

# Along the Byway

Iowa Mississippi River Parkway  
Commission Newsletter

VOLUME 1 SUMMER 2001

## Beautiful Road Links River Communities

The road outside your door is now a National Scenic Byway and that makes you a stakeholder of a beautiful and unique route for travelers from all over the world.

### OVERHEARD ALONG THE BYWAY



In the words of Iowa MRPC Chairwoman Patsy Ramacitti, "The designation of Iowa's Great River Road (GRR) as a National Scenic Byway (NSB) is an opportunity for all of the stakeholders to help promote the NSB/GRR and to enhance our recreational, historical, cultural, scenic and natural resources along the byway."

Ramacitti, who represents Scott County, feels, "An added bonus for stakeholders is the exciting education involved along the way." Learning just how *many* people are true stakeholders along this road by the river is something she found amazing at recent stakeholder meetings.

The early May presentations, held in Burlington, Bettendorf and Dubuque, brought people together from tourism, city management, county government, and transportation agencies to learn about grant opportunities. The National Scenic Byway Discretionary Funds support projects that enhance, protect and preserve the route, and are administered by the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT) from the office of Margaret Roetman. (Q and A on page 2)

Ramacitti asks you, as a GRR/NSB stakeholder, to take ownership of this designation, and promote your affiliation proudly. Today or tomorrow tell someone else that you live along a very special route, one of only 66 in the United States, and one of two in the state of Iowa.

### SHOWING THE WAY

Full color maps of Iowa's Great River Road, detailed with labels of paved county routes and meandering streams, are available from your MRPC county commissioner.

Clayton: M.J. Smith, 563-252-3283

Dubuque: Jerry Enzler, 563-557-9545

Scott: Patsy Ramacitti, 563-332-5446

Louisa: Al Bohling, 800-798-0227

Muscatine: John Oberhaus, 563-726-5395

Lee: Gene Enke, 563-372-3325

Others: Call Chairwoman Ramacitti

### MORE ON GRANTS, SIGNS AND STAKEHOLDERS INSIDE

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COMMENTS AND SUBMISSIONS FOR THIS NEWSLETTER WELCOMED BY EDITOR

AT: [MJSMITH@ALPINECOM.NET](mailto:MJSMITH@ALPINECOM.NET)



## Q AND A BY MARGARET ROETMAN

Margaret is the Iowa Scenic Byway Coordinator. Her job at IDOT is to administer and guide the byway program, to be a liaison between communities and organizations and the NSB and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and to provide technical assistance to communities as they implement protection and enhancement activities. Contact her at 515-239-1792 or email: [margaret.roetman@dot.state.ia.us](mailto:margaret.roetman@dot.state.ia.us)

### QUESTION

What is the purpose of the NSB, and how can my community get involved?

### ANSWER

The purpose is to recognize and enhance the best of America's transportation corridors. The Great River Road has been designated because it is an exceptional route, exemplifying regional characteristics of our nation's culture, history and landscape.

The fundamental strength of the byway is and will be derived from the people in the communities who join together to promote its unique and priceless resources. This promotion is best accomplished one person at a time, as stakeholders welcome visitors from far and near whom happen along the road, and share the idea we must all work together to protect and preserve its essence.

### QUESTION

What is the status of NSB grant applications?

### ANSWER

The following projects, submitted in late May, are being reviewed at the state level and at the FHWA Division Office in Ames, and will be forwarded to Washington, D.C. for

consideration. Notification of funding comes in late 2001 or early 2002.

Muscatine: Visitors' Center and Signage

Dubuque: GRR Interpretive Center

Burlington: Scenic Byway Historical Information Center/Phase I: Burlington Historic Railroad Depot

Bellevue: Mississippi River Scenic Trail

McGregor: Improvements to Triangle Park

Guttenberg: Creation of new byway pull-off facility, protection of existing natural site, restoration of scenic byway overlook.

Davenport: German American Heritage Center Elevator/ Stair Tower

Audubon Society: Great River Road Birding Trail

Louisa County: Interpretive Center for Environmental Education at Langwood Education Center

### QUESTION

What projects have the best chance of success and when is the next round of applications due?

### ANSWER

Projects with a high degree of coordination with other endeavors along the GRR/NSB and those telling local and national stories of the road will be most successful. FY2003 applications will be due May 30, 2002. Application guidelines will be posted at [www.byways.org](http://www.byways.org) in January, but applicants will benefit from early preparation.

