



## Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission 2013-14 Annual Report July 2014



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### Mission

The mission of the Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Minnesota is to promote, preserve and enhance the resources of the Mississippi River Valley and to develop the highways and amenities of the Great River Road. The Commission is organized and guided by Minnesota Statute 161.1419.

### Quarterly Meetings of the Full Commission

The MN-MRPC held four full Commission meetings between July 2013 and July 2014 – August 22, 2013; November 14, 2013; February 6, 2014 and May 15, 2014. Each meeting included updates from regional citizen Commissioners and partner state agencies.

### Projects & Activities

#### **Great River Road Corridor Management Planning and Implementation**

This project will develop a Corridor Management Plan to guide the work of Minnesota's Mississippi River Parkway Commission for the next 10 – 15 years. The project will also implement a current CMP key strategy - signing the Mississippi River Bicycle Trail (MRT) statewide.

#### 2014 Accomplishments

- Phase I of Mississippi River Trail signs (Hastings to Iowa Border) were installed (148 miles).
- Phase II of Mississippi River Trail signs (Hastings to Elk River) were fabricated and installed (300 miles).
- Meetings were completed to secure municipal agreements for Phase III (Elk River to Lake Itasca) of the Mississippi River Trail sign project.
- Additional funds (\$35,000) were received from the National Park Service, toward total cost of MRT route signage.
- 15,000 copies of the Mississippi National River & Recreation Area's "Mississippi River Companion" were printed. The 129 page, spiral bound booklet includes GRR and MRT mapping and visitor details for the 72 mile National Park in the Twin Cities. The piece received an Award of Excellence from the Great Lakes Graphics Association. An abbreviated version is available at <http://www.nps.gov/miss/planyourvisit/missrivercomp.htm>.
- A Request for Proposals was developed and released for the Corridor Management Planning project. A subcommittee of MN-MRPC members reviewed applications, conducted interviews and selected Kimley-Horn and Associates to complete the project. The project task list/timeline is attached.
- The CMP consultant team presented at May MN-MRPC meeting to provide project overview and timeline and request feedback on first steps.
- Two project management meetings were held focused on project start up.
- Organizations were invited to serve on the Project Advisory Team and the first meeting was held in June 2014. See attached list of invited organizations.
- A database structure was developed to house all information gathered on resources and amenities. Coordination took place with MnDOT, DNR, and other state agencies.
- A conference call was held with representatives from Kimley-Horn, National Geographic and the MN-MRPC to align the project database with possible future information needs of the Mississippi River Geotourism initiative.
- Public outreach began including planning of six public open houses for July, social media launches and a new Corridor Management Plan web page (<http://www.mnmississippiriver.com/cmp/>).
- Detailed field work began including route review, resource and amenity descriptions and visitor surveys.

## **Great River Road Visual Resource Protection Plan Project**

The final stages of the project were completed including gathering information on stability risk factors from local governments. Maps noting landscape typologies were provided with partners asked to mark areas as low, medium or high for risk of change. The final report was revised and is scheduled for final release soon. The report and tools/assessments developed will be utilized along the full length of the Minnesota Great River Road as the new Corridor Management Plan is developed. The public was invited to submit their favorite views (on-line, by mail or in person); the top 50 views were identified and mapped, then assessed by staff and volunteer teams.

## **Interpretive Panels**

Design, fabrication and installation were completed for Great River Road Interpretive Panels at Itasca State Park, Sand Prairie Wildlife Management Area, Sibley Pioneer Church Memorial, Dakota County Swing Bridge Overlook and New Albin State Entrance, with panels delivered to Bemidji for incorporation into a park redevelopment. The full project now includes 26 panels at six sites, utilizing stories from the Minnesota Great River Road Interpretive Plan.

## **Historic Roadside Property Restorations**

The Great River Road Historic Property Restoration Project received a 2013 Minnesota Preservation Award from the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota. The award was accepted at the Minnesota Preservation Gala on Sept 27, 2013 (article attached). A state appropriation provided funds for this multi-year, MnDOT coordinated project to restore 12 roadside properties on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

## **Resource Protection - Silica Sand Mining**

The MN-MRPC received requests from stakeholders for a resolution on silica sand mining to address to Great River Road intrinsic qualities in the Bluffs Region. This is a situation shared by other Mississippi River states. A presentation was made to the MN-MRPC by Bill Mavity of Pepin County, Wisconsin, assisted by Dave Smith of the Wisconsin MRPC in August of 2013 regarding Pepin County's Great River Road Preservation Zoning Ordinance. A subcommittee of the MN-MRPC was created to address requests for a resolution. A resolution was drafted, posted for public review and testimony, and adopted at the November 2013 MN-MRPC Meeting. A copy of the resolution is attached. It was distributed to cities, counties and townships from Hastings to the Iowa border.

