



MRPC Board of Directors Meeting

MINUTES of June 12, 2026

Virtual Attendance

- John Anfinson, MN (Pilot)
- Anne Lewis, MN (proxy)
- Senator Karin Housley, MN
- Kris Sampson, WI (proxy)
- Francis Schelfhout, Transportation
- Katie Hammond, IA
- Mark Kross, MO
- John Young, KY
- Derick Biglane, MS (Treasurer)
- Sharon Calcote, LA
- Sabrina Chandler, ERA
- Pat Audirsch, AR, Culture and Heritage
- Susanne Thiede-Barnet – National Office

The Pilot called the June 12, 2026, meeting to order at approximately 9:02 am. A quorum of eight states was confirmed.

Approval of Minutes

Anne Lewis (MN) moved to approve the March 13 minutes of the prior meeting. Second by Sharon Calcote (LA). Motion approved.

Financial Report

Treasurer Derick Biglane (MS) presented financial statements through May 2026:

- Balance Sheet: Checking and money market balances remain strong. Approximately \$100,000 of the \$150,000 in 2026 state assessments has been received, leaving approximately \$50,000 in accounts receivable. Total assets were approximately \$313,000. A current liability of approximately \$1,920

represents interest from the Dubuque fund that is available for expenditure during 2026, generally for marketing. Total equity was approximately \$310,000.

- State Assessments: Two-thirds of state assessments have been received. Illinois' payment has been approved and is expected shortly. Mississippi will be invoiced after July 1 in accordance with its fiscal year and expects payment by approximately August 1.
- Expenses: Expenses remained generally consistent with budget. Items noted included the annual Zoom subscription and \$115 in legal expenses related to the Mississippi River Trail (MRT) project. Regular expenses included social advertising, website hosting, accounting and the National Office retainer.
- Actual vs. Budget: Map donations and interest income were tracking close to budget projections. Expenses were under budget and generally at or below 50% of annual allocations at this point in the year. Total expenses through May were approximately \$32,000, with the organization showing a net positive of approximately \$71,000.

The Pilot noted that 2026 has been one of the stronger recent years for timely receipt of state assessments.

Derick Biglane moved to accept the financial statements as presented. Second by Senator Karin Housley (MN). Motion approved.

Joint National Scenic Byway Conference – October 6–8, 2026

The National Office provided an update on the joint MRPC/National Scenic Byway Association conference in West Memphis, Arkansas.

Approximately 25 people were registered at the time of the meeting, with total attendance anticipated at approximately 200–250. Members were encouraged to register and reserve lodging as early as possible to assist with planning and ensure availability at the conference hotel.

The agenda is available on the member site and has been promoted through the Q2 newsletter and biweekly conference communications. The National Scenic Byway Association continues to pursue sponsorships to support conference programming.

The Southland Casino Hotel will serve as the primary lodging location, with shuttle transportation to conference activities at the West Memphis Civic Center and Auditorium.

Members were reminded that the MRPC Board meeting will begin at noon on Tuesday, October 6, earlier than the traditional meeting time. The MRPC General Session will begin at 1:30 pm and continue through the afternoon, followed by the evening welcome reception.

The Pilot noted the significant networking opportunity presented by bringing MRPC members together with representatives of other scenic byways from throughout the country. The National Office noted that this will be the first national gathering of scenic byways since 2011.

Organizational Identity – Great River Road/MRPC

Following discussion by the Marketing Committee, Sharon Calcote (LA) recommended clarifying the organization's public-facing identity.

Members discussed the longstanding challenge of communicating the relationship between the Mississippi River Parkway Commission and the Great River Road. While the Mississippi River Parkway Commission remains the legal and organizational entity, members generally agreed that the Great River Road is the stronger and more recognizable public-facing identity for tourism, partnerships, sponsorships and conference promotion.

The Board also discussed the need to retain the Mississippi River Parkway Commission name because of state legislation and existing organizational structures.

Sharon Calcote moved that the name of the corporation shall remain the Mississippi River Parkway Commission, doing business as the Great River Road. Second by Mark Kross (MO). Motion approved with no opposition.

