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## Resource and Intrinsic Qualities Assessment and Significance

### Introduction

The Federal Highways Administration's National Scenic Byway Program identifies six intrinsic qualities for which byways may be designated: archeological, cultural, historic, natural, scenic, and recreational. It further defines intrinsic qualities as "features that are considered representative, unique, irreplaceable, or distinctly characteristic of the area."

The Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway possesses characteristics representing all of the six intrinsic qualities. Based on the consulting team's review of the inventory of resources, community meetings, and discussions with Alliance representatives, it was determined that the *historic* and *cultural* intrinsic resources were the two strongest categories and thus would provide the most distinctive experience for visitors. In addition, the river and its adjoining valley's natural resources are of statewide significance from ecological, environmental policy and cultural perspectives. Together, history, culture and nature tie the Byway together from end-to-end with resources of regional and national significance. Recreational and scenic intrinsic qualities are of very high quality as well, but are secondary to the above qualities. Archeological qualities are abundant, but are undeveloped and thus largely not accessible to the public.



*"The Minnesota River flows 335 miles from its source near Ortonville before emptying into the mighty Mississippi near in St. Paul. The Minnesota Valley Basin drains 16,700 square miles of lands, which includes all or parts of 37 counties in Minnesota. It is the largest tributary to the Mississippi River in Minnesota."*

*Corridor Partnership and Marketing Plan, Phase I Plan, March, 1999*



During the course of both phases of byway planning, the Alliance and the UMVRDC prepared a full inventory of resource sites along the Valley. Please refer to this document's appendices for the byway-long resource inventory of over 300 sites, photos for each site and detailed discussions of the natural and cultural histories of the Valley.



*The Continental Divide creates the river and provides one of the first points of national significance within the Valley.*



*The Valley's tall grass prairies are a national treasure.*



*The Valley's intrinsic qualities are connected to what humans have done on the land as well as the land itself.*

Flowing from the major intrinsic quality categories are the two themes chosen to unite interpretative efforts: *Struggles for a Home* and *Food for a Nation*. Along with these lead interpretive themes, the *River's Legacy* will be a consistent adjacent or foundation theme in all interpretation. This is of particular importance given the Alliance's objective to increase Minnesotans' awareness of the River's attributes and needs.

## Review of Intrinsic Qualities

The Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway winds its way through hills, farmland and small towns sited along the valley floor. In many locations along the route, one can still see the breadth of the valley, miles apart from rim to rim. This valley was carved out over 12,000 years ago when the rising waters of a large, newly formed glacial lake, Lake Agassiz, destroyed a natural earth dam near what is now Browns Valley. The rushing waters and floods carved a valley, forming what became the ancient River Warren. Eventually the Minnesota River established itself, and populations of ancient and Native people established themselves within its valley. Today, visitors experience this landscape as a gently flowing river running through a broad valley of rolling hillsides and long, even plains. Towns and farms are spaced evenly across this landscape. Anywhere one looks closely, the interaction and connections between people and the land are consistently evident and thus strongly shape each of the intrinsic qualities reviewed below.

As a part of our Phase I planning, we prepared a very detailed review of the cultural and natural history of the river valley. That material is contained in the intrinsic qualities appendix in this document. The discussion below is a summary of that material placed within the context of the byway's planning needs.

The inventory appendix also offers a pictorial record of the byway which will be useful for those unfamiliar with the River Valley's landscape, sites and structures.



## Historic Resources

The interpretive theme, *Struggles for a Home*, is a story-line that ties together many of the historic resources and events that have and continue to occur along the Scenic Byway. 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 European immigrant struggles, their relationships and cultural clashes with the Native Americans, the concept of Manifest Destiny 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 Dakota-U.S. Government tensions resulted in national legislation that accelerated the Euro-American domination of the West.

The theme, *Struggles for a Home*, spans the history of the River Valley to include all living things that called it home. Evidence of early man, estimated to be living in this region as far back as 9,000 years ago, were discovered in the Valley near Browns Valley. The Dakota, Ojibwe and Ho Chunk once shared the land by hunting, fishing and gathering food, only to be replaced by the Germans, Norwegians and Swedish in their quests to create a new agricultural-based society in this territory.

