Action 1 is not in sequence since the actions are organized here by topic. Refer back to page 10-2 for an explanation of how this chapter is organized.***

### Sequential Steps for Implementation

1. Define a full-time position for a UMVRDC staff-person to focus on byway implementation. The argument to make to UMVRDC commissioners is that of making a kickoff investment for one year in this position with future wages being paid by county support, grant admin fees and National Byway funding. The key byway responsibilities for this person would be the following: day-to-day contact for Alliance, grant writing and administration, MNDOT contact, coordinator for other support agencies efforts along the byway, coordinating information on potential funding options (foundations, government grants, etc., coordinating development of annual byway implementation agenda, organizing annual conference, manage



interpretive program development and coordinate Alliance-driven marketing efforts. Cost: \$50,000. Resources: UMRVDC funds with additional request to all 12 counties to fund position for one year with evaluation after that period.

2. Alliance identifies the one or more organizations within each of the seven segments that has staff who can support -- in a part-time manner -- the implementation agenda for their segment as well as support regional actions that are applicable to their segment. Cost: \$0. Resources: Alliance members
3. Alliance with UMRVDC creates roadshow presentation on the byway plan. This can be a modification of the PowerPoint presentation used for the plan workshops in November of 2000. Cost: \$0. Resources: UMRVDC.
4. UMRVDC staff and an Alliance representative from each segment arrange for and make presentation to targeted organizations in each segment. Review segment plan with each agency and identify ways to cooperate and support effort. Identify specific tasks that local segment agencies could take on. Review plans for seeking major economic development grant and role that each support agency could play. Cost: \$0. Resources: UMRVDC and Alliance members' time.
5. Staff and Alliance prepare their 2001-2002 annual agenda work program based on above meetings. Cost: \$0. Resources: Staff and Alliance time.
6. Staff prepares implementation grant application to National Scenic Byways Program during this spring's grant cycle. Seek funding for initiation of media marketing effort, design guidelines proto-type manual, first annual conference, for detailed interpretive plan and for initial construction funds. Seek a funding package of \$500,000 with the argument that the media marketing effort could be rolled out nationwide after this testing and that the design guidelines could also be a national model. Cost: Staff time for grant preparation. Resources: National Scenic Byway Program.
7. Staff pursues major Economic Development Administration, USDA Rural Development and/or Small Business Administration grant for a 12-county regional economic development program driven by this tourism initiative. These funds would pay for staff/admin expenses as well as other aspects of implementation (See marketing efforts, business recruitment and Valley Venture Fund for small business development.) Lobby for congressional support for this application. Cost: Staff time. Resources: Seek \$1 to \$3 million for program from Federal economic development agencies.



8. Once again, pursue state funding for Travel Information Centers in the corridor. Expand the current request for the Ortonville TIC to include the Lake Area Discovery concept for the Ortonville facility and to support the other two sites in Montevideo and Granite Falls. Cost: Staff time. Resources: State legislative funding.
9. Over the course of the first several months, define and begin to implement a limited version of a corridor-long RiverGuides Program wherein school children, non-profit groups and other organizations begin to participate in the RiverStories Byway Initiative. Start small. Seek foundation funding for the educational and environmental components of the program. Cost: Staff time with perhaps \$20,000 of funding sought for the development of curricula and promotional materials on the program. Resources: Foundation support and staff time.
10. Organize and hold a corridor-long RiverStories Byway Conference in September that will pull together all of the related organizations and feature the byway's accomplishments and future plans. This allows enough time to hear about grant applications and to lay the groundwork for continued financial support from counties and local units of government for the following year's efforts. Kickoff the RiverGuides program at this event. Cost: Staff time to organize. Use \$5000 of byway grant funds for event. Resources: Byway grant funds.

