



# NATIONAL EXTENSION TOURISM NETWORK

## Scenic Byways Boost the Tourism Sector

### Background

With the goals to recognize, protect, and promote the nation's most outstanding roads, the National Scenic Byways Program is administered through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Through state departments of transportation, communities can apply for designation as a State or National Scenic Byway.

There are 184 federally designated byways—"distinct and diverse roads designated by the U.S. Secretary of Transportation. America's Byways include National Scenic Byways and All-American Roads." There are many more byways in existence that are not formally designated as national byways to the tune of 1,269 state-designated scenic byways, with more roads constantly in the process of being added at both state and national levels as well (Source: America's Byways, <http://bit.ly/3m4QLlW>).

State Byway Programs are typically grassroots efforts to heighten awareness of states' historical and intrinsic resources. They are categorized by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidelines of cultural, historical, archeological, recreational, natural, and scenic but each one is unique and tells its own story. (Source: FHWA Policy 5.18.95, <https://bit.ly/3Zf0tjW>)

For the traveler, the Midwest Travel Writers Network notes a variety of byway journey features in its book "Midwest Road Trip Adventures," including "captivating scenic views, intriguing places, friendly communities, historic interpreters dressed in period costumes providing tours and demonstrations, great road-tripping detours, lovely accommodations, entertainment venues, mom-and-pop restaurants with home-cooked meals, and outdoor recreation opportunities and landscapes that won't disappoint." (Source: <http://bit.ly/3Z0Drxp>)

### What Opportunities Do Byways Create?

The National Scenic Byways Program positively impacts local communities and the tourism industry and helps communities balance economic development and resource conservation. With the goal to attract both local residents and visitors or tourists via "the scenic route," byways feature unique destinations and local hidden gems, and enhance entrepreneurship through additional support to small business.

### Scenic Byways:

- Enhance Tourism Economic Activity
- Expand Access to Outdoor Recreation
- Provide a Method to Protect and Promote Scenic Roads
- Valorize Landscape and Cultural Assets of Rural Areas

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**Federal Highway Administration surveys show that 23% of all vehicle trips and 30% of all miles driven are for recreational purposes such as taking vacations, pleasure driving, and other forms of recreation.**

*Source: Scenic Byways: A Design Guide for Roadside Improvements*

184

**NATIONAL-DESIGNATED  
BYWAYS**

1,269

**STATE-DESIGNATED  
BYWAYS**

144

**NATIONAL FOREST  
BYWAYS**

**To learn more:**  
[extensiontourism.net](http://extensiontourism.net)  
[net@extension.org](mailto:net@extension.org)



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## How is Extension Responding?

Federal and state byway programs are the result of public/private partnerships. Byways are also logical connections between rural areas and agritourism destinations at farms, ranches, fisheries and more. University-based Extension and Sea Grant programs offer research, education and outreach programs, and convene national and state partnerships in academia, governmental agencies and the private sector. They provide resources to communities including community and economic development tools, training for entrepreneurs (and helping communities to become “friendly” to small business), asset mapping, facilitation for strategic planning and development of byway corridor management plans (required for initial and continued state/federal designation), as well as agritourism, target marketing plan development and impact research.

## Examples of how NET and its members are supporting scenic byways



THE OHIO STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION

Local educators with The Ohio State University Extension Community Development assist local scenic byways, like the Appalachian Byway of Ohio, with expansion efforts, corridor management planning and target marketing support.

<https://noble.osu.edu/program-areas/community-development/appalachian-byway-ohio>



The University of Minnesota Tourism Center has conducted research on tourism visitor profiles, agritourism, and Byway awareness, impact on quality of life and the economy.

<https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/2>

Sample byway research report:

<https://bit.ly/3EB8ms4>



With \$4.6 billion in travel-generated spending, West Virginia is one of the most rural states in the country with six byways. West Virginia University Extension helps support sustainable tourism efforts and research helping guests discover the beauty of the Mountain State.

<https://extension.wvu.edu/community-business-safety/tourism-hospitality/sustainable-tourism>



The Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant promotes Coastal and Nature Tourism and promotes its natural assets and diverse types of activities that tourists and residents enjoy along its birding trails and scenic byways.

<https://youtu.be/lv1MuymHtmU>

## What can be done with additional resources and partnerships?

As was echoed in sessions and conversations at the biannual National Scenic Byway Foundation's Heartland Byways 2022 Conference in Leavenworth, Kansas, where a NET representative attended, there is a definite need for additional research to quantify the economic impact of byways collectively nationwide or state by state, as well as to learn more about byway visitor preferences. In addition, Extension can assist local communities and even states with additional byway development, training for byway leaders and with grant development for key byway enhancements, preservation efforts and more. Byways and Agritourism are also logical partners for conservation, preservation and grant work. **To learn more about the National Extension Tourism Network, visit the National Extension Tourism website at [extensiontourism.net](http://extensiontourism.net).**

To learn more:  
[extensiontourism.net](http://extensiontourism.net)  
[net@extension.org](mailto:net@extension.org)



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