

2

Byway Organizational Plan

Introduction

A critical element to ensure successful long-term support for development and management of a Byway is the presence of a strong community-based management group. This group should include leaders and representatives from local stakeholder groups and community-based organizations along its entire length as well as state-wide. Participation should reflect representatives from community leadership, civic organizations, special interest groups, interested residents, industry, and local, state and federal agencies, all of whom have a presence within the Byway corridor. For this byway, that organization is the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway Alliance.

The Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway Alliance

The Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway Alliance is a nonprofit made up of 25 core members and a partnership membership of more than 80 members. The membership is made up of counties, cities, chambers of commerce, river valley residents, businesses, tourism organizations, and historic and preservation groups from throughout the valley as well as representatives from various state agencies and organizations. The Alliance meets monthly to discuss the Byway's general management including marketing, infrastructure and site development, and resource protection.



Restoring portions of the river's water quality to high levels have required regional cooperation. Similar cooperation will be required for byway implementation.



A Sampling of Byway Partners

Towns and Cities

- Henderson
- Le Sueur
- St. Peter
- Ottawa
- Mankato
- Lower Sioux Tribal Community
- Upper Sioux Tribal Community
- New Ulm
- Granite Falls
- Redwood Falls
- Montevideo
- Milan
- Ortonville
- Browns Valley

Counties

- Sibley
- Le Sueur
- Blue Earth
- Nicollet
- Brown
- Renville
- Redwood
- Yellow Medicine
- Chippewa
- Traverse
- Lac Qui Parle
- Swift
- Big Stone

Tourism and Business Affiliates

- Le Sueur Chamber and Tourism
- St. Peter Tourism and Visitors Bureau
- Redwood Area Chamber and Tourism
- New Ulm Chamber and Visitors Bureau
- Granite Falls Chamber of Commerce
- Big Stone Lake Area Chamber of Commerce
- Montevideo Chamber of Commerce and CVB
- Mankato Chamber and Convention Bureau



The mission of the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway Alliance is:

To coordinate efforts to promote and develop the scenic byway along the Minnesota River.

In doing so, the Alliance:

- Represents the interests of the people of the Minnesota River Valley who live, work and recreate along the riverway, provide the leadership necessary to ensure that the region retains its high quality of life and offers opportunities for ongoing involvement resulting in an increased level of community pride.
- Works to provide visitors seeking to enjoy the resources of the Byway with a safe, convenient and memorable experience. An important part of this effort is packaging the many and varied resources of this lengthy byway with high quality information.
- Works to promote economic development while enhancing, protecting and preserving the intrinsic qualities of the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway.

A History of Accomplishment

The Alliance has been actively involved for five years with Byway issues on behalf of the public, residents, businesses and stakeholders who call this corridor their home, workplace and playground. Since 1997, the Alliance has accomplished many projects, including the following:

- Conduct monthly (sometimes more often) meetings of the Alliance.
- Creation of three Byway Brochures, one for each segment.
- Hosted two seminars on marketing.
- Solicited funds from local government entities and organizations to support byway projects
- Established a database for notification of partners on activities.
- Worked to add Byway to Minnesota Office of Tourism's website.
- Created central calendar of community events along entire length of Byway.
- Secured rights to logo.
- Created and are selling denim-logo shirts to raise funds.

- Developed displays and represented the Byway at Tourism and Trade Shows.
- Applied and secured four consecutive federal scenic byway grants.
- Applied for LCMR dollars.
- Achieved Minnesota nonprofit status.
- Created marketing poster with brochure rack for distribution of byway brochures.
- Hired consultants and completed corridor management plan for byway segment from Mankato to Granite Falls.
- Hired consultants to develop promotional video and web site, new brochure and preliminary kiosk designs.
- Hired consultants to complete corridor management plan for remaining segments of Byway.
- Cosponsored event “Run, Ride and Row” with numerous communities along Byway.
- Provided speaker for first Minnesota Scenic Byways conference
- Nominated for FHWA Environmental Excellence Award by MNDOT
- Prepared application for National Scenic Byway designation.

And More Partners....

Federal Partners

- *US Fish and Wildlife Department*
- *National Scenic Byways Program*
- *Federal Highway Administration*

State and Regional Organizations

- *Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission*
- *Lower Sioux Agency Historical Site*
- *Upper Sioux Agency State Park*
- *MN Office of Tourism*
- *MN Department of Transportation*
- *MN Department of Natural Resources*
- *MN Historical Society*
- *Minnesota River Basin Joint Powers Board*

Nonprofits

- *Sacred Heart Historical Society*
- *Redwood County Historical Society*
- *Joseph R. Brown Heritage Society*
- *Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River*
- *Minnesota Machinery Museum*
- *Chippewa County Historical Society*
- *Minnesota Trails Initiative*
- *Clean Up Our River Environment*
- *Audobon Minnesota River Valley Birdir Trail*

Organizational Principles

As the Byway and the Alliance move forward, there are definite principles that will guide the organizational approach.

1. No new regional organizations are envisioned. Instead, this byway will move forward through the coordinative role of the Alliance and through the flexible and dynamic partnering of the Valley’s many organizations and entities on an as-needed basis. Varying projects and varying needs will determine partnerships. Through it all, the Alliance will provide a consistent forum for communication and cooperation.
2. Partnerships will be critical to the success of the byway, and new partnerships are continually encouraged as the Alliance moves forward. The Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway Alliance has a strong history of convening important stakeholders in an effort to keep this project locally-driven and the Alliance will continue to play that role.



