



## **Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission 2022-23 Annual Report (July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023)**

**56 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue S, #283, St. Cloud, MN, 56301 • 651-341-4196 • [www.mnmississippiriver.com](http://www.mnmississippiriver.com)**

### **Mission**

- The mission of the Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission (MN-MRPC) is to preserve, promote and enhance the resources of the Mississippi River Valley and to develop the highways and amenities of the Great River Road (GRR). The Commission is organized and guided by Minnesota Statute 161.1419 and is a member of the ten state Mississippi River Parkway Commission.
- The Minnesota Great River Road is designated and managed by the Minnesota Department of Transportation under Minnesota Statute 161.142.
- The Minnesota Great River Road spans 565 miles, 43 communities, 20 counties, three tribes and six unique destination areas.

### **Commission Meetings**

- The MN-MRPC held regular business meetings on August 11, 2022; November 17, 2022; and June 1, 2023.
- Meeting materials, recordings and commission information are available at <https://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/mrpc/mrpc.html>.
- The Commission continues to focus on implementation of the MN Great River Road Corridor Management Plan (CMP) and the ten-state MRPC Corridor Management Plan.
- Election of the At-Large Member for a new two-year term took place at the November 17 meeting. Officers were elected and the Executive Committee was designated at the June 1, 2023 meeting.

### **Projects & Activities**

#### **Great River Road Ambassador Program**

- Goals of the Ambassador Program are to 1) develop and strengthen MN Mississippi River Parkway Commission (MN-MRPC) partnerships with byway attractions to leverage improved value from cooperative Minnesota and ten-state efforts; 2) provide Ambassadors with resources, materials, and training to maximize their time and talent; 3) confirm and update Minnesota Great River Road attraction information included in Plan Your Trip and other marketing; and 4) encourage Mississippi River exploration and stewardship.
- Virtual Ambassador Orientation sessions were held with the National Park Service Mississippi River Visitor Center, National Eagle Center, and Forest History Center. MN-MRPC staff and MnDOT Great River Road Program Managers served as presenters.
- Great River Road Ambassador kits were sent as follow-up to the sessions, including bandanas, reflective stickers, and post-it notes for use at events and with visitors. Maps were also provided as requested.
- Materials on the Ambassador Program web page were maintained and updated.
- Ambassador sessions will be offered in the future to other partners including community tourism offices, Parkway Commissioners and Minnesota Grown members.
- A Drive the Great River Road Month 2023 launch event (via Zoom) will focus on Community Tourism Offices and their role as Great River Road Ambassadors.
- Great River Road promotional items were purchased for Ambassadors to utilize during Drive the Great River Road Month and at other special events; recognizing the important role they play in making the byway a premier destination.

### **Drive the Great River Road Month**

- The MN-MRPC celebrates Drive the Great River Road Month annually in September, in conjunction with the ten-state MRPC annual promotion.
- The 2022 Minnesota theme was "Follow the Great River Road to Fall Harvest Fun" sponsored and led by Minnesota Grown/Minnesota Department of Agriculture.
- Goals of the 2022 campaign were to: promote driving the Great River Road and exploring communities and farms along the route ; encourage travel along the GRR to find Minnesota Grown products, experiences, and members; build and expand upon partnerships with other organizations who work on the Commission and have natural synergy with Minnesota grown (State Parks, Explore MN, etc.); and help Minnesota Grown members along the Great River Road become more familiar with the Great River Road to cross-promote/market.
- Highlights of the Fall Harvest promotion included a kick-off event and trivia contest at the Minnesota State Fair, traveler kits distributed to 250 members of the public, landing webpage showcasing specially developed themed itineraries, social media posts and promotion by MN-MRPC members and partners.
- The MN-MRPC nominated Minnesota Grown for a National MRPC Stewardship Award in gratitude and recognition of their efforts to promote agriculture destinations and partnerships along the Great River Road.
- A team was convened, and planning began for Drive the Great River Road Month 2023 with the theme – *Inspired: Amazing Art and Vibrant Vistas of the Great River Road*. Goals include encouraging travel to MN Great River Road communities in the fall shoulder season, raising awareness of art destinations along the full MN Great River Road and building relationships with MN Great River Road Ambassadors in communities.

### **Great River Road Network of Interpretive Centers**

- Ambassador sessions were held via Zoom for the National Park Service Mississippi River Visitor Center, National Eagle Center, and Forest History Center.
- The MN-MRPC November 2022 meeting was held at Historic Fort Snelling, with a tour of the new Visitor Center prior to the meeting.

