

# 7

## Marketing and Promotion

### Introduction

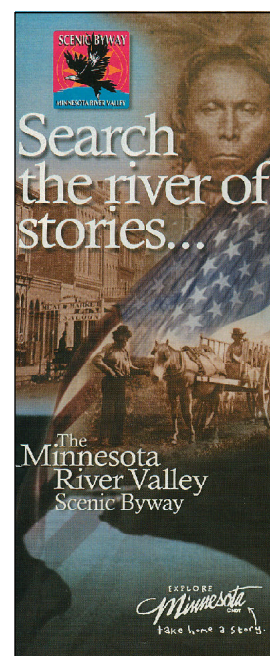
The Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway Alliance takes a very active role in working with regional and local tourism marketing entities to pool resources and ideas to promote the Byway. As discussed below, a wide range of marketing activities are underway, including significant plans to create a series of State Travel Information Centers along a portion of the corridor.

This chapter provides an overview of current marketing activities, clarifies the strategic directions the byway should take in its marketing and offers regional marketing recommendations.

### The Status of Marketing Along the Byway Today

#### There are Very Active Marketers along the Byway

Many organizations along the Byway have marketing programs and the Alliance is gradually building a loose collaborative marketing system with all of these groups. The Alliance, itself, is in the early stages of promoting the Byway as a new tourism product. Its efforts have primarily been on foundation activities such as the byway brochure, the byway video and the new website. In the months and years ahead, the types and complexity of marketing actions will expand. Following are brief summaries of the major existing marketing programs and their efforts. For a more detailed discussion of current marketing efforts see the Marketing Appendix.



### **Alliance Marketing Accomplishments**

- Hosted celebration upon Byway designation
- Created coordinated Byway Calendar of Festivals Brochure
- Created Byway Poster with brochure pocket for distribution
- Developed initial Byway Brochures (3 segments)
- Co-hosted and sponsored several marketing workshops
- Supported RDC in regional tourism study and visitor center feasibility
- Cosponsored Run, Ride and Row along Byway
- Created Byway Display and attended trade shows
- Secured Federal Highway Funds for planning and promotion
- Created of full-color Byway printed lure brochure and coordinated Byway-wide distribution
- Developed promotional video
- Launched web site (currently under construction)
- Developing preliminary kiosk designs
- Released byway-focused media announcement for National Tourism Week
- Hired consultants to complete Corridor Management Plans
- Created Points-Of-Interest database and developed photo inventory of resources along length of Byway
- Submitted application for National Byway designation
- Submitted LCMR application for comprehensive kiosk development project.
- Developed a database of GIS based maps for the byway

## **Western Minnesota Prairie Waters Coalition**

The counties of Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Swift, and Yellow Medicine, representatives of the nonprofit Western Minnesota Prairie Waters Tourism Coalition and the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission have created a partnership under the name of *Prairie Waters*. This area stretches from just south of Browns Valley to Granite Falls. It is designed to encourage cross promotion, partnerships and collaboration among communities, counties and businesses.

The collateral prepared for the region is marketed under the theme: *Western Minnesota Prairie Waters: Rivers, Lakes and Roots*. The image projected by the Prairie Water materials describes a region that has a vast outdoor landscape, abundant wildlife and waterfowl, and distinctive communities with deep ethnic roots and a rich history that describes the settling of the area.

The following are highlights of Prairie Waters current promotional materials, the area's current target markets, current promotional actions and potential target markets given the area's resource base. New marketing directions are explored more fully later in this chapter.

### **Promotional Materials**

- Area guide
- Events calendar brochure
- Heritage and antiques brochure
- Culture, Nature and History brochure
- Ag Tourism brochure
- Website
- 800#

### **Current Markets**

- Hunters
- Anglers, sportfishermen
- Wildlife and nature lovers
- Boating
- Families who fish and boat
- Families seeking lakeside resort
- Travelers with an interest in farming and agriculture

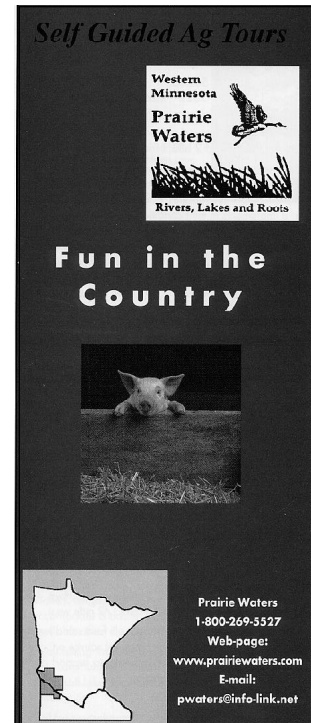


## Promotional Actions

- Trade show attendance
- State Travel Information Center racks
- Print ads in AAA, MN Monthly and others
- Local brochure outlet distribution

