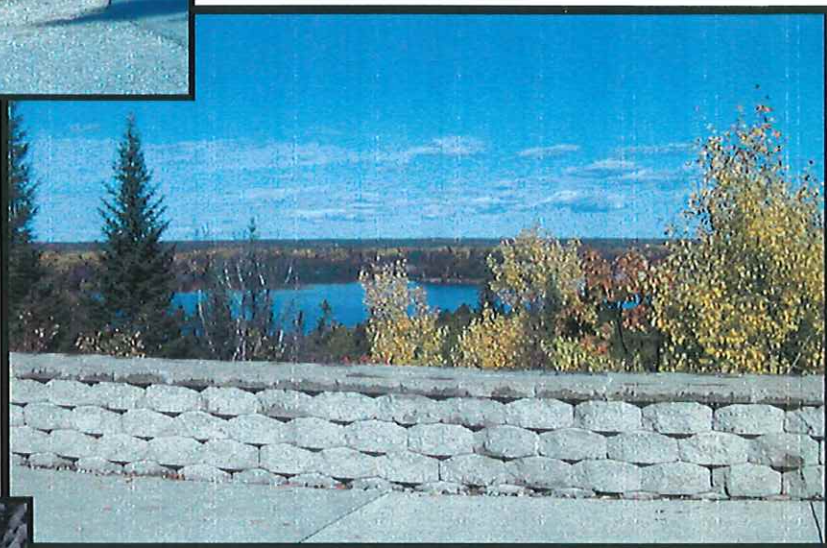


River Road Scenic Byway



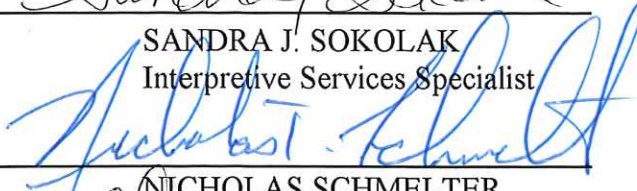
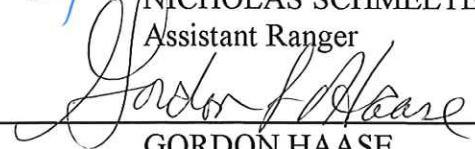
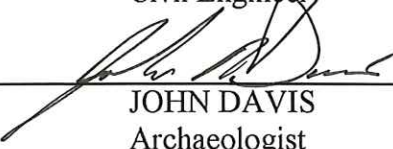
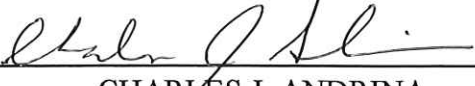
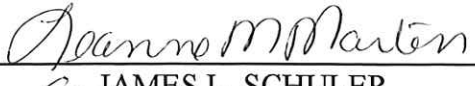
Corridor Management Plan



Huron-Manistee
National Forests



**River Road Scenic Byway
Corridor Management Plan
Huron-Manistee National Forests, Michigan
Eastern Region**

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I. Introduction

River Road National Forest Scenic Byway parallels the historic Au Sable River. This 22.5 mile byway is located in Iosco County in the northeast corner of Lower Michigan. It includes a county road and a portion of State Highway M-65 and is administered by the Huron-Manistee National Forests. In early 1989, River Road was accepted and approved as the fifteenth National Forest Scenic Byway to be designated in the United States and was officially dedicated on May 19, 1989. Since the dedication, several noteworthy activities and examples of public participation and partnership have generated along the byway. Consumer's Energy provided funds to develop a high quality brochure for use in promoting the new Scenic Byway. The Friends of River Road Committee was established in 1990. They successfully raised over \$13,000 in private donations for the purchase of the materials to reconstruct the stairway and viewing deck at Iargo Springs. These initial partnerships led to increased public attention and the involvement needed to gather additional funds through other sources.

In 1991, Iosco County and Iosco Jobs 2000 successfully submitted a Communities in Transition Grant application through the Michigan Department of Commerce. Iosco County received \$400,000 to improve existing sites and to construct new ones along the Byway. In turn, a Cooperative Agreement between the Forest Service and Iosco County allowed the Forest to become the lead agency in determining how the monies would be used.

In 1992, Consumer's Energy and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) reached a settlement agreement for the relicensing of the power dams along the Au Sable River. As part of that agreement, Consumer's Energy agreed to set aside capital investment funds for improving several byway sites and additional funds for the annual operations and maintenance of those sites.

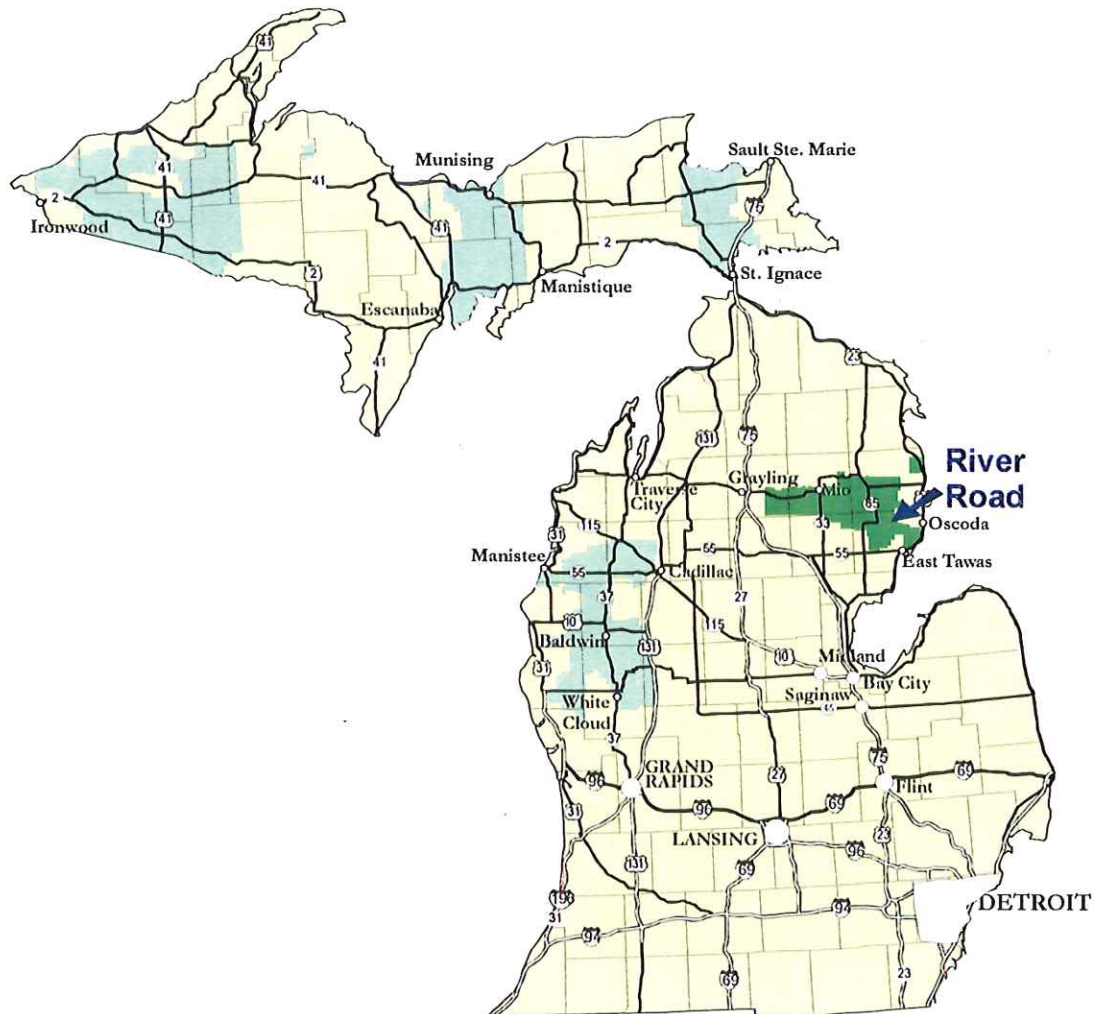
Over the last several years, River Road National Forest Scenic Byway has received State and National attention with several partners receiving awards of recognition for their outstanding contribution to, and support of the byway.

