



# Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission

## 2014-15 Annual Report

### August 2015



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#### Mission

The mission of the Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Minnesota is to promote, preserve and enhance the resources of the Mississippi River Valley and to develop the highways and amenities of the Great River Road. The Commission is organized and guided by Minnesota Statute 161.1419. The Minnesota Great River Road is designated and managed by the Minnesota Department of Transportation under Minnesota Statute 161.142.

#### Quarterly Meetings of the Full Commission

The MN-MRPC held full Commission meetings on August 28, 2014; November 20, 2014; February 26, 2015 and June 11, 2015. Each meeting included updates from regional citizen Commissioners and partner state agencies.

#### Projects & Activities

##### **Great River Road Corridor Management Planning and Implementation**

This project is developing a Corridor Management Plan to guide the work of Minnesota's Mississippi River Parkway Commission and MnDOT for the next 10 – 15 years. The project has also implemented a current CMP key strategy - signing the Mississippi River Bicycle Trail (MRT) statewide.

##### 2015 Accomplishments

- Phase III of Mississippi River Trail signs (Hastings to Elk River) were fabricated and installed. 1,174 signs were installed, requiring 24 municipal agreements. Total project from 2013 to 2015 included 800+ miles, 2,262 signs and 55 municipal agreements.
- MRT kiosk content was developed in partnership with local communities. Kiosks featuring MRT and GRR information will be installed in seven MRT host communities (see attached sample) in late summer 2015.
- A project website provides information updates and invitations to participate throughout the Corridor Management Plan development process - [www.mnmississippiriver.com/cmp](http://www.mnmississippiriver.com/cmp). A series of email blasts were sent to stakeholders and partners throughout the year including project updates and invitations to participate.
- Six public open houses were held along the corridor in July 2014 (flyer attached). Meetings with Regional Development Commissions and Area Planning Organizations were also held, as well as meetings in host communities to determine placement of MRT information kiosks.
- Six public open houses were held along the corridor in May 2015. View assessment pilot sessions were also held in six communities with local tourism officials, interpretive center managers, a city engineer and MN-MRPC Commissioners.
- Ten stakeholder meetings were held from November 2014 to February 2015 to better understand how byway corridor management aligns with and can help organizations fulfill their missions. Meetings were held with the five MN-MRPC member state agencies, White Earth Nation, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, and the Prairie Island Indian Community; as well as with the Minnesota Department of Health and the University of Minnesota to discuss strategies for healthy and active living along the corridor. A general session overview and four breakout sessions at MnDOT's All Planners Group Annual Workshop also informed the plan.
- An online survey was conducted in summer 2014. Stakeholders, partners and the public were asked to identify favorite places and travel themes most of interest. 543 specific favorite place locations were identified and 215 "six word or less" river stories were submitted. A second online survey was conducted in spring-summer 2015. Participants were asked to help prioritize preliminary themes and goals, provide feedback on views to be protected, and share recommendations for multi-modal improvements.
- A sign inventory was completed with 649 sign locations visited and geolocated. 126 missing signs were noted along with a significant amount of others past their useful life.

- The field team visited and recorded information on over 750 resources along the Great River Road (see attached preliminary summary). Each entry includes specific location, photograph, resource type, byway intrinsic quality, and a brief description that can be used for promotional purposes and traveler information.
- MnDOT included the CMP project as part of its internal conflict scoping process with Division Directors and five Districts to facilitate future implementation of strategies. Meetings were also held to plan for receiving, housing and maintaining the byway database and maps.
- Monthly Project Management Team meetings were held. Four Project Advisory Team Meetings were held (September, November, January and March). Two workshops were held with MN-MRPC members, in February and June 2015.
- The Consultant Team presented at the 2015 MRPC Semi-Annual Meeting and gathered feedback from technical committees.
- An Investment Inventory for the Minnesota Great River Road was completed by the Region Five Development Commission, along with recommendations and time estimates for future updates. Cities, counties, townships, and park districts were contacted regarding current and future development plans along the Great River Road, including details on projected cost, funding sources and needs. The inventory will be an appendix of the CMP.
- Five main themes were defined for the plan – Facilities Management; Technology; Education & Engagement; Placemaking; and Health & Active Living. Goals and strategies have been developed under each theme and are being refined and prioritized. Lead and supporting roles and potential resources to implement are being identified.
- Great River Road Signage, Plan Your Trip (for travelers seeking information) & Plan Your Project (for road management entities) are emerging as the top three priorities for short term implementation.
- The Corridor Management Plan and associated database/mapping will be finalized in late fall, 2015.

### **Great River Road Visual Resource Protection Plan Project**

This project, managed by the National Park Service, has recently focused on development of a final implementation chapter for the plan including specific management strategies. National Scenic Byway Intrinsic Qualities and Great River Road details are addressed in the management strategies, for each of 20 specific views. In addition, the Corridor Management Plan project will be applying the lessons learned statewide. In May 2015, pilot testing of view nomination and assessment forms/processes took place with regional commissioners and local Convention and Visitors Bureaus, etc. Six pilot sessions were conducted, with two different local views assessed at each session. The input received is being used to modify the forms and techniques for future broad use in the corridor. The public will be asked to submit favorite views and local teams will assess those views with the resulting database providing information for use as development decisions are made, as well as a map of views that can be promoted to visitors.

