



Great River Road Network of Museums and Interpretive Centers

Nomination Form

Name of organization: Aitkin Area Chamber of Commerce

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Introduction: This is a network of museums and interpretive centers about the Mississippi River along the Great River Road. It is not our intent to select every museum or interpretive center along the Mississippi River, even though we recognize there are hundreds of museums that are doing excellent work. Our goal is to have a network of premier institutions that are willing to work together to further the interpretive and marketing goals for the Great River Road.

Section 1- Qualifications

The institution must interpret the Mississippi River or some significant aspect or relationship to the river with a high level of quality and be open to the public on a published, regular basis.

1. What story does your institution tell about the Mississippi River as part of its regular daily visitor experience? How does it relate to the themes for interpretation which are attached? Why do you feel that this significant aspect or relationship to the river is presented at a high level of quality? Describe the quality of the visit your guests receive.

In Aitkin, it's impossible to ignore the influence of the Mississippi in every aspect of our community experience. Just as the river physically shaped our land, so too did it shape our economy, culture, and demographics.

At the Aitkin Area Chamber of Commerce Interpretive Center, we would tell the story of how Aitkin County exists as we know it thanks to economic success due to our proximity to the Mississippi, and also emphasize the recreation experiences on or near the river that makes Aitkin County so special. Our visitor experience would embody Theme 8 and 9. The City of Aitkin is just one piece of the puzzle; Aitkin County has a network of Mississippi experiences

that are connected but unique. That connectedness is an integral part of the story we want to tell. Each satellite location we would highlight at the Interpretive Center relates to other themes directly; see narrative for details.

The Aitkin Area Chamber of Commerce Interpretive Center would be highly visible and accessible in our walkable downtown area. Visitors will be greeted by friendly, knowledgeable staff and will be guided through our wall-mounted displays. They will have access to informational materials that they can take with them so they can get onto the Great River Road and experience everything the Mississippi has to offer.

2. What is the length of stay for the typical visitor experience at your institution? Please provide what you consider an average time, what you consider a short stay and what you consider a long stay for regular attendance.

Average: 30 minutes

Long: One hour

Short: 15 minutes or less

However, if visitors travel to each satellite location, it could easily be a day-long or even weekend-long trip.

3. What educational or interpretive programs beyond exhibits do you conduct that interpret the Mississippi River or some significant aspect or relationship to the river?

We believe the Mississippi is something to be experienced first-hand. While our exhibits will provide history and context, which are important, we will also provide resources that allow visitors to physically interact with the river. On a daily basis, we provide kayak and canoe river route maps, fishing guides, river-side campsite recommendations, and more. We also promote (and host) educational, recreational, and conservation events and programs that happen on or related to the Mississippi. Many of these events and programs take place at our satellite locations. One example of an event we offer that celebrates our significant relationship to the river is our Ripplesippi River Run (a kayaking event that includes the Mississippi).

4. What are your published and regular hours? Please describe hours for various seasons.

Hours for our interpretive site are 9am-3pm, Monday-Friday. Hours for our satellite locations vary, but many are accessible to the public at any time. See narrative for more information.

5. What is the annual attendance for regular museum hours at your site, exclusive of special events? What is the admission fee?

In an average year, we have about 1,500 visitors. About 120-130 per month. There is no cost.

6. What is your proximity to the Great River Road?

We are located on the Great River Road. It turns onto HWY 210 just one block south of us.

7. Did you enclose a letter of endorsement from your state Mississippi River Parkway Commissioner?

Yes.

Section II- Duties and Obligations:

1. Members of the network must have the Great River Road map at their site, at a minimum for reference, but preferably for sale or for distribution to visitors. One map will be provided as will an order form for additional maps. Will you agree to stock and/or sell the Great River Road map?

Yes.

2. Members of the network must ensure that front line personnel who have contact with the public are knowledgeable of and will promote the Great River Road and the museums and interpretive centers in the region. Describe how you will ensure that your front line personnel will be trained, briefed and monitored.

There are two staff members at the Aitkin Area Chamber of Commerce. We will be given a reference guide with all the necessary materials to familiarize ourselves with so we can speak knowledgeably of the region. We will also access any learning resources from the Great River Road so we are familiar with the organization's narrative and benefits and tell the broader story. Additionally, we are in collaboration with all satellite locations to learn all relevant information.

3. Are you willing to display signage at your center showing that you are a member of the Great River Road Network? This may be inside or outside signage, but must be prominently displayed. Where will you display the Interpretive Center sign?

Yes. We will display the sign outside the entrance to our office building. The entrance is highly visible in downtown Aitkin, and faces the Great River Road.

4. Are you willing to secure the needed funds to have an officially approved Great River Road Interpretive Center sign erected at your site?

Yes. We have funds reserved for signage.

Section III - Capacity:

The following questions are asked primarily for information purposes and will not be major factors in determination of inclusion in the network.

1. Do you have access to the internet? If your facility has a website, what is the address? Do you have the ability to post the www.experiencemississippiriver.com website on your website?

Yes. Our website is aitkin.com. We will create a page on our site dedicated to our Great River Road story, and link the GRR website. We will also add the logo to our "affiliates" section.

2. Do you have traveling exhibit space? If so, what size is it in square footage? Would you be willing or interested in hosting a traveling exhibit?

Not at this time. There is a possibility for this in the future; we have a miniature riverboat that we often use in the Riverboat Heritage Days and Fish House parades.