



**Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission
2nd Quarter Meeting
May 30, 2024 • 2:00 – 4:30 p.m.
Hybrid – Zoom and Capitol Room 123**

DRAFT AGENDA

2:00 p.m.	Welcome & Introductions	Housley/All
2:10 p.m.	Approve Today's Agenda & Minutes from 2/9/24	Housley/All
2:15 p.m.	Informational Presentation <ul style="list-style-type: none">- MRPC/Operation Pollination Partnership	Roz Schnick (invited)
2:30 p.m.	Commission Business <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Budget Report- Archiving/Historical Records Process- MN-MRPC Classification in Transportation Funding Statute	Packet/Lewis/Miller Zoff Karnowski
2:45 p.m.	MRPC 2024 Annual Meeting – Sept. 18 – 20, Winona <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Update & Details- Requests for Assistance & Participation	Planning Team/All
3:15 p.m.	National MRPC <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Board Updates- Committee Updates<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Communications & Marketingo Culture & Heritageo Environment, Recreation & Agricultureo Transportation	Board Members Committee Members
3:35 p.m.	Commission Projects <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Drive the Great River Road Month 2024<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Status Updateo Requests for Assistance/Participation- Interpretive Center Outreach	Wilson/DNR Planning Team Anfinson/Miller/All
4:00 p.m.	Public Utility Projects Near Great River Road <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Northland Reliability Project - Update- Other	Miller All
4:10 p.m.	Commission Member Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Refer to Written Updates in Packet- Brief Highlights or Action Requests	All All
4:25 p.m.	Other Business	
4:30 p.m.	Wrap Up and Adjourn	



**Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission
1st Quarter Meeting – February 9, 2024
Centennial Building Room 101/Zoom Hybrid
MINUTES – Draft**

Commissioners Present

Sally Fineday – Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids
Megan Christianson – Grand Rapids to Brainerd
Karl Samp – Brainerd to Elk River
John Anfinson – Elk River to Hastings
Sen. Karin Housley
Paul Hugunin – Agriculture Appointee
David Kelliher – Historical Society Appointee
Grant Wilson – Natural Resources Appointee
Anne Lewis – At-Large Member

Technical Advisors/Staff Present

Kelli Bruns – Natural Resources
Carol Zoff – Transportation
Peter MacDonagh - Transportation

Megan Voelke - LCC
Chris Miller – MN-MRPC Staff

Members Absent

Sen. John Hoffman
Rep. Sydney Jordan
Rep. Leigh Finke
Lisa Havelka – Tourism Appointee
Marni Karnowski – Transportation Appointee
Kate Carlson – Hastings to Iowa Border
Tucker Blythe – National Park Service

Guest Present

Kathleen Ryan - Aitkin County
Lauren Peck – Natural Resources

The meeting was called to order at 2:05 p.m. by Senator Housley, Chair. A quorum was present after the informational presentation.

Informational Presentation - Aitkin River Trails Committee: Kathleen Ryan of Aitkin County was welcomed to the meeting and shared information about the Aitkin River Trails Committee, their events and plans for the future. The committee aims to promote Aitkin County as a destination for outdoor recreation and natural wonder; and includes the Aitkin County Chamber, Aitkin County Economic Development, Mississippi Headwaters Board, key community members, and a representative of the MN-MRPC. Regional Commissioner Megan Christianson has attended the committee's meetings and spoke highly of the group and its results. Commission members followed up with questions and discussion, and requested details on upcoming 2024 events when available.

Approve Agenda and Minutes from 11/16/23 Meeting: Motion by John Anfinson and seconded by Karl Samp to approve the draft agenda and meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried.

Budget Report: The year-to-date budget report in the meeting packet was reviewed and discussed. Motion by Anne Lewis and seconded by Sally Fineday to accept the report as presented. Motion carried.

