

Dear Culture and Heritage Committee,

My name is Andy Fowler, and I am the fisheries biologist responsible for managing the Fairport Fish Hatchery for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, located along the Mississippi River near Muscatine, Iowa. I am writing to express my strong support for the Friends of the Fairport Fish Hatchery in their application to designate the hatchery as a Great River Road Interpretive Center.

The Fairport Fish Hatchery has played a vital role in Iowa's conservation and fish production efforts for over a century. Originally established as a biological research station to study the reproduction of freshwater mussels—once essential to Muscatine's pearl button industry—the facility has since evolved into a modern hatchery. It currently operates 20 ponds across nearly 18 acres, producing species such as Walleye, Bluegill, and Northern Pike to support Iowa's rivers, lakes, and ponds. As part of the DNR's Mississippi River Fisheries Management team, we also conduct biological surveys, restore aquatic habitat, and provide public outreach and educational programming. This dual mission of fish culture and education makes the hatchery an ideal candidate for interpretive center designation.

Over the past several years, the Friends of the Fairport Fish Hatchery have made remarkable strides in enhancing the site's historical, educational, and recreational value. Their efforts have led to the creation of two interpretive trails that guide visitors through key features of the hatchery, including former lab buildings, ponds, and historic infrastructure. They have also constructed a pedestrian bridge and an educational pavilion—both incorporating materials from the original historic pumphouse—installed educational signage, and hosted numerous community events. In partnership with DNR staff, they have added a timeline marker, developed trail brochures, and are planning future improvements, including an observation deck.

In my role as hatchery manager, I have had the opportunity to work closely with the Friends group. Their dedication, professionalism, and shared vision have transformed the hatchery into a meaningful public resource and a welcoming destination for visitors of all ages.

The Friends group has also built strong connections between the hatchery and the broader community, engaging hundreds of volunteers from organizations such as United Way, Boy Scouts, 4-H clubs, FFA chapters, and the University of Iowa. These partnerships have supported trail maintenance, habitat improvements, educational programming, and facility upgrades. Their ability to mobilize youth groups, civic organizations, and service clubs has fostered a strong sense of local stewardship and made the hatchery a true community asset.

I fully support their application and believe the Fairport Fish Hatchery is exceptionally well-suited to join the network of Great River Road Interpretive Centers. This designation would provide well-deserved recognition of the site's historical and ecological significance while expanding its role as a hub for conservation, education, and public engagement.

Sincerely,



Andy Fowler



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



To Whom It May Concern:

As the Mayor of Muscatine and President & CEO of the Greater Muscatine Chamber of Commerce & Industry, I am pleased to offer my enthusiastic support for the Friends of Fairport Fish Hatchery's application to be designated as an Interpretive Center on the Great River Road. This designation will significantly enhance the educational and eco-tourism opportunities in Muscatine County, benefiting our community and visitors alike.

The Fairport Fish Hatchery offers a wealth of informational and educational opportunities. Its two interpretive trails—featuring 9 signs on the North Trail and 10 signs on the South Trail, some with QR codes linking to approximately 25 educational videos—provide engaging insights into the region's natural and cultural history. The Educational Pavilion, with its 12 detailed 3' x 4' panels, a 6' x 2' timeline, and two artifact display cases (with a third soon to be added), showcases artifacts from archaeological investigations of the former biological station's living quarters. These resources offer visitors a unique opportunity to explore the area's heritage. The North Trail guides visitors through a forested hillside rich with archaeological ruins, while the South Trail provides access to the operational side of the hatchery, including fishponds and the reservoir, fostering a deeper understanding of aquaculture and environmental stewardship.

The Friends of Fairport Fish Hatchery have played a pivotal role in advancing eco-tourism in Muscatine County. Their efforts have created a destination that attracts visitors, supports local businesses, and promotes sustainable tourism. By highlighting the region's natural beauty and historical significance, the hatchery strengthens our community's identity as a hub for environmental education and outdoor recreation.

Designation as an Interpretive Center on the Great River Road will amplify these benefits, drawing more visitors and fostering collaboration among our organizations. This recognition will enhance the hatchery's visibility and reinforce Muscatine's commitment to preserving its natural and cultural assets for future generations.

Thank you for your dedication to this project. I wholeheartedly support the Friends of Fairport Fish Hatchery's application and encourage all stakeholders to join in celebrating this opportunity to elevate our community.

Be Your Best!!!