### **Regional Meetings & Elections**

- Two virtual regional meetings and elections were held per MN Statute 161.1419.
- The Metro Region (Elk River to Hastings) Meeting was held on November 30; and the Bluffs Region (Hastings to Iowa Border) Meeting was held on December 1. Agendas included state and national Great River Road updates and gathering of feedback from regions and elections. John Anfinson and Kate Carlson were elected as Regional Commissioners. Meeting materials and videos are available at <https://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/mrpc/Meetings22-23.html>
- New member orientation was held via Zoom in January 2023.
- The MN-MRPC statute was amended during the 2023 legislative session to change regional commissioner terms from two-year to four-year staggered terms, to help build continuity and smooth transitions for the Commission. Current regional commissioner terms were defined with end dates. New elections will then be held for the new four-year terms.

### **MN Great River Road Website & Social Media**

- Site data from July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023, included 12,303 sessions and 17,950 page views during the year. Top pages visited – home page, order maps, and about the Minnesota Great River Road.
- Maintained MN Great River Road Facebook page with posts on events, activities, and attractions along the river. Total organic (unpaid) reach was 6,243 with top posts as follows – Drive the Great River Road Month launch & sweepstakes; Fall Color finder map; Winona Ice Park; and Little Falls things to see and do.

### **Plan Your Trip Interactive Mapping**

- Plan Your Trip online resource mapping, hosted and managed by MnDOT, continues to be available to the public via [www.mnmississippiriver.com](http://www.mnmississippiriver.com).
- Traveler resource data was maintained, Minnesota Grown listings were updated to reflect current data, and edits received from Interpretive Centers and MN-MRPC members were incorporated into the interactive map.
- Demonstrations were provided as part of Ambassador Orientation sessions.

### **MN Great River Road Print Map**

- Maps remaining in stock from a multi-year supply printed in spring of 2020 were distributed in response to requests received. The needs and capacities of partners continue to vary.
- 5,300 maps were shipped to partner locations in FY 23 upon request. The remaining quantity will be shipped by the end of 2023.

- Maps were mailed out individually as ordered from the website.
- The map master design files were updated in preparation for a future re-print. The updated map, now including the Itasca County Historical Society (the newest MN GRR Interpretive Center) was posted online and is available at [www.mnmississippiriver.com](http://www.mnmississippiriver.com).

### **Grand Rapids Wayside Conveyance**

- MN-MRPC Regional Members Sally Fineday and Megan Christianson volunteered to work with a team from MnDOT and the community of Grand Rapids on plans for a possible property conveyance from MnDOT to a local partner, with considerations for positive impact to the Great River Road and its travelers.

### **Media/Information Responses**

- MN-MRPC staff and members responded to requests for information. Examples included individual requests for Great River Road attraction information and route directions, media requests from travel writers and documentary producers, maps for a local rental property, and Mississippi River mileage calculations for an indoor swimming challenge.
- Commissioner Anne Lewis served as a step on guide and shared Great River Road information with a tour group visiting Itasca State Park (affiliated with the American Queen).

### **National MRPC**

- MN-MRPC members serve in leadership roles for the National Mississippi River Parkway Commission. John Anfinson currently serves as Pilot Pro Tem of the National MRPC, and Anne Lewis as Pilot Emerita. Minnesota was represented on Technical Committees by Marni Karnowski and Nicole Bartelt (Transportation); Megan Christianson and Kate Carlson (Marketing); Peter MacDonagh (Environment, Recreation & Agriculture); David Kelliher and John Anfinson (Culture & Heritage).
- Five MN-MRPC members participated in the Annual Meeting of the MRPC in Memphis, September 2022. MN-MRPC members provided a presentation on Building Relationships with Interpretive Centers/Great River Road Ambassador Program.
- Senator David Senjem received a Distinguished Service Award recognizing his long-time positive leadership and Anne Lewis was recognized for her service as MRPC Pilot.
- MN-MRPC members and staff participated in the Spring Webinar Series.
- The MN-MRPC participated in the Summer Fun on the Great River Road promotion through outreach to partners and communities and sharing on social media. Minnesota partners provided information on a wide variety of events and gained exposure for their communities.

