



Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission
2nd Quarter Meeting – June 11, 2025
Capitol Room 120/Zoom Hybrid
MINUTES – Draft

Commissioners Present

Karl Samp – Brainerd to Elk River
John Anfinson – Elk River to Hastings
Kate Carlson – Hastings to Iowa Border
Sen. Karin Housley
Sen. John Hoffman
Lisa Havelka – Explore Minnesota
David Kelliher – Historical Society
Marni Karnowski – Transportation
Anne Lewis – At Large

Technical Advisors/Staff Present

Amanda Dirnberger – Natural Resources
Peter MacDonagh - Transportation

Carol Zoff – Transportation
Diane Henry-Wangenstein – LCC
Megan Voelke – LCC
Andrew George - LCC
Chris Miller – MN-MRPC Staff

Members & Technical Advisors Absent

Sally Fineday – Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids
Megan Christianson – Grand Rapids to Brainerd
Rep. Huldah Momanyi-Hiltsley
Paul Hugunin – Agriculture
Grant Wilson – Natural Resources
Tucker Blythe – National Park Service

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by MN-MRPC Chair Sen. Karin Housley, followed by introductions. The meeting packet and recording are available at <https://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/mrpc/>.

Approve Agenda and Minutes from 2/21/25 Meeting: Motion by John Anfinson and seconded by Karl Samp to approve the agenda and February 21, 2025 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried.

Election of Officers: The MN-MRPC elects officers every two years, with the last election held in 2023. Karl Samp facilitated the election of officers. David Kelliher nominated Anne Lewis for the position of Treasurer, with no other nominations noted. Anne Lewis nominated John Anfinson for the position of Vice Chair, with no other nominations noted. John Anfinson nominated Sen. Housley for the position of Chair, with no other nominations noted. Motion carried. Officers were thanked for their willingness to serve, and the meeting was turned over to Chair Housley.

Executive Committee Appointments: The Executive Committee is designated by the MN-MRPC every two years. The committee is to include the Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary-Treasurer. Two additional positions are to be filled by the MN-MRPC and overall membership is to include a House or Senate member, regional member, and agency member. Motion by Senator Housley to keep Sally Fineday and Lisa Havelka as the two additional positions on the Executive Committee. Motion carried.

Legislative Updates: Sen. Housley shared information about the bonding bill and provided examples of funded projects, noting that water was a primary focus this year. John Anfinson mentioned funding for the St. Anthony Falls Laboratory, to study sediment implications that would result from dam removal. Diane Henry-Wangenstein reported that LCC appropriations were included in the State Government Finance Bill which will result in stable funding for the MN-MRPC in the next biennium.

Regional Meetings/Elections: Chris Miller shared a reminder that regional meetings are being planned for this fall, prior to the November MN-MRPC meeting, to recommend Regional Commissioner candidates for new

four-year terms. This includes the Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids to Brainerd, and Brainerd to Elk River regions. The Elk River to Hastings and Hastings to Iowa Border regions will be due for regional meetings/elections in 2027.

Budget Report: The budget report included in the meeting packet was referenced and an overview was provided by Chris Miller. Fiscal year end is coming up on June 30, and the MN Great River Road map project is the last main project expense yet to come in. A new fiscal year and budget biennium will begin on July 1, 2025.

2025 National MRPC Annual Meeting: Anne Lewis shared information about the program and speakers, and John Anfinson shared location information for the MRPC 2025 Annual Meeting, which will be September 10 – 12 in Baton Rouge. MN-MRPC funds can be used to cover costs for public and legislative members, as the budget allows. Out-of-state travel approval is needed before any airline reservations are made, or any other arrangements that cannot be cancelled in the event approval is not received. Members interested in attending were asked to notify Chris by July 1, so a list can be forwarded to the Chair for consideration. Sen. Housley, Sen. Hoffman, and Karl Samp expressed interest at the meeting. John Anfinson and Anne Lewis plan to attend in their National MRPC leadership roles, with costs covered by the National Office.

National Mississippi River Day – June 2: John Anfinson reported on the designation of June 2 as National Mississippi River Day by the organization One Mississippi. They partner with 70 organizations and are requesting help gathering proclamations for this annual event (<https://www.mississippiriver.org/about>). Draft proclamation wording was included in the meeting packet and Commission members were asked to review the options, and consider possible edits for use in Minnesota. The MN-MRPC may be asked to help request proclamations for future years at state and local levels.

MRPC Communications & Marketing Committee: Chris Miller reported on initiatives discussed at the last meeting including the Summer Fun on the Great River Road events promotion which includes a sweepstakes and free online events listing where local partners can upload their information; and plans for a campaign promoting 250 favorite things to see and do along the Great River Road, in honor of the America 250 celebration in 2026. Favorite things to see and do can now be submitted in preparation for the 2026 campaign. Kate Carlson noted that Mississippi River cruise boats have started their arrivals at river cities including Winona, bringing opportunities to showcase the communities.

MRPC Culture & Heritage Committee: John Anfinson shared a recap of online workshops held for Interpretive Centers in May, titled, Elevate Your Center: Partnerships and Visibility Along the Great River Road. The agenda featured the Executive Director of Discovery Park of America (a GRR Interpretive Center) on the topics of community perceptions and economic impact of Interpretive Centers, and Susanne Thiede-Barnet of the National MRPC Office provided data and examples of how the National MRPC promotes and partners with Interpretive Centers. This was a first-time event, offered twice, and attendance and response were positive. Anne Lewis noted the value of these types of events. The presentations and a recording are available at <https://mrpcmembers.com/elevate/>. The Culture & Heritage Committee has received a new Interpretive Center nomination from the Mississippi Wildlife Heritage Museum in Leland, Mississippi, and will be following up with the applicants.

