

WESTERN SKIES SCENIC BYWAY INTERPRETIVE MASTER PLAN



July 2015

Front cover: A rolling stretch of the Western Skies Scenic Byway along Highway 44.

Facing page: Flowers in bloom in August 2014 at Sheeder Prairie west of Guthrie Center.

WESTERN SKIES SCENIC BYWAY INTERPRETIVE MASTER PLAN

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Submitted to:



**Golden Hills Resource
Conservation & Development**

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Western Skies Scenic Byway begins in Stuart, off Interstate 80.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Western Skies Scenic Byway Map	3
Establishing the Byway	4
Scope of Work.....	5
The Planning Process.....	6
Chapter 2: Vision and Mission	7
Vision Statement.....	9
Mission Statement.....	10
Goals	10
Chapter 3: Byway Travelers	13
Traveler Demographics and Visitation Data	15
Survey Results	16
Byway as a Connecting Route.....	16
Target Audiences.....	17
Chapter 4: Interpretive Resources	19
Resource Categories.....	20
Byway Welcome Centers Map	21
Agricultural Resources.....	22
Cultural Heritage Resources	26
Scenic and Natural Resources	38
Special Attractions	44
Chapter 5: Themes and Messages	53
Defining Themes and Messages	54
Primary Theme.....	55
Sub-Theme 1 & Messages: Immigrant Settlers	56
Sub-Theme 2 & Messages: Agricultural Innovation	58
Sub-Theme 3 & Messages: Scenic Views	60
Sub-Theme 4 & Messages: Preserving the Past	62
Sub-Theme 5 & Messages: Historic Travel Routes.....	64
Sub-Theme 6 & Messages: Art along the Byway.....	65

Chapter 6: Interpretive Media	67
Western Skies' Sense of Place	69
Plan Media Holistically	70
Capitalize on the Byway's Strengths.....	71
Create a Distinctive Visual Identity.....	72
Unified Design Standards	73
Interpretive Experience Hubs	75
Recommended Hub Sites.....	84
Wayside Exhibits.....	88
Recommended Wayside Sites.....	96
Byway Artwork.....	100
Murals.....	100
Statues.....	102
Publications.....	105
Byway Brochure	105
Travel Guide Booklet	110
Online Media	114
Western Skies Website	114
Social Media.....	117
Mobile Digital Media.....	118
Audiovisual Tours.....	118
QR (Quick Response) Codes.....	121
Recommendations for the WSSB	122
Family Activities	124
Proposed Byway Spur to Coon Rapids.....	126
Media Development Cost Estimates	130
Appendix	131
Visioning Meeting Results	132
Community Meeting Results.....	135



Blazing star in bloom at Dinesen Prairie near Harlan in Shelby County.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Sunset breaks through the clouds between Guthrie Center and Audubon.

INTRODUCTION

In west-central Iowa, the Western Skies Scenic Byway travels 142 miles from Stuart to Missouri Valley. The route showcases Iowa's cultural and agricultural heritage. The byway swells and dips, passing western Iowa farmsteads and bisecting rural towns settled by immigrants. True to the byway's name, the sky is as much of a feature as the land, with passing clouds and glowing sunsets adding to the view.

The byway spans Guthrie, Audubon, Shelby, and Harrison counties. In the east

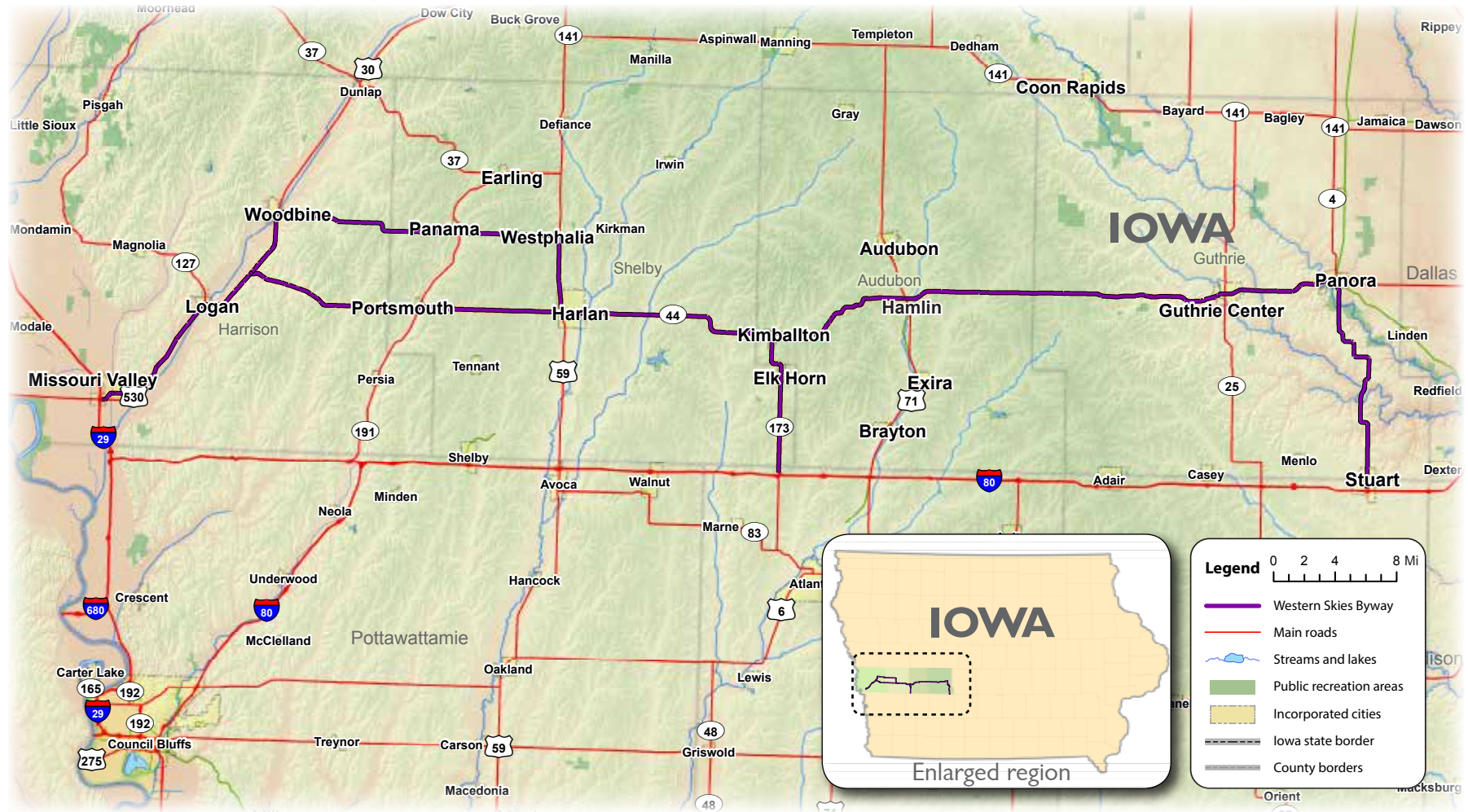
it begins at I-80, while in the west it joins Interstate 29, making it easily accessible. The byway parallels I-80, making it an off-the-beaten-path option for travelers.

The byway includes a spur to the Danish settlements of Kimballton and Elk Horn. On the western end, the route splits, offering travelers the choice of continuing straight or taking a northern loop that passes through Westphalia and Woodbine.

Kimballton is one of two towns along the byway that were settled by Danish immigrants.



WESTERN SKIES SCENIC BYWAY MAP



ESTABLISHING THE BYWAY

The Western Skies Scenic Byway was dedicated in 1998 and is among the first state-designated scenic byways in Iowa. Today it is one of 11 scenic byways in Iowa.

In 2008, Golden Hills Resource Conservation & Development, based in Oakland, Iowa, added a byway project manager position. Golden Hills also

held stakeholder meetings that year. In 2009, Western Skies was awarded a grant through the Federal Highway Administration America's Byways program to create and implement a Corridor Management Plan, a project that is currently in progress.

Downtown Audubon's sidewalks are adorned with mosaics featuring John James Audubon's bird artwork.



SCOPE OF WORK

In January 2012, Golden Hills RC&D was awarded a Transportation Enhancement grant through the Iowa Department of Transportation to complete interpretive master plans for ten Iowa byways. Additional funds were awarded for the Loess Hills National Scenic Byway plan and the Western Skies Scenic Byway plan through the Iowa West Foundation.

A request for proposals was issued in early 2013, seeking interest from firms in providing professional services to develop long-range interpretive master plans for Iowa's byways. Four firms were interviewed in August 2013. In February 2014, a professional services agreement for the ten interpretive master plans was entered into between Golden Hills RC&D and Schmeckle Reserve Interpreters, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

Schmeckle Reserve Interpreters agreed to develop one interpretive master plan for each of the following scenic and historic Iowa Byways: Delaware Crossing, Driftless Area, Glacial Trail, Grant Wood, Historic Hills, Iowa Valley, Lincoln Highway, Loess Hills, River Bluffs, and Western Skies.

The work is divided into three phases, with Loess Hills and Western Skies to be completed in the first phase. Phase one interpretive master plans (including this plan) were scheduled for delivery in 2015.

Each interpretive master plan shall be based on the following tasks:

- Task 1: Inventory and Analysis of Byway Resources
- Task 2: Stakeholder Coordination and Public Input Process
- Task 3: Development of Interpretive Themes and Conceptual Interpretive Plan
- Task 4: Finalize Interpretive Plans with Recommendations and Design of Interpretive Elements
- Task 5: Reporting



Undulating hills are common along the Western Skies Byway.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Interpretation is defined as a communication process that guides visitors in their search for meanings in objects, places, and landscapes. We adhere to the philosophy that interpretive planning is a process of consensus development—of achieving a shared perspective by all stakeholders of why interpretation is needed, who it will serve, and what significant stories it will tell. Effective planning answers the following questions, which can be illustrated by the Planning Triangle:

Who?

Determine who the byway visitors are and the experiences that they are seeking. This includes activities and visitor groups that are not currently being targeted as byway users.

Chapter 3: Byway Travelers

Why?

Confirm and/or further define the purpose, vision, and goals of developing a master plan for the Western Skies Scenic Byway.

Chapter 2: Vision and Mission

How? When? Where?

Who?
Audience

*Interpretive
Master
Plan*

What?
Resources

Why?
Mission

What?

Examine the significant tangible resources of the byway and describe their intangible meanings. Then, distill these tangibles and intangibles into unifying themes and messages that will serve as a framework for development and programming.

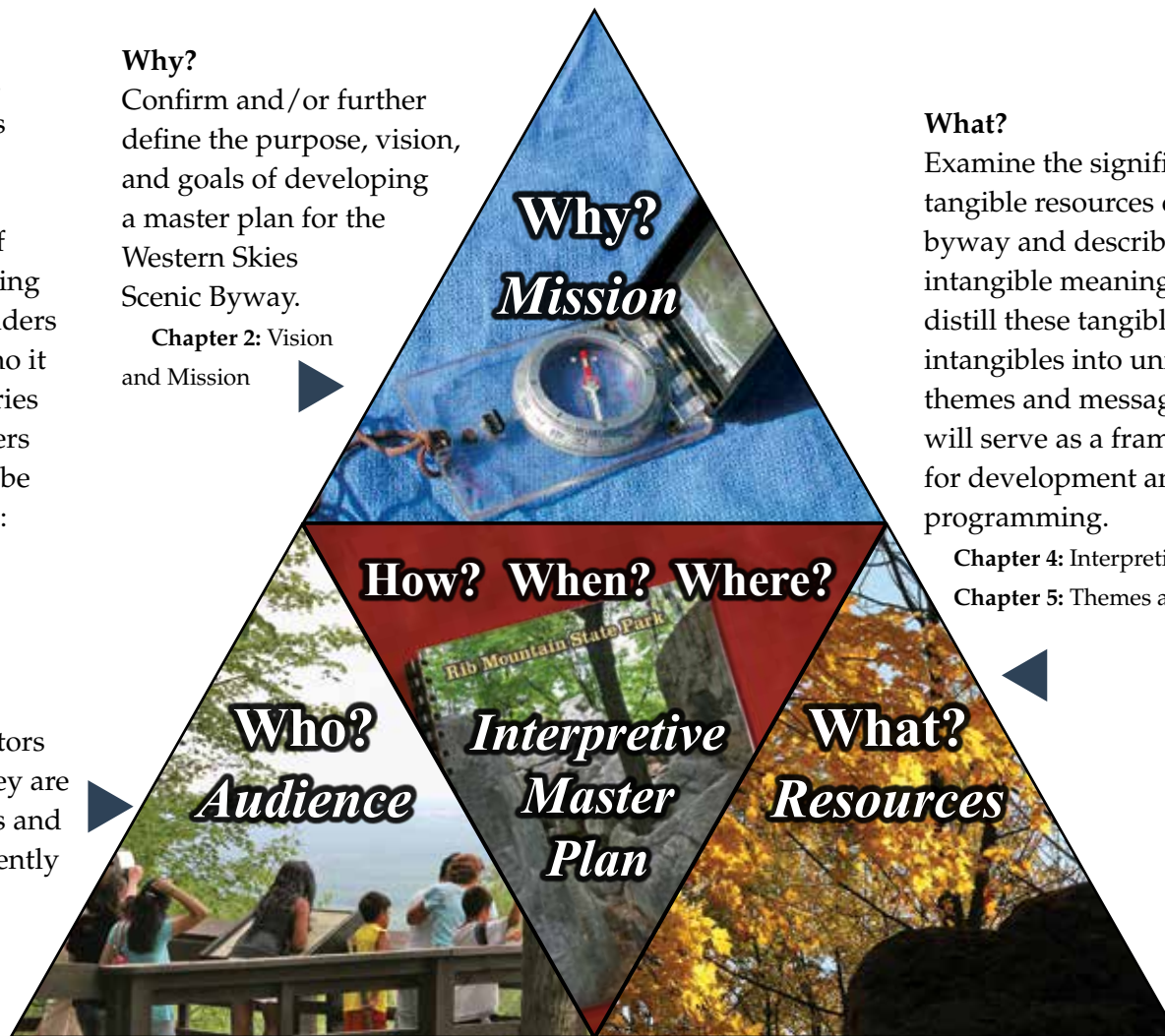
Chapter 4: Interpretive Resources

Chapter 5: Themes and Messages

Where? When? How?

Based on the why, who, and what, develop a plan for interpretive facilities, media, and programs that best facilitate visitor-resource connections within the parameters of the mission and vision of the Western Skies Scenic Byway.

Chapter 6: Interpretive Media



The windmill collection at Nathaniel Hamlin Park south of Audubon.

CHAPTER 2

VISION AND MISSION





Participants brainstorming at the stakeholder visioning meeting in Panora in April 2014.



Participants voting on responses at the stakeholder meeting.

VISION AND MISSION

A strong vision and mission supported by established values and goals will guide future planning, management, and implementation efforts for the Western Skies Scenic Byway.

The vision, mission, goals, and strategies for the Western Skies Scenic Byway were developed in a series of stakeholder meetings conducted by Katy Anderson, former byway coordinator at Golden Hills RC&D.

Vision

The vision statement should answer two questions:

1. What are the values or beliefs of the significance of this place that informs your work? Why should people go there?
2. What would you ultimately hope to accomplish as a result of your efforts?

Values and Beliefs—Significance Statements

In west-central Iowa, the Western Skies Scenic Byway travels 142 miles from Stuart to Missouri Valley. The route showcases Iowa's cultural and

agricultural heritage. The rolling landscape defies the stereotype that Iowa is entirely flat. The roadway is located in the Southern Iowa Drift Plain, which consists of ancient glacial till eroded through the eons. This region contrasts with the flat, pothole-studded landscape just to the northeast formed by the more recent Des Moines Lobe glacial advance.

The four byway counties were homesteaded by farmers who moved from eastern states and by immigrant farmers from Germany, Denmark, and other northern European countries. Here Angus cattle breeder W.A. McHenry and hybrid corn developer Roswell Garst were pioneers in scientific farming practices that improved farm production throughout the world.

Today, prosperous farms, many of which are cultivated by the descendants of these pioneer agriculturalists, provide the landscape of the byway corridor. The roadway curves and flows with the landscape, offering pleasant views of terraced cornfields and well-kept farmsteads. Travelers seeking an alternative to the monotony of Interstate 80 will be rewarded by this choice.

Western Skies Vision Statement

The vision of the Western Skies Scenic Byway is to secure sustainable growth and development of the designated route and corridor while holding firm to the history and culture that continues to be visible today. Through strategic partnerships with local, state, national, and regional organizations, the byway aims to create a unique and experiential attraction attentive to minimize environmental impact. Attention is directed towards development of the arts, small businesses, traveler amenities, and cultural and natural resources along the byway with a broad marketing approach. Through a collaborative effort and regional approach, the Western Skies Scenic Byway aims to positively impact economic development in the byway region while respecting the resources located along the route.



A barn quilt decorates an old barn near Lenon Mill Park in Panora.



Community members and stakeholders at a community meeting in June 2014 at the Museum of Danish America in Elk Horn.

Mission Statement

The mission statement answers two questions:

1. How do you plan to work toward this broad vision?
2. For whose specific benefit does the organization exist?

Western Skies Mission Statement

The mission of Western Skies Scenic Byway is to offer a memorable and cultural travel experience that stitches together tranquil small towns, farmsteads, and scenic countryside, all preserved through a pioneering spirit and stewardship of the land.

Goals

To support the mission and pursue the vision of the Western Skies Scenic Byway, byway stakeholders developed a series of short- and long-term goals. Selected goals related to interpretive efforts along the byway include:

Short-Term Goals (3-5 years)

- Continued efforts on the part of small towns to renovate and improve facades
- Promote outdoor recreation opportunities
- Promote natural resources, including timber, woodlands, prairies, and wildlife
- Promote agricultural heritage and history along the byway
- Support and encourage agritourism
- Promote art along the byway in multiple forms
- Ramp up printed advertising and marketing
- Continue and enhance digital marketing
- Target marketing
- Wayfinding and signage to attractions and amenities

Long-Term Goals (5-10 years)

- Conduct and collect comprehensive inventories of resources and amenities along the byway
- Develop concept of byway bike trail
- Explore byway visitor centers/kiosks at each end of the byway
- Wireless connectivity available in each community
- Research and roll out a byway app to assist travelers
- Byway bus tour
- Scenic overlooks constructed along byway showcasing expansive views

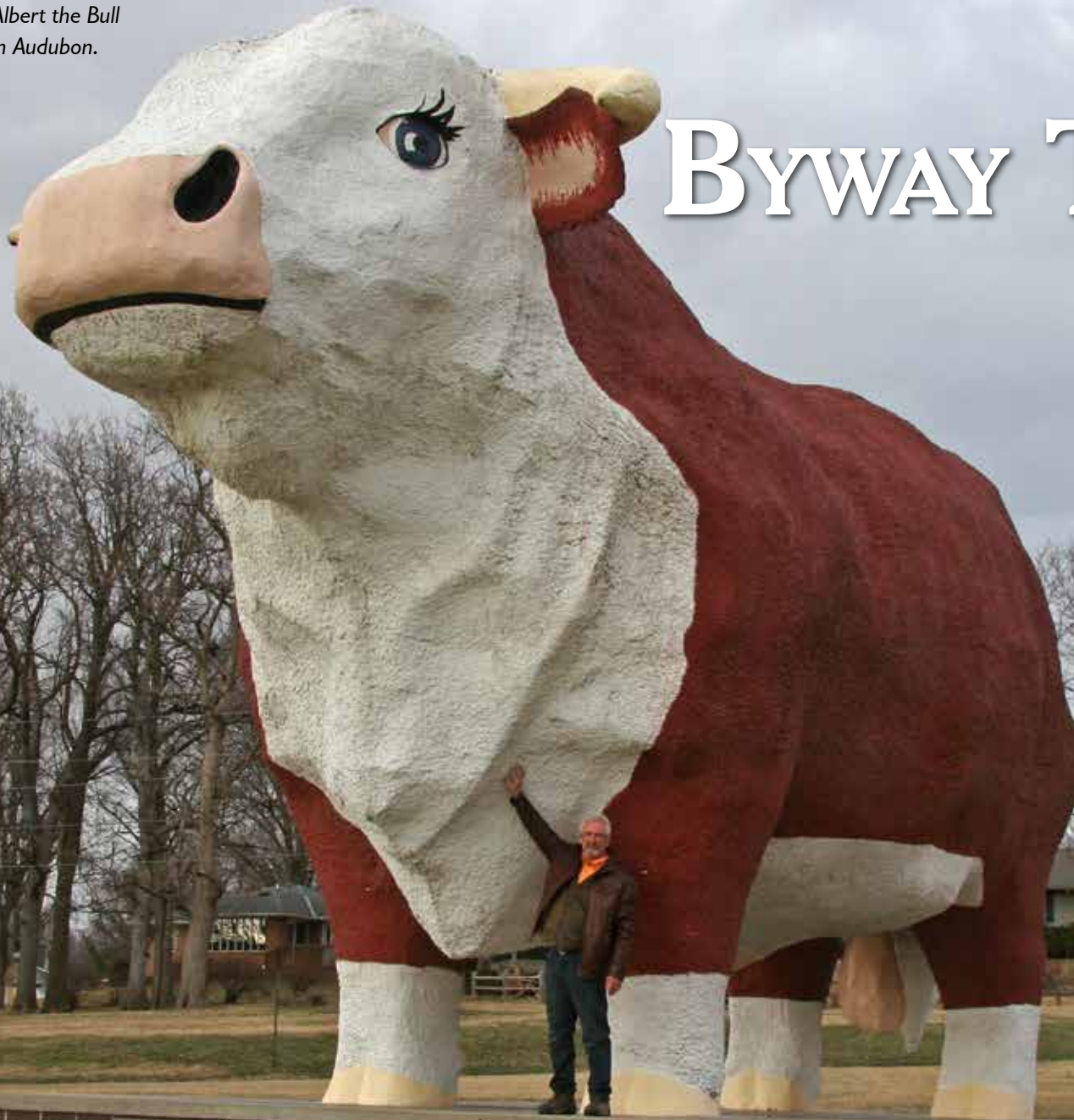


Farmsteads and rural residences are common along the Western Skies Scenic Byway.

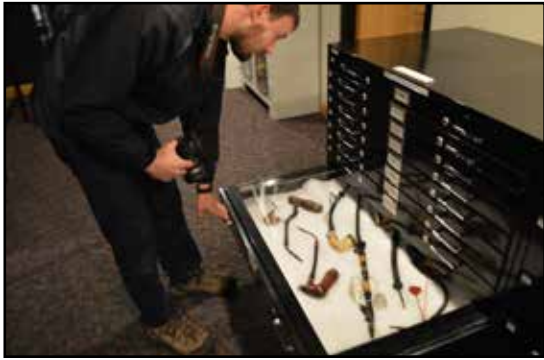
*Albert the Bull
in Audubon.*

CHAPTER 3

BYWAY TRAVELERS



ALBERT THE BULL
AUDUBON IOWA • 50025



Checking out the collections at the Museum of Danish America in Elk Horn.



Exploring the artistry on the Freedom Rock in Kimballton. A Freedom Rock is being painted in every Iowa county. Kimballton is home to Audubon County's rock.

BYWAY TRAVELERS

Who tours the Western Skies Scenic Byway and what are they seeking? The answers to these questions are fundamental to planning products, services, and experiences. But the answers to these questions are complex and multifaceted. Tourists can enter and exit at any point along the route and choose from numerous opportunities along the way. Travelers on the Western Skies Byway are diverse and have many reasons to travel the route.

Even though the Western Skies Scenic Byway has existed since 1998, it is not well-known among travelers, and thus information about its visitors is not extensive. Anecdotally, byway travelers are interested in agriculture and agricultural history, or may be getting in touch with their own farming roots, byway stakeholders said. Travelers want to experience the Danish and German culture. Others are seeking outdoor experiences at parks and recreational areas.

Many travelers serendipitously take the Western Skies Byway after noticing it on an Iowa map, according to Kathy Dirks, coordinator of the Harrison County

Historical Village and Iowa Welcome Center. Some tourists say they take the byway to avoid the tedium of Interstate 80. Because “scenic” is part of the route’s name, travelers expect good views, Dirks said. Route travelers tell the Harrison County Welcome Center staff that they enjoyed the views of rolling hills, farms, and small towns. “I believe the scenic portion is what they are trying to experience, or to get a taste of the real Iowa—away from the interstate,” Dirks said.