Executive Committee Support Letter Authority: On January 23, the Executive Committee approved letters of support for the City of Sauk Rapids for two projects previously approved for Transportation Alternatives program letters. The new letters were for the same projects, but two different funding sources. The Executive Committee requested that the full Commission consider formalizing this authority for the Executive Committee between regular quarterly meetings. Motion by Grant Wilson and seconded by Anne Lewis to give Chair and Vice Chair authority to provide updated letters of support for projects previously reviewed and approved by the MN-MRPC. Motion carried.

MN-MRPC Priorities: The Executive Committee reviewed the listing of current and on-hold MN-MRPC priorities and past feedback provided by the full MN-MRPC. If the MN-MRPC decides to move forward and host a National MRPC Annual Meeting, that will move to the top of the priority list and timelines for other projects could change. The priorities list will be reviewed again in the future. Members were asked for comments or information on new topics that have come up recently. Carol Zoff requested volunteers to assist in reviewing material and developing a process for retention of Great River Road and MN-MRPC historical records, and its addition to the current priorities list. David Kelliher noted that MN Historical Society archivists stand ready to help. Carol Zoff, John Anfinson, David Kelliher and Chris Miller volunteered to work on a plan.

National MRPC 2024 Annual Meeting: John Anfinson provided background on status of the 2024 Annual Meeting. The MN-MRPC Executive Committee discussed hosting an Annual Meeting in Minnesota in 2024 or 2025, with the

preference being 2025. They asked that the National Office check with other states for 2024. After doing so, the National MRPC remains in need of a host state and location for the 2024 meeting. Discussion included the organizational importance of having a site for the 2024 Annual Meeting; impacts of the short planning timeline on MN-MRPC's capacity; and the need to be realistic about this timeline in terms of what can be provided. A suggestion was made to say yes to 2024 with the understanding that Minnesota would then be able to host again in a year of our choosing, with longer timelines to plan and promote.

Motion by John Anfinson and seconded by David Kelliher to move forward with plans to host the 2024 MRPC Annual Meeting in Minnesota. Motion carried. There was discussion on the process to choose the meeting location. Motion by John Anfinson and seconded by Sen. Housley to authorize the MN-MRPC Executive Committee to select a meeting host site for recommendation to the National MRPC. Motion carried.

Bemidji and Winona were mentioned as possible locations. Information on venues and availability will be requested from both communities. The Twin Cities was noted as another option if needed. The National MRPC Office will contract with facilities, handle overall meeting planning and registration. A planning team from the MN-MRPC will be needed to work on agenda topics and host state responsibilities. Assistance and participation from all MN-MRPC members will be requested as the plans come together. John Anfinson, Anne Lewis, and David Kelliher volunteered to serve on the planning team. Sally Fineday and Karl Samp offered to assist if the meeting location is in northern Minnesota.

MRPC Communications and Marketing Committee: Chris Miller reported on the most recent meeting. The 4th quarter 2023 marketing report was shared and will be available soon on the MRPC members website. Newsletter and social media content ideas for 2024 were discussed, and states will be asked to submit information and photos under several topics for use throughout the year. Details will be sent out to MN-MRPC members when available.

MRPC Culture and Heritage Committee: John Anfinson reported on activities of the committee including their work to facilitate model Interpretive Center nominations that can be reviewed and utilized by sites interested in starting the process. There are now two model nominations in place, one of which is the newest GRR Interpretive Center - Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge Visitor Center in Wisconsin.

MRPC Environment, Recreation and Agriculture Committee: Roz Schnick of the Wisconsin MRPC will speak at the May 30 MN-MRPC meeting. Chris will send out links to a couple of upcoming webinars recommended by Roz.

MRPC Transportation Committee: Peter MacDonagh reported that the committee continues to work on trademark clarifications or permissions needed to sign the Mississippi River Trail (MRT). The committee is also documenting signage and directions to Great River Road Interpretive Centers. Minnesota has provided the requested information.

