

**Final Report to Minnesota Department of Transportation on the St. Croix
Scenic Byway Plan**



East Central Regional Development Commission

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TAP Funds and Purpose of Planning Process

The tasks for the St. Croix Scenic Byway plan consisted of contacting interested parties about participating in the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). MN/DOT has the responsibility for implementing the TAP program for eligible projects in Minnesota. The East Central Regional Development Commission was approached to assist with updates to the St. Croix Scenic Byways Corridor Management Plan which was completed 2009. Further to identify potential projects along the byway that may be eligible for TAP funding.

Developing a work group and touring the byway was critical in order to gather pertinent information to ensure that any potential projects had a transportation purpose. Compiling background information, identifying investment priorities for the corridor and assigning priority of investments were the last steps to the planning process. This project was unique due to including Washington County which is outside of the East Central MN planning region.

Scenic Byway description



The 124 mile St. Croix Scenic Byway route passes through three Minnesota counties: Washington, Chisago and Pine. Today, the cities along the route offer visitors unbeatable scenery, a range of activities and a variety of businesses to explore. The Washington County area of the byway runs north from Point Douglas and Great River Road.

The byway continues north to Chisago County past Franconia Township, Interstate State Park, and the National Park Service River way Headquarters, Wild Mountain Road, and Wild River State Park.

The Northernmost County along the Byway is Pine County. Within Pine County you will find St. Croix State Park, Banning State Park and the Veterans Evergreen Memorial Scenic Drive (see route map at appendices).

Task Force Development & Planning Process

Robert Voss, ECRDC Executive Director and Jennifer Russell, ECRDC Economic Development Director reviewed and assessed the St. Croix Scenic Byway plan and the past planning efforts. Tours along the byway were conducted to identify the characteristics of the byway to aid in the early planning process. One of the team members included was Mr. Bill Neuman who is responsible for the coordination of the St. Croix Scenic Byway Historical Travel Guide.

After meeting with Mr. Neuman, he helped categorize a mailing list that included representatives from local units of government (see appendices), MN/DOT, township representatives, former task force members, business leaders and local citizens in communities along the byway. A series of meetings located along the byway were conducted to obtain input on potential projects, discussion of the Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) its purpose and intent, and characteristics of the byway.

Summary of Meetings

The first meeting was held on November 20, 2015 in Taylors Falls. The TAP planning process and program parameters were discussed with emphasis on developing potentials projects for TAP funding consideration. The taskforce reviewed and discussed the previous St. Croix Scenic Byway plan and any conditions that may have changed since. The group compiled a stakeholder list of those who would have impact on the planning process. Three additional meetings were planned to continue the planning process.

The second meeting took place at the Marine on St. Croix City Hall on March 16, 2015. Five categories of byway assets were discussed. Scenic, Archeological, Historical, Cultural, and Recreational assets were identified and discussed. Mr. Wade Vitalis, from the City of Taylors Falls assisted the group in identifying the assets of the scenic byway and a list of assets was compiled and made available.

The group established that the scenic byway holds great significance in helping to promote sustainable tourism in local communities. Mr. Neuman provided maps and information from the St. Croix Watershed National Heritage planning effort.

Examples of possible TAP projects were discussed. Some of the potential project ideas that were first discussed were the design of the proposed round-a-bout at the intersection of State Highway 95 and Highway 8 near the Franconia Sculpture Park, improvement on a current scenic overlook and the trail connection between Taylors Falls CBD and Interstate Park. Much discussion was centered on the need for improved signage to better mark the St. Croix Scenic Byway route.



