



**Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission  
3rd Quarter Meeting – August 13, 2020  
Zoom Virtual Meeting  
MINUTES – Draft**

**Commissioners Present**

Sally Fineday – Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids  
Megan Christianson – Grand Rapids to Brainerd  
Karl Samp – Brainerd to Elk River  
Cordelia Pierson – Elk River to Hastings  
Sen. David Senjem  
Sen. Patricia Torres Ray  
Rep. Tony Jurgens  
Rep. Anne Claflin  
Paul Hugunin – Agriculture Appointee  
Lisa Havelka – Tourism Appointee

David Kelliher – Historical Society Appointee  
Grant Wilson – Natural Resources Appointee  
Anne Lewis – At Large Member

**Technical Advisors/Staff Present**

John Anfinson – National Park Service  
Carol Zoff – Transportation  
Tim Wilcox - Transportation  
Diane Henry Wangenstein – LCC  
Kasey Gerkovich - LCC  
Chris Miller – Staff

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Meeting called to order at 2:00 p.m. by Chair Senjem. Roll call was taken with the members listed above present. There was a quorum.

**Approve Minutes from 2/6/20 Meeting:** Motion by Cordelia Pierson and seconded by Megan Christianson to approve the minutes from the 2/6/20 meeting as presented. Motion carried.

**Budget Report:** Treasurer Anne Lewis provided an overview of the reports in the meeting packet including noting that there have been changes due to pandemic related restrictions on travel and group meetings. The FY 20 budget activity report reflects the year that ended June 30, 2020 and the FY 21 budget includes the operating budget for the new fiscal year but does not yet include funds carried forward from FY 20. The final close out of FY 20 is still underway and the FY 21 budget will be adjusted accordingly when the funds are known and available. Motion by Karl Samp and seconded by Anne Lewis to approve the budget reports. Motion carried.

**Regional Meetings/Elections:** Plans for fall regional meetings and elections have not yet been made due to continuing uncertainties related to travel and in person group meetings. The Metro and Bluffs Regions are due for meetings and elections this fall. Topic will be referred to the Executive Committee for consideration and guidance.

**Federal Legislation Update – INVEST/Moving Forward Act and Great American Outdoors Act:** The meeting packet included a resolution passed by the National MRPC and a news release related to the INVEST/Moving Forward ACT. This bill passed in the U.S. House including funding for National Scenic Byways. Commission members received information about the bill while in the House and public members including Karl Samp and Cordelia Pierson made contacts to their members of Congress. Additional requests might be made as the legislation moves through the Senate and/or conference committee.

The Great American Outdoors Act has passed in both the House and Senate and was signed into law. An overview from Scenic America was included in the meeting packet. John Anfinson shared that this act provides over \$900 million for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Minnesota funds will flow through the DNR and could provide opportunities for local communities looking to add parkland and trails. Grant Wilson will provide information that can be shared. Sen. Senjem noted that some communities seeking bonding funds may be interested in this opportunity. Cordelia Pierson underscored that this is an important program and funding source that she has worked with in the past.

**All American Road Designation:** Sen. Senjem expressed thanks to all who worked on the nomination for the MN Great River Road. Notification could be as early as November or not until sometime in the first quarter of 2021. Carol Zoff reported that eight of the ten Mississippi River states submitted nominations for the designation and noted the usefulness of the information for many purposes, including Drive the Great River Road Month.

**Drive the Great River Road Month:** Anne Lewis reported on Minnesota's 2020 plan for this annual promotion and referenced handouts in the meeting packet. Scenic reaches from the All-American Road nomination are the focus of this year's promotion in Minnesota along with encouragement to visit the unique river towns along the route. This is less

specific to certain attractions or sites than in the past, hopefully providing options whatever the situation happens to be throughout September. A news release will be distributed to media and our partners along the route, information will be posted on Facebook and a campaign is underway with Minnesota Monthly. The National MRPC will be running a sweepstakes and ten state information campaign.

Rep. Jurgens suggested that legislative members consider sending a release and others agreed. Staff will prepare a draft. Members requested links to the information/social media for sharing; suggested additions to the media list; noted that state agencies are not able to promote the National Great River Road sweepstakes but can share information about the MN Great River Road; requested to be notified when news releases are distributed to allow for potential follow up; and suggested looking into whether a message could run on MnDOT electronic signs. Staff will follow up.

**2020 MRPC Virtual Annual Meeting:** The National MRPC will be holding its first ever virtual National Great River Road Meeting on September 17 from 9:00 to 3:00 in lieu of an in person Annual Meeting. A save the date flyer and agenda topic list were referenced in the meeting packet. Anne Lewis provided an overview of the planned sessions. Participants will be able to register for the full day or for individual sessions. The virtual event is complimentary, all are welcome, and state MRPC members are invited to attend and spread the word. The registration link and complete agenda will be available on August 27. The MRPC Board and Standing Committees will be meeting via Zoom on September 15. Chair Senjem encouraged all MN-MRPC members to attend the National Meeting if possible and noted the great content.

**2021 MRPC Annual Meeting:** The MN-MRPC has offered to host the MRPC Annual Meeting in fall of 2021 in Bemidji after cancellation of the 2020 in-person meeting. More discussion will take place as 2021 approaches.

**National MRPC Committee Updates:** Carol Zoff reported for the Transportation Committee, noting that the Federal Highway Administration received 64 National Scenic Byway designation nominations from 30 states. 38 of the nominations were for National Scenic Byway status and 24 (8 from MRPC states for the Great River Road) were for All-American Road Status.