Additionally representatives from MPCA, DNR, MnDOT, and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture were among those responsible for drafting a toolkit for local governments to use as they consider how to regulate silica sand mining. These regulations deal with how silica sand can affect health, the environment, and quality of life, including byway travelers and byway intrinsic qualities.

<http://www.eqb.state.mn.us/documents/Tools%20for%20Local%20Govt%20approved%20March%202019.pdf>

## **Mississippi River Bicycle Trail (MRT) Celebration**

MRT sign project activities were completed as noted above. A ribbon cutting event for the Hastings to Iowa Border Region was held on October 2, 2013 at the National Eagle Center (agenda attached).

## **National MRPC**

The MN-MRPC was represented at both the 2013 Annual and 2014 Semi-Annual MRPC meetings. Commission member Karl Samp was elected MRPC Pilot Pro Tem. At the Annual meeting a ceremony and press conference were held at the St. Louis Gateway Arch to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Great River Road National Scenic Byway.

## **Mississippi River Connections Collaborative/Geotourism**

The MN-MRPC was pleased to be involved in meetings and discussions related to the Mississippi River Geotourism Project led by the Mississippi River Connections Collaborative (MRCC). The MN-MRPC provided a letter of support in December of 2013 (attached) after meeting with Terry Eastin of the MRCC. The MN-MRPC co-hosted an informational meeting for partners and stakeholders in February of 2014 (flyer attached).

## **Hospitality Training Partnership**

The Department of Natural Resources partnered with the MN-MRPC and Department of Transportation on a hospitality training project focused on state parks and forests along the Great River Road. The DNR provided graphic design services to update regional tear-off map tablets. The MN-MRPC utilized grant funds to print the maps. The maps were distributed along with a flash drive including a PowerPoint presentation highlighting things to see and do along the Great River Road, and an offer for in-person training sessions at the state parks. The tear-off sheets feature a Great River Road map on one side, with travel ideas, places of interest, Minnesota Grown farms and markets, and contact information on the reverse side. The map tablets are available for viewing at <http://www.mnmississippiriver.com/regionalmaptablets.cfm>.

## **Funding/Great River Road Investments**

The Minnesota Great River Road and its amenities are supported by several funding sources, including those managed by the MN-MRPC as listed below (state operating budget, FHWA and state grants) and those managed by related organizations (other scenic byways, partner organizations such as the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, State of Minnesota, etc.).

### **State Operating Budget**

The MN-MRPC operated with state funding at levels allowing the Commission to proceed with priorities. State operating funding for FY '14 was \$66,150 which was a one-time 5% increase due to anticipated costs associated with the Corridor Management Planning project.

### **Federal Highway Administration Grants**

- Minnesota Great River Road Corridor Management Planning & Implementation (\$560,000) - Grant work continued during 2014. MRT signs were installed for Phase I of the statewide signage project (Hastings to Iowa Border), and fabricated and installed for Phase II (Hastings to Elk River). 15,000 copies of the Mississippi National River & Recreation Area's "Mississippi River Companion" were produced. Contract work began for the Corridor Management Plan project.
- Minnesota Great River Road National Scenic Byway Marketing (\$43,000) – Final grant tasks were completed in spring 2014, focused on hospitality training and materials for state parks and their communities.
- Minnesota Great River Road Interpretive Panels, Phase 1 (\$50,000) - This project centers on a series of interpretive signs in various Minnesota Great River Road destination areas. Panels were designed, fabricated and shipped to three locations in 2014.

### **National Park Service Grant**

Great River Road Corridor Management Planning and Implementation (\$140,000) – Funds are local match for the National Scenic Byways Grant, and dedicated to specific tasks in the project that directly benefit the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. Additional funds were awarded in FY '14 (\$35,000) to assist with sign costs, bringing the total contribution to \$175,000.