Potential future revisions to the bylaws will be addressed through the appropriate process.

Great River Road Logo Use Policy

The Board discussed expanding use of the national 10-state Great River Road logo by outside organizations.

Historically, MRPC has limited use of the national logo primarily to organizations and activities in which MRPC was directly involved. The Marketing Committee recommended allowing broader use when doing so supports the organization's mission and increases visibility for the Great River Road.

The proposed policy would:

- Allow nonprofit and tourism-related organizations to request use of the logo, with requests reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the Executive Committee.
- Require approved users to follow established logo standards and link to the Great River Road website.
- Prohibit alteration, manipulation or incorporation of the Great River Road logo into another organization's logo.

- Continue to generally prohibit for-profit businesses from using the logo simply to manufacture and sell Great River Road merchandise for their own profit.
- Allow consideration of other appropriate for-profit uses aligned with the organization's mission, with a proposed \$100 usage fee.

Anne Lewis (MN) recommended adding provisions establishing the approved duration of logo use and minimum clear space around the logo to prevent it from being visually combined with other marks or language. The National Office agreed to incorporate both provisions.

Anne Lewis moved to provisionally approve the proposed logo use policy, with the additions discussed, allowing the policy to be implemented immediately. Second by Sharon Calcote (LA). Motion approved.

National Scenic Byway Day – September 22

The National Scenic Byway Association has established September 22 as National Scenic Byway Day and invited MRPC to participate.

The date falls during MRPC's annual Drive the Great River Road Month, providing an opportunity to coordinate national scenic byway promotion with existing Great River Road marketing.

Sharon Calcote (LA) moved that MRPC co-sponsor National Scenic Byway Day with the National Scenic Byway Association and pay the approximately \$75 fee associated with expanding the virtual event capacity. Second by Anne Lewis (MN). Motion approved.

2026 Work Plan

The Pilot recommended several additions and updates to the 2026 Work Plan:

- Add National Mississippi River Day.
- Add National Scenic Byway Day under marketing.
- Add MR100 planning for 2027, recognizing the 100th anniversary of the 1927 Mississippi River flood.
- Add the newly approved Great River Road logo use initiative.

Transportation Committee

Francis Schelfhout (WI DOT) provided updates on the Mississippi River Trail (MRT), U.S. Bicycle Route designations and Interpretive Center signage.

The National Office has incorporated MRT references into the Great River Road website and resubmitted materials requested as part of the ongoing trademark/legal process.

Wisconsin transportation staff are coordinating with counterpart states regarding U.S. Bicycle Route numbering along the MRT. The emerging approach would use U.S. Bicycle Route 45 on the west side of the Mississippi River and U.S. Bicycle Route 43 on the east side to avoid duplicate route numbering.

Work also continues on Interpretive Center assessments and signage standards. Arkansas assessments were scheduled, and Wisconsin's informal assessments have largely been completed. The goal is to use the assessments to develop updated Corridor Management Plan language establishing levels of signage support. Francis hopes to have a draft CMP amendment available for Board consideration in the fall.

Approximately \$4,500 was budgeted for Transportation Committee work in 2026, primarily related to legal expenses, with approximately \$184 spent to date. The National Office will follow up with legal counsel regarding the status of the MRT work.

Marketing Committee

Sharon Calcote (LA) reported that Louisiana will participate in the Tourism Expo in Japan and a related tourism mission. The Great River Road will be promoted as a full 10-state experience to Japanese media and travel professionals rather than solely as a Louisiana product.

Environment, Recreation and Agriculture Committee

The Pilot reported that the committee continues to consider topics including pollinators, invasive carp and other biological and agricultural issues affecting the Mississippi River corridor.

The National Office reminded members that National Pollinator Week is approaching and that promotional materials are available on the member site.

Sabrina Chandler (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service) later joined the meeting and shared an America 250-related initiative on the Upper Mississippi River. The Upper Mississippi River Relay encourages visitors to travel to participating river sites, photograph designated features and visit participating Interpretive Centers to receive a commemorative patch. Participating locations include the Driftless Area Education and Visitor Center in Lansing, Iowa; Genoa National Fish Hatchery; and the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge Visitor Center.