## Assets with More Promotion Potential

- Canoeing
- Bicycling
- Heritage sites and heritage stories
- Ethnic-travel (e.g., Scandinavian descendents)



## **Big Stone Lake Area**

At the north end of this travel corridor Big Stone Lake Area Chamber of Commerce provides the most active tourism marketing efforts for the western portions of the Byway. The Chamber represents the towns of Ortonville, Minnesota, Big Stone City, South Dakota and all of the communities and resorts on both sides of Big Stone Lake. The area has a long tradition as a tourism destination for outdoor enthusiasts, with booms as early as the late 1800's when Big Stone Lake was lined with hotels, resorts and pleasure boats. Today, many of those hotels and resorts are gone but the area's charm and relative isolation make it a place where you can still "get away from it all." The image is centered around the lake and the natural resource base.

### **Promotional Tools**

- 800 number
- Web site
- Printed guide
- Step-on guide service from top-quality local guide

### **Current Markets**

- Hunters
- Anglers
- Boaters
- Families who fish and boat
- Families seeking lakeside resort
- Birdwatchers
- Natural history enthusiasts

### **Promotional Actions**

- Travel and sporting trade shows including Iowa, Nebraska and North and South Dakota
- MN State Tourism represents the region internationally as part of their statewide product offering
- Press tours with focus on hunting, fishing and birding
- Guide distribution in state Travel Info Centers

### **Assets with More Promotion Potential**

- Bison herd
- Tallgrass prairie
- Nature tourism
- Canoeing and seakayaking
- Bicycling



## Appleton

Appleton is just beginning to develop its tourism product and as such has not ventured deeply into marketing and promotion. Nonetheless, the community has some exciting plans for the near future. Currently, Appleton's strongest markets are drive through travelers and anglers/hunters using the nearby state parks, refuges and private hunting properties.

The community's location near the Pomme de Terre River and Marsh Lake make it a popular destination for anglers and river recreators. The community is working to market the river environment with major improvements to the riverside parks. These plans include a trail, campground, restrooms, new river channel, native plantings and nature interpretation. Canoe access will be provided as well and the community is working to encourage the startup of a small canoe rental business.

The other major asset in Appleton's favor is its war veteran's heritage and related sites of interest. Appleton is the only town in the U.S. with all its streets named for war veterans. The community plans to invest in a veterans memorial that will include a plaza and museum.



## **Montevideo**

Montevideo is the next marketing entity eastward on the Byway, with a combination Chamber and Convention & Visitors Bureau. This city is located along a major transportation corridor, at the intersection of MN Highway-7 and US-212. The area has a high density of historic sites/attractions and both the Chippewa and Minnesota River flow nearby. The expansion of the regional bike path network is creating a bicycle-friendly destination for this segment of the Byway. Nearby Milan, with its ethnic festivals, sites and folk art school is also drawing heritage travelers to the area. The area also has active alternative agriculture and environmental activist communities -- features that will be appealing to some travelers. Combine this with its proximity to both Lac qui Parle State Park and Wildlife Management Area and Montevideo is a community that can be marketed as a two to three day travel destination. Despite these resources, Montevideo does not present a distinctive and well defined image through its travel materials.

### **Promotional Materials**

- Community guide
- Historic site brochure

### **Current Markets**

- General highway travelers
- Canoeists
- Folk art and folk festival

### **Promotional Actions**

- Guide distribution
- Limited print ads

### **Assets with More Promotion Potential**

- Chippewa River
- Canoeing
- Organic farms
- Stream and river fishing
- Bicycling
- Heritage tourism



## Granite Falls

Granite Falls lies 12 miles east of Montevideo and offers a classic small downtown experience. It is also adjacent to the Upper Sioux Agency State Park and the Firefly Creek Casino, both of which are the major attractions in the area. Granite Falls lies on SH212 and SH23, two of the major feeder routes from the Twin Cities. The trip is approximately 100 miles from the western side of the Cities.

The community is characterized by its charming downtown lying directly on the river with a suspension bridge and scenic views of the river from the main commercial street. The architecture is turn of the century and the downtown is very pedestrian oriented. The town also offers some unusual shopping, such as the *Valley Troll*. The oldest exposed rock in the world -- 3 billion year old granite -- is located in Granite Falls, as is the Volstead Museum. The Swensson Farm Museum can be reached within a short drive of the town. The major events for the community are the Western Fest and Ole and Lena Day. Both has received media coverage. A lodging tax was established in January of 2000 and a marketing plan is being prepared in order to put those dollars to good promotional use.