That idea is shared by Ro Giencke, who recalled traveling the Western Skies Byway during a trip west on her blog called “Home is the Country of the Heart” (www.rogiencke.com):

“Farewell I-35 and 80, 70, this time we aren’t going to use you, we said. And we mostly stuck to our word, resisting the convenience of the interstate systems which expedite travel time.

Instead, we studied maps for state or county roads that linked the small towns. The routes were sometimes winding and sometimes slow but they put us smack dab in the countryside and this suited us perfectly this time.

We especially enjoyed the designated scenic byways. Iowa's Highway 44 is named the Western Skies Scenic Byway. It's a name to thrill to.

The name is evocative of the big skies we came for and the long horizons that are a nightly show as the sunset spreads its flame for all to see.

Travelers are also surprised by the unexpected topography of the Western Skies Byway in a state stereotyped as flat.

In a 2007 article in Budget Travel, Erik Torkells recounted a trip through western Iowa's small towns:

“*We drive a long stretch of Route 44, the Western Skies Scenic Byway, over hills dotted with hay bales and purple wildflowers. People tend to think Iowa is entirely flat, cornfield after cornfield, but it's not at all.*

Traveler Demographics and Visitation Data

The Travel Iowa 2013 Welcome Centers Survey Report can give a sense of demographic information about tourists who may be traveling the Western Skies Scenic Byway. Travelers are most often Baby Boomers with the disposable income and time to travel byways.

The average age of respondents who filled out a welcome center traveler survey is 55 to 74 years old (63% of total respondents at Harrison County Welcome Center and 44% at Danish Windmill Welcome Center).

The size of travelers' groups is between 2.3 people (Harrison County) and 2.6 (Danish Windmill). Byway visitors are generally adults traveling without children (Harrison: 78% and Danish Windmill: 59%).

Travelers spend 2.4 days (Danish Windmill) to 3.4 days (Harrison County) in Iowa for their trip. They spend roughly \$250 on lodging, transportation, food, shopping, and entertainment.

Most visitors to Iowa Welcome Centers are residents of Iowa (18% at Danish Windmill and 6.7% at Harrison County). Curiously, the top state for visitors to Harrison County Welcome Center is California (7.6%). Residents of other Midwestern states such as Illinois, Minnesota, and Nebraska are some of the other top visitors to the welcome centers.



Visiting St. Boniface Catholic Church in Westphalia.



Viewing the video about the history of the Danish Windmill at the Welcome Center in Elk Horn.



Visiting Nathaniel Hamlin Museum and Park south of Audubon.

Survey Results Promising for Byway Visitation

Tourists' interest in Iowa scenic byways is high. Scenic byways are among the top 10 activities for visitors, according to a Travel Iowa survey of people who ordered an Iowa Travel Guide online in spring 2013. (Travel Iowa 2013 Iowa Trip Planning Survey).

More than 45 percent of visitors to Iowa Welcome Centers in 2013 listed scenic byways as one of their main areas of interest, the third attraction listed after historical attractions (55%) and museums (46%) (Travel Iowa 2013 Welcome Centers Survey Report).

Perhaps more specific to the Western Skies Scenic Byway, 65 percent of visitors at the Harrison County Welcome Center listed scenic byways among their main areas of interest, likely because the route shares the road with the Loess Hills and Lincoln Highway byways in that part of the state. Also, nearly 50 percent of survey respondents at the Danish Windmill Welcome Center in Elk Horn noted that they were interested in scenic byways. (Travel Iowa 2013 Welcome Centers Survey Report).

Byway as a Connecting Route

The fact that the Western Skies Scenic Byway links up with both the Loess Hills National Scenic Byway and the Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway makes it a natural choice for travelers who want to connect more than one byway. For example, travelers coming from Des Moines or other points east may find it appealing and convenient to take the Western Skies Byway to head west to the Loess Hills and to northwestern Iowa destinations such as Le Mars.

The website "Biker Chick News," a site for female motorcyclists, features a travelogue about taking the Western Skies Byway to reach the Loess Hills:

“Now Susan and I are not ‘let’s get there’ kind of people. We are more ‘let’s take our time getting there’ people. So to say that we stopped frequently would probably be an understatement, but generally speaking, we stopped frequently. We passed through several lovely small towns, including Adel, Redfield, Guthrie Center, and Harlan, and finally picked up the Loess Hills road in Logan.

Target Audiences

Schmeeckle Reserve Interpreters led an interpretive master plan visioning meeting on April 7, 2014. During the meeting, stakeholders were asked to discuss the primary target audience for interpretive media along the Western Skies Scenic Byway. Stakeholders responded that the target audiences include:

- Families
- Outdoor enthusiasts and recreationists
- Visitors drawn by the cultural identity of the region, including tourists from Denmark and Germany, and people researching their family history
- Retirees and empty-nesters
- Urbanites
- Local residents, including business owners, young adults moving into the area, and the region's children



Historical pioneer cabins at the Shelby County Historical Society and Museum in Harlan.

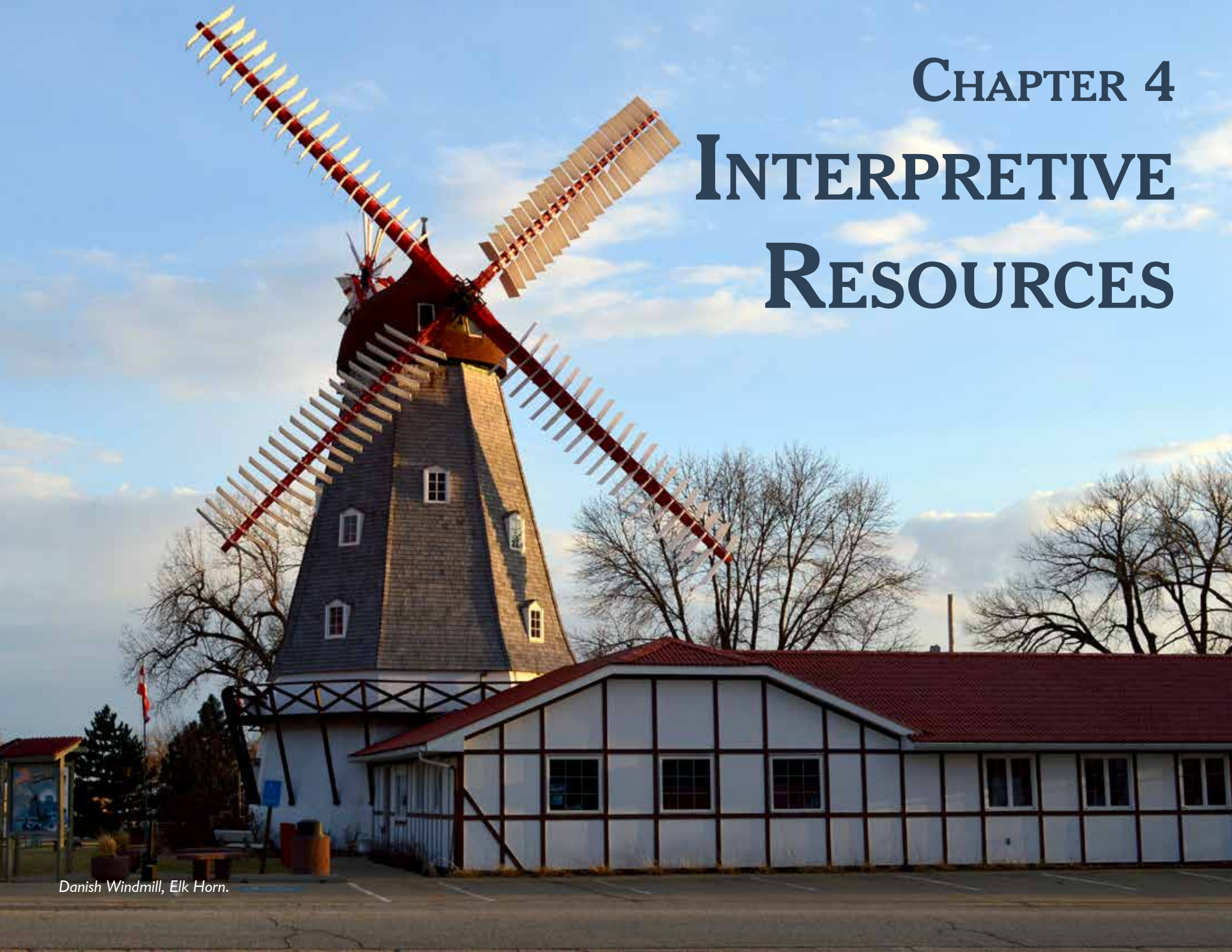


Viewing the Loess Hills National Scenic Byway and Western Skies Byways interpretive panels at the Harrison County Historical Village and Welcome Center in Missouri Valley.

CHAPTER 4

INTERPRETIVE

RESOURCES



Danish Windmill, Elk Horn.

INTERPRETIVE RESOURCES

This comprehensive inventory of interpretive resources documents the natural and cultural attractions along the Western Skies Scenic Byway. This inventory serves as the foundation for the interpretive themes and messages in Chapter 5 that connect the tangible resources with their intangible meanings. Interpretive media are then developed from these themes and messages to engage visitors in meaningful experiences along the byway.

The interpretive planning team sought input during a leadership visioning session in April 2014 in which the following questions were posed:



Discussing resources at a byway stakeholder meeting in Panora in April 2014.

- What are some important and unique resources along this byway that visitors should experience?
- What compelling stories and meanings should visitors take away from their byway experience?
- Who are some key people we should interview who know the cultural and natural history of this site?

The team also sought input during a community meeting in which the following questions were posed:

- What are some “must see” places, things, or activities that a Western Skies tourist should experience when they travel the byway?
- What significant stories about this region of Iowa would you share with byway travelers?
- What documents, people, or other resources will help us learn about the cultural and natural stories of this area?

The planning team used this input and byway publications and other documents as the basis for exploring the byway and experiencing each resource. Staff members from various attractions and

knowledgeable citizens were interviewed to gain further insight.

Resource Categories

The primary story of the Western Skies Scenic Byway is its history of agricultural innovation and its cultural heritage of immigrants who settled the area, creating ethnic enclaves. The byway also is true to its name, providing stunning wide-open views of a western sky that casts light and shadow on a rolling, pleasant landscape. Therefore, resources in this chapter are divided by these categories and noted by these symbols:

- **Agricultural Resources** #
- **Cultural Heritage Resources** #
- **Scenic and Natural Resources** #
- **Special Attractions:** Other special attractions are listed last in this chapter. #



Iowa Welcome Centers serving the Western Skies Scenic Byway region

- 1 Danish Windmill and Welcome Center (Elk Horn)
- 2 Harrison County Historical Village and Iowa Welcome Center (Missouri Valley)
- 3 Underwood I-80 Welcome Center

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

Growing with the Changing Times

Generations of Iowa farmers have adapted to fluctuating markets, innovative inventions, and social reforms. When John Deere perfected the steel plow, the rich prairie sod could be cut without sticking. Steam-powered riverboats and trains connected Iowa

farms to distant cities. The Civil War caused prices and demand for farm products to soar. Wheat was king until insects destroyed whole crops, forcing farmers to investigate corn and livestock.

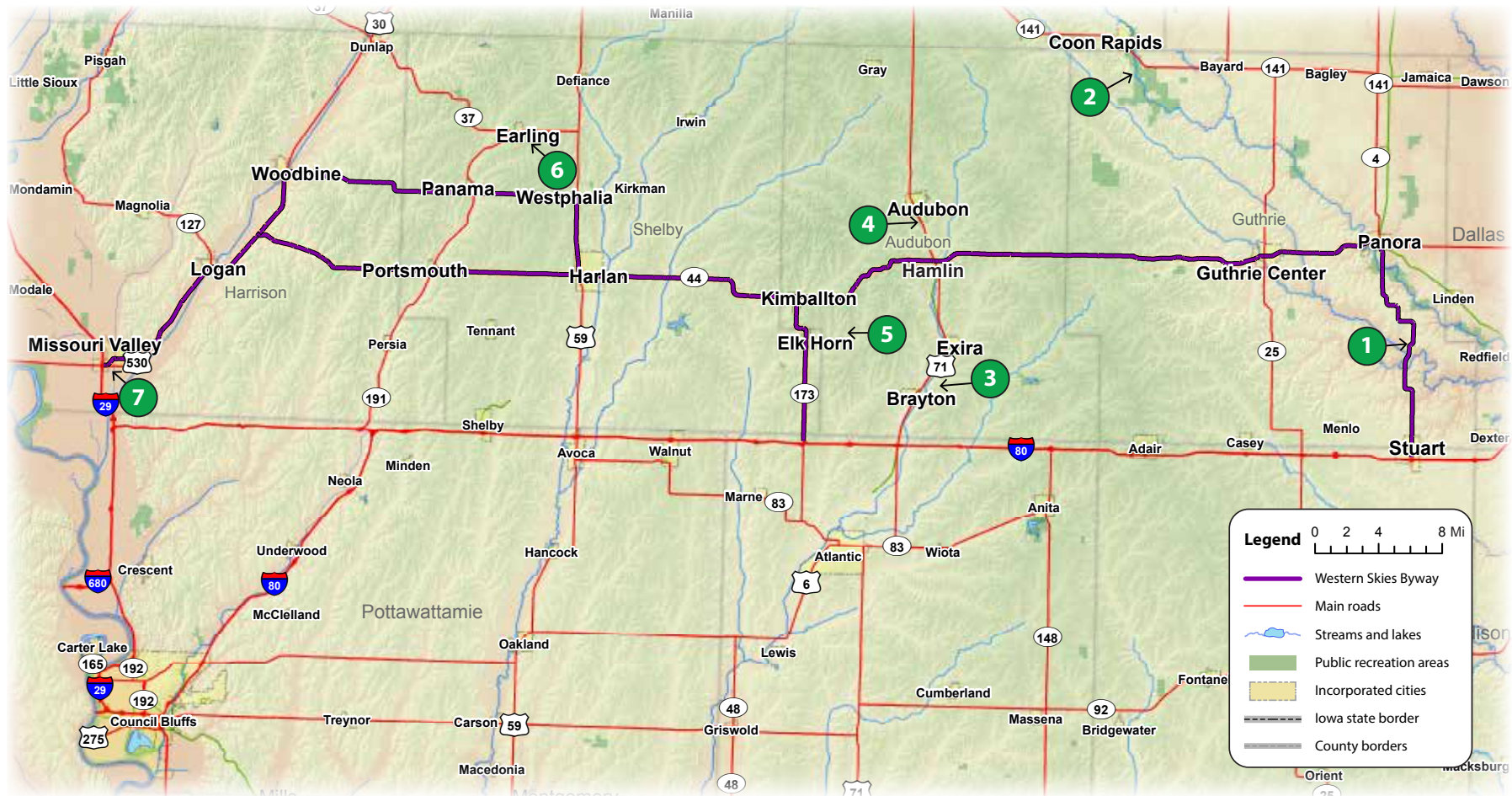
Iowa has often been on the cutting edge of agriculture. Scientific breeding of genetic lines of cattle like Black Angus and polled Herefords produced better meat at the packing houses. The development of hybrid corn is rooted in the rich fields of southwestern Iowa, where pioneers like Roswell Garst and Henry Wallace promoted its virtues.

Agriculture evolved from self-contained and diverse family farms to the golden age of agriculture and to specialized farming. Iowa farms are still evolving as they produce honey, goat cheese, wine, ethanol, and wind.



Cattle farms and crop fields make up the scenery of the Western Skies Scenic Byway.

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES



- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| 1 Dale Valley Vineyard | 4 Albert the Bull | 7 Wisecup Farm Museum |
| 2 Whiterock Conservancy | 5 Danish Countryside Vines and Wines | |
| 3 Plow in the Oak Park | 6 Hybrid Corn Pioneers Museum | |



Dale Valley Vineyard.

Guthrie County

Stuart

1 Dale Valley Vineyard

Dale Valley near Stuart opened in 2007 and grows more than eight varieties of grapes and produces more than 14 types of wine. Weddings and other events are held at the vineyard.

Coon Rapids

2 Whiterock Conservancy

Whiterock Conservancy, a nonprofit land trust off the byway in northwestern Guthrie County, protects and manages 7 square miles of land along the Middle Raccoon River. The land originally was owned by the Garst family, owners of the Garst hybrid seed company. The conservancy's mission focuses on land management, providing recreation opportunities, and demonstrating sustainable agriculture practices. Farmhouse and cabin lodging and camping are available.



A ridge-top view from a trail at Whiterock Conservancy.

Audubon County

Exira

3 Plow in the Oak Park

This roadside park on Highway 71 was established to showcase a bur oak that grew up around a plow. The story behind the tree is that a farmer was plowing his field when marching Union soldiers passed by on their way to join the Civil War in the early 1860s. The farmer unhitched his mules, leaned his plow against a small bur oak, and joined the Union forces. He never returned to hitch up his plow again, and over time, the oak grew around the plow.

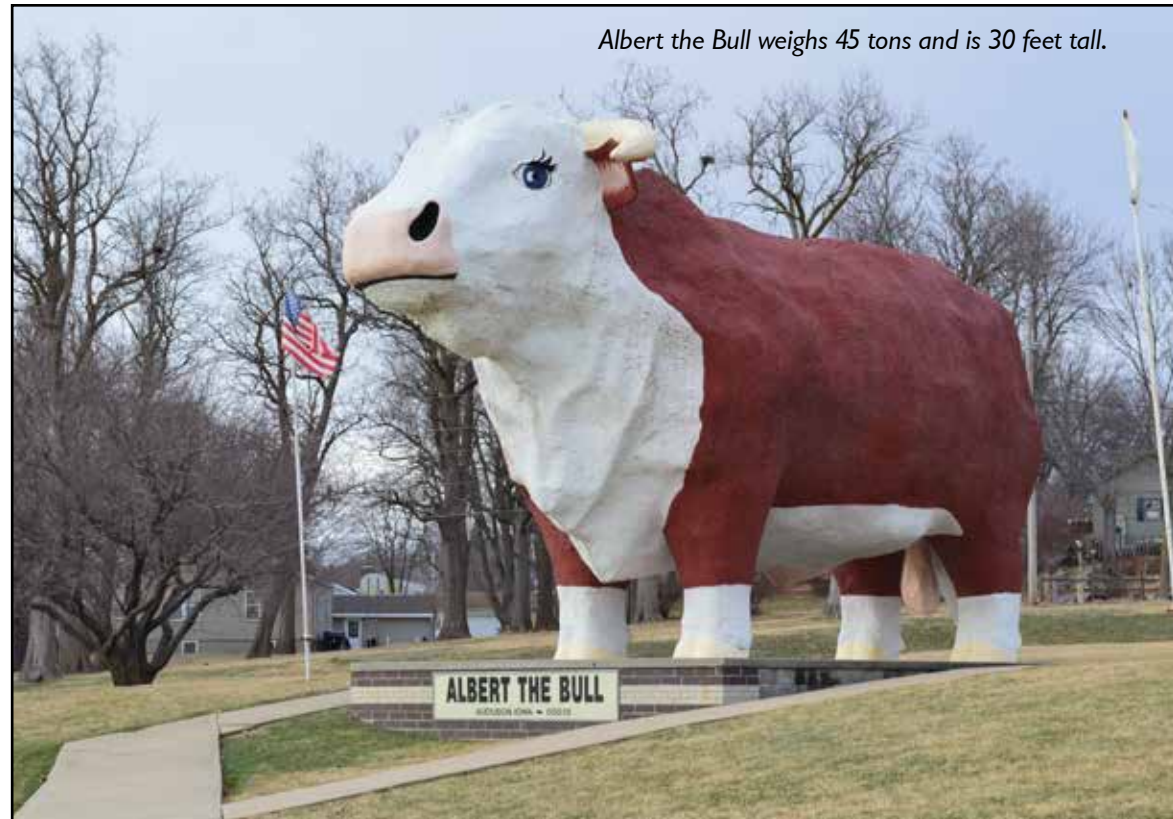
Audubon

4 Albert the Bull

Albert, the world's largest bull, was built in 1964 to commemorate a 1950s local beef promotion called Operation T-Bone. The Hereford is named after Albert Kruse, who started the campaign. Albert weighs 45 tons and stands 30 feet tall, with a 15-foot horn span. He is "authentic right down to his toenails." The frame was made from old windmills and was coated in concrete. It takes 65 gallons of paint to cover the concrete in red and white colors.



Plow in the Oak Park.



Albert the Bull weighs 45 tons and is 30 feet tall.

*Danish
Countryside Vines
and Wines near
Elk Horn.*



Elk Horn

5 Danish Countryside Vines and Wines

Opened in 2006 east of Elk Horn, Danish Countryside’s vineyard produces grapes for more than 20 types of wine. The winery also features event facilities.

Earling

6 Hybrid Corn Pioneers Museum

The corn museum off Highway 37 and Ironwood Road highlights Shelby County’s prominent role in hybrid corn manufacturing. It displays vintage seed bags, tools, and farm equipment. Owner Steve Kenkel holds a two-day Hybrid Corn Pioneers Historical Expo every other year at the museum.



Omaha World-Herald

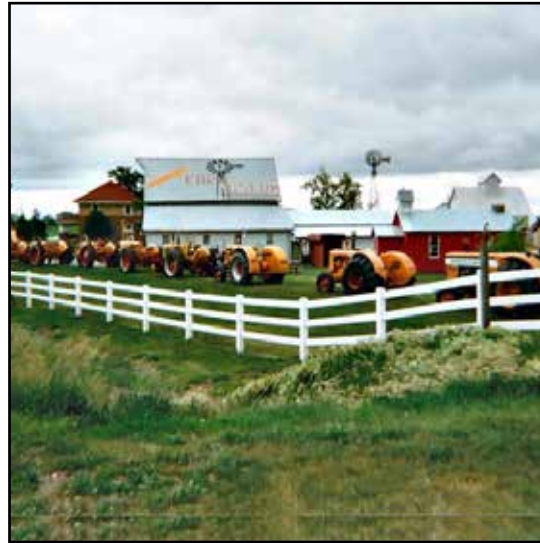
*Steve Kenkel of the Hybrid Corn Pioneers Museum
in Earling.*

Harrison County

Missouri Valley

7 Wisecup Farm Museum

This historical household and farm equipment museum includes 1950s farm machinery, replicas of a 1800s school house and cedar church, a log cabin, and household antiques. Educational tours are offered.



Wisecup Farm Museum, Missouri Valley.



CULTURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES

Immigrants to Iowa

Iowa was the promised land for Euro-American immigration in the 1830s. Yankees from the east were the first to relocate to the rich, open prairies. They were quickly followed by British and German immigrants. Half of all Iowa

farmers were of German descent by 1920. Danes arrived slightly later (1870s through 1920s) and settled mainly in the southwestern part of the state. Eastern Europeans arrived in the early 20th century.

