

Lake Mille Lacs Region Explores Scenic Byway Designation

As the nation marks the 25th anniversary of the National Scenic Byways Program the Lake Mille Lacs area has embarked upon the process of a possible scenic byway designation. Currently, twenty scenic byways dot Minnesota's roads less travelled, and are significant economic drivers. "Scenic Byways host thousands of visitors annually who bring tourism, cultural, and economic vitality to the communities along the byway corridors," said East Central Regional Development Commission (ECRDC) senior planner Penny Simonsen. "The tourism generated by these byways is often the key supporting financial source to many of our historic designated sites as well as the local businesses along the byways.", notes Tina Chapman, Mille Lacs Area Tourism Council.

In response to local requests, the ECRDC, based in Mora applied for funding from the Minnesota Department of Transportation to provide an assessment looking at the development of a future scenic byway. "Across Minnesota, the scenic and historic byways continue to be very popular and contribute significantly to local, regional, and state economies," said Simonsen.

A steering committee is being formed to manage and coordinate the planning process that will include substantial community input, creating preliminary proposed roadway enhancements, result in a plan that includes timelines, tasks, and budgets that may support a future scenic byway designation.

"More than just suggested road trips, Minnesota's byways are a catalyst for the preservation of Minnesota's culture, history, and would enhance efforts to increase tourism in the Lake Mille Lacs region," Simonsen further adds.

Upcoming events are planned to encourage comments and feedback along with an opportunity to learn more about scenic byways. For information related to scenic byways and how you can participate contact Penny Simonsen at 320-679-4065x23 or penny.simonsen@ecrdc.org. Lake Mille Lacs Scenic Byways can also be found on Facebook.