



**Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission
Executive Committee Meeting
July 17, 2025 • 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.
Hybrid – Zoom/Centennial Office Building Meeting Room 101**

DRAFT AGENDA

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- Welcome & Review of Agenda
 - Great River Road - Roadside Storybook (Interpretive Panels)
 - Review Status
 - Develop Recommendations
 - Regional Meetings/Elections
 - Review Timeline and General Plan
 - Consider Draft Rules on Process for Member Elections/Appointments
 - America 250
 - MN-MRPC Staffing Transition
 - Other Business
 - Adjourn

**Please note –
No public testimony will be taken during this meeting.**

Minnesota Great River Road Roadside Storybook Project Background - Nov. 18, 2021



The Federal Highway Administration's National Scenic Byways Program invites travelers to *Come Closer to America's heart and soul....*

FHWA's program codified how to manage a byway for travelers and residents who respond to their invitation by including byway interpretation as a primary responsibility, in addition to safeguarding intrinsic resources and the byway experience.



The **2000 Minnesota Great River Road Corridor Management Plan** implementation resulted in significant interpretation accomplishments:

- ✓ Developed 2001 Minnesota Great River Road Interpretive Plan, with **Roadside Storybook**
- ✓ Fabricated and installed **Roadside Storybook** in four+ counties
- ✓ Developed 2004 10-state Great River Road Interpretive Plan and Toolkit
- ✓ Designated 13 Minnesota Great River Road National Interpretive Centers



The **Roadside Storybook** describes the river's stories, with a chapter in each of the 21 counties along the river in Minnesota. The design carries forward frames and panel layouts MnDOT used at Rest Areas and overlooks previously. Each county chapter included six panels which provided:

- ✓ 10-state and statewide overview, and county map of intrinsic resources (one panel)
- ✓ Hydrology and geology (one panel)
- ✓ Flora and fauna (one panel)
- ✓ River-related human and natural history and sometimes its present or future story (three panels)



The current [Minnesota Great River Road Corridor Management Plan](#) includes specific **Roadside Storybook** strategies that respond to public and partner engagement that told the Parkway Commission to focus on

- ✓ Add more interpretation along the byway,
- ✓ develop White Earth, Leech Lake and Prairie Island community content,
- ✓ apply technology (QR codes, website, interactive map/YouTube, digital travel guides), and
- ✓ maintain existing roadside interpretation.

The CMP field survey revealed visitors desire more interpretation on the Great River Road itself so they can understand what they are seeing and experiencing. Example responses stated: "Need more signage and interpretive areas," "Would like to see more information on the Ojibwe tribe," and "Need more signs to talk about history and area. Did not know it was a scenic byway until the survey people told us." This sentiment was repeated at open houses and local meetings.

CMP "An interpretive sign turns facts into an experience that captures visitors' interests, provokes their curiosity, and makes them emotionally and actively involved so they feel a part of the story and understand the significance of a site. While existing interpretive panels, Interpretive Centers, visitor centers, local museums, and Minnesota Historical Society sites, our visitors, MN-MRPC, PAT and public outreach tell us more interpretation directed specifically to Great River Road travelers is needed." Using MnGRR Plan Your Trip map information can also encourage revisitation with so much left to see, and cross promotion to other destination areas, or even ten states.



Currently there are 63 interpretive panels, in 32 frames, on 22 sites along the river from the headwaters to the Iowa boarder. MnDOT field analysis of existing Great River Road interpretive panels indicates approximately

- ✓ 31 are in good condition, but need cleaning;
- ✓ 30 need repair
- ✓ 18 need replacement

In addition, a complete **Roadside Storybook** develops 16 more counties and three Tribal communities (6 panels ea.)

(Hubbard, Beltrami, Itasca, Aitkin, Cass, Morrison, Stearns, Benton, Wright, Anoka, Hennepin, Ramsey, Washington, Goodhue, Wabasha, Winona)

Minnesota Great River Road Roadside Storybook Panel Content Development – Nov. 18, 2021



The **Minnesota Great River Road Roadside Storybook** describes the river's stories, with a chapter in each of the 21 counties and 3 Tribal communities along the river in Minnesota. The design carries forward frames and panel layouts MnDOT used at Rest Areas and overlooks previously.



Each chapter included six panels:

- One about 10-state and statewide overview, and county map of intrinsic resources
- One about Hydrology and geology
- One about Flora and fauna
- Three about River-related human and natural history, present or future story

The cost of designing interpretive panels can vary greatly, so at this time no cost estimate is provided for panel content development. ***A Commission working team is recommended to develop a content development estimate.***

This project per panel development costs may be less than average interpretation projects because of

- the scale of the Roadside Storybook,
- the format is established,
- draft county content is developed (2002), and
- stakeholders and partners can see existing examples of the panels in place.