### **Minnesota Transportation Alternatives Program**

MnDOT provided funds in 2014 to offer a grant program to help transition Minnesota byways away from National Scenic Byways Grants and into the process for Transportation Alternatives Funds. Applications for the first round were due June 20, 2014. \$1.48 million total awarded, with \$960,000 going to projects along the Great River Road (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe/Cass County Multi Use Trail; Pine Bend Bluffs Scenic Turnout and Overlook; Mississippi River Regional Trail – Rosemount West).

MnDOT is also coordinating and funding development of Capital Investment Plans for all Minnesota byways to assist them in competing for funds from TAP and other source in the future. Regional Development Commissions have been contracted to complete the plans, with Region Five assigned to the Great River Road.

## **Examples of Local & Regional Activities**

- **Minneapolis Riverfront Partnership** – This group continues to address riverfront issues and needs in the city, including events such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Riverfront Summit, October 2013 at Mill City Museum.
- **Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board** – Work has been underway on the St. Anthony Falls Regional Park Plan and MN-MRPC members have been involved on related committees.
- **10<sup>th</sup> Annual St. Paul Great River Gathering** – This annual gathering of the community focusing on the Mississippi and City of St. Paul was held May 8 at newly restored Saint Paul Union Depot. Three members represented the MN-MRPC at the event.
- **MN DNR "Take Aim at Summer"** – The annual event is held at DNR central region headquarters along the Mississippi River in St. Paul, focused on outdoor activities available within an urban area.
- **Mississippi National River and Recreation Area: Alternative Transportation Plan** – Over \$704,000 was awarded by the National Park Service to fund all FY 2014 and FY 2015 projects identified in the Alternative Transportation System 5-Year Implementation Plan. Projects include MRT route signage, MRT trail improvements, and a Mississippi River skyway over a major area highway.

- **Brainerd-Baxter Mississippi River Revitalization Project** – This group continues to work with the National Park Service's Parks and Trails Program. The University of Minnesota is also assisting with this local planning effort titled "Bridge to Bridge." Recent highlights include acquisition of 38 acres of riverfront land with help from the Rotary Club and DNR. Options are being explored for development of new riverfront amenities. A planning event was held in May 2014 at Central Lakes College.
- **St. Cloud Area** – "Mississippi Partners" continues work on implementation of the urban river plan by prioritizing, educating, marketing/promoting, advocating, and fundraising for future river initiatives – [www.mississippipartners.org](http://www.mississippipartners.org).
- **Take a Day OFF\* (Outdoor Family Fun) on the Mississippi** - This annual event at Stearns County Mississippi River Park is organized by Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District, Minnesota DNR, Benton County, St. Cloud State University and several other local partners. 40 different activities were offered. The Great River Road and Mississippi River Trail had a promotional booth at the event.
- **Cuyuna Lakes Mountain Bike Trail** – The 2103 Minnesota Bicycle Summit was held in fall 2103 in the Brainerd area, and featured an event day on the mountain bike trails at the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area.
- **Mississippi Northwoods Habitat Complex** – A grand opening event was held in September 2013, including canoeing courtesy of Wilderness Inquiry. This parcel of land, recently acquired for public use, includes 2.7 miles of Mississippi River shoreline.
- **Oliver H. Kelley Farm** – The Oliver H. Kelley Farm, on the banks of the Mississippi River, is an important agriculture history site near the Great River Road. Funding was included in the 2014 Minnesota Capitol Bonding Bill for visitor center improvements, which will allow more individuals and groups to experience the site.
- **Lady Slipper Scenic Byway** – A dedication and ribbon cutting was held in June 2014 highlighting lady slipper salvage and replanting in coordination with road construction, a board walk, two parking and interpretive sites along the Mississippi River and near shared roadway with the Great River Road.
- **Minnesota Scenic Byways Conference** – The conference was held March 25-26 in Duluth, with representatives from the MN-MRPC in attendance.
- **The Nature Conservancy** – Todd Holman of The Nature Conservancy provided a presentation at the February 2014 MN-MRPC meeting, regarding priorities and freshwater programs as background for future partnerships.
- **Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventure (UWCA)** – This program involving Wilderness Inquiry, the National Park Service, the Mississippi River Fund and other partners provided river canoe experiences to 12,000 youth in the Twin Cities in the summer of 2014.

