



## **Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission 2024-25 Annual Report (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025)**

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### **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 and is a member of the ten state Mississippi River Parkway Commission.
- 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; and is home to 13 National Great River Road Interpretive Centers.

### **Commission Meetings**

- The MN-MRPC held regular business meetings on August 15, 2024; November 21, 2024; February 21, 2025; and June 11, 2025.
- Meeting materials, recordings and commission information are available at <https://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/mrpc/mrpc.html>.
- The Commission continues to focus on implementation of the MN Great River Road Corridor Management Plan (CMP) and the ten-state MRPC Corridor Management Plan.

### **Great River Road Projects & Activities**

#### **Great River Road Ambassador Program**

- Ambassadors include staff from our 13 Great River Road Interpretive Centers and from community tourism offices, as well as MN Mississippi River Parkway Commissioners.
- Goals of the Ambassador Program are to 1) develop and strengthen MN Mississippi River Parkway Commission (MN-MRPC) partnerships to leverage byway attractions from cooperative Minnesota and ten-state efforts; 2) provide Ambassadors with resources, materials, and training to maximize their time and talent; 3) confirm and update Minnesota Great River Road attraction information included in [Plan Your Trip](#) and other marketing; and 4) encourage Mississippi River exploration and stewardship.
- A virtual meeting was held on July 31, 2024, focused on Interpretive Centers and their roles as Great River Road Ambassadors.
- Great River Road Ambassador promotional item kits were sent as follow-up to the session. Maps were also provided as requested.
- Virtual Ambassador Orientations are available upon request. Two orientation sessions were provided in January 2025.
- Ambassador information including fact sheets and presentations is available at <https://www.mnmississippiriver.com/minnesota-great-river-road-ambassadors/>.

### **Drive the Great River Road Month**

- The MN-MRPC celebrates Drive the Great River Road Month annually in September, in conjunction with the ten-state Great River Road promotion.
- The 2024 Minnesota theme was *GO with the Flow on the Great River Road (GO = Get Outdoors)*, led by the MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR).
- Goals were to: promote traveling the Great River Road and engage with the amazing variety of outdoor recreation opportunities along the Mississippi and GRR in Minnesota; promote the variety of ways to recreate and different modes of accessibility – travelers can engage with recreation in the manner and at the pace that works for them; include easy and less expensive ways to get outdoors; and build partnerships between the commission members.
- A kick-off event was hosted by the DNR at the Minnesota State Fair/Natural Resources Building Outdoor Stage. The event included a reading of the Governor's Proclamation designating September as Drive the Great River Road Month in Minnesota, and a trivia contest with members and partners of the MN-MRPC and the audience of fair goers.
- Get Outdoors itineraries for MN Great River Road destination areas (regions) were developed and designed by the DNR, highlighting DNR sites along the Great River Road, national public lands and content provided by community partners. The itinerary package was distributed during the month of September and continues to be available for download from the MN Great River Road website. Five communities submitted local information and photos for the campaign.
- The MN-MRPC office, members and partners promoted Drive the Great River Road Month and the outdoor recreation theme on social media.

### **Great River Road Network of Interpretive Centers**

- 11 representatives from Minnesota including Interpretive Centers, MN-MRPC members and local partners, participated in workshops offered by the National Mississippi River Parkway Commission in May 2025.
- The free workshops, titled "Boost Visibility for Your Interpretive Center" were designed to help boost visibility, attract more visitors, and foster community partnerships for Great River Road Interpretive Centers.
- MN-MRPC and National MRPC Vice Chair John Anfinson served as moderator for the workshops.
- The MN-MRPC assisted with Minnesota completion of the National MRPC online data verification process for all Interpretive Centers.

### **Plan Your Trip Interactive Map**

- The Minnesota Great River Road Plan Your Trip interactive map is the primary online information source for the byway. The tool is developed, hosted, and maintained by the MN Department of Transportation (MnDOT) in partnership with the MN-MRPC.
- Plan Your Trip includes detailed route information, plus over 700 things to see and do, organized by category and searchable based on interests of the user.
- A team was convened to discuss implications of a GIS platform update scheduled for January 2026 meaning Plan Your Trip would no longer function without a full rebuild. This change impacted both Plan Your Trip and Regional Story Maps. These components provide much of the route information on the MN Great River Road website.
- MnDOT provided a full basic rebuild of the Plan Your Trip interactive map. A draft was provided to a group of reviewers, comments were gathered and incorporated, and a full launch of the rebuilt online map will take place by August of 2025.
- Due to prioritization of the Plan Your Trip mapping and need for additional resources, Story Maps (digital travel guides) were removed from the MN GRR website and the content was copied and stored for possible development of new regional pages at a later date.

