

# Sunrise Coast Pure MI Byway

Marketing Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

July 15, 2025, at 10 a.m.

Location: Alpena City Hall and Virtual



## **Present:**

1. Anne Belanger (Presque Isle County);  
Chairperson
2. Denise Cline (NEMCOG)
3. Doug Baum (NEMCOG)
4. Montiel Birmingham (City of Alpena  
Planner)
5. Mary Ellen Jones (Alcona County)
6. Rich Castle (Consumers Energy &  
Develop losco)

The Marketing Committee was called to order at 10 am.

1. **Website:** The committee discussed the features of the current website that are a priority to maintain on the new website. Mary Ellen stated that the event list is a critical feature of the website. Currently, Jared Cline keeps the list updated along with a few volunteers along the coast. The group discussed having a static website with no features that need regular updating. This would require eliminating businesses from the site since businesses need updating regularly. In addition, the interactive map would not be possible on a static website. The group discussed if it would be possible to get analytics from other byways to see how our website compares – if ours gets more hits, is it because it is a dynamic website? The group will look at other byway websites around the country to view different options and research different developers.
2. **Printing:** Denise updated the group on communications with Clayton – funding from other sources other than MDOT will make future printing requests more competitive with MDOT. The current MDOT funding was for guidebook printing and some website upgrades. Since LIAA will no longer be doing website upgrades, there is leftover funding for this fiscal year. The group discussed using that leftover funding to print more materials. Since the guidebooks and paddle guides were just printed, the group discussed the other two materials that are in demand – the county-level brochures and the Sunrise Coast Birding Trail Guide. The Winter Map, Trail Map, and History Map all still have good supplies at the NEMCOG offices. The county-level brochures are the highest priority at this point since those are the brochures that are supplied to the Welcome Centers. The birding trail maps are second in priority.
3. **Merchandise:** The committee discussed the need for the funding to create merchandise to begin to make the program sustainable. Doug noted that about \$10,000 worth of merchandise is a good starting point. A lengthy discussion occurred about how to raise those funds. NEMCOG's finance director has evaluated this, and there is a method for NEMCOG to sell merchandise. Doug has met with a business owner with five stores along the coast, and he is willing to sell Sunrise Coast merchandise on endcaps within those stores (grocery and hardware stores). He is not asking for exclusivity. Montiel discussed selling on the website where the product is made as product is sold which would require limited funds up front. Anne brought up selling licenses. Anne noted that the group needs to identify sellers in each county. The type of merchandise was discussed – useful items are important. Nylon drawstring backpacks and beach towels are good choices because they are not

size-based. Water bottles are good if they are high quality. The committee discussed funding options including corporate sponsorship, donations, and foundation grants. The Community Foundation for Northeast Michigan and Meijer grants were discussed. The committee then discussed whether the leftover MDOT funds should be used for printing or for merchandise. Anne will find out which of those items would be a better grant application – whichever one is not the best grant application should be done with the leftover MDOT funding. It was stated that, since we are nearly out of the county-level brochures, we should make sure that those brochures are printed first.

4. **Legislative Tour:** Denise said that they had brought up the need for a legislative sponsor to the NEMCOG Board, then the ice storm hit, and those discussions halted. The Legislative Tour is being planned for the summer of 2026 – the fact that it is an election year might spur participation. We will need dinner and lunch sponsors. It is possible to flip the route direction and start in Mackinac this time. We should also make sure our state and federal reps are invited.
5. **Discovery Tour:** Mary Ellen recommended starting in January 2026 for the October 2026 tour. We need to find leaders that are willing to work within their communities to push this forward. The template is already there to follow. The committee discussed the need to blend the Discovery Tour with America 250. Is it possible to blend the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary with Indigenous Peoples' Day? To acknowledge both? We did acknowledge both for Columbus Day and Indigenous Peoples' Day in the past. The Discovery Tour kick-off needs to start with pitches to the local communities and grant applications for funding to advertise. Possibly Arenac County might qualify for funding from the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe – they participated in the previous Discovery Tour. Denise talked about the need to include River Road National Scenic Byway in the Discovery Tour.
6. **Dark Skies:** Ann updated the group on a dark sky event at the Ocqueoc Outdoor Center which will raise money for that facility. Possibly dark sky events can help to raise money for the Sunrise Coast program. The group then talked about red lights which are used at dark sky events as a merchandising option – with the US 23 logo and the phrase “From Sunrise to Dark Skies” on them. A dark sky tour should be on the website.
7. **General:** The committee discussed whether a Friends of the Sunrise Coast group is needed for fundraising purposes. Anne will discuss this with the Community Foundation. The committee discussed other sources of funding including National Scenic Byways.

Meeting adjourned at 11:49.