

CASE STUDY

the
**ROAD
BECKONS**

BEST PRACTICES FOR BYWAYS

LEVERAGING RESOURCES

**THE SHEYENNE RIVER VALLEY SCENIC BYWAY:
HIDDEN TREASURES OF THE GREAT PLAINS**

North Dakota



THE SHEYENNE RIVER VALLEY SCENIC BYWAY: HIDDEN TREASURES OF THE GREAT PLAINS

*In a state known for its flat, endless horizon, the Sheyenne River Valley provides a stunning contrast. Lined with trees, the *Sheyenne River Valley Scenic Byway* stretches 63 miles along the longest river in the state.*

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Occupied for over 11,000 years, the Sheyenne River Valley enjoys a diverse cultural history. From prehistoric times to the present, the Valley's abundant natural resources have sustained its inhabitants. A predominantly agricultural landscape, the region is dotted with small rural communities. When changes in the farming industry threatened to undermine the economic vitality of the region, residents once again turned to the richness of their resources to sustain them. What began as a small project to increase tourism and tell the story of the Valley has exploded into a \$1.5 million project that includes 41 interpretive sites, 10 map panel locations and a visitor center.

WINNING ELEMENTS:

RECOGNIZING THE POTENTIAL. An interpretive project that started out as "2 sheets of plywood" has grown into a comprehensive interpretive effort. The byway group realized that investing in high quality interpretation adds value to the visitor experience and resident's quality of life.

FUNDING DIVERSITY. Funding for the project was leveraged from more than 39 different sources. Sources ranged from standard local, state and federal entities, to a substantial contribution from the private sector, to the levying of local sales taxes. Unique sources include \$5,000 from a neighboring state for the creation of a tall grass prairie interpretive panel and 88 cents in street change spied when byway advocates traveled to Washington, DC for the national designation event! Well-coordinated in their efforts, byway supporters also initiated a community Grant Writer's Roundtable to identify grant sources and coordinate application submissions.



Visitors learn about pioneer farming traditions during Sodbuster Days at Fort Ransom State Park (right) and enjoy a wide variety of recreational opportunities (opposite right). PHOTOS: JANET SCHULTZ



UTILIZING IN-KIND SERVICES. Recognizing the opportunities available, the byway called on the U.S. Army National Guard for help in site work and deployed court offenders to provide manual labor on the byway as part of their required hours of community service. The project also has benefited from numerous in-kind donations of equipment, materials and labor made by local businesses and organizations located along the byway.

LEARNING FROM OTHERS. Intent to get it right and create a world-class experience for visitors, byway committee members visited 10 national scenic byways in 7 states to learn more about interpretation, marketing, signage and visitor centers. As a result, the byway is quickly becoming the first point of contact for proposed and established byways in North Dakota.

STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE. While farming has undergone an economic downturn, it represents an important part of the Valley's heritage. Designation of the byway provided the perfect opportunity to tell the story of the link between the communities located along the route and the Valley itself. By creating awareness for the significance of the region's resources and the potential benefits of tourism-based economic development, the community created buy-in and support for the plan. Thanks to an informed process, the interpretive

TIMELINE

- **1996** North Dakota announces the inception of its state scenic byways program
Byway Committee formed, corridor management plan developed
- **1997** Designated one of North Dakota's first 3 scenic byways
- **1999** Installed 8 interpretive panels
- **2002** Designated a National Scenic Byway
Installed an additional 5 interpretive panels
- **2003** Received National Scenic Byways program funding (the grant will be used to provide interpretation at the new visitor center, install additional map panels, develop marketing materials—including a brochure—and provide a range of visitor amenities to enhance the visitor experience including the installation of a pedestrian bridge, the provision of park benches, picnic tables and comfort stations, and the planting of native grasses).
Installation of a series of 28 interpretive signs along the byway
(Fall): Projected opening of the Rosebud Visitor Center in Valley City

initiative will reposition the area as a treasured destination while preserving the rural character and integrity of the landscape.

ATTRACTING COMMITTED PARTNERS.