### Promotional Materials

- Annual visitors guide
- Prairie Waters Tourism Coalition materials

### Current Markets

- Event attendees
- People wanting to see the river
- Casino visitors coming into town
- State park visitors coming into town
- History buffs
- Visitors to unique shopping

### Promotional Actions

- Visitors guide
- TV, radio and print ads for two major events
- Firefly Creek Casino promotes heavily and Granite Falls benefits

### Assets with More Promotion Potential

- River
- Andrew Volstead Museum
- Trail development from Wegdahl
- Golfing
- Horseback riding



## **Redwood Falls**

Redwood Falls is the next major community that markets along the byway. Route 19 from the Twin Cities enters the town from the east and Highway 71 brings traffic from the south. Redwood Falls has a similar profile to Granite Falls in that it offers a quaint downtown and proximity to a casino and a popular state historic site -- Jackpot Junction and Lower Sioux Agency State Historic Site, respectively. The downtown offers great potential with its architecture and the nearby Alexander Ramsey Park. This is the largest city park in the state and is known as *The Little Yellowstone of Minnesota*. EPodunk.com recently named Redwood Falls as one of the top ten best Minnesota cities in which to live.

### **Promotional Materials**

- Annual visitors guide
- Periodal advertising

### **Current Markets**

- Event attendees
- Golfers
- Wildlife buffs
- Native American and Pioneer history buffs
- Casino visitors

### **Promotional Actions**

- Visitors Guide
- Web site
- Trade shows
- Print advertising
- Redwood Falls benefits from casino advertising

### **Assets with More Promotion Potential**

- Golfing
- Need to make people more aware of the town's location relative to the casino
- Architecture
- Alexander Ramsey City Park





## **New Ulm**

Moving south from Redwood Falls, the next community with significant amounts of tourism activity is New Ulm. Working from the city's German settlement and heritage, New Ulm has become an attractive destination and has developed a very healthy tourism economy that sponsors German festivals, events and products. The downtown offers one of the most distinctive shopping experiences along the central section of the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway. New Ulm has the highest concentration of specialty eating establishments and lodging properties on the Byway, with the exception of Mankato. All in all, New Ulm can be classified as having a fully developed tourism sector.

### **Promotional Materials**

- 52 page full color visitors guide
- Lure brochure
- Trade and tour show materials

### **Current Markets**

- Ethnic festivals and ethnic interest
- Shopping
- Specialty eating and lodging
- Motor coach tours

### **Promotional Actions**

- Heritage Fest
- Advertising purchases in 20 publications annually
- Trade shows including international show in Berlin
- Work with MN Office of Tourism
- Motor coach tours - a few hundred in total

### **Assets with More Promotion Potential**

- Nearby Native American history and sites
- Relationship to the river and the byway



## **Mankato**

Mankato represents the largest metropolitan area along the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway, but has shown a limited amount of interest in participating with the Alliance. They responded that much of their efforts are spent in attracting groups for special and sporting events and conferences, and they do not see the Byway as a priority for marketing. Mankato offers all the amenities of a large metro area, with its own symphony, ballet, and theater groups. The city serves as a regional hub for shopping, with all the major retail and restaurant outlets. Home to Minnesota State University, it has a large campus that also draws sporting and cultural events to the area. The city has 690 beds, with only one bed and breakfast and no lake resorts.

### **Promotional Materials**

- Full color visitors guide
- Web site
- Community map
- Convention planning guide
- Tournament planning guide
- Vikings Camp publication
- Holiday Shopping Guide
- Celebration of Lights publication
- Self-guided Dakota site guide

### **Current Markets**

- General shoppers
- University students and family
- Sports fans, Vikings Training Camp fans
- Skiers to Mt Kato
- Heritage travelers, museum goers
- POW WOW attendees and those interested in Dakota history
- Cyclists on two major trails

### **Promotional Actions**

- Annual Press Tours
- Trade show attendance including tour shows and consumer shows
- Wide distribution of promotional materials
- Numerous special events
- Print advertising

### **Assets with More Promotion Potential**

- Connection to the Byway with the potential for becoming a hub for byway exploration



## **St. Peter**

While St. Peter serves as the commercial hub for the eastern segment of the Byway, it does not promote a marketing theme or image as strong as New Ulm's nor does it have the size and resources of Mankato. The town's history is that of an early port of entry river town (almost becoming the state capitol) with over 300 steamboat landings. This activity provided tradegoods and supplies for the western portion of the territory. Little of this era remains or has been incorporated in its tourism experience. An active town, the tourism economy appears to be supported by activities of the local college, regional athletic events, and the distinctive shopping found in its downtown district. The Traverse des Sioux Treaty Site, along with the historic downtown and numerous national register properties anchor the attraction base for St. Peter. Heritage and an interesting pedestrian experience are strong potential markets for St. Peter.