The per panel savings may not be substantial, though, as

- the draft content, while vetted and refined, is 19 year old,
- CMP strategies include all new Tribal community content and integration throughout, and
- incorporating technology.

Factors that affect content development cost include:

- Themes. Do you have a theme established for your sign(s)? Can you articulate the interpretive objectives (what you want people to know, feel, or do as a result of viewing your panel)?
- Reference Material. How much time to identify information sources for the text and graphics?
- Graphics. How many photographs, illustrations, and/or graphics are currently available? How many will require research, creation, or purchase?
- Template. Do you have an established graphic style, or will our designers be starting from scratch? Is there a “template” (template would include colors, font styles, graphic look of sign panels) already established? Will there be multiple signs done from the same “template”?
- Maps. Are you going to need a map? If so, who will provide it?
- Review Process. Who will be the reviewers? Will their comments be compiled and approved prior to submittal?

Given these variables, design costs can range from \$2,500 – 3,500 per sign including:

- Template development
- Text research and development
- Image acquisition (finding photos, illustrations, etc. If images need to be purchased, plan on another \$50-100/image)
- Graphic layout and design
- File preparation for fabrication, development of specifications and COR services
- Project management



Minnesota Great River Road Roadside Storybook Preliminary Cost Estimate – Nov. 18, 2021



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Preliminary cost estimate for existing sign refurbishment is based upon the assumption to

- replace all sign and frames if multiple signs are on one site, and
- panel redevelopment to address updates from scans, add QR codes and/or add Tribal content such as dual language.

Existing Interpretive Sign Rehabilitation

Existing GRR Interpretive Sign Sites	22
Existing Sign Frames	32
Existing Sign Panels	63

Remaining New Roadside Storybook Build Out	Qty	Unit Cost	Estimated Total Cost
Counties (16 x 3 Frames X 2 Panels/frame)	48	\$8,000	\$384,000
Tribal Lands (3 sites x 3 Frames x 2 Panels/frame)	9	\$8,000	\$ 72,000
Counties (16 x 6 Panels content development)	96	\$4,500	\$432,000
Tribal Lands (3 sites x 6 Panels content development)	18	\$4,500	\$ 81,000
Subtotal			\$969,000

Existing MnGRR Interpretive Sign Rehabilitation	Qty	Unit Cost	Estimated Total Cost
Full Replacement (23 frames w/ 46 panels @ 12 sites)	23	\$8,000	\$184,000
Cleaning (9 frames w/ 17 panels @ 9 sites)	9	\$500	\$ 4,500
Modify Replacement Panel Content	42	\$2,000	\$ 84,000
Subtotal			\$272,500

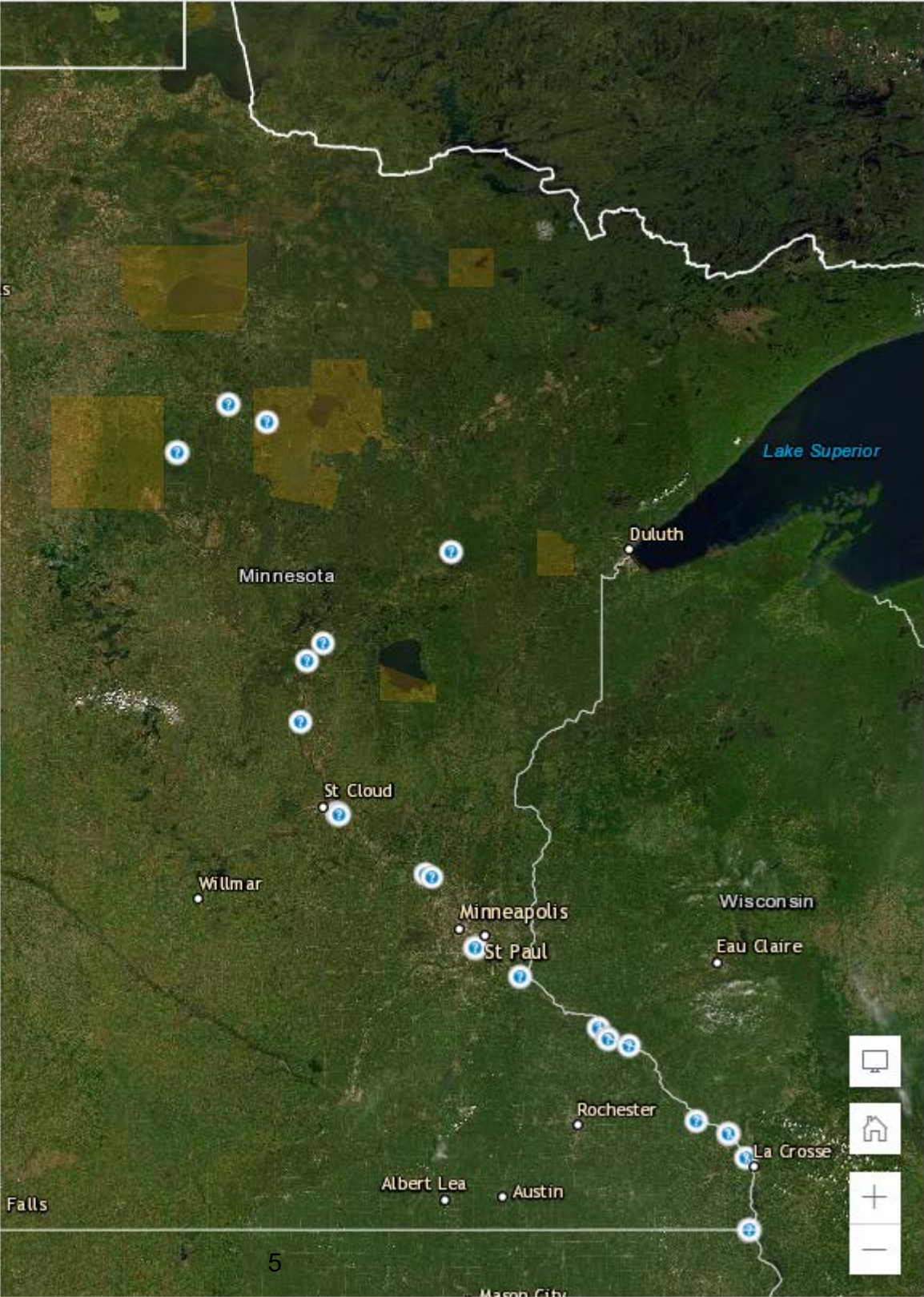
Existing Sign Rehabilitation and Storybook Build Out	Total	\$1,241,500
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Legend