### **National MRPC**

MN-MRPC members participated in MRPC Standing Committees and carried out projects at the state level. Four MN-MRPC representatives participated in the 2014 Annual Meeting in Memphis. The MN-MRPC planned and hosted the 2015 Semi-Annual Meeting of the MRPC in St. Cloud, MN; and promoted attendance to partners from along the Minnesota Great River Road. The St. Cloud Area Convention and Visitors Bureau provided invaluable assistance and support. The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area was recognized at the Semi-Annual Meeting with the MRPC Stewardship Award.

### **Mississippi River Geotourism Program**

The MN-MRPC participated in meetings and discussions related to the Mississippi River Geotourism Program being developed with assistance from the National Geographic Maps Division. Two MN-MRPC members participated in the Project Orientation and Outreach Workshop. The Commission also promoted the meeting to partners and stakeholders. The MN-MRPC submitted a nomination for the Minnesota Great River Road. A project fact sheet (attached) was developed encouraging amenity sites and local businesses along the MN GRR to submit nominations and specific outreach took place to interpretive centers and state parks.

### **Minnesota Great River Road Map/Travel Planner Re-Print**

25,000 map/travel planners were printed and shipped to 48 partner locations for distribution. Sites included state and national parks, historic sites, interpretive centers, and community tourism offices.

### **Mississippi Corridor Critical Area Rulemaking**

The DNR was authorized by the legislature to update rules for the Mississippi Corridor Critical Area, a land corridor along the Mississippi River in the seven county metro area where there are special land use regulations that guide development activity. A subcommittee of the MN-MRPC was formed to develop comments on the draft rules, including reference to the

Great River Road as a nationally significant resource and specifics related to byway intrinsic qualities, as well as provide the GIS byway alignment files for mapping.

### **Funding/Great River Road Investments**

The Minnesota Great River Road and its amenities are supported by several funding sources, including those managed by the MN-MRPC as listed below (state operating budget, FHWA and National Park Service grants) and those managed by related organizations (other scenic byways, partner organizations such as the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, State of Minnesota, etc.). The 2015 Minnesota Legislature extended the sunset date for the MN-MRPC from June 30, 2016 to June 30, 2020. Funding for FY '16 and '17 was appropriated through the Minnesota Legislative Coordinating Commission, the MN-MRPC's fiscal agent, at levels consistent with the previous biennium.

#### **State Operating Budget**

The MN-MRPC operated with state funding at levels allowing the Commission to proceed with priorities. State operating funding for FY '15 was \$63,000, plus carry over from the FY'14 of \$12,945.08.

#### **Federal Highway Administration Grants**

- Minnesota Great River Road Corridor Management Planning & Implementation (\$560,000) - Grant work continued during 2015. A summary is provided beginning on page one of this report. \$81,920.82 remains at the close of FY '15.
- Minnesota Great River Road Interpretive Panels, Phase 1 (\$50,000) - This project centered on a series of interpretive signs in various Minnesota Great River Road destination areas. Sign frames for MRT kiosks were purchased and shipped to seven locations as the final activity under this grant.

#### **National Park Service Grant**

- Great River Road Corridor Management Planning and Implementation (\$175,000) – Funds are local match for the National Scenic Byways Grant. \$8,481.12 remains at the close of FY '15.

#### **Minnesota Transportation Alternatives Program**

In the second year of a three year program to help transition Minnesota byways into the new MAP 21 funding structure, MnDOT provided funds in 2015 for FY' 16 projects. A solicitation was released in October. \$1.5 million was awarded, with two Great River Road projects receiving funding – Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe/Cass County Bike Trail; and the final section of the Mississippi River Regional Trail – Rosemount East. A solicitation for FY '17 projects, the final round of these grants, was released in May 2015, with applications due in early August. MnDOT also coordinated and funded development of Corridor Management Plans for 17 other Minnesota byways to assist them in competing for funds from TAP and other sources in the future and to help guide the program statewide. Regional Development Commissions have been contracted to complete the plans, with Region Five assigned to develop the Great River Road investment summary to be incorporated into the new CMP project. In response to an action alert from the National Scenic Byways Foundation, the MN-MRPC sent letters to Minnesota's congressional delegation asking for clarification of language in the next Federal Surface Transportation Bill to specifically mention Scenic Byways as eligible for funding in the Transportation Alternatives Program.

### **Examples of Local & Regional Activities**

- **Minneapolis Riverfront Partnership** – This group continues to address riverfront issues and needs in the city, including initiatives such as the Marshall Street Protected Bikeway Project which MnDOT has participated in.
- **Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board** – Work has continued on the Central Riverfront Plan and MN-MRPC members have been involved on related committees.
- **Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation** – Conducted the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Placemaking Residency engaging the community in presentations, workshops, walking and biking tours, and hands-on activities. MnDOT Participated in a full-day Eco-District workshop. The organization also held the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Saint Paul Great River Gathering. Three members represented the MN-MRPC at this event.
- **MN DNR "Take Aim at Summer"** – The annual event was held in early June at DNR central region headquarters along the Mississippi River in St. Paul, focused on outdoor activities for families available within an urban area. Over 400 people were in attendance.
- **National Park Service "Find Your Park" and 2016 Centennial** – Find Your Park is a major campaign to promote all parks, whether local, state or national. Partnerships are a key segment of the effort and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area and MN-MRPC are working on plans for joint promotion.