Taskforce meeting, Taylors Falls

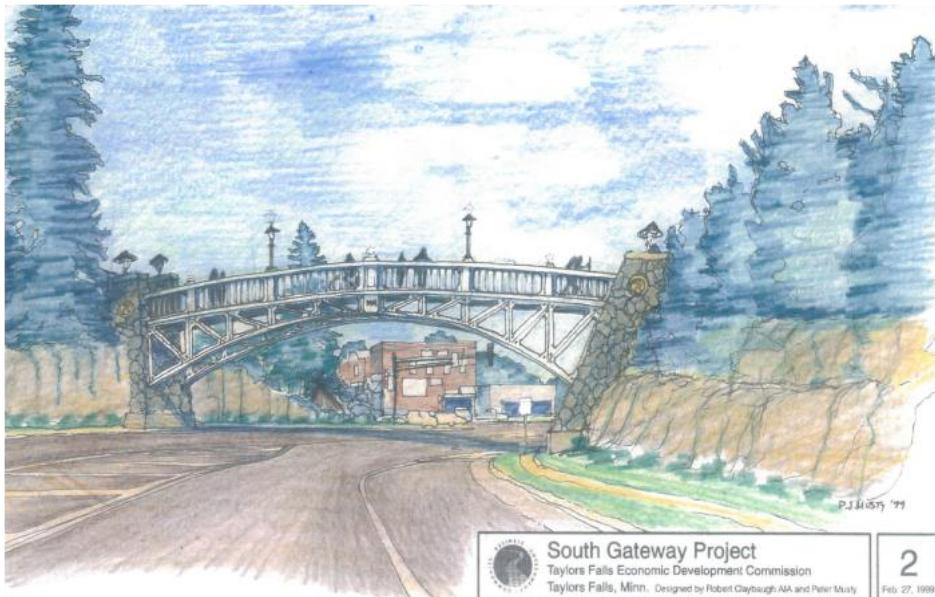
On May 7, 2015 a third meeting was held in Bayport to further discuss potential projects for the St. Croix Scenic Byway. This meeting was intended to gather information from local units of government and stakeholders in the southern portion of the byway route near Washington County. Identifying investment priorities for the corridor was crucial for the next steps in the planning process.

Action Plan to Move Forward

A common theme throughout the corridor was the need for more substantial and visual signage to mark the byway. Design features included distinctive signage constructed of native basalt rock welcoming those to the St. Croix Scenic Byway. The taskforce has had discussions with MnDOT metro officials to address safety considerations relating to the proposed signage.

There was a general agreement that marketing efforts should continue and expand to highlight the amenities along the byway. An educational video is currently being created in coordination with the St. Croix Scenic Byway Historical Travel Guide and will soon be available.

A pedestrian bridge located across highway 8 near the intersection of State Highway 95 was also proposed (pictured below). Additional contacts were made to stakeholders in the northern most portion of the St. Croix Scenic Byway route to obtain additional concerns, issues or project recommendations.



Proposed pedestrian bridge, Taylors Falls

Scenic Byway Projects

The general public's knowledge and awareness of the St. Croix Scenic byway remains pretty limited. The intent of the three projects being proposed is to give significant exposure to the existence of the Byway primarily to traffic on Highway #8 and #95 in Chisago County.

The area near and in Taylors Falls is a high profile location. There are over 1.5 million people that visit the area in the summer – 430,000 annually visit Interstate State Park which was recently ranked 8th of most popular Minnesota State Park. Just across the river, Wisconsin Interstate has 320,000 visitors.

The first of three projects proposed will enhance the profile of the existence of the Scenic Byway at the junction of Highways #8 and #95 just south of Taylors Falls. A new roundabout to be built by MnDOT in 2016 provides a great location for an entrance sign to the Byway. A location has been identified in consultation with MnDOT for a significant sign welcoming visitors to the St. Croix Scenic Byway at that intersection.

The high visibility and growth of the Franconia Sculpture Park and the existence/access point of the funded and “to be built” Swedish Immigrant Trail on Tern at the same roundabout will give the visitor to the valley a sense they are in fact entering an important place.

In addition, as the Highway #8 traffic enters the city limits of the City of Taylors Falls, two additional enhancements will greet visitors. An identified area owned by MnDOT and formerly a pull off spot for cars, which has become increasingly more of a pedestrian walkway/viewing area. This location could be converted to a more user friendly amenity by adding safer railings and a safer walking surface in this scenic area along with installing interpretive signage to include the Scenic Byway route and history.

Finally, Taylors Falls is the terminus of the Gateway Trail. The final project would be funding to design a pedestrian bridge across Highway #8 to provide safe access for Swedish Immigrant Trails users into Interstate State Park. This would be a significant enhancement to safety of Highway #8 corridor and the Scenic Byway where usage has been on the increase. It will also leave the visitor with full knowledge that the St. Croix Scenic Byway is of great import and hopefully peak their interest in learning more.