### **Promotional Materials**

- Variety of brochures and rack cards

### **Current Markets**

- College students and families
- College sports fans
- Regional shoppers
- Heritage travelers
- Motor coach tours for senior church groups, bank clubs and community education groups

### **Promotional Actions**

- Special events and festivals
- Print ads (AAA Home and Away, Sioux Falls Argus Leader and Omaha World Herald)

### **Assets with More Promotion Potential**

- River history
- Architecture
- Native American history - Traverse des Sioux Treaty Center
- Eastern hub for byway travelers
- One of oldest cities in Minnesota and its history
- City of refuge during US-Dakota Conflict



## New Visitor Center Network

A comprehensive tourism study, the *Regional Tourism Center and Tourism Development Study*, was conducted in 1999 to establish the feasibility of establishing a network of Minnesota Regional Travel Information Centers in the western portion of the byway corridor. This study examined the current conditions, market, traffic counts and possible site locations for a new facility. The initial findings confirmed that this region of the State is in need of a Travel Information Center to serve the travelers of this region and to promote the diversity of its resources. The study examined the feasibility of new Travel Information Centers for Ortonville, Montevideo, and Granite Falls, an area of the State which currently does not have any such facility. Co-locating services at these locations would maximize the efficiency of each facility, i.e., chamber and museum staff at one location would all help with distribution of Travel Information Center information and assistance.



## State Promotional Strategies and Coordination

Since the state plays such a key role in the marketing of most byways, a review was performed of current Minnesota Office of Tourism (MOT) and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) marketing materials regarding the River Valley. The following are highlights from that review.

1. Minnesota Office of Tourism (MOT) Marketing Theme, *Take Home A Story* fits well into the type of experience visitors can have along the byway.
2. MOT provides opportunities for external marketing outside of the state through grants.
3. MOT's international strategy for 1999 included Europe (Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, and the UK) and Asia (Japan), all countries with strong interest in River Valley history topics (Native Americans, *Little House on the Prairie*, etc.) In addition, Canadian markets included both Winnipeg and Regina.
4. The Byway is fairly well contained in one travel region as designated in the publications and thus there is minimal confusion regarding where and by whom the Byway is being marketed. The Prairie Region in MOT's 2000 Travel Guide contains most of the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway towns with the exception of Brown's Valley. MOT has developed a brochure called, "Southern Minnesota- Something for Everyone" and includes nearly all the byway communities.
5. MOT has an outstanding scenic byway web site ([www.exploreminnesota.com/index.asp?section=SCENICBYWAYS](http://www.exploreminnesota.com/index.asp?section=SCENICBYWAYS)). Once connected to the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway pages, the viewer is able to obtain the following:

Things to Do:	68 listings
Museums and Historic Sites:	28 listings
Lodging:	58 listings
Festivals and Events:	38 listings
The Arts:	0 (come back later message)
Community Links:	Big Stone Lake Area, Montevideo, Granite Falls, Redwood Falls, New Ulm, Mankato, Le Sueur, and St. Peter



6. MOT's Personalized Travel Planning Service provided information on a trip along the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway and within 10 days a report was delivered with a comprehensive list of travel options, including:
  - 45 hotel/motel accommodations
  - 11 bed and breakfasts
  - 1 historic inn
  - 2 resorts
  - 35 camping opportunities
  - 1 canoe rental
  - 6 hiking recommendations
  - 1 launch
  - 6 State Parks
  - 14 Chamber Offices
  - 2 Gaming Facilities
  - 32 Historic Sites
  - 8 Science and Nature Sites
  - 5 Tour/Excursion Opportunities
  - 1 Waterfall
  - 51 Festivals and Events
7. The DNR has Minnesota River Canoe Route Guides (4 sections). These provide information about canoeing stretches of the Minnesota River.
8. The DNR puts out a colorful and interesting publication *A Guide to Minnesota State Parks* that provides valuable info on the State Parks located along the byway.
9. The Minnesota Byways Commission created a Minnesota Scenic Byways Master Marketing Plan in July of 1998 that outlined the marketing goals, objectives and strategies for both National and Minnesota Scenic Byways of the state.



## Issues and Challenges

There are a variety of marketing and promotion issues and challenges facing this byway.

### The Byway's Character Needs Packaging to Make it More Accessible to More Visitors

The Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway is a beautiful and charming place to visit today, but in order to make it more accessible to a broader range of visitors, creative packaging is needed. The following are some examples of how packaging is needed.