### **MN Great River Road Print Map**

- The MN Great River Road map was last printed in 2020, and no stock remained for distribution to marketing partners, though requests for the map continue to be received.
- An update and reprint of the MN Great River Road print map was recommended by a committee and the full MN-MRPC, using funds available due to lower than anticipated meeting costs earlier in the year and carry over from the prior fiscal year. Outreach to distribution partners confirmed the project quantity.
- The commission defined project specifications and requested and received quotes from multiple vendors followed by vendor selection and a project agreement.
- Content edits were made and 29,000 maps were printed and shipped to 41 partner distribution locations.

- Maps were mailed out individually as ordered from the website throughout the year and customized travel information was provided upon request. The map is also available in a downloadable pdf format at <https://www.mnmississippiriver.com/order-maps/>.

### **MN Great River Road Website & Social Media**

- Site data from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, included 15,303 sessions (FY 24 -15,000 sessions) and 46,434 page views (FY 24 – 58,000 page views). Top pages visited – Home Page, About the Minnesota Great River Road, Order Maps and All-American Road.
- Maintained MN Great River Road Facebook page with posts on events, activities, and attractions along the river. Total organic (unpaid) reach was 12,476 (26,859 in FY 24 and 6,243 in FY23) with top posts as follows – Get Outdoors in Lake City (Drive the Great River Road Month); The Great River Road Named Best Scenic Drive; Winona Weekend; and Drive the Great River Road Kick-Off Event.
- A map and website committee provided guidance on changes to the website as changes to the Plan Your Trip interactive mapping and Regional Story Maps were taking place.

### **National MRPC Board and Committees**

- MN-MRPC members serve in leadership roles for the National Mississippi River Parkway Commission. John Anfinson currently serves as Pilot Pro Tem of the National MRPC, and Anne Lewis as Pilot Emerita. Minnesota was represented on Technical Committees by Peter MacDonagh (Transportation); Megan Christianson and Kate Carlson (Marketing); Marni Karnowski (Environment, Recreation & Agriculture); and David Kelliher and John Anfinson (Culture & Heritage).
- The MN-MRPC participated in the Summer Fun on the Great River Road promotion through outreach to partners and communities and sharing on social media. Minnesota partners provided information on a wide variety of events and gained exposure for their communities.

### **National MRPC 2025 Annual Meeting – Winona**

- The MN-MRPC hosted the 2024 MRPC Annual Meeting in Winona, September 18 – 20.
- A team of MN-MRPC members partnered with the National MRPC Office and host community of Winona on planning that began in early 2024.
- The meeting engaged attendees on topics related to economic development and tourism along the Great River Road, including examples from Winona and throughout Minnesota. Work sessions of four technical committees and the MRPC Board of Directors took place, along with updates on National MRPC initiatives and a review of accomplishments of the individual states.
- The agenda included presentations by MN-MRPC members and partners including a panel involving all five MN-MRPC state agency members, community events panel, and Winona outdoor recreation panel.
- Attendees from nine of the ten Mississippi River states participated in the meeting. 12 MN-MRPC members & technical advisors attended.
- The meeting featured activities at two MN Great River Road Interpretive Centers – an opening reception at the Minnesota Marine Art Museum, and awards banquet at Winona County History Center.
- Dave Senjem, former MN-MRPC Chair, was presented with an Honorary Membership Award.
- Special thanks to Visit Winona, the Minnesota Marine Art Museum, Winona County History Center, Riverport Inn, local caterers/vendors, and all the speakers who volunteered their time and expertise.

### **USA Today Readers Choice Best Scenic Drive Award**

- The National Great River Road was announced as a finalist in April 2025. MN-MRPC conducted outreach to members and local partners about the award and voting process using tools provided by the National MRPC.
- The Great River Road was announced as the Best Scenic Drive in the U.S. in the 2025 USA Today 10Best Readers' Choice Awards. MN-MRPC shared the announcement and encouraged partners and members to promote their specific attractions and qualities as part of this award.

## **Great River Road Investments and Support**

- **State Operating Budget:** The MN-MRPC operated with state funding at levels allowing the Commission to continue its basic work. The operating budget for FY '25 was \$78,000, along with carry-over of \$7,964.25 from FY '24. 94% of the total budget was spent. Priorities included the National MRPC Annual Meeting in Winona, and MN Great River Road print map project.
- **MnDOT:** MnDOT provides staffing support for the Great River Road through a designated Great River Road Program Manager; and management/hosting of online mapping for Great River Road navigation and visitation.