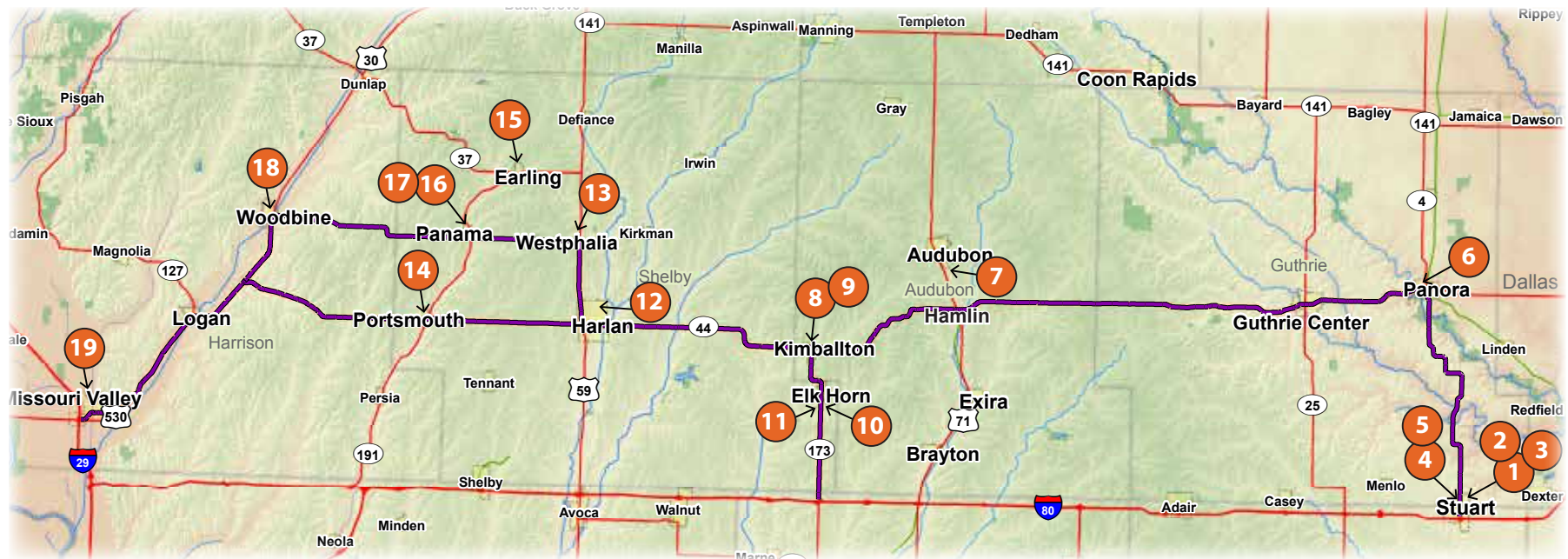
Most immigrants to Iowa did not speak English and practiced customs different from many Americans. Transitioning to a new life in America was made easier by traveling and settling with fellow countrymen. Many towns and enclaves held distinct ethnic personalities for several generations until their children, born into the common Midwestern culture and educated in Iowa's public schools, assimilated into the larger society.

Today, villages like Elk Horn and Kimballton proudly celebrate their Danish heritage, while the Westphalia area maintains a strong connection to its German roots.



Danish culture is on display in Elk Horn. The Museum of Danish America flies the national flag of Denmark.

CULTURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES



- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 Bonnie and Clyde Historic Marker | 7 Nathaniel Hamlin Park | 13 St. Boniface Catholic Church |
| 2 Hotel Stuart | 8 The Little Mermaid Statue and Hans Christian Andersen Park | 14 St. Mary's Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church |
| 3 Rock Island Railroad Depot | 9 Immanuel Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church | 15 St. Joseph Catholic Church |
| 4 Saints Center for Culture and the Arts | 10 Danish Windmill | 16 St. Mary's Catholic Church |
| 5 White Pole Road | 11 Museum of Danish America | 17 Panama Historic One-Room School Museum |
| 6 Guthrie County Historical Village | 12 Shelby County Historical Society and Museum | 18 Lincoln Highway |
| | | 19 Harrison County Historical Village and Welcome Center |



Hotel Stuart.

Guthrie County

Stuart

1 Bonnie and Clyde Historic Marker

In April 1934, Depression-era outlaws Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow robbed First National Bank in Stuart. A sign on one of the building's second-floor windows marks this infamous event.

2 Hotel Stuart

Hotel Stuart, built in 1906, was a community hub. Jack Kerouac even visited as he crossed the country for his book *On the Road*. It is being restored as a boutique hotel with suites, a restaurant, bar, and lounge.



Former First National Bank in Stuart, which was robbed by outlaws Bonnie and Clyde.

3 Rock Island Railroad Depot

The brick train depot was built in 1879 with material from a demolished depot at Rock Island, Illinois. It contained a ladies' and a gentlemen's waiting room, a ticket office, and a baggage room. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is being restored. In *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac recalls a night spent stranded in Stuart, sleeping outside the depot waiting for a westbound train before finally catching a bus to Omaha.

4 Saints Center for Culture and the Arts

Built from 1908-1910 in the Byzantine and Romanesque style with an Italian Baroque interior, the Saints Center for Culture and the Arts was a Catholic parish in Stuart. It was once voted the "most beautiful church in Iowa" by Des Moines Register readers. In 1995, an arsonist who opposed the Catholic Church set the building on fire to, in his words, "take the heart and soul out of a small town." The parish built a new church in town, but the community banded together to restore the building as a community cultural center. The Saints Center is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It hosts weddings and community events. Its Learning Museum features a self-guided video kiosk tour.

5 White Pole Road

Designated in 1910, the White Pole Road followed the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad from Des Moines to Council Bluffs. Poles along the route were painted white, and auto tourists were encouraged to travel the "Great White Way." This re-created section connects the communities of Adair, Casey, Menlo, Stuart, and Dexter.



White Pole Road sign in Stuart.



Rock Island Railroad Depot, Stuart.



Saints Center for Culture and the Arts, Stuart.



Restored one-room school at the Guthrie County Historical Village, Panora.



Guthrie County Historical Village buildings.

Panora

6 Guthrie County Historical Village

Guthrie County Historical Village features 12 buildings, numerous exhibits, and thousands of artifacts that explore the history of Guthrie County from 1850 to the early 20th century. Historic structures include a train track, caboose, depot, country school, log house, and general store.

Audubon County

Audubon

7 Nathaniel Hamlin Park

The former county home farm south of Audubon has a Victorian-house museum, machinery building with antique farm and home artifacts, one-room schoolhouse, blacksmith shop, barns, antique windmills, a walking trail, and a gazebo to view and feed a herd of elk. A mural in the machinery building stands 9 feet tall and stretches 172 feet long. It depicts the cattle industry of 1973, from the western range to the feedlots of Iowa and to the dinner table.



Collected farm equipment at Nathaniel Hamlin Park, Audubon.

Kimballton

8 The Little Mermaid Statue and Hans Christian Andersen Park

Purchased in 1974, this statue is a replica of the famous Little Mermaid that stands in Copenhagen Harbor and honors the famous storyteller Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale *The Little Mermaid*. Hans Christian Andersen Park also includes eight sculptures based on the author's short stories. Each statue features an audio synopsis of the story available by cell phone.



Little Mermaid statue in Hans Christian Andersen Park in Kimballton.

9 Immanuel Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church

This Danish church was built in 1904 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Immanuel Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Kimballton.



Danish Windmill, Elk Horn.

Elk Horn

10 Danish Windmill

Elk Horn is home to the only authentic operating Danish windmill in the United States. Built in 1848 in Denmark, the Danish Windmill was used to grind grain into flour. In the 1970s, Elk Horn residents raised more than \$100,000 to relocate the mill from Denmark to Iowa. Visitors can see the grinding stones and climb to the top of the 60-foot mill to watch the wings turn. The building adjacent to the windmill houses a Danish import gift shop and a Welcome Center.

11 Museum of Danish America

This three-floor museum focuses on Danish culture, the story of Danes' immigration to the United States and the Midwest, Danish cultural artifacts, and Danish design, including Lego toys. An outdoor exhibit celebrates designer Jens Jensen's prairie school of landscape architecture and includes a Danish homesteader's cabin. Bedstemor's House, at the corner of College Avenue and Union Street, is a 1908 restored Victorian home first built by a Danish immigrant. The museum's Genealogy Center on Main Street assists visitors in finding links to their Danish past.



Museum of Danish America, Elk Horn.

Shelby County

Harlan

12 Shelby County Historical Society and Museum

This museum houses thousands of artifacts, telling the story of the area's settlement. Pioneer log cabins are displayed outside. The museum is planning exhibits that will describe the region's innovative cattle breeding and its impact on Iowa agriculture.



Emil Flusche's home sits behind St. Boniface Catholic Church.

Westphalia

13 St. Boniface Catholic Church

German settlers began building St. Boniface in 1881. The workmen baked the bricks and forged the church's first bell. St. Boniface is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This historic district also includes a rectory, cemetery, school, and shrines. Emil Flusche's home, the site of the town's first Catholic Mass, is now behind St. Boniface.



Collected artifacts at the Shelby County Historical Society and Museum, Harlan.



Interior of St. Boniface Catholic Church, Westphalia.



Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church, Portsmouth.



St. Mary's Catholic Church, Panama.

Portsmouth

14 St. Mary's Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church

Built in 1890 and constructed of bricks made locally, the church was destroyed by a tornado in 1940. Rebuilding in 1951 included construction of the Our Lady of Fatima Shrine using Ozark stone and Tennessee flagstone and also included white Carrara marble statues imported from Italy.



St. Joseph Catholic Church, Earling.

Earling

15 St. Joseph Catholic Church

This circa 1882 church has a 150-foot steeple and Gothic-style architecture. Newly painted statues depicting the saints and the Stations of the Cross decorate the wall.

Panama

16 St. Mary's Catholic Church

German Catholic immigrants completed construction of this church in 1908. It features Gothic-style architecture, with a high altar and pillar-supported arches. Stained glass windows depict the lives of the Holy Family and early church saints. A three-dimensional replica of the Lord's Supper is on the front altar.

17 Panama Historic One-Room School Museum

Washington Township #7 was built in 1925 after the original 1879 school building was destroyed by a tornado. The Shelby County country school system discontinued using the school in 1959. In 1960 it was moved to the town of Panama. It was used by various schools and churches until it reopened in 2009 as a museum. The interior and artifacts reflect the look of a 1920s country school.

Harrison County

Woodbine

18 Lincoln Highway

The transcontinental Lincoln Highway through Woodbine was bricked in 1921 and the stretch is the largest remaining original portion of the highway in Iowa. It is on the National Register of Historic Places.



Lincoln Highway marker in Woodbine.

Missouri Valley

19 Harrison County Historical Village and Welcome Center

Owned and operated by the Harrison County Conservation Board, the historical village features an original 1800s log cabin, general store, school, antique farm equipment, and other artifacts. The official Iowa Welcome Center offers tourist information and publications.



Panama Historic One-Room School Museum.



One-room schoolhouse at the Harrison County Historical Village and Welcome Center, Missouri Valley.



The Raccoon River at Nations Bridge Park north of Stuart.

SCENIC AND NATURAL RESOURCES

The Landscape of West-Central Iowa

It is a common misconception that Iowa is flat. The hills of southwestern Iowa roll to the horizon like giant ocean swells. The continental glaciers that deposited a gift of rich soil have been gone long enough that rivers and creeks have shaped the land into well-defined hills and valleys.

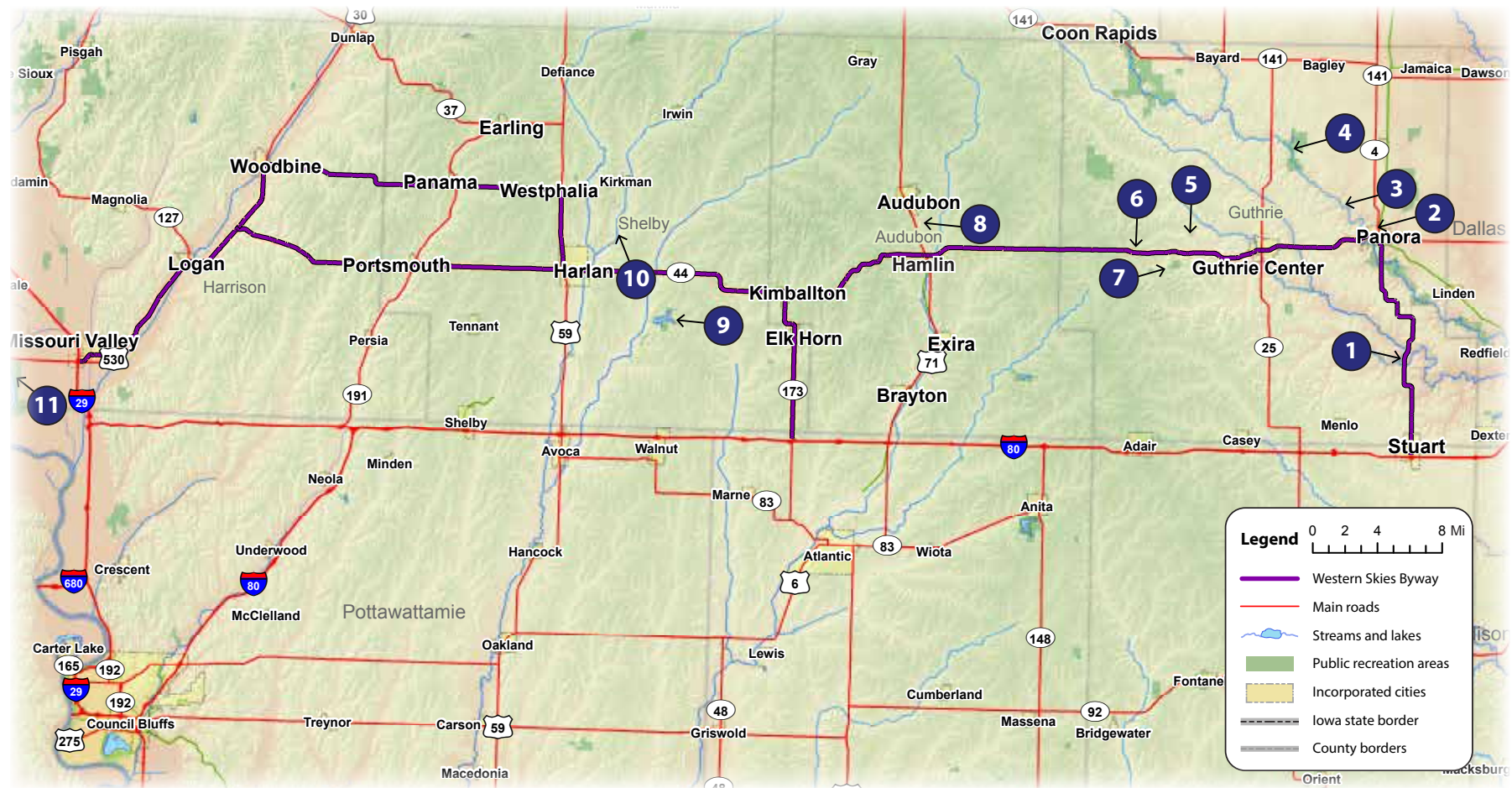
Settlers valued the fertile prairie soil, free of tree stumps, but they also depended on the wooded ravines sheltering trees that were a source of building material and fuel.

The vast landscape and panoramic views create a sense of open space and connectedness to sunlight, clouds, sky, and changing weather. The meandering roadway climbs along wide ridges and glides gracefully down through valleys.



The byway spine weaves through the rolling landscape of the region.

SCENIC AND NATURAL RESOURCES



- | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| 1 Nations Bridge Park | 5 Sheeder Prairie State Preserve | 9 Prairie Rose State Park |
| 2 Lenon Mill Park | 6 Missouri-Mississippi Divide | 10 Dinesen Prairie State Preserve |
| 3 Raccoon River | 7 Sutcliffe Woodland | 11 DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge |
| 4 Springbrook State Park | 8 T-Bone Trail | |



Picnic shelter and lookout tower at Nations Bridge Park north of Stuart.

Guthrie County

Stuart

1 Nations Bridge Park

The 81-acre Nations Bridge Park is 5 miles north of Stuart on Highway P28. It was named after early settler John Nations. The South Raccoon River runs through the park and offers good catfishing. The park includes picnic spots, two shelter houses, self-guided nature trails, playground equipment, and camping.

Panora

2 Lenon Mill Park

On the banks of the Middle Raccoon River, Lenon Mill was built in 1863 to spin wool and was changed to a flour mill in 1877. A remaining grinding stone rests where the mill once stood. Lenon Mill Park has camping, fishing, and access for canoeists.

3 Raccoon River

The Middle Raccoon River flows southeast through Guthrie County, past Springbrook State Park and Panora. The South Raccoon River flows east from Nations Bridge Park, emptying into the Middle Raccoon River. Both rivers are popular canoeing and fishing destinations.



The Middle Raccoon River at Lenon Mill Park in Panora.

Guthrie Center

4 Springbrook State Park

On the Middle Raccoon River, Springbrook State Park encompasses 930 acres of rolling hills, mature timber, and a small lake. The state acquired the park in 1926, and most of the buildings were constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s.

5 Sheeder Prairie State Preserve

Sheeder Prairie is a virgin 25-acre tallgrass prairie 5 miles west of Guthrie Center. It was dedicated as a biological state preserve in 1968. More than 200 plant species, including more than 30 types of grasses, are found there.

6 Missouri-Mississippi Divide

At an elevation of 1,440 feet, this hydrologic divide separates water flowing west to the Missouri River and water flowing east to the Mississippi River.



Springbrook State Park.



The Missouri-Mississippi Divide along Highway 44.



Sheeder Prairie State Preserve.



Bicyclists on the T-Bone Trail in Exira.

7 Sutcliffe Woodland

Sutcliffe Woodland includes 55 acres of oak-hickory forest, hiking trails, fishing, and a self-guided interpretive trail. It is managed by Guthrie County Conservation. Dr. John Sutcliffe, who donated the property, planted numerous tree species and shrubs. The woodland also includes a section of a handcart trail used by Mormons on their travels west.

Audubon County

8 T-Bone Trail

The 21-mile T-Bone Trail is built on the rail bed of the former Rock Island Railroad spur. It runs from Audubon's Albert the Bull to Atlantic. Biking, walking, and roller-blading are allowed on the asphalt and concrete trail.

Shelby County

Harlan

9 Prairie Rose State Park

The attractive, manmade 218-acre Prairie Rose Lake is the main attraction at this state park. Picnicking, hiking trails, and camping are also available.

10 Dinesen Prairie State Preserve

This 20-acre native tallgrass prairie remnant northeast of Harlan was dedicated as a biological state preserve in 1977. The gently rolling prairie has loess-topped ridges. It is named after former owner Derald Dinesen.



Sutcliffe Woodland near Guthrie Center.



Prairie Rose State Park.



Dinesen Prairie north of Harlan.

Harrison County

Missouri Valley

11 DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge

This national wildlife refuge, established in 1958, lies in the Missouri River Valley floodplain on a former meander of the Missouri River. Migrating ducks and geese congregate here in late fall and early spring. The visitor center houses the Steamboat Bertrand collection, more than 250,000 artifacts recovered from the Bertrand, which sank in the Missouri River in 1865. The wreck was located in the late 1960s and its Civil War-era contents were excavated and preserved. The visitor center also contains interpretive displays on the historical development of the Missouri River Basin, the ecological impacts of that development, and the natural history of the area.



Steamboat Bertrand exhibit at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge, Missouri Valley.



Visitor center entrance at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge.



Masonic Temple clock tower in Stuart.



Lake Panorama in Panora.

SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS

Surprising Roadside Finds

There is an allure to visiting unconventional attractions in this beautiful Iowa landscape. One excursion just off the byway promises a view of a Civil War-era plow encased by an oak tree. Around the corner, travelers run into the Tree in the Middle of the Road.

The citizens of Audubon, the home of Albert the Bull, have embraced their village's namesake by theming their downtown with a statue of Audubon, a stained glass mural, and hundreds of tile pictures of his folio bird prints embedded in sidewalks and parks.

Iowa Freedom Rocks are prominent in several locations on the byway and reflect patriotism and the large number of American veterans that hail from Iowa.

The Museum of Religious Arts offers a non-intimidating introduction to some traditional Christian traditions and arts.

Guthrie County

Stuart

1 Masonic Temple

The Masonic Temple, adorned with an ornate clock tower, was completed in 1894. It is on the National Register of Historic Places. The interior has been renovated and contains apartments, offices, and retail outlets.

Panora

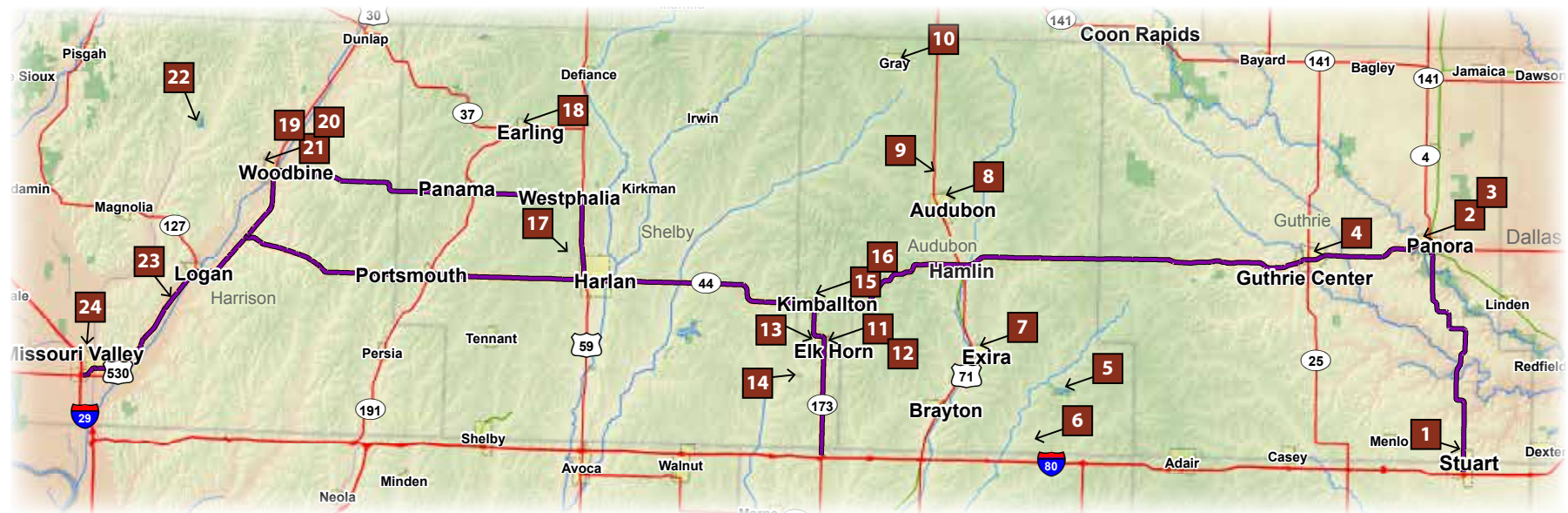
2 Lake Panorama

Established in 1968, Lake Panorama is a private lake community. Lake Panorama National Golf Resort and Conference Center is open to the public and features a popular 18-hole golf course.

3 Raccoon River Valley Trail

This 89-mile multi-use recreational trail extends from the Des Moines area northwest to Jefferson, passing through Panora. The concrete and asphalt trail follows a former railroad track. The trail winds through the Middle and North Raccoon River corridors, with areas of prairie and timber reminiscent of Iowa in the late 1800s.

SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS



- | | | |
|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1 Masonic Temple | 9 Taylor Hill Lodge | 17 Farm Sweet Farm |
| 2 Lake Panorama | 10 Heritage Rose Garden | 18 Shelby County Freedom Rock |
| 3 Raccoon River Valley Trail | 11 Egg Crate | 19 Cross the Rail Art Trail |
| 4 Guthrie County Freedom Rock | 12 Elk Horn Veterans Memorial Mural | 20 Grain Elevator Corn Stalk |
| 5 Littlefield Recreation Area | 13 Electric Vehicle Charging Stations | 21 Woodbine Main Street |
| 6 Tree in the Middle of the Road | 14 Elk Horn Creek Recreation Area | 22 Willow Lake Recreation Area |
| 7 Audubon County Courthouse Museum | 15 New Century Art Guild | 23 Museum of Religious Arts |
| 8 John James Audubon Plaza and Bird Walk | 16 Audubon County Freedom Rock | 24 Watson Station |



Tree in the Middle of the Road, Brayton.

4 Guthrie Center

Guthrie County Freedom Rock

Artist Ray “Bubba” Sorensen II is touring Iowa, painting a large boulder in each of Iowa’s 99 counties to honor veterans. Guthrie Center is home to the Freedom Rock for Guthrie County.

Audubon County

Brayton

5 Littlefield Recreation Area

Littlefield is an Audubon County Conservation Board park with a dammed lake, campground, and live bison display.

6 Tree in the Middle of the Road

An old cottonwood tree in the center of the intersection of Nighthawk Avenue and 350th Street, two gravel roads, has been there for more 150 years. Legend has it that it grew from a stick used to mark the county line before the Civil War.



Guthrie County Freedom Rock in Guthrie Center.

Exira

7 Audubon County Courthouse Museum

On Washington Street in Exira, the museum displays antique tools, glassware, furniture, and toys. A nail collection includes 6,000 items.

