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Interpretation Plan

Introduction

This section of the corridor management plan provides guidance and direction for interpretive activities along the 287-mile long Byway. An important aspect of this byway’s interpretive strategy is to mesh resource management, product development and marketing within the interpretive effort. Each aspect of the byway’s efforts in each of these four categories should augment and support the other byway development categories.

Status of Interpretation along the Byway

There are existing interpretive strategies along the byway that are distinctive and unique that should be noted. These communities and/or sites have initiated personal services interpretation, offer services that provide unique access to resources, or offer distinctive products or services. These are just a few examples of interpretive initiatives that should be used as models for considering other distinctive interpretive strategies.

Browns Valley to Ortonville

- The Eahtonka II, Judy Drewicke. Charter cruises, public excursions, step-on guide services
- Stony Run Trade Co., Don “Baboo” Felton. Paddle maker and historian, lectures, displays, demonstrations and voyager goods.
- Independently Speaking, Brent Olson. Author, historian and storyteller.
- Big Stone Lake State Park interpretive programs
- Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge. Summer herd of bison to



What Is Interpretation?

*There are many definitions for interpretation. Credited as being the “Father of Interpretation”, Freeman Tilden stated in his book, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, that*

“Interpretation is an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.”

*Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 1962.*



graze on refuge. Tours available during special events.

- Big Stone County Museum. Tour guide available.

Ortonville to Montevideo

- Milan Folk Arts Center
- Java River Coffee Shop. Use of locally produced farm-products on menu, kayaks for rent.
- Lac qui Parle County History Center.
- Lac qui Parle State Park, Refuge and interpretive center
- Lac qui Parle Hunting Camp. Professionally guided waterfowl hunts.

Montevideo to Granite Falls

- Swensson Farm Museum. Living history farmstead built in 1901.

Granite Falls to Mankato

- Upper Sioux Agency State Park interpretive exhibits
- Lower Sioux Agency State Historic Site and Interpretive Center
- Fort Ridgley State Park
- Gilfillan Estate
- Minnesota Machinery Museum
- Birch Coulee State Historic Site
- Schell Museum of Brewery. Special tours for groups of 20 or more.

Mankato to Belle Plaine

- W. W. Mayo House, Le Sueur. Guided tours available.
- Flandeau State Park
- Minneopa State Park
- Traverse des Sioux State Historic Site and Center
- Cox House, St. Peter

Travel Information Center Project and Kiosk Funding

The Alliance will continue to seek funding from the LCMR and other sources for the following interpretive infrastructure development:

- Kiosk and Entrance Signage Planning for up to 15 sites
- Kiosk Design
- Secure Kiosk Locations
- Project Construction and Installation



Interpretive Issues and Challenges

Interpretation should appeal to a variety of audience segments.

By targeting new interpretive services and opportunities to the needs, expectations and interests of specific definable segments of Byway visitors, greater impact can be created. Audiences that need to be considered include:

- Mixed family groups-passing through on vacation to another destination
- Mixed family groups coming to visit friends and relatives
- Individuals and/or non-related groups traveling to participate in outdoor recreational activities (hunting, fishing, camping)
- Adults - both male and female
- People traveling with children
- Students visiting historic learning centers
- Locals traveling to learn more about local heritage
- Byway travelers
- Locals attending special events, festivals and activities

Interpretation can also be designed to address special interest segments. Market segments that would find the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway of interest include history buffs, outdoors enthusiasts, birders, folk and craft artists, antiquers, senior citizens, and byway enthusiasts.

There is a need for experienced-based tourism to complement existing destinations and to unite the corridor

There must be opportunities for visitors to become actively involved - whether reading a sign or brochure, riding on an old farm implement, hand-threshing, listening to storytellers or watching and listening to traditional native dances and music. Local artists, crafters and residents should create souvenirs which will add to the options for learning about area resources. This will also enable the visitor to reflect on the experiences each time they see that item after returning home.

Develop innovative educational resources that support curriculum activities of area schools.

Opportunities exist for the development of educational activities that tie school curriculum into activities that can take place along the Byway. Geology, biology, history, and natural sciences are all examples of themes that could complement current curriculum goals in the classroom.