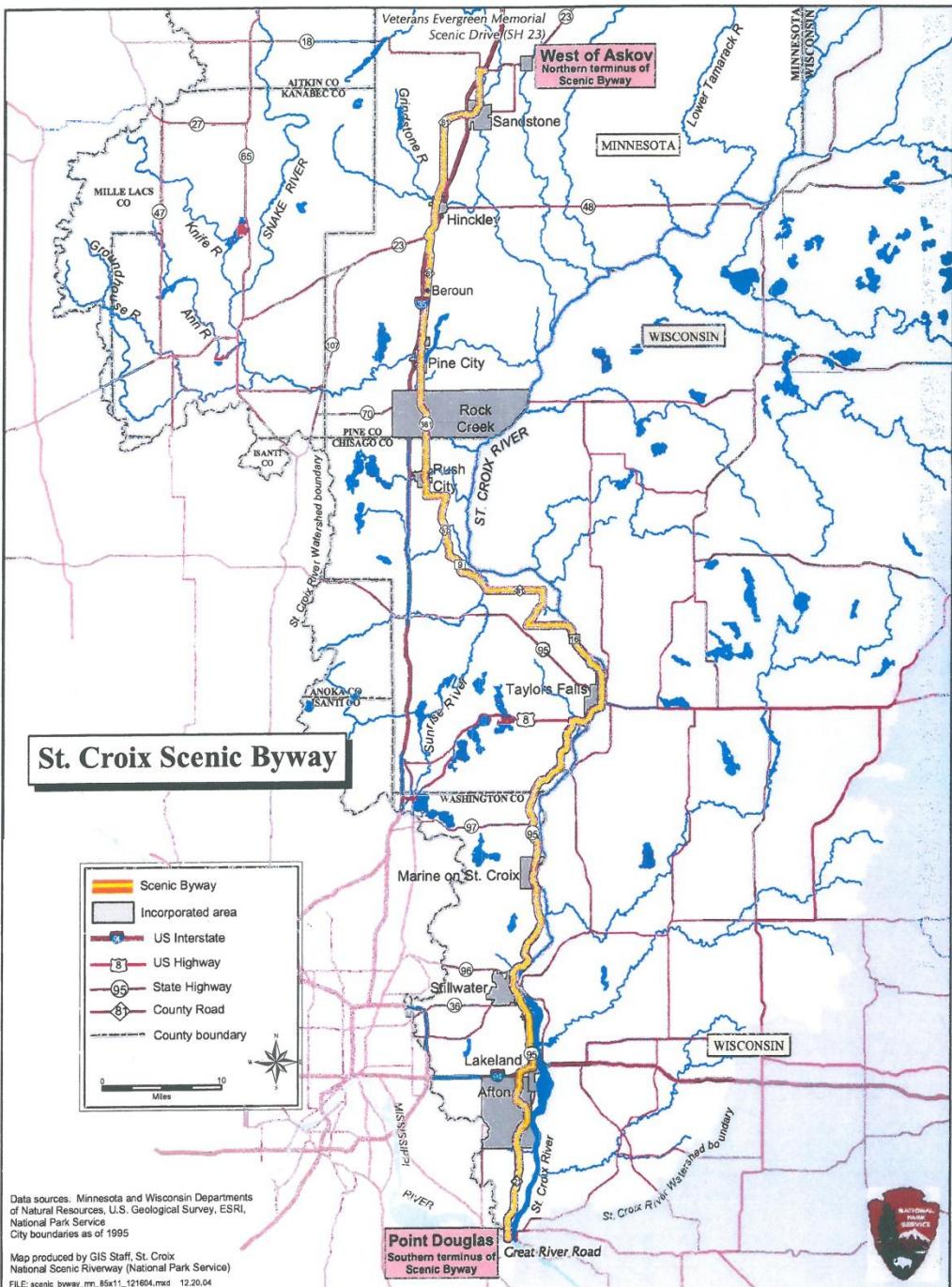
It is anticipated that these three projects will provide a standard and encourage other communities, counties and municipalities to make like type investments to enhance visitation and awareness of the St. Croix Scenic Byway.

Conclusions/Final Comments

Overall, the taskforce determined that there was an abundance of potential projects that could be executed to emphasize the amenities along the St. Croix Scenic Byway. The projects that were selected showed the most interest from the taskforce and were to increase recognition and awareness of the St. Croix Scenic Byway. The community and regional stakeholder involvement process was effective when determining projects eligible for TAP funding.