- The area is rural, charming and has abundant small town hospitality. For most travelers, however, these small towns need to be packaged into day drives or tours, or themed by similar qualities so that visitors can link several communities together into an experience of some length. In most cases, information is needed on the history of the small towns to help visitors understand their significance.
- The Valley's landscape, water systems and public land holdings offer exceptional opportunities for people to get up close to nature. These resources are at the core of the byway's current tourism product and experience. The challenge is to make more people aware of these resources and again, to package the experiences in ways that make them accessible to a broader range of visitors. For example, most people driving through the region would not find many of the wonderful nature reserves and nature walks unless they were deliberately looking for them.
- The river is quiet, mysterious and fun. In many places it is not accessible to the average traveler due to a lack of information. In addition, lingering images of the river's polluted past may deter some visitors from exploring the river. Public relations need to update that image and tell a message of people really using and enjoying the river.
- The Byway has a rich natural history which, if interpreted properly, will be appealing and educational for all travelers. The Valley's landscape speaks in a subtle voice. Good interpretation can make more people aware and thus more appreciative of that landscape and natural history. Good media stories can tell these stories as well.
- The Byway's story *Struggles for a Home*, in particular the U.S./ Dakota Conflict is significant and distinctive. The Valley has high quality museums and interpretation on this topic, but nonetheless, there is great potential to expand and strengthen this story to a level of a nationally significant destination.



- The Byway's story *Food for a Nation*, agriculture and the Valley's contribution to feeding the world is interesting and also has great potential. Again creative interpretive development and creative marketing are needed to make it accessible and known to travelers.
- The Byway is long and disjointed due to its various roads and routes. This makes for an interesting adventure, but packaging is needed to create more coherent tourism products.
- The region's travel costs (products and services) are a value compared to many other areas and this topic needs to be communicated to travelers.
- All in all, the corridor needs a unifying concept to pull together all of its ideas and sites into a more concise tourism product.

### **The Physical Byway Route Needs a Stronger Identity in Order to Support Marketing Efforts**

- Other than a limited number of signs, there is nothing about the current collection of routes that suggest to the traveler that they are actually one route. This byway is an assemblage of roads, in some respects with other nearby roads offering similar driving experiences. It is not the only way to get from Belle Plaine to Browns Valley. It is not distinctive due to consistent design or layout. Therefore, if one markets the byway and then people come to drive the byway, they must find a cohesive, coherent, synthesized route. Signage, landscape elements, interpretive facilities and supporting materials must tie the byway together. A visitor or travel writer driving the route must see the logic for its routing, must easily find the story that it has to tell.

### **Due to the Byway's Length, the Marketing Strategy Must Seek Ways to Offer the Route in Consumable Segments**

- The Alliance has intelligently segmented the byway into seven parts: fish segment (Browns Valley to Ortonville), goose segment (Ortonville to Montevideo), canoe segment (Montevideo to Granite Falls), tipi segment (Granite Falls to Redwood Falls), falls (Redwood to New Ulm), beer stein (New Ulm to Mankato) and river boat (Mankato to Belle Plaine). Each item-- fish, goose, canoe, etc. -- is an icon associated with a geographic segment of the river.
- The question is, Can this segmentation work from a marketing perspective? This plan's answer is a qualified "Yes". That





means that it can and should be used in some situations, but not in others. The seven segment approach should be used to orient the traveler in printed materials, in maps and at kiosks. For targeted marketing (e.g., historic sites, Struggles for a Home, agritourism, etc.), the segmentation does not work since each of these resources can be found all along the byway. The Action Summary section of this chapter clarifies this concept via the recommendations offered.

### Byway Marketing Must Sometimes Lead and Sometimes Complement Other Marketing Activities

- Because there are so many other existing marketing efforts for specific communities, sites and for multi-county regions (i.e., Prairie Waters), the byway must take a supporting or complementary role rather than a lead product role. The byway is a connector between places. It can be, along with the river, the tourism product that encourages multi-town exploration and longer stays. The marketing challenge is to both offer the byway as the centerpiece product in some cases and as the backdrop product in other cases. Articles and website material for example can directly focus on the byway experience. Festivals and site specific activities will be a typical site-focused-product behind which the byway might place itself. Therefore, the Alliance should seek a limited number of *leading marketing roles* and a limited number of *supporting marketing roles*.

### Marketing for the Byway Must Reach Residents as well as Visitors

- The marketing effort must not only make potential visitors more aware of the byway, it must also make local, regional and state residents aware of the river, the byway and the reasons why these resources are of importance to all Minnesota residents. Therefore, the marketing strategy must have an in-state component as well as an out-of-state strategy. An important component of the in-state effort must be elected officials and residents living within the corridor who may not feel that tourism is an important economic development objective to pursue.



