

Lake Koocanusa Scenic Byway Workshop I Series

Visions, Goals, and Intrinsic Themes

Meetings Notes

Meetings began with a welcome by Timory Peel (FS Recreation Solutions Enterprise Team), Emilyn Sheffield (award-winning scenic byway planner and Professor from CSU-Chico), Mary Laws (Kootenai National Forest Recreation Planner), and Alana Mesenbrink (Army Corps of Engineer Libby Dam Planner). Timory and Emilyn have been working together on scenic byway projects for several years and are excited to bring their knowledge and experience to this project.

Twenty-six community members and agency employees participated in the workshops held over the two evenings.

The notes and all documents shared at the workshops are also posted on the Kootenai NF's website at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/projectdetail/kootenai/landmanagement/projects/?cid=STELPRDB5410418>.

Project Purpose and Scenic Byway Background

The Lake Koocanusa Scenic Byway (LKSB) was designated a National Forest Scenic Byway in 1992. The designation includes State Highway 37 between the towns of Libby and Eureka and the FDR 228 on the east side of the lake from the Libby Dam Visitor Center access to the bridge and intersection with the Yaak 92 Road.

The LKSB was designated a Montana Scenic-Historic Byway in 2011 contingent on the completion of a corridor management plan within 2 years. This planning effort will meet that state requirement.

Our project goals are to complete a corridor management plan (CMP) that will:

- Identify ways to enhance the visitor experience and the economic vitality of the gateway communities and surrounding area
- Identify the community values
- Identify opportunities to get your existing visitor traffic to work harder for you economically as well as promote to new markets if you desire

Scenic byways are a good visitor draw tool because you can market them to the level your community chooses. Recent break-throughs in social media applications allow you to deliver detailed stories targeted to a range of individual interests such as lake recreation, fishing, wildlife viewing, history, photography, rock climbing, hiking with the byway as the central draw and transportation route. In addition, there are apps available that allow you to cache interpretive information for areas without cell service.

The FS has GPS'd 60 observation points along the FDR and Hwy 37. Although most views are now obscured by forest vegetation, they are engineered, paved pull-offs suitable for providing interpretation and encouraging visitors to stop.

There are thousands of years of Kootenai history in the area. We'll work with the Tribe to determine what stories they would like to share.

Current studies are showing that people are staying closer to home – travel time has dropped to less than 3 hours. On the heels of September 11, there was a 5-year period where travel emphasis was on friends and family. Eureka currently benefiting from Canadian travels but have

to be careful of becoming too dependent on just that market. Currency values change, Calgary promoting local opportunities and increasing your competition. Their visitation is buying you time to plan for the future and opportunities to diversify. Local planners using tourism to as a stepping stone to attract businesses and diversify the economy. The scenic byway may be another tool to help promote the area and bring in a new generation of entrepreneurs or the young locals who have had to leave back.

Folks asked how much additional traffic could the corridor support? We can tap into that information from the lake management plan effort but planners feel that most of the corridor and facilities are underutilized. Some sites at the northern end are crowded, how can we distribute that use to underutilized locations?

Someone asked what constituted the byway corridor. FHWA generally includes the viewsheds of the road, so the actual width varies. However, the route provides an opportunity to link/promote the gateway communities and fan out to other recreation opportunities in the area.

History of the Byway Movement

Galvanized by the 1964 President's Commission on the Americans Outdoors, a growing body of national outdoor research consistently confirms that scenic driving is a popular and common form of outdoor recreation. Based in part on this information, a variety of programs recognizing special travel routes as scenic byways were born in the late 1980s. Byways make en route travel more interesting and the landscapes they traverse more understandable as our culture becomes increasingly urban. Scenic byways help connect people to places.

California was an early leader in the scenic driving movement developing the first scenic highway programs in the country. Federal agencies such as the Forest Service and BLM followed and FHWA highways entered the game in 1991 with designations for National Scenic Byways and All American Roads. Currently, at least six federal agencies have route designation programs (e.g., USDA Forest Service, USDI National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, FHWA).

FHWA developed its national scenic byway program to recognize excellent driving experiences and requires a community-driven corridor management plan as a prerequisite for designation.

This is a recognition program, not a regulatory program. The finished CMP will describe the adjacent land management agency management but will not contain any new or change in direction.

What are the Benefits of the Scenic Byway Program?

Scenic byways are a tool communities can use to promote the scenic and recreation attractions of an area, with the potential to draw a desirable visitor demographic. Scenic byway drivers tend to be courteous, spend more, and are lighter on the land. There are tested tourism tools for communicating visitor messages to slow down, come early, stay longer, tell their friends.

Writing a CMP, communities can:

- Develop a shared vision for the future of their road corridor.
- Align planning efforts of various land management planning documents (Forest Service, County, Bureau of Land Management, etc.).
- Increase cooperation among communities and/or agencies.
- Organize the information about the corridor currently spread among various sources.
- Secure resources for safety improvements, interpretation, resource protection, etc.
- Identify methods to improve the visitor experience.
- Influence visitor management.
- Identify strategies to improve community economic vitality.

