

## **Sustaining the St. John Valley ByWay: Implementing our Goals and Future Steps**

The Corridor Management and Partnership Plan is a guiding document. Its intent is to provide guidance and reference for management of the byway. Those involved in the planning of the byway recognize that its success depends on a number of factors: realistic goals and objectives, competent people to carry out efforts, buy-in and enthusiasm from stakeholders, strong collaboration, adequate and sustainable funding, methods to measure success, and the ability to grow and adapt.

### **Community Participation**

How to keep the byway alive? Without a doubt, community participation is the key. This participation comes in a variety of forms – through a management committee, professionals, stakeholders, and organizations within the St. John Valley.

The byway’s mission, along with its value and vision, should be broad and inclusive. Some things already work well in the Valley: making a dollar stretch countless directions, cooperative alliances, casual gatherings, and meeting face-to-face. Similarly, there are many challenges to community participation, such as the overuse of volunteers, perceived “turf/territory” impediments, lack of leadership skills, and difficulty securing funds. It will be the job of any group involved in the byway management to integrate diverse interest groups, constructive techniques and be mindful of the challenges.

By virtue of the abundance of assets and the region’s strong sense of culture and identity, we believe that the byway will endure. However, it would be remiss and shortsighted not to seize the opportunity to invest in practical and hands-on implementation of the byway goals, merged with a bold, visionary approach. Byway management needs to be grounded in high levels of idea exchange, information sharing, spanning boundaries and building solid relationships. These efforts will help to achieve the vision of the byway, which is worth repeating:

*The vision of the St. John Valley Cultural Byway is a world destination for residents and visitors to enjoy our rich history, vibrant culture, and beautiful landscape. Communities along the byway’s 104-miles of road work together to share authentic and unparalleled tourism experiences about who we are – our diversity, traditions, French language, and ways of life. The byway is integral to building a better quality of life for residents through insightful management, quality products and services, collaboration with public, private, and nonprofit groups, and investment in preservation and stewardship. We strive to build a lasting legacy that fosters a sense of regional pride, inspires international cooperation, and establishes our place within the story of our nation.*

### **Components of a byway management committee**

To ensure short and long-term success for the byway, its volunteer management committee, will be a fluid coalition composed of people from throughout the region, ideally directed by a professional and supported by an anchor organization, which provides technical assistance.

Many members will have already served on the byway planning committee, with additional members carefully selected. Because of the overabundance of nonprofit organizations already in the region, there is no need to create another; but rather to work creatively with existing organizations and leverage their assets. This does not preclude, however, that at some point a nonprofit entity may be formed.

In describing the aspects of a collective approach that brings organizations together and establishes a cooperative agreement based on a shared effort, the following is a suggested guide:

- 12-15 person committee (e.g., members of the byway planning committee plus new members);
- loose coalition, collective, citizens group, cooperative agreement;
- develops charter, but organized in such a way to minimize high levels of organizational management;
- an established organization acts as an anchor, providing assistance and guidance;
- mandate is byway focused, and embraces its mission to foster larger tourism, economic, and environmental development that serve the byway and the region;
- could become a membership that welcomes a wide cross-section of the population;
- seek people who are passionate about living in the St. John Valley and advancing it.

### **Public Agencies, Nonprofits and Private Enterprise**

To ensure success for the byway, the management team will need to build and maintain networks of public agencies, businesses, and nonprofits within the region and beyond. The byway's relationship with these entities will vary depending on the kind of support required, such as funding, resource, technical assistance, or affinity marketing.

The St. John Valley, with a population of only 13,000 people enjoys an abundance of public agencies, institutions, and nonprofits. There are dozens of businesses that benefit from the byway, such as hotels, restaurants, gas stations and other tourism-related services. Each with its own mission and responsibilities, they often intersect with one another around common interests and goals. The St. John Valley Cultural Byway is one of those common interests and goals.

Some examples: the many communities along the Fish River Scenic Byway, which radiates southward from Fort Kent in the western part of the region, are potential collaborators with the St. John Valley Cultural Byway. Both byways can benefit from their connection to one another by promoting and sharing resources whenever possible.

Because the St. John River is an essential part of the byway experience, another entity that can benefit the byway is the St. John Aroostook Resource, Conservation and Development District (RC&D). This organization helps residents care for and protect natural resources in a way that will improve the area's economy, environment, and living standards. In 2002 it was a major partner in sponsoring *The St John – a River Without Borders* conference.