## 2. Resource Management Actions

Action 12 (pg 4-9): Integrate an Environmental Stewardship Message within the Alliance's Image

Action 13 (pg 5-6): Identify Threatened Resources on an Annual Basis

Action 14 (pg 5-7): Recognize Well-Managed Change

Action 15 (pg 5-7): Encourage the Adoption of Design Guidelines for New Development within the Corridor

Action 17 (pg 5-8): Support Local Agriculture

Action 19 (pg 5-9): Coordinate with Environmental Management Programs

Action 20 (pg 5-9): Support a Healthy Valley Rural Culture by Promoting Local Cultural Organizations and Events



## Sequential Steps for Implementation

1. Work with segment support partners to identify resources in each segment that are either threatened or which have undergone important management and/or improvement. Establish the Byway Management Award Program for the September conference. Segment partners should publicize these resource issues and build support for investments to protect resources and encourage well-managed change. Cost: \$0. Resources: Support agencies and Alliance members in each segment.
2. Seek funding from a state planning source for the preparation of a Design Guidelines for New Development. Seek some of these funds from the Byway grant. Seek assistance in the preparation from a resource such as the Small Town Design Center from the University or other similar organizations. Cost: \$50,000. Resources: Foundation funding, state planning assistance and/or byway grant funds.
3. Establish one or two Byway Stewardship Partnerships for resource management objectives. The National Tallgrass Prairie Project might be one. The River Valley Birding Trail might be another. The objective should be the marriage of the environmental protection efforts of the partner and the tourism marketing message that the tourism community will send out. Cost: \$0. Resources: Staff time.
4. As the RiverStories interpretive program develops, seek ways to expand the number and extent of agriculture and rural culture oriented festivals and events. Cost: \$0 for organizing time. Resources: Staff time.

## 3. Marketing Actions

Action 32 (pg 7-18): Find Funds for and then Implement a Byway Media Marketing Program

Action 31 (pg 7-18): Seek National Byway Designation

Action 1 (pg 1-7): Carry Out a Local Public Relations Effort that Conveys the message that the Byway Accomplishes a Range of Community Objectives.

Action 35 (pg 7-20): Assist the Office of Tourism on International Marketing

Action 36 (pg 7-21): Miscellaneous Marketing Actions



## Sequential Steps for Implementation

1. As noted above, seeking funding from the National Scenic Byways Program for a media marketing campaign. This would consist of hiring a professional media marketing firm to bring in multiple press tours each year and will result in dozens of articles being placed in the national travel media each year. This effort is critical to demonstrate quick results that tourism marketing can have a real impact on the Valley. Results can be evident within 6-9 months of startup. Tourism businesses and local units of government will see the entire program as having credibility when visitation increases from such a program. Cost: \$200,000 program per year. Resources: National Scenic Byway Funding in year one followed by a regional fundraising effort from the tourism community in years that follow.
2. Pursue National Scenic Byway Designation in the Spring of 2002. Prepare a dynamite package, obtain designation and then benefit from the national and international marketing that will follow. Cost: \$0. Resources: Staff time.
3. Work with the State tourism office to revise materials and information on the Minnesota River Valley Byway to mesh with the corridor management plan and the byway's marketing objectives. Cost: \$0. Resources: Staff time.
4. Working through the segment partners, place regular press releases on the byway's progress. If the media marketing project is funded, this will be a typical service from the firm that assists the region. Cost: \$0. Resources: Staff time or PR firm services.
5. Assist segment partners in the implementation of segment-level marketing efforts. Cost: \$0. Resources: Staff time.

## 4. Tourism Product Development

There are a wide variety of recommendations contained with many of these actions regarding product development. Generally speaking, the product development recommendations are detailed in the segment plans contained in Section Two of this Chapter. Please refer to those documents for the product development efforts that should proceed.



## 5. RiverStories Interpretive Program

This will be a Valley-long interpretive and community development project to construct 40 sites with kiosks and interpretive signage. This is seen as the beginning of an eventual corridor-long interpretive program covering the byway's three interpretive themes of Struggles for a Home, Taking Food to a Nation and The River's Legacy. The program will also seek to gain state support for the construction of state Travel Information Centers within the corridor.

Actions 33 (pg 7-19) and 40 (pg 8-9): Create the *The RiverStories Interpretive Program*

Action 41 (pg 8-10): Develop a Detailed Interpretive Plan that entails each of the Byway's Four Segments

Action 42 (pg 8-10): Encourage Businesses to Participate in Interpretation

Action 43 (pg 8-11): Local Groups and Entrepreneurs Should Consider Ways to Support the RiverStories Program