Types of Interpretation

Interpretive services can readily be subdivided into two types: personal and non-personal.

Personal interpretive services are those which involve a person (naturalist, guide, ranger) who directly communicates with the visitors. These personal services include such things as:

- hikes
- walks
- talks
- demonstrations of crafts, skills or scientific experiments
- living history characterizations
- theatrical, dance, artistic or musical performances
- staffing a visitor information booth to answer guest questions; and
- guided excursions via train, boat, horseback or even commercial airlines.

Research has shown personal services to be the most effective method of communication because they have the advantage of two-way dialog between interpreter and visitor.

Non-personal interpretive services are those which involve some type of medium, whether written, auditory or visual to communicate desired messages. These media often include:

- signs
- indoor and outdoor exhibits
- movies or videos
- written brochures and trail guides
- taped messages which may be visitor-activated along a trail or in a museum or available for a take-along tape recorder
- special radio frequencies for auto travelers.



Sensitive Resources Should Not be Misused.

There are areas where it is inappropriate for visitors to go. Many of the historical sites along the Byway are located on private land. Visitors must respect the rights of landowners. Interpretive kiosks should be located strategically along the road right-of-ways to enable visitors to view those sites which are visible and to visually locate those sites which are not. As with any site containing historic relics and artifacts, it is imperative that visitors not be permitted to remove any items from these sites. This Byway contains several sensitive cultural areas such as religious or ceremonially sacred sites, including the Native American burial mounds found throughout the area. There are also many Scientific and Natural Areas along the byway that merit special care by visitors. Also, the subject of the clashes between soldiers, EuroAmerican settlers and Native Americans is an extremely sensitive subject and must be treated in a manner which presents historical information with both accuracy and sensitivity.

Interpretive Principles

Many of the historic, cultural and natural resources along the Byway have disappeared. Prairies, wetlands, wildlife, historic buildings, pioneer trails and roadways, and evidence of both Native American and early European settlements have been replaced or removed as the area was cleared and permanently settled. Through interpretation, however, this history can be recreated and enjoyed.

This interpretive program should accomplish the following:

- Encourage partnerships along the Byway,
- Help identify the important themes and best locations for interpreting them,
- Identify optional types of media to be utilized,
- Integrate the existing resources available, such as available land and locations in which to install the interpretive media,
- Discourage any degradation to the scenic views or character of interpretive sites
- Ensure ADA Compliance in All Projects. The Americans with Disabilities Act will be complied with on all projects. Every site design shall recognize and accommodate the needs of disabled visitors, to interpret the sites and history of the Minnesota River Valley for the disabled, and to follow all applicable ADA policies.



Interpretive Objectives

Implementation of this plan will enable the Alliance and partners to accomplish a number of objectives:

- understand and implement effective methods for visitor management, both attracting more visitors and moving them away from overused or fragile resources or those on private lands;
- develop themes and strategies which will help market the entire Byway and highlight specific designated sites along the Byway;
- incorporate effective techniques for planning, managing and evaluating interpretive services;
- enhance community and Byway involvement by stimulating cosponsored activities, materials or other cooperative partnerships;
- increase visitor and community awareness, interest, knowledge and stewardship of natural, cultural and historic resources being featured;
- increase visitor involvement during targeted seasons;
- provide opportunities for firsthand experiences with natural, cultural and historic resources;
- generate awareness, support and funding for resource protection and preservation efforts;
- generate significant positive economic and tourism impacts;
- generate options for active visitor involvement by providing experiences which will create memorable impacts - whether reading a sign or brochure, sitting on a thresher or tractor, or listening to pioneer stories or songs.



Interpretive Techniques for the Scenic Byway

The interpretive media discussed in this strategy include the following:

- Small Interpretive Kiosks
- Optional: Small Interpretive Kiosk modified for 24 Hour Visitor Info Center
- Wayside Signage Exhibits
- Printed guides/ brochures
- Low frequency radio transmission system
- Activity Booklet
- Audio Tape Tours
- Self-Guided Trail
- Step-On Guide Service in each Community
- Byway Passport Program

Small Interpretive Kiosks

This plan outlines numerous sites for interpretive kiosks. Each of these sites will have four panels, 2 large (42" x 30") and 2 small (42" x 16") interpretive panels. Each small kiosk will have an orientation panel and at least one activity-oriented panel that will encourage visitors to take part in some activity along the Byway. Each panel provides detailed interpretive information on site specific subjects and any unique local history.