This River Road Scenic Byway Corridor Plan is an updated version of the original plan developed in 1990. Through extensive partnerships and grants, many of the planned developments outlined in the original plan have been completed. Extensive public involvement and public scoping took place throughout the byway nomination, grant writing, project development, and Environmental Assessment processes. Documentation of these processes can be reviewed at the Huron Shores Ranger Station located in Oscoda.

The Huron-Manistee National Forests as the primary landholder, will continue to be the managing agency for River Road Scenic Byway. The focus of this plan is to highlight community support and involvement, showcase the opportunities that exist for public recreation and education, identify management issues and concerns, and plan for future development along River Road Scenic Byway.

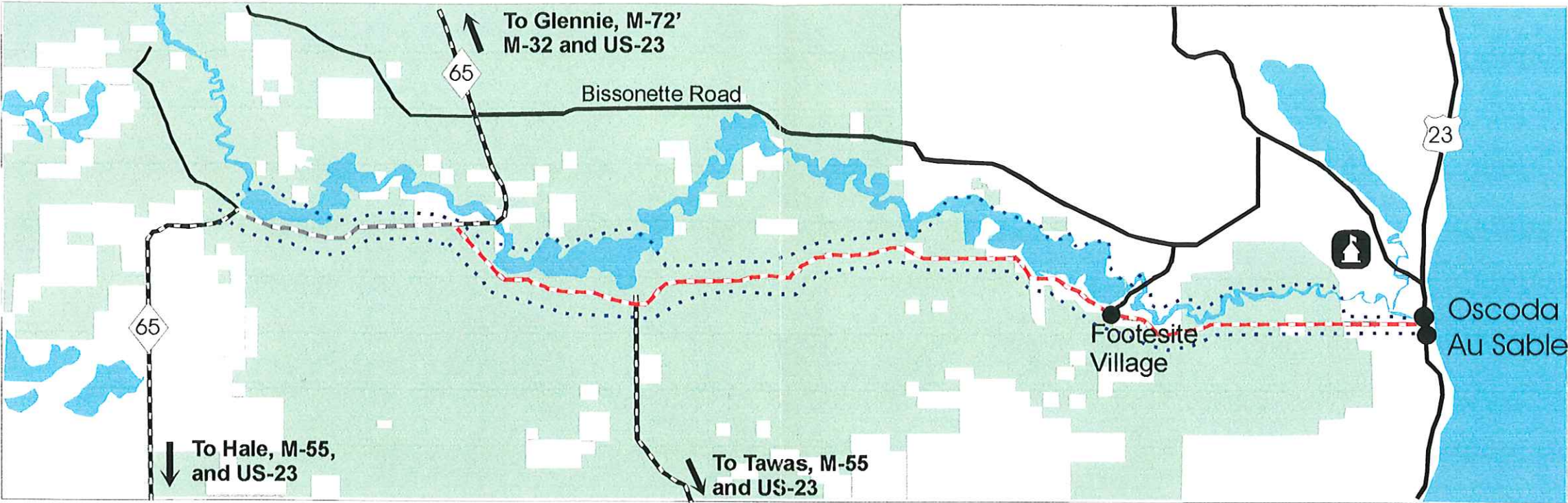
II. Location

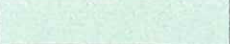
River Road is an easy day's drive from major population centers such as Chicago, Illinois and Toledo, Ohio. It is about four hours from the Detroit, Grand Rapids and Lansing, Michigan areas and less than two hours from the Midland, Bay City and Saginaw areas. The west end of the byway is about 40 miles from Interstate-75 and the east end intersects with US-23 at Oscoda. Interstate-75 and US-23 are major north/south routes through the state.

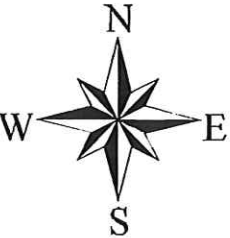


River Road National Forest Scenic Byway is located on the Huron National Forest. Every weekend, hundreds travel to this “up north” vacation area, seeking relief from fast paced urban living.

River Road National Forest Scenic Byway Land Ownership and Managed Corridor



-  River Road Scenic Byway (M-65)
-  River Road Scenic Byway (River Road)
-  Scenic Byway managed corridor
-  National Forest Ownership
-  State or Private Ownership



III. Vision & Goals

Vision

River Road National Forest Scenic Byway will provide high quality recreation opportunities to a standard necessary to satisfy increased public demand and serve a diverse audience. All management activities will compliment a natural appearing landscape with minimal development necessary to protect natural and historic resources, insure public safety, minimize user conflicts, and foster positive outdoor recreation opportunities.

Goals

- *Upgrade recreation facilities to meet the needs of increasing visitor use and to protect natural and historic resources.*
- *Develop interpretive materials and programs to improve public education and awareness of the areas unique resources and how these public resources are managed.*
- *Provide barrier-free facilities, creating quality recreation opportunities for all Scenic Byway travelers.*
- *Provide year round recreational opportunities to meet the existing demand and to help boost local economies during off seasons.*
- *Seek State Heritage Route designation and ultimately National Scenic Byway designation to further promote this unique area.*

IV. Existing Resources (Intrinsic Qualities)

Overview

Existing resource conditions today have been largely influenced by human activity from the lumbering boom of the 1800's, to the harnessing of the river for power in the early 20th century. Lumbering opened this part of Michigan to development and a strong tourism base largely attracted to Lake Huron and the Au Sable River, was established by the 1920's. However, the landscape exhibited the severe scars of a short but aggressive lumbering era followed by a less than acceptable degree of land stewardship. The early 1900's saw the creation of the Huron National Forest with its many endeavors to restore the abused lands in the area. Most significant among the Forest Service's achievements was the reforestation of nearly 50,000 acres of barren sand plains to productive red pine forests. Aided by the federally funded Civilian Conservation Corps, the Forest Service constructed recreation facilities, built roads and bridges, and cleaned rivers and streams that had been choked by logging debris. Today, the forests are healthy productive ecosystems with clean clear rivers and lakes and an abundance of wildlife.

These forests are the areas' history books. Human impacts and influences can be seen in the stumps left by 19th century loggers, old narrow gauge railroad grades, rows of planted red pine forests, and scars left by fires that swept through destroying the towns of Au Sable and Oscoda. Historic building and monuments stand along the Byway as visual reminders of these past events. Visitors to Lumberman's Monument Visitor Center have the opportunity to learn about the area's history

The first of six hydroelectric dams, operated by Consumer's Energy, was constructed in 1911. Construction of these dams forever altered the landscape and the environment of the Au Sable River Valley. Over passage of time the shorelines have become very natural appearing and the impoundments are highly used recreation areas. They have some of the most spectacular scenery in Lower Michigan with panoramic views of forested landscapes and excellent wildlife viewing opportunities.

River Road Scenic Byway provides access to the National Forest and all it has to offer. From highly developed scenic overlooks and visitor center, to remote campsites and hiking trails, travelers to River Road have a variety of recreation experiences to choose from. Boating, swimming, hiking, camping, cross-country ski touring, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, wildlife viewing, kayaking, canoeing, hunting, berry picking, mushroom gathering, fuelwood cutting, horseback riding, fishing, picnicking, fall color touring, off-road vehicle riding, or simply driving for pleasure are some of the ways of enjoying River Road and the Au Sable River Valley.

Natural

Much of the landscape is a young forest as with most of Lower Michigan. The typical vegetation along the corridor includes red pine plantations mixed with jack pine and oak mostly about 70 years old and some pockets of aspen. Along the Au Sable River shoreline is a mix of large hemlock, red and white pine, balsam fir cedar, birch, aspen, maple, oak and smaller shrubs. The majority of land within the corridor is under National Forest management. A detailed plan was developed in 1985 that outlines vegetation management for the Scenic Byway Corridor.