Recent Program Funding Changes

The 2012 transportation bill, called MAP-21 for short, changed the funding environment for the National Scenic Byways program. Although byway related projects are still eligible under the Transportation Alternatives Program and the Federal Lands Access Program, the stand-alone discretionary grant program for scenic byways was eliminated. Scenic byway designations are still beneficial though as transportation funding to federal land management agencies is prioritized for important recreation access and economic generator routes.

Other Current Planning Efforts

There are several other concurrent planning efforts are underway in the area and include:

- ACOE multi-year master planning effort
- ACOE, the FS, and MT DNRC joint lake management plan for the reservoir
- Lincoln County comprehensive economic development strategy effort (have identified tourism as an important piece of the economic planning)

Community Thoughts for the LKSB

What would you like to see as a positive impact on the area and visitors?

- Return visitors who bring their family and other guests. *(Emily note: Traditional travelers are a good demographic as they invest more and share more when back home.)*
- More business/economic investment. Attract light industry and small businesses. Positive economic impact while maintaining the beauty and integrity of the natural environment.
- Opportunity to tie all the recreation facilities and information together.
- Would like to see an emphasis on Geotourism styled promotion. A style of tourism that allows communities to share their lifestyle with visitors without changing the way of life that is the draw. Maintains the availability for the local residents while drawing visitors.
- Look beyond the route and use it as a launch pad for other recreation in the area/county.
- Have visitors appreciate the natural resource management on the public lands. Appreciate the smaller towns and their lifestyles.
- Work toward the positive aspects of attracting tourism and lessen the negative impacts; avoid culture clashes.
- Pull interests together – Libby, Eureka, agencies, community organizations, private businesses

What is special? What do you want travelers to experience?

- You feel like you are driving out in the past or the wild, even though it is paved.
- Good, solid, well-engineered route with long, scenic vistas.
- Feeling of awe. Of welcome. Unhurried.
- There are multiple loop opportunities including the byway itself, the Yaak, and Pipe Creek giving different recreation experiences.
- No cell coverage along most of the byway, some folks love the disconnect. You are can completely disconnect. Okay with locals, harder for visitors.

- The dam visitor center and all the recreation facilities are a big draw. *(Note: There is a national push to prepare the next generation of “STEM” innovators – providing education experience in science, technology, engineering, and math. The dam is an ideal education location to fit in these criteria.)*
- Magnificent landscapes with an understanding of working management.
- There are very few lakes that have such little development as this one does. Flathead has houses all along the lake; if you are driving or boating here, you don't see any development.
- The cultural sites – the river was a travel corridor for generations. Native Americans, David Thompson and other fur traders, the railroad before it was moved. There is technology available to provide interpretation that would “x-ray” the reservoir allowing you to share visual stories of what the valley looked like before the reservoir.

What do you want to retain?

- Clean and fresh look.
- The remoteness and the natural beauty.
- The Montana spirit.
- The ability to experience an uncrowded recreation experience.
- The vitality of the local towns.
- Preserve the uniqueness of the attraction while sustaining the community economics. Give the communities a tourism market that they “can live with”. We don't want to be like Lake Tahoe.
- Retain the Rich, Rare, and Remote feeling.

What do you want to enhance?

- Folks would like to see more of the lake views, opportunities for vegetation management. Both ACOE and FS support. MT DOT needs to clear (vegetation) the ROW.
- Would like to see some short interpretive trails (1/2 mile to 2 miles long from some of the pullouts. They could be varied along themes – geologic, natural, archaeological, etc. Provide a rec benefit as well as a safety one by encouraging visitors to take a break and stretch their legs. If they were paired by restroom facilities, it would be much appreciated.
- Could improve the physical experience of driving the long route with a travel rest/interpretive center. A “halfway there” without undercutting the natural experience.
- Signing on both ends to let people know what's ahead, and where to expect facilities, and identify all the interesting locations (portal signing). Consistent identity signing then continued along the route.
- Also, improve signing along the corridor. Long stretches between services or information. There is a need for some confidence building including signs, interpretation, story-telling of the history and contemporary uses. Additional bathroom facilities.
- Adventure Cycling is located in Missoula – opportunity to draw their business as a cycling location because of multiple loop and “century route” (100 miles) opportunities.

