



Mississippi River Parkway Commission

701 East Washington Avenue, Suite 202
Madison, WI 53703



Mississippi River Parkway Commission Marketing Committee Video Conference Call

Attendees: AR, KY, MS, MO, MN, IA, IL, LA, and National Office (NO)

August 12, 2020 | 11 AM-12 PM

NOTES

Meeting began at 11:03am.

Chair reorganized distributed agenda.

- I. **Annual meeting update:** Chair asked what Marketing Committee can do to promote Annual Meeting being done as a virtual Zoom conference. MN shared meeting is a good opportunity to strengthen our brand and provide information to commissioners, CVBs, media, and other contacts including regional representatives. Requests states send database of contacts including emails to NO to send meeting invitations. Registration opens on August 27th which is when the full agenda will be announced.

Discussed NO's tourism-based e-newsletter database. NO shared database is over 36,000. While meeting program isn't designed for general audience, NO will look messaging to use promotional email list to send invites.

Currently programmed presentations include: Interpretive Centers will talk about how they've kept people engaged during these times including Arkansas Heritage, the Dubuque Museum and the Delta Blues Museum. The session is hosted by Culture and Heritage's co-chair John Anfinson. Sabrina Chandler, representing ERA and is the manager of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge, will lead the conversation on importance of clean water to the Mississippi River. Video from Eddie Harris called River to the Heart which narrates his story paddling the river. Transportation Committee hosting a conversation with a representative from Tool Design on multi-modal transportation in communities. Sherry Quamme will host conversation with Mark Falzone from Scenic America on obtaining funding for the Great Outdoors Act and how the process could work for National Scenic Byway Foundation. Doug Bourgeois, representing the Marketing Committee and LA Assistant Secretary of Tourism, will host a media event sharing stories along the river.

Mission Statement: Preserving, promoting and enhancing the Mississippi River Parkway for communities and travelers

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KY asked if an opportunity exists for Marketing Committee to discuss their amenities along the GRR. MN said goal for Doug's presentation is to tell stories about the River and there could be ways to add to it.

II. **2020 Marketing Plan**

a. Flavors campaign: launched after last marketing call (July 24th-Aug 25th). NO shared promotions are tools to see what messaging gets traveler response. A concise message on how to travel 10 states regarding food theme is a challenge with each state having different situations due to COVID-19. Campaign used stories collected through last year's Flavors of the GRR to tie into GRR intrinsic qualities. Set up contest as simple sweepstakes to gain e-newsletter subscribers, Facebook fans and overall brand engagement. A \$500 giveaway has been a successful prize during this time and used for this promotion. Received 3,235 entries to date, exceeding goal of 3,000. Facebook fan growth goal halfway there. Added 888 to e-newsletter list which now tops 36,000. Contest appears to be working to add Facebook fans into subscribers.

- Drive the Great River Road: NO shared 2019 project description and challenges to revised it for 2020. Last year's campaign highlighted hot spots to visit, events and interpretive centers (ICs) including blog posts and signage for them. This year, ICs are closed in many areas, events have been canceled and no one would use the word "hot spots" to describe travel assets. NO working on the second quarter report and while it isn't complete, NO shared web stats for Q2. Chicago is a top market. Close to 100k pageviews during the shutdown quarter. Top pages were "Drive the GRR best drive in America." Fun facts page had nearly four-minute average time per page time. Example of challenges for marketing Drive GRR month is Chicago can't visit Wisconsin without being quarantined for 2 weeks. NO transitioned conversation to learn about current state of travel in COVID-19 as way to determine direction for Drive campaign.

- COVID-19 Messaging Update:

MN: focusing on scenery, and outdoor recreation travel. Found remote locations are trending. MN doesn't have any restrictions on outside state travel. Repurposed AAR content and took unspent travel money

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to run an ad campaign emphasizing scenery, outdoors and (especially) river communities. Using social media predominantly.

IA: Visits to Iowa GRR page have been up. No restrictions on outside travelers. Northern counties getting a lot of Wisconsin traffic. Inconsistencies in COVID response/policies.

AR: New landing page called “Arkansas—ready for travel” outlining steps businesses and organization taking to keep people healthy. Welcome centers reopened. Virus numbers are still bad, and schools go back on the 24th. Putting advertising dollars behind AR monthly newsletter, Discover Arkansas. ICs are closed with exception of state museums.

LA: Response is in stage 2. Cases go up and down. Push for staycations, go to state parks, travel byways but stay close to home to return in evening. Other promotions featuring visiting friends and families mitigating exposure Great River Road and byways have seen a lot of action.

MS: public schools start Monday, Aug 17 with option to go virtual or in person. A third have chosen to go virtual. MS per capita COVID rate is #1 in cases at the moment. GRR restaurants have done a good job with curbside and to go. All interpretive centers are closed with the exception of Delta Blues Museum. Towns on the road have had a severe reduction in tourism. River traffic is down with cruises shut down. Leadership has been spotty at best, can't decide how to take action against COVID.

MO: Similar to Iowa there aren't any travel restrictions or mandates. Promoting outdoors and physical distance. Promoting attractions that have implemented measures to keep people safe. Governor initiated a pledge campaign to show what is being done to take preventive measures. Working with DMOs to promote safety travel message.

IL: Governor has launched \$5 million mask campaign which has cut tourism budget in half. Essential spending only which means no advertising until 2021. Schools open Aug. 17. Seeing visitors still come through.

KY: State is totally locked down. Schools are on a delay and won't be open until the end of September.



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NO: Based on feedback, NO will update Drive project charter with emphasis on outdoor activity and push the social platforms and website. Messaging will also encourage travelers to order the map.

- III. Mississippi River Country: Continuing work on entering Canada market. NO shared MRC has discussed possibility of a joint piece between MRPC and MRC using GRR map as a fulfillment piece in Canada. Joint piece could share cost between the two organizations. If a joint piece happened, it would be in MRC's FY22 budget (July 1, 2021.) LA asked when a new map could come out. NO thought it could be budgeted for MRPC's 2021 budget. If it was a joint piece, the goal would be to have new maps ready for Drive campaign. If MRPC determines they want the piece sooner or doesn't want a joint piece, it would have more flexibility on when it would come out.
- IV. Toolkit Reminder: NO will have updated toolkit for Drive GRR campaign.
- V. Set next meeting date: Annual meeting on Sept 15. Time TBD.
- VI. No other business

Meeting adjourned at 12:17pm.