Mixed forests line the shorelines of the Au Sable River.

Vegetation is managed primarily for ecosystem restoration. Much of the Scenic Byway corridor falls within designated old growth areas. These areas concentrate on restoring old growth ecosystems. Reestablishment of white pine and the emphasis on producing large diameter trees is perhaps most significant to the recreating public by creating a sense of returning the forest back to its pre-lumbering appearance.

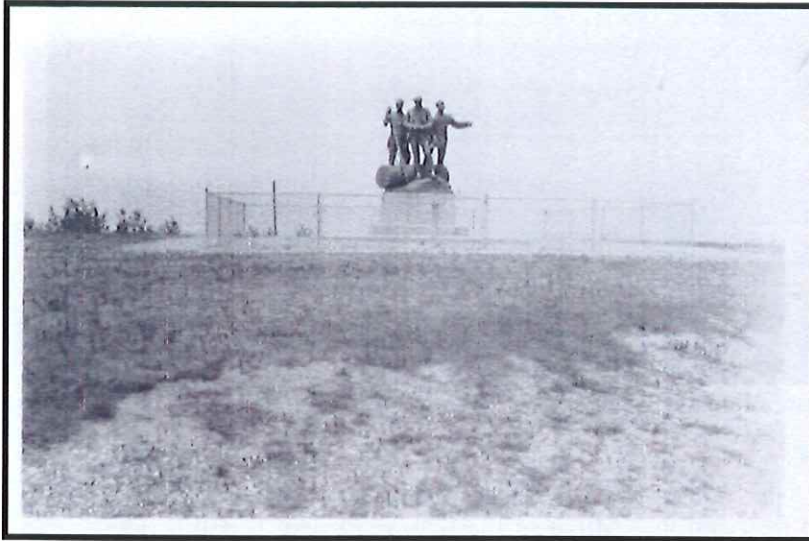


Whitetail deer, wild turkey and other wildlife are often seen along the byway.

The Au Sable River Valley and surrounding forests are a wildlife and bird watchers paradise. Whitetail deer and wild turkey are commonly seen from the car. Colorful Indigo Buntings and Scarlet Tanagers, elusive warblers and the majestic Bald Eagle can be sighted from the overlooks. Turtles, mink, geese, and other waterfowl are spotted along the shoreline. The recently reintroduced Trumpeter Swans are often seen on Loud and Foote Ponds. Restoration of the jack pine ecosystem has brought the endangered Kirtland's warbler back to nest in the area.

Historic

As visitors travel River Road, they can get an idea of the historical events that ultimately changed and reshaped the Au Sable River Valley. The open log slides, fire scarred forests, red pine plantations of the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Kiwanis Clubs, and the power dams that harnessed a river are visual reminders of the past. Three monuments dedicated to these events stand along the byway.



Lumberman's Monument was dedicated a national recreation area by the Secretary of Agriculture on May 12, 1932. It stands in tribute to the strong work ethic of those that cut the big pine, rode the logs down swift icy rivers, and sawed logs into lumber to build the cities of a rapidly expanding nation. It also stands as a reminder of how swiftly forests and landscapes can be forever altered. Many of Michigan's families have ties to the 1800 lumbering era and coming to Lumberman's Monument is an annual event that passes from generation to generation.

Inscription on Lumberman's Monument:
"Erected to perpetuate the memory of the pioneer lumbermen of Michigan through whose labor made possible the development of the prairie states".

When Lumberman's Monument was dedicated in 1932, it stood on a landscape left barren by the very men it pays tribute to.

Today, Lumberman's Monument stands in the same location dwarfed by tall red and white pines, symbols of a restored forest.



Lumberman's Monument Visitor Center tells the lumbering story and how the National Forests' resources are managed.

As visitors travel River Road they will be passing through a young forest reestablished through the efforts of volunteers working with the U.S. Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps. Most of this reforestation effort took place between 1928 and 1940.

The Kiwanis Monument, funded by the Kiwanis Clubs of Michigan, honors the first such effort. Their donation of several million red pine seedlings in 1928 reforested about 10,000 acres. These trees now stand nearly 80 feet tall. A stone representing each contributing club was placed within the monument.



Inscription on the Kiwanis Monument:

**WE BUILD
TO PLANT A TREE IS TO PERFORM AN ACT OF FAITH
FAITH IN THE FUTURE TO PLANT A WHOLE FOREST
IS MORE THAN AN ACT OF FAITH – IT IS POSITIVE
BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE.**



Canoeer's Memorial pays tribute to those that travel the waterways and all canoe marathon racers.

The third monument recognizes the importance of the Au Sable River as a major transportation route. First for Native Americans, then French fur traders, followed by the log drives, and today, boating and canoeing for pleasure. The Au Sable River Canoe Marathon is part of the triple crown of canoe marathon races. Each summer, hundreds attempt to paddle from origin to mouth during the Au Sable River Canoe Marathon. Only the strong prevail.

National Historic Structures

Several structures along the byway are on the National Register of Historic Places or meet the criteria for National Register designation. These structures will be managed in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, the Secretary of Interior's Standards for the treatment of Historic Properties, and Forest Service policy, in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer and the interested public.

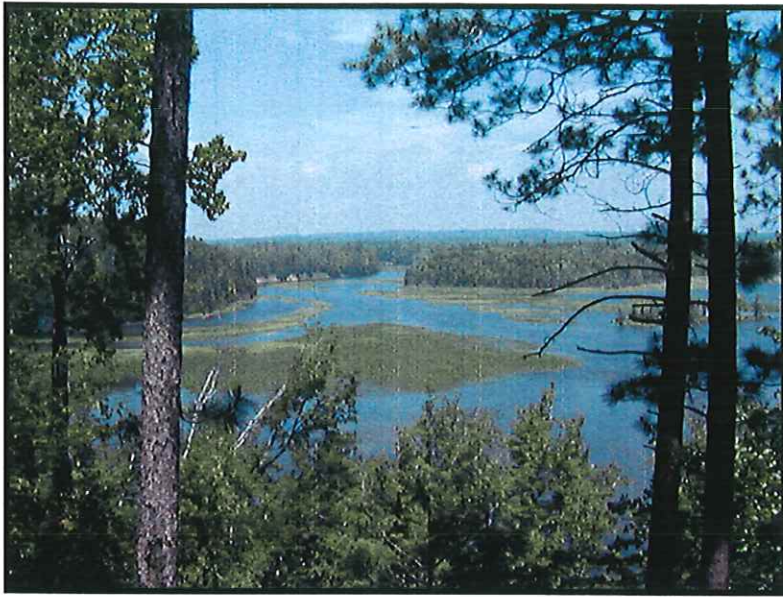
- Cooke Hydroelectric Plant is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was the first hydroelectric dam constructed on the Au Sable River. It operates much as it did during its first year of operation in 1912, and the overall appearance of the plant is relatively unchanged.
- M-65 Bridge meets the criteria for National designation.
- The 1930's Comfort Station at Lumberman's Monument Visitor Center meets the criteria for National designation.
- The Well House at Monument Campground meets the criteria for national designation.
- The Lumberman's Monument statue meets the criteria for National designation.
- The Rollways Picnic Shelter has yet to be evaluated but will likely meet the criteria for National designation.



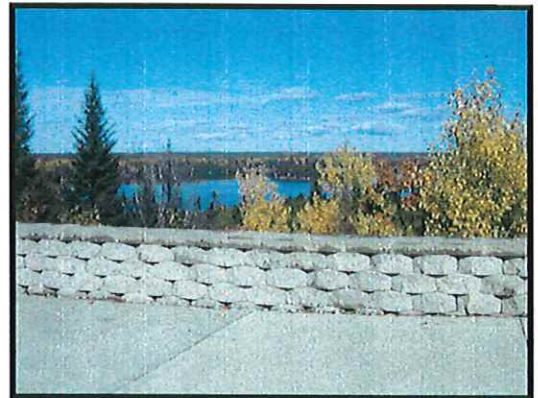
The old Comfort Station at Lumberman's Monument is a 1930's log structure built by the Civilian Conservation Corps. It exhibits the craftsmanship of log building construction during that time period. It has been evaluated and meets the criteria for the National Register of Historic Places.