Interpretive Signs



Tribal Reservation/Trust Lands



St. Cloud Travel Information Center Example – June 2025





MN Mississippi River Parkway Commission

Roadside Storybook Project – May 16, 2022 – 12:30 p.m. via Zoom

John Anfinson, Kelli Bruns, Carol Zoff, Tim Wilcox, Chris Miller

Content Storage/Access

- Existing interpretive content for 21 counties plus designs of existing panels has been organized and placed on MnDOT FTP site for team access.
- LCC is developing a secure webpage for long term storage and access of the materials. Webpage organization was discussed, with the main recommendation being to organize the files by county and in order from upstream to downstream rather than alphabetical.

Vendor/Consultant Examples

- Kelli provided the following example - Schmeckle Reserve Interpreters at the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point. Carol noted that they did work on the ten-state MRPC Interpretive Plan several years ago.
- Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway is working on a roadside marker project and likely has examples.

Feedback from Current Panel Site

- DNR provided feedback on panels at Itasca State Park. Panels are very popular and a focal point that helps orient visitors. There is a lot of content presented in an “explorer focused” way. They like the location for panels and would want to keep it and partner on the updating process.

Review of Existing Content & Panels

- Team members confirmed recommendation that all content needs to be reviewed and updated. It’s 20+ years old. There’s a lot of good content but in some cases, it’s dated (examples include metric measurements). QR codes could be added to panels to guide visitors to more information or look at other technology options such as cell phone tours.
- What should be considered as part of the content review? Criteria should be developed. Categories could include things like interpretation, plain language, accessibility, graphics, logos. Avoid content likely to become dated.
- DNR has interpretive guidelines that can be used as reference. Other agencies and partners might also have guidelines or processes. This information gathering/coordination could be part of the contract for a consultant.

Project Scope & Budget

- Need to develop scope and details for content review/updating/creation and then fabrication/installation. Some funding sources prefer the project split into two phases.
- Update or develop content first, then go to partners for confirmation and edits. Partners could include Interpretive Centers, regional commissioners, site contacts, cities, counties, state agency partners, and NPS.
- Give project to a consultant with a set of guidelines for updating content. Task would be to confirm that stories are relevant and updated. Focus on stories now, design later.
- There could be a rehab/re-do project first for panels that exist but are no longer in good condition.
- More time and involvement will be needed on cultural content and stories of place than on basic scientific information.

Panel Locations

- Interagency agreements might be needed for placement of new panels or updating existing installations. Documentation would be helpful for those involved with installations or maintenance in the future.
- Consider posting content online as a flipbook or similar format, to get it out there while funds are sought for panel installations.

Next Steps

- A lead agency/organization, project manager and fiscal agent will need to be identified prior to seeking funding.
- Begin to identify funding options.
- Team will do content review of two examples to develop guidelines for the update process/project scope. Mary Gibbs Visitor Center (heavy visitation staffed Interpretive Center) and one smaller unstaffed site where panels have deteriorated. Tim will review information and make a recommendation for a second example.
- Set meeting to begin the content review after the two examples are identified.
- Request involvement from any MN-MRPC members interested in helping develop the project scope.