Advocacy Groups

Following are advocacy groups concerned with resource preservation, protection and land-use issues along the Scenic Byway:

Browns Valley Historical Society
Big Stone Natural History Association
Big Stone County Historical Museum
Bonanza Education Center
Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission
Western Minnesota Prairie Waters Tourism Coalition
Le Sueur County Historical Society
Wicollet County Historical Society
Old Settlers' Association of Le Sueur County
Pheasants Forever Chapter
Friends of the Kasota Prairie
Nature Conservancy
Friends of the Minnesota Valley
Chippewa County Historical Society
Minnesota Historical Society
Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society
Mac qui Parle County Historical Society
Mac qui Parle Park and Wildlife Association
NATURE: Clean Up Our River Environment
Joseph R. Brown Heritage Society
Blue Earth County Historical Society
Lower Sioux Indian Community
Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River
Mankato Paddling Club
Ducks Unlimited
National Audubon Society
Land Stewardship Project
Preserve Ottawa

The UMVRDC has been a major reason why this byway is moving forward. This agency should stay involved.



3. Communities will define the priorities for their immediate areas along the byway. The Minnesota River Valley Byway is long and while the Alliance is devoted to guiding the overall shape of the byway, it will be up to communities and counties along the route to pursue the specific actions to be taken in their vicinities. In this way, each segment and subsegment along the route will develop in ways that meet the needs of residents with the Alliance and local tourism groups providing guidance on how to meet the needs of visitors.
4. Marketing should be carried out by the Western Minnesota Prairie Waters Tourism Coalition as well as by one or two other subregionally organized entities.
5. Funding can and will be sought by a variety of different partners but in a coordinated fashion. In other words, while any number of organizations can and should pursue funding opportunities, there should be a coordinated process through the Alliance to identify high priority funding sources and ensure that strong, non-duplicative applications are coming out of the Valley.

Action Summary

The term *open structure* should be a guiding phrase for the Minnesota River Valley Byway's organizational approach. The following action recommendations support an *open structure* and yet will result in work being accomplished. Please note that these actions follow in sequence from Chapter One and therefore the first action noted in this chapter is Action # 2. See the previous chapter for Action One.

Action 2: Maintain UMVRDC in the Staff Support Role to the Alliance

Currently, under the leadership and technical assistance being provided by the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission (UMVRDC) to the Alliance, an outstanding track record of activities and products developed has been developed and delivered on behalf of the Byway. Subcommittees, task forces and smaller working groups have been organized within the Alliance to complete many of these projects with the assistance of UMVRDC. This relationship between UMVRDC and the Alliance has been successful and should be continued.

Action 3: Seek Funding to Support a Regional Marketing Position at UMVRDC

There is a need for at least one person to be devoted to marketing the whole Minnesota River Valley on a day-to-day basis. Given the existing support and management functions at UMVRDC, it makes sense to place such a person in that office with satellite offices in one or two other locations along the byway. Foundation and government grant funding should be sought to support this position initially. In years ahead, the position should demonstrate its value and receive county and chamber support from the entire length of the byway. When National Scenic Byway designation is attained, there should be annual partial support for such a position from the federal level. A key role of this person will be coordinating efforts with existing tourism marketing organizations in the Valley. Given the size of the byway, one person must focus her/his efforts in a limited number of areas. It is recommended that this person focus their attention on media marketing, i.e., working with travel and other writers to attain more press coverage for the Valley. This approach will allow the Valley to stretch its dollars further and tell a more complex story about the region and why people should travel there.

If regional marketing is to be achieved, then it needs to be someone's fulltime job to get it done.

Action 4: Seek Commitments from Other Regional Entities to Devote Part-time Staff to Byway Efforts

While informal coordination and cooperation has been occurring between county and regional planning organizations all along the byway, it should be an objective to seek more formal support from those organizations in the form of part-time devoted staff positions. This will create a web of professionals directly involved in the byway effort all along the corridor, will relieve some of the burden from UMVRDC for day-to-day implementation and will encourage more integration between the byway program and the other activities carried out by the other entities. The key to this action will be attaining support from each organization by presenting them with a clear set of actions that their organizations might be supporting and pursuing. Ideally, those action agendas should be tied to potential funding sources that will help each of the participating agencies.

The RDC model of working with the Alliance should be created with other RDC's along the corridor.

Action 5: Coordinate funding strategies for the byway

The Alliance should maintain a funding database/information resource from which it can alert partners to funding opportunities and help to ensure that timely, strong funding applications go forth from the Valley. Preparation of most grants should be left to local groups, but the Alliance/UMVRDC will be in a good position to easily provide necessary support documentation for grant applications.

The Alliance should play a coordinative role.



Action 6: Provide input on important planning documents relating to economic development, environment, development and preservation

Create a system that allows for comment on important development projects.

The operative word in this action is “input”. It is not feasible or appropriate for UMRDC staff -- or any other staff -- to take on the job of reviewing every document and development proposal. Instead, the Alliance should work to encourage local reviewers to take into account the objectives and concepts from this plan. The use of the segment-by-segment summary documents found in the implementation chapter of this plan will assist with this effort as will this document’s executive summary. Alliance members should also take on some responsibility for reviewing major plans and proposals when they are applicable to the given Alliance member’s community.

Action 7: 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

The Alliance should encourage and support.

Using the recommendations from this document, as well as new opportunities that arise, the Alliance should set a limited number of annual priorities for important projects and encourage those projects to move forward. The Alliance may take the lead on some projects while in other cases, local entities will need to be leaders.

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

Hold an annual conference.

Annual byway conferences should be held at which the accomplishments of the Alliance are promoted and the next year’s priorities are discussed and accepted. Of particular importance is obtaining support and attendance from the various elected and private sector partners that will be critical to long term success. The Alliance should work vigorously to demonstrate that it is a multifaceted organization that works in partnership with a variety of different entities.