- **Mississippi National River and Recreation Area:** MNRRA convenes quarterly meetings of the Trails and Open Space Partnership, a coalition of over 50 agencies and organizations. The group is implementing a five year Alternative Transportation Plan with partners in the Twin Cities Area, to increase visitation to the park without increasing congestion. From this work [www.rivertripplanner.org](http://www.rivertripplanner.org) provides multi-modal trip planning. MNRRA also developed a plan for the Mississippi National Water Trail, with the vision - "The Mississippi River National Water Trail offers a world class, resource-based, recreation experience in the Twin Cities metro area that enhances connections between the water trail and other recreation experiences." MnDOT and MN-MRPC participate as core advisors on these efforts.
- **Brainerd-Baxter Mississippi River Revitalization Project** – A public input process was conducted to gather ranking of amenities, a plan was finalized and released by the University of Minnesota Center for Rural Design and funding was secured from the Community Foundation to hire part-time staff to begin implementation of the plan. MnDOT and MN-MRPC participate in this effort.
- **St. Cloud Area** – "Mississippi Partners" continues work on implementation of the urban river plan – [www.mississippipartners.org](http://www.mississippipartners.org). The City of St. Cloud has approved funds for a downtown trail extension along the Mississippi River.
- **Take a Day OFF\* (Outdoor Family Fun) on the Mississippi** - This annual event at Stearns County Mississippi River Park is organized by Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District, Minnesota DNR, Benton County, St. Cloud State University and several other local partners.
- **Cuyuna Lakes Mountain Bike Trail** – Concern was noted during the year over possible impacts of new mining activities. All local units of government in the area passed resolutions to maintain the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area and mountain bike trails. The Cuyuna Trails Association has developed a plan for trail expansion to include a three day riding experience near the Mississippi River. The Association also hosted events such as the "Cuyuna Crusher" mountain bike race which was expected to draw 300 - 500 people from around the nation.
- **Oliver H. Kelley Farm** – The Oliver H. Kelley Farm, on the banks of the Mississippi River, is an important agriculture history site near the Great River Road. A kick-off celebration was held in September 2014 by the Minnesota Historical Society to mark the start of work on the new Visitor Center being constructed thanks to funding from the legislature.
- **Lady Slipper Scenic Byway** – Members of the Byway Board received Minnesota Horticultural Awards for lady slipper transplant efforts along the byway, a section of which runs concurrently with the Great River Road. The byway is also planning with several local partners for development of a pedestrian/bicycle bridge over the Mississippi River. MnDOT has provided technical advice and MN-MRPC has provided a letter of support.
- **Upper St. Anthony Lock** – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers closed the Upper St. Anthony Lock in June 2015 to slow the movement of invasive species northward. This closure will affect paddling groups on the river and several organizations have worked together to identify the best portage options. The lock will still be maintained as a flood control structure and options for keeping the visitor center open are being discussed.
- **Bemidji** – Implemented "Nice Ride" bike rental program - <http://bemidji.niceridemn.org/>.
- **Fort Snelling Upper Post** – DNR, MNHS and NPS are among the partners working to redevelop the Upper Post at Fort Snelling. Pre-design work is scheduled to begin soon. Historic Fort Snelling is a member of the network of Great River Road Interpretive Centers.
- **Great Rivers Confluence** – Carol Zoff represented the MN-MRPC at a workshop held in Afton, MN, which included discussion on marketing river communities during fall and winter seasons.
- **Dakota County/City of Inver Grove Heights** – Completed the Rock Island Swing Bridge Trailhead/Wayside Rest, funded by Scenic Byway and National Park Service grants. MN-MRPC provided letters of support.
- **Three Rivers Park District** – The Park District kicked off two major master planning efforts for recreational facilities along the Great River Road – Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park and Mississippi River Regional Trail. MnDOT has provided technical advice.
- **Grand Rapids** – The Showboat Landing river stage venue was repurposed and is hosting a variety of events in the summer of 2015, before closing with potential relocation to the another location on the river in future years.

## Membership

The MN-MRPC is organized by state statute to include: (2) Members of the House of Representatives; (2) Members of the Senate; (5) Members of State Agencies - (1) appointed by each: DNR, MnDOT, Historical Society, Agriculture & Tourism; (5) Regional Members – (1) from each of the Great River Road regions established by statute (1) Member-At-Large – appointed by the other 14. New member welcomed over the past year: Anne Lewis, Grand Rapids to Brainerd Region.

**This report is respectfully submitted on August 17, 2015. Rep. Sheldon Johnson, MN-MRPC Chair**





Online at [www.mnmississippiriver.com](http://www.mnmississippiriver.com)

## Mississippi Crossings

### Crossroads of History

This area is named for its history as a crossroads of transportation by river, rail and road—first for the voyageurs and fur traders, then loggers, and today, thousands of vacationers. The river was once the main highway of the Native Americans and later served as a major transportation route for the fur trade in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Today, many of the 25 steamboat landings once located between Aitkin and Grand Rapids are water accesses and camping sites.