## **Funding/Great River Road Investments and Support**

- **State Operating Budget:** The MN-MRPC operated with state funding at levels allowing the Commission to continue its basic work and implement Corridor Management Plan priorities. The base operating budget for FY '23 was \$78,000 plus carry-over from FY '22 resulted in a total budget of \$94,823.88. Approximately 75% of the budget was spent, partially due to lower than anticipated travel expenditures.
- **MnDOT:** MnDOT provides staffing support through a designated Great River Road Program Manager.
- **Minnesota Transportation Alternatives Program:** Local Great River Road communities sought funds for projects through the Minnesota Transportation Alternatives Program. MnDOT provided information on project intent, MN-MRPC conducted outreach to local applicants, reviewed information on five projects, approved and provided letters for the four project applications from along the Great River Road that submitted full proposals. The requests, totaling just over \$3 million, were for trail projects that would improve the byway experience for visitors and residents and help implement the MN Great River Road Corridor Management Plan.
- **National Scenic Byway Grants:** The Dakota County Fischer Avenue Trailhead Project was awarded a National Scenic Byways Grant during FY 23 (\$700,000). Two other projects – the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Culture and Interpretive Center and Washington County Douglas Point Trailhead Project – were not funded but plan to reapply in the next round of funding. MN-MRPC provided outreach to partners about the funding opportunity, feedback on projects and letters of support.
- **Additional Letters of Support:** Letters of support were provided for the Cuyuna Lakes Trail Association Brainerd to Riverton Trail Project and City of Sartell Paper Mill Property Amenities. Both organizations are seeking funds from multiple sources for projects that would improve the Great River Road and/or Mississippi River Trail experience.

- **Land and Water Conservation Fund:** The MN Department of Natural Resources provided an informational presentation at the August 11, 2022 MN-MRPC meeting. The presentation included an overview of two types of funding opportunities that might be applicable for Great River Road partners.

### **Examples of Local, Regional and Partner Activities or Issues**

- **Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board** – Representatives from the MN-MRPC and Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board met in July 2022 regarding plans for West River Parkway, a section of the Great River Road in Minneapolis.
- **Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock & Dam/Lock & Dam #1 Disposition Study** – A comment period was opened for scoping of the disposition study and Environmental Impact Statement for Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock & Dam and Lock & Dam #1. MN-MRPC submitted a letter to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers asking that FHWA defined byway intrinsic qualities and the MN-MRPC mission be considered as part of the scoping process.
- **Brainerd Mississippi Landing Trailhead Park (Lyman P. White Park)** – A grand opening and ribbon cutting event was held on June 3, 2023, celebrating this new park along the Mississippi River in Brainerd. The park includes an amphitheater, outdoor learning center and canoe/kayak launch. The MN-MRPC provided letters of support for funding applications, and Commissioner Karl Samp served on the Brainerd Riverfront Committee. <https://www.brainerddispatch.com/news/local/brainerds-newest-park-is-open>
- **Explore Minnesota** – Published an online article “Follow the Mighty Mississippi River on a Family Road Trip to Remember” - <https://www.exploreminnesota.com/list/follow-mighty-mississippi-river-family-road-trip-to-remember>

### **Membership**

- The MN-MRPC is organized by state statute to include: (2) Members of the House of Representatives; (2) Members of the Senate; (5) Members of State Agencies - (1) appointed by each: DNR, MnDOT, Historical Society, Agriculture & Tourism; (5) Regional Members – (1) from each of the Great River Road regions established in statute; (1) Member-At-Large – appointed by the other 14.
- New members were welcomed – Sen. Karin Housley (Chair), Sen. John Hoffman, Rep. Sydney Jordan, Rep. Leigh Finke, Nicole Bartelt (MnDOT), Kate Carlson (Hastings to Iowa Border Region), and Peter MacDonagh (MnDOT Great River Road Program Manager).
- Thank you to departing members Sen. David Senjem, Sen. Patricia Torres Ray, Rep. Kristin Robbins, Rep. Emma Greenman, Jennifer Weaver (Hastings to Iowa Border Region), Marni Karnowski (MnDOT), and Tim Wilcox (MnDOT Great River Road Program Manager) for their service to the Commission.
- Sen. David Senjem was recognized at the November 17, 2022 meeting for his 20 years of dedicated service and outstanding Commission leadership.

**This report is respectfully submitted on August 23, 2023.  
Anne Lewis, MN-MRPC Secretary-Treasurer**



Anne Lewis, MRPC Pilot and MN-MRPC At-Large Member, presents Sen. David Senjem with his National MRPC Distinguished Service Award in Memphis, TN, September 2022

**Savor Fall Harvest on the Great River Road**

September is Drive the Great River Road month, and this year's theme is a celebration of Fall Harvest on Minnesota's stretch of this scenic roadway along the Mississippi River!

