



GREAT LAKES USA

May 5, 2020

RE: Great River Road in Illinois All-American Road Designation

Dear Federal Highway Administration:

It is my pleasure to recommend the GREAT RIVER ROAD in Illinois be designated an All-American Road. As one of the longest byways in the nation, the Great River Road offers a multitude of unique destinations along the Mississippi River through ten states from Minnesota to Louisiana. The Great River Road in Illinois highlights the heart of the nation and exemplifies its varied history and culture, establishing the byway as a key destination to experience the *great American road trip*.

Since 2000, the Great Rivers Country office has worked tirelessly to promote the Great River Road in Illinois, partnering with the Illinois Office of Tourism, Brand USA and in-country partners on international promotional campaigns and sales missions. As a result of these cooperative efforts, thousands of visitors each year visit the byway from key markets in Japan, Germany, China and the United Kingdom. Overseas visitors continue to provide a positive economic impact across the state, with international traveler spending reaching 2.1 billion dollars in 2019.

Illinois' 557-mile byway stretches the entire western border of the state along the Mississippi River, showcasing significant destinations such as charming towns, early French forts, Lewis and Clark history, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, John Deere destinations, and the home of Ulysses S. Grant, to name a few. Through the efforts by the Great Rivers Country office and its cooperative efforts with state and local tourism offices, there continues to be a direct positive economic impact on the communities lining the byway. In 2018, the economic impact of travel in counties along the Great River Road in Illinois increased 4 percent resulting in 1.89 billion dollars of travel related expenditures in the region.

The distinct historic and cultural destinations along the byway make it unique, drawing travelers from across the nation and the world. As the third largest watershed, the Mississippi River attracts travelers just to view its vast expanse. The byway deserves the distinction as an All-American Road as this would further establish the route as a true taste of America and would bolster tourism efforts for the state while it recovers from the ripple effect of the pandemic.

I believe that by becoming an All-American Road, the distinction will attract even more visitors, thus generating even more tourism dollars. When the current pandemic is behind us, people are going to be eager to travel and the tourism spending will be of great assistance in the recovery of our country. Because of these and many other contributions to the state and individual communities along the byway, I strongly recommend the designation of the Great River Road in Illinois as an All-American Road.

Sincerely,

Lee Anthony "Toby" McCarrick, Executive Director

Great Lakes USA