Audubon

8 John James Audubon Plaza and Bird Walk

Audubon's downtown features dozens of 2-foot-by-2-foot ceramic tile mosaics that are based on John James Audubon's prints in *Birds of America*. A life-size bronze statue of Audubon is in the Plaza. A 21-foot-tall clock tower on a Victorian building features Audubon and his dog, Zephyr. It is created of stained glass and is lit at night. Murals depicting scenes from Audubon's life are in the post office and library. The library mural features Audubon's trip down the Ohio and Mississippi in 1820.

9 Taylor Hill Lodge

Three miles north of Audubon, Taylor Hill is an English barn built in the early 1890s by Grandpa Taylor. The interior has been remodeled into a lodge with six rooms for rent year-round.



John James Audubon statue in Audubon's park.



Taylor Hill Lodge.



Ceramic-tile mosaic of Audubon's cardinal print.



Audubon County Courthouse Museum, Exira.



Elk Horn Veterans Memorial Mural.

Gray

10 Heritage Rose Garden

This rose garden has more than 200 varieties of roses. Tours can be scheduled.

Elk Horn

11 Egg Crate

A former egg candling business next to the Danish Inn, the Egg Crate now houses booths full of antiques for sale.

12 Elk Horn Veterans Memorial Mural

This mural on the side of a building depicts members of various Armed Services branches. The park also includes stone monuments.

13 Electric Vehicle Charging Stations

Elk Horn has four electric car charging stations, including one by the Danish windmill. They are the only charging stations between Chicago and Denver.

14 Elk Horn Creek Recreation Area

Southwest of Elk Horn, this recreation area offers camping and is operated by the Shelby County Conservation Board.



Electric vehicle charging stations near the Danish Windmill.



Egg Crate in Elk Horn.

Kimballton

15 New Century Art Guild

New Century, located on Main Street, is a nonprofit organization that promotes artistic culture and arts-related careers in the Midwest, especially for military veterans wanting careers in the visual arts. Three buildings include more than 4,000 square feet of gallery space. The guild hosts contest, exhibitions, workshops, and events.

16 Audubon County Freedom Rock

Artist Ray “Bubba” Sorensen II is touring Iowa, painting a large boulder in each of Iowa’s 99 counties to honor veterans and celebrate local history and culture. Kimballton secured the Freedom Rock for Audubon County.

Shelby County

Harlan

17 Farm Sweet Farm

Also known as Rosmann Family Farms, this farm northwest of Harlan has been certified organic since 1994. The Rosmanns raise organic beef, pork, and popcorn for sale at their on-farm store.

Earling

18 Shelby County Freedom Rock

Artist Ray “Bubba” Sorensen II is touring Iowa, painting a large boulder in each of Iowa’s 99 counties to honor veterans and celebrate local history and culture. Earling is home to the Freedom Rock for Shelby County.



Shelby County's Freedom Rock in Earling.



Audubon County's Freedom Rock in Kimballton.



A corn stalk sculpture covers an old grain elevator in Woodbine.

Harrison County

Woodbine

19 Cross the Rail Art Trail

Woodbine hosts an annual outdoor sculpture exhibit. Sculptures are displayed beginning from August through March.

20 Grain Elevator Corn Stalk

An old grain elevator off Highway 30 in Woodbine is adorned with a 60-foot cornstalk made of steel.

21 Woodbine Main Street

The Woodbine Main Street organization has focused in recent years on renovating historic buildings. The National Main Street Center honored Woodbine in 2014 as a Great American Main Street winner.

22 Willow Lake Recreation Area

Willow Lake Recreation Area, 6 miles west of Woodbine, has a 27-acre fishing lake with boat ramp access, fishing jetties, prairie and woodland trails, a campground, and cabins for rent.



Woodbine's Main Street.



A Cross the Rail Art Trail sculpture in Woodbine.

Harrison County

Logan

23 Museum of Religious Arts

Founded by a local couple who believed that new, modern churches lacked the religious tradition of the historic altars, communion rails and the like, the Museum of Religious Arts aims to preserve and exhibit religious arts, tradition and culture, fostering an appreciation of religious history. Various exhibits include a wax-figure “King of Kings” display, a Southwestern-style mission chapel, and religious paintings by child-prodigy artist Akiane.

Missouri Valley

24 Watson Station

Watson Station is a 100-foot-long replica of an old-time small town railroad depot. Housed in the depot are two trains. The first is a restored steam train, originally owned by the Missouri Valley Fire Department and later by John Watson, for whom the station is named. The second is a 2013 Union Pacific diesel replica. Both trains operate during the station’s season, May through October. The depot features railroad-related artifacts and displays, including a major collection of miniature to scale brass locomotives, as well as “Winterview,” a miniature Christmas village.



Watson Station in Missouri Valley.



Museum of Religious Arts, Logan.

Terraced farm fields along the Western Skies Byway.

CHAPTER 5

THEMES AND MESSAGES



THEMES AND MESSAGES

An interpretive theme creates a framework for planning and it places resources and events into meaningful contexts for visitors. Themes are the important ideas that organize the messages that we wish to communicate about the Western Skies Scenic Byway. Once these important concepts are identified, decisions can be made about what site resources and media are most appropriate to tell these stories.

The theme statement, which is the main idea of an interpretive opportunity, should contain universal concepts. A **universal concept** is an intangible meaning that has significance to almost everyone but may not mean the same thing to all people. Universal concepts are the ideas, values, challenges, relationships, needs, and emotions that speak to the human condition.

Compelling interpretive themes link a tangible resource to visitors' interests. Interpretation is most effective when media and other interpretive opportunities allow visitors to grasp the meanings expressed in themes and relate them to their own lives. Visitors may not be able to repeat the themes we write,

but if they are provoked, inspired, or can relate the information to something within themselves, we have succeeded.

Organization of Themes and Messages

- A **primary theme** expresses the main idea that ties together the stories of the Western Skies Scenic Byway. To provide a cohesive visitor experience, all interpretation should relate to this holistic theme.
- **Sub-themes** split the primary theme into several more specific and workable ideas. These broad story lines guide visitors to discover deeper meanings and relationships with the byway's resources.
- **Messages** break down the broad sub-themes into specific, discrete stories that can be told with interpretive media and programming.

PRIMARY THEME

The Western Skies Scenic Byway winds through a rural landscape of rolling hills and broad skies where European immigrants created a distinct sense of place as they shaped farming practices that have evolved into modern-day agriculture.





Danish Immigrant Wall of Honor at the Museum of Danish America in Elk Horn.



Scale model of the Danish Windmill, Elk Horn.

SUB-THEME 1

Danish and German immigrants settled the communities along the Western Skies Scenic Byway, establishing cultural traditions that flourish today.

Messages:

- 1.1 Immigrants who settled in Shelby and Audubon counties beginning in the 1860s were attracted by the agricultural potential of the fertile prairie soil and interspersed woodlands.
- 1.2 The Danish villages of Elk Horn and Kimballton are the largest rural Danish settlement in the United States.
 - 1.2.1 An Elk Horn farmer rallied the community to raise the money needed to buy a windmill from Denmark and to reconstruct it in Elk Horn, where it is has become a community icon and tourist attraction.
 - 1.2.2 The Museum of Danish America celebrates Danish culture and tells the story of immigrants who settled in western Iowa.
 - 1.2.3 Kimballton honors Danish storyteller author Hans Christian Andersen with a park featuring statues depicting his fairy tales, including a replica of the Little Mermaid statue found in Copenhagen Harbor, Denmark.
 - 1.2.4 Immanuel Danish Lutheran Church in Kimballton, built in 1904, is a rare historic Danish church in the area.
- 1.3 Beginning in the 1870s, German Catholics settled in Audubon and Shelby counties, lured by relatively inexpensive, fertile agricultural land and the ability to live among those of the same faith (National Register of Historic Places).
 - 1.3.1 The Catholic Church developed the area's first German settlement by running advertisements in U.S. German-language newspapers and in Catholic community newspapers in Germany.

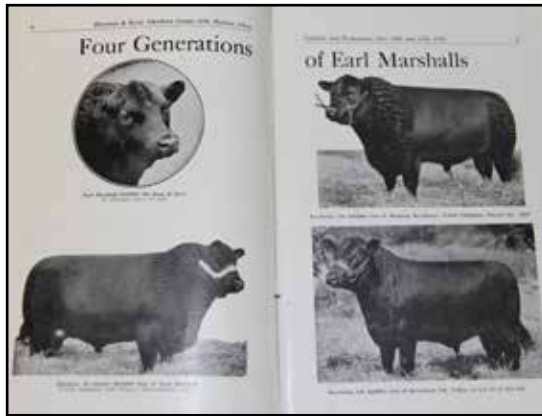
1.3.2 German immigrant Emil Flusche served as a land agent for the church and the railroad, with a \$1 per acre commission for all German Catholics who settled permanently in the area, 50 cents of which went to construction of a church.

1.3.3 The Catholic Church heavily influenced the growth and development of the Westphalia settlement and expanded into newly developing towns through the establishment of Catholic mission churches.

1.3.4 The Catholic Church was important to maintaining German ethnic identity and it permeated all facets of the community's social, educational, and political development.



Emile Flusche's home in Westphalia.



Earl Marshall, a legend in cattle breeding.



Farming is still the dominant industry along the byway.

SUB-THEME 2

Agriculture, the scenic backdrop along the Western Skies Scenic Byway, also has a storied local history of innovation and evolution.

- 2.1 Farming provided a way of life and a livelihood for Germans, Danes, and other immigrants who settled the area along the byway.
- 2.2 Contour farming and terracing evident along the byway are modern ways that farmers practice conservation.
- 2.3 Whiterock Conservancy, a land trust dedicated to showcasing sustainable agriculture and restoring native prairie and forests, provides recreational opportunities for visitors. It has a storied history as the Garst Farm, where innovations in fertilizer use, hybrid seed corn, animal feed systems, and livestock production were implemented.
- 2.4 Roswell Garst was born in 1898 in Coon Rapids. He began farming in 1920 and later met Henry A. Wallace of Orient, Iowa, who was editor of *Wallace's Farmer* and one of the founders of the Hi-Bred Corn Company. In an agreement with Wallace, Garst raised the parent stock of hybrid seed. In 1931, Garst and Charley Thomas formed Garst and Thomas Hi-Bred Corn Company. Garst's salesmanship helped expand use of hybrid corn.
- 2.5 From the 1940s through the 1960s, Garst promoted other new agricultural innovations, including increased applications of nitrogen fertilizer, continuous corn crops on the same field year and year, using corncobs as a feed supplement, and the development of cow-calf herds.
- 2.6 Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev visited Roswell Garst in 1959 in the most high-profile exchange of agricultural knowledge and technology between the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.
- 2.7 Dale Valley Vineyard in Stuart and Danish Countryside Vines and Wines in Elk Horn are part of

a statewide resurgence in grape production and visitors' increasing interest in wineries.

- 2.8 Barn quilts along the byway provide bursts of color and celebrate local heritage.
- 2.9 Tourist sites such as Wisecup Farm Museum, Harrison County Historical Village, the Hybrid Corn Museum, and Nathaniel Hamlin Park showcase relics from earlier agricultural eras, including antique farm equipment and windmills.
- 2.10 The Hybrid Corn Pioneers Museum in Earling is the only one of its kind in the country, telling the story of Shelby County farms that raised corn hybrids from the 1920s to the 1940s.
- 2.11 Albert the Bull, a 30-foot Hereford statue in Audubon, commemorates the area's historical cattle production and the beef promotion Operation T-Bone.
- 2.12 In 1897, William A. McHenry, a resident of Denison near Harlan, traveled to Scotland and bought Aberdeen Angus cattle. Fifteen years later he had bred Earl Marshall, one of the greatest sires of all time. Earl

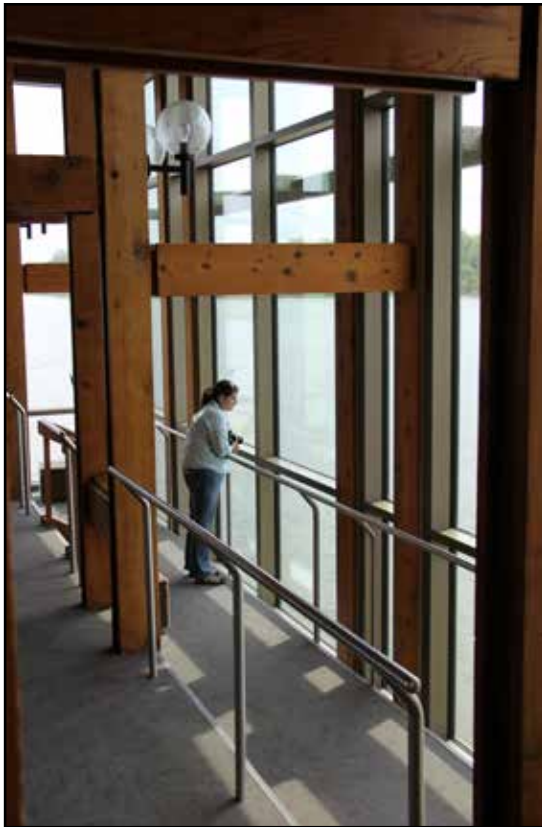


Hybrid corn pioneer Roswell Garst, right, and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at the Garst Farm in Coon Rapids in 1959.

Marshall's bloodlines are found in more than 99 percent of Angus cattle alive today.

- 2.13 Massive turbines that harness wind energy are a new take on the windmills of yesteryear.

- 2.14 Plow in the Oak Park features the roadside attraction of an oak tree that has grown up around an antique plow blade, a curiosity accompanied by the legend of a farmer who left his field work to join the Civil War and never returned home.



A waterfowl viewing area in the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center, Missouri Valley.

SUB-THEME 3

Unexpected ridges and valleys dotted with prairies, woodlands, lakes, and rivers are interspersed in the agricultural landscape of the Western Skies Byway, providing scenic views and recreational opportunities.

- 3.1 The Western Skies Byway is in the Southern Iowa Drift Plain, where the terrain varies considerably. Like the Des Moines Lobe, it is composed almost entirely of glacial drift, but the pre-Illinoian glaciers that deposited material in this part of Iowa were much older. Streams have had time to erode the land and form well-defined drainage systems. Hilltops are of similar elevations, revealing the approximate level of the land surface constructed by the last ice sheet. A layer of loess soil from 2 to 10 meters was deposited over the glacial till.
- 3.2 DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge has a variety of habitats, from floodplain, grassland, and tallgrass prairie, and is a busy migration corridor for waterfowl in spring and fall.
- 3.3 State and county parks preserve the Byway's natural and cultural heritage, providing places for recreation and time in nature.
- Nations Bridge State Park
 - Prairie Rose State Park, Harlan
 - Springbrook State Park
 - Elk Horn Creek Recreation Area
 - Sutcliffe Woodland
 - Littlefield Recreation Area

- 3.4 Sheeder and Dinesen prairies showcase unplowed remnant tallgrass prairies that once were common in Iowa.
- 3.5 River and biking routes along the Raccoon River are recreational corridors.
- 3.6 Whiterock Conservancy is a vast land trust that welcomes public use through bicycling, four-wheeling, horseback riding, and canoeing.



Four-wheeling on trails at Whiterock Conservancy near Coon Rapids.



Phlox growing at Dinesen Prairie near Harlan.



A mural depicting John James Audubon in the town of Audubon.

SUB-THEME 4

The byway's historical villages, historic buildings, and collected artifacts preserve the past for modern travelers.

- 4.1 Stuart's Masonic Temple, Hotel Stuart, and Bonnie and Clyde bank recall the late 1800s and early 1900s.
- 4.2 Lenon Mill Park's old grindstone is a link to when rivers were used to turn grain into flour.
- 4.3 History of the byway's rural settlers is re-created through antique equipment displays, one-room schoolhouses, and other historic structures at the Harrison and Guthrie county historical villages, Nathaniel Hamlin Park, and in Shelby and Audubon county museums.
- 4.4 The Bertrand collection at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge encompasses meticulously preserved artifacts from the Civil War era that were recovered decades after the steamboat sank in the Missouri River.
- 4.5 John James Audubon's *Birds of America* artwork is re-created as mosaics that delight pedestrians in downtown Audubon, and the artist is featured in murals around town.



Guthrie County's history is interpreted at the Guthrie County Historical Village in Panora.



The contents of the Steamboat Bertrand were preserved when it sank in the Missouri River, creating a snapshot of life in the Civil War era.



An original bricked portion of the Lincoln Highway preserved in Woodbine.



Mormons migrated through western Iowa, including Sutcliffe Woodland near Guthrie Center.

SUB-THEME 5

Historic travel routes that parallel and intersect the byway corridor are reminders of the romance and danger of earlier transportation by foot, rail, and car.

- 5.1 Several towns along the byway (Stuart, Guthrie Center, Audubon, and Harlan) were platted and developed as the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad expanded from Des Moines to Council Bluffs.
- 5.2 The early 1900s White Pole Road followed the Rock Island line, with white poles along the route to mark the way.
- 5.3 Woodbine has preserved an original bricked portion of the transcontinental Lincoln Highway.
- 5.4 Watson Station in Missouri Valley features a replica of an old railroad depot, while a historic Rock Island Depot still stands in Stuart.
- 5.5 Mormons migrating west to Salt Lake City, Utah, traveled through western Iowa, including with handcarts through Sutcliffe Woodland in Guthrie Center.

SUB-THEME 6

Art found along the byway reflects the landscape, its people, and their values and heritage and helps to create a sense of place.

- 6.1 A corn stalk sculpture on Woodbine's grain elevator creates a whimsical welcome to town.
- 6.2 Elk Horn's mural commemorates veterans of various Armed Services branches.
- 6.3 Cross the Rail Art Trail sculptural show adds an artistic flair to Woodbine's vibrant downtown.
- 6.4 New Century Art Guild in Kimballton fills a niche by giving veterans an artistic outlet.
- 6.5 John James Audubon Plaza and Bird Walk showcases mosaics re-creating the great ornithologist's bird paintings.
- 6.6 Saints Center for Culture and the Arts in Stuart brings Eastern European architectural style to western Iowa, with Byzantine and Romanesque design.
- 6.7 Small statues depicting characters from Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales encircle the Little Mermaid fountain in Kimballton.
- 6.8 Artist Ray "Bubba" Sorensen II is touring Iowa, painting a large boulder in each of Iowa's 99 counties to honor veterans. Kimballton secured the Freedom Rock for Audubon County, while Guthrie Center is home to Guthrie County's rock.
- 6.9 The Museum of Religious Arts in Logan celebrates Judeo-Christian heritage through art and artifacts.



Sculptures in Kimballton depict Hans Christian Andersen's fairy-tale characters.

CHAPTER 6

INTERPRETIVE MEDIA



An interpretive panel at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge, Missouri Valley.



Hybrid seed corn-themed sculptures near the town of Coon Rapids.

INTERPRETIVE MEDIA

Heritage interpretation is a communication process that guides visitors in their search for meanings in objects, places, and landscapes.

The Western Skies Scenic Byway has a rich natural and cultural heritage. The meanings that can be communicated to visitors are expressed in greater detail in Chapter 5: Themes and Messages. The techniques used to communicate interpretive messages to byway visitors are referred to as interpretive media.

Well-planned interpretive media can open windows of revelation to visitors who seek to find their own personal

connections and meanings in these resources. Part of the joy and reward in traveling a beautiful scenic byway is the sense of discovery in exploring a new and exciting place and the feeling of growing emotionally and intellectually in the process of this discovery.

Interpretive media takes many forms. Wayside exhibits, trail signs, brochures, websites, audio tours, apps, and visitor center exhibits are some of the ways we attempt to help visitors find their way and enjoy their experiences. Visitors' lives are enriched as they discover their own meanings regarding these resources.



A booklet for a self-guided interpretive nature trail at Sutcliffe Woodland near Guthrie Center.

WESTERN SKIES' SENSE OF PLACE

The byway is a microcosm of the Heartland. It is a rolling, rural landscape blanketed by a patchwork of crops, pastures, and small communities that proudly celebrate their ethnic roots. One-room country schools stand as testament to the value that Iowa has placed on education. Gravel roads divide the countryside into geometrically proportioned sections of 640 acres. Farmsteads dotted every 160 acre quarter-section for a century until family

farms were replaced in the 1960s by larger, mechanized crop and livestock operations.

This bucolic land with big ridges and deep valleys showcases the broad horizon, sun, and sky. Windmills are the iconic symbol of people living with the land. Modern wind generators point to the future, while creaking old Aermotors tell tales of the past.

This is the land where hybrid corn was developed to become king of American crops and the land where livestock was scientifically bred to meet the demands of modern markets.



A scene along the Western Skies Scenic Byway during the height of the summer 2014 growing season.

PLAN MEDIA HOLISTICALLY

A trip along the Western Skies Byway is an opportunity to discover meaningful cause and effect relationships between natural and cultural events that have shaped the land and people into what they are today. While most visitors enjoy their casual journey, many more appreciate understanding the forces and stories that create greater richness in the sense of place found in the villages and farms in this typically Iowa landscape.

The physical presence of signs and structures and other media along a

roadway command attention. They offer immediate information and orientation. Several things should be considered to develop a comprehensive approach to media:

- **Brand and Unify the Experience:** Visually coordinate the color palette, type fonts, and other design elements to create immediate recognition by travelers. All media should be cross-referenced so a reader can access information that will connect them to related stories, resources, and media.

For instance, paper publications should direct readers to websites, wayside exhibits, and audio tours.

- **Diversify Delivery Techniques:** Multiple delivery approaches are required to communicate successfully with travelers of many ages, interests, backgrounds, and motivations. Weather and seasons require that we offer alternative forms of media.
- **Be Accessible:** To communicate with the greatest number of people possible, we need to incorporate a full spectrum of learning styles like auditory, visual, and tactile. Media should be developed to connect with a continuum of travelers like tourists, bus tours, resident commuters, and families.



A wildlife overlook at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge, Missouri Valley, with interpretive panels, binoculars, and viewing blinds for watching birds.

CAPITALIZE ON THE BYWAY'S STRENGTHS

The most encompassing experience on the Western Skies Scenic Byway is viewing the vast panoramic landscape as it unfolds along sweeping ridges as one drives through this rich, rolling farmland. Perhaps that is why some locals call it “the ridge road.” In the words of Enos Mills, the father of interpretation, “the essence is to travel gracefully rather than to arrive.” As planners, we recognize that much of the pleasure on this route is simply the drive.

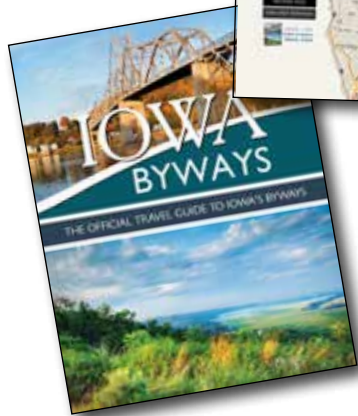
Scenic overlooks where one can park and take time for a photograph might be desirable but perhaps expensive and unnecessary. The gravel crossroads offer safe and spontaneous opportunities to take time to view and photograph the scenery. A Veterans Monument and Sculpture Park planned for development on the byway just west of Kimballton will include views of the expansive surrounding landscape.

Many visitors feel rewarded by opportunities to see connections that give greater meaning to their observations and experiences. For example, learning that these huge hills and valleys are the result of ancient glacial deposits that have eroded over tens of thousands of years gives insight into why the features

are so graceful and prominent. It follows that the river systems have had time to develop and that the hills have been softened by weather.



A panoramic view from a ridge along the Western Skies Scenic Byway.



Following a set of design guidelines, as has already been done for the Iowa Byways, creates a family of media that is instantly recognizable as belonging to the state's scenic routes.

CREATE A DISTINCTIVE VISUAL IDENTITY

The complex landscape of any road corridor has conflicting visual components that distract travelers from the byway experience. To be successful, interpretive efforts should capitalize on the recognizable icons and strong features of the area's sense of place.

The colors and curves of the media graphics, the selected construction materials, and even the fonts of the messages need to be unified to each other and reflect the character of the ridges, valleys, and villages of the byway (See "Unified Design Standards"). What may seem like redundant design elements to the planning team will be reassuringly familiar to a byway traveler.

