



# Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission

## CMP Project Management Team Meeting/ Geotourism Partnership Presentation

### December 11, 2013

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Attendees: Karl Samp, Carol Zoff, Terry Eastin, Rep. Sheldon Johnson, Sheronne Mulry, Mark Anderson, Susan Overson, Diane Henry-Wangensteen, Nancy Salminen, Cordelia Pierson, David Kelliher, Chris Miller

Karl Samp called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m., and welcomed Terry Eastin of the Mississippi River Connections Collaborative, followed by introductions.

#### Corridor Management Plan Task Updates

- MRT Sign Fabrication and Installation Phase I - The Corridor Management Plan project includes signing the Mississippi River Trail (MRT) in Minnesota, which is an 800 mile bicycle route. Signs were fabricated and installed in summer/fall of 2013 from south of the Hastings river bridge to the Iowa border. A ribbon cutting event was held October 2 at the National Eagle Center in Wabasha.
- MRT Sign Fabrication and Installation Phase II – Planning and municipal agreements are now complete for Phase II, which will involve the portion of the route from Hastings to Elk River. Bids for the project will be received January 31 2014, with fabrication and installation scheduled for spring/summer 2014.
- MRT Sign Fabrication and Installation Phase III – Phase III will complete signage from Elk River to Lake Itasca. Municipal agreements are necessary due to location of signs on local roads. Discussions with local units of government will begin in early 2014 and bids will be received in January 2015, with fabrication and sign installation in spring/summer 2015. There is currently a gap in funding needed to complete the project due to higher than anticipated costs. Several possible funding sources are being discussed.
- Mississippi River Companion Printing and Distribution – This 129 page spiral bound booklet features detailed mapping and information about the 72 miles of river in the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, including the Great River Road and Mississippi River Trail. Final edits are in process and printing will be completed soon. 15,000 copies will be produced and the piece will also be available online.
- The tasks above are eligible expenses under the National Park Service grant that is providing match to the National Scenic Byways Grant. In order to meet the requirements of the National Scenic Byways grant and cash flow the overall project, some of the tasks using National Park Service funds had to be completed prior to accessing the National Scenic Byway funds for Corridor Management Planning.

#### Mississippi River Sustainable Destinations Initiative/National Geographic Partnership

Karl Samp introduced Terry Eastin of the Mississippi River Sustainable Destinations Initiative Board, and also Executive Director of Mississippi River Trail, Inc. The Mississippi River Connections Collaborative is a formal agreement between the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Mississippi River Trail Inc. to promote the magnificence and diversity of the Mississippi River as a national treasured landscape. The partnership includes 60 units of the National Park Service and National Wildlife Refuges in the river corridor. 349 park units are located along the Mississippi River (including state, local and national). Tourism is becoming a stronger economic force nationally. The Mississippi River Sustainable Destinations Initiative is focusing on promoting geotourism and is working with National Geographic on the effort. A study completed in Montana shows that geotravelers tend to spend more and stay longer than average travelers.

National Geographic has completed several geotourism projects worldwide, including the Gulf States Initiative. The Mississippi River project would be the largest undertaken to date. A website would be developed to showcase geotourism sites in all ten Mississippi River states and 100,000 printed National Geographic maps would also be created. Geotourism is about authentic cultural experiences and includes ecotourism, cultural, heritage, indigenous, agritourism, local cuisine and sightseeing components. The “product” is the place and tourism is encouraged while protecting the place. Travelers will be able to access this information online by category. Local sites will enter their own information, to be reviewed by National Geographic and the Geotourism Stewardship Council before being included. Local editors (stewardship council or other designated group) would give final approval to content before activation. Priority is on micro, small and medium

sized local businesses and attractions. They often have limited or no advertising budgets and this project would provide exposure at no cost. National Geographic would help engage local stakeholders, teach them how the system is designed, acquire necessary data and support outcomes in the future. A Mississippi River Geotourism Council would be developed and would oversee the project long term. Members of the MRPC could help fill this role.

Funds are being raised for project start up. \$200,000 must be secured before National Geographic will begin the ten state project. After the base funding is raised initial tasks can be started, in general in the following order: Geotourism Council defined; establishment of website; engage local communities; create and distribute map guide; long term maintenance and growth. Eventually it is anticipated that an average of \$100,000 will be needed from each state.

Discussion, suggestions and next steps –

- State tourism offices should be involved.
- Initiative should be presented to the boards of the National Mississippi River Parkway Commission and Mississippi River Country (which includes all ten state tourism offices).
- How will funding be secured? Each state will be asked to contribute, along with foundations and private companies. There will likely be a mix of public and private dollars.
- How will the stewardship council work? Will there be one for each state, or one for all ten states? This is to be determined but representation from all states will be needed. There could be mini-councils in each state. This is where the MRPC could play a large role.
- A structure and process will be needed to gather data from local sites.
- How will the scope/project area be determined? Options under consideration include using the Great River Road as the focus, 20 mile distance from the river, or counties bordering the river.
- Is there a way to include large “homegrown” corporations in the project? Yes, options are being discussed.
- Each state will need to consider participation and how to secure funds. The goal is to have enough funding commitments by March to allow the project to begin. Terry would work with groups such as the MN-MRPC to do presentations and make connections with potential funders. State and local groups would need materials to assist with funding requests.

### **Corridor Management Plan – Request for Proposals**

- Review by Task – Copies of the current draft Request for Proposals were distributed. The document includes an overview of the project and background on the MN-MRPC and Great River Road along with a detailed listing and explanation of fifteen tasks to be completed. The draft has been reviewed by LCC and House Counsel. Tasks were reviewed and discussed. The draft document will be emailed to meeting attendees for additional review and the RFP will be revised using feedback from today’s meeting as well as emailed comments.
- Discuss Coordination with Mississippi River Sustainable Destinations Initiative – There was discussion on how to combine or align the CMP and Sustainable Destinations Initiatives. Data gathered for the CMP project and processes used should be aligned with the National Geographic initiative. The inventory and map of resources developed for the CMP could be provided to National Geographic to assist with their data gathering. Terry offered use of the MRT copyrighted logo for the CMP project.
- Discuss Process/Timeline to Finalize – The current proposed timeline would include release of the RFP in late January and potential contract start in mid-April. The process includes a question/answer period prior to an informational meeting for interested bidders, receipt of proposals, review by a selection committee, interviews/presentations as needed, and contract development and execution. Selection committee members are needed. If interested please contact the MN-MRPC office. Input on content to be shared during the informational meeting is also needed. Some topics and background are more conducive to sharing in a meeting setting rather than being included in the RFP text.

Meeting adjourned at approx. 12:45 p.m.