The kiosks should conform to the following guidelines:

- Each text block section should contain less than 50 words.
- The main interpretive concept is communicated in 15 seconds.
- Provocative headlines and graphics are used to draw attention to the interpretive message.
- All written labels should be written at a 5th grade vocabulary level.
- Byway logo should be included.



Interpretive Themes

The story of the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway will be divided into three parallel themes: *Struggles for a Home*, *Food for a Nation* and *The River's Legacy*. These themes will create the interpretive thread to tie the stories of the corridor together to provide the visitor with a bigger picture of the Minnesota River Valley's heritage.

Following are the three major theme statements for the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway:

Historical: Struggles for a Home

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 wars on the Indians, 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 Indian-European tensions resulted in national legislation that accelerated the European domination of the West. The struggle for survival often meant that there were winners and their were losers, and this went beyond the human drama. Virgin timber, native tallgrass prairies, wetlands, and wildlife all fought to survive as man encroached on this unsettled part of America. This, too, can be seen as part of the overall story that is waiting to be told along the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway.

Cultural: Food for a Nation

The Minnesota River Valley has a regional, national and international story to tell of the growth and development of the American system of agriculture: *Food for a Nation and to the World*. This story is evident through a number of key characters and topics: the prairie soils, the opening of the prairie to farming, the Homestead Act, the crops chosen, the development of agricultural and other cooperatives, the food processing companies and systems (including Green Giant), and evolving production and land stewardship systems. The Valley was shaped by the transportation systems created to bring these crops to market, starting first with the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, expanding to railroads and the Great Lakes, and creating the worldwide system of food manufacturing and distribution that remains to this day.

Natural: The River's Legacy.

The Minnesota River provides the background and context for the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway. The byway is about the uniqueness of the Minnesota River ecosystem. There would be no Minnesota River byway without the Minnesota River; the future of the byway is interwoven with the future of the river. The Minnesota River watershed is a huge area covering almost 10 million acres, involving 37 counties, and dominating the southwest quarter of the state. Long an abused natural resource, the Minnesota River is now emerging as an integral part of the region and a critical element of its economic sustainability. Native people and then settlers came to the valley, drawn by vast resources found within it. But human interaction with the Minnesota River has often not been positive. The seas of prairie and wetlands throughout the valley that sustained thriving populations of birds and bison and contributed to the health of the river were plowed and drained to expose the rich underlying soils that characterize the area. These practices compiled with establishment of towns and cities almost destroyed the river. Now people are trying to save the river. Now the legacy is being restored.

But the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway is also tied to the river's past. The byway brings the traveler together with intensely beautiful scenic views, interesting and varied topography, historical background, unique cultural experiences and diverse recreational opportunities. The Minnesota River is now most often gentle and calm. Once, however, the river valley was filled by the Glacial River Warren. The glacial river carved the valley down into ancient rock. Today there are outcrops of this bedrock, among the oldest rock formations in the world, throughout the valley. The valley varies from one to five miles in width and from 75 to 200 feet deep. The scenic byway flows along with the river through steep bluffs and low flood plain areas that characterize one of the most impressive landscapes in Minnesota. Wood slopes and flood plains of willow, cottonwood, elm and ash rise into upland bluffs of red cedar and remnants of prairie grasses. Many areas appear virtually unchanged from how they would have looked during presettlement times.

The Minnesota River Valley is located in a unique transition zone where east meets west in the middle of continent. This east-west factor makes the Minnesota River basin an important habitat area. Wildlife and birds abound in the riparian system. The river flood plain acts as an extension of the Eastern forest and adjoining grasslands and marshes provide habitat for many bird species. The Minnesota Audubon Society is currently establishing a Birding Trail along the Minnesota River featuring primary birding

The written text should conform to the following guidelines:

- All sentences are short, simple sentences.
- Unfamiliar and technical terms are avoided unless explained.
- Active verbs are used in writing text.
- Text includes descriptions of experiences visitors can have on the site.
- Colorful language and images are used to stimulate interest and visitor involvement.

