

*“Along the Great River Road, we found a little bit of everything.
Heavy industry, civilizationsthousands of years old ...And our own personal history as glimpsed through
two trips 16 years apart.”*

–The New York Times, “Along the Mississippi,” October 13, 2017

Sample text that would accompany this benefits list in the form of a cover letter

*The following is a list of the primary benefits that the ten Mississippi River states receive when participating as a member of the Mississippi River Parkway Commission. Participation can include fiscal support from annual dues payments (\$15,000), as well as agency staff and Commissioner salaries and travel/meeting expenses, and ten-state and individual state project/program development. The Mississippi River Parkway Commission thanks **State Name** for providing this much needed fiscal and in-kind support which is critical to achieving the Commission’s mission to lead in preserving, promoting, and enhancing the Great River Road National Scenic Byway along the Mississippi River benefiting communities and travelers.*

MISSISSIPPI RIVER PARKWAY COMMISSION– BENEFITS TO DUES-PAYING STATES

Experience Mississippi River website

All ten member states are featured on our website, www.experiencemississippiriver.com, which receives nearly 175,000 unique users and more than 210,000 website visits every year.

- State information: Each state has its own page, featuring contact information, links to state MRPC and/or tourism websites and highlights interpretive centers, locks and dams, scenic overlooks, agritourism and events
- Blogs and itineraries: Our itineraries and blogs are updated regularly and contain information about attractions, recreational options and more in each of the 10 Great River Road states
- Resources: Visitors can order our free 10-state travel map or download the Drive the Great River Road mobile app (available in English and Japanese), as well as sign up to receive visitor information from individual states

10-state Great River Road map

Each state is featured on our 10-state Great River Road map, which highlights the national route in each state and information on each state’s interpretive centers.

- More than 125,000 maps are distributed annually, either mailed directly from the MRPC National Office (for online and phone requests) or sent to the states and partners (local CVBs, interpretive centers, DOT traveler information centers, etc.) for distribution
- Maps are also available to view and download on the MRPC website

Drive the Great River Road mobile app

Our incredibly popular Great River Road mobile travel app just got even better with a customized navigable map that allows travelers to easily drive the National Scenic Byway.

- 8,000+ downloads
- Available for free on Apple and Android devices
- Directions and information included for interpretive centers, scenic overlooks, agritourism attractions, locks & dams

Social media

The MRPC maintains a robust social media presence for the Great River Road, and participating states receive significant benefits from these efforts.

- Facebook (www.facebook.com/GreatRiverRoad)
 - More than 32,000 active and engaged fans
 - Posts made 3-4 times/week; highlight events, attractions in each state as well as general travel information
 - Advertising ensures growing fan base and good interaction
- Pinterest (www.pinterest.com/greatriverrd)
 - Pinterest remains a favorite travel planning tool and we have boards on all 10 states, as well as activities like biking and birding and information on Drive the Great River Road Month
- Photography/video
 - All aspects of our marketing efforts include photography and video showcasing the assets along the Great River Road, and one of our initiatives is to increase our YouTube presence and add Instagram to our marketing platforms

Contests/Promotions

Seasonal promotions focus on general travel and specific activities along the Great River Road and in each state, highlighting the wide variety of assets, attractions and events travelers can discover. Our promotions received nearly 7,000 entries in 2017.

- Drive the Great River Road Month
 - Promotional campaign held annually in September encouraging exploration of the National Scenic Byway
 - Includes monthly giveaway as well as opportunities for local recognition for states (toolkit including press releases, media event templates, talking points and more)
- Other promotions focus on activities/assets of the states along the Great River Road (birding, biking, culinary, geocaching, etc.)

E-newsletters

We distribute e-newsletters to more than 18,000 opt-in subscribers interested in the travel along the Great River Road. These e-newsletters highlight the activities and attractions available during the upcoming season along with our promotions.

Public relations

Our public relations efforts get national attention. We routinely pitch story ideas and work with media, including standing interviews with area radio and TV stations.

Some highlights from 2017 include:

- “Along the Mississippi,” travelogue by New York Times writer Peter Kujawinski
 - Shared story of his family’s road trip from Illinois to Louisiana
 - Appeared on the front page of NYTimes.com on October 13
- Monthly appearances on AM 1230 KWNO in Winona, MN
- Worked with camping website 50campfires.com for stories and coverage for their trip along the Great River Road
- Pickups of seasonal press releases focusing on recreation/promotions

Great River Road Network of Interpretive Centers

The MRPC works with and provides resources for the network of more than 75 interpretive centers located along the Great River Road.

- Interpretive center signage: Branded Great River Road signage was provided to promote and drive visits to all of our network of interpretive centers, increasing visitation, length of stay and revisitation along the length of the Mississippi River
- Hospitality training: State MRPC commissions provide Great River Road training to frontline personnel on the themes and history of the Great River Road and how to best serve byway travelers

National meetings

Two annual on-site meetings provide synergy, coordination, collaboration, promotion, 10-state project development and economic impact for all member states

- Locations vary across the 10 states, but typically are in Mississippi River communities providing understanding and context of this vast and iconic river for meeting participants
- Annual meetings generate more than \$50,000 of economic impact for host destinations
- Teleconferences and web-based meetings with boards, four standing committees, and representatives of each state continue the work year-round

National Office resources and support

The National Office provides support and resources to states while interfacing with public inquiries about the 10-state Great River Road National Scenic Byway. The National Office maintains a database of interested visitors, as well as partners along the 10 states.

- mrpcmembers.com: An online resource for states that includes an archive of Commission work featuring toolkits (for use in conjunction with promotions like Drive the Great River Road Month and interpretation), agendas, meeting minutes, Great River Road logos and more
- National toll-free line: The National Office takes map orders and answers questions for travelers interested in exploring the Great River Road

Use of Great River Road national logo

Member states may use the national 10-state Great River Road logo in their marketing materials.

Awards and recognition

States can nominate organizations and individuals for a variety of awards or designations, including membership in the Great River Road network of interpretive centers, the Stewardship Award, Distinguished Service Award, Pilot's State Award and Honorary Membership Award

10-state Corridor Management Plan (CMP)

Transportation, marketing, historic and natural resource management can yield economic and quality of life benefits by developing and then implementing the CMP. Benefits include but are not limited to:

- faster and better public engagement by providing Great River Road context and stakeholder contacts as states implement CMP strategies locally;
- clear and consistent corridor planning, design and maintenance;
- prioritization of investments to achieve goals and strategies by Federal, state, tribal and local partners from the public, non-profit and private sectors;
- holistic corridor management including transportation, marketing, historic and natural resources resulting in a consistently positive Mississippi River byway traveler experience;
- DOTs implementation support helps them with public engagement, context sensitive solutions, livability, social equity, pollinator habitat, water quality, and other current transportation industry initiatives;
- implementation measures can help quantify the return on investment by state agencies;
- the CMP can serve to acknowledge and thank Federal, state and local agencies and other partners for their support.

Mississippi River Country – international marketing opportunities

Through our partnership with the 10 state tourism offices in conjunction with Mississippi River Country, the Great River Road is marketed to the travel trade, independent travel markets and media in Japan. We regularly plan and host familiarization tours for Japanese media throughout the 10 states and attend Tourism Expo Japan in Tokyo and the annual IPW travel show in the United States.