Learn about the Great River Road

Explore sample trip itineraries

Plan your own adventure using the interactive trip-planning tool

MINNESOTA GROWN

All-American Road  
GREAT RIVER ROAD  
CANADA TO GUYANA

Fall Harvest webpage for Drive the Great River Road Month, courtesy of MN Dept of Agriculture



Drive the Great River Road Month 2022 Kick-Off Event at MN State Fair. L to R – Kent Whitworth, MNHS; Anne Lewis, MRPC Pilot/MN-MRPC At-Large Member; Grant Wilson, DNR; Andrea Vaubel, MDA; Nancy Daubenberger, MnDOT; David Kelliher, MNHS; Lauren Bennett McGinty, Explore Minnesota; Sen. David Senjem; John Anfinson, Elk River to Hastings Region; Paul Hugunin, MDA; Christina Iliev, MDA



**Mississippi River Paddling Adventures**

Jun 7 - Sep 2, 2023  
All Day



**Music in the Park**

Second and fourth Thursday  
June - August 5-8 p.m.

Jun 8 - Aug 24, 2023  
5:00 - 8:00 pm



**Fishing On The Refuge**

Enjoy the Mississippi River with the eagles this summer!  
KIDS 12 & UNDER FISH FREE  
Poles, Tackle & Ice provided!  
national.eaglecenters.org/fishing

Jun 8 - Aug 12, 2023  
10:00 am - 3:00 pm



**Summertime by George**

2023 LINEUP

Jun 14 - Aug 16, 2023  
5:00 - 8:00 pm



**Winona Municipal Band Concerts**



**Eagle Viewing River Cruises**



**Great River Shakespeare Festival**



**Minneapolis Riverfront Walking Tour**



David Kelliher, MNHS, with Sen. David Senjem, Karl Samp and Paul Hugunin at Historic Fort Snelling 11-17-22

Examples of Minnesota Great River Road community events submitted for National Great River Road "Summer Fun on the Great River Road" promotion, 6-23



### **2022 Drive the Great River Road Month – Follow the Great River Road to Fall Harvest Fun!**

- Sponsored by Minnesota Grown/Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- Goals: promote driving the Great River Road and exploring communities and farms along the route; encourage travel along the Great River Road to find Minnesota Grown products, experiences and members; build and expand upon partnerships with other organizations who are part of the MN-MRPC and have natural synergy with Minnesota Grown; raise awareness of Minnesota Grown members along the Great River Road to facilitate cross promotion/marketing.

### **MN-MRPC/MDA News Release & MDA PR Firm Contract**

- 14 news clips from a variety of locations/news outlets along the GRR – print and broadcast.

### **Fall Harvest on the Great River Road Webpage**

- Special landing page developed on minnesotagrown.com, featuring information about the Minnesota Great River Road, Fall Harvest itineraries and more.

### **State Fair Press Event – Drive the Great River Road Month Kick-Off**

- Comments and trivia contest at Minnesota Grown booth. Participants included the MRPC Pilot (Chair), MN-MRPC Chair and several members, MN Department of Agriculture Deputy Commissioner, MN Department of Transportation Commissioner, MN Historical Society Executive Director, and Explore Minnesota Executive Director.

### **Governor's Proclamation**

- Read by MN-MRPC Chair Dave Senjem during State Fair Press Event.

### **Social Media**

- Facebook and Instagram - 16 Facebook posts and 5 Instagram posts by Minnesota Grown, including video posts of State Fair event, and Minnesota Grown staff member travel using one of the itineraries.
- Social media shares, posts, and blogs by MN Great River Road, MN-MRPC members and agencies. Explore Minnesota posted a "Trip on a Tankful" article linking back to the Drive Month landing page.

### **Traveler Kits & Survey**

- Drive the Great River Road kits were available to the first 250 people to sign up. Announced on Facebook and Instagram August 3, total reach of 8,400, over 250 orders by August 15. Maps, travel information and road trip goodies donated by MN-MRPC members and partners. Bags and specialty themed items provided by Minnesota Grown. Orders were from 8 different states and 105 cities in Minnesota.
- Kit recipients were surveyed, 35 responses received. Most had not heard about the Great River Road before ordering the kit, 82% visited GRR locations, 100% plan to visit a GRR site in the future.

### **Themed Itineraries**

- 7 themed itineraries were developed and promoted, featuring different areas of the Great River Road and highlighting Great River Road communities and Minnesota Grown members.

### **Minnesota Grown "Pick of the Month" E-newsletter**

- Feature in newsletter that goes to 35,000 subscribers.

### **Minnesota Grown "Living Local" Fall Magazine**

- Two pages in inaugural edition of new print publication.

### **Photo Contest**

- Social media photo contest with prizes provided by MN-MRPC members and Minnesota Grown.