Drive the Great River Road Month 2024: A team meeting was held in late January to start planning for the September 2024 promotion. Grant Wilson introduced Lauren Peck, from the DNR Central Region Communications Office, who will be partnering on the promotion this year, provided an overview of discussions to date and requested feedback from members. The team wants to capture input from MN-MRPC members and then get back together to continue planning. The overall theme centers on connecting people to outdoor recreation, special outdoor places, and highlighting the 100th anniversary of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

Commission Discussion

- Build on things already happening and take advantage of what is available. Focusing could be the challenge.
- Partnering with agencies is great. Historic sites might be a theme for a future year and could include partnering with tribal nations.
- There are outdoor opportunities at MN Historical Society sites that could be included in this year's theme.
- The structure of the promotion is needed first followed by outreach to fill in the content specifics.
- A kick-off event has already been discussed, possibly something at the State Fair based on the Minnesota Grown example. Events like that are great ways to gather and connect patterns.
- Members were asked to send additional ideas to Grant, Kelli or Chris, and/or let them know if you would like to join the planning team.

MN Great River Road Print Maps: A limited supply of MN Great River Road maps remains on hand, which will not be enough to supply partner distribution sites for the summer season. The remaining maps can be used to fulfill individual requests from the website and provide small quantities for Commission members and partners. There was discussion by the Executive Committee on whether print maps should continue to be used for MN Great River Road promotion and

information. The committee recommended consideration by the full Commission. Does the Commission recommend printing an updated map if/when funds are available or a focus on electronic information only?

Commission Discussion

- Interpretive Centers are an important feature of the maps, and the maps are more than just driving directions – they provide exposure to what is available along the route.
- It will not be possible to fund maps now if the 2024 Annual Meeting is hosted in Minnesota. If not, consider printing maps.
- Cost varies depending on the size of the print run, shipping, and storage. Quotes could be obtained after checking quantities at partner distribution sites. Some sites use quite a few maps, others do not, depending on a lot of factors.
- Maps can be particularly important if areas of the route are missing any road signs or there are gaps in cell phone coverage.
- Maps are how people learn about the Great River Road.
- If a new quantity is printed, the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge should be visible and marked.
- Come back to this topic in the future, consensus was to continue with printed materials as funding allows.

Northland Reliability Project Update: The comment letter authorized by the MN-MRPC in November 2023 was submitted, and responses from Minnesota Power and Great River Energy included specific response to the MN-MRPC comments. Additional opportunities to review and comment on this project should be coming in the future. Information will be sent to members when available.

Dairyland Wabasha Relocation Project Update: MN-MRPC representatives that volunteered at the last meeting met with project contacts in December. Meeting notes were referenced in the meeting packet. Additional information will be shared with Commission members in the future as it is received.

Lotis Environmental Bowstring Project Update: Comments and requests were emailed as authorized at the November 2023 MN-MRPC meeting. A summary of communications on the project was referenced in the meeting packet. Sally Fineday described concerns related to projects that often take the least costly option on tribal lands, which was why she requested the documentation showing full review and approval by the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. The documents were provided as requested and demonstrated the appropriate levels of review.

Overall Process for Comments on Public Utility Projects: Are there changes needed to the current process or other considerations to be included?

- MN-MRPC is not a regulatory body but should raise awareness of the value of National Scenic Byways/All-American Roads. Member agencies and their comments can help support this.
- Some states have scenic easements in place that help with definition and protection of certain areas. Is information available that would allow the Commission to include scenic easements and/or scenic areas in comment letters?
- There are likely to be more renewable energy projects coming and should the Commission prepare a response to be ready for such projects if they impact the Great River Road?
- An example was shared regarding regulations on signage/billboards along a byway – are there rules or regulations that would also apply to utility projects?

