

Scenic Viewscapes



Pumpkin Island Light near Deer Isle, Maine

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Maine stays billboard-free despite challenge

For the second time in three years, Scenic America and a coalition of business owners, tourism officials and municipal leaders have defeated a bill that threatened to jeopardize Maine's longstanding ban on billboards.

LD 483 would have greatly expanded the definition of an "on-premise" sign by allowing them to be bigger, taller, and further away from the business.



Front Street in downtown Bath, Maine.

It also would have encouraged the proliferation of electronic signs with bright, changing images.

While the bill's sponsor couched it as an "Act to Promote Small Business," during a hearing before the legislature's Transportation Committee several small business owners spoke out against the bill, saying it wasn't needed and would actually be detrimental to the many businesses that rely all or in part on tourism, the state's top industry.

"More, flashier and bigger signs are not what we need to attract more visitors and business to Maine," said Alvion Kimball, owner of the Orland House Bed and Breakfast. He said that most of their customers find them online, on a GPS or smart phone, or by word of mouth.

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Scenic America lawsuit seeks to overturn Federal ruling on digital billboards

Seeking to protect one of the last remaining meaningful pieces of the Highway Beautification Act (HBA), Scenic America has filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), asking the Courts to revoke a 2007 FHWA guidance memorandum that allowed digital billboards to start proliferating on federal highways across the country.

Digital billboards, brightly-lit signs with commercial messages that change intermittently every few seconds, appeared along federal highways around 2005. State transportation officials, charged with controlling outdoor advertising and following FHWA's longstanding prohibition on intermittent commercial message

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Paul Bunyan Scenic Byway generates \$21.6 million for local economy

A recent study by the University of Minnesota Tourism Center found that the Paul Bunyan Scenic Byway is a major draw for travelers and has a significant positive impact on the local economy.

The study found that in 2010 an estimated 23,800 travel parties visited the region specifically because of the byway. These visitors spent a total of \$21.6 million dollars while in the area including \$14.6 million on locally produced goods and services.

Of course, Scenic Byways do more than just contribute to the local economy. They also help preserve and promote the natural, historic



and scenic character of a region and are a source of pride for local residents and businesses.

The Paul Bunyan Scenic Byway is one of 150 designated roads in the National Scenic Byways Program administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Scenic America lawsuit (continued from page 1)

lighting, turned to FHWA for additional guidance. Under immense pressure from a powerful billboard lobby to approve the signs, FHWA reversed its stance.

Since FHWA reversed its position, the number of digital billboards has proliferated rapidly around the



Lady Bird Johnson inspired the Highway Beautification Act.

country. Most of these billboards operate along the federal highways regulated under the HBA. Drivers are being distracted, adjacent properties are being devalued, homes are being invaded by lights shining through windows, and America's roadways and communities are being blighted by these TVs-on-a-stick. In our 30 year existence Scenic America has never filed a lawsuit, but we refuse to stand by while our Federal leaders make a mockery of the Highway Beautification Act.

To learn more, go to:

www.scenic.org/lawsuit

SIGN OUR PETITION!

Voice your support for upholding the Highway Beautification Act by signing our petition at www.scenic.org/petition.

Hilton Head works to move all overhead wires underground

One of the most inspiring and forward-looking municipal improvement projects in the country is currently underway in the Town of Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, where crews are more than halfway through a 15-year project to put overhead power lines underground.

The work began in 2004 after the Town passed an ordinance requiring the conversion of all overhead power lines to underground. Hilton Head's goal is to protect the health, safety and welfare of residents and visitors, increase the reliability of electric service, and boost the local economy by

improving the aesthetics of an island that receives more than 2 million visitors annually.

According to spokesman Marc Torin the project is right on time and under budget. The Town is even

giving away the old wooden poles to residents... provided they have the means to pick them up!

To learn more and see before/after photos go to:

www.scenic.org/hhisland



Before and after photos show an improved roadside view in Hilton Head, South Carolina.

Maine's sign laws (continued from page 1)

Groups including Scenic America, the Maine Tourism Association and Natural Resources Council of Maine spoke about the importance of protecting Maine's visual environment and scenic heritage. Carolyn Manson of the Maine Tourism Association presented research from 2012 that showed scenic beauty was the number one reason travelers gave for visiting Maine.

The Maine Municipal Association also registered its opposition. "Municipal officials believe that the proposals in LD 483 will have a significant impact on Maine's

natural aesthetics and could have the unintended consequence of negatively impacting tourism," said spokesperson Kate Dufour.

In addition to testifying at the hearing, Scenic America staff created an online advocacy portal allowing hundreds of Mainers to voice their opposition to the bill and their support for the state's strong sign laws. Several Committee members mentioned the large number of emails they had received opposing LD 483, and the Committee rejected by the bill by a vote of 11-2.



Mt. Katahdin, the highest point in Maine and the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail.

A nearly identical bill was introduced by the same sponsor in the previous legislature. That bill was defeated along with another that would have allowed off-premise billboards, which have been banned in the state since 1977. The ban was the result of a years-long organizing and outreach effort spearheaded by Marion Fuller Brown, a former Maine legislator and a founder of Scenic America.

Download a copy of the Maine Tourism Association's recent tourism study at www.scenic.org/me.

Scenic America honors California State Senator Mark Leno



(left to right) Mary Tracy, California State Senator Mark Leno and Milo Hanke of San Francisco Beautiful.

Scenic America recently presented its Stafford Award to California State Senator Mark Leno for his long-time support of scenic beauty and his bold efforts to combat billboard blight in the state.

The award was given in San Francisco during the recent conference of Scenic America's Board of Directors, affiliates and allies.

While on San Francisco's Board of Supervisors, Leno introduced legislation to restrict the placement of advertising on the sides of buildings, increased fines for illegal signs and required all billboards to display license numbers.

Most recently, Sen. Leno introduced Senate Bill 690, which sought to give local governments the authority to force owners to remove or modify billboards that violate their original conditions.

Scenic groups gather in San Francisco to rally for beauty

Scenic America held its annual Spring conference on May 2-3 at the City Club of San Francisco, culminating in a Symposium titled "Reclaiming America the Beautiful From the Forces of Blight." The sessions featured speakers representing more than 15 Scenic America affiliates from all over the country, as well as guest speakers including Huey D. Johnson, founder of the Trust for Public Land.

Scenic America chose to convene in San Francisco because of the city's rich history and culture, its intrinsic scenic assets, and the presence of San Francisco Beautiful, a local allied group focused on making the city's neighborhoods more attractive and livable. Kearstin Krehbiel, Executive Director of SF Beautiful, spoke about local initiatives the group is planning including Play Streets, a program to occasionally close select city blocks to vehicular traffic, allowing children to play while their families and neighbors spend time together building community. Tom Radulovich, Board Chair of Bay Area Rapid Transit, spoke of the importance of valuing each neighborhood's unique sense of place and limiting things like outdoor advertising that homogenize communities and diminish residents' sense of ownership and accountability.

Scenic America staff, directors and affiliates left the conference energized, focused and more ready than ever to work together to protect America the Beautiful from the forces of visual pollution.

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