## Marketing Objectives

The proposed marketing objectives for the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway are:

1. Market in partnership with Byway tourism organizations, communities, businesses, services and attractions.
2. Increase byway awareness and interest among corridor residents and elected officials.
3. Increase byway awareness and interest among Minnesota residents and businesses.
4. Increase byway awareness and interest among residents of adjoining states, Minnesota's major visitor origin states and among national travelers.
5. Use the marketing program to raise the general awareness of corridor communities as good areas for investment and to dispel lingering negative images of the Minnesota River.
6. Participate in a supporting role in marketing efforts driven by byway marketing partners such as Prairie Waters and the various community chambers and CVB's.
7. Take the lead in other marketing efforts in which the byway will be seen as the primary product.
8. Align marketing with investment and interpretive efforts so that the product promoted is easily found and consumed by the visitor.
9. Increase visitor expenditures for tourism businesses along the Byway route.
10. Develop strategies to increase Byway visitation during the fall, spring and winter seasons.



## Defining an Image for the Byway

A review was performed of materials that are available that offer a portrait of the image being conveyed to the public. The current images of the Minnesota River and its Valley consist of the following:

- Agricultural breadbasket
- Recovering river. That is, a river well on its way toward cleanliness and a restored ecosystem.
- The place where New Ulm is located. This community has such an established tourism image, that for many people, there is no doubt a higher level of awareness of New Ulm than of the byway.
- The place where all the state parks are located.
- Somewhere out there in southwestern Minnesota. There's no lakes there, are there?

**For the future, it is recommended that the byway's image consist of the following elements:**

- River of Stories, the theme now in use by the Alliance.
- The way in which the stories are conveyed is through the *RiverStories Byway*, an integrated scenic drive, trail system, interpretive program and town center exploration experience that will link together the byway's three themes: Struggles for a Home, Taking Food to a Nation and the River's Legacy as well as other related efforts such as the Audobon Birding Trail through the Valley and the ever expanding trail network.
- The other side of rural Minnesota, that is, it offers a different and refreshing change of pace from going to a lake.
- A relaxing two day drive through rural America that offers something special in every season of the year
- A place to learn a lot about Native American and early Euro-American settler history
- An agricultural breadbasket where there is good food to eat and lots of fun things to do themed around food
- 300 miles of natural surprises and pristine countryside you never knew were there.

If woven together, these elements will address many of the marketing strategy's objectives, will provide the Valley with an end to end product/experience that defines the Valley and unites byway supporters, and finally gently distinguishes the corridor from the rest of the state while at the same time making people more aware of the special challenges and opportunities offered by the state's namesake river.



## Action Summary

Marketing actions for the full byway are described below.

***American Byway status will bring benefits to the byway.***

### Action 31: Seek American Byway Designation

Continue to seek National Byway (recently renamed *American Byways*) designation in particular for marketing leverage offered as being part of the Program. The Federal Highway Administration is in the process of developing a national and international branding and marketing program for nationally designated byways.

Securing a designation will ensure that the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway benefits from the national marketing effort. The byway narrowly missed designation during the last round due to the need to complete this plan. With this plan as part of the package, the byway should be well positioned to receive designation in 2002, the next nomination year.

***For a product this large and undefined in the minds of the traveler, a media marketing program will produce significant results.***

### Action 32: Find Funds for and then Implement a Byway Media Marketing Program

Media marketing is the process of promoting through the writers and other media professionals and subsequently the publications/programs that publish their stories and shows. It flows directly from and addresses the objectives developed from this strategy. It is more cost effective than advertising in that whereas advertising buys a one-page -- or less -- concise graphic with a little text, a travel article provides up to several pages of in-depth coverage. It allows for a more complex strategy to unfold in that a variety of issues can be addressed. For example, for the Minnesota River Byway, there are various audiences to target (i.e., local, regional, state and national) and there are a variety of stories to tell (i.e., see our tourism destination, the river is healthy again, its a nice place to visit and to live, etc.) The results are immediate; when an article runs in the targeted area, it generates business for local tourism establishments. It is also easy to track the results as visitors can easily remember where they read about the destination.

The media marketing effort would accomplish a variety of actions for the byway including the following:

1. Create a Public Relations/Press Package. A public relations package would be prepared for use to promote the Byway to group tour operators, travel writers, trade magazines and news outlets. This press package should include: (1) photographs of the Byway including all seasons; (2) news releases describing important winter and summer recreational resources and events; (3) key area brochures and publications; (4) special stories on activities that may improve exposure of the area



during shoulder seasons; (5) local tourism contacts that can help travel writers with stories (business owners, managers, guides and consultants).

2. Expand and Work all Press Contacts. The Alliance should work with the Office of Tourism and local tourism offices to develop press contacts to market the Byway. These contacts should include the travel writers for regional Minnesota papers as well as writers for major papers in North and South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa, Indiana, Wisconsin and Canada. Ongoing efforts to distribute press releases and editorial advisories should be maintained.
3. Host Press Tours. Several press tours each year would be hosted for travel writers that write for publications that represent the target markets of the Byway as well as any other variety of publications that might have an interest and angle that fits the byway.
4. Educate the Industry. There are individuals, travel information centers, travel agencies and related businesses, and organizations that are part of the travel industry who do not know about the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway. The marketing program would find ways to educate them through newsletters, tours, sharing of marketing materials, cross promotion strategies, incentives and word of mouth.