Scenic Easement Information/Mapping: Carol Zoff described scenic areas and scenic easements and how this information might be included in future MN-MRPC comments on proposed public utility projects along the Great River Road. Scenic areas and scenic easements have different definitions, and both exist in Minnesota. MnDOT is working to make mapping of scenic easements and scenic areas available to the public and will keep the MN-MRPC informed as the process continues. An update will be provided at a future meeting.

Letter of Support Request – Brainerd TH 210/Lum Park Bridge Project: The Commission approved a letter of support for this project in November 2023 as part of the Transportation Alternatives project listing. The City of Brainerd is now requesting a letter for a LCCMR application and/or a general letter of support for the project. They are also seeking bonding funds. Motion by Karl Samp and seconded by Senator Housley to approve the City of Brainerd TH 210/Lum Park Bridge Project letter as requested. Motion carried. Karl Samp requested a map of the project area for reference.

Next Meeting: May 30, 2024; 2:00 – 4:30 p.m.; Capitol Room 123 and Zoom

Adjournment: There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:25 p.m.

MN-MRPC FY 24 Activity Budget - Status as of 5/14/24

Activity/Item	FY 24 Allocation	Spent 5/10/24	Pending	Remaining	% Spent
Quarterly Meetings	\$5,500.00	\$1,566.23		\$3,933.77	28%
Other meetings including travel & per diem	\$1,500.00	\$1,315.99		\$184.01	88%
Dues & Memberships (MRPC - \$15,000; NSB Foundation \$150)	\$15,150.00	\$15,150.00		\$0.00	100%
National Meetings	\$10,000.00	\$3,722.94		\$6,277.06	37%
Communications including website hosting, phone, Zoom, Constant Contact, etc.	\$1,300.00	\$1,268.76	\$25.40	\$5.84	100%
Website Regular Maintenance Updates & New Arts Page	\$2,400.00	\$1,400.00	\$75.00	\$925.00	61%
Shipping (incl. Ambassador kits and maps)	\$1,000.00	\$1,044.41		-\$44.41	104%
General Material Printing & Supplies	\$750.00	\$143.87		\$606.13	19%
Admin Contract	\$38,400.00	\$28,800.00	\$3,200.00	\$6,400.00	83%
Professional-Technical Services - including additional staff hours, web services, graphic design services, etc.	\$2,000.00	\$3,900.00		-\$1,900.00	195%
Total Operating Budget	\$78,000.00	\$58,312.20	\$3,300.40	\$16,387.40	79%
Notes:					
Approx. \$4,200 should remain in the National Meetings line item, which could be utilized for other commission activities.					
\$2,500 of the \$4,200 from National Meetings line designated for 2024 MRPC Annual Meeting Sponsorship - facility rental fees					
Overage in Professional-Technical Services likely to be offset by funds remaining in Quarterly Meetings line item.					
Limited supply of maps (3,000) remains on hand for individual mailings, meetings and partner distribution. No plan for a new print run at this time but something to consider					

MISSISSIPPI RIVER PARKWAY COMMISSION



QUARTER 2 UPDATE



Credit

: Mississippi River at sunset/Pat Wrischnik

As the sun sets on another week, enjoy your weekend along the Great River Road or wherever you might be!



Credit:

Visit Winona

SAVE THE DATE - 2024 MRPC ANNUAL MEETING - SEPTEMBER 18-20

Hotel reservations are open for the [2024 MRPC Annual Meeting](#), which will be held Wednesday, September 18, through Friday, September 20, in Winona, Minnesota.

Reservations at the Riverport Inn & Suites are available online at riverportinn.com with code "MRPC24" or by calling (507) 452-0606. King rooms are \$139 and double queen rooms are \$149 per night.

There are many suggested transportation options to Winona. Find them [here](#).