One of the most powerful stories to be told about this region and within the theme *Struggles for a Home* must be the relationships between the Dakota and Euro-American settlers. Following decades of relative peace, increasing land pressure, broken promises and antagonism from the U.S. government toward the Dakota lead to the events of 1862 and the Dakota Conflict. This war was overshadowed by the national Civil War occurring at the same time, but remains a silent memory to many who still call this place home, including ancestors from both the Native American and Euro-American cultures.

By the mid-19th century people from the east were surging west into the area known as the Minnesota Territory. The bison and elk had long since left due to the depletion of the herds from overhunting associated with the fur trade. Settlers began building homes, clearing prairies for farmland and raising families.

In 1851 the United States signed the Treaty of Traverse Des Sioux (along the banks of the Minnesota at St Peter -- a central point along the Byway) and the Treaty of Mendota. With these treaties,

### **Minnesota River Valley Merits National and Regional Significance Based on Historic Intrinsic Qualities**

*A number of points demonstrate the national and regional significance of the historic intrinsic qualities of the Byway:*

- 1) The US-Dakota Conflict of 1862 is of national significance in that it was the most deadly armed Native American uprising against the colonization of North America. This is well documented by historians.*
- 2) The Conflict and its documentation provide a clear and geographically defined record of relations between the Dakota Sioux, the U.S. government and the forces driving Manifest Destiny. That record and its story offer important connections to the status of Native Americans in today's society and the ways in which Euro-Americans have structured their society. There are many positive as well as many negative stories to tell of how both cultures have fared over the last 140 years. The current-day presence of Dakota communities within the Valley is an element of the regional and national significance of this intrinsic quality as are the well defined and historically intact Euro-American communities. Both offer a continuity to the original Conflict that is significant.*
- 3) The Minnesota River and the Valley played a particularly important role in Manifest Destiny as they offered a path for literally hundreds of thousands of individuals and families moving from east to west across the country. The historic sites and their relationship to this westward expansion is of regional significance to Minnesota as well as to the story of the development of the United States.*



the U.S. government acquired almost 24 million acres of Dakota lands. Thousands more immigrants began pouring into the region, and the Minnesota River became the highway for western settlement as it carried passengers and goods to the growing towns and cities of the west.

Life along the river began to change drastically after these events for both the Dakota and the Euro-American settlers. A reservation was established for the Dakota, running 10 miles wide along the river from Browns Valley to near New Ulm -- an area that matches a good portion of the scenic byway's corridor. The system operated for almost a decade, but there were often delays by government officials in making treaty payments and delivering food. Resistance to the U.S. government's imposed culture (e.g., schooling systems and agriculture) generated a desire among many of the younger Dakota to defy the government.



Three of the many styles of architecture from the Valley.

The U.S. government's commitment to its treaty obligations deteriorated by 1862 to a point that Dakota families went with absolutely no supplies or food well into the summer. These mounting late payments of food and money from the U.S. government were major factors in the decision by some Dakota leaders to attempt to regain their former lands and traditional way of life. With most of the settlers off fighting the Southern secessionists, a rebellious act by several young Dakota resulted in the death of an immigrant family. From these events, the Dakota Conflict erupted. By the end of 1862, between 500 and 1500 settlers and an unknown number of Dakota lost their lives. (Due to the Dakota's traditions of removing their dead from the battle fields, their losses were difficult to assess. It is estimated that the Dakota had similar losses as a result of both the fighting and the trauma of relocation to the Dakota Territory.) Many settlers fled Minnesota forever, and thousands of Dakotas were imprisoned or fled into exile. At the end of the conflict, on the day after Christmas, under the order of President Lincoln, the largest mass execution ever held in American history took place with the hanging of 38 Dakota men in the town of Mankato, Minnesota.

