

# Preserving Heritage, Enhancing Communities

Organized management plans will encourage tourism.

By Peter Mahony and Jeffrey Grob

A scenic byway is not just a road; it is a road with a story to tell. Scenic byways almost always offer spectacular views; they often contain important historical sites and an interesting array of wildlife. Many present the traveler with an array of outdoor activities or a scenic experience that includes spectacular structures; some reveal the artifacts of early American history or Native American cultures. All of them provide visitors with an engaging educational or entertaining experience.

Scenic byways have become an increasingly important asset to communities, regions, and both tourists and commuters. Communities profit from an organized management plan that preserves and enhances the byway corridor while at the same time encouraging tourism. Travelers enjoy an unusually attractive corridor that offers recreational and educational activities for visitors of all ages.

The National Scenic Byways Program ([www.byways.org](http://www.byways.org)) is a voluntary, com-

munity-based program administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to recognize, protect, and promote America's most outstanding roads. Through their state departments of transportation, communities can apply for designation as a State or National Scenic Byway for funding from the FHWA. Unlike some earlier state scenic roads programs that focused solely on the promotion of roads, the Scenic Byways Program helps communities balance economic development with natural and cultural resource conservation.

## Designation and Funding

The program has two principle components: designation and funding.

National Scenic Byways designations recognize those roads across the country that possess one or more of six intrinsic characteristics of regional significance—scenic, natural, historic, recreational, archaeological, and cultural elements—that contribute to a unique travel experience. In addition, the byway must have strong community support and develop a management plan that describes in detail the preservation, marketing, and improvement strategies for the byway.

Currently, 126 roads in 44 states have been designated as either National Scenic Byways or All-American Roads. All-American Roads are the best of the National Scenic Byways. They must meet the same criteria as National Scenic Byways, but they also must be considered a destination that attracts visitors as an endpoint rather

than a stopping point en route to somewhere else.

Funding for the National Scenic Program was increased by 85 percent to \$148 million over six years by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (TEA-21) for projects such as statewide byways programs, corridor management planning, byways promotion, scenic easements, and billboard removal. The FHWA awards the funds competitively each year in the form of merit-based grants covering 80 percent of the project cost, with the remaining 20 percent matched by local, state, and other federal or in-kind means.

## Millstone Valley Plan

Vollmer Associates ([www.vollmer.com](http://www.vollmer.com)) is leading a team of expert consultants in preparing a Corridor Management Plan (CMP) for the Millstone Valley Scenic Byway Corridor. Located in the narrow Millstone River Valley in Somerset County, NJ, the 25-mile long route runs through the growing suburbs of New Brunswick and Princeton. The objective of the design team is to preserve the natural beauty of the landscape and its historic integrity while making it easier for visitors to find the significant sites and learn about its colorful past.

The Millstone Valley, originally the home of the Lenni Lenape Native Americans, was settled by the Dutch in the late 1600s and early 1700s and was the site of several skirmishes between the local militia and British troops during the Revolutionary War.

The Valley's history is revealed through a series of coordinated, interpretive pull-offs, walking tours, guidebooks, and other media designed to



*The Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park is the backbone of the Millstone Valley Scenic Byway Corridor.*

teach both visitors and residents about the sites that make the area unique.

The management plan establishes a continuous green corridor along the byway and serves as a focal point linking historic sites, natural areas, trails, and greenways while forming a north-south green spine for Somerset County and beyond. Automobiles, bicycles, and pedestrians coexist along narrow roads and trails winding through and along the Delaware and Raritan Canal and its neighboring farms and woodlands. The corridor is also an ecological asset. It supports regional efforts to preserve farms, woodlands, and water quality along the Canal and Millstone River, and addresses flooding issues in a manner that is sensitive to its natural and historic resources.

## Intrinsic Qualities

The Delaware and Raritan (D&R) Canal State Park, surrounded by 11 National and State Register Historic Districts, is the backbone of the Millstone Valley. The Valley offers numerous opportunities for recreation. In addition to several official bike routes, the towpath along the D&R Canal also is used by bikers. The towpath is especially attractive to walkers and joggers, ranging from distance runners who might be in training to casual strollers on a short walk. Montgomery County's network of pathways, which links one end of the township to the other, is scheduled to be connected to the towpath through a meadow and via a new bridge over the river and the canal.

Other attractions include 160 bird species and animal and plant life available for exploration and a Canal Museum, which is being refurbished. The State Park at Six Mile Run has a number of trails for hiking and horseback riding. For equestrians, a 25-mile endurance ride is an annual feature in the park. Both the canal and the river are available for canoeing and kayaking. A full-time naturalist schedules park events.

The Millstone Valley is also an archaeological treasure. Since it has been inhabited continuously for many centuries, artifacts and other remains of its history lie buried in the ground. Although there has never been an aca-

demically dig, relics are often uncovered by residents building a foundation or gardening. In recent years, gardeners have found keys, bottles, metal toys and coins, flatware, and many types of crockery as well as parts of leather shoes, boots, and harnesses; blades and hinges; and tractor and buggy parts. One neighbor amassed a large collection of Indian arrowheads gathered in his fields. Several of the descendants of the original Dutch families have donated collections of family documents to the Rutgers library or local historical societies, which are available for research.

With the development and adoption of the CMP, municipalities within the project's limits will have land use and design controls to sensitively direct growth within its borders and to avail themselves of federal and state funding sources. The CMP will be used to preserve, protect, and enhance the historical, natural, and scenic characteristics of the Millstone Valley Byway while improving access to recreational activities and guiding the traveler through the corridor.

## Palisades Interstate Parkway

The CMP that Vollmer is preparing for the Millstone Valley is based on the same qualities as one the consulting firm completed for the Palisades Interstate Parkway (PIP), a New York State Scenic Byway that is soon to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The vision statement for the PIP, which runs from northern New Jersey through Rockland County in New York, is "to conserve and enhance its scenic, natural, cultural, recreational, tourist, and historic Parkway character and corridor qualities while balancing and improving the safety and non-commercial transportation needs of this corridor far into the future."

The CMP's implementation strategy has led to funded programs that have improved the parkway's safety through roadway improvements consistent with its historic parkway and landscape design intent; established a visitors center at a former median gas station; coordinated tourism, special cultural, and historic celebratory events with the two



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counties, eight municipalities, and the Palisades Interstate Commission; and designed an end-to-end bikeway/trailway with links to existing trails into surrounding communities.

Second phase PIP implementation includes a series of measures that will be applicable to the Millstone. They include:

- Establishing maintenance guidelines and standards as well as a permanent source of funding for the surrounding parkway landscape. For the Millstone, this is particularly relevant to the D&R Canal.
- Implement creative ways to reduce the impact differential between tourism-oriented and commuter-oriented traffic.
- Improve wayfaring to tourist attractions through maps, brochures, websites, signage, highway advisory radio, and visitor information pull-offs.
- Develop interpretive programs to encourage natural, historic, and cultural resource stewardship and improve public awareness of the regional environmental setting and the historical enhancement context of the corridor.

Designation as a National Scenic Byway provides new opportunities for the development of heritage-based tourism, including funding opportunities for preservation and enhancement projects. New Jersey has yet to designate a byway through this program, but Route 29 along the Delaware River is being considered. GE

*Mr. Mahony, AICP, and Mr. Grob, LA, are Associates with Vollmer Associates, New York, NY.*