



**Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission  
2nd Quarter Meeting – May 27, 2021  
Zoom Virtual Meeting  
MINUTES – Draft**

**Commissioners Present**

Megan Christianson – Grand Rapids to Brainerd  
Karl Samp – Brainerd to Elk River  
John Anfinson – Elk River to Hastings  
Jennifer Weaver – Hastings to Iowa Border  
Sen. David Senjem  
Sen. Patricia Torres Ray  
Rep. Kristin Robbins  
Rep. Emma Greenman  
David Kelliher – Historical Society Appointee  
Grant Wilson – Natural Resources Appointee  
Marni Karnowski – Transportation Appointee  
Anne Lewis – At Large Member

**Technical Advisors/Staff Present**

Gina Bonsignore – Natural Resources  
Tim Wilcox – Transportation  
Craig Hansen – National Park Service  
Diane Henry Wangensteen – LCC  
Sandy Most - LCC  
Chris Miller – MN-MRPC Staff

**Members Absent**

Sally Fineday – Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids  
Paul Hugunin – Agriculture Appointee  
Lisa Havelka – Tourism Appointee  
Carol Zoff – Transportation Technical Advisor

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Meeting was called to order at 2:05 p.m. by Chair Senjem. Roll call was taken with the members listed above present. There was a quorum.

**Approve Minutes from 2/24/21 Meeting:** Motion by John Anfinson and seconded by Anne Lewis to approve the minutes from the February 24, 2021 meeting as presented. Motion carried.

**Informational Presentation – Mississippi River Restoration & Resilience Initiative (MRRRI):** John Anfinson introduced Whitney Clark, Executive Director of Friends of the Mississippi River. MRRRI is a new federal initiative and Friends of the Mississippi River is playing a lead role. The initiative would include federal funding for grants and partnerships in the Mississippi River watershed area. There is a lead organization for each Mississippi River state, and four focus areas – clean water; river corridor habitat; natural infrastructure; and aquatic invasive species. Rep. Betty McCollum is championing this initiative with a goal of it being signed into law this year. A link will be sent out for any MN-MRPC members wishing to sign on individually in support of this effort. There was discussion about how MRRRI aligns with potential legislation supported by the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative.

**Budget Report:** Anne Lewis provided an overview of the year-to-date budget report in the meeting packet. It was noted the end of the budget year and current biennium is June 30. Operating and project budget funds remain, as the Commission's travel and project implementation schedules were impacted by the pandemic. Diane Henry-Wangensteen of LCC reported that they are seeing similar situations with other commissions, and that the state budget for the new biennium has not yet been set. Chris Miller reported that there are some remaining invoices for projects expected prior to fiscal year end. Motion by Anne Lewis and seconded by Megan Christianson to approve the report as presented. Motion carried.

**MRPC Board & National Meetings:** MRPC Pilot Anne Lewis referenced her report in the meeting packet. A virtual MRPC Semi-Annual Meeting was held in April with good participation. The 2021 Annual Meeting will be virtual as well, likely in early October. Current plans are to move back to in-person meetings for 2022 with potential sites being Baton Rouge in spring and Bemidji in fall. Pilot Lewis is working with the National Scenic Byways Foundation to raise awareness of byways with members of Congress by sending letters introducing a selection of scenic byways and highlighting benefits of the program. The letter recently sent will be shared with MN-MRPC members as an FYI.

**MRPC Marketing Committee:** Chris Miller reported for MN-MRPC representative Lisa Havelka. The 1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2021 report is available online and a link will be provided to MN-MRPC members. A few highlights - website and social media are performing well; MRPC is using state assets listed in AAR nominations for promotions throughout the year; All-American Road resources are available online – logos, photo/video, etc.; maps have been extremely popular; Drive the Great River Road Month (September) will focus on drawing attention to the AAR designation.

**MRPC Culture & Heritage Committee:** John Anfinson, Committee Co-Chair, provided an update. Congratulations to the Itasca County Historical Society – the seven states present on the recent Culture & Heritage Committee meeting recommended their designation as a new National Great River Road Interpretive Center. MRPC Board approval is the next step in the process. Aitkin County had also submitted a nomination with a different concept, which is on hold for now and could be edited for re-submission in the future. The Culture & Heritage Committee is currently reviewing criteria for new and existing Interpretive Centers. John described his recent visits to 30 Interpretive Centers in multiple states. The Driftless Visitor Center is working with neighboring states on an application for National Heritage Area Designation.

**MRPC Environment, Recreation & Agriculture Committee:** MN-MRPC representative Marni Karnowski reported that no meetings have been held recently but that upcoming focus areas include pollinator habitat and invasive species, which are in line with the Corridor Management Plan.

**MRPC Transportation Committee:** MN-MRPC representative Tim Wilcox reported that the committee is working on updating its page and resources on the MRPC Members website including Corridor Management Plan and All-American Road documents. Updated GIS route information is also being requested from all states.

