



Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission 2017-18 Annual Report August 2018



56 33rd Avenue S, #283, St. Cloud, MN, 56301 • 651-341-4196 • www.MnMississippiRiver.com

Mission

The mission of the Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission (MN-MRPC) is to preserve, promote and enhance the resources of the Mississippi River Valley and to develop the highways and amenities of the Great River Road (GRR). 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. The Minnesota Great River Road spans 565 miles, 43 communities, 20 counties, three tribes and six unique destination areas.

Commission Meetings

The MN-MRPC held regular quarterly meetings on August 31, 2017; November 9, 2017; March 15, 2018 and June 14, 2018. Executive Committee meetings were held on July 10, 2017 and January 24, 2018.

Meeting materials are available at <https://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/mrpc/mrpc.html>. Significant progress was made toward implementation of the Minnesota Great River Road Corridor Management Plan (CMP), with three of four initial implementation projects nearing completion.

Projects & Activities

Wayfinding Signage: The full 565 mile MN Great River Road and five other Minnesota scenic byways are being fully resigned in 2018. Sign installation began in spring 2018 with completion planned prior to Drive the Great River Road Month in September 2018. Funding and project management was provided by MN Department of Transportation, with matching funds from the MN Department of Natural Resources. The Great River Road sign inventory from the CMP is attached, highlighting the need for and importance of the signage. Wayfinding signage was one of four initial CMP implementation projects identified.

Plan Your Trip & Plan Your Project Interactive Mapping Tools: New Plan Your Trip and Plan Your Project Interactive Mapping Tools were developed for the MN Great River Road and in beta test status as of July 2018. Plan Your Trip provides navigation and information on things to see and do along the full 565 mile route. Plan Your Project includes enhanced information for road management authorities for use as they plan and implement projects/construction along the byway. Feedback was gathered from industry professionals on preliminary drafts at the MN GIS/LIS Conference in October 2017. A demonstration was provided to the MN-MRPC in March 2018. The Plan Your Trip tool includes 700+ places to see and things to do along the Mississippi River/Great River Road along with navigation and multi-modal facility details, as well as regional travel guides for each of the six MN GRR regions. Full launch is planned for Drive the Great River Road Month (September) 2018. Plan Your Trip and Plan Your Project were two of the four initial CMP implementation projects.

Ambassador Development: A draft framework has been developed to introduce and train a wide range of corridor stakeholders on how to use the new mapping tools including public agencies who manage and promote the byway and its attractions, private businesses who serve byway traveler needs, as well as transportation planning, design, construction and maintenance staff whose work affects the byway experience. This is the fourth of four initial implementation project identified in the CMP.

Regional Meetings/Elections: Three elections were held per MN Statute 161.1419 for Commission members to represent specific regions of the Great River Road. Two elections were conducted via email due to travel and weather constraints. The Brainerd to Elk River Regional Meeting was hosted by the Charles Lindbergh House and Museum (a newly designated National GRR Interpretive Center) on February 28, 2018.

MN GRR Maps and Website: 28,000 copies were printed and shipped to 52 locations for distribution during the summer 2018 travel season. The Minnesota Great River Road website had 254,991 visits during the year – an average of 21,249 per month. Individual brochure requests and travel inquiries were answered by the MN-MRPC office and 8,870 Minnesota Great River Road Map/Travel Planners were downloaded from the website, along with over 10,000 regional map tablets. A variety of other resources and materials were also accessed often.

National Advisory Committee on Travel and Tourism Infrastructure (NACTTI): As part of Commissioner Charles Zelle's NACTTI membership MnDOT developed and distributed a survey through the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) to gather information on state DOT travel and tourism measures and application of new transportation planning requirements. 22 states responded and information is being evaluated for use by NACTTI as they develop program recommendations.

MRCTI Collaboration: MN-MRPC representatives worked with Rita Albrecht, Mayor of Bemidji MN and MRCTI member, on co-location of MRCTI and MRPC meetings in fall 2020. Both meetings will be held September 15 – 17, 2020 and joint activities are under discussion to help inform and align efforts of the groups.

The Trust for Public Land – Turning Back to Rivers Project: The Trust for Public Land is seeking funds for land acquisition and restoration projects which would impact five GRR/Mississippi River communities. Project staff presented information to the MN-MRPC, referenced the GRR Corridor Management Plan in the funding application and consulted with Commission representatives and staff prior to submitting the application. The MN-MRPC provided a letter of support for a major funding request.

Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails Commission: A representative of the MN-MRPC provided a presentation in February 2018 focused on common objectives of the Commissions and Corridor Management Plan implementation.

2017 Commissioners on Wheels Tour: As part of the MN Business First Stop initiative and fifth annual "Commissioners on Wheels Tour", eight state agency Commissioners toured SE Minnesota in September 2017 to meet with local officials and businesses and learn about issues of the region. GRR information was presented while the bus traveled the GRR in the Bluffs Region.

National MRPC: MN-MRPC members participated on MRPC Standing Committees and carried out projects at the state level. Five MN-MRPC members participated in the 2017 Annual Meeting in Marquette, IA and four members participated in the 2018 Semi-Annual Meeting in Quincy, IL. The MN-MRPC implemented and promoted Drive the Great River Road Month and Flavors of the Great River Road campaigns within the state, including news releases, social media and website promotion, and itinerary development. Details are attached. A 10-state corridor management plan is in development to focus future work of the ten state organization to which Minnesota has contributed information.

Minnesota GIS/LIS Conference: The MN-MRPC provided a keynote presentation on the Great River Road at this annual conference of 600-700 GIS professionals from around the state, October 5 – 7, 2017 in Bemidji. The presentation centered on the new MN GRR interactive mapping tools under development with a theme of "Travel the Great River Road to Find Minnesota's Sense of Place." The format was a trip down the Minnesota Great River Road aligned with the 11 National Great River Road Interpretive Themes, as well as highlighted how GIS mapping can be a tool to manage transportation assets to improve the byway experience. An exhibit booth was also staffed and feedback gathered throughout the conference to inform further development of the Plan Your Trip and Plan Your Project online mapping tools.

Mississippi Multimedia Gallery: The MN-MRPC and MnDOT continued conversations with the Center for Global Environmental Education at Hamline University regarding partnership possibilities related to the Mississippi Multimedia Gallery, a place based story telling tool featuring the full length of the Mississippi River via interactive kiosks.

Funding/Great River Road Investments and Support

The Minnesota Great River Road and its amenities are supported by several funding sources including those managed by the MN-MRPC (state operating budget) and those managed by member/partner organizations.

State Operating Budget

The MN-MRPC operated with state funding at levels allowing the Commission to continue its basic work. The budget for FY '18 was \$63,000.

MnDOT/MnDNR

MnDOT provided special project staffing in the form of a graduate student worker for final development of the Plan Your Trip and Plan Your Project Interactive Mapping Tools. Funds and project management have also been committed to sign the Great River Road and five other Minnesota byways. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has dedicated funds to the GRR signage project as required match to MnDOT funds for certain roadways.

Minnesota Transportation Alternatives Program

Local Great River Road communities sought funds for projects through the Minnesota Transportation Alternatives Program. MN-MRPC conducted outreach to local applicants, reviewed project information, approved and provided letters for seven project applications along the Great River Road. Requests totaled \$5,887,846 for a variety of projects that would improve the byway experience for visitors and residents and help implement the GRR Corridor Management Plan.

State Bonding Funds

Local Great River Road communities sought state bonding funds for projects during the 2018 legislative session. MN-MRPC conducted outreach, reviewed project information, approved and provided letters of support. Letters were provided for eight state bonding requests totaling \$100,275,000. \$26.5 million was approved for four of the projects. Applicants included two National Great River Road Interpretive Centers - Historic Fort Snelling and the National Eagle Center and both received partial funding for their projects.

Minnesota Scenic Byways Program

The annual MN Scenic Byways Workshop was held October 3 – 4 in Duluth. The Great River Road was represented on the advisory committee for development of a strategic plan for the Minnesota Scenic Byways Program, MN-MRPC members had an opportunity to review and comment, and the plan is being finalized for distribution/implementation in fall 2018. The plan will help guide and prioritize MN Scenic Byway Program management and implement the updated Memorandum of Understanding. Goals are organized under three priority areas – education, funding and communication. Three members of the MN-MRPC serve on the Scenic Byway Program Strategic Plan Committee.