It is estimated that 40-60 hours will be needed to make annual updates to the St. Croix Scenic Byway plan. This will involve convening the taskforce, gathering/reviewing current data and preparing a report

Appendices





Contact List for St. Croix Scenic Byway Stakeholders

City	County	Contact Person
Afton	Washington	Ronald J. Moorse
Afton	Washington	Richard Bend
Amador Township	Chisago	Lin Strong
Askov	Pine	Terry Johnsen
Bayport	Washington	Susan St. Ores
Center City	Chisago	Terrie Trudeau
Center City	Chisago	Jill Behnke
Chisago City	Chisago	John Pechman
Chisago City	Chisago	Bob Gustafson
Chisago City	Chisago	Steve Heth
Chisago County	Chisago	Benjamin J. Utech
Chisago County	Chisago	Rick Greene
Chisago County	Chisago	George McMahon
Chisago County	Chisago	Ben Montzka
Fish Lake Twp	Chisago	Andrea Nekowitsch
Hastings	Dakota/Washington	Melanie Mesko Lee
Hastings	Dakota/Washington	Paul Hicks
Hinckley	Pine	Mark Perry
Hinckley	Pine	Donald Zeman
Hudson	St. Croix	Devin Willi
Hudson	St. Croix	Dennis D. Darnold
Marine on St. Croix	Washington	Lynette Peterson
Mission Creek Township	Mission Creek	Pamela Greden
Oak Park Heights	Washington	Eric A. Johnson
Oak Park Heights	Washington	Scott Richards
Oak Park Heights	Washington	Julie Hultman
Osceola	Renville	Joel West
Osceola	Renville	Gary Beckmann
Pine City	Pine	Nathan Johnson
Pine City	Pine	Frank Christopherson
Pine City	Pine	Holly Wilson
Pine City	Pine	Paul Janssen
Pine County	Pine	Mark A. LeBrun
Pine County	Pine	Stephen Hallan
Pine County	Pine	Steve Chaffee
Pine County	Pine	Matt Ludwig
Rock Creek	Pine	Sandra Pangerl
Rush City	Chisago	Amy Mell
Rush City	Chisago	Dan Dahlberg
Sandstone	Pine	Sam Griffith

October 10, 2014

St. Croix Scenic Byway Stakeholders:

I am writing to invite you to a meeting regarding the St. Croix Scenic Byway. This route is eligible for Transportation Alternatives Program funding through MnDOT. The St. Croix Scenic Byway is a 124-mile scenic route that follows along the St. Croix National Scenic River and is located in three MN Counties: Washington, Chisago and Pine.

The purpose of this meeting is to start a process to identify potential projects which would qualify for these funds. It is critical that this process has local input and participation. As a stakeholder along or near this corridor, I am seeking your involvement. Please pass along this announcement to anyone else you think would have an interest.

We will provide light refreshments for the meeting and a preliminary agenda is attached. Please join us on November 20th at 7:00-8:30 p.m. at the Taylors Falls Community Center located at 312 Government St, Taylors Falls, MN 55084.

Please RSVP to Jennifer Russell at jennifer.russell@ecrdc.org by November 13th.

11/20/15 Taylors Falls, MN

Agenda

1. Call to order
2. History of the St. Croix Scenic Byway
3. What are Scenic Byways? Discuss elements of a Scenic Byway
4. Project overview-ideas
5. TAP project eligibility
6. Discuss how to proceed. Committee?
7. Who else should be involved?
8. Next steps
9. Adjourn

What are Scenic Byways?

Scenic Byways are roads that feature many of Minnesota's finest cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and archaeological locations and landscapes.

What are elements of a Scenic Byway?

Scenic, Cultural, Historic, Recreational, Archaeological

- **Scenic quality** is the heightened visual experience derived from the view of natural and manmade elements of the visual environment of the scenic byway corridor. The characteristics of the landscape are strikingly distinct and offer a pleasing and most memorable visual experience.
- **Cultural quality** is evidence and expressions of the customs or traditions of a distinct group of people. Cultural features include, but are not limited to, crafts, music, dance, rituals, festivals, speech, food, special events.
- **Historic quality** encompasses legacies of the past that are distinctly associated with physical elements of the landscape, whether natural or manmade, that are of such historic significance that they educate the viewer and stir an appreciation for the past.
- **Recreational quality** involves outdoor recreational activities directly association with and dependent upon the natural and cultural elements of the corridor's landscape.
- **Archeological quality** involves those characteristics of the scenic byways corridor that are physical evidence of historic or prehistoric human life or activity.

March 3, 2015

St. Croix Scenic Byway Stakeholders:

I am writing to invite you to the second meeting regarding the St. Croix Scenic Byway. This route is eligible for Transportation Alternatives Program funding through MnDOT. The purpose of this meeting is to continue the process of discussing/identifying potential projects which would qualify for these funds. It is critical that this process has local input and participation. As a stakeholder along or near this corridor, I am seeking your involvement.