Scenic

No matter the season, the high bluffs along the Au Sable create breathtaking panoramic views of forests and water. Depending on the stretch of river, views vary from large lakes to a narrow river with grassy areas, islands and peninsulas adding interest to the terrain. Fall is a spectacular time to drive the byway. Gold hued aspen, scarlet oaks, and brilliant red maples contrast with the green pines that line the shoreline. A favorite attraction during the fall is a ride on the Au Sable River Queen touring Foote Pond. Tour busses combine this guided two-hour tour with stops at the overlooks and Lumberman's Monument Visitor Center creating a full day of scenic beauty for their customers.



This is a typical summer scene of the Au Sable River, from the viewing deck at Westgate Welcome Center.



Fall color at Canoer's Memorial.



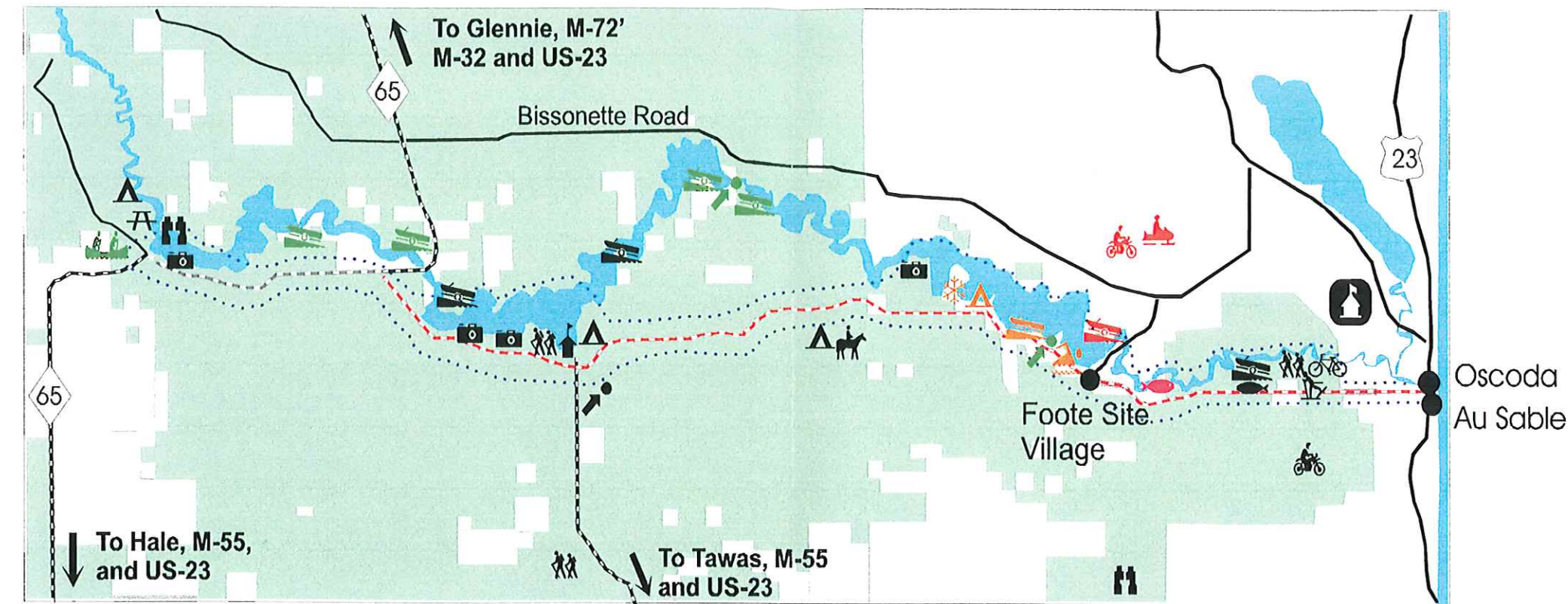
Winter can be a great time to explore River Road

Recreation

River Road Scenic Byway has perhaps the highest concentration of recreation facilities in all of Northeast Michigan. Federal, state, and township agencies, and private businesses combine to offer a variety of recreation experiences. Campgrounds, hiking, skiing, off-road vehicle/snowmobile, and horseback riding trails, scenic overlooks, picnic areas, beaches and boat landings, all can be found in this 22-mile stretch. Canoe liveries operate at both ends of the byway and the Au Sable River Queen tours Foote Pond. Lumberman's Monument Visitor Center is centrally located at the intersection of River Road and Monument Road.

For visitors looking for a more secluded recreation experience, River Road Scenic Byway accesses the near half million acres of public lands that make up the Huron National Forest. Berry picking, mushroom gathering, hunting, fishing are some of the more passive recreation opportunities available. Adjacent to River Road are two areas designated as Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized areas managed by the Huron National Forest. These areas of more than 6000 acres are virtually undeveloped. Backcountry campers and hikers can enjoy the National Forest without the sounds of traffic and the human disturbance of more populated developed facilities.

Recreation Opportunities Within Or Near The Managed Corridor



- | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Campground | Fishing Access | Forest Service Facility |
| Picnic Area | Winter Sports Park | Michigan Department of Natural Resources Facility |
| Boat Landing | Beach | Oscoda Township Facility |
| Scenic Overlook | Attraction | Privately Owned Facility |
| Hiking / Cross-country Ski Trail | Bike Trail | |
| Visitor Center | Horseback Riding Trail | |
| Canoe Livery | ORV/snowmobil Trail | |
| Watchable Wildlife Location | | |

Following is a detailed description of the developed recreation facilities located along River Road Scenic Byway:

Rollways Campground has 19 camping spurs, pressure water system and vault toilets. It sits high above Loud Pond of the Au Sable River. It currently operates under a concessionaire permit. **Rollways Picnic Area** is adjacent to Rollways Campground. It has a large log shelter, picnic tables and toilets. It operates under the fee demo program; a Huron-Manistee Vehicle Pass is required to park at the site. Adjacent to the campground and picnic area is a canoe livery that operates under a special use permit from the U.S. Forest Service.

The Rollways complex is in close proximity to the **Michigan Shore-to-Shore Riding and Hiking Trail** and the **Huron Snowmobile/ATV Trail System**. The Michigan Shore-to-Shore Trail extends 260 miles connecting Lake Huron and Lake Michigan. It's open to horseback riders and hikers. The Huron Snowmobile Trail System provides 84 miles of groomed trail and 45 miles of dirtbike and quad-runner trails in Iosco County.



Rollways picnic shelter is a log structure built by Civilian Conservation Corps enrollees in the 1930's. Two impressive stone fireplaces face one another from the gable ends of the building.



View from the west viewing deck at Westgate Welcome Center.

West Gate Welcome Center is the first developed scenic overlook on the Byway. It has two viewing decks high above Loud Pond, paved parking, sidewalks, and vault toilets. The kiosk includes a large map of the Byway, interpretive panels and a list of area events. Capital investment funds from Consumer's Energy were used to construct this site, and they continue to fund a portion of the annual operating costs. A hard surfaced walking trail connects this complex with Rollways Picnic Area and Rollways Campground.

Iargo Springs has been a popular tourist attraction for many years. The area was operated and maintained by Oscoda Township under license from Consumer's Energy prior to acquisition by the U.S. Forest Service in 1986.

The principle feature at this site is the many free flowing streams that begin as springs and flow into the Au Sable River.