### QUESTION

In the meantime, what should stakeholders be doing to demonstrate their interest in the byway?

### ANSWER

Communities are encouraged to talk about their visions for the road with others, and to develop a common theme compatible with the National Byway theme.



## MEET A FELLOW STAKEHOLDER



Hiking to the source of Big Springs along the Great River Road north of Guttenberg is worth a mouthful of mosquitoes and knee-high nettles. Watching and listening as water cascades over a series of limestone walls and tables is like visiting Northeast Iowa's Niagara Falls.

Iowa Department of Natural Resource (DNR) biologist Karen Aulwes helps look after this 11-acre property, being considered for development as a roadside park and trail by the City of Guttenberg. What follows is a description of a forgotten treasure, what nature lovers have called, "a diamond in the rough."

The property is located just off the Great River Road between the north entrance to Bussey Lake Access and the Abel Island causeway. There is no road sign, but a gravel parking area is observable to the west from the county road.

A gray property stake marks the entrance to this walking trail. Following the way of the deer, sounds of nature interrupt the quiet of a woods growing in late spring. The rush of the 55-degree water moving over the rocks, forming sponge pools, bubbling up, and flowing down again, takes the mind of the hiker to the scene of an Indiana Jones movie.

Aulwes is like a nature detective. In April, she walked through this water looking for life. Carrying a special backpack outfitted with an electrode, she gently shocked the fish for a few minutes and attracts them to the surface. Shock after shock, there were no fish in the 18-24 inches of water, not even one minnow in the Big Springs. Scratching her head, the biologist wonders about the toxins from the batteries and paint cans that have been dumped at the springs' mouth over the years.

This biologist, who wears green khakis, and hiking boots to her job turns over rocks here and there to study the signs. Caddis, an aquatic insect that tastes like lunch to fingerling trout, are present. That's encouraging, "But where is the watercress?" The biologist wonders out loud about "a big event, maybe something traumatic happening at the origin or mouth of the spring." Big Springs empties into Bussey Lake, providing cool water, fresh oxygen and making a friendly habitat for fish. The experienced anglers know where to cast, just beyond the silted-in delta-like area where the springs empty into the northwestern corner of the lake.

She finds more snails, Mayflies, fresh-water sponges, and stone flies on the rocks in the spring bed. Fish should be the next species in this chain of life, but they are missing. The professional scientist will complete studies at both ends of the waterway and decide what to do next. A native Iowa fish, the South Pine Brook Trout, may do well here.

One must walk through the water or use a mossy log bridge and continue forward progress to breathe in Big Springs. In spectacular view, this perch should one day be a photo spot with a trailside bench. One wonders, "How did these multiple tiers of limestone form and where does this never-ending stream start?" There are so few of these natural wonders remaining. It seems like this place should belong to more than one person.

Quote to Contemplate: *Let us a little permit nature to take her own way.....Montaigne*



## KEEPING THE BYWAY FREE AND CLEAR

The goal of the Great River Road/National Scenic Byway is to create a seamless visual impression.

Steven Westvold, IDOT, works with communities to adopt ordinances to manage signing. He explains, "The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 restricted new signs along scenic byways, except those in certain exempted categories. A state may exclude any segment that is inconsistent with the state's criteria (scenic, historic, recreational, cultural, archaeological, or natural) for designating state scenic byways. This means new off-premise advertising signs may not be erected at locations along designated scenic byways, that previously fully conformed to the criteria."

The issue is important as it relates to the Great River Road because the entire length of the route in Iowa was designated a NSB. Westvold said the IDOT proposes to amend its Outdoor Advertising

Administrative Rule to comply with this requirement and provide a consistent standard for the entire route, because of the number of local jurisdictions involved, and the change should be effective before the end of 2001. If you have a question about signing in your city, contact Westvold at 515-239-1255.

## WEBSITE TAKES YOU THERE

A website of the GRR/NSB is under development. Travelers are using the internet to plan their journey to Iowa. Visitors will seek out bold landscapes of the Mississippi River. Add your historical, cultural, or natural resource to the site by sending a color photo and description of your unique resource to Patsy Ramacitti at 4674 Kynnelworth Drive, Bettendorf, IA 52722. Be active and involved in promoting this road and world-famous waterway.



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