



## **What's Designation All About?**

*Nomination and Designation of National Scenic Byways and All-American Roads*

### *Who Designates?*

Under the National Scenic Byways Program, the U.S. Secretary of Transportation recognizes certain roads as National Scenic Byways or All-American Roads based on their archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic qualities. There are 72 such designated byways in 32 states. The Federal Highway Administration promotes the collection as America's Byways.

### *Who Nominates?*

Anyone may nominate a road for possible designation by the Secretary, but the nomination must be submitted through a state's official scenic byway agency and include a corridor management plan designed to preserve and enhance the unique qualities of the byway.

The byways themselves typically are supported through a network of individuals who volunteer their time and effort. It is a bottom-up, grassroots oriented program. Local citizens and communities create the vision for their byway, identify the resources comprising the intrinsic qualities, and form the theme or story that stirs the interest and imagination of visitors about the byway and its resources. Local citizens and communities decide how best to balance goals, strategies, and actions for promoting the byway and preserving its intrinsic qualities. The vision, goals, strategies, and actions for the byway are laid out in the corridor management plan required for the byway.

Nomination is not about filling out an application. It's all about telling the byway's story. That's the premise that is driving the FHWA's work on requesting nominations for possible national designation. Nominees might want to think of their byway's nomination as a combination of the community's guide and a visitor's guide for the byway.

### *National Scenic Byway*

To be designated as a National Scenic Byway, a road must possess at least one of the six intrinsic qualities. The significance of the features contributing to the distinctive characteristics of the corridor's intrinsic qualities must be recognized throughout the multi-state region.



### *All-American Road*

To receive an All-American Road designation, a road must possess multiple intrinsic qualities that are nationally significant and contain one-of-a-kind features that do not exist elsewhere. The road or highway must also be considered a “destination unto itself.” That is, the road must provide an exceptional traveling experience so recognized by travelers that they would make a drive along the highway a primary reason for their trip.

### *Access to Funding: National Scenic Byways Grant Program*

Approximately \$22 million are available for projects on scenic byways. Project applications must be submitted through the state in priority order to the Federal Highway Administration. FHWA encourages states and byways to give priority to applications for

- 1) seed grants that strengthen a byway organization’s capacity to help implement the corridor management plan for a National Scenic Byway or an All-American Road, and
- 2) projects that fill a critical void or need on a National Scenic Byway or an All-American Road.

FHWA typically receives requests totaling about \$60 million each year. Over the past few years, about 45 percent of the funds have used for projects on state scenic byways, 45 percent on nationally designated byways, and the remaining 10 percent for statewide projects. The Federal Highway Administrator and the Secretary select projects for funding under this discretionary grant program.

### *Scenic Byways and the Prohibition of Outdoor Advertising*

The one federal regulation that applies to designated scenic byways is a prohibition on new billboards when the route is part of an Interstate, National Highway System, and former federal-aid primary road. Designated scenic byways on other road types can establish billboard control through local, county, or state laws. Generally, the zoning that affects outdoor advertising is controlled by local units of government.

An issue that frequently comes up is whether gaps or segmentation of a scenic byway is allowed, particularly in commercial or industrial areas. The issue may arise when a road is being considered for designation as a scenic byway or years after its designation. Regardless of timing, the considerations are the same – a portion of the road may be excluded from designation as a scenic byway if:

- 1) the determination is consistent with State’s scenic byway program,
- 2) the road or property along the road does not possess or is not essential to the intrinsic qualities related to the designation of the road as a scenic byway, and



- 3) the action is not designed solely to evade Federal outdoor advertising requirements.

*Closing:*

America's Byways are a distinctive collection of American roads, the stories and treasured places. They are roads to the heart and soul of America. Byways are exclusive because of their outstanding qualities, not because byways are confined to a select group of people.

Managing the intrinsic qualities that shape the byway's story and interpreting the story are equally important in improving the quality of the visitors' experience. Travelers and visitors are intrigued by a byway's story. People leave with an appreciation for the byway's resources and intrinsic qualities. The experience beckons them to travel other roads in the collection.

The National Scenic Byways Program is founded upon the strength of the leaders for individual byways. It is voluntary, grassroots program. It recognizes and supports outstanding roads. It provides resources to help manage the intrinsic qualities within the broader byway corridor to be treasured and shared. Perhaps one of the underlying principles for the program has been articulated best by the byway leader who said, "the program is about recognition, not regulation."