Examples of Local, Regional and Partner Activities

- **Lady Slipper Scenic Byway** – The byway and its partner agencies continue to seek funding for a new pedestrian/bicycle bridge over the Mississippi River along a stretch of roadway that runs concurrently with the Great River Road. The MN-MRPC has provided letters of support for funding applications and the Commission has been actively involved with the project.
- **Grand Rapids** – The 2018 Grand Rapids Visitor Guide features the Great River Road.
- **Dayton** – The City of Dayton is working toward implementation of the Stephens Farm Master Plan, a multi-year effort to create a premier gathering place at the river. Opportunities include programs aimed at the history of the farm and Mississippi River and creation of passive and active recreational activities at the riverfront including an off-road trail that do not exist in Dayton today.
- **Dakota County** – Pine Bend Bluffs Trailhead was completed, providing bluff top views of the river and over ½ mile of shoreline and serving as primary access to the 300 acre Pine Bend Bluffs State Natural Area. The project was a partnership between Dakota County, MN DNR and the City of Inver Grove Heights. The Mississippi River Regional Trail – Rosemount West segment was completed and provides a critical Mississippi River Trail (MRT) link. Both projects utilized National Scenic Byways funding along with significant funds from other sources.
- **Frontenac** – Plans are underway to develop an Olympic quality ski jump, which is expected to draw visitors from across the country; and to redevelop Villa Maria, a historic school on the shores of Lake Pepin into a boutique hotel and event center. Considerations are also being given to reopen a sand pit and expand mining operations along Highway 61 (Great River Road). MnDOT and MN-MRPC have provided informational resources as requested by local stakeholders.
- **Cuyuna Lakes Mountain Bike Trail** – Expansion will be taking place at the Cuyuna Lakes Trails thanks to approval of state bonding funds during the 2017 legislative session.
- **Camp Ripley** – Partners have been convened for discussions on the Sentinel Landscape program, which involves land buffering military installations and using those acquisitions to facilitate recreational use as well. The Great River Road and Mississippi River Trail have been identified as opportunities to connect with visitors and residents.

- **Brainerd Riverfront Committee** – New “Mississippi Riverfront” banners installed in downtown Brainerd. The Riverfront Committee is seeking funds for implementation of their plan as well as technical assistance from the National Park Service and regional park designation. The MN-MRPC has been actively involved with the project. Details and a full copy of the plan are available at <https://brainerdriverfront.org/mississippi-river-partnership-plan/>.
- **St. Cloud Area** – Bringing the community back to the river to realize the economic, ecological, and spiritual value of the Mississippi is the key goal. The RiverWalk builds upon recent planning studies and projects and creates, in physical form, a regional destination that will bring new commerce, education and recreation opportunities to the banks of the River. The MN-MRPC was represented on the committee and The City of St. Cloud has included Phase I in their Capital Improvements Plan as a 2020 construction project and is actively seeking funds. The full plan is available at http://mississippipartners.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2017-10-19_RIVERWALK_FINAL-SMALL.pdf
- **Minneapolis** – The Upper St. Anthony Lock has been closed to navigation which opened opportunity for development of a community vision for the future of the lock. Information about The Falls Initiative was presented to the MN-MRPC in November 2017. The National Park Service has been managing the site as a visitor center and has seen a tenfold increase in visitors to the lock. The United States Army Corps of Engineers has launched a disposition study to determine the future of the Minneapolis locks. A project is being pursued to connect the Stone Arch Bridge to the University of Minnesota via a ½ mile acquisition from Burlington Northern.
- **Mississippi National River and Recreation Area** – Mississippi River Paddle Share program is now fully operational throughout the park. Kayaks are available for rent at six locations in the park. All the Minneapolis and St. Paul stations are aligned with Nice Ride bike share stations. For a separate fee, visitors can paddle one way and bike back along the river. The program is the first of its kind in a National Park. Full details are available at <http://paddleshare.org/#info>.
- **Historic Fort Snelling (GRR Interpretive Center)** – \$15 million in state bonding funds were approved during the 2018 legislative session for visitor center improvements. The project involves rehabilitation of two historic buildings, landscape to provide focus on the river, and expanded storytelling to include a broader representation.
- **National Eagle Center (GRR Interpretive Center)** - \$8 million in state bonding funds were approved during the 2018 legislative session for downtown Wabasha revitalization including expansion of National Eagle Center
- **Mississippi River Trail** – New Minnesota state bicycle maps were produced and distributed.
- **Shore Excursions Trips to Headwaters** – MN-MRPC member Karl Samp served as step on guide and shared Great River Road information on the trip to Itasca State Park for a tour group affiliated with the American Queen. The tours were a success and will be offered again.
- **Wabasha** – The city achieved Main Street America designation in the small city category and will receive assistance with training and economic development.
- **Winona** – Grand re-opening of Levee Park was held on June 25, 2018 after the city's \$2.8-million redesign of the park. The park is intended to be a gateway to the riverfront – linking downtown to the Mississippi River and encouraging foot traffic.