Reconstruction of this site began in 1990 through a partnership agreement with the Friends of River Road Committee. The committee raised funds to rebuild the stairway and construct a viewing deck by soliciting private donations through the "One Step At A Time" campaign. Additional monies from a Rural Economic Development

Grant obtained by Iosco County funded the reconstruction of two low level dams, 1400 feet of boardwalk, and nine small viewing decks in the spring area. At the top the parking area was paved, sidewalks constructed, and benches, vault toilets, and interpretive signs installed.

Iargo Springs acts as a trailhead for the **Highbanks Hiking and Ski Trail System**. This seven mile non-motorized trail follows the south shore of Cooke Pond along the high bluffs of the Au Sable. It provides a slower paced opportunity to experience the Huron National Forest and the Au Sable River Valley.

Canoer's Memorial is another site of historical significance in the county. Marathon canoe racing began in 1940, with a 240-mile race down the Au Sable River from Grayling to the mouth of the Au Sable in Oscoda. This race has been held annually since that time. In 1950, a monument was erected on the site to commemorate marathon canoe racing by principally two individuals in the Oscoda area, Harry Curley and Jerry Wagner. The U.S. Forest Service acquired this land in 1986. It underwent major reconstruction in 1991 with funds from the Rural Economic Development Grant.



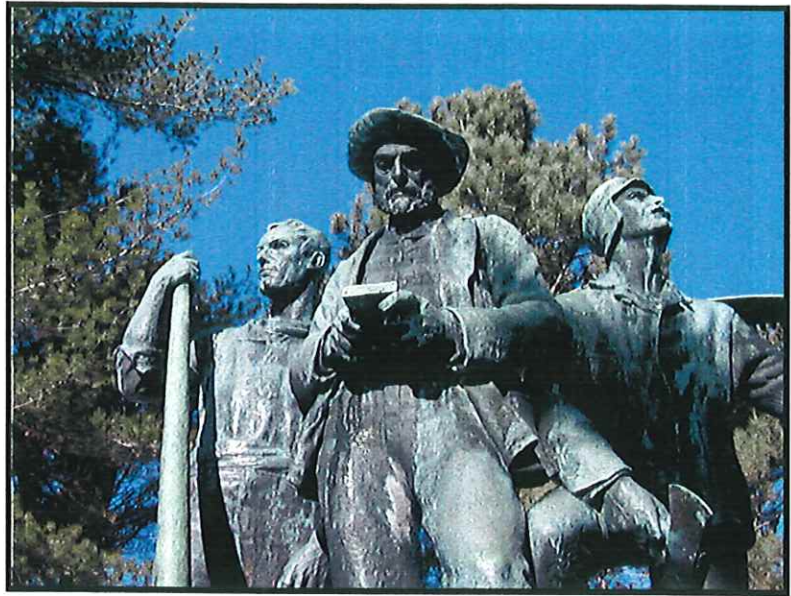
300 steps take visitors from the viewing deck down to the free-flowing spring area. Two log dams have been reconstructed, creating small waterfalls.



A stone overlook surrounds Canoer's Memorial protecting the fragile soils and riverbank from heavy use.

Lumberman's Monument Visitor Center will continue to be the focal point for visitors traveling the scenic byway. The visitor center is usually staffed from May through October and is closed during the winter. It averages 120,000 visitors annually during the six months it is open. An additional 20,000 visitors use the grounds and the trails when the Visitor Center is closed.

Lumberman's Monument was dedicated in 1932, as tribute to the men that dedicated their lives to cutting the white pine that built a nation. The lands surrounding the Monument, were designated to be used for recreation and educational purposes only.



The three characters represent three phases of the logging operation. At the left is the River Rat, the Timber Cruiser stands in the middle, and at right is the Sawyer.



Interpretive programs and exhibits focus on the lumber history and natural resource management.

Operated by the Huron-Manistee National Forests, this facility offers hard surface parking areas for sixty-five cars and five busses or RV's, two picnic areas of which one is barrier free, an outdoor exhibit area, hard surfaced walking trails, and a stairway down to the shore of Cooke Pond. Interpretive programs are offered throughout the summer that tell the story of the early lumberman and educate visitors about the forest and resource management. As part of their requirements for re-licensing, Consumer's Energy funds 50% of the annual operations and maintenance costs for Lumberman's Monument. This stipulation is in effect for the remainder of their license.

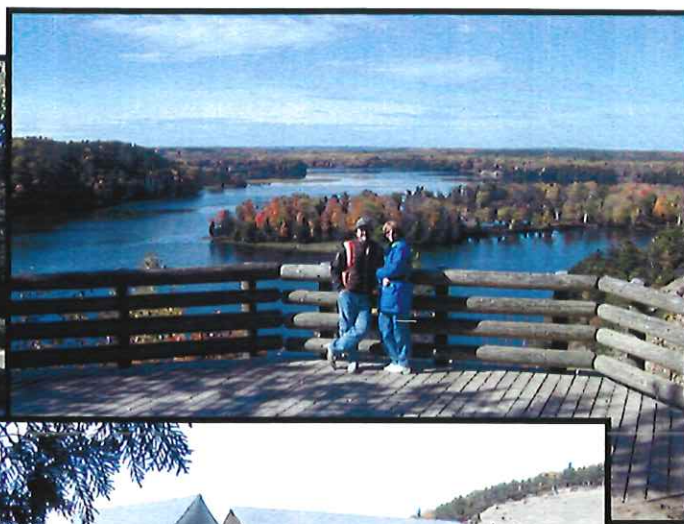


Lumberman's Monument Visitor Center was constructed in 1982. It receives more than 120,000 visitors annually.

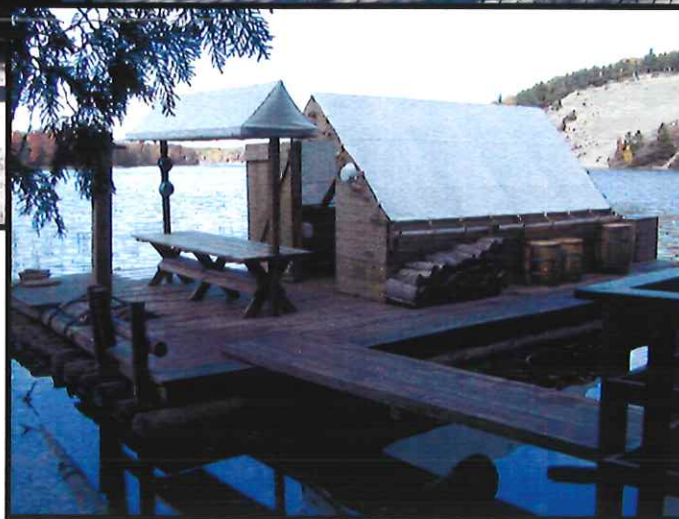
The small visitor center was built in 1982. It consists of modern restrooms and a small reception area. Many additional functions of the visitor center have expanded the scope of the program and have increased visitation. These additions include; an interpretive sales outlet, expanded interpretive program schedule, the addition of the primitive camping permit system operation, increased use by schools and camps, increase of fall color bus tours, and perhaps the most significant, the designation of River Road as a National Forest Scenic Byway. This small building doesn't accommodate this increased use. The center is often crowded and the restrooms have waiting lines. It offers no opportunity for indoor programming or interpretation. Our vision is to eventually build a new center that can be operated year-round.



Above: A logjam sits at the edge of the outdoor exhibit area.



Right top: The Sand Dune Overlook offers spectacular views of Cooke Pond.



Right bottom: A wanigan or floating cook shack waits visitors on the shores of Cooke Pond.



Monument Campground was renovated in 2001. New toilets, hardened walkways and paved spurs make the campground more accessible.

Six miles south of River Road is the **Corsair Hiking and Ski Trail System**. This area is designated Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized and falls within the designated old growth area. The Corsair Trail Council keeps the 22 miles of trails groomed for cross country skiing and maintains the warming shelter. They raise funds to purchase grooming equipment and pay a person to run and maintain the equipment. This trail system attracts a large number of visitors from southern Michigan.