## **Membership**

The MN-MRPC is organized by state statute to include:

(2) Members of the House of Representatives

(2) Members of the Senate

(5) Members of State Agencies - (1) appointed by each: DNR, Mn/DOT, Historical Society, Agriculture & Tourism

(5) Regional Members – (1) from each of the Great River Road regions established by statute

(1) Member-At-Large – appointed by the other 14

New member welcomed over the past year: Nancy Salminen, Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids Region.

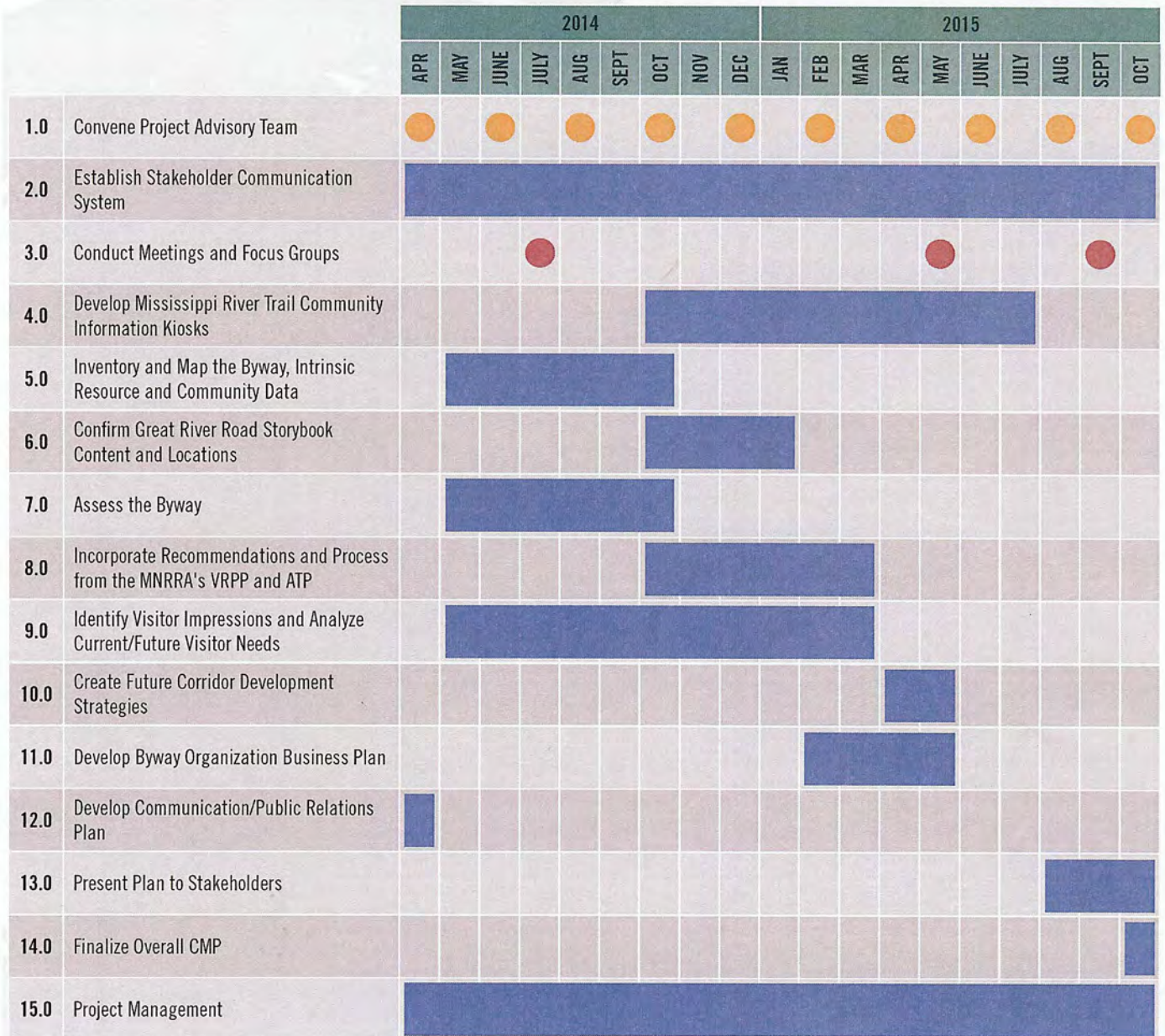
**This report is respectfully submitted on July 23, 2014.**