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. Four state agencies reappointed current members, and Lisa Havelka was welcomed as the new appointee representing Explore Minnesota Tourism. Nancy Salminen was re-elected to represent the Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids Region and Karl Samp was re-elected to represent the Brainerd to Elk River Region. Lauren Larson represented the Grand Rapids to Brainerd Region for a portion of the year and the Commission is grateful for her interest and service.

**This report is respectfully submitted on August 21, 2018.
Sen. David Senjem, MN-MRPC Acting Chair**

Table 3.1.1.1. Breakdown of Sign Inventory

County	Missing	Modifications Needed	Meets Standards	Grand Total
Aitkin	5	19	12	36
Anoka	1	1	2	4
Beltrami	18	16	9	43
Benton	4	4		8
Cass	7	6	16	29
Chisago		1		1
Clearwater	5	9		14
Crow Wing	26	21	34	81
Dakota	15	6	46	67
Goodhue	1	2	16	19
Hennepin	26	29	28	83
Houston		1	11	12
Hubbard		10	3	13
Itasca	11	37	19	67
Morrison	1	11	21	33
Ramsey	3	1	14	18
Stearns	2	24	1	27
Wabasha		1	11	12
Washington	4	2	3	9
Winona	2		11	13
Wright	4	1	26	31
Grand Total	135	202	283	620
	22%	32%	46%	



2017 Drive the Great River Road Month - Minnesota Promotion Drive the Great River Road to Find Minnesota's Sense of Place

Goals

- Short term - To raise awareness of the Great River Road and its ability to connect a traveler or adventurous resident to events and places in Minnesota's history and current scene that reflect our Sense of Place.
- Long term - Get people to drive the Great River Road for even just a few of the stops that may be nearest them and to plan a trip for the future.

MN-MRPC Member Agency Promotion

- Requested promotion assistance from MN-MRPC member agencies. Special thanks to the agencies for their help!!
- MnDOT Facebook post (2,843 reached in 6 days)
- Newsletter articles listed below (DNR, MnDOT)

Governor's Proclamation

- Requested and received proclamation from the Governor's Office, posted at www.mnmississippiriver.com. Also referenced in MnDOT communications.

MN GRR Social Media

- 8 Facebook posts (Great River Road MN). Two sweepstakes posts, six featured sites. Total Facebook reach – 3,324 (compared to 789 during September 2016)
- Top Facebook posts– Grand Rapids, Beltrami County History Center
- Twitter (@GreatRiverRdMN) – three tweets – two promoting sweepstakes and one linking to Star Tribune column

MN Great River Road Website

- General information was posted on September 1 about the sweepstakes and GRR. Posts, photos and links to featured attractions added each week.
- 24,855 website visits in September (up from 2016 – 16,040 visits for month of September, also up from summer 2017 numbers – 24,004 visits in August, 23,001 in July, 24,569 in June)
- 1,066 MN Great River Road Map/Travel Planners and 3,046 MN GRR Regional Maps downloaded from September 1 – 17, 2017. (2016 - 1,441 MN GRR Map/Travel Planners and 794 Regional Maps downloaded in month of September)

News Release

- Early August - provided draft release information to featured sites along with request for photos.
- August 23 - sent release to media list and distribution partners (CVBs/Chambers, State Parks, Interpretive Centers, Welcome Centers, etc.).
- September 11 - sent release with customized message and photo to local community papers of featured sites.
- Articles – Minneapolis Star Tribune Travel Column 9/9/17; St. Cloud Times 9/14/17; MnDOT Newline article to 5,000 MnDOT employees 9/6/17; MnDNR Traveler Newsletter GRR article in September edition 9/8/17

Print Materials

- 10-State Great River Road Maps were provided to Interpretive Centers as needed to replenish their supplies. 1,500 shipped in late August.



Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Minnesota
 300 33rd Avenue South, Suite 101 • Waite Park, Minnesota 56387
 Phone: 651-341-4196 • E-Mail: info@MnMississippiRiver.com

Members of the Hour: Sheldon Johnson (DFL - 678) – Chair **Members of the Senate:** David Sorenson (R - 25) Patricia Torres Ray (DFL - 65) **State Agency Appointees:** Paul Hagenath – Agriculture, Scott Bradley – Transportation, Adam Johnson – Explorer, Minnesota Tourism, Keith Parker – Natural Resources, Andrea Kalle – Historical Society **Regional Appointees:** Nancy Johnson – Lake Itasca-Crowley National Park, Open – Grand Rapids to Brainerd, Karl Samp – Brainerchto Elk State, Corinda Peterson – Elk, Rose to Hastings, Shaconna Muly – Hastings to Iowa Border **Member at Large:** Anne Lewis

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACTS: Chris Miller, Director, Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission, 651-341-4196
 Anne Lewis, Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission Member, 410-493-0362

Drive the Great River Road to Find Minnesota's Sense of Place

Waite Park, MN (August 23, 2017) Searching for the truly authentic Minnesota experience? Try exploring Minnesota's Sense of Place with a drive along the Mississippi River during National Drive the Great River Road Month this September.

One of America's beloved writers and regionalists, Wendell Berry, is often quoted as saying, "If you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are." Minnesota's Mississippi River Parkway Commission (MN-MRPC) couldn't agree more. That's why this year, during National Drive the Great River Road month, Minnesotans are encouraged to Drive the Great River Road to find their own Minnesota Sense of Place.

"The Mississippi River is integral to the Minnesota experience," said Representative Sheldon Johnson, Chair of the MN-MRPC, the state byway organization that oversees the network of roads, trails and water access points along the Mississippi River. "So much of our history and current development has been, and is still being driven, along this central corridor of our state." MN-MRPC is part of the 10-state Mississippi River Parkway Commission encouraging all Americans to get out and drive along the great American river from Lake Itasca to the Gulf of Mexico this month.

"Minnesota's history and many of its cities' and towns' well-being hinge on the Mississippi River. The same is true for the whole country. That's why travelers flock to it from around the world, and local communities are refocusing on the river for their development," said Johnson. "By getting out and driving the Great River Road, you can discover more of what it means to be a Minnesotan and see first-hand how the history and development along the river has shaped who we are."

Here are a handful of ways to find your own Minnesota Sense of Place by driving the Great River Road this September.

- To see a town that epitomizes the history of how the river's flow shaped the land and the people, start your journey in Bemidji, where First Nations people trading intersected with explorers' and trappers' travels at the cross roads of the river and Lake Bemidji in the early 1800s. With deep roots in Native American heritage, Bemidji's water nexus was transformed by a second-phase crossroads – railroads. Today, the Mississippi River and Lake Bemidji are at the heart of a third wave of transformation: one of arts, culture and recreation. <http://bemidjihistory.org>
- For members of many Ojibwe tribes, wild rice is not just a crop, it's part of a ribbon of life. If you travel the Great River Road in its Northwoods section, you'll find Leech Lake, where the harvest and processing are at the core of the community. If you stick around long enough to listen to the stories at the Ojibwe Fisheries Building in Cass Lake <http://www.llojibwe.org/dtm/fisheries/wildrice.html>, you'll be able to learn first-hand the differences in the grains, how it's best cooked and why it's so important to Native culture.

STATE of MINNESOTA

Proclamation

WHEREAS: The Great River Road is America's greatest drive, encompassing 3,000 miles of interconnected roads that follow the world's greatest river, the mighty Mississippi through 10 States, from Lake Itasca in Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico; and

WHEREAS: The Great River Road has been designated a National Scenic Byway for its historical, cultural, recreational, natural, and scenic treasures; and

WHEREAS: The Great River Road connects hundreds of vibrant cities and unique river towns; and

WHEREAS: The Great River Road is the ideal way to discover and experience the rich culture of the Mississippi River region, the heart of America; and

WHEREAS: The Minnesota Great River Road spans 565 miles, 41 communities, 20 counties, three tribes and its unique destination areas—linking travelers from near and far with all the riches of the Mississippi River region; and

WHEREAS: Minnesota is the proud home of the Headwaters of the Mississippi River; and

WHEREAS: There is no scenic drive in America quite like the Great River Road.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, MARK DAYTON, Governor of Minnesota, do hereby proclaim the month of September 2017, as

DRIVE THE GREAT RIVER ROAD MONTH

In the State of Minnesota



IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Minnesota to be affixed at the State Capitol this 31st day of August.