A nice side trip off River Road is Cooke Dam Road. This 3.2 mile county road takes visitors from the high sand plains down to the edge of Cooke Pond Impoundment providing excellent opportunities to view the river from a different perspective. **Cooke Dam**, located at the end of the road, offers the visitor an opportunity to closely observe the operation of a hydroelectric plant as well as boat access to the Au Sable River at Cooke or Foote Ponds. These public boat accesses are owned by Consumer's Energy.

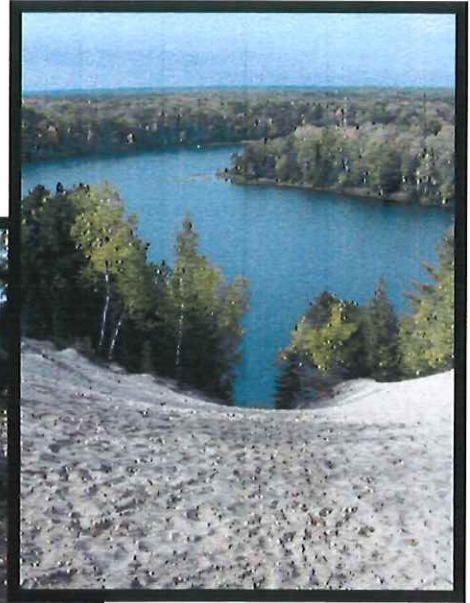
Cooke Dam Road also leads to the popular primitive camping area known as **Sawmill Point**. This area has 16 of the 102 Au Sable River primitive campsites located from Alcona Pond to Lake Huron. These areas are managed by the U.S. Forest Service and require a camping permit from May 15 through September 30. The small **Sawmill Point Boat Launch** was reconstructed in 2000 using funds provided by Consumer's Energy under their re-licensing agreement.

Monument Campground has 19 sites, a pressurized water system, and vault toilets. It is located adjacent to Lumberman's Monument Visitor Center. This campground underwent a major renovation in 2001. The goal of the renovation was to make the campground accessible and user friendly. The entrance road and spurs were paved and lengthened to accommodate larger RV's, accessible vault toilets, picnic tables, fire rings, grills, and lantern posts were installed. Also, two double occupancy sites were added to allow for larger families to camp together.



The warming shelter at Corsair is heated with a propane fireplace. The Corsair Trail Council raises money through donations and fundraisers to maintain the building.

Foote Pond Overlook was the last Forest Service managed site to be developed. It overlooks an area known locally as Champagne Hill. A paved entrance road and parking area, sidewalk, interpretive panels, and a masonry viewing deck were installed.



Foote Pond Overlook sits high above Foote Pond of the Au Sable River.

Old Orchard Park is operated by Oscoda Township through a lease agreement with Consumer's Energy. This is the largest campground located along River Road. It has over 500 sites both primitive and full service with modern restrooms and shower facilities. A winter sports park at the west end of the campground offers sledding and tubing hills, ice-skating rink and ski trails. **Footesite Park** is adjacent to the Old Orchard campground. This highly used facility has a boat launch, swimming beach and picnic area. Oscoda Township operates this facility also. In keeping with the FERC agreement, Consumer's Energy reconstructed the site in 1999 with paved parking, new toilets and upgraded launching facilities. The **Au Sable River Queen** utilizes this area for docking. This is a privately owned business offering paddlewheel rides on Foote Pond. It is a favorite attraction for bus tour groups during peak fall color season.

Other campgrounds that serve the area include Tawas State Park, Harrisville State Park, East Tawas City Park, KOA, Round Lake National Forest Campground, South Branch National Forest Campground, and Alcona Township Park.

Lower Au Sable Scenic Overlook is managed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Anglers use this area during the spring steelhead and fall salmon runs. Years of heavy use led to severe bank erosion. This site was recently renovated with two stairways accessing the river, designated parking areas, and rock riprap to stabilize the shoreline.

Whirlpool River Access Site provides visitors with river access mid-way between the state access points at each end of the 12-mile segment of the Lower Au Sable River. The area has a convenient boat launch and scenic fishing areas for the outdoor enthusiast. A barrier-free fishing pier is also available at whirlpool in a beautiful, natural setting. This free flowing portion of the Au Sable provides fishing opportunities for salmon, steelhead, walleye and bass. This is a favorite stretch of river to canoe. Canoe liveries under special use permit use this launch to put in and take out canoes.



The boardwalk and hardened shoreline provide angler access to the Lower Au Sable River.



Eagle Run Trail System is groomed for cross-country skiing during the winter.



A large map at Eastgate Welcome Center orients travelers to facilities located along River Road.

East Gate Welcome Center is the last developed recreation site or the first depending on which direction you are traveling. The developed portion is similar to West Gate with paved parking, sidewalks, toilets, a large map of the byway, and interpretive signs. Eastgate is also the trailhead for **Eagle Run Trail System**. This seven mile hiking and ski trail loop system runs along the banks of the lower Au Sable. Eagle Run is open to mountain bikes during the non-snow season.

IV. Resource Management Issues and Actions

Since its designation as a National Forest Scenic Byway, many recreation facilities have been developed or upgraded, directional signing has been improved, and guidelines have been established for vegetation management along the route. Many of the proposed action items relate to maintaining existing facilities and scenic qualities, restoring and preserving the resources, and assuring that the Byway is accessible to all visitors.

Natural

Issue 1. Restore vegetation to a more natural appearing landscape.

Actions

1. Continue to restore ecosystems, through thinning, controlled burning and planting in accordance with the Forest Plan and River Road Scenic Byway Vegetation Plan.
2. Utilize interpretive facilities and materials to educate users about natural resource management activities.

Issue 2. The Byway corridor is intersected numerous times by utility lines or by running adjacent to the roadway. While it's acknowledged that the hydroelectric dams are an integral part of the areas history, the lines and substations detract from a natural appearing landscape.

Actions: Work with public electric and gas utilities to screen substations within the corridor using natural plantings and relocate powerlines when feasible.

Issue 3. Resource managers are concerned about the impacts from increased recreation use to the resources.

Actions

1. Monitor impacts on T&E species and sensitive areas within the corridor.
2. Educate visitors on Tread Lightly use ethics.

Issue 4. Litter accumulates during high use periods on the section of Byway from Oscoda to Foote Site Village.

Actions: Promote the Adopt-A-Highway, Adopt-A-Forest, and Adopt-A-River programs fostering volunteers to help keep the byway corridor litter free.

Historic

Issue 1. Two buildings and one statue within the corridor meet the criteria for the National Historic Register of Historic Places.

Actions

1. Develop restoration plans for the Comfort Station, Lumberman's Monument well house, and the Lumberman's Monument statue, in consultation with state preservation staff, for the repair and maintenance of these structures.
2. Evaluate Rollways Picnic Shelter for historic preservation status. If the property is significant, conduct a condition assessment and develop a restoration plan.



Rollways picnic shelter was constructed by Civilian Conservation Corps enrollees in the 1930's. It is an example of log building construction and stonework for that time period.

Issue 2. Several prehistoric and historic sites exist within the Byway corridor. Currently these areas are closed off to some public uses to protect the integrity of sites.

Actions: Seek funding to evaluate and recover historic sites.

Issue 3. Visitors are unaware of the way the land was formerly used and how that influenced today's management of the cultural and natural resources.

