



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Mississippi National River and Recreation Area
111 E. Kellogg Blvd., Ste 105
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-1256

3 April 2020

Danielle E. Blackshear
Transportation Specialist
Office of Human Environment, Livability Team
Federal Highway Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE, Washington, DC 20590
Phone: (202) 366-2064 | Room E74-438
Danielle.Blackshear@dot.gov | <https://highways.dot.gov>

Re: Great River Road All-American Road Designation

Dear Ms. Blackshear:

The Mississippi River Parkway Commission has worked to preserve, promote and enhance the Great River Road National Scenic Byway since 1938. While the Byway title is important, designation as an All American Road would take the Great River Road to the level it deserves. The Mississippi River is one of the world's great rivers, and the Great River Road is the one feature that connects travelers to its entire length.

As Superintendent of the only National Park Service unit whose mission is the Mississippi River, I know what it means to protect, preserve and enhance the nationally and internationally important sites of the Mississippi River. I also know the river's draw for national and international visitors. All American Road designation would enhance the park's visitation and visits to sites all along the river, since more people would make the Great River Road their destination. It would also provide powerful leverage to protect and enhance the river and its key resources.

The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area encompasses 72 miles and 54,000 acres of the Mississippi River and adjoining lands running through the greater Twin Cities metropolitan area. We take in five counties, 21 towns and cities, four townships and about 90 local, regional and state parks within our boundaries.

The Mississippi River here runs through one of the most unique reaches along its entire course. Four of the seven reaches in Minnesota occur within the park's boundaries: the Prairie River, Gorge, Where the Big River Begins and the Driftless Area.

Consider some other striking facts about Mississippi River and the places along it in this national park:

- St. Anthony Falls is the Mississippi River's only major waterfall and the reason Minneapolis led the nation and at times the world in flour production between 1880 and 1930. Two National Historic Landmarks stand there: the Pillsbury A Mill and the Washburn A Mill. They bookend James J. Hill's Stone Arch Bridge, which is a National Civil Engineering Landmark.
- Located at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers, Fort Snelling is our other National Historic Landmark, and it has stories covering the period 1820-1946. It overlooks the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, offering scenic views while adding the landscape's scenic character.
- St. Paul is the head of navigation on the Mississippi River – The bookend to New Orleans.
- Resting high on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River in St. Paul, the burial mounds in Mounds Park date back nearly 2,000 years and represent the northern most extension of Hopewell Culture, a culture that occupied the Ohio and upper Mississippi river valleys.
- Far older are the Ordovician period fossils in the bluffs that date from 444 to 488 million years ago, when this place lay near the Equator. National Park Service geologists have said that we have some of the best examples of Ordovician Period fossils of any national park.

Stories and places like these are why Congress established the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area as a National Park Service unit in 1988.

Although not on our fee title land, the Great River Roads runs entirely within the park's boundary. Our Mississippi River Visitor Center, in the Science Museum of Minnesota, in St. Paul, is a Great River Road Interpretive Center.

All American Road designation would bring a new emphasis to the national and international places, resources and stories within the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area and to the Great River Road. If you have any questions, please contact me at john_anfinson@nps.gov or 651-293-8432.

Sincerely,



John O. Anfinson
Superintendent