It is recommended that the byway pursue a National Scenic Byways grant as well as other funding sources (e.g., Economic Development Administration and state sources) to implement a media marketing campaign for the entire byway.

### **Action 33: Create the The RiverStories Program**

The Alliance should formally announce the beginning of the RiverStory Program as an Alliance sponsored effort to create a pathway via car, boat, bike and foot from Belle Plaine to Brown's Valley that will provide a seamless flow of stories and experiences about the Minnesota River Valley, about the cultures of the region, about the history of the state and about other topics such as food, folklore and the arts. (See Chapter 8 for more details on this program.)

***RiverStories will be both an interpretive program and a marketing and promotion effort.***

From a marketing perspective, this recommendation helps to solve a variety of marketing challenges.

- First, it unites many aspects of tourism development that communities are doing now and may do in the future under the banner of "telling the river's story". This program takes the



disjointed byway experience that exists today and provides an easy to understand angle that unites the entire drive (e.g. Your route takes you where it may, as you follow the river's story.) The Alliance thus presents to the visitor a simple, but appealing, concept: come hear stories and perhaps find your own story.

- Second, this program fits nicely within the state “Take Home a Story” theme.
- Third, this concept simplifies the Struggles for a Home, Taking Food to a Nation and River Legacy interpretive themes and produces one, easy to understand product that can appeal to a wide range of visitors. It also is easily expandable to include other concepts.
- Fourth, from a public relations perspective, it allows the byway to leverage the authors who lived in or near the corridor at one time or another (e.g., Laura Ingalls Wilder). The concept of stories suggests an oral tradition, as well as written, and thus incorporates the Dakota culture.
- Fifth, an important part of building local support for the byway is making it relevant and tangible to residents and elected officials. This theme allows the Alliance to unite its interpretive, riverside facility investments, signage, visitor information, marketing and trail strategies under one umbrella: The RiverStories Byway. The stories to be told by each community should generate a degree of self-interest and buy-in from each town along the byway.

#### **Action 34: Pursue Funding to Expand the Byway's Signage System**

***Signage is an important marketing action.***

This is a critical action. More signs of a variety of types are needed to make visitors aware of the byway and to direct their travels.

#### **Action 35: Assist the Office of Tourism on International Marketing**

***Support the state's international marketing efforts by coordinating local programs with state initiatives.***

The byway should concentrate on the U.S. markets, but nonetheless the Alliance should look for low cost opportunities to create an international presence. The Alliance should work with the Minnesota Office of Tourism to be included in activities that stimulate interest in international visitation. Package existing materials that can then be carried with any state dignitary that is traveling abroad, a Welcome to the Minnesota River Valley package. Small gifts, brochures, slides and press releases should be cleverly packaged to invite dignitaries to the Minnesota River Valley.



## Action 36: Miscellaneous Actions

- Working with the associations linked to the target outdoor and cultural markets, test a direct mail campaign pitching promotional weekends and specialty tours.
- Enhance the web site to contain information that is “niched” for the various target markets identified in this strategy. Provide on-line, downloadable PDF information files on niche activities. Maintain a current events calendar on-line.
- Work with local museums to improve gift shops that offer distinctive publications, educational games and locally produced gifts and crafts that support the themes presented in the exhibits.
- Increase and market the availability of customized tours and step-on guide services (currently there are full-service tour companies and guides available only in Ortonville and New Ulm).
- Provide professional marketing assistance for the Milan Folk Arts School and create distinctive lodging opportunities in this segment of the byway for students coming from outside the area.
- Find another site for the Encampment at Traverse des Sioux before too much time has passed and any momentum from past events is lost.
- Develop more information, interpretation and increase marketing efforts for all communities interested in watchable wildlife and particularly birding festivals (the state DNR office is currently conducting workshops state-wide on this subject).
- Develop a Byway-only brochure rack that hold only Byway Corridor sites and attractions. This would mean not including community-focused brochures but limiting rack to tourism-related publications.
- Promote hospitality training that cross-markets communities and resources up and down the River Valley.
- Encourage more distinctive shopping, dining and lodging facilities along the Byway. Encourage farmers to develop farm-stays.
- Promote local artists and folk-arts of the region. Byway enthusiasts are looking for that one-of-a kind experience. For example, if any community promotes an ethnic image, work with local restaurants to offer at least one ethnic dish on their menu.
- Identify sites that are capable of hosting bus tours and work on strategies to encourage more group tours throughout Byway Corridor.