Camp Ripley Entrance



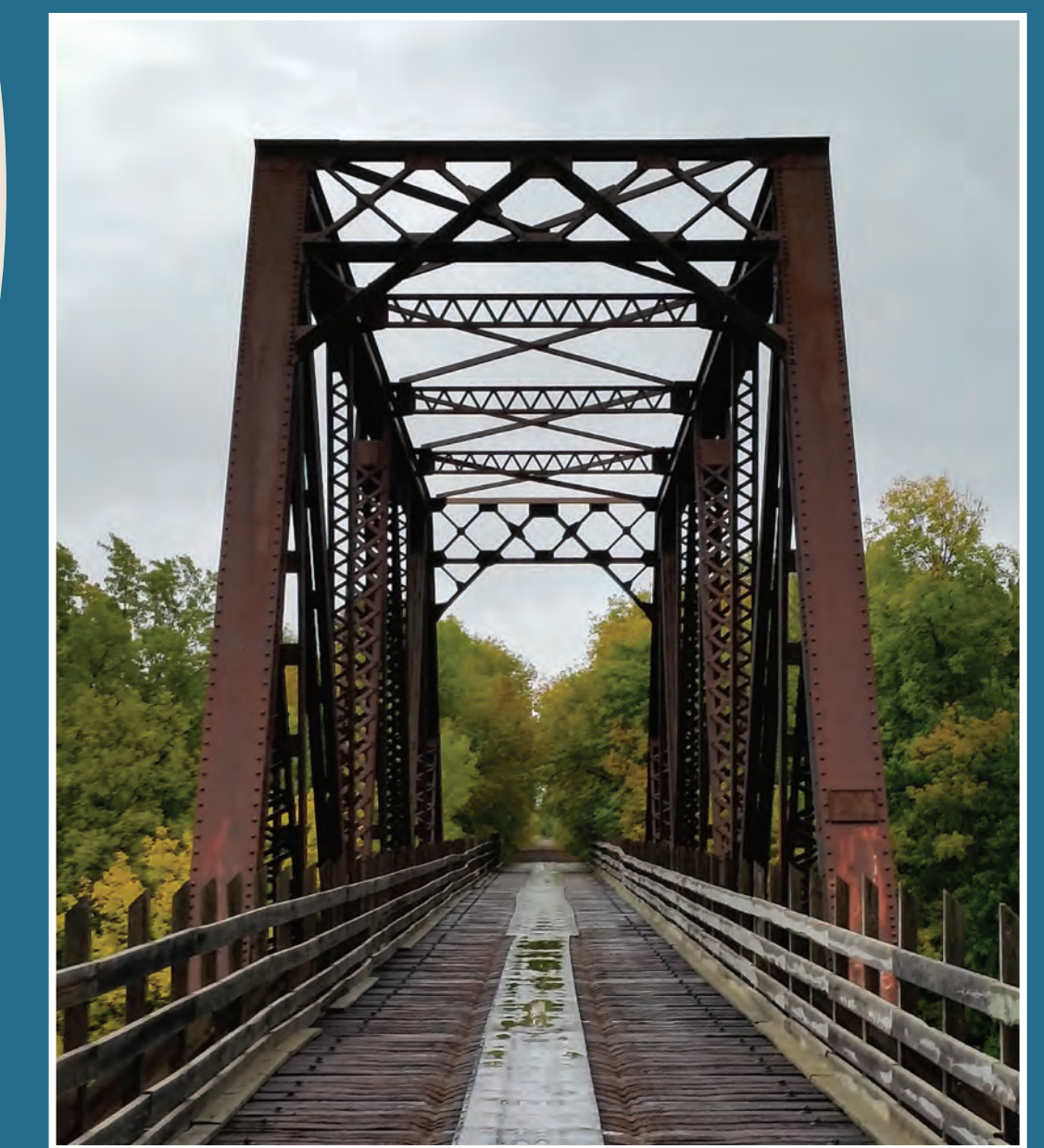
Charles A. Lindbergh State Park

### The Past as Travelogue

Don't miss antiquing in Aitkin, Deerwood, Crosby, and Ironton or the opportunity to canoe this beautiful section of the Mississippi. There is a rich history and culture in this area, with countless recreational opportunities to explore. Visit the Northern Pacific Depot in Aitkin, Croft Mine Historical Park in Crosby, Crow Wing County Historical Museum in Brainerd, and Minnesota Military Museum at Camp Ripley.