Action 44 (pg 9-2): Pursue a series of multi-lingual strategies

### Sequential Steps for Implementation

1. Refine the concept of an integrated RiverStories program and produce a map illustrating the concept. Use this map in presentations and for general public education of the RiverStories concept. (Please note that the segment plans indicate the priority interpretive sites within each of the seven segments.) Cost: \$0. Resources: UMVRDC GIS time and Alliance time.
2. Hold a series of 1/2 day Tell Your Story Workshops at which relevant local groups and individuals would be invited to come in and outline the interpretive story that their community could tell. The research, recommendations and maps from this project would guide their thinking. The result would be an agenda for local as well as regional action. The process should identify not just historical stories but also interesting features of the community today -- good food, interesting people, etc. Cost: Staff time and organizational resources. \$10,000. Resources: Staff time. Also seek support from a foundation such as Blandin for facilitator time or basic material support.
3. As noted above, apply for \$200,000 in the spring 2001 National Scenic Byways Grant round to prepare a detailed plan for and then begin construction on the first RiverStories sites. Sites and projects should be multi-topic (i.e., recreation and history





and agriculture) and should include established sites that can be linked into the program merely with the erection of a logo sign. Funds should also be sought from state sources. Cost: \$0. Resources: Staff time.

4. Apply for foundation, Transportation Enhancements and other funding to erect direction signage to sites, and find interesting stories and story tellers. Partner with MNDOT, county engineers offices, schools and universities to perform the work. Cost: \$100,000. Resources: Foundations, federal sources and technical assistance from institutions.

## 6. Valley Ventures Fund:

Tourism businesses often have difficulty meeting the requirements of most loan programs. The region should create a revolving loan fund specifically designed for tourism businesses in order to encourage investment in the Valley.

### Sequential Steps for Implementation

1. As noted above, apply for federal economic development assistance for a revolving loan fund for tourism businesses. Cost: \$1 million. Resources: EDA, USDA and/or Small Business Administration. A direct congressional appropriation in next year's budget might also be possible if local leaders have sufficient influence.
2. As a part of the marketing effort, deliberately target potential small tourism business operators with information on the tourism and small business opportunities within the Valley. Cost: part of marketing effort. Resources: federal funds initially. Regional funds should be used in the future.



## 7. Transportation Improvements:

Federal and state highway funds should be sought to fund resurfacing, signage and pullout investments for key sections of the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway. Other efforts could seek funding for alternative transportation projects in the Valley such as rail or cycling.

Action 28 (pg 6-9): Erect and Maintain More Byway Logo Signs

Action 16 (pg 5-6): Encourage Well-Planned Roadway Modifications

Action 21 (pg 6-6): Alliance Works with State and County Highway Project Planning Teams to Incorporate Byway Issues

Action 22 (pg 6-6): Maintain the Character of Rural Roads

Action 26 (pg 6-8): Act as a Facilitator of Signage Policy and Action

Action 27 (pg 6-8): Develop a Written Set of Guidelines for Information, Signage and Interpretative Facilities

Action 29 (pg 6-9): Erect Points-of-Interest Signs.

Action 30 (pg 6-9): Sponsor Annual Signage, Safety and Improvement Tours

Action 34 (pg 7-20): Pursue Funding to Expand the Byway's Signage System

### Sequential Steps for Implementation

1. As noted above, see National Scenic Byway funds for interpretive projects.
2. Seek Transportation Enhancements and Byway grants for signage along the byway. Cost: \$100,000. Resources: Federal Highway Administration.
3. Organize a consortium of county and state engineers to talk about byway design issues at the September byway conference. Cost: \$0. Resources: Staff time.
4. Work with MNDOT to develop new rules for signage placement. Cost: \$0. Resources: Staff and Alliance member time.



## 8. Recreation Investments:

The final leg of the strategy will expand the Valley's network of walking, biking, horsebacking and snowmobiling trails. These funds will also improve access to the river and support efforts such as the Audubon Society Minnesota River Valley Birding Trail.

Action 18 (pg 5-8): Develop and Invest in Regional Recreation Amenities such a Regional Trail System

Action 23 (pg 6-7): Create More Bicycling Facilities

Action 24 (pg 6-7): Create More Bicycling Events

### Sequential Steps for Implementation

1. Work with counties as they continue to pursue funding for trail construction and expansion through the Valley. The Alliance should be assertively supportive of these efforts, but it makes the most sense for counties and other local government entities to apply for the funds and manage construction. Cost: \$0 to Alliance. Resources: Staff time.
2. Work with local tourism organizations to develop more bicycling events and other recreational oriented events. Cost: \$0. Resources: Staff time.