Optional panels and 24 Hour Visitor Info Centers

Communities that do not have a formal visitor information center, or wish to have information available to visitors when their centers, chambers, and cvb's are closed, may wish to construct a similar kiosk design, preferably in a visible location on the Byway in the downtown area. These kiosks can be easily modified to include a small roof to shelter brochure racks that can contain information on the Byway and surrounding communities.

Wayside Signage Exhibits

Wayside exhibits are recommended for sites along the Byway where specific interpretation messages are important to the story yet there is no need for visitor orientation. Mounting and framing should be the same color as that on the kiosks and panel colors should be complimentary to the landscape. Wayside exhibits are often low-profile, to give visitors a view and perspective of the site. Panels should be 36"x24".



Low frequency radio transmission system

Messages can be transmitted along the Byway to travelers through their vehicle radios via radio transmissions. This approach should be utilized along stretches of the Byway where there is limited opportunities for other interpretive media and a need to keep the visitor engaged in the Byway's message.

Activity Booklet

An Interpretive Activities Booklet/Self-Guiding Tour Book would be full of interesting information and activities designed for families with children, domestic or international travelers. The Interpretive Activities Booklet would build upon the existing interpretive messages and give visitors more to think about and do.

Audio Tape Tours

An audio taped tour should be developed for the segment of the Byway that has the highest density of historic sites related to the Dakota Conflict. These tapes should be available at visitor centers, gift shops and chamber of commerce offices. Tapes can either be sold outright or rented for a nominal fee. This project should become the prototype for other themed Audio Tape Tours such as organic farming, life of women on the prairie, geology of the Minnesota River Valley, watchable wildlife (starting with birding).

Self-Guided Trails

Whenever feasible, the creation of trails or walkways on which visitors travel along and messages are communicated through the use of brochures, wayside exhibits or other media should be built. This gives visitors an opportunity to get out of their vehicles and experience the landscape firsthand.

locations. Deer, turkey, pheasants and other game birds and waterfowl provide ample hunting opportunities. The Minnesota River provides important recreational opportunities for anglers from southern Minnesota, South Dakota, Iowa and Nebraska. Walleye, northern pike, and channel catfish are found as well as sauger, and smallmouth bass.

Part of the river from Lac qui Parle dam to Franklin is a designated Minnesota Wild and Scenic River. Boaters and canoeists frequently enjoy excursions on this winding river and there are many access points on the banks along the entire route. There is also growing interest in the development of a trail network along the entire river corridor with groups already actively working on establishment of sections of the trail.

The future of the river is linked to the sustainability of communities within its watershed. An awareness of and appreciation for the value of the river for recreation through historic, cultural and scenic opportunities enhances the need for a healthy river system. A healthy river system supports varied quality recreational experiences, including travel on the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway. The Scenic Byway contributes to the future of the river by heightening public interest in preservation and improvement to the resource. The future of the byway and the future of the river go hand in hand.

The RiverStory Pathway: A Unifying Interpretive Vehicle

The three dominant interpretive themes will be delivered to visitors through a unifying experience called the RiverStory Byway. As introduced in Chapter 7 and detailed in the action recommendations that follow, this concept will simplify and integrate the three themes into one umbrella project extending between each end of the byway.

Together, these elements will provide the content and structure for the majority of interpretive sites along the Corridor and will be tied into ongoing marketing efforts. A detailed inventory of attractions along the route has been compiled into a database managed by UMRVDC. This database can be used to identify thematic sites and provide listings of attractions and visitor services along the route.



Action Summary

Following is a list of suggested interpretive actions for the byway as a whole. The separate standing document, The RiverStories Program details the site specific investments that should be made along the byway.

Action 40: Create the RiverStories Program

RiverStories will be a byway-long effort to tell the stories of the river -- the three themes noted here, as well as others -- as part of one umbrella pathway, byway or linear experience. Rather than dividing the byway into separate stories and separate segments, the RiverStories Program will allow for all of these interpretive efforts to be marketed as part of one product: a journey along the River of Stories.