**Rep. Sheldon Johnson, MN-MRPC Chair**

# Great River Road Corridor Management Plan Development & Plan Implementation Services

## Great River Road Project Schedule

### Proposed Project Schedule by Task





## Project Advisory Team Invited Membership

- ▶ National Park Service – Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program
- ▶ National Park Service – Mississippi River and Recreation Area (MNRRA)
- ▶ US Fish & Wildlife Service
- ▶ US Army Corps of Engineers St. Paul District
- ▶ US Forest Service – Chippewa National Forest
- ▶ League of Minnesota Cities – Intergovernmental Relations
- ▶ Federal Highway Administration – Minnesota Division
- ▶ Association of Minnesota Counties
- ▶ MN Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus
- ▶ Minnesota Chamber of Commerce
- ▶ University of Minnesota Extension Service
- ▶ Initiative Foundation
- ▶ Mississippi Headwaters Board
- ▶ Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Minnesota
- ▶ Office of the Governor
- ▶ The Nature Conservancy
- ▶ The Trust for Public Land
- ▶ Minnesota Department of Health
- ▶ Indian Affairs Council/Native Tribes adjacent to the Mississippi River
- ▶ Quality Bike Products
- ▶ Department of Employment and Economic Development

## MnDOT receives Minnesota Preservation Award

By Rich Kemp

The Preservation Alliance of Minnesota Sept. 27 presented MnDOT with a 2013 Minnesota Preservation Award for the Great River Road Historic Property Restorations.

“This is great affirmation for MnDOT, all the CO and District contributors, and Carol Zoff for the heavy workload, responsibility, project management, collaboration and trouble-shooting in the successful delivery of the legislative funding and GRR Historic Property Restorations,” said Scott Bradley, Context Sensitive Solutions director.

Zoff, senior landscape architect, worked with the Mississippi River Parkway Commission and several partners to preserve sites along the Great River Road.

“I really appreciate the MN-MRPC for identifying a need, prioritizing it, championing to secure funding, leveraging assistance to deliver, coaching along the way and promoting the results,” said Zoff, senior landscape architect.

This was the 29th year of the Minnesota Preservation Awards. More than 30 award nominations were submitted this year.

“The response to our call for nominations continues to demonstrate that preserving our heritage is a value across the state,” said Will O’Keefe, Preservation Alliance of Minnesota. “Our jury had much discussion and debate in choosing the projects that best fulfilled the judging criteria.”



MnDOT, the Mississippi River Parkway Commission and several partners received the Minnesota Preservation Award from the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota at a ceremony Sept. 27 at Christ Church Lutheran in Minneapolis. From left: Todd Grover, MacDonald and Mack Architecture; Rep. Sheldon Johnson, Mississippi River Parkway Commission chair; Carol Zoff, MnDOT; Tom Vesley, MnDOT; Amy Meller, MacDonald and Mack Architecture; Charlie Zelle, MnDOT; Angie Wolf Scott, MacDonald and Mack Architecture; Betty Buckley, MnDOT; and Ray Stenglein, Environmental Associates. *Photo courtesy of the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota*

**Urging the development of proper procedures and regulation in siting and operation of silica sand mining and processing facilities in the Great River Road National Scenic Byway Corridor of southeastern Minnesota**

*Whereas* the statutory role of the Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission, established under Minnesota Statute 161.1419, is to work toward the planning, construction, maintenance, and improvement of the Great River Road or Mississippi River Parkway and

*Whereas* the Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission mission is to promote, preserve, and enhance the resources of the Mississippi River Valley and to develop the highways and amenities of the Great River Road (National Scenic Byway) and

*Whereas* the Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission promotes, supports, and advances actions, responsibilities, procedures, controls, operational practices, and strategies to maintain the intrinsic archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic qualities that support National Scenic Byway designation and

*Whereas* in response to input and requests from stakeholders the Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission passed a motion to draft a resolution related to its mission and byway intrinsic qualities and

*Whereas* there has been an identified need for more guidance in the approval process and oversight in affected counties and local governments and

*Whereas* silica sand operations create concern over potential negative effects; e.g. air & water quality, public health, traffic flow & safety, highway & bridge quality, property value, and aesthetic qualities within the region (all affecting tourism and community quality of life) and the Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission supports the efforts of the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board and

*Whereas* the potential for silica sand jobs and an economic boom within the Great River Road corridor are significant, there is also the potential for significant adverse economic impacts to the Great River Road's tourism industry and

*Whereas* the value of the land and silica sand resources are significant for owners as are profits for the mining industries

***Therefore be it resolved,*** that

The Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission encourages local units of government to refer to and work with the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board Silica Sand Technical Assistance Team and

The Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission supports zoning ordinances and other land use practices that protect the archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational and scenic qualities of the Great River Road National Scenic Byway and the Mississippi River.





