



Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission
2nd Quarter Meeting – June 11, 2015
State Office Building, St. Paul MN
MINUTES – Draft

Commissioners Present

Scott Bradley – Transportation Appointee
Karl Samp – Brainerd to Elk River
Anne Lewis – Grand Rapids to Brainerd
Mark Anderson – At Large Member
Nancy Salminen – Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids
Keith Parker – DNR Appointee
Andrea Kajer – Historical Society Appointee
Rep. Sheldon Johnson - Chair

Commissioners & Technical Advisors

Absent

Paul Huginin – Agriculture Appointee
Adam Johnson – Explore Minnesota Appointee
Sen. David Senjem
Sen. Patricia Torres Ray
Cordelia Pierson – Elk River to Hastings
Bill Von Bank – Explore Minnesota
Cynthia Wheeler - DNR

Technical Advisors & Staff Present

David Kelliher – Historical Society
John Anfinson – National Park Service
Carol Zoff – Transportation
Diane Henry-Wangenstein – LCC
Chris Miller – Staff

The meeting was called to order at 3:15 by Chair Sheldon Johnson, followed by introductions. A quorum was present.

Review of Agenda

The agenda was considered. Motion by Karl Samp and seconded by Nancy Salminen to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried.

Review of Minutes from 2/26/15 Meeting

Motion by Andrea Kajer and seconded by Scott Bradley to approve the February 26 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried.

Agency and Regional Updates

Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids: Nancy Salminen will be doing Great River Road interpretive center training at Itasca State Park next week, at one of their three regular training sessions for personnel. This will provide a good audience for the information. Bike Bemidji: Loop the Lake Festival is scheduled for June 20. Lady Slipper Byway representatives will be meeting soon with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe regarding a possible project to build a pedestrian bridge over the Mississippi River near Pennington, paralleling the Great River Road.

Grand Rapids to Brainerd: Anne Lewis reported on recent conversations with representatives from area Convention and Visitors Bureaus and the Cuyuna Lakes Trail Association. The Cuyuna Crusher mountain bike event is coming up at the end of June. Flyers were distributed. This event draws 300 – 500 people from around the country. Other events are also coming up and the Cuyuna Lakes group is interested in Great River Road and Mississippi River Trail materials for distribution. Aitkin Riverboat Days will be held July 30 – August 2, and the group has asked for maps or details on where boat landings are located for public access to the river. Carol Zoff offered to send a link to this information. In Grand Rapids, the Showboat Landing venue is being repurposed and will be used this summer for several events including a film festival and series of “Wine on the Mississippi” gatherings (over 100 people attended the first event in the series).

Brainerd to Elk River: Karl Samp provided updates on local events coming up – Little Falls Dam Festival, June 19-20; Elk River Art Soup, June 27; Brainerd 4th of July Celebration, Monti River Festival,

July 9-12; and Take a Day OFF on the Mississippi, August 1. The Brainerd Riverfront Planning Project is continuing. Release/presentation of the final plan release is scheduled for June 17, 4:00 – 6:00 p.m. The Community Foundation has provided a grant to hire part time staff to begin implementation of the plan. The HRA will serve as host for the funds and position.

Historical Society: Andrea Kajer noted that the Mill City Museum's opera season will begin soon, followed by the concert season. Pre-design work for Historic Fort Snelling projects will begin soon if funding is included as currently listed in the bonding bill. The Oliver Kelley Farm visitor center has been demolished and a new center will be built in its place thanks to funding provided by the legislature. The historic site will remain open while the new center is constructed.

Natural Resources: Keith Parker reported that the DNR will again partner with several other organizations to offer the Take a Day OFF on the Mississippi River event, August 1 at Stearns County Mississippi River Park. The Take Aim at Summer Fun event was recently held at the Central Region headquarters featuring many free outdoor family activities. Over 400 were in attendance and response was very positive. The City of Saint Paul is developing a new archery range in the area. The DNR will also be partnering on the Powderhorn event next Saturday, where attendees can learn to camp, fish or participate in archery. Outreach events such as these have provided good connections to the community, and also help provide pathways to careers in conservation. Upper St. Anthony Lock was recently closed. Invasive carp have been caught in the St. Croix, which is a concern but not a crisis due to the healthy ecosystem. The DNR is working with a group including the Minnesota Historical Society and National Park Service on plans to redevelop the Fort Snelling Upper Post.