As the largest and bloodiest "Indian War" in United States history, Minnesota's Dakota Conflict, was overshadowed by the American Civil War, but nonetheless, it was truly one of the greatest "Struggles for a Home" ever seen in American history. This story of settlement, this *Struggle for a Home* affected the daily lives of all those who lived in the Minnesota River Valley. The battlefields, historic homesites and farms, early townsites, old fur trading posts, Indian agencies and reservation lands, military forts, steamboats, mills and hundreds of other points along the river all add to the





outstanding historical resources of the Byway which, with proper guidance, can serve to tell this story in a compelling and important manner. The Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway offers an exceptional opportunity to tell this important story across the landscape upon which it occurred.

## Cultural Resources

The *Struggles for a Home* theme introduced above certainly centers around the historical incidents that caused the confrontation of 1862, but that story consists of much more than recitations of historical fact. The underlying reasons for the struggle lie in the clash of cultures that occurred throughout the Americas as Europeans sought to claim this country as their own and the Americans who preceded the Europeans sought to maintain their cultures. The Minnesota River Valley and its Byway offer exceptional opportunities to explore these historic and continuing cultural issues.

First, there is much history to be told of the River Valley and of the people who have lived here. Beginning with prehistoric cultures and moving to the present offers one consistent theme: people who live in this Valley have largely supported themselves from the land. This is not an urbanized landscape or a failed rural economy. The current modes of living from the land are highly developed and quite healthy in the Valley. A new form of living from the land has been created in this Valley over the last 100 years, but it bears many connections to the subsistence cultures that thrived here for thousands of years prior the first white settler's small farm. Those similarities and differences in that connection to the land offer many cultural intrinsic quality development opportunities.

Second, the Byway corridor's ten mile boundary coincides with the lands initially negotiated as belonging to the Dakota by the U.S. government and then subsequently largely taken away by the government. Quality interpretation will allow visitors to gain a better sense of what it would be like to live within the corridor prior to and then after Euro-American settlement. The opportunities to see a riverside farm and then to learn about how the Dakota lived from the same riverbanks will be a rich educational experience. The same is true for any number of cross-cultural issues that might be explored including community social and physical structures, family structures, educational systems, religious beliefs, recreation and on and on. Learning upon the very land that these two cultures each call home provides a connection to place that should be powerful for the visitor.

### ***The River Valley's Cultural Intrinsic Qualities are of Regional and National Significance***

*The following points underline the significance of the Valley's cultural intrinsic qualities:*

- 1) The growth and productivity of agriculture in the Valley is one of the strongest in the nation. Based on sheer output of product per acre, the Valley is one of the top five agricultural areas of the nation.*
- 2) The historic developments related to taking food to a nation are of significance. The agricultural cooperative movement started here. The large food processing corporations that now move and process food for the entire nation started here. The level of agricultural research and innovation relative to mechanization is of regional and national significance.*
- 3) Related to the Valley's significant historic qualities, the interaction of the Dakota and the Euro-American cultures is of regional significance in that the two cultures first coexisted peacefully, then clashed and then needed to reestablish a new equilibrium within the Valley. While the dynamics of the relationships between the two cultures changed after the Conflict of 1862, there nonetheless continued to be a sharing of the Valley to some degree. This is in contrast to either the extinction of Native American culture that occurred in the East and the separation of cultures that largely occurred in the West.*



*"Minnesota's history rests, in large measure, on its rural foundations, especially its agricultural heritage. Throughout the state, farm landscapes--whether the broad open plains of the Red River Valley or the more intimate forested valleys of the Minnesota River--tell a rich, compelling story of hard work, community spirit and fertile production since the mid 1800's. The patterns of landscapes made by roads, tracks, shelterbelts and woodlots, and the sites of towns and farmsteads, reveal the hard-won achievements of generations of settlers as they adapted to and used a land of lakes and rivers, rolling hills, forests and tallgrass prairies." (Agricultural Historic Landscapes Study, Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office, Project Introduction, p 1).*



Tall grass prairie



Third, Dakota people still reside within the Valley and their presence and participation in the byway program could provide for a level of current-day reality that is often missing from historic sites. In other words, one can learn about the 140 year consequences of the Conflict of 1862 and attempt to understand how the Dakota people have subsequently found their own path into the 21st century.