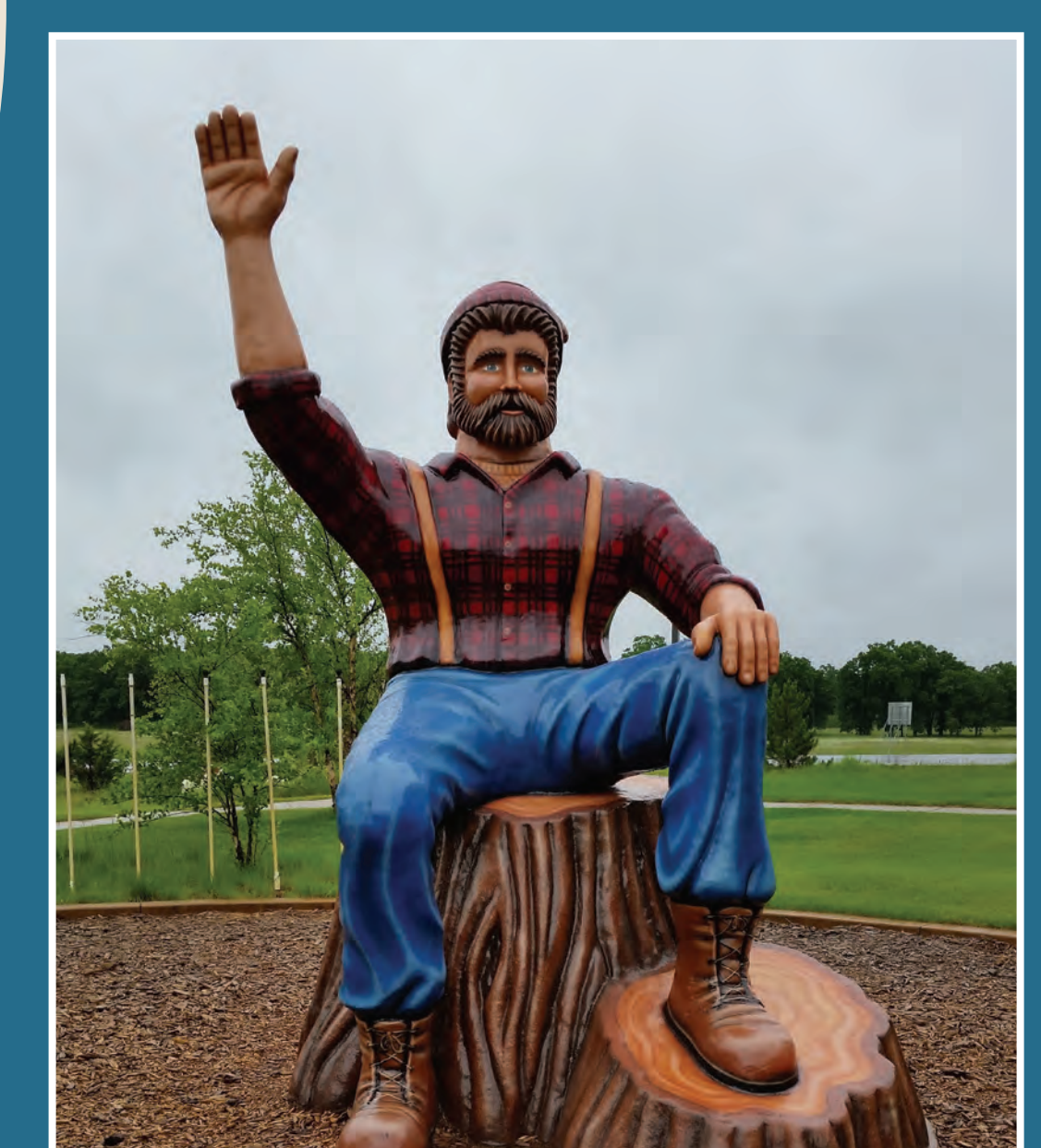
Explore the historical routes inspired by the River. Grand Rapids, Aitkin, the towns of Cuyuna Range, Brainerd, and Little Falls will be your hosts.



Soo Line Bridge, Palisade

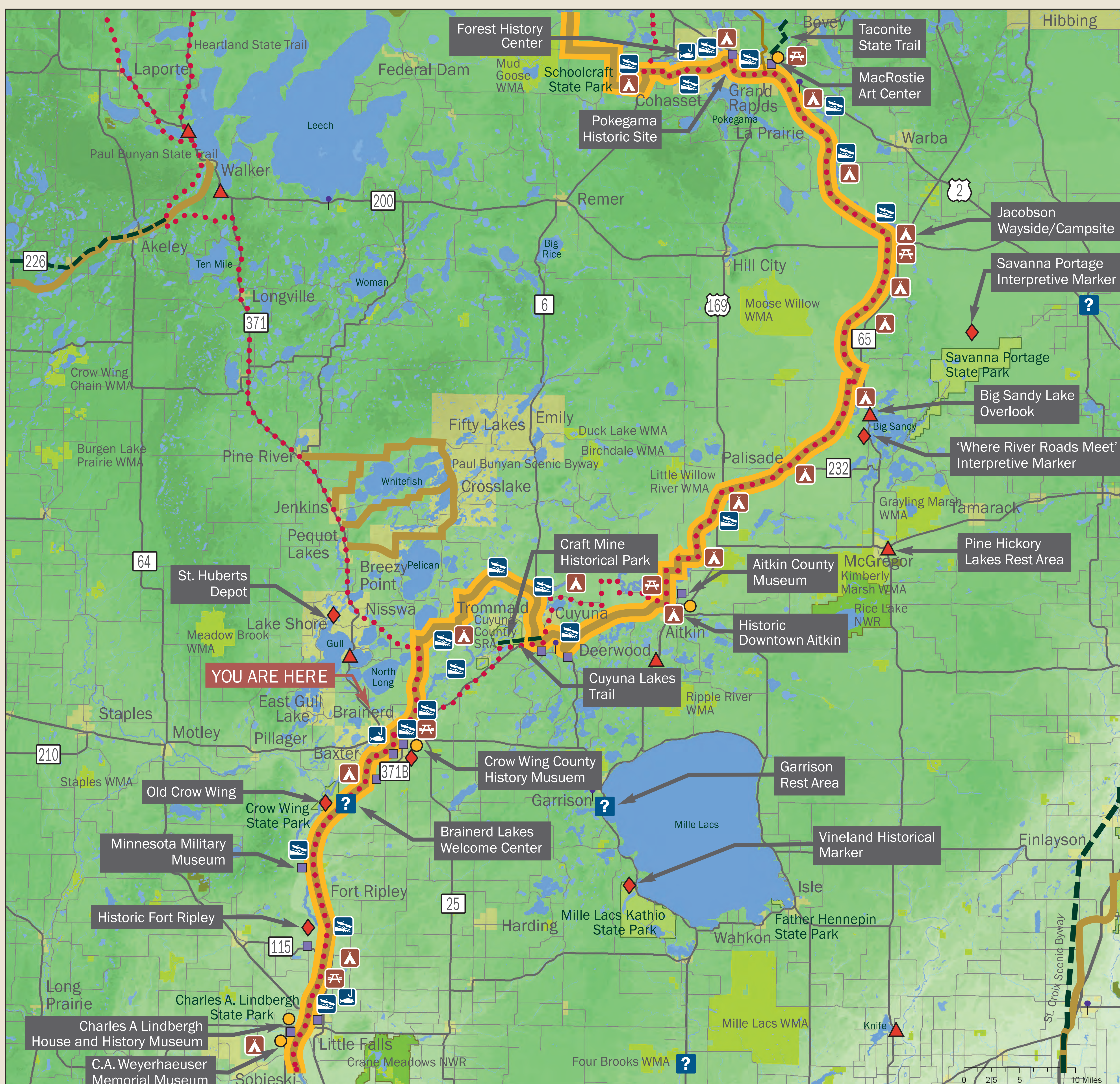
The worst mining disaster in Minnesota history occurred on the Cuyuna range on February 5, 1924 at the Milford Mine when a tunnel being blasted too close to a lake caused water to flood the mine and kill 41 miners.