The Iowa Department of Transportation already has developed a strong identity for the Western Skies Scenic Byway and the Iowa Byways program. New road signs installed a few years ago are unified across the state in terms of artistic style. An accompanying Iowa Byways guide creates a unified family of byways. The website follows with the same look, reassuring travelers that the Iowa Byways program is well planned and executed. The media recommendations that follow aim to build on the pre-existing design work to further the byway's interpretive goals.

Visual Identity Through Design

- The colors used on the byway logo should serve as the palette for other media.
- The Western Skies and Iowa Byways logos should be replicated on all publications, interpretive signs, and online media for optimal exposure and recognition.
- Apply unified design standards for all frames and supports for signs, hubs, and wayside exhibits.
- Apply consistent graphic elements such as type style and sizes, color palette, and artistic approaches.

Unified Design Standards



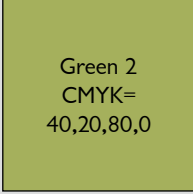


To increase recognition and to provide a more cohesive experience for travelers, all media should be graphically and visually unified. The use of unified and repeated colors, fonts, logos, and other graphic elements will combine media into a family of recognizable byway features. The following suggestions should be considered in the design of future media.

Color Palette



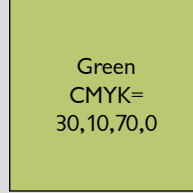
A standard set of colors unites media, highlights important messages, and evokes feelings about a site or an organization.

In 2010, the Iowa Department of Transportation Office of Media and Marketing established logos and color palettes for all Iowa byways and for the overall Iowa Byways brand. Brand descriptions and regulations are described in the “Iowa Byways Brand Guidelines” documents prepared for each byway. “The brand is ultimately the program’s public identity intended to create awareness of the program and its benefits and to encourage and enhance the visitor’s experience on Iowa’s scenic byways,” according to the document.

Western Skies Scenic Byway Color Palette

 <p>Orange CMYK= 0,40,90,0</p>	 <p>Green 1 CMYK= 20,0,60,0</p>	 <p>Green 2 CMYK= 40,20,80,0</p>	 <p>Black CMYK= 0,0,0,100</p>	 <p>White CMYK= 0,0,0,0</p>
Curved header.	Curved header.	Curved header, tint boxes.	Lettering on large blocks of text over light backgrounds.	Text over dark backgrounds, picture borders.

Iowa Byways Color Palette

 <p>Light Blue CMYK= 100,70,60,0</p>	 <p>Dark Blue CMYK= 100,90,70,0</p>	 <p>Green CMYK= 30,10,70,0</p>
Subtitles.	Titles and subtitles.	Alternative option for tint boxes.

The color palette established as part of the logo designs should be repeated in byway media. The two shades of green and the orange reflect the colors of the landscape and sky along the Western Skies Scenic Byway. The green represents the farmed hills, while the orange highlights the glowing western sky that appears when the sun sets.

The light and dark blue colors of the Iowa Byways logo reflect the open expanse of sky along the byway, and are complementary with the colors chosen for the Western Skies byway.

Recommended Typography

CHELTENHAM BT

Main titles and headings

Brushtiptravis

*Headings and subheadings,
handwriting (quotes, photos)*

Garrison Sans

Main text

Garrison Sans Italic

Photo captions

Garrison Sans Italic

Photo credits

Typography

The design and selection of letter forms creates the personality and readability of blocks of type on interpretive media. Each typeface expresses personality and sets a tone that reflects the organization or the message that is being interpreted, so it should be selected purposefully.

Combinations of various styles can add an interesting hierarchy to the media design and help create specific personalities for each message. Fonts can appear lighthearted and fun, informal, businesslike, old-fashioned, rustic, or legalistic. They can seem difficult to wade through or look easy to read.

Stylized fonts attract attention for titles and short headings but can be burdensome to read in longer texts.

On the Iowa Byways logo, the typeface for “IOWA” is a derivation of Cheltenham BT set in all caps. The original typeface was manipulated to blend with the abstract graphic representations of hills and valleys. The recommended font for main titles and headings on Western Skies Scenic Byway media is **Cheltenham BT Bold**, evoking the timeless nature of the Western Skies region and creating consistency between media.

Brushtiptravis is an informal script font that provides contrast to the more formal Cheltenham BT. It serves a similar purpose as the script font used alongside the curving line on each page of the Iowa Byways guide. The Western Skies guidebook pages say “Sunsets and Scenery” in a white script font. These types of fonts welcome viewers and invite them to explore interpretive media. Brushtiptravis is recommended for some headings such as on wayside exhibits, for subheadings, and to emulate handwriting. It can add style to photographs or quotes where handwritten messages may be appropriate.

Simple, familiar fonts work best for longer texts that require more reading. **Garrison Sans Regular** is recommended for the main text on Western Skies media. Garrison Sans is used in the Iowa Byways publication, and it is also similar to Gill Sans, which is the font used on the byway logos. It is a sans serif font that is easy to read. Garrison Sans also works well for photo captions and credits.

A **hierarchy of type sizes** is also important to emphasize the relative significance of various messages. Typically, a main title is the largest size, followed by subheadings, main text, captions, and credits.

Repeating Graphic Elements

Another important factor that contributes to a unified design style is the use of repeating graphic elements. These elements, in combination with the color and typography schemes, develop a unique identity for the byway.

The Western Skies Scenic Byway and Iowa Byways logos are essential graphic elements that should be included on all byway media, from interpretive signs and publications to websites and apps. They provide a unified brand for the byway and for the Iowa Byways program.

According to the Iowa DOT, “the colors and curves in the Iowa Byways logo are an abstraction of the undulating Iowa landscape. Individual logos for the individual byways in the Iowa Byways program were developed in an intentionally simple graphic style so as to appear as a recognizable and memorable graphic theme, descriptive of the character and experience of the byway, and as a safe and effective wayshowing tool when displayed on signage.”

The Western Skies Scenic Byway logo was designed to represent the story and experience of the byway.

Other repeated graphic elements on future interpretive media will reinforce the already existing design identity. These may include:

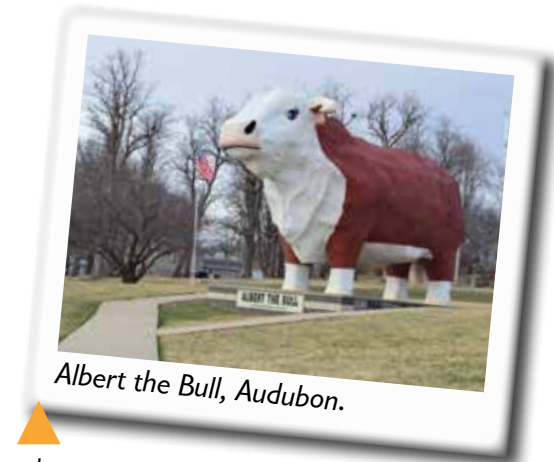
- Curving header bars comprised of gently interwoven contrasting dark, medium, and light colors from the Western Skies color palette. The curve is reminiscent of the wave pattern in the Iowa byways logo and the overlapping hills in the Western Skies byway logo.
- Faded light blue backgrounds with a gradient or full-panel picture backgrounds on interpretive media.
- White, snapshot-style borders for photos, with feathered edges, tilted slightly, and with drop shadows.
- Tint boxes with feathered edges, rounded corners, and drop shadows.
- Large focal point images to draw attention.
- Byway website addresses and QR codes that link to the Iowa Byways website.



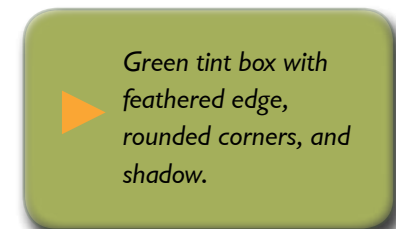
The Western Skies and Iowa Byways logos are essential graphics elements to include on all media.



Curved header with byway colors.



Snapshot photo effect with white feathered borders, caption, tilt, and shadow.



Green tint box with feathered edge, rounded corners, and shadow.

INTERPRETIVE EXPERIENCE HUBS

The long, linear corridor of the Western Skies Scenic Byway parallels the well-traveled route of Interstate 80 and connects with two national byways: the Loess Hills National Scenic Byway along Iowa's western border and the Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway near Missouri Valley.

There are billboards and official highway signs in addition to welcome centers that invite travelers to detour off the interstate and visit attractions on the more tranquil Western Skies Scenic Byway. It is imperative that the traveler's attention be drawn to a menu of additional experiences beyond those highlighted on billboards when they enter these communities.

Experience hubs orient travelers to the attractions and stories of a byway. They consist of multiple signs that provide maps, information, and interpretation. These should be prominently sited at key byway entry points and at areas of high traveler use such as welcome centers, visitor centers, and significant attractions.

The planning team proposes that gateway locations such as Elk Horn, Stuart, and Woodbine install highly visible experience hubs that entice visitors to explore local attractions. These structures will have enough mass and character to attract attention even in busy areas.

The purpose of the experience hubs is to:

- Create an identifiable, quality Western Skies structure that displays interpretation about the byway.
- Serve as a gateway and a hub to each community and to the entire Western Skies Scenic Byway even when other staffed facilities are closed.

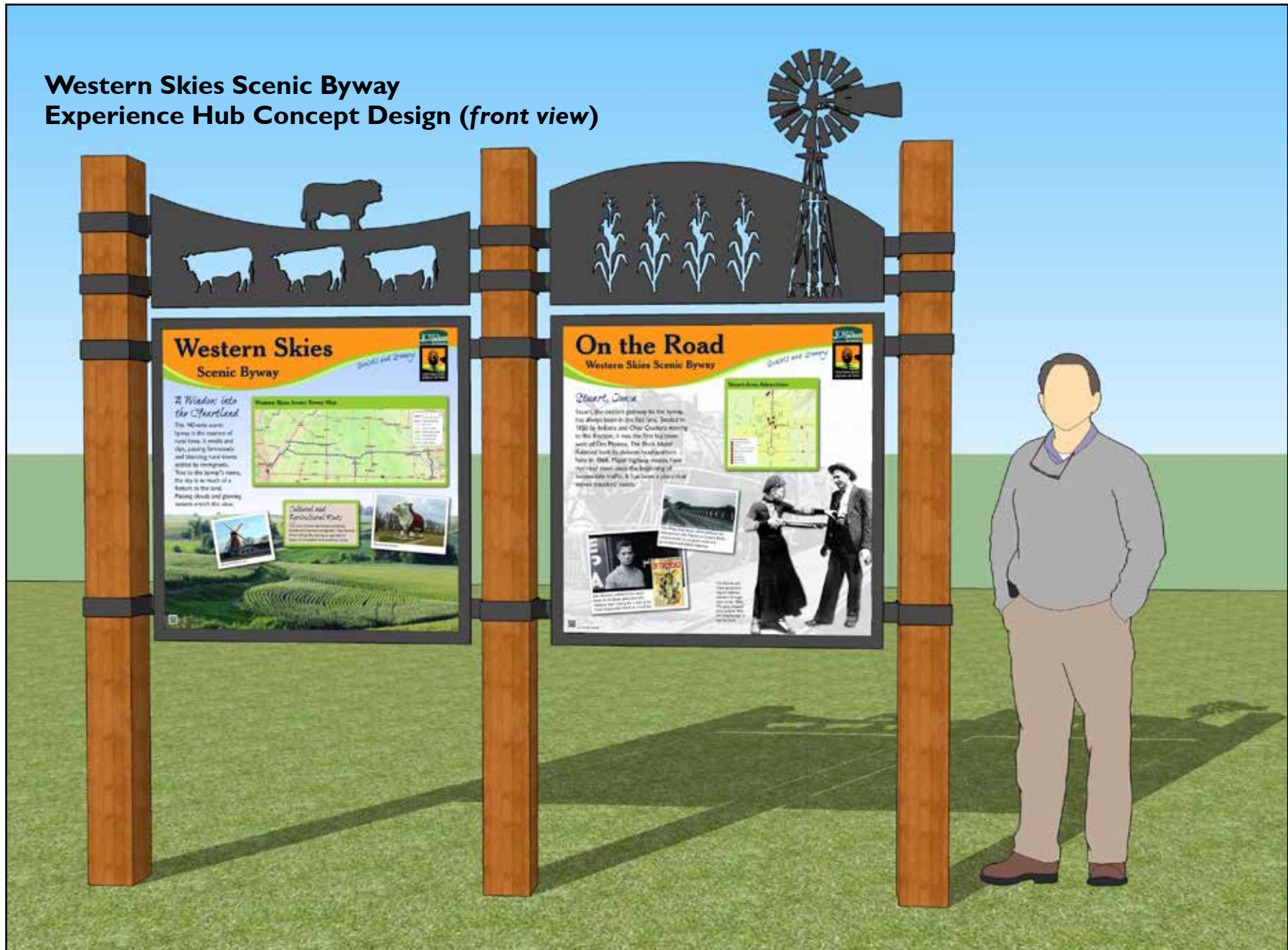
Experience Hub Design

A strong visual identity should be created throughout the byway. The hub structures present an opportunity to introduce the byway to motorists who pass by and are unaware of the byway. Many local residents also are unaware of the byway and its stories. These hubs can even connect residents with their communities' histories.

The structures and their signage are an opportunity to create an artistic repetition that unifies and identifies the byway experience. The planning team proposes an experience hub design for the Western Skies Scenic Byway that represents the rolling landscape of the region with graceful curves and with muted colors that mirror the agricultural landscape and expansive sky. Each kiosk should:

- Display a distinct image that will become synonymous with the byway.
- Exhibit a unified design with all other signage and interpretive media.
- Reflect byway themes through unique graphics cut into the steel frame, such as a rolling landscape, windmills, livestock, and corn.
- Be highly visible to travelers but not overpower existing agency and site entry signs at welcome centers, parks, and attractions.
- Appear rustic and durable in rural sites but be formal enough to fit into town settings.
- Be vandal resistant.

Western Skies Scenic Byway Experience Hub Concept Design (front view)



- Appear elegant but be economically produced.
- Be easily replaced, modified, or repaired.
- Provide concise orientation information.
- Provide compelling stories about the surrounding attractions.

Construction elements of the hub should appear stylish and durable and yet be affordable. Wooden timbers and iron create a substantial feel and authenticity. Weathering steel filigree can present an ageless look with enough detail to allow symbols and scenes that support the stories of the Western Skies Byway. For example, polled livestock, corn plants, and windmills can be cut into the steel to provide a sense that these structures are thematically crafted to help tell the story of this place.

The strong combination of wood and steel appears organic but is very vandal-resistant and maintenance-free. The full-color, high-density laminate panels require minimal attention and are reasonably resistant to damage and vandalism. Their graphic design elements are addressed in greater detail

in this chapter. A ten-year warranty against fading and delaminating is standard with any panel fabricator.

The panels should be dramatic and concise as viewers generally have a limited amount of time and patience to invest in viewing the hubs. These panels compete for attention with birds singing, fog or rain, sunlight, wind, and traffic sounds. Keeping messages short and exciting and telling the story visually will help grab and keep visitors' interest.

Each experience hub will contain four interpretive panels (two panels on each side of the structure).

- An **overview map panel** containing general information about the Western Skies Scenic Byway to provide travelers an overview of why this route is significant and why it was designated a scenic byway. The focus should be the byway's importance as a microcosm of Iowa's history and agricultural contributions. This panel will be the same at all six experience hub locations.

- A **local attractions panel** should offer greater details of each particular community, with a regional map of the local attractions identified and described. It will be unique to each community.
- An **agricultural panel** that interprets the agricultural themes of the byway, especially as they can be seen near that particular community. The basic storyline will remain consistent, but each agricultural panel will interpret a slight variation that focuses on the agricultural aspects reflected locally.
- A panel that interprets the **human cultural history** of the community as it relates to the ethnic groups and settlement along the byway as a whole.

Western Skies Scenic Byway Experience Hub Concept Design (back view)



Western Skies

Scenic Byway

Sunsets and Scenery



A Window into the Heartland

This 142-mile scenic byway is the essence of rural Iowa. It swells and dips, passing farmsteads and bisecting rural towns settled by immigrants. True to the byway's name, the sky is as much of a feature as the land. Passing clouds and glowing sunsets enrich the view.

Western Skies Scenic Byway Map



Cultural and Agricultural Roots

This area of Iowa was heavily settled by Danish and German immigrants. They farmed these rolling hills, leaving an agricultural legacy of innovation that continues today.



Danish Windmill, Elk Horn.



Albert the Bull, Audubon.

Experience Hub Overview Panel Concept Design (Stuart)

Each kiosk would include a panel that introduces the Western Skies Scenic Byway and the interpretive theme of the route. It would include a map of the byway. This panel would be repeated on all seven kiosks.

35.5"



www.iowabyways.com

35.5"

Experience Hub Local Attractions Panel Concept Design (Stuart)

The local attractions panel would interpret the local area, including a map and description of noteworthy sites to visit. This panel would be unique on each of the seven kiosks. The Stuart panel would interpret the town's history as a transportation hub visited by a famous writer and infamous outlaws.

On the Road

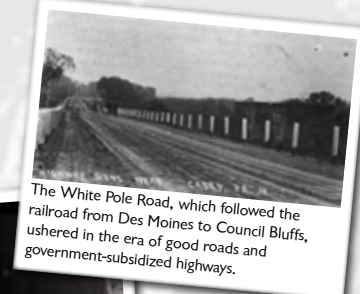
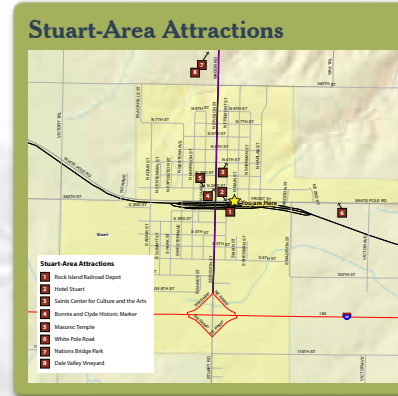
Western Skies Scenic Byway

Sunsets and Scenery

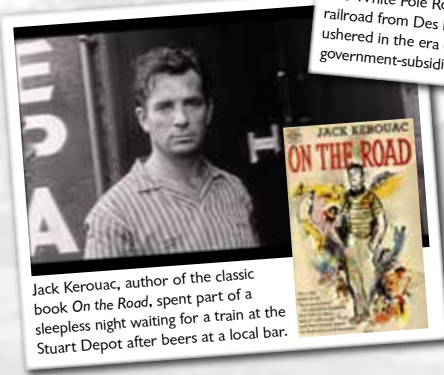


Stuart, Iowa

Stuart, the eastern gateway to the byway, has always been in the fast lane. Settled in 1850 by Indiana and Ohio Quakers moving to the frontier, it was the first big town west of Des Moines. The Rock Island Railroad built its division headquarters here in 1868. Major highway routes have run near town since the beginning of automobile traffic. It has been a place that serves travelers' needs.



The White Pole Road, which followed the railroad from Des Moines to Council Bluffs, ushered in the era of good roads and government-subsidized highways.



Jack Kerouac, author of the classic book *On the Road*, spent part of a sleepless night waiting for a train at the Stuart Depot after beers at a local bar.



The Bonnie and Clyde gang were regular highway travelers through town in the 1930s. The gang stopped here in April 1934 just long enough to rob the bank.



Ag Innovations

Western Skies Scenic Byway

Sunsets and Scenery



It Happened Here

Iowa's rich prairies are a cradle of agricultural innovation. This region is the home of hybrid corn and a bull whose breeding superiority still reigns today. Crops must make it to market, and Iowa's impassable dirt roads prompted new corridors like the White Pole Road and railroad spurs from Stuart to outlying farm communities.



At the height of the Cold War in 1959, agricultural pioneer Roswell Garst of Coon Rapids hosted Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev in an effort to improve U.S.-Russia communications.

Corn is King

Corn was the first hybrid crop successfully marketed. It remains America's most economically significant crop. Visionaries like Henry Wallace of Des Moines and Roswell Garst of Coon Rapids were early developers of hybrid corn before the Great Depression.



Living with the Land

This bucolic land with big ridges and deep valleys showcases the open horizon, sun, and sky. Windmills are the iconic symbol of living with the land. Modern wind generators point to the future, while old, creaking Aermotors tell tales of the past.



An exceptional Angus cattle sire named Earl Marshall bred by W.A. McHenry in the early 1900s near Harlan produced bloodlines that are found in more than 99 percent of Angus cattle alive today.

www.iowabyways.org



Experience Hub Agricultural Panel Concept Design (Stuart)

Each kiosk would include a panel that provides an overview of the agricultural theme of the byway, especially as it can be seen locally. This panel would be unique on each of the seven kiosks. The Stuart panel would entice visitors to travel the byway by highlighting agricultural stories found along the route.

Experience Hub Cultural History Panel Concept Design (Stuart)

The cultural history panel would tell the story of local settlement, including the various European groups that farmed the area. This panel would be unique on each of the seven kiosks. The Stuart panel interprets the cultural influences that visitors will see along the byway.

Iowa Immigrants

Western Skies Scenic Byway

Sunsets and Scenery



Settling a Strange New Land

Iowa was the promised land in the mid-1800s. Yankees moved to these rich prairies, followed by new European immigrants. Many did not speak English so they settled with their fellow countrymen. Communities displayed their ethnic identities until their children, born here and educated in Iowa schools, assimilated into the larger society.

Coming and Going in Stuart

Stuart's location on a busy travel corridor influenced its population. The influx of travelers and workers at the Rock Island Railroad district headquarters here constantly changed the community's personality.



Starting in the 1870s, waves of Germans settled around Westphalia, lured by inexpensive farmland and the ability to live among others of the same faith. Workmen baked the bricks to build St. Boniface Catholic Church in Westphalia in 1881.



Iowa settlers embraced education, as witnessed by the one-room schools that dotted the countryside, including this one in Panama on the western end of the byway.

Danish Roots

The largest rural Danish settlement in the United States is in the Elk Horn and Kimballton area. The only authentic working Danish windmill in America is in Elk Horn.



www.iowabyways.org

Experience Hub Concept Design at Rock Island Railroad Depot, Stuart



Recommended Experience Hub Sites

There should be an adequate number of experience hubs along the route to orient travelers as they explore the byway. The hubs should be placed where travelers already gather to look for amenities and where there are significant stories and historic structure. Ideally they should be easily seen from the byway.

All communities along the byway eventually should have some interpretive media and recognition concerning their unique history and association with the byway. This philosophy of media dispersal is intended to help capture new audiences like Iowa commuters and local residents who are potential byway travelers and supporters. This plan identifies potential sites for experience hubs.

Experience hub locations were selected because of their convenient proximity to byway attractions; visibility for travelers; and the significance of the local stories to the overall understanding of the byway.



Rock Island Railroad Depot, Stuart.



Panora Community Center and Library.



Randi Jo Munch Park in Hamlin, along the T-Bone biking trail.

1 Stuart

Install an experience hub at the **Rock Island Railroad Depot**, across the street from the renovated Hotel Stuart. Stuart is the beginning of the byway, and the depot has been considered as a visitor/welcome center.

Suggested stories: This hub will interpret the story of Stuart as a town located on a main travel corridor with wagon trails, railroads, the White Pole Road, and I-80. Famous outlaws like Bonnie and Clyde and the beat generation writer Jack Kerouac all passed through this well-traveled place.

2 Panora

Install an experience hub in front of the **Panora Community Center**. This green space on Main Street/Highway 44 is clearly visible from the highway. It contains picnic tables and a gazebo that currently has an interpretive panel about the Western Skies Scenic Byway.

Suggested stories: This experience hub will describe how this village was named for its panoramic views and will relate the background of its early settlement. The scenic views of the Western Skies Byway are especially prevalent here.

3 Hamlin

Place an experience hub at **Randi Jo Munch Memorial Park** at the intersection of Highways 44 and 71, where all travelers must pause at a stop sign and where parking is readily apparent. This is a crossroads with attractions located in all four directions.

Suggested stories: A panel here should interpret the area north at Audubon, emphasizing the cattle industry and telling the story of John James Audubon and the reason why the village was named after him. To the south lie Plow in the Oak Park and the Tree in the Middle of the Road, both roadside curiosities. There are panoramic views and a graceful ridge-top roadway to the east and the Danish Villages are to the west.

Elk Horn

4 Install an experience hub in the vicinity of the **Danish Windmill** and the state-designated Iowa Welcome Center. This Danish settlement is a major byway attraction.