We're excited to share that our evening welcome reception on Wednesday, September 18, will take place at one of our Great River Road Interpretive Centers, the [Minnesota Marine Art Museum](#). The evening will include hors d'oeuvres and a tour of the museum and pollinator garden, as well as viewing of the Mississippi River and the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

HAPPY 100TH ANNIVERSARY TO THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE AND FISH REFUGE



Congress created the largest “wild-life preserve” ever in order to save the upper Mississippi River backwaters from being drained and converted to farmland. Since 1924, the [Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge](#) has been a haven for fish and wildlife, as well as 3.7 million visitors annually. Hunting, fishing, observing wildlife, and other recreation across 240,000 acres of Mississippi River floodplain and 261 river miles from Wabasha, Minnesota, to Rock Island, Illinois, enthrall these visitors.

What might you see?

- 306 species of birds
- 300+ bald eagle nests
- 50% of the world’s canvasback ducks
- 20% of eastern U.S. tundra swans
- 51 species of mammals
- 42 species of freshwater mussels
- 119 species of fish



June 7 will be “Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge Day.” June 22 will be the 100th anniversary celebration and dedication of the refuge visitor center as the newest Great River Road Interpretive Center.

Once again this summer, we'll launch a campaign to highlight summer events along the Great River Road from Memorial Day to Labor Day. The Summer Fun on the Great River Road campaign includes a [searchable event calendar](#), monthly gas card giveaways, and online promotion.



See the campaign [toolkit](#) featuring logos and sample social media posts that you can include in your Great River Road marketing. This serves as a wonderful opportunity to cross-promote events and travel along the Great River Road.

PROMOTE YOUR EVENTS

Our events calendar is open for submissions—you can add your events [here](#). Note that several fields are required, and we encourage you to include a photo of your event if one is available.

Events must take place in the county or parish that includes your state's section of the Great River Road or borders the Mississippi River. Partners from state agencies, state commissions, DMOs, Interpretive Centers, communities and other organizations along the Great River Road are welcome to submit their events at no cost.

COLLECTING INFORMATION ON ACCESSIBLE VIEWING AREAS

We want to inventory and share information on accessible viewing areas along the Mississippi River. Share your information [here](#).

TOURISM DATABASE COLLECTION

We are creating a database of tourism organizations along the Great River Road. These can include CVBs, chambers of commerce, and other related tourism organizations. Share your information [here](#).



Let's promote National Pollinator Week along the Great River Road again this year. We developed a toolkit that states, interpretive centers and other organizations can use during this year's Pollinator Week, June 17-23. The toolkit includes suggestions on how you can promote pollinators in your area, sample social media posts, and resources. Download the toolkit [here](#).

In 2023, we signed on with the Mississippi River Operation Pollination Partnership. We're continuing to collect public pollinator habitat location information along the Great River Road. This Information will be shared with visitors and used as part of the Mississippi River Operation Pollination. [Share pollinator habitat information](#).

[The State Pollinator Playbook](#), developed by Mike McClanahan and his team, serves as a guide for states. It looks at what programming already exists along the Great River Road, what can be done, and who acts. Pollinators make the Great River Road a better National Scenic Byway, and everyone can play a role in supporting pollinators. Together we are raising awareness of pollinators.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR INTERPRETIVE CENTERS (IC)

We are requesting that all ICs update their online information [here](#). This information will be used for promotion (including website, printed map, newsletters, social media, PR) and is necessary for us to maintain communication. Please take a few moments to review your IC information.

We're asking all states to complete their annual Interpretive Center visit checklists. You can find the online form (and a downloadable version) [here](#).

If you have a new IC nomination, please contact the National Office or Culture and Heritage committee chairs. We now review applications quarterly, but they must be received a minimum of 30 days prior to a meeting to make the agenda. There are two model applications online for ICs to use as a guide. See examples and fill out the online form [here](#).