The Red River Ox Cart Trail, the primary trading route between St. Paul and Winnipeg in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, crossed the Mississippi River at Crow Wing, now Crow Wing State Park.



Brainerd Lakes Welcome Center

### Destination Area: Mississippi Crossings



Explore the Great River Road and the Mississippi River Trail by following the routes marked by these signs:



Funding provided by FHWA National Scenic Byways, National Park Service, and Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission







Online at [www.mnmississippiriver.com](http://www.mnmississippiriver.com)

## Brainerd, a Mississippi River Trail Community

**F**rom the 1840s through the 1860s, the old town of Crow Wing, seven miles to the southwest of Brainerd, was the principal settlement in the area. That changed in the 1870s when the Northern Pacific Railway constructed its main line bridge over the Mississippi River here. For many years, Brainerd was predominantly a railroad town, it but became an important lumber, paper, and agricultural center. Today, the city is a major employment center and is a part of the Brainerd Lakes region, one of Minnesota's most popular vacation destinations.



Soo Line Bridge in Palisade

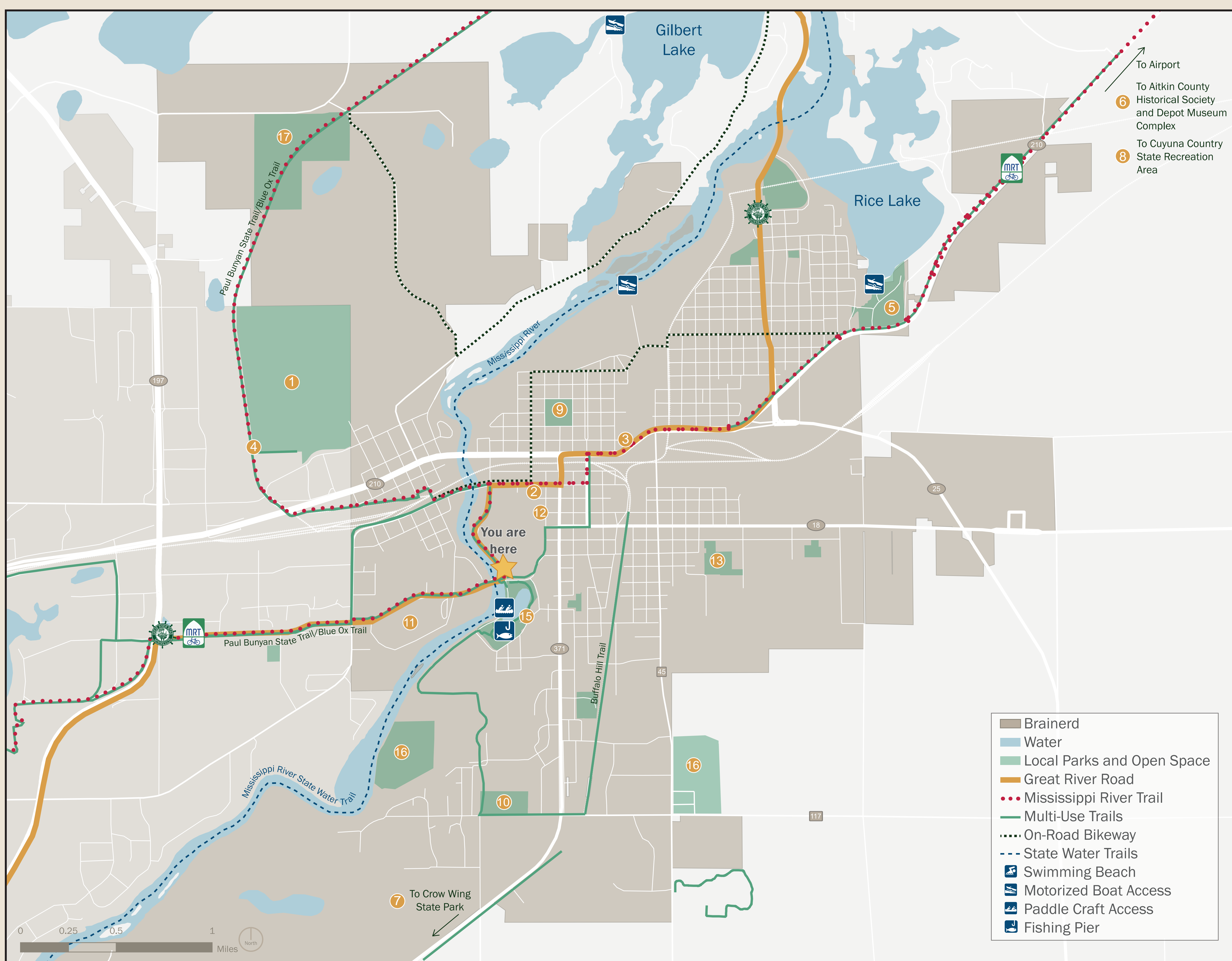
### River Facts

From its headwaters to this point, the Mississippi River meandered north and east and finally south again, sorting out its course through a glacially swept terrain. Around Brainerd, it assumes what is called a dendritic, or tree-like, drainage pattern. Small streams flow into tributaries and the main river channel, similar to the branches and trunk of a tree.

### Did you know?

Steamboats traveled this section of the river as early as 1858, a dozen years before Brainerd was founded, until the late 1800s. Just north of this sign along the trail is an informational marker identifying the location of one of Brainerd's steamboat landings.

### ▼ The City of Brainerd



### Attractions

- |   |  |                   |
|---|--|-------------------|
| 1 Northland Arboretum                                       | 7 Crow Wing State Park                 | 13 Jaycees Park   |
| 2 Crow Wing County Historical Society Museum                | 8 Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area | 14 Rotary Park    |
| 3 Franklin Arts Center                                      | 9 Gregory Park                         | 15 Kiwanis Park   |
| 4 Paul Bunyan State Trail                                   | 10 Buffalo Hills Park                  | 16 Fairgrounds    |
| 5 Lum Park  | 11 Central Lakes College               | 17 Trailside Park |
| 6 Aitkin County Historical Society and Depot Museum Complex | 12 Brainerd Public Library             |                   |

### Biking on the Mississippi River Trail (MRT)



Brainerd welcomes bicyclists to explore their community and the river! The MRT offers opportunities for visitors to bicycle short loops of an hour or less as well as trips along the full length of the Mississippi River.