Dr. Brad Bark

Mayor of the City of Muscatine
President & CEO of the Greater Muscatine Chamber of Commerce & Industry

DR. BRAD BARK, City of Muscatine | bbark@muscatineiowa.gov | (563) 264-1550

DR. BRAD BARK, GMCCI | bbark@muscatine.com | (563) 263-8895

June 30, 2025

Dear Mississippi River Parkway Commission:

On behalf of the Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine, I am honored to offer this letter of support for the Friends of Fairport Fish Hatchery's application to be designated as an Interpretive Center on the Great River Road.

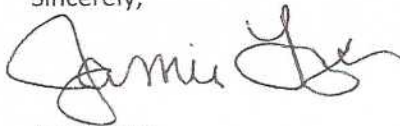
Located directly along Iowa Highway 22, a scenic stretch of the Great River Road between Muscatine and Davenport, the Fairport Fish Hatchery offers a uniquely immersive experience that blends the ecological, cultural, and industrial history of the Mississippi River. The Friends of Fairport Fish Hatchery (FFFH) have transformed this site into a powerful educational resource through the development of two interpretive trails, an Educational Pavilion, artifact displays, and QR-code-enabled videos.

Their interpretive efforts highlight the critical relationship between mussels and fish, the environmental legacy of the pearl button industry, and the ongoing restoration of aquatic ecosystems. The site invites visitors to explore areas rich with archaeological features from the former biological station and to experience the operational side of an active fish hatchery—offering a rare combination of past and present, learning and action.

The hatchery's location along the Great River Road makes it a natural and strategic addition to the network of Interpretive Centers. It has already become a point of pride for Muscatine County and an emerging destination for eco-tourism, school field trips, and outdoor learning experiences. FFFH's thoughtful, community-driven approach aligns fully with the values and vision of the Great River Road.

We strongly support their application and believe this designation will amplify the important work already happening at the Fairport Fish Hatchery, while enhancing the collective impact of the Great River Road's interpretive sites.

Sincerely,



Jamie Leza
Vice President, Operations
jleza@givinggreater.org

CFNS
**ACCREDITED
FOUNDATION**



National Pearl Button Museum

@ The History and Industry Center

Muscatine, Iowa

June 20th 2025

Dear Culture and Heritage Committee,

My name is Dustin Joy, and I am the Director of the National Pearl Button Museum in Muscatine, IA, an official Great River Road Interpretive Center. I am an enthusiastic supporter of the Parkway Commission's work. Our association with the Great River Road has benefited our museum and our town in many ways. We appreciate the opportunity to tell the unique, interesting, and important history of the pearl button industry to travelers from around the world.

I write today to offer my support for the application of Friends of the Fairport Fish Hatchery to become a Great River Road Interpretive Center, also. The Fairport Hatchery, originally the Fairport Biological Station, played a unique and interesting role in the history of the pearl button industry. The Fairport station was one of the first substantive efforts at what we might call environmental research, giving us a better understanding of these fascinating creatures at the center of the button industry. Later, the Fairport station housed German prisoners-of-war, a little-known part of Iowa's World War II heritage.

I have worked with Sandy Stevens, Jim Elias, and Paul Carroll of the Friends group for many years. Their hard work and dedication have turned Fairport into a historical destination, which buttresses the work we do here. The Friends group, and the hundreds of volunteers they have motivated, have spent thousands of hours to preserve, improve, and interpret the history of this site. They have built hiking trails, featuring beautiful signage and a bridge incorporating materials from the old hatchery pumphouse. They have installed an excellent educational pavilion, with artifacts and informational panels, telling the story of the hatchery. And they have carried out extensive archaeological work on the field station site, preserving this valuable history for future generations. The Friends group has made the Fairport Hatchery one of the must-see destinations along the Great River Road in Muscatine County.

I hope you will approve the application of the Fairport Fish Hatchery to help us tell these important stories. We feel that they would be an excellent complement to the story we tell at the pearl button museum. The Hatchery would support our work and fill a different niche in education about the Mississippi River.

Thank you,

Dustin Joy
National Pearl Button Museum
117 W. 2nd St. Muscatine, IA 52761
(563)263-1052

6/30/2025

Great River Road Interpretive Center

To whom it may concern,

I, Park Ranger Ben Marcus, and the other Wildcat Den State Park Staff formally endorse the application that the Friends of the Fairport Fish Hatchery (FFFH) will be submitting to be an official Interpretive Center on the Great River Road. This Friends Group has been very eager and motivated to get the Historical Fish Hatchery more accessible for public visitors to have a hands-on experience learning about what has taken place at the Fish Hatchery. They have done this by establishing an interpretive trail system with kiosks and signage, as well as creating an entrance informational building. They are continuing to find ways to further improve the Fish Hatchery for both the State and for the visitors that drive along IA Hwy 22, in Muscatine County, IA.