Q1 MARKETING HIGHLIGHTS

- 90,368 views on [experiencemississippiriver.com](https://www.experiencemississippiriver.com)
- Visitors averaged 3 minutes and 5 seconds on [experiencemississippiriver.com](https://www.experiencemississippiriver.com)
- Over 90,000 Facebook followers
- Over 1.6 million combined social media paid ad impressions, leading to a reach of 904,668, 36,606 engagements, and 9,149 link clicks
- 50,572 opt-in subscribers on our e-newsletter list

MEDIA PICK UPS

- [How to Explore These 4 American Cities on Their Scenic Waterways](#) – Travel & Leisure, February 2
- [Curious Louisiana: The Great River Road](#) – The Advocate, February 16
- [The Best Road Trips Across the US](#) – Detroit Free Press, February 18
- [12 Scenic Road Trips to Take in the United States](#) – msn.com, March 25
- [15 Essential Scenic Drives in the United States](#) – yardbarker.com, April 12
- [9 of the Most Welcoming Towns in Mississippi](#) – WorldAtlas

MORE FUNDS FOR NSBP

For the fourth consecutive year, federal funds have been allocated for the National Scenic Byway Program (NSBP). The Fiscal Year 24 Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development (THUD) appropriations bill, signed by President Biden on March 9, allocates \$7.5 million for NSBP. Now two representatives, including Garrett Graves of Louisiana, will send a bipartisan letter to the House Appropriations Committee requesting \$60 million for the NSBP in the FY25 THUD appropriations bill.

GREAT RIVER ROAD MEMBERSHIPS ARE FOR ANYONE

Do you know someone who loves the Great River Road? Remember to share information on the Great River Road Champion program. Membership makes a great gift, too. [Learn more here.](#)

USE THE GREAT RIVER ROAD CO-OP ADVERTISING PROGRAM

The co-op advertising program allows DMOs, businesses, and other travel partners to buy into content across the Great River Road's online channels to gain valuable exposure through our website, social media platforms, and e-newsletters. [Get started here.](#)

SHOP THE GREAT RIVER ROAD

Place your order at the [Great River Road store](#) and proudly wear your Great River Road apparel.

UPCOMING DEADLINES

Please note these upcoming deadlines for applications and nominations:

- [Stewardship Award](#): June 15
- [Honorary Membership Award](#): August 15
- [Interpretive Center Nominations](#): June 16 (for review at July meeting) or August 19 (for review at September meeting)
- [Distinguished Service Award](#): August 15

UPCOMING MEETINGS

- May 17 @ 9am – [Transportation Committee](#) (Zoom)
- May 21 @ 10am – [Culture & Heritage Committee](#) (Zoom)
- June 4 @ 9am – [Marketing Committee](#) (Zoom)
- June 12 @ 10am – [Environment, Recreation and Agriculture Committee](#) (Zoom)
- June 14 @ 9am – [Board of Directors](#) (Zoom)
- September 18-20 – National Annual Meeting in Winona, Minnesota

COMMITTEE CO-CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION & MEETING DATES

- **CULTURE AND HERITAGE**

- John Anfinson: janfinson@comcast.net
- Pat Audirsch: pataud@sbcglobal.net
- **Meetings:**
 - May 21 (10am)
 - July 16 (10am)
 - September 19 (Annual Meeting)
 - November 19 (10am)

- **ENVIRONMENT, RECREATION & AGRICULTURE**

- Sabrina Chandler: sabrina_chandler@fws.gov
- Erin Holmes: erin_l_holmes@fws.gov
- **Meetings:**
 - June 12 (10am)
 - September 19 (Annual Meeting)
 - November 20 (10am)

- **MARKETING**

- Sharon Calcote: scalcote@crt.la.gov
- Kim Williams: kim.williams@arkansas.gov
- **Meetings:**
 - June 4 (9am)
 - September 19 (Annual Meeting)
 - November 5 (9am)

- **TRANSPORTATION**

- Francis Schelfhout: Francis.Schelfhout@dot.wi.gov
- Mike McClanahan: Michael.McClanahan@tn.gov
- **Meetings:**
 - May 17 (9am)
 - July 26 (9am)
 - September 19 (Annual Meeting)
 - November 15 (9am)