Finally, along with Native American history, there are rich stories to be told of the European descendents that moved to the Valley in the 1800's and whose resulting culture characterizes the Valley today. The Minnesota River Valley has a regional, national and international story to tell of the growth and development of the American system of agriculture. This story can be told under the interpretive theme *Food for a Nation*. This story is evident through a number of key characters and topics: the prairie soils, the Homestead Act, the opening of the prairie to farming, the impact on the land of the crops chosen by farmers, the development of agricultural and other cooperatives, the food processing companies and systems (including the Green Giant Company), and recent evolutions in farming and biotechnology.

## Natural and Scenic Resources

The landscape along the Minnesota River Valley is beautiful and characteristic of the prairie. It contains some of the largest undisturbed prairie grasslands areas in Minnesota and is part of the National Northern Tallgrass Prairie Historic Preservation Area. The Byway's winding route always brings the traveler back to the river's banks, but not before enjoying small detours through prairie and rivertowns, in and out of prairie woodlands and wetlands and across long unbroken fields of some of the finest farmland in America. Of particular interest and importance in the current landscape are efforts to convert marginal farmland back to a more natural state using native grasses and woody vegetation. Various state and federal conservation easement programs are supporting this work.

A wide variety of vegetation fringes the river. The tall grass prairies that still remain offer a tremendous diversity of wildlife. This ecosystem is home to over 40 percent of Minnesota's 287 state-listed rare plant and animal species. As visitors travel along the river, either by car or canoe, they will see the riverbanks lined with cottonwood, elm and soft maple. These often fall into the river, creating snags which provide habitat for fish populations. Where the river widens visitors can view sandbars, swampy areas and marshland, often filled with willows and reeds.

From Granite Falls to Redwood Falls, the Minnesota River flows through an area of granite outcrops. Some outcrops are the oldest exposed rocks discovered in the world, dating back more than three billion years. Away from the river the high granite domes are covered with cedar and oak.

Above the river valley exists a terrace of prairie, wet meadow, oak woodland and lowland hardwood plants. Shrubby patches of wild plum, wolfberry and narrow-leaved meadowsweet provide wonderful habitat for open country birds. Wildflowers range from pasque flowers and prairie violets in early spring, to summer's yellow stargrass, palespike lobelia and sunflowers. The fall's gentian and milkweed bring the blooming season to its end. The Scenic Byway's large, colorful hardwoods in the eastern section create a breathtaking drive during the changing of the seasons.

## Recreational Resources

The recreational resources along the Byway are of regional significance. The Corridor is home to six State Parks, one National Wildlife Refuge, a stretch of Minnesota Wild and Scenic River, Project Riverbend and several of the largest and most diverse wildlife management areas in Minnesota. Several community and county parks represent some of the largest in land-size in Minnesota, including Alexander Ramsey Park in Redwood Falls.

Four of the major categories of recreational resources found along the byway are profiled below.

### Parks and Trails

The corridor has the highest density of state parks in the state and its trail system is on the path to become significant as well. Most parks and recreational areas have picnic and warming shelters, camping sites, restrooms, interpretive trails and boat access. Hiking and biking trails, as well as horseback trails are available at many sites and continue to be expanded.

Visitors coming during the winter are enjoying these same trails for cross country skiing, snowmobiling and snowshoeing. Snowmobiling is a popular activity during the winter and a large trail system is available throughout most of the Byway corridor. Ice skating and sledding are also popular at nearby lakes and parks.

There is growing demand for more campgrounds that can

### **Natural Intrinsic Qualities of Regional and National Significance**

*The geologic forces that shaped the river, the ancient rock outcroppings and many of the resulting ecosystems are of regional significance. Some of the largest remaining areas of undisturbed prairie landscape can be found along the Minnesota River Valley. The Corridor holds several Scientific and Natural Areas containing rare and sensitive species and important historic landscapes, including Bonanza Prairie, Plover Prairie, Yellow Bank Hills, Clinton Prairie, Kasota Prairie, the Gneiss Outcrops, Blue Devil Valley, and Chamberlain Woods. Most of the western end of the byway is part of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Protection Area, a national strategy to preserve prairie remnants of native tallgrass prairie to ensure protection of unique plant communities, native fish and wildlife, and historic and cultural sites.*



*Bicycling will be a leading tourism product in the future.*



accommodate horse trailers and camping opportunities. The Upper Sioux Agency State Park has campsites for horse camping as well as has the distinction of offering tipi rentals for a unique camping opportunity.