Mark Dayton
 GOVERNOR

Steve Pimmon
 SECRETARY OF STATE

Traveler Tip - Explore the Great River Road

You can travel the same path as our migrating monarchs on the Great River Road! The Great River Road National Scenic Byway follows the course of the Mississippi River for 3,000 miles from Itasca State Park in northern Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. The scenic route passes through 10 states and hundreds of river towns and is the longest scenic byway in America. It takes about 26 hours of straight driving to travel from north to south along the byway. Most people take four to 10 days to make the journey.

September has been designated as Drive the Great River Road Month. Vibrant colors paint the trees and you'll find festivals, farmers markets and fun activities all along the Mississippi River corridor. The road passes through or near several Minnesota State Parks where you will find a variety of programs and opportunities to connect to the outdoors. Find www.mnstateparks.com that will help you experience the big, woods and lands of the Great River Road in Minnesota, including numerous apple orchards and pumpkin patches open for tours and festivities.



Explore

Learn more about the Great River Road in Minnesota.

TRAVEL

Minnesota's best fall drive? Great River Road might be it.



By KERRI WESTENBERG, STAR TRIBUNE
 September 08, 2017 - 12:57 PM

Post Details

Minnesota Department of Transportation
 Published by Kristi Lee (P) · September 6 at 12:56pm

Celebrate Drive the Great River Road Month by exploring our great state this September.

The Great River Road follows the Mississippi River from the headwaters of Lake Itasca down to the Gulf of Mexico. The national route is 3,000 miles total, with 565 stretching through Minnesota. Along the route, you'll find birding, boating, biking, history and more! Plan your trip:



September is Drive the Great River Road Month in Minnesota



The Great River Road stretch along the Mississippi River.

Get More Likes, Comments and Shares
 Boost this post for \$30 to reach up to 8,700 people.

2,843 people reached

Boost Post

R.L. Scarborough, Michele Monfilis and 5 others



Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Minnesota

300 33rd Avenue South, Suite 101 • Waite Park, Minnesota 56387

Phone: 651-341-4196 • E-Mail: info@MnMississippiRiver.com

Members of the House: Sheldon Johnson (DFL – 67B) – Chair **Members of the Senate:** David Senjem (R – 25); Patricia Torres Ray (DFL – 63) **State Agency Appointees:** Paul Hugunin – Agriculture, Scott Bradley – Transportation, Adam Johnson – Explore Minnesota Tourism, Keith Parker – Natural Resources, Andrea Kajer – Historical Society **Regional Appointees:** Nancy Salminen – Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids, Open – Grand Rapids to Brainerd, Karl Samp – Brainerd to Elk River, Cordelia Pierson – Elk River to Hastings, Sheronne Mulry – Hastings to Iowa Border **Member at Large:** Anne Lewis

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACTS: Chris Miller, Director, Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission, 651-341-4196
Anne Lewis, Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission Member, 410-493-0362

Drive the Great River Road to Find Minnesota's Sense of Place

Waite Park, MN (August 23, 2017): Searching for the truly authentic Minnesota experience? Try exploring Minnesota's Sense of Place with a drive along the Mississippi River during National Drive the Great River Road Month this September.

One of America's beloved writers and regionalists, Wendell Berry, is often quoted as saying, "If you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are." Minnesota's Mississippi River Parkway Commission (MN-MRPC) couldn't agree more. That's why this year, during National Drive the Great River Road month, Minnesotans are encouraged to Drive the Great River Road to find their own Minnesota Sense of Place.

"The Mississippi River is integral to the Minnesota experience," said Representative Sheldon Johnson, Chair of the MN-MRPC, the state byway organization that oversees the network of roads, trails and water access points along the Mississippi River. "So much of our history and current development has been, and is still being driven, along this central corridor of our state." MN-MRPC is part of the 10-state Mississippi River Parkway Commission encouraging all Americans to get out and drive along the great American river from Lake Itasca to the Gulf of Mexico this month.