- **Minnesota Transportation Alternatives Program:** Local Great River Road communities sought funds for projects through the Minnesota Transportation Alternatives Program. MnDOT identified two projects with benefit to the Great River Road and provided information on project intent. The MN-MRPC reviewed the project summaries and approved letters for projects that moved forward with full proposals. MN-MRPC conducted outreach to local applicants and provided one letter of support based on responses received. The request, totaling \$800,000, was for a project that would improve the byway experience for visitors and residents and help implement the MN Great River Road Corridor Management Plan.
- **National Scenic Byway Grants:** The National Scenic Byways Program released a Notice of Funding Opportunity with applications due in December of 2024. The MN-MRPC participated in the Federal Highway Administration's webinar in October of 2024, conducted outreach to potential applicants, and provided letters of support for applications submitted by the City of Brainerd, Washington County and the City of Saint Paul for projects that support the MN-MRPC mission and help implement the MN Great River Road Corridor Management Plan. In addition, the MN-MRPC coordinated with partners within Minnesota and supported the National Mississippi River Parkway Commission's National Scenic Byway Grant application, submitted by the Tennessee Department of Transportation on behalf of all ten Mississippi River states. This project proposes the development of a cutting-edge navigation app, a companion website for trip planning, a printed promotional map, and a targeted online marketing campaign to promote the national scenic byway to audiences across the United States and Canada.
- **Additional Letters of Support:** A letter of support was provided for the Three Rivers Park District as they sought federal funds for a trail project that would improve safety and the Great River Road/Mississippi River Trail byway traveler experience. The MN-MRPC also shared information on Department of Natural Resources funding opportunities for park and trails projects with eligible applicants along the Great River Road.

### **Examples of Local, Regional and Partner Activities or Issues**

- **Regions 5 and 7E Long Range Transportation Plans** – The Transportation Planner for Regions 5 and 7E and their project consultant presented information to the MN-MRPC at a Quarterly Meeting and discussed ways for the Great River Road to be involved and considered as part of the planning process.
- **Explore Minnesota Southern Region Meetings** – The MN-MRPC Director participated in online update meetings offered for the southern region, which includes several Great River Road communities.
- **Mississippi Headwaters Board (MHB)** – The MN-MRPC maintains ongoing communication and partnership with this organization that covers the first 400 miles of Mississippi River in Minnesota.
- **Community Tourism Outreach:** The MN-MRPC requests and posts Facebook content from local communities.
- **LLBO Tourism Meeting** – In July 2024, the MN-MRPC Vice Chair and MN-MRPC Director met with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe's planner and project consultant as part of a feasibility study for cultural tourism. The MN-MRPC provided MN Great River Road information, data, and examples of opportunities to share tourism information via Great River Road platforms.
- **National Scenic Byway Association** – The MN-MRPC maintains active membership in the National Scenic Byway Association, provides information on the MN Great River Road for promotional opportunities, and participates in webinars and networking offered by the association.

### **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 the Great River Road regions established in statute; (1) Member-At-Large – appointed by the other 14.
- The MN-MRPC welcomed the following new members during the 2024-25 year – Rep. Huldah Momanyi-Hiltsley and Amanda Dirnberger (DNR technical member).
- The Commission thanks the following outgoing members for their service - Rep. Sydney Jordan, Rep. Leigh Finke, and Kelli Bruns (DNR technical member).

**This report is respectfully submitted on August 18, 2025,  
John Anfinson, MN-MRPC Vice Chair**





2024 MRPC Annual Meeting attendees at the Winona County History Center





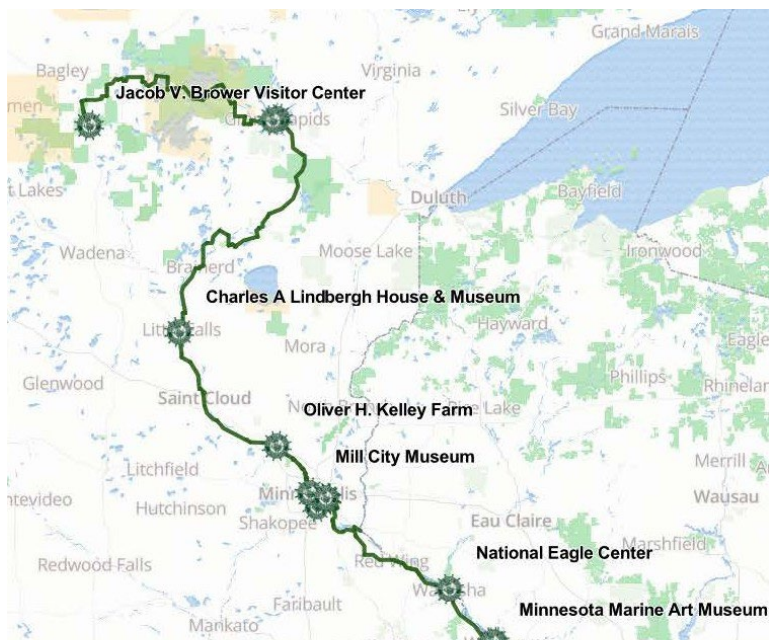
Great River Road voted Best Scenic Drive, USA Today 10Best Readers Choice Awards