### **Nature Tourism**

The remaining northern tallgrass prairie has an abundance of outstanding watchable wildlife viewing opportunities. Many species of birds make this habitat their home, including songbirds, marsh and wading birds, waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors and upland game birds. The exceptional ecosystems and bird habitats of the region play an important role in providing quality habitat for song birds and waterfowl populations important to the North American natural systems.



*Nature and educational tourism are already being successfully promoted, but the room for growth is great.*

Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge has 11.5 miles of Minnesota River running through its boundaries. It consists of over 10,000 acres, of which 1,700 are native prairie. A combination of eastern and western waterfowl species migrate through the Minnesota River Valley, up the Central and Mississippi flyways.

Birdwatching opportunities continue to grow along the Byway and communities along the Byway are beginning to tap into the economic benefits of the growing “birding” market, with annual events near Ortonville and Madison. Marsh Lake, a man-made reservoir on the Minnesota River west of Appleton has one of only two nesting colonies of white pelicans in Minnesota. The bald eagle winter population continues to grow along stretches of the Minnesota near Montevideo and Granite Falls as well as Swan Lake by Nicollet, with hundreds of eagles drawing people to the area for viewing. Lac qui Parle has over 27,000 acres of wetlands, brushlands, woodlands and native prairie that offer viewing of abundant wildlife almost any time of year. A new environmental learning center recently opened on Lac qui Parle.



*White tail deer are one of many popular hunting resources.*

### **Hunting**

Lac qui Parle Wildlife Management Area is best known for its goose hunting. In the fall as many as 150,000 Canada geese may land at Lac qui Parle at one time. Most are part of the Eastern Prairie Population which nests near the southwestern shore of Hudson Bay during the summer and winters in Missouri’s Swan Lake Refuge. Deer, duck, pheasant and turkey hunting are also popular hunting options along the Byway. Trapping of muskrat, mink, fox, raccoon and beaver are still allowed in some areas with proper permitting. Blackpowder hunting has grown in recent years as has bow hunting.





## Fishing

Area lakes and rivers provide some of the finest fishing in the Midwest. Through an aggressive stocking program by the Department of Natural Resources, Big Stone Lake has become the site for national walleye fishing contests held each year in Ortonville. Throughout the corridor anglers can enjoy a diversity of fishing for walleye, largemouth bass, crappies, northern pike, perch, blue gill, and catfish in the Byway's water resources.

During the winter months, hundreds of ice fishing houses will pop up throughout the Byway corridor on nearby lakes. For the hearty souls, a simple hole in the ice and overturned bucket can provide an morning or afternoon fishing experience on the frozen waters of Minnesota.



*Great fishing and canoeing are found all along the river.*

## Action Summary

As is detailed in subsequent chapters, the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway will primarily focus its efforts on interpreting and promoting the Valley's historic and cultural resources, both of which have regional and national significance. But the foundation upon which these two intrinsic qualities rest is the natural and environmental resources of the Valley. Closely connected to those intrinsic qualities are the recreational and scenic qualities of the Minnesota River Valley. All five intrinsic qualities are strong along this byway and all five will play important roles in the byway's success and its interpretation.

### Action 12: Integrate an Environmental Stewardship Message within the Alliance's Image

Along with communicating to elected leaders and the general public the message that this byway will encourage broad community development and community health, the Alliance should use similar actions to raise awareness around the issue of the Valley's natural systems. As noted in the chapter, the River is recovering from years of environmental misuse and the job is far from over. To a large extent, the successful enhancement of the river will be a key to the success of the byway. The public should be made more aware of the Valley's exceptional character -- historic, cultural and natural. Increased awareness will result in stronger financial and political support for needed changes and investments that will help the river recover. In addition, heightened awareness will ensure that the historical and cultural resources of the Minnesota River are protected and interpreted respectfully.

***Public relations work should integrate the environment and economic development.***