## Mississippi River Trail - Hastings to Iowa Segment Ribbon Cutting

October 2, 2:00 – 3:00 p.m.  
National Eagle Center  
50 Pembroke Ave, Wabasha

- Welcome
  - Rollin Hall, Mayor of Wabasha
  - Rolf Thompson, Executive Director, National Eagle Center
- Statewide Significance and Project Partner Comments
  - Charles Zelle, Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Transportation (invited) or designee
  - John Anfinson, Interim Superintendent, Mississippi National River & Recreation Area
  - Rep. Sheldon Johnson, Chair, Mississippi River Parkway Commission of MN
- National Significance
  - Suzanne Pepin, Mississippi River Trail, Inc. Board Member
- Local Significance
  - Cheri Wright, Director, Wabasha-Kellogg Chamber/CVB
- Ribbon Cutting
- Optional Activities
  - Bike ride led by members of the Wabasha Bicycle Club
  - National Eagle Center admission, live eagle program at 3:00 p.m. and/or self-guided tour
  - Wabasha Historic Walking Tour, brochures/maps available

Special thanks to the National Eagle Center, City of Wabasha and Wabasha Bicycle Club for their help with this event!





## Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Minnesota

300 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue South, Suite 101 • Waite Park, Minnesota 56387

Phone: 651-341-4196 • E-Mail: [info@MnMississippiRiver.com](mailto:info@MnMississippiRiver.com)

**Members of the House:** Sheldon Johnson (DFL – 67B) – Chair; Mike Benson (R – 26B) **Members of the Senate:** David Senjem (R – 29); Patricia Torres Ray (DFL – 62) **State Agency Appointees:** Paul Hugunin – Agriculture, Scott Bradley – Transportation, Adam Johnson – Explore Minnesota Tourism, Keith Parker – Natural Resources, Andrea Kajer – Historical Society **Regional Appointees:** Nancy Salminen – Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids, John Schaubach – Grand Rapids to Brainerd, Karl Samp – Brainerd to Elk River, Cordelia Pierson – Elk River to Hastings, Sheronne Mulry – Hastings to Iowa Border **Member at Large:** Mark Anderson

October 11, 2013

Terry Eastin  
Mississippi River Connections Collaborative/MRT Inc.  
858 N Jackson  
Fayetteville, AR 72701

### **Re: Support for The Mississippi River Sustainable Destinations Initiative**

The Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Minnesota (MN-MRPC) supports the Mississippi River Connections Collaborative and its partnership with the National Geographic Geotourism Program, focused on implementation of the Mississippi River Sustainable Destinations Initiative.

This partnership and project align well with the mission of the MN-MRPC, byway organization of the Minnesota Great River Road National Scenic Byway. The mission of the MN-MRPC is to promote, preserve and enhance the resources of the Mississippi River Valley and to develop the highways and amenities of the Great River Road. The Geotourism Program also fits well with the intrinsic qualities that define National Scenic Byways – archaeological, historic, recreational, scenic, cultural, and natural.

The MN-MRPC will soon begin development of a new MN Great River Road Corridor Management Plan for the next 10 – 15 years, which will include strategies leading to improved livability, availability of healthy lifestyle options, and improved access to the river itself. The plan will seek to improve the traveler experience while protecting and enhancing the intrinsic qualities of the scenic byway. The Geotourism Program will reinforce and enhance our efforts.

The MN-MRPC supports The Mississippi River Sustainable Destinations Initiative and looks forward to the possibilities along Minnesota's Great River Road and beyond.

Sincerely,

Rep. Sheldon Johnson, Chair



Exceptional Destinations. Authentic Experiences



You are cordially invited to a presentation entitled:

## “Envisioning the Mississippi River Through Geotourism”

presented by:

**James Dion**  
Sustainable Destinations Program Manager  
National Geographic Society

3:30 p.m.  
State Office Building, Room 300 South  
February 13, 2014

hosted by:

Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Minnesota  
and  
Mississippi River Connections Collaborative

**Mississippi  
River**  
Connections Collaborative



**NATIONAL  
GEOGRAPHIC**