Actions

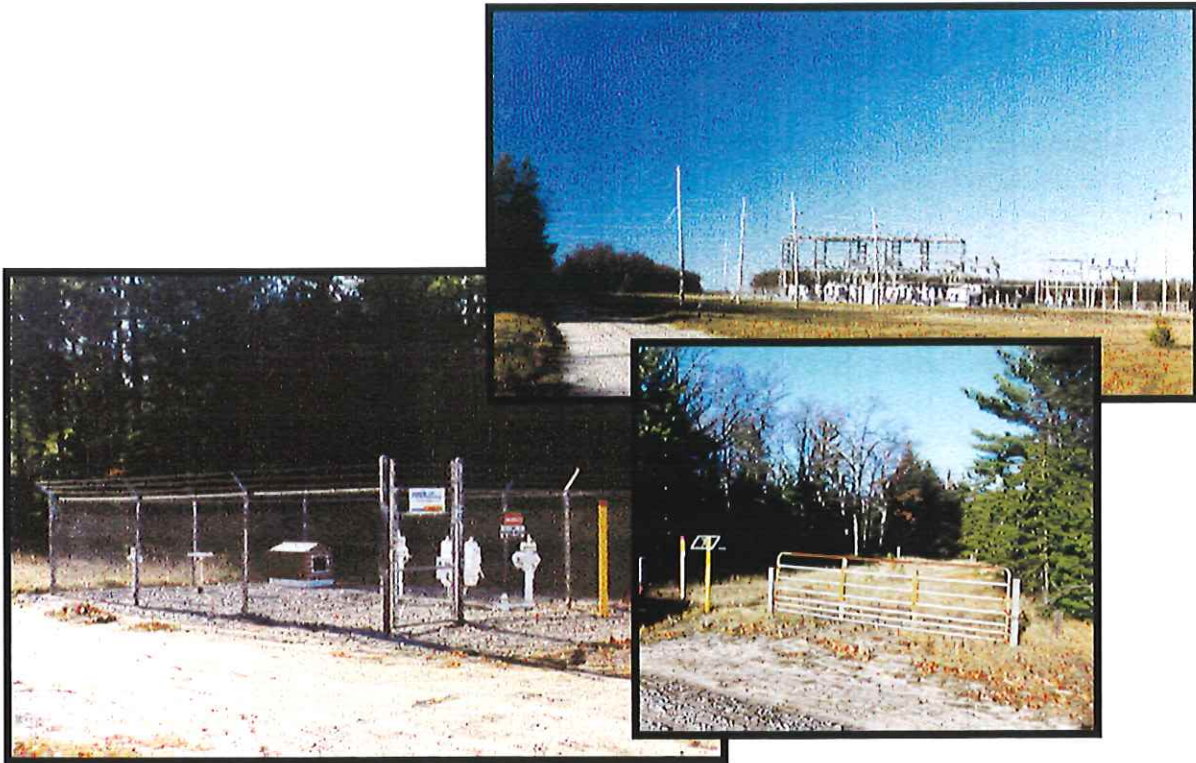
1. Provide year round cultural and natural resource interpretation at Lumberman's Monument Visitor Center. Target school groups, bus tours, Byway travelers, and recreation users.
2. Prepare an interpretive plan for the Byway and include historic interpretation, education, and preservation as part of the plan.

Scenic

Issue 1. Utility and natural gas lines are visible throughout the corridor. They cross the route many times and pass through several of the scenic overlooks.

Actions

1. Work with Consumer's Energy and Michcon to screen substations.
2. Work with both utilities to use post and rail barriers similar to those used by the Forest Service when closing off motorized access.
3. Work with Consumer's Energy to relocate powerlines when feasible.



Consumer's Energy and Michcon have substations and closures that are visible from River Road.

Issue 2. There is a combination of private, township, county, state and federal signing along the Byway. This has led to some duplication of recreation signs.

Actions

1. Inventory all signing for consistency, duplication, need, and appearance.
2. Work with private businesses and other agencies to formulate a sign plan for the Byway.

Recreation

Issue 1. Facilities at Rollways Campground are aging and need to be replaced. The site does not meet current accessibility guidelines.

Actions: Complete Rollways Campground upgrades similar to Monument Campground. Install new toilets and water system, create larger parking spurs, construct stairway access to Loud Pond, and pave the entrance road and spurs. Install grills, picnic tables, and fire rings that meet accessibility guidelines. Install hard surfaced walkways to toilet and drinking water facilities.

Issue 2. Illegal off-road vehicle (ORV) use is occurring on the power line right-of-ways.

Actions

1. Work with Consumer's Energy to close off these areas to motorized use.
2. Utilize Lumberman's Monument and volunteer ORV patrols to educate ORV users on Tread Lightly principles.
3. Construct barriers where needed that discourage illegal motorized use and meets accessibility guidelines.
4. Upgrade the ORV parking areas at Grass Lake Road and River Road to allow better access to designated trail systems.

Issue 3. There is a lack of year round developed recreation facilities to meet public demand.

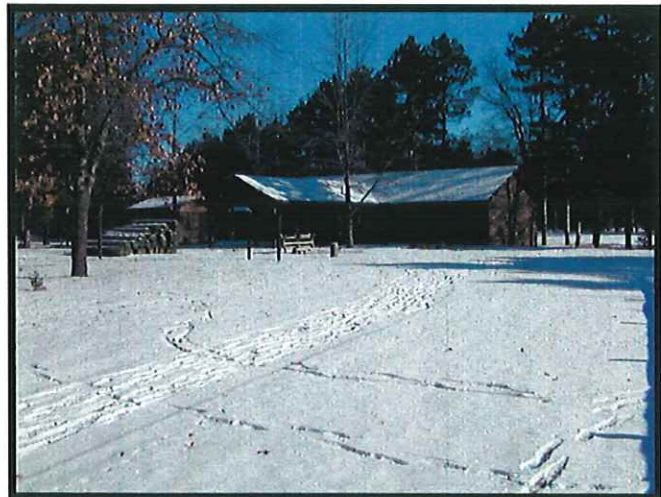
Actions

1. Seek funding to snow plow parking lots at Iargo Springs, Westgate Welcome Center, Whirlpool River Access, and Sawmill Point Access.

Issue 4. Lumberman's Monument Visitor Center does not meet the needs of the visiting public. It does not provide an indoor interpretive area, adequate restroom facilities, or adequate space for information and visitor contact.

Actions

1. Construct an all season visitor center with improved parking, indoor interpretive area, larger restrooms facilities, and an expanded visitor services area.
2. Look for tourism organizations and non-profit groups that can enhance visitor services that would like to share space within the visitor center.



The Lumberman's Monument Visitor Center building is closed during the winter. There is enough use during these months to consider having the center open year round.

Issue 5. Iargo Springs is a unique natural area. A system of elevated boardwalks and stairways was constructed to help preserve the fragile environment and yet allow access to the area. People are not staying on the boardwalks causing damage to the site.

Actions

1. Create a program of signing, railings, and visitor contacts to educate users and protect the site.
2. Update the interpretive signing to address resource protection problems.

Issue 6. There is an increasing demand for bicycle trails and nothing is provided along River Road. This demand is likely to increase if the pathway along US-23 is completed. While River Road is adequate for vehicle traffic, it does not provide a safe environment for bicycles or pedestrians.

Actions

1. Evaluate the Byway corridor for feasibility of constructing a hard surfaced bike path from Oscoda to Rollways Road. The preferred route would travel through a forest environment.
2. If there is no other alternative, work with Iosco County Road Commission and MDOT to incorporate a bike path into future road construction.

Issue 7. Three AM information radio systems are located along the Byway. They are not utilized to their fullest potential.

Actions: Work with Forest Service personnel, Chamber of Commerce Offices, and local communities to establish creative, informative, educational and timely programs for the three radio systems.

Issue 8. There is public interest in expanding the corridor to include M-65 and McKinley Road to Mio.

Actions: Support local citizens, business owners, tourism associations and Governmental Agencies in their efforts to expand the byway corridor.

VI. Transportation, Roadway Standards and Safety

The River Road Byway corridor runs on a combination of county and state highways. 17.5 miles is on the county highway known as River Road. This is a two lane paved road with aggregate shoulders. River Road has a high traffic volume, which is mostly tourism based and occurs primarily during the summer months. The commuter traffic is local use, with most travelers not in a great hurry to get somewhere. The width of the road is sufficient to accommodate present and future use. M-65 is a much heavier traveled highway. It is a major north/south route through northeast Michigan. It is a direct route to federal and state lands and summer recreation cottages and homes. The 5 miles of Scenic Byway was recently resurfaced, passing lanes were installed, and the intersection onto River Road was redesigned.