- Recreation access to the water including boating, walking to the water, motorized access. Frustrating for folks there are limited opportunities to pull-off and walk to the water's edge with their dogs/kids.
- More recreation access to the mountains surrounding the lake.
- Stability in the lake level for recreation access. (*Note: Stabilizing lake level is not something the scenic byway CMP can directly address. As a headwaters dam, fluctuation in the lake level will always be present. However, the community desire for consistent and adequate access can be shared with the lake management plan development and both documents can identify a need for lake access extensions/mitigation to maintain recreation access. Additional documentation may boost competitiveness for funding or grants.*)
- Intentionally connect Libby and Eureka for a well-programmed experience.
- Business at both ends working together to tell folks where to go/stop/recreation/eat. Towns close up at 5 or 6 pm, no evening venues, limited lodging. Draw enough throughput for varied dining opportunities.
- Appreciation of the fullness of human uses that have occurred, the logging camps, the mining, the small towns that are gone, the Native American uses.
- Honor the families who lost their homes/homesteads by education and story-telling.
- Share the vibrant Tribal stories of the past and today.
- More camping opportunities on the forest for more of the year.
- Education on the practice of leave no trace recreation.
- Safety for bicycling.
- More bathrooms.
- Slow drivers pull over signing.
- Picnic area facilities
- Educating visitors on how to be a good “guest” (Geotourism ethics)

Intrinsic Features

The FHWA has identified six categories of intrinsic qualities for scenic byways that represent unique, irreplaceable, or distinctly characteristic features of a byway corridor. Some qualities may fit under more than one category and it is possible to nominate a byway for national designation in more than one category. This is an iterative process so we'll continue to work to identify these throughout the planning effort.

Cultural features are the 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, and vernacular architecture that are currently practiced.

Archaeological features are historic and prehistoric features that are on or adjacent to the byway, are still visible and capable of being inventoried and interpreted, and are appropriate to highlight.

Scenic features are heightened visual experience derived from the view of natural and manmade elements of the visual environment.

Historic features encompass 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 of the past.

Recreation features involve outdoor recreational activities directly associated with, and dependent upon, the natural and cultural elements of the corridor’s landscape.

Natural features are those in the visual environment that are in a relatively undisturbed state. These features predated the arrival of human populations, and may include geological formations, fossils, landforms, water bodies, vegetation, and wildlife.

Creating the list of intrinsic features can be used to build an interpretive plan for the byway. A good interpretive plan provides a framework to package your story and provide a clear and coherent description for the casual visitor.

The completed CMP will list the interpretation theme community participants feel are the important stories to share. The implementation plan section will describe how to share your stories and teach visitors to slow down and appreciate the unique aspects of this corridor (potentially through signing, brochures, information at visitor centers, the national monument or community festivals.)

Table 1. Community Identified Intrinsic Features for the LKSB

<p>Archaeological</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rock art/petroglyphs • Native American camps • David Thompson trading post • Towns underwater • Stories of how reservoir impacts traditional tribal lands 	<p>Cultural</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amish communities • Festivals – Irish Fair, Amish Auction, Bluegrass Festival, Rodeo, County Fair, Blackpowder Rendezvous, Quilt Show, Car Show, Nordicfest, Logger Days, Fishing Derby • Downtown Eureka Main Street • Hunting blinds • The dam – architecture, unique features of headwaters management • Evidence of management including harvest and fire – education as to why it matters 	<p>Historic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dam architecture • The route itself • Fire lookouts • David Thompson route’ • Railroad • Old towns; Rexford moved multiple times • Historic village • Railroad logging • Logging camps
<p>Scenic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall foliage; “leaf peeps” • Ten Lakes Scenic Area • Kootenai River • Canadian Rockies • Rugged terrain • Patchwork of forest ecosystems • Ksanka Mountain • Cabinet Mountains • Expansive views of lake and mountains 	<p>Recreation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mountain and touring bicycling • Motorcycle riding • Rock climbing (Stone Hill) • Boating • Camping • Hiking • Birding • Cabin rentals • Fishing • Water sports • OHVs/ATVs • Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail • Snowmobiling • Hunting 	<p>Natural</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geologic fault line • Springs • Waterfalls/icefalls on rock cliffs • Little N. Fork Fall • Eagles/Osprey and their nest stands • Clean water • Ural herd of sheep/big horns • Charismatic megafauna • Drumlins • Wildflowers • Huckleberries • Columbia River Treaty • Water balancing of headwaters dam

Next Meeting

Timory will take this information and begin developing the outline of the CMP and determine the additional information we’ll need from the communities. We’ll schedule another set of workshops

for later this spring, May or June, to discuss positioning strategies to best benefit the communities.

If you have any comments, edits, or additions for these notes, please let Timory Peel know at tpeel@fs.fed.us.

Web Links for Additional Information

www.byways.org: Trip planning site for exploring America's Byways.

<http://www.bywaysonline.org/>: National Scenic Byways Program information.

<http://www.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/scenic/>: Montana State Scenic-Historic Byway Program information.

<http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/byways.pdf>: National Forest Scenic Byway Program information.

<http://www.nsbfoundation.com/>: National Scenic Byway Foundation website.

<http://www.byways101.org/>: Information and tools for building a byway organization and promoting scenic byways.

<http://www.scenic4.org/> : Link to the Ebbetts Pass Byway website as an example of a successful byway promotion through a community byway organization.

<http://www.scenic4.org/cmp.html>: Example CMP recently completed for the Palms to Pines CMP.