RiverStories should be the theme that ties much of the implementation program together.

The uniting concept of *story* will shape all interpretation. History will be told from the perspective of individual lives. The interpretive kiosks and sites described below will all be themed around the idea of telling part of the river's story. Where possible, real people will tell their stories in person, or via audio, video or the web. When put together, all of these tales will comprise the Minnesota River's story. For the visitor, their encounter will be fun, informative and personal. A creative writing component of the program might encourage children following the pathway to create their own stories related to the river pathway. A similar track for adults could feature creative writing, poetry and journalism to encourage adults to tell their own stories as a part of what they take away from a journey along the byway.

The dominant themes from which the majority of the stories will be drawn are Struggles for a Home, Taking Food to a Nation and The River's Legacy. As appropriate, other more site specific stories will be woven into the Pathway. In addition, efforts such as the Audubon Society's Minnesota River Valley Birding Trail, the Prairie Passages and the Minnesota River Comprehensive Recreation Guidance Plan, should be brought into the partnership. The same holds true for any community or event along the byway.

The Program itself will consist of the promotion of a series of sites and activities along the river corridor that can be woven into one pathway experience that unites all the stories and unites the river valley behind one integrated tourism product. The byway may at times consist of off-road or in-town experiences that are not directly connected to the byway. Alliance partners will take the lead in gaining public support for the projects in their respective communities and helping to create local StoryTeller Teams who find and support local interpretive efforts.



This approach overcomes a major problem facing the byway: in order to gain more political and marketing weight, the communities of the river valley need to find something in common around which to unite. Unfortunately, neither the river nor the Byway, in and of themselves, seem to be sufficiently compelling to garner widespread support for a regional tourism initiative. This slight shift in focus -- from river and road to a 300 mile long linear storytelling experience -- may provide the right nucleus for regional organizing.

The key to initiating this effort will be obtaining a National Scenic Byways Grant or other grants to fund the detailed design and construction of the first sites.

The length of the river requires a more detailed plan for each segment.

Action 41: Develop a Series of Detailed Interpretive Plans for Each of the Byway's Four Main Segments

Please refer to the Segment Implementation Plans that follow Chapter 10, Implementation for a detailed discussion of interpretive recommendations for these segments.

Browns Valley to Ortonville

Ortonville to Granite Falls

Granite Falls to Mankato

Mankato to Belle Plaine

Businesses will find promotion via the support of education.

Action 42: Encourage Businesses to Participate in Interpretation

The opportunities to enhance visitor experiences along the Byway through interpretation should not be limited to the specific sites listed herein. Other businesses should look to interpretation to enhance the visitor experience, encourage them to stay longer and spend more money in the area.

This should include such things as:

Restaurants:

- Redesign menus to reflect theme names for foods.
- Enhance decor along theme lines.
- Develop foods which would use authentic recipes passed down from early residents. Make these recipes available through a *RiverStories Cookbook*.

Bakeries:

- Encourage bakeries to offer pioneer breads and pies. Each item should have a tag or flyer explaining the origins of the recipe



for the item. Make these recipes available through a *RiverStories Cookbook*.

Lodging facilities:

- Include interpretive information in rooms.
- Small facilities should name rooms after prominent historical figures and provide interpretive information about the lives of those individuals on the wall of the room or on a flyer in the room.
- Lodging on working farms should be encouraged.

Action 43: Local Groups and Entrepreneurs Should Consider Ways to Support the RiverStories Program

- Reenactments
- Heritage Festival: feature local ethnic celebrations; collect oral histories, family heirloom interpretation, trail rides, wagon rides, food.

Encourage businesses to be full partners in the interpretive effort.

Recommendations for Interpretive Souvenirs

- Booklet featuring Native American traditions, stories or natural remedies.
- Packets of Make-Your-Own Pioneer Toy kits with interpretation of the history of each item.
- Interpretive place mats with a map of the route with tidbits of interpretive information about each site. These could be sold in packets, either plasticized for sale to visitors or paper. Paper ones could be distributed through local restaurants to get more folks aware of and interested in taking the route..
- Develop interpretive cookbook containing both recipes and interpretive stories of pioneer women with excerpts from diaries.