Sheer grit and determination has driven this project. Identifying champions with the appropriate complement of resources and talents to get things done has been critical to its success. Over 75 strategic partnerships continue to progress with numerous local, regional, state and federal agencies committed to enhancing the byway corridor and the surrounding area.

WHAT HAPPENED

The Sheyenne River Valley National Scenic Byway owes its roots to a series of community meetings held in 1996 following the announcement of the North Dakota Byways Program. Residents were quick to realize that state designation provided an excellent means to raise awareness and appreciation for the area's resources as well as help promote tourism based economic and community development. Soon after the announcement of the state program, a byway committee was formed, a preliminary corridor management plan (CMP) developed and application for state designation submitted. In 1997, the route was designated one of North Dakota's first Scenic Byways.

Quick to act on the items outlined in the CMP, the byway committee met to review potential interpretive opportunities and discussed installing wooden signs to interpret key sites.

As the discussion progressed, a local firm recommended bronze placards. Then representatives from the National Park Service toured the byway with members of the North Dakota State Historical Society and suggested that National Park Service standards be employed in developing the signs. Sites were toured and agreed on and the project took off from there!

In 1999, 8 interpretive panels were installed at unique bridge locations in Valley City.

In 2002, 5 interpretive panels were added to the collection. Currently, 22 sites are under contract to receive 28 different interpretive signs including 2 gateways and 8 map panel locations. Plans are also well underway to construct a visitor center at the I-94 gateway to the byway at Valley City. The center will include interpretive displays and house a tourist destination attraction: "Rosebud," an 1881 Northern Pacific Railroad Superintendent's Coach, one of only 8 built.

INROADS TO SUCCESS

ACTIVELY INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY.

The Sheyenne River Valley National Scenic Byway is truly a product of the efforts of the residents in the counties and communities through which it travels. Local residents have been actively involved in the selection of byway

routes, the design, fabrication and installation of signs, the preparation and distribution of marketing materials, and the planning, development and improvement of amenities in the corridor. Public involvement activities, preference testing procedures and survey techniques applied during the scenic byway's development will provide the means for the gathering of additional input from residents and visitors.

VALUING THE RESOURCE. Tourism will contribute to increased awareness and support for preserving and enhancing the intrinsic qualities of the byway corridor. The benefits of tourism for the local communities and economies will be a strong incentive for residents, businesses and public officials to get involved and work together to protect and manage the area's unique resources.

TAPPING INTO THE POWER OF VOLUNTEERS.

A visionary byway leader and committed volunteers are the fuel that runs the Sheyenne River Valley National Scenic Byway. Group members share the work and recognition. To celebrate national designation, the entire byway committee made the trip to Washington, DC to attend the designation event. In recognition of their work to secure national scenic byway status, the group received a Community Spirit Award from the Valley City Area Chamber of Commerce. Having blazed the trail to become the first nationally designated byway in North Dakota, byway members are quickly becoming coaches and mentors to other byways within the state.

A new visitor center will welcome byway travelers.



LESSONS FROM THE ROAD: “IN THEIR OWN WORDS”

During this project we learned:

1. How to identify project and partner “champions” critical to leadership and the communications process by building strong community support for the project and selecting team members with the talent and resources to get the job done
 2. To develop our ability to leverage monies and network
 - Utilized U.S. Army National Guard for site work
 - Utilized court identified offenders in a community service program to provide manual labor to the byway as part of their required hours of service
 - Leveraged in-kind donations of equipment, materials and labor from organizations and businesses along the byway
 - Volunteered countless hours. Committee members have put in thousands of hours at no pay to make a difference in development of the byway corridor
 - Traveled to Washington, DC to celebrate national designation. With no local byway budget line item, 7 committee members attended the national designation event by staying at the home of a relative, booking low budget flights, soliciting a private sponsor, and partnering with ND Parks & Recreation Department, Federal Highway Administration and the America’s Byways Resource Center
 - Visited 10 national byways in 7 states to learn about interpretation, marketing, signage and visitor centers
- Leveraging Private Donors**
- Contractors provided or donated equipment and/or materials at discounted rates
 - Leveraged donations from multiple community organizations and local families
- Leveraging Local Grants—Seed Money**
- Created a 1 percent Food and Beverage Tax for tourism development
 - Raised Accommodation Tax from 2 to 3 percent for construction of a visitor center and marketing of the byway

