

October 29, 2020

Nebraska Department of Transportation,
Nebraska Scenic Byways Program
Attn: Sarah Soula, External Affairs Manager
CC
Erich Strack, Government Affairs Manager

Dear Nebraska Department of Transportation,

As the only national nonprofit that helps citizens safeguard the scenic qualities of America's roadways, countryside, and communities, Scenic America actively supports local efforts to preserve scenic beauty and oppose visual blight in communities throughout the United States. Our organization has identified scenic byways as key element of our nation's transportation system, which also serve to promote scenic beauty across the country. Scenic byways highlight some of America's most outstanding scenic features, and encourage the protection of the natural, historic, recreational, and cultural characteristics of the places which host these byways.

We have learned of the Department of Transportation's intention to update the Nebraska State Scenic Byways Program (414 NAC 1) to remove portions of the rule which are no longer applicable. In particular, the proposal addresses the following section, which has served as the basis for the creation of the original state byways program,

"...authorizes the Nebraska Department of Roads of Transportation to designate portions of the State Highway System as a scenic byway when the highway corridor possesses unusual, exceptional, or distinctive scenic, historic, recreational, cultural, or archaeological features."

This regulation and its related components, having served the stated purpose of identifying and designating up to ten Nebraska roads as scenic byways, is now proposed to be removed.

We encourage the Department of Transportation to develop a new process for nominating and designating additional scenic byways, and for allowing future expansion of the Nebraska Scenic Byways Program. Such a process is also needed to account for the potential loss of designation of current scenic byways, so that new candidate roadways may be considered.

Recognizing and protecting scenic byways serves the best interests of everyone in Nebraska. A closure of the nomination process, without a compensating new nomination process, will threaten to erode those scenic elements which make Nebraska a desirable place to live, work, and do business, and may stifle growth of local communities. Through the Corridor Management Plans which guide scenic byways management, communities develop strategies to promote tourism, historic and natural preservation, roadway safety, and economic development.

Scenic byways serve as a keystone of economic development across the country. For example, a 2019 National Parks Service report found that in 2018, an estimated 14.7 million visitors to the Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia and North Carolina spent around \$1.1 billion, supporting 15,900 local jobs.¹ In Louisiana, every dollar spent on scenic byways created a \$1.56 return on investment in both direct and secondary impacts.² In Nebraska, total travel expenditures for 2009 totaled almost \$3.8 billion for trips 100 or more miles from home, and travel-related employment accounted for 42,400 jobs.³ Scenic byways are a crucial part of the Nebraska travel industry.

The Nebraska State Scenic Byways Program also serves to designate and protect scenic byways which may be candidates for the National Scenic Byways Program, which was reauthorized by Congress in 2019 after an eight-year hiatus. Nominations for new National Scenic Byways are currently being submitted, and pending legislation may authorize new funding for the national program next year. To achieve maximum benefits from this new legislation, it is crucial for states to maintain robust scenic byways programs.

In the interest of promoting tourism and economic development, and conserving the aesthetic qualities which make Nebraska a special place, we encourage the Department of Transportation to create a new state scenic byways nomination process. By allowing Nebraska to properly maintain and grow its scenic byways program, state leaders can ensure that Nebraska's beauty can be enjoyed by residents, visitors, and future generations.

Thank you for consideration, and we will be available to answer your questions and provide additional guidance as needed.

Sincerely,



Mark Falzone,
President, Scenic America

¹ <https://www.nps.gov/blri/learn/news/economic-impact-2018.htm>

² <https://www.crt.state.la.us/Assets/documentarchive/impact-report/Scenic%20Byways.pdf>

³ https://history.nebraska.gov/sites/history.nebraska.gov/files/doc/hp/SHPO_Heritage_Tourism_9.12.11%20final.pdf