Transportation: Scott Bradley announced that the solicitation for FY '17 Transportation Alternatives/Scenic Byway Grants was released at the end of May. This is the third and final year that these grants will be funded as a transition into MAP-21. Byways will then need to work through Area Transportation Partnerships to apply for Transportation Alternatives funding. \$1.5 million is available through the FY '17 solicitation for byway infrastructure projects. Applications are due at 3:00 p.m. on August 7 and eligible funded projects must be ready for construction by September 30, 2018. Carol Zoff has met with MnDOT districts regarding the Corridor Management Plan project and input received to date. She has also brought the project through the MnDOT Conflict Scoping Process, which has identified priorities for management of the road. Meetings have been held with GIS staff to begin planning for receipt and maintenance of data to be provided by Kimley Horn. The data will likely be maintained in two formats – 1) "Plan your Trip" for travelers seeking information and 2) "Plan your Project" for road management entities. MnDOT has also worked with Regional Development Commissions to update all byway Corridor Management Plans, to assist in transitioning into new funding structures. As part of that process, an investment inventory was completed for the MN Great River Road, listing current and future projects along the corridor. The inventory will be included in the CMP.

National Park Service: John Anfinson reported that the National Park Service is working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other partners to determine how the Upper St. Anthony Lock & Dam Visitor Center will move forward after closure of the lock. Many events and initiatives with a focus on art are part of the National Park Service Centennial Celebration, including painting and writing about the Mississippi River. The book Roadtrip with a Raindrop was also mentioned as an example of current interest in the river. The author will be at Mill City Museum on October 22, 7:00 p.m. NPS is partnering with the Saint Paul Police Department to offer "Cops & Bobbers," a program to involve youth in fishing. The Minneapolis and Saint Paul Convention and Visitors Bureaus participated in a large trade show in Orlando last week and featured the Mississippi River as a draw for international tourists, as well as the NPS Centennial.

Commission Business

FY '15 Budget Status: Mark Anderson provided an overview of the budget report, included in the meeting packet, and Chris Miller responded to questions. If funds remain at year end, the MN-MRPC could pay a portion of their National MRPC dues for 2016. An invoice has been requested. As approved at the last meeting, the MN GRR map re-print was completed. 25,100 maps were printed and shipped to 48 partner locations. Costs related to the MRPC Semi-Annual Meeting (mainly member attendance/travel and registrations for invited speakers) have been paid. Expenditures are on track for the National Scenic Byways CMP Grant and National Park Service Grant.

Legislative Updates: The state government finance bill has been signed. LCC received a slight increase in their appropriation but is also projecting significant cost increases in some areas of their budget. MN-MRPC funding levels are expected to remain stable. The MN-MRPC sunset date was also extended from June 30, 2016 to June 30, 2020.

National MRPC Updates

2015 Semi-Annual Meeting: Karl Samp, Planning Team Chair, reported that great feedback was received from MRPC Semi-Annual Meeting attendees. Special thanks were noted to John Anfinson for his excellent presentation and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area was also congratulated on their receipt of the MRPC Stewardship Award. There was a very positive response to the presentation by the Cuyuna Lakes Trail Association. MN-MRPC attendees mentioned highlights including Ed Fairbanks' presentation followed by the song and dance group graciously provided by the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. It was a highlight of the meeting. Field sessions went well even though the weather was cool and rainy. Sincere appreciation was conveyed for the efforts and financial support of the St. Cloud Area Convention and Visitors Bureau. The meeting also would not have been a success without the work of the planning team – Karl Samp, Anne Lewis and Carol Zoff, as well as all MN-MRPC members who donated items, attended the meeting, introduced speakers and assisted overall.

Interpretive Center Checklist & Presentation: Nancy Salminen reported on the meeting of the MRPC Culture and Heritage Committee, which included discussion on the new Mississippi River cruises to be offered by Viking River Cruises. A letter from the MN-MRPC went to the cruise line director, to provide information about the Great River Road and offer ideas on Mississippi River attractions such as the Great River Road Interpretive Centers. Training and better connections with Interpretive Center staff are priorities for the Culture and Heritage Committee. Assistance is needed to make sure all Interpretive Centers are visited and that training/information on the Great River Road is provided for staff. A visit checklist is included in the meeting packet – each center should be visited annually. A power point presentation has been developed for training and copies for all interpretive centers have been provided on flash drives. There was discussion on how to accomplish the visits and training for the ten GRR Interpretive Centers in Minnesota. Nancy Salminen has set an appointment to visit/train staff at Itasca State Park. Anne Lewis offered to visit the Forest History Center. John Anfinson will do the checklist and training for the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area Visitor Center. Karl Samp might be able to visit one or two centers in SE Minnesota on his way to the MRPC Annual Meeting. A suggestion was made that a possible timeline could be to complete the visits and training prior to National "Drive the Great River Road Month" in September. Chris Miller will add a list of Minnesota GRR Interpretive Centers to the presentation on the flash drives, and will follow up with members regarding visits of the remaining sites. (MN GRR Interpretive Centers are: Itasca State Park (Jacob Brower and Mary Gibbs Centers); Forest History Center; Mill City Museum; Minnesota History Center; Science Museum of Minnesota; MNRRA Visitor Center; Historic Fort Snelling; National Eagle Center; Minnesota Marine Art Museum; and Winona County History Center.