Additionally, as part of the byway planning, a regional gathering of historical societies and cultural groups was convened. Besides sharing information about one another, they also expressed their willingness to promote and support the byway through their websites and programming.

These organizations know about each other and have a history of mutual support that can be tapped into by the byway management committee. The following lists of entities (in no particular order) can support the byway in a variety of ways, such as technical assistance, promotions, resources, and funding.

### **Regional**

- Historical societies and regional cultural groups
- Fish River Scenic Byway
- Chambers of Commerce
- Restaurants, lodging establishments, gas stations
- Outdoor recreation and nature-based groups
- St. John-Aroostook Resource Conservation & Development Area
- Acadian Archives
- University of Maine at Fort Kent
- Municipalities
- Outgrowth of *CMA*

### **County**

- Northern Maine Development Commission
- Aroostook County Tourism
- The Aroostook Partnership
- New Ventures (formerly Women, Work, and Community)
- Northern Maine Community College
  - Aroostook County Government

### **State**

- Maine Department of Transportation
- Other Maine Scenic Byways
- Maine Office of Tourism
- Maine Department of Environmental Protection
- Maine Downtown Center
- Bicycle Coalition of Maine
- Maine Department of Public Safety
- University of Maine System

### **Federal**

- Federal Highway Administration
- Scenic America
- National Park Service

### **Funding and Partners**

It would be unreasonable to assume that securing a direct and steady stream of funding to sustain the byway will come easy. The byway management committee must possess an understanding of fundraising, keep up-to-date with existing and potential funding entities, and consider creative approaches to fundraising. For example, some of the entities listed below may not necessarily have granting programs, but may be able to partner with the byway to help access or serve as a pass-through for funds from another source.

Funding the byway with multiple sources can provide leveraging power between private and public sector partners and increase the byway's chances for success over single-source funding. Efforts will be made to connect to grant writing resources, such as the Grantsmanship Center and the Maine Philanthropy Center. Additionally, there is a growing number of online fundraising websites that offer an alternative funding source for specific initiatives. These include CauseVox, Fundly, Kickstarter, to name a few. Below is a list of potential funding agencies and partners in alphabetical order.

### **State Public Agencies**

Maine Arts Commission  
Maine Department of Economic and Community Development  
Maine Department of Transportation  
Maine Historic Preservation Commission  
Maine Office of Tourism

### **State Private Foundations**

Betterment Fund  
Davis Family Foundation  
Environmental Funders Network (Maine)  
Libra Foundation  
Maine Community Foundation  
Margaret E. Burnham Charitable Trust  
Morton Kelly Foundation  
Quimby Family Foundation  
Stephen and Tabitha King Foundation

### **Federal Public Agencies**

Grants.gov (resource for federal sources)  
Northern Border Regional Commission Grant Program  
National Endowment for the Arts (Traditional Arts, Your Town, Citizen's Institute on Rural Design)  
National Endowment for the Humanities  
National Park Service (Preserve America, Save America's Treasures)  
National Trust for Historic Preservation (Share your Heritage)  
United States Department of Agriculture (Rural Development, Preserve America)

### **National Private Foundations**

ArtsPlace America  
Foundation Center (national fundraising resource)  
Foundation for Rural Service

J. M. Kaplan Fund (historic preservation)  
Jane's Trust  
Kresge Foundation  
Musser Fund  
Nathan Cumming Foundation  
Northern Forest Center  
Northeastern States Research Cooperative  
Sewell Foundation  
Surdna Foundation  
Tiffany Foundation  
Tourism Cares  
Wallace Foundation

## **Conclusion**

Sustainability is neither a rigid nor finite concept. Certainly, the byway will evolve and shift over time. By virtue of the substantive development that forms its foundation and the outstanding efforts of its creation, the St. John Valley Cultural Byway will endure. However, we are well aware that the practical, direct, and hands-on elements of the every day, such as communications and marketing, collaborative partnerships, volunteers and personnel, fundraising, and program implementation, will require sobre attention, and intentional and proactive action. Keeping the byway and what it represents alive is a primary objective of this plan. Community participation is key to its success, best stated by a byway committee member: *“The byway would benefit most from a bit of tender loving care from the folks who live, work and play along our byway. This requires an ongoing effort to engage and educate the public.”*