### Route Profile

- ▶ The MRT has something for everyone within Minnesota—but not all segments are appropriate for all types of users.
- ▶ The on-road segments are suitable for experienced bicyclists comfortable sharing the road with traffic.
- ▶ The off-road segments on paths and trails are generally suitable for bicyclists of all abilities.
- ▶ As of 2015, all Clearwater Co., some Hennepin Co., and all Minneapolis park segments are not signed. Please refer to Dept. of Transportation route maps.

### Basic Equipment



- ▶ The Minnesota MRT travels through urban and rural settings.
- ▶ Always carry necessities, such as drinking water, tools, parts and proper clothing.
- ▶ Most bicycles will work just fine for bicycling the entire length of the MRT; however, mountain bikes might be more appropriate for gravel sections of the route in Aitkin Co.

Explore the Great River Road and the Mississippi River Trail by following the routes marked by these signs:



Funding provided by FHWA National Scenic Byways, National Park Service, and Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission





# Join us, on Minnesota's Great River Road!

Is Mississippi River exploration a part of your life? How can this river experience be improved and sustained? The journey of developing a new Corridor Management Plan for Minnesota's Great River Road, National Scenic Byway of the Mississippi River, is underway, and you're invited to join in this adventure. **Please meet us at:**

## Boom Island Park Picnic Shelter

724 Sibley St. NE  
Minneapolis, MN 56413

MONDAY, JULY 21  
4:00 – 6:00PM

## Diamond Point Park Pavilion

1700 Birchmont Dr. NE  
Bemidji, MN 56601

MONDAY, JULY 28  
4:00 – 6:00PM

## Riverside Park Picnic Shelter

1800 Kilian Blvd.  
St. Cloud, MN 56301

WEDNESDAY, JULY 23  
4:00 – 6:00PM

## KAXE Rotary Tent

260 NE 2nd St.  
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

TUESDAY, JULY 29  
4:00 – 6:00PM

## Minnesota Marine Art Museum

800 Riverview Dr.  
Winona, MN 55987

THURSDAY, JULY 24  
3:30 – 5:30PM

## Lum Park Picnic Shelter

1619 Washington St.  
Brainerd, MN 56401

WEDNESDAY, JULY 30  
4:00 – 6:00PM

*\*All events will occur from 4:00 – 6:00PM, except the Winona event, which will take place from 3:30-5:30PM.*

To request an ASL or foreign language interpreter, call 651-366-4720. To request other reasonable accommodations, call 651-366-4718 (TTY, Voice or ASCII), or email your request to [ADArequest.dot@state.mn.us](mailto:ADArequest.dot@state.mn.us)

*This project is made possible in part by funding from America's Byways Program and the US National Park Service*



## MINNESOTA Great River Road CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLAN

The CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLAN is being developed by the Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Minnesota and the Minnesota Department of Transportation, with the help of partners.