Please pass along this announcement to anyone else you think would have an interest. Please join us on March 16th, 6:00-7:30 p.m. at the City of Marine on St. Croix Village Hall located at 121 Judd Street, Marine on St. Croix 55047

Please RSVP to Jennifer Russell at jennifer.russell@ecrdc.org by March 12th.

3/16/15 Marine on St. Croix

Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Review Scenic Byway assets
3. Brainstorm Projects / Possible projects
4. Next steps- discuss how to proceed
5. Adjourn

April 16, 2015

St. Croix Scenic Byway Stakeholders:

I am writing to invite you to the third meeting regarding the St. Croix Scenic Byway. This route is eligible for Transportation Alternatives Program funding through MnDOT. Based on our last meeting discussion, we will now move forward with identifying projects that are eligible for Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding. We will be focusing on some priority projects for the byway.

As a stakeholder along or near this corridor, I am seeking your involvement. Please pass along this announcement to anyone else you think would have an interest. Please join us on May 7th, 6:30-7:30 p.m. at the Bayport City Library located at **582 4th St N, Bayport, MN 55003**.

Please RSVP to Jennifer Russell at jennifer.russell@ecrdc.org by April 30th.

5/7/15 Bayport

Agenda

1. Review Eligibility for TAP
2. Identify possible projects
3. Prioritize Projects
4. Identify investment priorities
5. How to proceed/should we meet again?
6. Adjourn

Potential Scenic BYway Funding Sources

Funding Source	Responsible Entity	Infrastructure	Non-Infrastructure	Notes
Scenic Byway Solicitation	MnDOT	X		Final solicitation occurring in CY 2015
Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)	ATPs / MnDOT	X		http://www.dot.state.mn.us/map-21/tap.html
Regional Sustainable Development Partnership	U of M		X	http://www.extension.umn.edu/rsdp/
Community Development Funding	DEED	X		http://mn.gov/deed/government/financial-assistance/community-funding/
Greater Minnesota Public Infrastructure Program	DEED	X		http://mn.gov/deed/government/financial-assistance/business-funding/infrastructure-grants.jsp
Explore Minnesota Grant Program	Explore MN		X	http://www.exploreminnesota.com/industry-minnesota/ways-to-get-involved/grants/
Parks and Trails Legacy Grant Program	DNR	X		http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/pt_legacy.html
Outdoor Recreation Grant Program	DNR	X		http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/outdoor_rec.html
Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) Rail-Crossings	MnDOT	X		
General transportation programming	MnDOT; Counties; Cities	X		Share Byway needs with responsible roadway entities; some may be able to be accommodated through standard transportation programming processes.
Minnesota Geospatial Information Office	MnGeo		X	Not a funding source but may be used as an information resource http://www.mngeo.state.mn.us/
Minnesota State Demographic Center	Admin Minnesota		X	Not a funding source but may be used as an information resource http://mn.gov/admin/demography/
State Health Improvement Program (SHIP)	MDH	X	X	http://www.health.state.mn.us/healthreform/ship/
County Fair Arts Access and Cultural Heritage Grants	MDA		X	http://www.mda.state.mn.us/en/grants/grants/countylfair.aspx
Recreational Trails Program	DNR	X		http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/trails_federal.html
Local Trail Connections Program	DNR			http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/trails_local.html

Regional Trail Grant Program	DNR	X	http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/trails Regional.html
Other DNR Grants	DNR	X	Depending on the project, other DNR grants may be appropriate http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/index.html
Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage Grants	MHS	X	http://legacy.mnhs.org/grants
RDC Transportation Planning Grants	MnDOT / RDCs	X	
Private Foundation Grant Opportunities	Varies		http://www.lmc.org/page/1/private-grant-sources.jsp
Chambers of Commerce	Varies	X	Local chambers may have funding available to assist with byway activities related to economic development
Byway Membership Fees	Byway groups	X	Consider charging a byway membership fee to accomplish small projects and/or provide match to other grant opportunities
Advertising Revenue	Byway groups	X	Sell advertising in byway publications to cover costs
Regional Arts Councils		X	http://www.arts.state.mn.us/racs/
Hazard Mitigation Assistance	FEMA	X	https://www.fema.gov/hazard-mitigation-assistance
Federal Land Access Program (FLAP)	FHWA	X	http://flh.fhwa.dot.gov/programs/flap/
Minnesota Design Team	AIA Minnesota	X	http://www.aia-mn.org/get-involved/committees/minnesota-design-team/
SHPO Grants	MHS	X	http://www.mnhs.org/shpo/grants/