Photo Credit: Adam Alexander/Courtesy of the Illinois Office of Tourism

[Plan Your Trip Interactive Map Rebuild](#)

[MN Great River Road Print Map](#)





## **Drive the Great River Road Month 2024** **GO with the Flow on the Great River Road (GO = Get Outdoors)**

### **Goals**

- Promote traveling the Great River Road and engage with the amazing variety of outdoor recreation opportunities along the Mississippi and GRR in Minnesota
- Promote the variety of ways to recreate and different modes of accessibility – travelers can engage with recreation in the manner and at the pace that works for them
- Include easy and less expensive ways to get outdoors
- Build partnerships between the commission members

### **Content/Itineraries**

- Get Outdoors itineraries for MN Great River Road destination areas/regions developed by the DNR, highlighting DNR sites along the Great River Road, content provided by five communities, and national public lands.

### **Press Release**

- Release was distributed to state and local media list, Interpretive Centers, Community Tourism Offices, and MN-MRPC members.
- Articles, posts, and shares included Grand Rapids Herald Review, Visit Grand Rapids, Visit Winona, National Eagle Center, Visit Little Falls, Visit Lake City, Sen. Karin Housley, and a month-long social media partnership of the Mississippi Headwaters Board and Visit Grand Rapids featuring the Grand Rapids Drive GRR Month sweepstakes

### **Governor's Proclamation**

- Requested and received a proclamation calling out September as Drive the Great River Road Month in Minnesota. The MN-MRPC Chair read the proclamation at the State Fair Kick-Off event and the proclamation was posted on the MN GRR Facebook page.

### **Social Media**

- MN-MRPC Facebook – 16 posts throughout September using content provided by community partners and general campaign information, total reach of 2,282 (reach the month prior was 664).
- Top posts – Get Outdoors in Lake City, State Fair Kick Off & Proclamation, Get Outdoors in the Little Falls Area, Get Outdoors at a Unique St. Cloud Area Park

### **MN Great River Road Website**

- Itineraries were posted for download and will remain available at <https://www.mnmississippiriver.com/order-maps/>
- Website data for month – 2,300 page views and 1,700 sessions, average time 31 seconds. Month prior (August) – 5,400 page views and 1,900 sessions, average time 1 minute 5 seconds

### **Kick Off Event**

- A press event was hosted by the DNR at the Minnesota State Fair including brief remarks, proclamation reading, a trivia contest, and distribution of maps and pins. Participants – Grant Wilson, Kelli Bruns, Lauren Peck (DNR); Sen. Karin Housley, John Anfinson, Anne Lewis (MN-MRPC Officers); Kent Whitworth (MNHS); and Randolph Briley (Explore Minnesota)

### **Promotional Items & Materials**

- Maps, stickers, and lapel pins were shipped to partners upon request.



# GO with the Flow on the GREAT RIVER ROAD

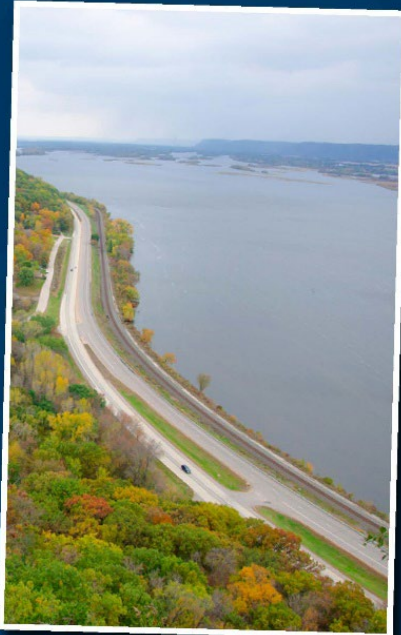
GO stands for "get outdoors," and there are countless options along the Minnesota Great River Road! The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is partnering with the Great River Road to encourage people to enjoy the outdoors along the mighty Mississippi River. The Minnesota DNR has more than 70 public recreation sites along or near the Great River Road and a wide array of opportunities to choose from. From hiking to paddling, and from bicycling to picnicking, the Great River Road, Minnesota DNR and their partners offer Minnesotans some of the best outdoor opportunities the state has to offer.