Suggested stories: The regional panel should tell the story of Danish immigrants and the diversity of Iowa people.

5 Harlan

Install an experience hub near the **Shelby County Chamber of Commerce**, one block south of the Highway 44 and 59 intersections.

Suggested stories: The story here is tied to the science of livestock breeding and corn production. The champion sire bull Earl Marshall should be an example of the innovative farming practices in this area.



Danish Windmill parking lot, Elk Horn, with benches and kiosks.



Shelby County Chamber of Commerce, Harlan.

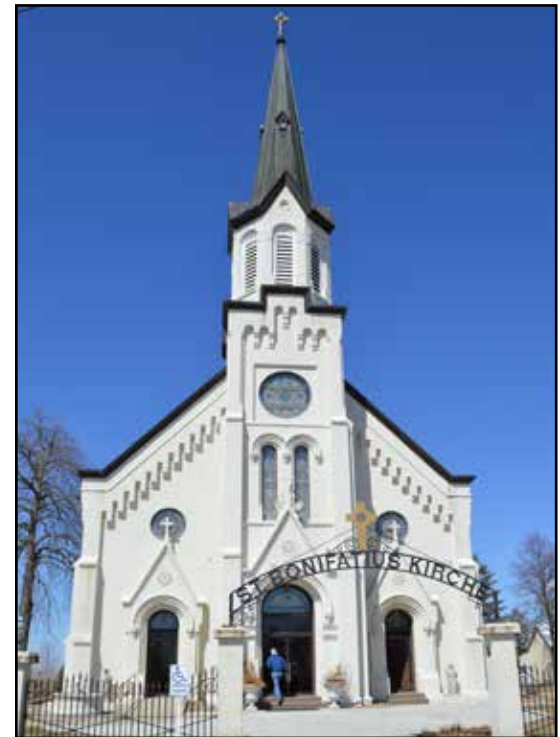
6 Westphalia

An experience hub should be built at **St. Boniface Catholic Church**, a focus of the German settlement in this town.

Suggested stories: An experience hub here can interpret the influx of German immigrants to this region of Iowa and the importance of their Catholic faith.



Woodbine Main Street Station.



St. Boniface Catholic Church, Westphalia.

7 Woodbine

An experience hub should be built at the **Woodbine Main Street Station**, a renovated 1928 canopy gas station on Walker Street.

Suggested stories: Good roads, rails, and commercial farm production can be seen here since this site still shows evidence of railroads and the Lincoln Highway, the first coast-to-coast hard surface roadway.



Wayside exhibits, like this one on the Great River Road in Prescott, Wisconsin, connect visitors to site-specific stories.



This wayside exhibit along a trail at Crowley's Ridge Nature Center in Arkansas involves visitors through tactile elements and push-button audio clips of frog calls.

WAYSIDE EXHIBITS

Wayside exhibits are interpretive panels placed along roads and trails to help visitors understand stories and meanings behind a resource or landscape. Photos, illustrations, and concise messages attract and hold a viewer's attention as they learn the stories of a site.

Wayside exhibits are an effective medium to communicate with travelers because they are always available regardless of time of day or weather. When installed next to the objects or sites that they interpret, they can immediately answer a viewer's questions about the site. They are a straightforward, non-threatening way to connect visitors with significant stories on the byway.

Wayside exhibits can visually convey the personality of a byway. Historic photos can show what a place looked like in the past. Wayside exhibits can share site-specific stories of a community and place them in a broader context and connect with universal meanings. They can show views from space or magnify tiny objects. They can showcase flowers blooming through a prairie summer or rare wildlife.

Today's technology offers a range of

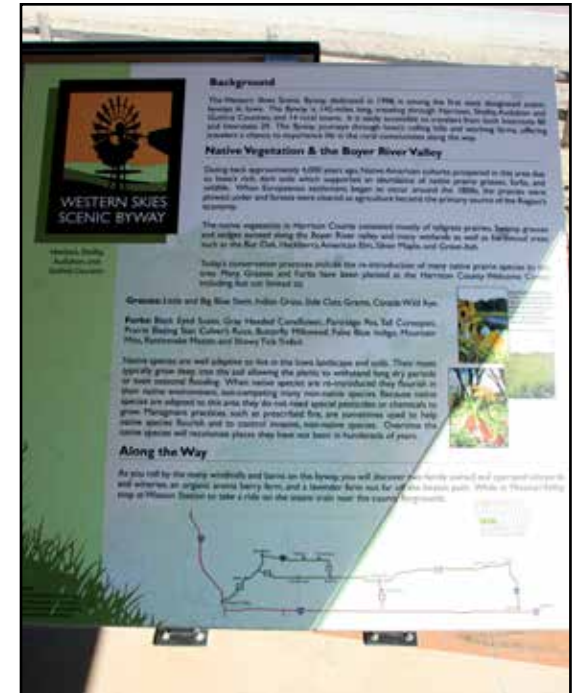
opportunities to enhance interpretive panels. Panels can be cut into different shapes. Digital audio recordings can be incorporated to add dramatic first-person stories, bird calls, or other clips. Touchable and interactive elements can be affixed to the panels for added visitor involvement. QR codes can connect visitors to websites, video, and audio.

Existing Wayside Panels

The planning team documented two interpretive panels specific to the Western Skies Scenic Byway.

Missouri Valley: The Western Skies Scenic Byway is interpreted as part of a larger interpretive panel in the shelter building outside the Harrison County Historical Village and Welcome Center in Missouri Valley. About three-fourths of the expansive panel is focused on the Loess Hills National Scenic Byway.

The panel provides an overview of the Western Skies Byway. It also discusses the native vegetation of the Missouri Valley area. A bottom section briefly describes some attractions, including wineries, aronia and lavender farms, and Watson Station.



An interpretive panel describing the Western Skies Scenic Byway is part of a larger Loess Hills National Scenic Byway panel at the Harrison County Historical Village and Welcome Center in Missouri Valley.

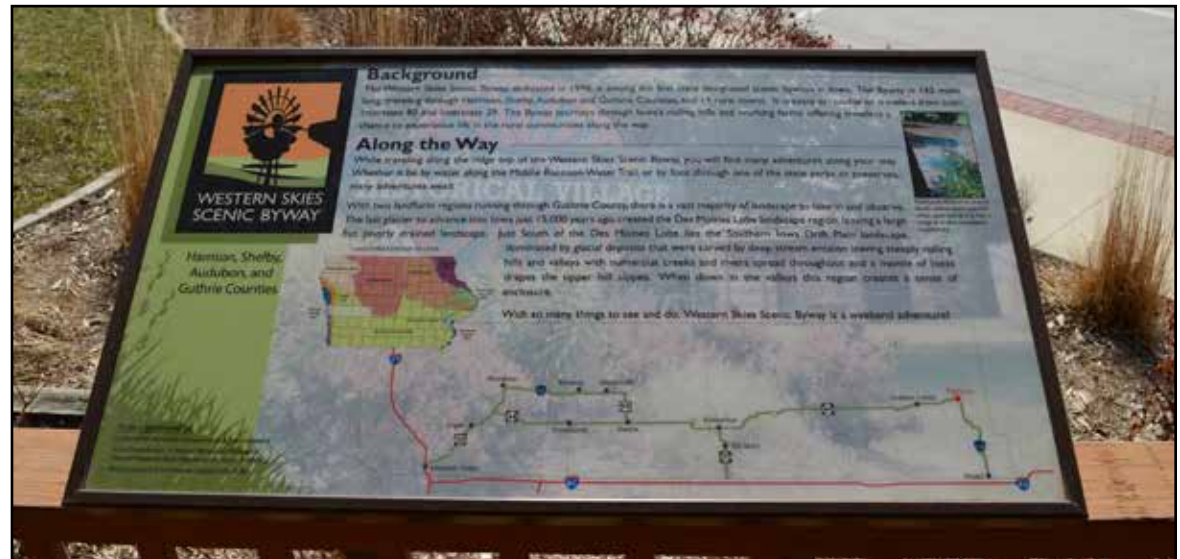
Creating an Effective Message

1. Communicate visually with photos and graphics.
2. Most visitors will look at an interpretive panel for only a few seconds. Apply the 3-30-3 Rule, a hierarchy that provides 3-second, 30-second and 3-minute message levels.
3. Use simple words, concise sentences, and short paragraphs.
4. Describe with concrete nouns and active verbs. Avoid adverbs and adjectives.
5. Relate to the reader with familiar terms, personal pronouns, metaphors, and quotes.
6. Provide multi-sensory involvement with tactile and audio devices.

Panora: An interpretive panel about the Western Skies Scenic Byway is found in a gazebo in front of the Panora Community Center on Main Street. The panel gives an overview of the byway, describing its length and location. A map across the bottom of the panel shows the route. The panel describes the byway as journeying “through Iowa’s rolling hills and working farms, offering travelers a chance to experience life in the rural communities along the way.”

The panel also tells a local story for visitors to Panora and Guthrie County. It describes how two landform regions are found in Guthrie County, and an adjacent map shows the landform regions of Iowa. The panel’s background photo is of the entrance sign for the Guthrie County Historical Village in Panora.

The panel is unified to the byway’s design standards as it includes the byway’s logo, color palette, and Gill Sans font.



An interpretive panel about the Western Skies Scenic Byway is located in a gazebo in front of the Panora Community Center.

Wayside Exhibit Design Recommendations

New wayside exhibit panels developed for the Western Skies Scenic Byway should incorporate the following design elements.

- **Unified design elements:** Structures should match the same style of the experience hubs so they can be readily identified as part of the byway’s family of signs. This should include:
 - Weathering steel supports with cut-out graphics similar to the experience hubs.
 - Western Skies and Iowa Byways logos.
 - Replication of colors, font styles, and graphic elements used on experience hub panels.
 - Website addresses and QR codes to connect visitors to online content.
- **Keep messages short:** As a rule of thumb, use no more than 60-70 words for the main message of a panel. See the “Creating an Effective Message” tips in the tint box for more recommendations for interpretive writing.

- **Panel materials:** High-pressure laminate material is a durable plastic material that allows for full-color, high-quality images and text. It is resistant to graffiti and scratches. Fabrication companies typically offer a 10-year warranty against ultraviolet fading and delaminating.
- **Size:** Wayside exhibit panels should be large enough to be noticeable and easily read but not too large that they detract from the landscape. A recommended size of 24-by-36 inches will facilitate non-framed and framed support styles.
- **Installation:** Wayside exhibit panels should be installed at a 30 to 45 degree angle to the ground, which offers the best view to a standing person. They should be placed high enough above the ground (a minimum of 30 inches on the lowest edge) to allow a person in a wheelchair to get close.

We recommend a limited number of wayside panels for the byway because many site-specific attractions are located within villages and towns where signs already have been created by sponsoring organizations. In addition, fewer wayside panels are needed because experience hubs are to be placed prominently in

seven communities, with maps and photos of the community attractions. Finally, many sites where a panel might be desirable, such as the Missouri-Mississippi Divide, are sites where access is limited and/or dangerous for travelers; others are privately owned property.

The Iowa Freedom Rocks in Kimballton and Guthrie Center would offer a more complete visitor experience if they were interpreted by a wayside exhibit. The panel could explain the vision of the project, show some small photos of other nearby Freedom Rocks, and provide a context of Iowa’s patriotic enthusiasm and ability to provide military recruits to serve American war efforts.

Wayside Exhibit Panel and Support Concept Design



Wayside Exhibit Support Concept Design (*back view*)



Wayside Panel Concept Design (Audubon)

Birds and Bulls

The Animals of Audubon

Birds and bulls serve as symbols of Audubon. The town was named for the famous naturalist and artist John James Audubon. He was greatly admired by the nation at the time Audubon was established in 1851. Albert the Bull was created more than 100 years later to symbolize the importance of Iowa in scientific livestock production. Herefords like Albert were a popular breed in the 1960s, when he was constructed by the Audubon Jaycees.

Birds of America

Audubon's *The Birds of America* is considered one of the finest ornithological publications ever produced. It contains hand-colored, life-size prints. The original edition was printed on the sheets of paper nearly 40 inches tall and 26 inches wide, the largest paper size available at the time.

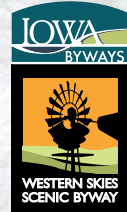


www.iowabyways.org



Birds in Mosaic

Stroll the sidewalks of Audubon to enjoy dozens of tile reproductions of the famous *Birds of America*.



Albert, the world's largest bull, was built to commemorate a 1950s beef promotion campaign called Operation T-Bone. Albert weighs 45 tons and stands 30 feet tall, with a 15-foot horn span. His frame was made from old windmills that were coated in concrete.

36"

Wayside Panel Concept Design (Panama)

One-Room Schools

'Everybody Needs an Education'

Iowans have always valued education. To ensure that everyone had access to a school, settlers aimed to build one every four square miles so children could walk to school. One teacher taught all eight grades. Solid and practical, the country school symbolizes the best of rural Iowa.

Washington Township #7

This venerable schoolhouse officially served the children of Shelby County until 1959, when it was moved two miles south to its present location. It continued to be used, mostly as a kindergarten, until the mid-1990s. It was saved from demolition by three former graduates who organized The Friends of Washington #7.



One-room schoolteachers—like this Washington #7 teacher in the back row, far right—often were young women who were responsible for teaching several grades of children ranging from kindergartners to teenagers.



Schoolboys playing on a swingset at a Shelby County one-room school, 1941.

*We walked from our farms even in winter
when snowbanks closed the roads;
we traveled in a group,
gathering neighbors along the way.*

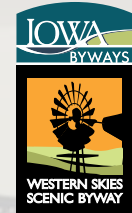
—Curtis Harnack, from
We Have All Gone Away



Students hard at work on their lessons at a Shelby County one-room school, 1941.

More than Books

Schoolchildren were responsible for pumping drinking water, stoking the fire, and cleaning the school each day. Bathrooms were in the form of separate boys' and girls' outhouses in the back corners of the one-acre schoolyard.





Bonnie and Clyde Historic Marker on the former First National Bank, Stuart.



White Pole Road, Stuart.



Guthrie County Freedom Rock, Guthrie Center.

Recommended Wayside Exhibit Sites

These proposed wayside exhibit locations are an initial recommendation, but other sites may be identified as communities become more invested in byway planning.

Stuart

- 1 **Bonnie and Clyde Historic Marker:** Install a wayside exhibit at the building the infamous duo robbed. This panel can interpret the tale of the gang's robbery of the bank.
 - 2 **White Pole Road:** Install an exhibit on the original route near the railroad tracks where white poles exist or can be created and where it is safe to stop for a photograph. This panel can interpret the creation of the route across Iowa.
- ### Guthrie Center
- 3 **Guthrie County Freedom Rock:** Install a wayside exhibit at the rock, which is on the byway route, to interpret Iowa military service and the Freedom Rock program.

Recommended Sites for Wayside Exhibits

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 Bonnie and Clyde Historic Marker, Stuart | 4 John James Audubon Statue, Audubon | 7 One-Room School Museum, Panama |
| 2 White Pole Road, Stuart | 5 Little Mermaid Statue, Kimballton | |
| 3 Freedom Rock, Guthrie Center | 6 Shelby County Historical Society and Museum, Harlan | |





John James Audubon's statue in Audubon's city park.



Hans Christian Andersen Park and The Little Mermaid Statue, Kimballton.



Shelby County Historical Society and Museum, Harlan.

Audubon

- 4 **John James Audubon Statue:** Install a wayside exhibit near the statue in the city park. The panel can interpret the story behind the town's name and the local emphasis on birds and bulls (Albert the Bull and livestock production).

Kimballton

- 5 **The Little Mermaid Statue:** Install a wayside exhibit in Hans Christian Andersen Park to interpret the Danish author and the villages' Danish ancestry.

Harlan

- 6 **Shelby County Historical Society and Museum:** A wayside here can interpret livestock breeding and hybrid corn because the museum can offer in-depth information on each subject.



Panama's Washington Township #7 and Historic One-Room School Museum.

Panama

- 7 Historic One-Room School Museum:** A wayside here can tell the story of Iowa's rural education and the Washington Township #7 school.

BYWAY ARTWORK

Art appeals to our emotions and can convey thoughts and feelings to all ages. It can be enjoyed at various levels—casually or in a more introspective way. Stylish artwork can capture attention and imagination and add an additional interpretive dimension to visitors' experiences.

Murals

Murals are highway-scale media that motorists can experience as they drive through the landscape of a byway. These huge paintings can be seen even at 55 miles per hour and can introduce ideas and create moods that other media can

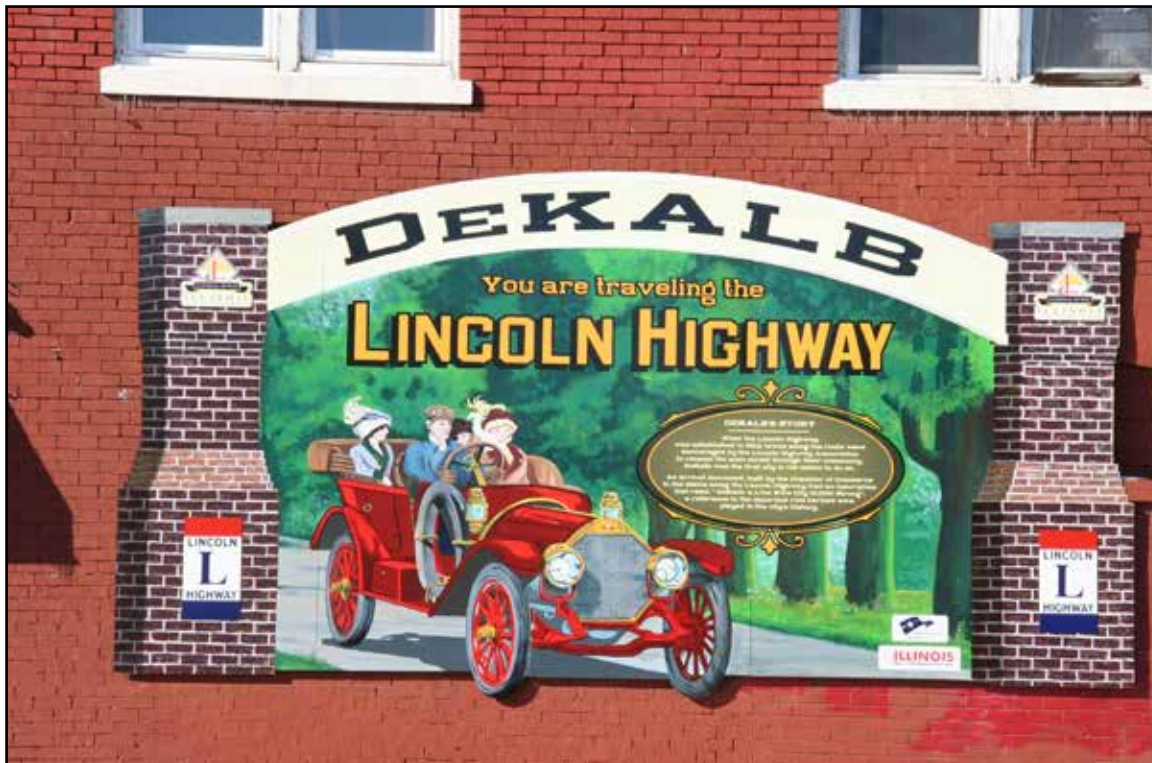
address in greater detail. These “through-the-windshield” interpretive pieces are a great way to make the past come alive or to introduce the unique personality of the community.

All towns and villages have buildings with unfinished walls where an adjoining structure was razed. These large, unsightly exteriors can be converted to artistic expressions of the community's sense of place.

Woodbine, Logan, and Missouri Valley share early national highway heritage with the coast-to-coast Lincoln Highway passing through their city limits. Large, blank walls on downtown buildings offer an opportunity to depict mural scenes of historic events on the route.

Logan could memorialize the Great Train Wreck of 1896 with a dramatic mural of the two trains charging toward each other and the terrified witness waving his hat in desperation. A wayside exhibit nearby could provide the interpretive story.

Woodbine's mural could show the epic transcontinental journey of the U. S. Army caravan of 1919, with a young



A mural along the Lincoln Highway in Illinois.

Army officer named Dwight Eisenhower, passing through the dusty town. That trip demonstrated the need for good roads. Eisenhower could be added to the corner of the mural, with an inscription of how he launched the development of the interstate highway system.

Stuart could display a mural of the White Pole Road, Iowa's first certified state route.

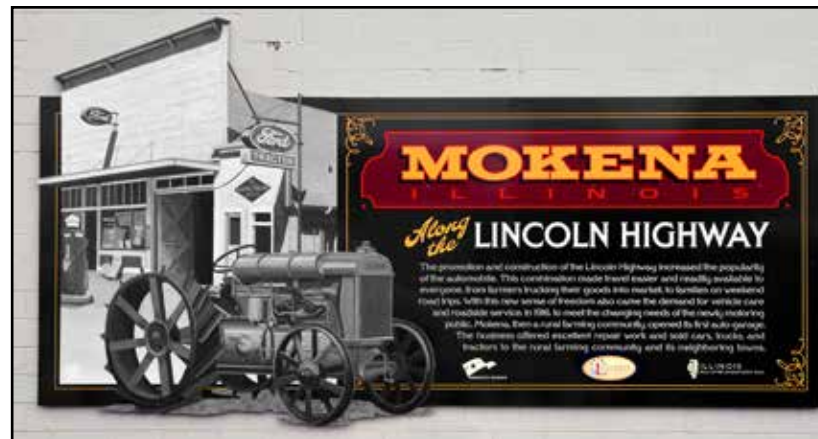
Other Western Skies communities could focus on the significant agricultural developments documented along the byway.

There have been some excellent examples of mural projects sponsored on scenic byways. The Illinois Lincoln Highway has some outstanding thematic murals that help tell the story of each town along the byway.

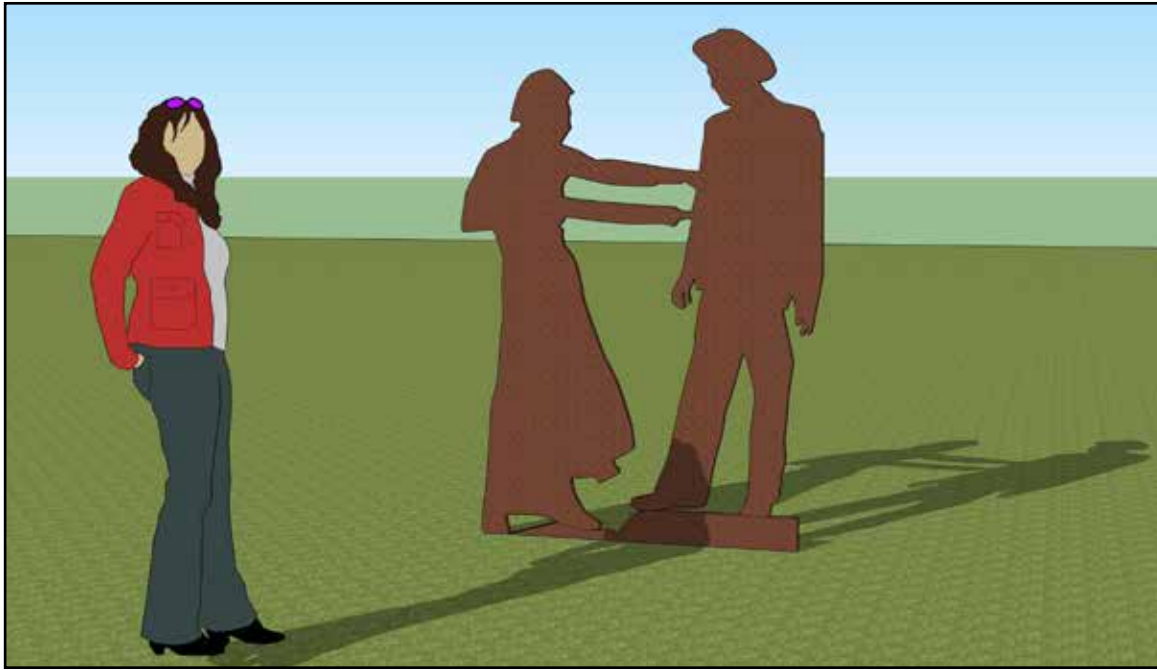
Organizations such as The Walldogs specialize in creating murals. When an organization commissions The Walldogs, a network of artists converges on the site, using leaders and local volunteers to paint the mural. For more information, visit www.thewalldogs.com.