I am confident that the work that the FFFH completed and will continue to do will be a great addition to the Great River Road Interpretive Center.



Ben Marcus, Park Ranger

Wildcat Den State Park
1884 Wildcat Den Rd.
Muscatine, IA 52761

July 3, 2025



414 E 3rd St, Suite 101, Muscatine, IA 52761

To those interested:

Re: Letter of Support from Muscatine County Historic Preservation Commission

FRIENDS of FAIRPORT FISH HATCHERY (FFFH) is associated with the Muscatine County Historic Preservation Commission (MCHPC) and is a 501(c)3 organization within the framework of the Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine (CFGM). The MCHPC is supportive of and appreciates the ongoing efforts of FFFH as they relate to the rich history of the Fairport Fish Hatchery.

FFFH's MISSION is challenging and valuable to our county-wide efforts: (1) Preserve historic resources and support historical and scientific research at the hatchery; (2) Educate visitors about the history of the hatchery and ties to the pearl button industry, (3) inform visitors of importance of mussels to improve water quality and conservation of natural resources; (4) promote eco-tourism and visitors to the hatchery.

Accomplishments of FFFH are monumental: Over the last four years, FFFH achieved their goals through hard work, dedication, public outreach, hundreds of volunteers, thousands of volunteer hours, and grants and donations totaling \$190,000. An educational Pavilion was designed and constructed, and currently displays nine interpretative panels, timeline and artifact case. Two interpretative trail systems with signage were formulated and are used by the public to get an overview of the 115-year old facility and its connection to the button industry of Muscatine and beyond. School children from the surrounding region are using the entire historic features plus the on-going fish propagation facilities of Iowa DNR as an outdoor classroom. Volunteers from local industry and schools have been and continue to be engaged in partnership with FFFH and Iowa DNR to maintain and improve documentation of the Fairport Fish Hatchery history.

The Muscatine County Historic Preservation Commission continues to be very supportive of the Friends of Fairport Fish Hatchery and appreciates their tireless efforts to uncover history and to showcase it to local adults and children as well as visitors to the region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chris Brase", is written over a horizontal line.

Chris Brase, Chair person
MCHPC Commission



United States Department of the Interior

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge
10728 County Road X-61
Wapello, IA 52653



July 7, 2025

To whom it may concern,

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service strongly supports the Friends of Fairport Fish Hatchery's request to be designated as an Interpretive Center on the Great River Road. This site offers many great educational opportunities spanning history, archeology, commercial industries, conservation, and biology. Specifically, they offer an educational pavilion with signage and QR code videos, timeline signage of the hatchery, and artifact displays that showcase artifacts collected from archeological investigations conducted at the former biological station's site.

They also offer many great informational opportunities. These include 2 interpretive trails (North and South Trail) that offer 9-10 informational signs per trail that include QR codes that lead to videos. The North Trail offers a walk through a forested hillside full of archeological ruins and the South Trail offers a walk through the working portion side of the hatchery, including fish-rearing ponds and a reservoir.

Designating the Friends of Fairport Fish Hatchery site as an Interpretive Center along the Great River Road will allow them to continue educating the public on this historically significant biological and archeological site while also emphasizing the ongoing science and conservation of fish, mussels, and other species. This designation could also promote and enhance public engagement opportunities as the organization strives to establish and achieve new goals that foster local appreciation and promote eco-tourism at the hatchery.

Thank you for considering this letter of support. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions you may have.

With Appreciation,

Ron Knopik, Refuge Manager

TO: Great River Road

It is with pleasure that I recommend adding the Fairport Fish Hatchery (Muscatine, IA) to the Great River Road. I am president of Friends of Pine Creek Grist Mill, another historic site on the Great River Road. The Mill is a 4 mile drive from the Hatchery.

The nearness of the Hatchery to the Mill should be attractive to visitors. That nearness opens the possibility of families, tour groups, and school classes easily visiting both sites in a day.

The Hatchery site includes two trails with interpretive signs. One is a walk thru the hidden (and unknown to locals) Living Quarters village site for staff of the Hatchery. Another interpretive trail is thru the working portion of the research facility. The new Educational Pavilion museum tells the story of the Hatchery and the pearl button industry. Unknown to most locals was the World War II German prisoner of war camp at the Hatchery site.

The Hatchery was little known to me until I attended an Earth Day activity there this spring. As a person who is interested in history and archaeology there is much to learn there. A walking tour to the hidden remains of the research center staff living quarters was an interesting surprise. A later visit to the working portion of the hatchery site was interesting to my wife and myself.

Tom Hanifan
President
Friends of Pine Creek Grist Mill
563-554-4228
tomhanifan@yahoo.com