Find fantastic opportunities close to home, at state and local parks, historic sites, and more.

Head to [mnmississippiriver.com](http://mnmississippiriver.com) and click "Plan Your Trip" to find your new favorite stop along the Great River Road.

Visit the DNR's Recreation Compass website to find numerous public spaces for recreation, including state parks and trails, public water accesses, scientific and natural areas, and much more. [mndnr.gov/maps/compass.html](http://mndnr.gov/maps/compass.html)

The Minnesota Great River Road is home to 13 National Great River Road Interpretive Centers—and many of them offer outdoor opportunities. Find out more at [mnmississippiriver.com/interpretive-centers](http://mnmississippiriver.com/interpretive-centers)



Visit Lake City

September 24 at 10:52 AM · 🌐



Thank you Great River Road MN!



Great River Road MN

Community Organization

Send message



Great River Road MN

September 20 at 7:33 AM · 🌐

Get Outdoors in Lake City! Known as the birthplace of water skiing, Lake Pepin provides world-class sailing opportunities, beautiful and expansive sandy beaches, and endless water sport activities. [visitlakecity.org/lake-pepin](http://visitlakecity.org/lake-pepin) The lake is one of Minnesota's most prolific fisheries, boasting over 85 different species. Photo courtesy of Visit Lake City

Chamber of Commerce and 32 others

4 shares

Comment

Share

reat River Road MN

Great River Road MN



Visit Grand Rapids

September 4 at 6:33 AM · 🌐

Enter for a CHANCE TO WIN our Go Get Outdoors Sweepstakes where you could win a trip for two for two-nights, that includes:

Two nights at Loon's Landing  
\$100 gift card to Rapids Brewing Co.  
\$100 gift card to Hotel Rapids and HR Bar  
\$50 gift card to Benders

Two VIP tours to The Judy Garland Museum  
Two Escape Room admissions at Itasca County Historical Society  
Welcome Basket from Visit Grand Rapids.  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Great River Road MN

ENTER NOW THROUGH September 30, 2024 [theoutdoormecca.com](http://theoutdoormecca.com) (must be 18 yrs of age to enter)

\*\*\*\*\*  
[www.visitgrandrapids.com/sweepstakes](http://www.visitgrandrapids.com/sweepstakes)  
\*\*\*\*\*

#getoutdoors #sweepstakes #fall #theoutdoormecca #lakes #trails #freshair #onlyinmn



# GO=GET OUTDOORS Sweepstakes

You and 18 others

5 comments 6 shares

Like

Comment

Share

Most relevant



Comment as Great River Road MN

Great River Road MN



WHEREAS: The Minnesota Great River Road spans 565 miles, 41 communities, 50 counties, three Tribes, 15 states, and not counting a countless number of miles;  
WHEREAS: The Minnesota Great River Road is a designated All-American Road, making it a destination unto itself;  
WHEREAS: Minnesota's Great River Road is the northernmost section of the national Great River Road, which begins in Lake Itasca, Minnesota, flows to Mississippi River for 1,200 miles through 10 states, and ends at the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana; and  
WHEREAS: The Minnesota Mississippi River Invasive Commission and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) are collaborating to 2024 to highlight the Minnesota Great River Road's diverse opportunities for outdoor recreation, support for the DNR's state parks and forest land, and scenic views, and  
WHEREAS: Minnesota's participation in outdoor recreation is very high, with two-thirds of Minnesotans reporting that, according to survey results, they take part in outdoor recreation at least once a week, and  
WHEREAS: Minnesota's scenic and historic recreation resources and has contributed to the nation's reputation as the outdoor recreation and water state, and  
WHEREAS: Minnesota is the proud home of the Mississippi River, which has been protected by the Minnesota State Park, Lake Park, the second oldest state park in the country, and has been designated as a National Scenic Riverway.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, TIM WALZ, Governor of Minnesota, do hereby proclaim September 2024 as:

## DRIVE THE GREAT RIVER ROAD MONTH

In the State of Minnesota



IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused this proclamation to be signed at the State Capitol this 26th day of August.

*Tim Walz*  
GOVERNOR

*Steve Dimm*  
SECRETARY OF STATE