**MN Great River Road Print Map:** Chris Miller reported that 80,000 of the new maps have been printed. The distribution plan has changed a bit due to operating status of our partner sites. The bulk of the supply is in storage at the printing company and shipments will go out to individual sites or groups of sites when needed and appropriate rather than shipping all quantity to the full list at one time. Maps are available to MN-MRPC members upon request and quantity is flexible.

**Ambassador Development:** Carol Zoff noted that work is beginning on development of 60 – 90 second videos to demonstrate use of the features available within the Plan Your Trip online mapping, which will make the tool more user friendly prior to launch of Ambassador Development. A two-year Ambassador Development launch plan was in place focused heavily on development of resources and in-person training sessions/meetings. Target audiences were Interpretive Centers, CVBs/Chambers, and Plan Your Trip attractions, with future expansion to additional audiences. Travel and in-person meetings have not been feasible on the original timeline and the plan needs modification to fit within current conditions. Topic will be referred to the Executive Committee as a starting point for further development.

**Great River Road Interpretive Center Nominations:** Megan Christianson has been working with sites in the region interested in becoming Great River Road Interpretive Centers. The Itasca County Historical Society and Aitkin County are planning to submit nominations. Letters of support from the MN-MRPC will be needed as defined in the MRPC nomination guidelines. Background on the potential nominations was provided followed by discussion. Karl Samp met with the Aitkin group earlier on in the process and noted the progress that has been made. John Anfinson has reviewed the Itasca County Historical Society nomination and provided feedback, and their nomination is along the lines of others recently submitted and approved. Carol Zoff applauded the groups and the progress made on nominations. Chair Senjem will review the nominations when ready and will consider letters of support on behalf of the MN-MRPC, generally recommending moving forward if the nominations are complete and aligned with guidelines.

**Improving Access and Welcoming Environment along the Mississippi River:** Cordelia Pierson opened the MN-MRPC discussion. She has also reached out to partners in her region for feedback, which is included in the meeting packet. With both COVID-19 impacts and social justice conversations happening, it is important to listen to and learn from people who may not feel they have access and opportunities to the Mississippi River/Great River Road and amenities. Questions to consider – Are there things we can do better? What reflections do members have?

## Member Questions, Discussion & Feedback

- Karl Samp asked if we are telling stories of indigenous people enough. Sally Fineday has made connections with storytellers in preparation for when an MRPC Annual Meeting is held in Bemidji. She also offered to work with Aitkin County on their Interpretive Center nomination to include the story of the Sandy Lake Tragedy; and offered to work with others from the MN-MRPC as discussions on this topic continue. Anton Treuer was noted as a resource by Sen. Senjem.
- Sen. Torres Ray noted increased park visitation, especially to local parks. Is there way to find out if more people are visiting the river and small towns, and are there people doing this who have not done so before?
- Grant Wilson expressed the importance of listening to input on experiences and interactions that people want. Outreach and more complete historic and cultural connections are things to consider.
- Lisa Havelka offered the Minnesota River Scenic Byway and their storytelling as an example of fostering relationships, especially their partnerships with the Upper and Lower Sioux Agency and story of the US-Dakota War.
- Anne Lewis suggested that the Plan Your Trip inventory of resources be reviewed for inclusivity and content.
- Carol Zoff noted that importance of storytelling was discussed during development of the Corridor Management Plan. There is a strategy to expand interpretive panel content to include stories from the three tribes along the river and review/add stories to existing panel content for counties. If National Scenic Byway funding is restored it could potentially provide resources for these types of projects if there are listed as eligible activities. The Commission might want to consider providing feedback on eligible activities if/when legislation continues to move.
- David Kelliher offered that the Minnesota Historical Society will be happy to be part of the conversation and share how they have worked to share more complete stories.
- Sen. Senjem described his observations along the river and suggested we consider additional locations for distribution of Great River Road maps.
- Sen. Torres Ray discussed the importance of being intentional, including finding the appropriate organizations to connect with and how to partner.
- Keep this topic on the agenda.

## Next Steps

- Refer to Executive Committee for additional discussion and planning, including possible designation of a work group or other process to bring recommendations to the full Commission for consideration.

## Commission Member Updates:

- David Kelliher reported that Minnesota Historic Sites are slowly reopening and shared information on the Oliver Kelley Farm including their opening for mostly outdoor activities on five upcoming Saturdays and a Victory Garden that has been created at the farm, providing produce for a local food shelf.
- Cordelia Pierson thanked all who work with the river on an ongoing basis and noted the visitation and diversity to the natural area north of the Stone Arch Bridge.
- Karl Samp shared that he recently had a meeting with representatives from River Travel Media and it might be interesting to hear more from them. Anne Lewis reported that River Travel Media was a host at last year's MRPC Annual Meeting in La Crosse and gave a presentation to the ten-state group. There might be opportunities to share hidden gems and stories with their audiences.
- Sen. Senjem noted a suggestion has been received to invite the University of Minnesota Tourism Program to speak to the MN-MRPC in the future. Karl Samp serves on a regional advisory committee. Carol Zoff reported that the MN Scenic Byways Offices has applied for funds to support return on investment studies on selected byways through U of M.
- Lisa Havelka provided an update for Explore Minnesota. Generally, they are being cautious about how much travel to promote. A Road Trip Bingo activity is planned for the fall and will include all five regions of Minnesota as well as scenic byways. More information to come.

**Next Meeting:** November 19, 2020, 2:00 – 4:30 p.m., location or Zoom to be determined.

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.