FUNDING SHARE & SOURCES	DOLLARS	PERCENTAGE
STATE SHARE:		
Special Road Funds, NDDOT	\$13,473	
State Tourism-Marketing Grant	\$5,000	2%
Neighboring State Dept. of Natural Resources	\$5,000	
ND Forest Service-ATB Grant-Pending	\$2,845	
LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHARE & SOURCES:		
City of Valley City-Food & Beverage sales tax	\$262,739	
City of Valley City-general funds	\$4,200	
City of Valley City-Visitor Center lot	\$62,442	
Valley City City-1% sales tax fund	\$4,000	
Lisbon Community	\$3,000	22%
Ransom County Jobs Development Authority	\$5,500	
Lake Agassiz Regional Development Council	\$1,000	
Barnes County Econ. Dev. Mill Levy	\$4,000	
Image Enhancement Signage Grant-pending	\$3,000	
PRIVATE SHARE:		
Cash		
Valley City Area Chamber of Commerce	\$12,855	
Valley City/Barnes County Development Corp.	\$100,000	
Ft. Ransom Community Club	\$200	
Citizens State Bank	\$300	
Ft. Ransom Sobbusters	\$1,000	
Ft. Ransom Fire Department	\$100	
Kadmas Lee & Jackson (Engineering firm)	\$3,790	
Walker Family-memorial	\$7,025	
Beyer Family/Concrete Dakota Inc.	\$7,500	
Cass County Electric	\$3,250	
Association of Retarded Citizens (Thrifty Shop)	\$1,500	
Valley City Convention & Visitor Bureau	\$186,200	
Barnes County Historical Society	\$400	30%
Daughters of the Pioneers	\$500	
Burlington Northern Santa Fe	\$1,000	
Planning Design Inc, Chicago, IL-wine fundraiser	\$5,329	
Washington, DC (street money)	\$.88	
Valley City Parks & Recreation	\$686	
Garrison Diversion Conservancy District	\$20,000	
ND Natural Resources Trust	\$10,000	
Garrison Diversion Conservancy Dist.-pending	\$100,000	
National Railroad Historical Society-pending	\$5,000	
Private donations	\$12,328	
In-kind		
Value for equipment & materials discounts (Thousands of hours of volunteer labor has and will continue to be donated)	Priceless	
FEDERAL SHARE & SOURCE OR PROGRAM CATEGORY:		
National Scenic Byways Program Grant		
Seed Grant	\$24,992	14%
Interpretive Grant	\$200,482	
Transportation Enhancements Program		
*Interpretation	\$80,000	27%
*Visitor Center-Construction	\$345,000	
Other		
USDA Forest Service-RCA Grant-Visitor Center	\$20,000	
National Recreational Trails	\$10,673	5%
National Recreational Trails-pending	\$40,000	
U.S. Army Corps. Of Engineers	\$5,600	
TOTAL COST	\$1,581,909.88	100%

- Created a Grant Writer's Roundtable to identify grant sources and coordinate grant applications
- Intend to pursue Home Rule Charter (a provision of the North Dakota Century Code designed to give cities or counties the ability to initiate local taxes) for Barnes and Ransom Counties to raise funds for development and maintenance of the byway

Leveraging Regional Partners

- Leveraged a \$20,000 recreation grant from the Garrison Diversion Conservancy District (funded by a farm land mill levy). Large scale funding will need to be identified and included in the Garrison Diversion Conservancy District Master Recreation Plan.