"Minnesota's history and many of its cities' and towns' well-being hinge on the Mississippi River. The same is true for the whole country. That's why travelers flock to it from around the world, and local communities are refocusing on the river for their development," said Johnson. "By getting out and driving the Great River Road, you can discover more of what it means to be a Minnesotan and see first-hand how the history and development along the river has shaped who we are."

Here are a handful of ways to find your own Minnesota Sense of Place by driving the Great River Road this September.

- To see a town that epitomizes the history of how the river's flow shaped the land and the people, start your journey in Bemidji, where First Nations people trading intersected with explorers' and trappers' travels at the cross roads of the river and Lake Bemidji in the early 1800s. With deep roots in Native American heritage, Bemidji's water nexus was transformed by a second-phase crossroads – railroads. Today, the Mississippi River and Lake Bemidji are at the heart of a third wave of transformation: one of arts, culture and recreation. <http://beltramihistory.org>
- For members of many Ojibwe tribes, wild rice is not just a crop, it's part of a ribbon of life. If you travel the Great River Road in its Northwoods section, you'll find Leech Lake, where the harvest and processing are at the core of the community. If you stick around long enough to listen to the stories at the Ojibwe Fisheries Building in Cass Lake <http://www.llojibwe.org/drm/fisheries/wildrice.html>, you'll be able to learn first-hand the differences in the grains, how it's best cooked and why it's so important to Native culture.

- Following the Great River Road (and the river) west, we find one of the state's great examples of how people have influenced the river and the river has influenced the people in Grand Rapids. Here the Mississippi, already known throughout North America as a great river feeding vast forest land in the mid 1800s, became a mecca for venture capitalists and journeymen immigrants riding the crest of a timber-driven westward American expansion. This mini-epicenter for the lure of logging offers glimpses of the past at Minnesota Historical Society's Forest History Center <http://sites.mnhs.org/historic-sites/forest-history-center> and UPM-Blandin's state-of-the-art modern paper-making operations. <http://www.upmpaper.com/about-upm-paper/upm-in-north-america/blandin-forestry/Pages/Default.aspx>
- Heading south to Elk River, driving the Great River Road brings searchers for a Minnesota Sense of Place to the Oliver Kelley Farm, where the working river starts to take over. Agriculture has been at the heart of Minnesota's economy for over 200 years and the Mississippi River has been at the heart of the state's agriculture. At this newly renovated Minnesota Historical Site and newly designated Great River Road Interpretive Center, visitors can learn about farming practices then and now and the history of the cooperative movement started by Oliver Kelley. <http://www.mnhs.org/kelleyfarm>
- Another place to see the Mississippi River's impact on Minnesota's economy and commerce, this time with transportation, is the Port of Saint Paul. Tucked below the city, the Port of Saint Paul boasts over four terminals, 30 businesses, and 1,200 jobs. 5 million tons of commodities go through those terminals annually, primarily grain, corn, soybeans, sand fertilizer, road salt and coal. A rich history of shipping throughout the 20th century matches the present-day drama of watching the port from the Great River Road. <https://www.sppa.com>
- At one of the last points on Minnesota's Great River Road as one travels south, nestled among the picturesque grandeur of the Bluffs, sits the City of Winona. This September, Minnesota Marine Art Museum features the *Mississippi River Shootout*, featuring photographs from the Headwaters to the Gulf. <http://www.mmam.org/MissRiverPhotoShootout> MMAM's permanent collection features historic American and European paintings by artists such as Monet, Picasso, O'Keeffe, and van Gogh, as well as Emanuel Leutze's masterpiece *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. Winona is yet another Minnesota city born and nurtured by the Mississippi River, making it a good place to experience "Minnesota's Sense of Place."

To help celebrate Drive the Great River Road Month, the National Drive the Great River Road Sweepstakes will be held during September, offering travelers a chance to win \$500 to use on their own trip along the Great River Road. Watch for information at www.experiencemississippiriver.com and www.facebook.com/GreatRiverRoad.

Photo Op: If you want to plant yourself at the "true head" of the Mississippi River, snap a selfie in Itasca State Park, apply the Great River Road filter and share it via Snapchat. The Snapchat filter will be available in proximity of the sign right where the lake and the small stream come together during Labor Day weekend.