This project will help provide and promote a superior Great River Road travel experience and improve quality of life locally, while maintaining existing resources and setting priorities for investment and marketing.

Kimley»Horn



### WHAT TO EXPECT

- Learn about the Great River Road and what has been accomplished along it
- Identify your favorite stops and destinations along the Great River Road
- Share what types of travel experiences you value along the Great River Road
- Write about why the river is important to you
- Share your ideas on amenities and facilities that should be developed in the future

### SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS!

Please visit the project website and social media for more information on the open houses and other opportunities to help us make the byway the best it can be.





## FIELD TEAM UPDATES

# Resource Inventory

### INTRINSIC RESOURCE

Archaeological	<b>25</b>	Historic	<b>198</b>	Recreational	<b>502</b>
Cultural	<b>81</b>	Natural	<b>151</b>	Scenic	<b>144</b>

### RESOURCE TYPE

Agritourism	<b>1</b>	Historic Site	<b>9</b>	Recreation Area	<b>9</b>
Beach	<b>9</b>	Interpretive Marker	<b>20</b>	Regional Park	<b>15</b>
Boat Access	<b>155</b>	Multimodal Hub	<b>5</b>	Rest Area	<b>24</b>
Bridge	<b>27</b>	Museum	<b>60</b>	Scenic Overlook	<b>17</b>
Byway Intersection	<b>10</b>	National Forest	<b>1</b>	Scientific and Natural Area	<b>19</b>
Campground	<b>22</b>	National Park	<b>2</b>	State Park	<b>18</b>
Campsite (Water Trail)	<b>43</b>	National Park	<b>2</b>	Tourist Information Center	<b>24</b>
City Park	<b>82</b>	Native American Sites	<b>2</b>	Trailhead	<b>31</b>
County Park	<b>17</b>	Other	<b>15</b>	Tribal Lands	<b>1</b>
Dam	<b>24</b>	Park Preserve	<b>13</b>	Visitor Center	<b>8</b>
Fishing Pier	<b>12</b>	Picnic Area	<b>10</b>	Wildlife Area	<b>15</b>
Forest	<b>24</b>	Public Art	<b>9</b>		



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## Minnesota Great River Road CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLAN



This project is made possible in part by funding from America's Byways Program and the US National Park Service





## Mississippi River Geotourism Program Join us in participating!

### Overview

- The Mississippi River Parkway Commission is pleased to participate in a National Geographic-branded initiative focused on promotion of Mississippi River geotourism aiming to “sustain or enhance the geographical character of the river – its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and the well-being of its residents.”
- The effort is led by the Mississippi River Geotourism Council and Mississippi River Connections Collaborative which includes the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Mississippi River Trail, Inc.. A website is being developed by the National Geographic Maps Division.
- Geotourism encompasses a range of travel opportunities including culture, heritage, history, food, nature, the outdoors, water, music and arts.
- The Mississippi River Geotourism Program seeks to promote the culture, heritage and ecological diversity of the people and places that are connected to the Mississippi River through the voices and stories of the people that live along its shores. The National Geographic Society and its partners are working with local organizations, businesses and residents to map travel experiences, stories and businesses along the Mississippi River. All are invited to recommend historic, cultural and natural landmarks; events, attractions and activities; businesses, artisans and storytellers, and local legends who capture the river’s unique character, heritage and beauty.

### Great River Road/Mississippi River Parkway Commission Involvement

- The National Ten-State Mississippi River Parkway Commission is a Mississippi River Geotourism Program partner.
- The Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Minnesota is nominating the Minnesota Great River Road for inclusion in the Mississippi River Geotourism Website, and will help spread the word to partners up and down the river encouraging local communities and representatives to nominate their unique and special attractions. We want to make sure Minnesota is well represented, as the Headwaters State, and home of 575 miles of Great River Road! We will also follow up with nominators regarding ways our byway corridor management plan can help facilitate our mutual success.

### Invitation to Participate and Spread the Word

- This project is looking for nominations on what is unique and authentic about the Mississippi River region. Please consider nominating your favorite sites and stories to the website. Nominating is free of charge.
- The scope of the Mississippi River Geotourism Program includes the people and places within every county that touches the river along its entire length.
- For more information about the project and to nominate visit [MississippiRiver.NatGeoTourism.com](http://MississippiRiver.NatGeoTourism.com).
- The website is user friendly and your nomination shouldn't take long, probably less than an hour in many cases, especially if you have a description and photographs ready to go. You'll be asked to set up an account and then enter text, media (at least one of the following - photos, video, sound, and/or pdf file), contact information and identify your location on a map. When setting up your account, be sure to check the box saying that you want to nominate places.
- Nomination guidelines are attached. We hope you'll nominate your site by October 1, 2015 and share with others who may be interested.
- If you have questions or would like more information, please contact: Chris Miller, Mississippi River Parkway Commission of MN, [info@mnmississippiriver.com](mailto:info@mnmississippiriver.com), or 651-341-4196.