Leveraging State Partners

- Leveraged \$5,000 from a neighboring state's Department of Natural Resources for a tall grass prairie interpretive panel
- Partnered with State Tourism for matching funds for a National Scenic Byways program grant

Leveraging Federal Partners

- Utilized congressional delegates to provide letters of support for byway development
 - Invited federal representatives to participate in the National Scenic Byway designation presentation in Washington, DC
- 3. How to write concept reports, requests for proposal, and a corridor management plan (CMP)**
- Wrote concept reports for federal grants ourselves to save an estimated \$6,000
 - Wrote our own CMP and National Scenic Byway designation application for under \$5,000



4. How to develop the interpretive planning process

- Panels. Evaluate basic concepts, design and fabrication materials
- Frames. Evaluate concepts, design and fabrication materials
- Determine and evaluate unique and significant sites
- Develop integrated themes
- Design and integrate visitor center/portal
- Evaluate and develop mapping criteria

5. The importance of having strategic community plans in place that include byway amenities (e.g., a regional master plan and a CMP)

- Byway committee members facilitated the strategic planning process for Valley City and Barnes County and donated \$5,000 toward the visitor center project.
- Corridor Management Plan

Wrote a visionary, proactive, comprehensive CMP to evaluate and identify needs, provide interpretation and visitor amenities, and develop and market the byway. Ultimately increasing visitor traffic through web site, brochures, radio, television and bus tour marketing

Increased visitor traffic has spurred economic development including 3 hunting lodges, a taxi-dermy business, driving range, 51 unit Americinn, craft store, restaurant, and several bed and breakfasts along the corridor

If we were to do it again, we would:

- Ask for more funding at the beginning of the project. What started out as a discussion for a couple of sites with wooden signs, grew to consideration for several bronze placards, and exploded into a \$1,581,909.88 project with 41 interpretive sites, 10 map panel locations and a visitor center!
- Have more funding in place prior to public announcement of intentions
- Hire a byway coordinator (subject to funding)

The Sheyenne River Valley National Scenic Byway is a product of the efforts of the residents in the counties and communities through which it travels.

PHOTO: JANET SCHULTZ

ASSESSING YOUR EFFORTS

*This project was successful because of a number of factors.
Is your byway implementing similar best practices?*



A homesteader's cabin along the byway. PHOTO: JANET SCHULTZ

ASSESSMENT
1 2 3 4

1: Never 2: Sometimes 3: Frequently 4: Always

1. We employ a wide range of funding sources.
2. We tap into a variety of in-kind donations and services.
3. We cultivate new byway partnerships and work to maintain existing partnerships.
4. We actively seek to learn from other byways and to share what we have learned.
5. We keep the community informed and involved in byway efforts.
6. We have taken an imaginative look at the resources along our byway to enhance the visitor experience.
7. We have a succession plan for byway leadership.
8. We plan for the future by documenting our efforts and keeping accurate records to ensure continuity as our organization grows and changes.
9. We challenge ourselves to find innovative solutions to accomplish our byway's hopes and dreams.

CONTACT

Name Bobby Koeplin
e-mail bkoepplin@kwh.com
Organization Shyenene River Valley Scenic Byway Committee
Address P.O. Box 784, Valley City, ND 58072
Phone 701-845-2251
Fax 701-845-2252

RESOURCES (Available for viewing at the conference)

Corridor Management Plan, Grant Writer's Roundtable (structure/operations), National Scenic Byway application, Easement and Maintenance Agreement (interpretive sites), RFP-Byway Interpretation, Concept Reports (interpretation and visitors center), Central Dakota Tourism Partnership information, byway partners, panel renderings.

ROAD WORK AHEAD

1. What can we learn from this case study?
2. Are there aspects of this case study that we would like to incorporate into our byway plans and initiatives?
3. What are our success stories in *leveraging partners and funding*?
4. What steps would we like to take to improve and expand our partnership and funding base?
5. What would we like to know more about related to this case study?



Interpretation at key sites helps to educate visitors. PHOTO: JANET SCHULTZ



America's Byways Resource Center
227 West First Street, Suite 610
Duluth, MN 55802
P 800.429.9297, ext. 5
F 218.625.3333
www.byways.org

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Case studies are drawn from the 2001 and 2003 Best Practices for Byways competitions.