MRPC Environment, Recreation & Agriculture: Marni Karnowski reported that the most recent meeting was in March and asked for comments from anyone who was in attendance. The ERA Committee and National MRPC are promoting National Pollinator Week (June 16-22), and the National MRPC/Great River Road has received a partnership award from the National Scenic Byways Association in recognition of its Byway pollinator partnership with Rotary International. Marni and others coordinated coverage of the next ERA Committee meeting, scheduled for June 18.

MRPC Transportation: Peter MacDonagh reported that the last two meetings have focused on ownership of the naming rights and logo for the Mississippi River Bicycle Trail (MRT) and mapping of wayfinding signage to

Interpretive Centers. The MRPC is now the official owner of the MRT name and logo, for use in all ten states. There are three parts to the Interpretive Center signage project – parcel maps, turn by turn directions, and a photo inventory of wayfinding signs. States are working on the project with a goal of having at least some states' information complete prior to the Annual Meeting in Baton Rouge. Peter also noted the Pollinator Playbook that was developed last year and contributed to the partnership award recently received by the MRPC.

Roadside Storybook: The Great River Road Roadside Storybook is content intended to provide a series of interpretive panels in all MN Great River Road counties. Carol Zoff referenced the overview in the meeting packet, specifically the need to address Great River Road interpretive panels that are aging and deteriorating. A condition review of the panels was completed in 2021, and results were discussed by an ad hoc committee, which also discussed needs related to the content for panels yet to be installed. A full review and update of the content, originally developed in 2003, was recommended. Panels currently exist in four counties and content was developed for 16 additional counties (content for six panels per county). The MN Department of Natural Resources has removed the panels from Itasca State Park and will be updating content and reinstalling panels as part of their overall interpretive efforts. Members referred this topic to the Executive Committee for the development of a recommendation on how to move forward, including short-term solutions for aging panels and long-term completion of this overall project.

MN Great River Road Information Tools – Update: Chris Miller reported that the print map project is nearing completion. Updates were made as needed (corrections only), and 29,000 pieces are being printed and shipped to approximately 40 partner locations for distribution. Changes have also been made to the MN Great River Road website as recommended by the Map-Website Committee. Regional story map links have been taken down, but content has been saved for future update work. Marni Karnowski reported on the Plan Your Trip interactive map project. Andrew Kurth of MnDOT has been working on the rebuild, it has been shared with a group of MN-MRPC/Great River Road representatives for comments and has now been submitted for required internal final reviews and approvals. The final product should be ready to go by early August, in time for Drive the Great River Road Month (September).

Letter of Support Request: Members reviewed the packet information regarding the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe National Scenic Byways Application for the GRR Rehab Project in Cass County. Status of the National Scenic Byways funding is unknown at this time, but a letter from the MN-MRPC would be useful if the grant is awarded, and would also allow the MN-MRPC Chair and Vice Chair to provide letters for other funding sources for the same project that might develop. Motion by Anne Lewis and seconded by John Anfinson to authorize a letter indicating full support of this project by the MN-MRPC. Motion carried.

Commission Member Updates:

- John Anfinson reported that the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI) 2025 Annual Meeting is scheduled to be held in the Twin Cities on September 16 – 17, providing an opportunity to show off the local section of river to this group of Mississippi River mayors. Senator Hoffman noted that the Twin Cities took on this role on short notice, funding/partnerships are still needed, and it would be nice to include a river experience as part of the meeting. Anne Lewis, Senator Hoffman, John Anfinson and David Kelliher offered to work on options for MN-MRPC involvement.
- Anne Lewis attended the National Scenic Byway Association's (NSBA) recent webinar on byway ideas for America 250. NSBA will be looking for content from byways for use in promoting byways as part of America 250. All-American Road application information has already been shared. Carol Zoff offered to provide graphics and information from Great River Road interpretive panels.
- David Kelliher reported on the start of historic sites season including expanded hours for visitors. Conversations will be taking place about a history theme for Drive the Great River Road Month. An announcement will be coming soon about an award of excellence for the Many Voices; Many Stories exhibit at Historic Fort Snelling.
- Karl Samp shared information on upcoming events at the Riverfront Park Amphitheater in Brainerd, paddling events sponsored by the Mississippi Headwaters Board, the Little Falls Dam Festival, several

Mississippi River documentaries currently available on Amazon Prime, and the Lakes Area Music Festival which brings over 250 musicians and performers to the Brainerd Performing Arts Center.

- Amanda Dirnberger provided updates from the Department of Natural Resources including fish tagging efforts at Lock and Dam Number 5; and the 3M settlement project being handled by the DNR and PCA, with grant processes currently underway and grant awards expected in January 2026. The goals of the project are 1) Restore, protect and enhance aquatic and terrestrial resources, wildlife and habitats; 2) Increase understanding of fish tissue contamination, improve communication about PFAS-based fish consumption advisories, and identify and enhance alternative, noncontaminated fishing areas; and 3) Improve and enhance outdoor recreational opportunities
- Kate Carlson announced the start of festival season in Winona. The Great River Shakespeare Festival begins soon, and Kate offered an opportunity for two free tickets to MN-MRPC members, for either Romeo and Juliet on June 26 or Comedy of Errors on June 27. Contact Kate for details.

Next Meeting: August 14, 2025, 2:00 – 4:30 p.m.

Adjournment: There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.