A Walldogs-created mural in Arcola, Illinois, celebrates the town's historic role in the broom corn industry.



A mural along the Lincoln Highway in Illinois.



Metal Statue Concept Design, Bonnie and Clyde, Stuart

Statues

Three-dimensional works of art have an attractive power that panels and flatwork lack. They can bring a story to life, create photo opportunities, and heighten participation. They have a strong physical presence that causes viewers to pause long enough to be motivated to engage with a nearby interpretive wayside for insights. Statues can convey a strong visual message that can be supplemented with wayside exhibits.

A steel cutout of a life-size Angus bull like the famous Earl Marshall has a commanding physical presence that can draw travelers' attention. It is durable and vandal resistant.

A wayside exhibit panel should interpret the statue and include a photograph of the bull. The significance of this sire's impact on modern cattle genetics should be part of the message.

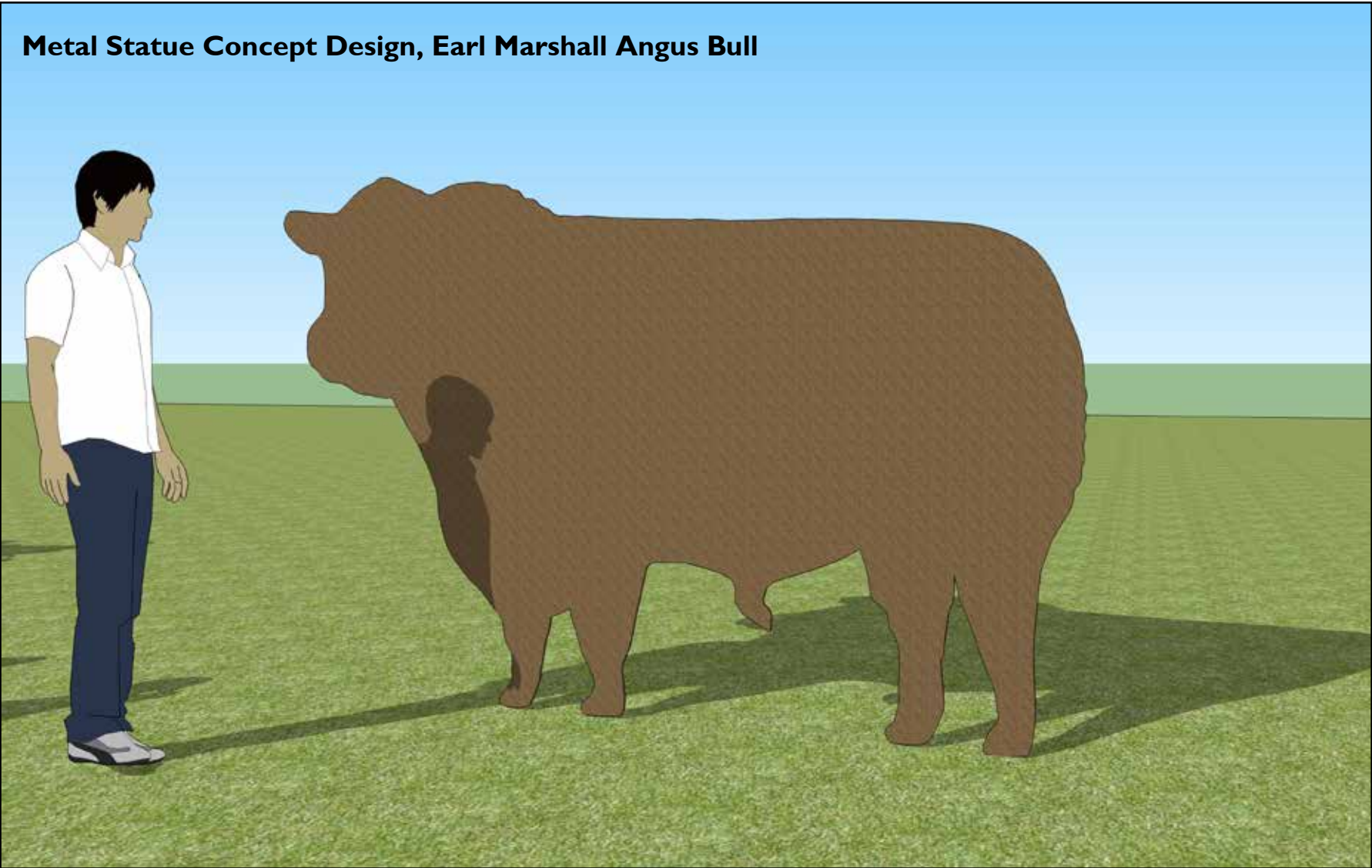
A provocative silhouette of Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow wielding guns outside the old bank building will attract the attention of any motorists entering downtown Stuart. A wayside panel will interpret the pair of infamous outlaws and will direct interested travelers down the street to the experience hub and more local attractions.

Metal Statue Concept Design, Bonnie and Clyde

Bonnie and Clyde Historic Marker, Stuart



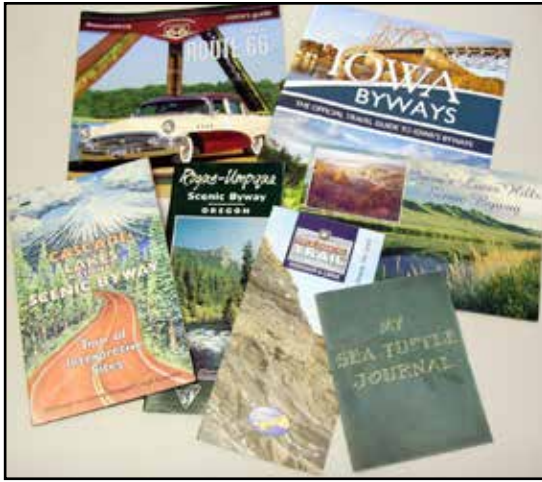
Metal Statue Concept Design, Earl Marshall Angus Bull



Metal Statue Concept Design, Earl Marshall Angus Bull

Shelby County Historical Society and Museum, Harlan





Interpretive publications can take many different formats, including brochures, maps, travel guides, and kids' activity booklets.



The Western Skies Scenic Byway brochure.

PUBLICATIONS

While most travelers prepare for trips using the Internet, there are many reasons to develop printed publications.

Although smartphone use is increasing, not everyone uses them or prefers to use them as their primary means of planning a trip and navigating. A significant number of people like to have a printed publication that can be tucked in their pocket and is not limited by spotty cell phone coverage or low batteries.

Publications have take-home value and serve as keepsakes of an adventure. They often are shared with others and have a longer shelf life than digital communications.

Byway Brochure

Brochures are a cost-effective primary marketing tool for byways because they reach casual travelers who are unaware of the byway until they enter an area. There are many travelers who do not plan a road trip in advance but look forward to a serendipitous adventure as they travel a new route.

A basic byway brochure should stimulate people to access more in-depth

information online or at welcome centers. It should be bold and concise with a simple, clean design and dramatic images that spotlight significant attractions and other byway media.

The Western Skies Scenic Byway currently has a byway brochure that is distributed at attractions and welcome centers. The brochure features an attractive cover photo of a windmill, with snapshots of attractions and scenery found along the route. Three inside panels offer sample weekend itineraries based on outdoor attractions; cultural and historical sites; and local landmarks. The full reveal inside has a byway map that also shows the locations of parks, preserves, and wildlife areas. The lower half of the full reveal lists restaurants, lodging, and points of interest.

A byway brochure redesign is included here to spur ideas for how to improve this essential publication.

Design Recommendations:

- **Size and folds:** an 11-inch-by-17-inch panel leaflet brochure is an effective layout for introducing the byway.

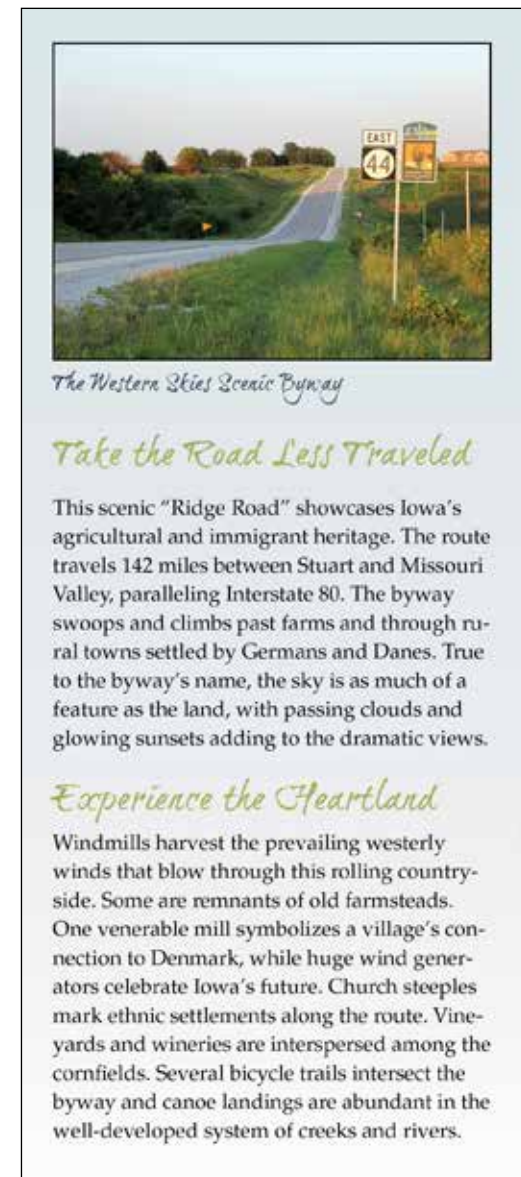
Western Skies Scenic Byway Brochure Concept Design



Front Cover



Back Cover



First Reveal

Agricultural Innovation

Bovine Sires, Hybrid Corn & Iron Curtains

This is the country where hybrid corn was developed and marketed to become king of American crops.



Albert the Bull, Audubon

It's also where livestock were scientifically bred to meet the demands of modern markets. Meet Albert, the world's largest Hereford statue, at Audubon, where also you can view tile replicas of Audubon's *Birds of America* in the city sidewalks.

At Whiterock Conservancy you can set foot on the Garst Farm, which played a role during the Cold War standoff between the Soviet Union and the West in 1959.



Roswell Garst, right, and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev.

Ethnic Identities

Mermaids and Windmills

Church spires and grain elevators tower over towns that were settled by immigrants. New England Yankees and Pennsylvania Quakers were followed by Germans, Danes, and Swedes. At first, they clustered in villages with people who shared their language and customs. Each generation integrated deeper into the mainstream American culture and ethnic personalities faded.

Danish Windmill, Elk Horn



Routes and Roads

Wagon Trails, Locomotives & Automobiles



T-Bone Trail, Exira

Farmers needed to get their products to market, so railroads were built into every agricultural community.

Iowa farmers banded together to create the first "good roads" like the White Pole

Road for better access to railheads.

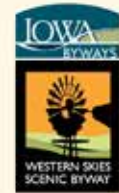
Today, abandoned railroad beds have found new life as bicycle trails like the Raccoon River Valley Trail or the T-Bone Trail. Take a detour down one of the many gravel roads and get in touch with rural Iowa!



White Pole Road, Stuart

Second Reveal: Thematic Descriptions

Welcome to the Western Skies Scenic Byway



Iowa Welcome Centers serving the Western Skies Scenic Byway

- 1 Danish Windmill and Welcome Center (Elk Horn)
- 2 Harrison County Historical Village and Iowa Welcome Center (Missouri Valley)
- 3 Underwood I-80 Welcome Center



For more information visit:

www.iabyways.org



Full Reveal Inside:
Byway Map

- **Design elements:** Colors, font styles, and graphic styles should be unified with other byway media (see “Unified Design Standards”).
- **Front Cover:** Needs to be designed to be noticed in a rack with other brochures. An obvious “Western Skies Scenic Byway” title should be visible above the rack holder. A focal-point photograph that represents the byway, like a dramatic windmill in a scene of rolling farm fields, encourages readers to open the brochure. The byway logo should be added to unify with other media.
- **Back Cover:** The back cover is an ideal place to include a map of Iowa showing the location of the byway and directions to the byway. Contact information also will be important here.
- **First Reveal:** When a reader first opens the brochure, another dramatic image of the road stretching out ahead draws the eye to a concise and active description of the byway.
- **Second Reveal (3 panels):** As the reader continues to open the brochure, three adjacent panels will highlight three themes of the byway: agricultural innovation, ethnic settlements, and the history of transportation in this part of the state. Descriptions of the characteristic features of the byway and some key attractions will pique the visitor’s interest.
- **Full Reveal Inside (6 panels):** The inside of the brochure features a map of the byway with the byway route clearly indicated. Iowa Welcome Centers along the byway are clearly indicated, guiding travelers to places for more information. Attractions also can be listed here.

Brochures also can be developed for specific topics of interest along the byway, such as agricultural attractions, a Danish tour guide, or a “Sacred Spaces” brochure that interprets the many churches along the byway.

Travel Guide Booklet

The Western Skies Scenic Byway is featured in the Iowa Byways travel guide. This printed guide is an essential resource for visitors traveling any of Iowa’s byways.

The guide is organized by byway in a user-friendly format. The Western Skies Scenic Byway takes up two pages. This section:

- Describes the byway using concise, creative language.
- Divides attractions by four categories: recreation, historic places, culture, and scenic views.
- Places the attractions on the byway map.
- Highlights the byway’s counties on an Iowa map.
- Uses the byway’s color scheme and logo to unify the section to other byway media, such as road signs.



WESTERN SKIES

Sunsets and scenery



Discover Danish and German heritage, windmills and a bit of infamous history

Venture off the beaten path and experience the communities that define true Iowa. The 142-mile Western Skies Scenic Byway parallels Interstate 80 and joins Interstate 29, offering you an easy way to discover all that western Iowa has to offer.



Begin your journey with a history lesson at the Museum of Religious Arts or Harrison County Historical Village and Welcome Center near Missouri Valley. At the other end of the byway, you'll find a bit of infamous history in Stuart where Bonnie and Clyde staged their last bank robbery.

Past and present meet in the largest rural Danish settlement in the country, located in the Danish villages of Elk Horn and Kimballtown. Elk Horn is now home to the only working Danish windmill in America. Finding inspiration in their Danish brethren, the area is coming to rely on sustainable sources of energy and you'll often see modern wind turbines standing tall on the land. You're in luck if you happen to be driving an electric car. Elk Horn is currently the only town between Chicago and Denver with charging stations available to motorists.

German heritage is also evident in the towns of Westphalia and Panama where you will see architecturally stunning German churches, built with great care and craftsmanship by town founders.

Native prairies, parks and an abundance of trails will entice you out of your vehicle and into the great outdoors. Whiterock Conservancy is worth a stop with its wonderful blend of outdoor recreation, conservation, agriculture and Iowa's darkest sky for star gazing.

Whether you're looking for a change of scenery or just a change of pace, Western Skies Scenic Byway offers both, while showcasing Iowa's agriculture and cultural heritage.



Image © 2011 Kenneth G. West Jr., all rights reserved. www.ioscapes.com



Pioneer Days
Image © 2011 Kenneth G. West Jr., all rights reserved. www.ioscapes.com



Danish windmill in Elk Horn
Image © 2011 Kenneth G. West Jr., all rights reserved. www.ioscapes.com



RECREATION

- 1 Dinesen Prairie State Preserve Wildlife Area, Harlan
- 2 Prairie Rose State Park, Harlan
- 3 T-Bone Trail, Audubon and Hamlin
- 4 Whiterock Conservancy, Coon Rapids
- 5 Sheeder Prairie State Preserve, Guthrie Center
- 6 Springbrook State Park, Guthrie Center
- 7 Raccoon River Valley Trail, Panora
- 8 Middle Raccoon River Water Trail, Panora

HISTORIC PLACES

- 9 Harrison County Historical Village and Welcome Center, Missouri Valley
- 10 Danish Immigrant Museum, Elk Horn
- 11 Danish Windmill Museum, Elk Horn
- 12 Guthrie County Historical Village, Panora
- 13 Rock Island Railroad Depot, Stuart

CULTURE

- 14 Museum of Religious Arts, Logan
- 15 German Heritage Park, Westphalia
- 16 Danish Villages, Kimballton and Elk Horn
- 17 Saints Center for Culture and the Arts, Stuart

SCENIC VIEWS

- 18 Boyer River, Missouri Valley
- 19 Harrison County Historical Village, Missouri Valley
- 20 Ridgetop view, Iowa 44 Kimballton

BYWAY CONTACT

Golden Hills Resource Conservation and Development, Oakland
712-482-3029
www.goldenhillsrccd.org

The Western Skies Scenic Byway is included as part of the Iowa Byways guide.

Recommendations

The Western Skies Scenic Byway would benefit from a separate, standalone travel guide focused specifically on the route. A Western Skies Scenic Byway travel guide could add greater depth to visitors' understanding of the byway, extending their visits and their connections to the resources.

Organize the guide by town: Allocate two pages of the guide to major byway towns and their surrounding area. For example, byway travel guide spreads could focus on Stuart, Panora, Guthrie Center, the Audubon area, the Danish Villages of Elk Horn and Kimballton, the German villages of Westphalia and Panama, among others.

Theme the attractions: Many visitors have specific interests, and the byway lends itself to agricultural, cultural, and scenic and natural categories of attractions. A map key system can be described in the beginning of the travel guide, using green circles for agricultural attractions, blue for cultural heritage, orange for scenic and natural; and red squares for other special attractions.

Design the guide to be consistent with Iowa Byways design standards and design guidelines specified in this plan:

The design should use logos, fonts, and colors consistent with those described in this plan and with other interpretive media.

Each town's pages should be developed in the following format:

- An introduction to the town or area that expresses its unique natural and cultural character.
- A map showing Welcome Centers and experience hub kiosks in the region.
- A map of the attractions in the region identified in themed categories: Agricultural; Cultural Heritage; Scenic and Natural; and Special Attractions.
- Concise, lively descriptions of each attraction.
- A strong focal point photo and snapshot photos of other attractions.

Western Skies Scenic Byway Guide Booklet Concept Design

(two pages interpreting the Audubon area)

Audubon Area

Tree in the Middle of the Road

Nathaniel Hamlin Park

Plow in the Oak Park

Audubon County

Celebrating Birds and Bulls

Birds and bulls serve as symbols of Audubon. The town was named for the famous naturalist and artist John James Audubon. Albert the Bull was created more than 100 years later to symbolize the importance of Iowa in scientific livestock production. Other roadside attractions abound in the nearby communities of Exira and Brayton.

- 1 Albert the Bull Park**
Albert, the world's largest bull, was built in 1964 to commemorate a 1950s local beef promotion called Operation T-Bone. The Hereford is named after Albert Kruse, who started the campaign. The frame was made from old windmills and was coated in concrete. Info: www.auduboncounty.com
- 2 Plow in the Oak Park**
The story behind a tree in this Highway 71 roadside park is that a farmer was plowing when marching Union soldiers passed by on their way to join the Civil War. The farmer unhitched his mules, leaned his plow against a bur oak, and joined the Union forces. He never returned, and over time, the oak grew around the plow. Info: www.auduboncounty.com
- 3 Nathaniel Hamlin Park**
The former county home farm south of Audubon has a Victorian House museum, machinery building with antique farm and home artifacts, one-room schoolhouse, blacksmith shop, barns, antique windmills, a walking trail, and a gazebo to view and feed a herd of elk. Info: www.auduboncounty.com
- 4 T-Bone Trail**
The 21-mile T-Bone Trail is built on a former Rock Island Railroad spur from Audubon's Albert the Bull to Atlantic. Biking, walking, and roller-blading are allowed on the asphalt and concrete trail. Info: www.atlantiaciowa.com
- 5 John James Audubon Plaza and Bird Walk**
Audubon's downtown features dozens of 2-foot-by-2-foot ceramic tile mosaics based on John James Audubon's prints in *Birds of America*. A life-size bronze statue of Audubon is in the Plaza. Info: www.auduboniowa.org
- 6 Audubon County Courthouse Museum**
On Washington Street in Exira, the museum displays antique tools, glassware, furniture, and toys. A nail collection includes 6,000 items. Info: www.auduboncounty.com
- 7 Littlefield Recreation Area**
This Audubon County Conservation Board park has a dammed lake, campground, and live bison display. Info: www.auduboncounty.com
- 8 Tree in the Middle of the Road**
An old cottonwood tree in the center of the intersection of Nighthawk Avenue and 350th Street, two gravel roads, has been there for more 150 years. Legend has it that it grew from a stick used to mark the county line before the Civil War.

ALBERT THE BULL

10 Western Skies Scenic Byway Travel Guide

www.iowabyways.org 11



Effective byway websites, like the Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway in Nebraska and the Coastal Connection Scenic Byway in Alabama, convey a thematic personality. They provide attractive design, obvious navigation, dramatic focal-point images, and concise writing.

ONLINE MEDIA

About 65 percent of leisure travelers begin researching online when deciding where to go, according to a 2014 survey commissioned by Google that polled 3,500 U.S. respondents.

A strong, well-developed online presence is imperative for sharing information and interpretive messages about the Western Skies Scenic Byway.

Western Skies Scenic Byway Website

The Western Skies Scenic Byway has an online presence through the statewide Iowa Byways website, iowabyways.org. The Iowa Byways homepage links to a separate web page about each of Iowa's 11 scenic byways, including the Western Skies Scenic Byway.

The Iowa Byways website exhibits excellent unified design with other byway media, including the logos and road signs and the Iowa Byways travel guide. Stunning photographs entice prospective visitors to the byways.

The Western Skies web page, like the other byways featured on the site, includes separate sections for events,

attractions, and travel services. A Trip Planner function allows website visitors to create an account and save attractions to an itinerary that can be printed or shared online.

Development and Design Recommendations

Western Skies Scenic Byway may benefit from its own standalone website to allow potential travelers to glimpse the stories and experiences they can encounter on the byway, heightening their expectations.

A redesigned website also can create opportunities to interpret the cultural and agricultural stories of the Western Skies Byway, using the overall theme and sub-themes presented in this master plan.

Design Recommendations

The **website navigation** should be obvious and directly link to pages that are most important to visitors planning their trip. Main navigation links would include:

- **About:** Drop-down menu items under About can include a **general overview** of the byway, a **brief history** of its development, a list of **council members**, and **contact information** for more information.

Western Skies Scenic Byway Website Concept Design



Clear and obvious navigation categories link to the most important pages.

Dramatic, focal-point banner's images change every few seconds to show different areas and seasons. Creative phrases interpret the byway.

Logo, font styles, colors, and curved header replicate style of other media.

Byway icons used as focal point images.

Upcoming events section highlights byway and community events.

Click to download the byway guide, with detailed maps.



Other printed media should be downloadable.

Contact information and social media icons displayed on every page.



A new Western Skies Byway website should accommodate mobile devices' smaller screens. The messages and photos are reduced to a single column. To reduce clutter, the navigation menu is hidden under the orange and white-line icon in the upper left, which is familiar to smartphone users. Clicking that icon brings up a menu with large buttons showing different navigation categories.

- **Explore the Byway:** Drop-down menu items under this heading can include links to explore more about each of the **byway communities**; and the **attraction categories** (cultural history, agricultural history, natural attractions, and special attractions).
- **Plan Your Trip:** Includes an interactive **byway map** to be used for planning and while driving the byway. Different icons can show the location of attractions and categorize them by topic. When a user clicks on an icon, they see a concise description of the attraction, with a link to a more detailed description elsewhere on the site or directly to the attraction's website. This section also can include **suggested itineraries** based on topics (attraction categories). It also should offer options to download the **Byway Guide, Request Information, Iowa Road Conditions, Iowa Welcome Centers, Lodging Options** (hotels, motels, cabins, camping), and **Dining Options**.
- **Events:** Includes news stories and events that are specific to the byway or its communities. It is important to keep this updated to show that the byway is actively supported.
- **Gallery:** This heading links to various **photo albums** showcasing the byway's communities and attractions by category.