Culture and Heritage Committee

The Pilot reported that the committee reviewed plans for the October national conference and encouraged Interpretive Centers to participate.

Discovery Park of America has offered free admission and other benefits to conference attendees traveling to West Memphis who stop at the attraction en route. Members were encouraged to consider similar opportunities at Interpretive Centers throughout the corridor.

The committee also discussed National Mississippi River Day and opportunities to build on the annual promotion.

USA TODAY Best Scenic Drive

The Great River Road was again named the No. 1 Best Scenic Drive in the United States in the USA TODAY 10Best Readers' Choice Awards, marking the second consecutive year it received the top ranking.

The Pilot noted that the back-to-back wins demonstrate the reach and engagement of the Great River Road's partners, Interpretive Centers, members and supporters. The National Office will explore whether USA TODAY can provide aggregate information about participation or voting that could help MRPC better understand and leverage that audience.

Anne Lewis noted the important role consistent Great River Road highway signage plays in maintaining awareness of the route throughout the 10 states.

Summer Showcase

The Board discussed the success of the first virtual Great River Road Summer Showcase, held June 1.

More than 40 people participated, with approximately a dozen presenters representing Interpretive Centers and Great River Road partners. The program provided an opportunity for Interpretive Centers and state representatives to share current projects, programs and visitor experiences.

The Pilot and National Office noted that the Showcase generated strong participation despite a relatively short promotional period and could serve as the annual virtual replacement for MRPC's former in-person semi-annual meeting. The format will be refined to keep future programs focused and on schedule.

State Updates

Missouri – Mark Kross:

Missouri continues working with MoDOT on a corrected digital map of the Great River Road. Once complete, the updated information will be shared with MRPC and consideration will be given to how corrected route information is distributed to outside mapping and travel organizations.

Wisconsin – Kris Sampson:

Wisconsin launched an updated Great River Road website in May and has received positive feedback. A new printed guide has also generated significant requests. Kris Sampson introduced himself as Sherry Quamme's successor as chair of the Wisconsin MRPC.

Iowa – Katie Hammond:

Two newer Iowa Interpretive Centers still need national Great River Road Interpretive Center signs. Recent pricing indicated that complete signs may now cost more than \$1,000 each, substantially higher than previous costs. The National Office will obtain updated pricing, explore alternatives and coordinate the summer order for signage needed throughout the 10 states.

National Office Updates

The National Office reported that an amended application for the 10-state Great River Road National Scenic Byway grant had been submitted. The revised request includes funding for a new website, app, updated marketing and a national map reprint.

The original application was submitted through Tennessee in December 2024. Because federal priorities had changed, the application was substantially revised to better address the new criteria. The amended application was submitted by the Great River Road before the deadline.

Members were reminded of upcoming deadlines:

- Stewardship Award nominations – July 1
- Distinguished Service Award nominations – August 15
- Honorary Membership nominations – August 15
- Interpretive Center annual checklists – ongoing

States were also encouraged to identify potential new Interpretive Centers and work with the Culture and Heritage Committee and National Office to begin the approval process.

The summer events campaign is underway from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Members and partners are encouraged to add events to the Great River Road website. A new America 250 event category has been added to allow visitors to search for related programming throughout the corridor.

Members were again reminded that the October Board meeting in West Memphis will begin at noon on Tuesday, October 6.

National Great River Road Map

Mark Kross (MO) asked about plans to reprint the national Great River Road map.

The National Office reported that a map reprint is not currently included in the operating budget but has been included in the amended National Scenic Byway grant request. Sponsorship opportunities have also been discussed, and other organizational funds could potentially be considered.

Existing maps remain available, but the map has not been updated in more than three years, meaning recently approved Interpretive Centers are not included. Mark will follow up with the Pilot and National Office regarding potential options.

Next Meetings

- **October 6, 2026** – Board of Directors meeting, West Memphis, Arkansas, beginning at noon as part of the joint national conference.
- **December 11, 2026** – Quarterly Board meeting.

Adjournment

Pat Audirsch (AR) moved to adjourn the meeting. Second by Mark Kross (MO). The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:35 am.