Five-year construction projects:

Iosco County:

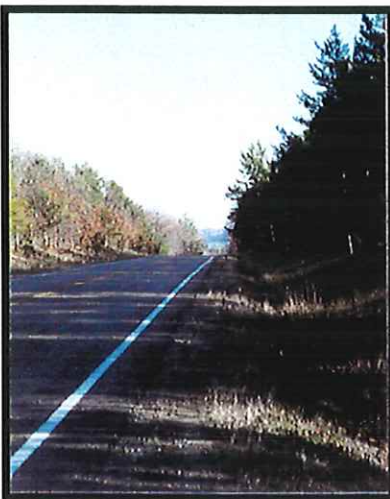
The final section of River Road that requires widening will occur in 2002. This is 4.55 miles of roadway that begins just east of Lumberman's Monument and extends to the intersection of River Road and M-65. It will be widened to 28 feet with 3-foot aggregate shoulders consistent with the previous upgrades. The road will remain open during the reconstruction. The project is funded using Tea-21 Economic Development Funds.

Michigan Department of Transportation:

On M-65, a new bridge crossing the Au Sable River will be constructed in 2003. The present bridge will remain open to traffic during construction. Traffic flow will not be significantly interrupted.

Issue 1. The roadways safely accommodate vehicular traffic, however it does not meet the demand for safe bicycle travel.

Actions: Look at alternatives to safely accommodate bicycle and pedestrian traffic along the route.



River Road traveling east toward Foote Pond



M-65 intersection to River Road.

VII. Outdoor Advertising and Sign Plan

Since much of the land within the byway corridor is managed by the Huron-Manistee National Forests, indiscriminate signing can be controlled along most of the route. Oscoda Township has zoning ordinances in place to address advertising signs on private land.

Actions

1. Conduct a sign inventory and prepare a detailed Sign Management Plan for the Byway. Include private advertising sign designs.
2. Work with all agencies and private business to conform to Byway sign design.
3. Evaluate existing interpretive signs for effectiveness and accuracy. Prepare an Interpretive Plan for the Byway corridor.



Top: Byway entrance signs are sandblasted redwood designed specifically for River Road.



Left: Oscoda Township followed the Byway sign design when they had a new sign made for Old Orchard Park.

VIII. Tourism Marketing and Development

River Road and the Au Sable River Valley have long been a vacation destination for the blue collar workers of southeast Michigan. Since its designation, River Road National Forest Scenic Byway has been heavily marketed throughout Michigan and surrounding states, catching the attention of several “downstate” media markets. The increased publicity reaches new customer bases and attracts visitors from all economic classes to the area.

Publications

Several local and regional tourism agencies include River Road in their marketing publications. A full color brochure has been reprinted several times and is distributed locally, through the Department of Transportation Welcome Centers, and mailed out by the Tawas and Oscoda Chamber of Commerce Offices. The route is included in the book titled *Scenic Byways East* published by Falcon Books and in the *Michigan Wildlife Viewing Guide*.



Actions

1. Continue to work with local and regional tourism organizations to market River Road as a destination attraction.
2. Keep the River Road brochure current and distribute through local tourism organizations, Welcome Centers, and National Forest offices.
3. Work with travel writers to incorporate River Road in pertinent publications.
4. Seek State Heritage Route and National Scenic Byway designations.
5. Work with county and state agencies to include River Road as a scenic route on county and state maps.

Video

River Road is included in three recently released marketing videos. **Return To Iosco County** is locally produced and sold as a souvenir by area merchants and Lumberman’s Monument Visitor Center. **Michigan Sunrise Side** and **Great Lakes Ports O’ Call** are marketing videos distributed throughout Michigan and surrounding states.

Actions: Seek opportunities to include River Road on travel and tourism videos.



The Web

Maps and details about the byway can be found on the Huron-Manistee National Forest website as well as several websites promoting local businesses and attractions. It is also included on the National Scenic Byway Organization website.

Actions

1. Complete the Lumberman's Monument Website.
2. Periodically monitor other websites for accuracy and provide current information when needed.

Tourism Associations

Tawas Area Chamber of Commerce, Oscoda/Au Sable Chamber of Commerce, and Michigan Sunrise Side are active supporters and marketers for River Road National Forest Scenic Byway. All of their tourism marketing materials include River Road as a must see attraction.

Actions

1. Continue to provide updated materials and information to all tourism associations.
2. Encourage the inclusion of River Road on familiarization tours set up through tourism organizations.
3. The Huron-Manistee National Forests will become active members of all local and regional tourism associations.



IX. Public Support, Participation and Partnerships

The development and continued management of River Road as a National Forest Scenic Byway is accomplished through the many individuals, organizations, private businesses, and agencies that are actively involved in the route. Strong public participation enabled site development and enhancement to occur sooner than originally anticipated. Partnerships have been developed that aid in the operation and maintenance of several sites.

Partner	Support
Michigan Department of Transportation	Road maintenance and signing
Iosco County Iosco County Board of Commissioners Iosco County Road Commission Iosco County Parks and Recreation Board	Support of Byway designation Secured funding to develop sites Road maintenance and signing Maintains the snowmobile trail system
Oscoda Township	Support of Byway designation Provides directional signing off US-23 and along River Road. Maintains Canoer's Memorial
Consumer's Energy	Support of Byway designation Provided funds for the Byway brochure Provides funds for Byway site development and maintenance.
Michigan Trail Riders Association	Maintains the Michigan Shore-to-Shore Horseback Riding and Hiking Trail.
Jobs 2000	Secured funding for Byway facility development
Friends of River Road	Secured funds for Iargo Springs development
Eastern National Forest Interpretive Association	Funds interpretive signs, programs and marketing.
Michcon	Supported the Byway designation
Corsair Trail Council	Maintains and grooms the Corsair Trail System and maintains the warming shelter
Mike Schraven - volunteer	Grooms the Eagle Run Trail System
Brian Marvin - volunteer	Keeps the Iargo Springs area clean and makes visitor contact at the site
Michigan Department of Natural Resources	Provides funds to maintain the snowmobile and ORV trails.
Kiwanis of Michigan	Maintains the Kiwanis Monument
Oscoda/Au Sable Chamber of Commerce Tawas Area Chamber of Commerce Michigan Sunrise Side	Supports and markets River Road Scenic Byway



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Huron-Manistee National Forests

1755 South Mitchell St.
Cadillac, MI 49601
231-775-2421 (voice)
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231-775-3183 (TTY)

File Code: 2300/2370

Date: August 7, 2003

Mr. Pete Hanses
Michigan Dept. of Transportation - Design Division
425 W. Ottawa
Lansing, MI 48909

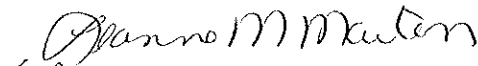
Dear Mr. Hanses:

Thank you for allowing the Huron-Manistee National Forests and the River Road Scenic Byway to be a part of the proposed U.S. Highway 23 State Heritage Route. River Road will offer U.S. Highway 23 travelers and opportunity to enjoy the National Forest, its unique recreation opportunities, and the scenic beauty of the Au Sable River Valley.

Enclosed is a copy of the River Road Scenic Byway Corridor management Plan for use in the planning of the U.S. Highway 23 State Heritage Route which will include River Road. This document is an updated version of the original River Road Management Plan written in 1990, after it was designated a National Forest Scenic Byway. The route has undergone significant changes since that initial designation. The majority of the projects outlined in the original plan have been completed, due in large part to the public and local government partnerships. This document showcases there improvements, identifies existing management issues, and provides actions that address those issues.

I look forward to continuing this valuable collaboration in seeking National Scenic Byway status for bother U.S. Highway 23 and River Road.

Sincerely,


JAMES L. SCHULER
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure

cc: Sandra Sokolak, Rose Ingram