**All-American Road Promotion:** Chris Miller provided an update and referenced information in the handout packet. The Federal Highway Administration has posted an online booklet on all newly designated National Scenic Byways and All-American Roads – the link will be provided. A link will also be shared to new All-American Road logos and a photo slideshow available from the National MRPC. The campaign with River Travel Magazine approved at the last meeting is underway and the first of four seasonal articles was posted in April.

**MN GRR Website:** General updates are being made to increase mobile friendliness and assist movement on the site, and new pages are being developed for Ambassador Development and All-American Road, including an All-American Road photo gallery and a “My Favorites” display and form. MN-MRPC members will be the first invited to submit favorites.

**Ambassador Development:** Tim Wilcox reported that Plan Your Trip instructional videos continue to progress. An example was shared. The videos will explain how to use all the features and categories within Plan Your Trip and will be one of the tools used for Ambassador Development. Work also continues on the collector app that will be used to accept requested updates to site information on Plan Your Trip. Ambassador information sessions will be held virtually with a possible transition to or combination with in-person sessions later. The launch audience will be GRR Interpretive Centers, followed by community tourism offices. A pilot session has been scheduled to gather feedback prior to the initial rollout to Interpretive Centers. MN-MRPC members are primary Great River Road Ambassadors and interest was expressed in sessions for members. A suggestion was also made to offer sessions for MN House and Senate members from Mississippi River districts in the future. Minnesota Great River Road logo items have been purchased for Ambassadors. Anne Lewis expressed thanks to MnDOT for their contributions and support including the student workers who have done such a great job.

**Improving Access and Welcoming Environment along the Mississippi River:** The work group has not met since the last MN-MRPC meeting. A presentation to the Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs has been scheduled to introduce the Great River Road/MN-MRPC, and to invite applications for Regional Commissioner positions. Sen. Senjem and John Anfinson volunteered to serve as presenters.

**National Scenic Byway Grants:** Carol Zoff provide the overview in the meeting packet, with information about the National Scenic Byways grant program, past project examples and upcoming opportunities. A Notice of Funding Opportunity is expected this summer for applications in the 2021 round of funding. \$16 million will be available nationwide. The program provides 80% of project funds with a minimum 20% local match required. If the MN-MRPC were to move forward with an application, an area of need for consideration is Interpretive Panels. Priority would be repair/replacement of panels no longer in good condition and then later completion of the full Roadside Storybook system which would involve content review/additions, production of panels, agreements on locations and installation. Tim Wilcox noted as an example his current work on repairs to panels at the Sand Prairie location. Details on the 2021 National Scenic Byways funding application process and timeline will be shared when available.

**Review Commission Process for Actions & Letters:** The MN-MRPC’s approved process for requested letters or actions was included in the meeting packet. Members reviewed the document with no recommended changes or additions at this time. Chair Senjem requested that a note be added documenting this review on May 27, 2021.

**St. Anthony Falls Cutoff Wall:** John Anfinson reported that the Minneapolis Star Tribune is working on a story about the cutoff wall, which will likely raise awareness of the issue. Failure of the cutoff wall under St. Anthony Falls would have significant impact on local water supplies. Ownership of and responsibility for the wall is currently undefined. John will continue to monitor developments and will keep the Commission updated.

**Commission Member Updates:** Grant Wilson referenced the written DNR update in the meeting packet including information from the electronic DNR Trailblazer newsletter on paddling the Mississippi River and State Wildlife Management Areas such as Sand Prairie WMA near St. Cloud. Wildlife Management Areas are public lands sometimes lesser known to people.

David Kelliher reported for the Minnesota Historical Society and announced that historic sites are opening on a staggered schedule during May and June. The Historic Fort Snelling revitalization project is in full swing, and an offer was made to host a future MN-MRPC meeting at the new visitor center when it opens.

Karl Samp asked about status of LCCMR project funding, including the Mississippi Riverfront Trailhead project in Brainerd. The trailhead will be a hub connecting to the Cuyuna Lakes, Paul Bunyan and Heartland Trails and will include an amphitheater and learning center. Sen. Senjem answered that the LCCMR project funding is still in the committee process, and that action on it is possible up to the end of June.

Marni Karnowski suggested inviting Holly Slagle, MN Scenic Byways Coordinator, to present at the next MN-MRPC meeting on the topic of National Scenic Byway Grants and the process involved. Information from other byways could also be shared. Marni also asked members to reach out anytime if there are topics from MnDOT they would like to hear about at future meetings.

**Other Business and Discussion:** Sen. Senjem opened discussion on Commission needs that may be able to be addressed with funds remaining in the fiscal year budget. Several possibilities were discussed and will be reviewed by MN-MRPC staff and LCC. Interpretive Center signage is a need. The Itasca County Historical Society will need a sign if/when they are formally designated as a Center and the Winona County Historical Society needs a sign that differs from the outdoor metal pole design. Jennifer Weaver suggested a material/style that would work for their location.

Motion by Megan Christianson and seconded by Anne Lewis to investigate options for Interpretive Center signage and maps for consideration by the MN-MRPC Chair. Motion carried.

**Next Meeting:** August 19, 2:00 – 4:30 p.m.

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 4:15 p.m.