For More Information:

In Minnesota, the Great River Road spans 565 miles, 43 communities, 20 counties, three tribes and six unique destination areas. Organized and guided under Minnesota Statute 161.1419 and managed under the umbrella of the Legislative Coordinating Commission, the MN-MRPC promotes and leverages resources, partnerships and activities of river communities and agencies to provide a communication link and collective voice for the Great River Road and its Mississippi River resources. The Commission is comprised of two members each of the state senate and house of representatives; five citizens representing segments of the river; one at-large citizen member; representatives of the Minnesota Departments of Agriculture, Natural Resources; Transportation; representatives of the Minnesota Historical Society and Explore Minnesota Tourism; and a technical advisor from the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. <http://www.mnmississippiriver.com>

###



Experience the Flavors of Minnesota's Great River Road!!

Celebrate the flavors of the Minnesota Great River Road's Mississippi River on your next road trip!! Wild Rice and walleye, straight from the river, are featured as some of the best and are classic Minnesota flavors! Bonus - you can fish yourself for the treasured walleye in many locations and experience the beautiful Minnesota outdoors at the same time. Choose one of the days below or choose them all... Just leave a "gone fishin" note and hit the road!



Before You Go: Place your order for **Native American-Harvested wild rice** online from the White Earth Nation at <http://realwildrice.com/wild-rice/> and gather inspiration from the recipes. For community information by region, including local tourism guides to help you find **local restaurant gems** where someone else will cook the wild rice and walleye for you, visit <http://www.mnmississippiriver.com/links.cfm>. For farmers markets and more local flavors along the way, look to **Minnesota Grown** to guide you - <https://minnesotagrown.com/>. And, the Minnesota DNR has a great online list of outfitters and boat rentals to help you plan before you leave home <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/watertrails/outfitters.html>.

Day 1: Begin the day at the Mississippi River headwaters in Itasca State Park, get your fishing license at the Jacob Brower Visitor Center, and pick up a copy of MN fishing regulations or check them at <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/fishmn/regs.html>. Then launch your own boat or rent kayaks and canoes right at the park. Sleep under the stars in the park's campgrounds or enjoy the rustic historic architecture of Douglas Lodge. https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/park.html?id=spk00181#homepage

Day 2: Follow the Great River Road to beautiful Lake Bemidji State Park, where you can continue to try for walleye from shore or boat, then camp at the park or find many lodging opportunities in nearby Bemidji or at surrounding river and lake resorts. Don't forget to try a local restaurant! https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/water_access/index.html offers public water access maps and safety tips.

Day 3: Fish walleye in lakes the Mississippi River runs through as it journeys east including Andrusia, Cass, Winnibigoshish, Ball Club and Pokegama. Restock your wild rice supply at the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Main Office at 15756 State Hwy 371 NW, Cass Lake, MN 56633 or online at <https://www.lwildrice.com/wild-rice-products.html> where you can also find recipes and history. For members of many Native American cultures, wild rice is not just a crop; it's a sacred component of their culture.

Day 4: Museum Day in Little Falls! Start at the Minnesota Fishing Museum, featuring over 10,000 artifacts related to Minnesota fishing. <http://www.mnfishingmuseum.com/> Grab some lunch downtown and head over to the Charles Lindbergh State Park and State Historic Site to soak in the beautiful setting and rich history.

Day 5: Below the St. Cloud dam, choose from over a dozen boat landings and fishing piers on the Mississippi between here and the Twin Cities to try your luck at fishing for walleye, or learn why this area is home to some of the best small mouth bass fishing in the state. For details about this stretch of river go to https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/watertrails/mississippiriver/seven_more.html

Day 6: Experienced paddlers can go low on the water to try their hand fishing walleye in the Twin Cities stretch of the Mississippi River by renting a kayak at <http://paddleshare.org/>, providing access to the river within the Twin Cities' very own National Park, the Mississippi National River & Recreation Area. Fishing piers, boat landings and marinas offer river access throughout this stretch too.

Day 7: From Hastings to the Iowa border, this section of Mississippi River offers three riverfront state parks and multiple DNR and local boat landings and marinas. The Mississippi Bluffs region is also home to the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, an angler's paradise https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Upper_Mississippi_River/Winona_District.html. Charming river towns along the way will tempt you to extend your Flavors exploration by offering great restaurants, farmers markets and more!

For more to see and do along the Minnesota Great River Road, visit www.mnmississippiriver.com