*There are a variety of other necessary, but secondary, actions.*



***This segment extends  
from Browns Valley to  
Montevideo***

## **Action 37: Western Segment Marketing and Product Development Actions**

Telling the story of the intrinsic resources along the Byway creates an important part of the tourism product for Scenic Byways. Interpretation, whether it is experienced through active or passive participation, is often the foundation for developing tourism products and services that are complimentary to the Byway's resources.

### **Dominant Interpretive Topics**

Major interpretation should focus on river valley formation, Lake Agassiz, River Warren, current and historic ecosystems, relationship of human cultures to Big Stone Lake and associated ecosystems, relationship of human culture to the prairie grass systems, living on the western frontier, the railroad's influence on settlement.

### **Major Activity Themes:**

Fishing, hunting, boating, canoeing, bicycling, bird watching, prairie botany, prairie tours, agri-tours.

### **Target Markets:**

Fishermen, bird hunters, birding clubs, botany clubs, horticulture and gardening clubs, families for canoeing, history buffs, railroad enthusiasts, bicyclists, people traveling across Minnesota toward the Badlands, Mount Rushmore, and Yellowstone.

### **Needed Infrastructure and Facility Investments for Marketing:**

- Visitor information facility in Browns Valley.
- Visitor Centers in Ortonville and Montevideo
- Public bathrooms in several areas
- Additional canoe and bike rental facilities in Ortonville, Milan.
- Interpretive kiosks throughout the byway segments.
- Kayaking course near Montevideo.
- Bicycle loop system of paths and routes
- Expansion of Milan's Folk Arts School.
- More lodging rooms as noted: Montevideo (emphasis on distinctive properties, inns/B&B), Ortonville (emphasis on upgrading resorts, additional resorts on Minnesota side, distinctive properties, inn/B&B), one lodging facility in Browns Valley (modern motel or resort).





## Action 38: Central Segment Marketing and Product Development

### **Dominant Interpretive Topics:**

The major theme will concentrate on the struggles by Native Americans and Europeans to establish and hold onto their homes, as well as the conflicts that arose between them. Forms of shelter, food propagation and gathering, movement on the river, movement on the land, social structures, local government, conflict resolution, family structures, education systems, religion, struggles and conflicts and peacemaking between groups.

*This segment extends from Granite Falls to Redwood Falls to New Ulm and finally, to Mankato.*

### **Major Activity Themes:**

Architecture tours, cultural interpretation, special events related to cultures, scenic drives, New Ulm's German products, food events and festivals. Educational events focusing on the interpretive themes. History on Native Americans.

### **Target Markets:**

History buffs, Native American culture buffs, European culture, small town America travelers, scenic byway enthusiasts.

### **Needed Infrastructure and Facility Investments for Marketing:**

- More distinctive lodging opportunities in Granite Falls.
- Further development of Scandinavian culture in this segment (Granite Falls) and in the Prairie Waters (Milan, Dawson, and Madison).
- New Traveler Information Center for Granite Falls.
- Kayak rental facilities

## Action 39: Eastern Segment Marketing and Product Development

### **Dominant Interpretive Topics:**

This portion of the River Valley presents many sides of the overall story along the river and therefore it is recommended that interpretation attempt to touch on all of the other experiences and stories to be found along the Byway. River ecosystems, river travel (from canoes to steamboats), farming and food processing, EuroAmerican/Dakota conflicts and cultural qualities, and the Joseph R. Brown story.

*This segment extends from Mankato north to St. Peter, Le Sueur and Henderson and to the byway gateway in Belle Plaine.*



**Major Activity Themes:**

Interpretive/educational touring, museums, factory tours, historic locations, quarrying operation tours, river walks, canoeing trails, distinctive shopping and unique events along this segment of Byway.

**Target Markets**

Day trippers from Twin Cities

**Needed Infrastructure and Facility Investments for Marketing:**

- Distinctive Lodging.
- Promotion of biking routes from Belle Plaine to St. Peter on Byway (if shoulders could be expanded) and county roads.
- Increase number of interpretive kiosks and roadside pull-offs that promote River Stories theme.
- Complete Joseph R. Brown Minnesota River Center in Henderson.
- Provide a small visitor kiosk in Henderson
- Interpretive site that highlights River Boat Story.
- Assist Henderson and Le Sueur's downtown with improved retail mix for tourism.
- Further development of the Food for a Nation story, particularly the Green Giant Story. The City of Le Sueur has been offered a major Green Giant collection if it can find a suitable property to house and display. More touring opportunities of food production facilities, farms, and other agricultural-related sites would greatly enhance this region and the interpretive theme.
- Finalize Treaty Site History Center exhibits in St. Peter and market its stories.

**Please refer to the Marketing Appendix for a set of Marketing Profiles that detail information regarding the byway's target markets**