Marketing Committee: Anne Lewis reported on activities of the MRPC Marketing Committee and implementation in Minnesota. September has been designated as annual "Drive the Great River Road Month." A promotional toolkit including details and press releases will be provided by the National Office, along with printed postcards. A Facebook sweepstakes will run during the month, with a \$500 grand prize. Materials will be received by the MN-MRPC by August 1 for use in promoting within the state. Anne suggested contacting news outlets and John Anfinson suggested a possible partnership with the National Park Service Centennial Find Your Park campaign. He will check on use of the logo and joint promotion options. The National Office is also working on a promotional toolkit for states to use with stakeholders, partners, and local communities. The purpose is to build GRR awareness and partnerships. A presentation, video and giveaways (key chains and window clings) will be included.

Mississippi River Geotourism Website – Nomination Process: Anne Lewis provided an overview of discussion by the MRPC Marketing Committee. Each state is being encouraged to nominate their section of the Great River Road, and also to encourage nomination of the Interpretive Centers in each state along with other sites as appropriate. The nomination process requires entry of information by someone at or close to/responsible for the specific attraction. A fact sheet has been developed as a possible tool for use by the MN-MRPC in encouraging nominations. The fact sheet is included in the meeting packet

along with the nomination guidelines provided by the Mississippi River Geotourism Program. Chris Miller has entered preliminary information for the Minnesota Great River Road and will help facilitate the process for others as needed. John Anfinson mentioned that MNRRA is a sponsor for the Mississippi River Geotourism program within the National Park Service, and is applying for funding that would support development of a mobile app.

Old Business

CMP Project Update: Chris Miller and Carol Zoff reported that the overall project is progressing well, and remains the primary focus for the Commission. After the plan is complete and implementation begins, committees and work groups will likely be convened. Existing/former MN-MRPC committees have generally not been meeting as the CMP is being completed. Pilots of the view assessment process to be included in the CMP were conducted in each of six communities where open houses were recently held and the feedback received was extremely valuable.

MRT Update: Liz Walton gave an overview of recent Mississippi River Trail activities and accomplishments. Phase III installation of signs is near completion, and a protocol is being established to track sign status over time. The MRT continues to get press, including being featured on the new Minnesota Bike Map and a television show called "Minnesota Travelers" that will air soon on Fox Sports. The first airing will be on July 5, 8:30 p.m. Slow progress is being made on getting the MRT route to show up on Google. The Inaugural Headwaters to Hills Ride will take place August 26 – September 2, from Lake Itasca to the Iowa Border. Space remains available and all were asked to help spread the word. Two ribbon cuttings for the newly signed MRT will be associated with the ride – one at Lake Itasca on August 27, and another in Saint Paul on August 31. MN-MRPC members mentioned that they're hearing much interest in the MRT. Materials were requested by Anne Lewis for the Cuyuna Crusher event.

New Business

Minnesota Business First Stop – Economy in Motion Event: An overview of the Minnesota Business First Stop project was provided in the meeting packets. An event called "Economy in Motion" will be held in September, involving commissioners of eight state agencies participating in a 2.5 day tour focused on forestry and transportation in greater Minnesota. The MN-MRPC has been invited to speak on September 11 in Duluth for 10 - 15 minutes about the Commission and Great River Road including transportation, tourism, workforce attraction and quality of life perspectives as well as the partnerships involved. MN-MRPC agencies involved in this group are DNR, DOT and Agriculture. Commission members expressed appreciation for the opportunity and designated Chris Miller to provide the presentation.

FY '17 MnDOT Transportation Alternatives/Scenic Byway Grants: Questions regarding the process were discussed, including application deadline (August 7), construction ready date (September 30, 2018) and matching funds requirement (20%). Letters of support from the scenic byway are required with the application. The application deadline is prior to the next MN-MRPC meeting and so any requests for letters received by the MN-MRPC office will be sent to members via email for consideration, as outlined in the process attached to the February 26, 2015 meeting minutes. Scott Bradley noted applications received for the FY '15 and '16 solicitations were excellent. Nancy Salminen reported that there could be an application for a pedestrian bridge project over the Mississippi River where the Lady Slipper Scenic Byway and Great River Road run concurrently, near Pennington.

Next Meeting:

Thursday, August 20, 2015

2:30 – 5:00 p.m.

State Office Building Room 500 North

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 5:05 p.m.