The **website design** should be updated to encourage discovery and to reflect the unified design standards recommended in this plan. This would include:

- Unified font styles, colors, and graphic elements (like the curved header) reinforce the visual identity of byway media.
- Incorporate dramatic and engaging photographs of byway scenery and attractions.
- On the home page, a rotating banner can switch photos every few seconds, representing different communities and seasons along the byway. A creative phrase superimposed over each image can reinforce the interpretive themes.
- Social media options, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, should be available in the same place on each web page on the site. This encourages sharing and interaction.

- Contact information also should be available on every page of the site, providing opportunities for travelers to ask questions.
- Other engaging media, such as videos, experience hub locations, and travel guides should be highlighted to encourage exploration.
- Design for viewing on mobile devices, which are increasingly used by travelers, both at home and on the road.

Social Media

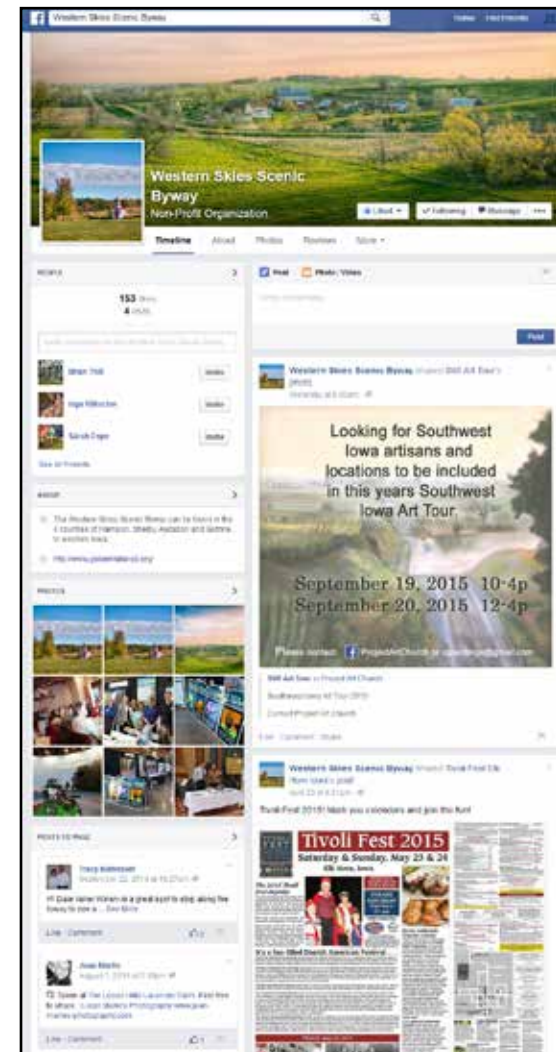
Along with using more traditional travel sites to research destinations, tourists are turning to social media.

In the 2014 Google travel survey, about 83 percent of the respondents said they use social networking, video, and photo sites to be inspired about travel destinations.

An active social media presence allows the Western Skies Scenic Byway to spread the word out about current events and to interpret the byway’s resources, while also serving as an information-gathering tool for the byway committee to stay in tune with travelers’ needs.

Western Skies Scenic Byway has developed an active social media presence on several platforms, including Facebook, Twitter (sharing text messages limited to 140 characters), and Pinterest (allows users to “pin” images to boards). Other opportunities exist with YouTube (sharing videos) and Instagram (sharing square photos with filters applied).

The major challenge with social media sites is keeping them updated and pertinent, but they can be well worth the time invested. They are inexpensive to communicate through, are instantaneous, and are easy to change or alter.



The Western Skies Scenic Byway Facebook page includes regular postings and updates.



Trail users on a bike trail in Rapid City, South Dakota use smartphones to scan QR codes on interpretive panels.



Cell phone tour for "Looking for Lincoln" sites in the Springfield, Illinois area.

MOBILE DIGITAL MEDIA

The number of people who own mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet computers continues to increase exponentially in the U.S. According to a 2014 Pew Research Center survey, 58% of adults now own a smartphone, up from just 35% in 2011. For those between the ages of 18-29, 83% own a smartphone. About 42% of adults own a tablet computer, up from 10% in 2011.

Travelers on the road expect to stay connected and find information through social media sites, Internet searches, GPS navigation, apps, and other technologies that are constantly evolving. Scenic byways like the Western Skies should plan innovative solutions for connecting with visitors who are using mobile technologies. The proliferation of personal mobile devices opens up a vast world of opportunities for sharing interpretive messages.

Audiovisual Tours

Audio tours have always been an effective method for interpreting messages along a scenic byway. Interpretive audio provides short clips of narration, sound effects, and music themed to specific sites along the byway.

Benefits of audio tours:

- Hearing a human voice adds a personal character to the tour, something difficult to accomplish with other forms of media.
- Music and sound effects are powerful connections to different places and times.
- Travelers on scenic byways often have long stretches of time driving from one point to another, an ideal situation for listening to interpretive audio messages.

Audio tours evolved from cassette tapes and CDs, with the Internet now providing a means for sharing audio (and even video) tours with a much wider audience through the use of mobile devices. Several forms of distribution are available, each with its own advantages and disadvantages.

Cell Phone Audio Tours

Developed before the increase in smartphone ownership, a traditional cell phone tour is a system where visitors call into a centralized phone number, punch in a specific tour code, and listen to the interpretive message.

Benefits of a cell phone tour:

- The vast majority of U.S. adults today own a cell phone, 90% according to the 2014 Pew Research Center survey. The technology is very accessible to most people.
- It is easy to update audio messages in a centralized database as resources and events along the byway change.
- It allows for tracking visitors for marketing purposes. How many people are accessing messages? Which messages are they accessing? Where are they accessing them from?

Limitations of a cell phone tour:

- It requires a cell phone signal in order to work. Rural areas away from cell towers are not the best candidates for inclusion in the tour.
- Requires monthly hosting fees (average of \$175 per month).

Podcasting/Downloadable Tours

Another distribution method is to offer the digital message files online for users to download. This can be done through a podcasting feed (user subscribes to a feed for automatic downloads and updates of the files) or posted on a website for manual downloading. These files are

then transferred to a personal audio device, like an iPod or MP3 player, or a mobile device that plays sound (or video), like a smartphone or tablet.

Benefits of a downloadable tour:

- Messages can be downloaded before the trip for planning purposes.
- Depending on the size, files can usually be provided on an existing website for free (no monthly maintenance fee beyond normal web-hosting costs).
- Messages can be recorded in-house and easily updated on the website.

Limitations of a downloadable tour:

- Users must own a personal audio device (just over 50% of Americans) and be knowledgeable about how to transfer files from a computer to the device.
- Audio and video files can take up large amounts of precious space on a mobile device, which may limit their use.



The Freedom Trail Audio Tour in Boston, Massachusetts can be downloaded to a mobile device prior to the visit.

The Illinois River Road mobile tour website at illinoisriverroad.org/mobile includes customizable searches for interests by community and a GPS-enabled “What’s Near Me?” feature.



Visitors to J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife refuge scan QR codes on signs to view videos along an innovative “iNature Trail.”

Mobile Website Tours

Mobile websites are similar to regular websites but designed specifically for the smaller touch screens of mobile devices. As tours, they can incorporate both visual and audio components, enhancing the sensory experience for visitors. They are also interactive—when a visitor touches a button, the website responds, providing an engaging experience.

Benefits of a mobile website tour:

- Encourages interactive participation.
- Works with all brands of mobile devices; just requires an Internet browser.
- Does not require any downloading of files; all pages, sound, and video are streamed directly through the Internet when viewed.
- Easy to create and update using common website editing tools.
- Services can be added to track usage.

Limitations of a mobile website tour:

- Requires access to the Internet. A strong cell phone signal or Wi-Fi connection is needed.
- Website programming has some limitations in terms of visual layout, responsiveness, and tools. They don’t look or react as slick as apps.

Byway Tour Apps

Mobile apps are convenient programs that are downloaded to a smartphone or tablet, providing quick and easy access to interpretive messages. Like mobile websites, apps incorporate both visual and audio components and encourage interactive participation. An app can tell a story through historic photos, narration and music, video, games, demonstrations, and other techniques.

Benefits of a byway tour app:

- Encourages interactive participation.
- Provides nearly unlimited options for design and techniques.
- Can use the GPS feature of a mobile device to automatically trigger site-specific messages or show attractions near the user’s current location.
- Typically much faster and responsive than web-based media.
- Does not require Internet access to run (although some features of the app may require this).

Limitations of a byway tour app:

- App must be downloaded and installed onto mobile device. Depending on content, this may take up a considerable amount of space.

- Apps are more difficult to program and update. Apps are specific to a mobile device's operating system. For example, Apple apps are different than Google Android apps. This requires multiple apps to be developed to reach the largest number of users.

QR (Quick Response) Codes

QR (Quick Response) codes are matrix bar codes that quickly link mobile devices to online media such as websites, audio clips, and videos. QR codes can be incorporated into publications, interpretive panels, and even artifacts along the byway. A traveler uses the camera on their smartphone or tablet to scan the QR code with an app, which decodes the information and uses other apps on the device to show the interpretive content. Stone masons in Japan have even engraved QR codes on tombstones so visitors can see information about the deceased person.

Benefits of QR Codes:

- Quickly connects mobile devices to online resources without the need to carefully type in a URL address.
- Can be created and printed on media for free. Multiple websites provide

services that create personalized QR codes.

- Since QR codes link to online resources, the resources can easily be developed, changed, or updated at minimal cost. The website also can track visitor usage.
- Different QR codes can be generated to link to different messages. For example, a wayside exhibit might have one QR code that links to messages for adults, and a second QR code that links to messages for children.

Limitations of QR Codes:

- QR codes require access to the Internet. A strong cell phone signal or Wi-Fi is needed.
- Traditional QR codes are composed of black and white squares, not always an attractive addition to a media design.
- Once created, the QR code will always point to the URL address that it is encoded with. If the online resource address changes, the QR code on all media will also need to be changed.



Alabama's Coastal Connection Scenic Byway has a free app that includes videos, events, a list of attractions, and a byway map.



Each iNature Trail panel at Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge is thematic and features two QR codes: one that links to a video geared toward adults and the other geared toward children.



Conceptual rendering of a Western Skies tour app that would provide a flexible way of sharing audio and visual interpretive messages with travelers.

Recommendations for the Western Skies Byway

The Western Skies Scenic Byway has great potential for tapping into the mobile devices that the majority of travelers bring with them on their byway journey.

Our team recommends the development of a professional audiovisual byway tour that can be distributed to travelers in multiple ways. Recommendations include:

- **Set a clear theme for the tour**, which will assist in the collection of stories and interviews. Some options include “Windy Western Skies,” a tour that gives an overview about harnessing wind, which would allow travelers to contemplate meanings related to farm windmills, Danish gristmills, and wind generators, all of which are seen on the byway. Another option called “Settling along the Western Skies” could give the history of settlement along the byway, with emphasis on the patterns of immigration and “becoming Iowan.” It could provide insights into the role that country schools played in binding communities together.

An audiovisual story interpreting the natural and social history of corn would be compelling, especially the story of hybrid corn. The Garst Farm at Whiterock Conservancy is an authentic touchstone for hybrid corn and the Cold War. The Hybrid Corn Museum at Earling in Shelby County does not have regular hours, so a tour by owner Steve Kenkel would offer great insights into the county’s major role in this important development.

- **Record oral histories and interviews** with people who lived and worked along the byway, and those who have special expertise based on the theme. High-quality video recordings will provide the most flexibility for producing an audiovisual tour.
- **Edit the messages down to their essence.** Choose messages that relate to universal concepts, those beliefs and ideas that mean something to all of us (love, family, tragedy, survival, etc.). These make the most interesting and engaging stories for visitors. Keep the messages short. Travelers likely will not listen to anything more than 3 minutes long. Short, intriguing messages will encourage visitors to choose more messages.

- **Create a narrative storyline.**
Narrators are often necessary to tell the story concisely and introduce the various oral histories and interviews. Narration should be active and friendly. More than one narrator, a male and female for example, provides variety. They should provide oral directions to the next stop. Sound effects can be added to enhance the audio experience.
- **Develop a Western Skies Tour App** that ties the narration and stories together into a holistic tour. An app provides a great deal of flexibility for presenting interpretation. Messages can be offered in an audio or video format. If only audio is available, photos can be shown to enhance the message (for example, historic photos of a community). The app should provide a map with tour locations indicated, and be linked to the user's current GPS location. It also can be programmed to read a GPS location to automatically offer site-specific messages. However, the user also should have the ability to listen to any of the messages when and where they want.

- **Develop a Western Skies Tour Web Page** that provides the ability to download or stream audiovisual messages. Once an app is developed, it will be easy to take the audio from specific messages and make them available in other formats. A web page with links to the audio or video files provides options for users to either download the tour onto a mobile device before their trip or stream the messages directly through a mobile device while at the site itself (as long as a cell signal is available).
- **Add QR codes to different media** that link to the audio/visual tour files. When audio or video files have been added to a web page, QR codes can be created that link directly to the messages. A user can simply scan a QR code with their mobile device, and that specific audio or video file will be streamed automatically to the device (as long as a cell signal is available). QR codes can be added to experience hub or wayside exhibit panels, travel guide and brochure publications, or welcome center exhibits.



QR codes, like the sample above, can be added to existing media or made into separate signs. They link directly to the byway tour website.



Louisiana's Creole Nature Trail All-American Road has developed a thematic children's travel kit with toys, binoculars, crayons, and an activity booklet.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Identifying and developing family activities should be considered for the Western Skies Scenic Byway. The recommendations listed below will help engage entire families as they travel along the byway.

Byway Kids' Discovery Kit

A children's discovery pack or box can be made available for checkout or for purchase at key locations on the byway, such as welcome centers. These kits can be filled with fun tools that entice kids to learn more about the Western Skies region.

A kit can contain some provocative items that help focus children's attention on the themes and stories along the byway. For example, a pinwheel is an involving way to introduce gristmills, water-pumping windmills, and modern wind turbines. Plastic Angus and Hereford cattle will make them aware of the livestock along the route and create anticipation for meeting Albert the Bull.

A coloring book inserted into the kit could feature Audubon prints that they will see among Audubon's mosaics, various types of windmills, distinctive churches on the route, farm animals, and crops.

Touring the Danish Windmill in Elk Horn and climbing the flights of stairs to the top of the structure can be a highlight for both children and adults traveling the byway.



Children's Byway Audio Tours and Apps

An audio tour or mobile app about the byway could be enhanced by using children to narrate using stories and subjects that interest kids.

An audio tour or mobile app for kids could feature stories of what it was like to grow up on a farm and help with chores.

A girl might tell what it was like to walk to her one-room country school, where they had all eight grades in one room, a pump for water, and an outhouse for a school bathroom.

A child describing the different types of windmills and how they work would be fun and educational for the whole family.

Sound effects such as windmills turning, farm equipment running, cattle mooing, or a school yard bell ringing could all add excitement to these stories.

Scavenger Hunt

We all like to explore and discover surprises. Scavenger hunts provide an immediate motivation for discovering things. Everybody has an equal chance to compete regardless of age. Incentives can be added for completing a scavenger hunt card, like an apple or an ice cream at a participating orchard or vendor or one entry fee with at least one or more paid entries at an attraction, which stimulates sales for small businesses.

Some scavenger hunt items to find might include:

- A one-room country school
- Terraced farm fields
- The Tree in the Middle of the Road
- The Little Mermaid
- Aermotor windmills
- Plow in the Oak



An audio tour targeted specifically to children can help them connect with the byway's stories.

PROPOSED BYWAY SPUR TO COON RAPIDS

A 16-mile byway spur is recommended on County Highway N46 from the byway on Highway 44 to Highway 141 in Coon Rapids. The major attraction on this spur would be Whiterock Conservancy in Coon Rapids. This active nonprofit land trust in Guthrie County, while not directly on the current byway route, is a

potential partner in the corridor because it exemplifies a number of the sub-themes identified as significant to the byway's stories.

The proposed spur traverses a beautiful rolling rural landscape with views that rival those on the designated byway. The road passes by the 1,600-acre Elk Grove Wildlife Manage Area and crosses the South Raccoon River. Coon Rapids, located on the border between Carroll and Guthrie counties, features a streetscape that includes art that interprets the "Hybrid Icons." These attractions strongly connect to the byway's themes and sub-themes.

Byway Spur Attractions

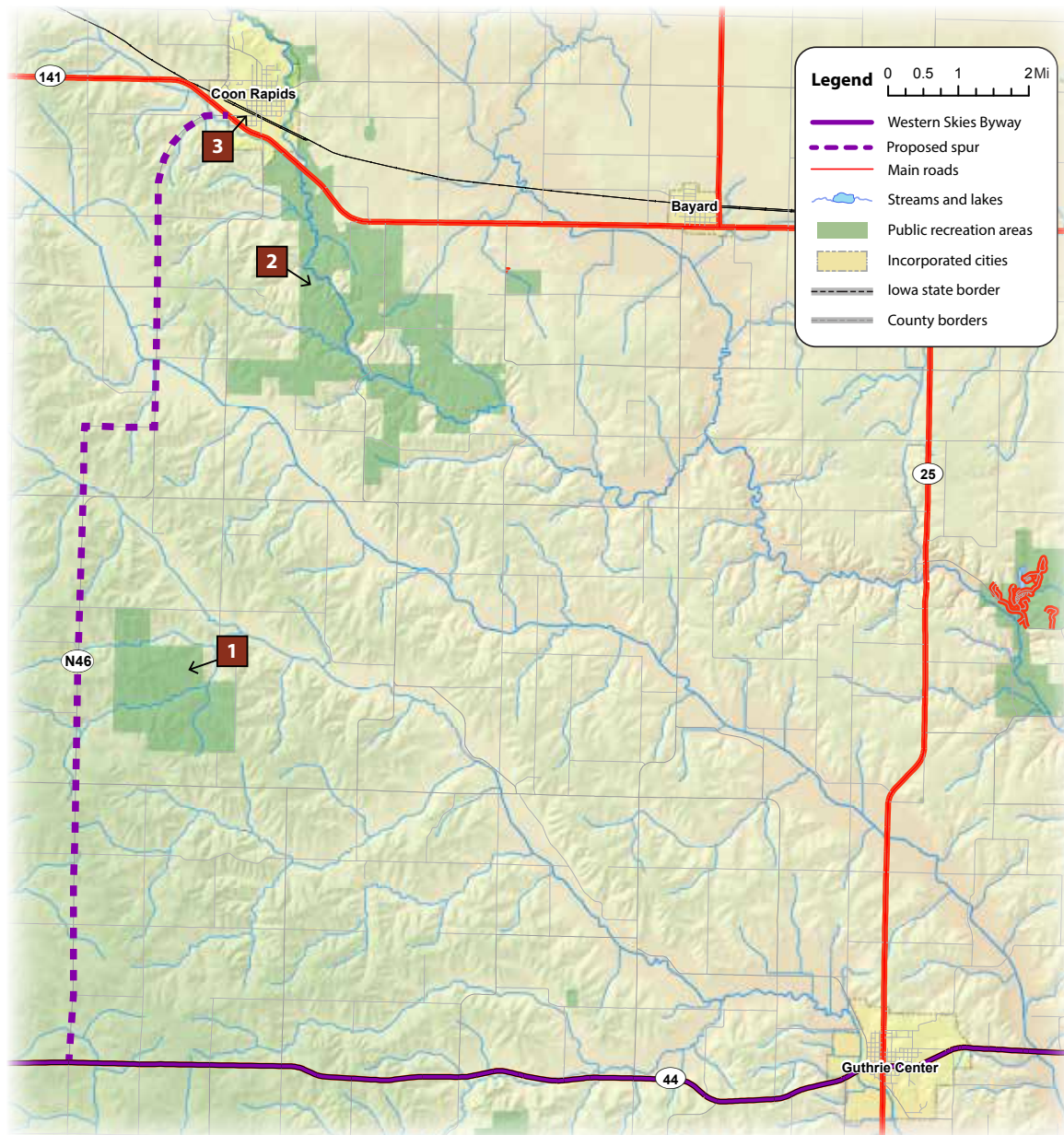
1 Elk Grove Wildlife Management Area

This 1,600-acre wildlife area consists primarily of timber and is open to hunting and other outdoor activities. This island of trees in an otherwise agricultural area provides habitat for wildlife. This wildlife area could be identified in byway guides and included on a proposed experience hub at Whiterock Conservancy.



Coon Rapids celebrates its connection to agriculture on its entrance sign.

PROPOSED BYWAY SPUR TO COON RAPIDS



Byway Spur Attractions

- 1 Elk Grove Wildlife Management Area
- 2 Whiterock Conservancy
- 3 Coon Rapids "Hybrid Icons" Streetscape Art



Roswell Garst and his business partner, Charley Thomas, are depicted in Coon Rapids art.

2 Whiterock Conservancy

Whiterock, now a land trust, was formerly Roswell Garst's farm. Garst was a strong proponent of innovative agricultural practices, most notably the hybridization of corn, a story that is characteristic of this region of Iowa.

The Garst farm played a significant role in the Cold War in 1959, when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev visited the farm accompanied by a "circus" of news media, making this a compelling human interest story with international implications.

Whiterock Conservancy includes a public recreational complex of hiking and biking trails as well as campgrounds and cabins and interpretive media that will attract a large contingent of visitors to the area and the proximity of the byway.

This farm visit is one of the few immersive opportunities within the byway corridor where visitors can experience a connection to agriculture as they tour and recreate.

3 Coon Rapids "Hybrid Icons" Streetscape Art

Streetscape art in Coon Rapids is based on the history and technology of hybridized corn and the Cold War-

era visit of Nikita Khrushchev. The art presents concepts such as hybridization, DNA structure, and genetics. It celebrates hybrid-corn icons Roswell Garst, Henry Wallace, and Charley Thomas.

Recommended Media

Whiterock created an interpretive welcome center in 2014 that will orient visitors to this large and diverse place. It is equipped to serve travelers on the Western Skies Scenic Byway. It is an attraction that is regularly open, which is rare and desirable on this byway.

Like Iowa state parks and The Nature Conservancy, Whiterock Conservancy has its own broad vision and identity, which requires that the byway identity be subservient and that themes be carefully integrated into the mission and overarching stories of the site.

Greater visitor attendance and spontaneous travel, common to byway travelers, will require more non-personal services and media at Whiterock. A hierarchy of public signage and other orientation media will be needed. Self-guiding apps and tours may be necessary to meet greater numbers and schedules. A highly developed website is essential to introduce the significant meanings

and fully prepare the traveler for this immersive experience.

An experience hub located at the Whiterock visitor center could introduce the byway but be themed specifically to the land trust. For example:

- An agricultural panel could address sustainable agriculture practices that are used on the Whiterock property, such as rotational grazing, seasonal cover crops, etc.
- The cultural heritage panel could focus on hybrid corn and could tell the Cold War saga, the story of Nikita Khrushchev's visit in 1959, and the continuing connections to Russian visits.
- A site-specific local panel could interpret the Coon Rapids community and detail the patterns of settlement that typify this region.



Whiterock Conservancy opened the Bur Oak Visitors Center in 2014. Visitors can stop here for more information about the Conservancy. An experience hub here could connect Whiterock's story to the interpretive themes of the Western Skies Byway.



Roswell Garst's farmhouse is on the National Register of Historic Places. Whiterock Conservancy guests can stay in the preserved home.

MEDIA DEVELOPMENT COST ESTIMATES

These estimates were established on in January 2015 based on quotes from Barking Dog Exhibits for frames and bases and from iZone Imaging for panel fabrication quotes. **These price estimates do not include writing and**

design costs. Mobile tour and website costs are based on actual costs of similar byways. Cost estimates for each category are considered broad estimates for the purpose of seeking funds.

Media Type	Info	Rationale	Cost Estimate
Experience Hubs	pg. 76	Highly visible way to orient travelers to regional attractions. Cost-effective where attractions are not routinely staffed.	Supports and frames: \$2,850 Panels: \$2,300 Total fabrication: \$6,000 each
Wayside Exhibits	pg. 88	Best way to communicate must-tell stories at significant sites along byway where no other tools are available.	Bases: \$500 Panels: \$350 plus shipping Total fabrication: \$900 each
Byway murals	pg. 100	Desirable way to call attention to the byway and help communities share their unique sense of place.	Highly variable based on artists and substrates
Steel silhouette statues	pg. 102	Highly visible way to focus attention on a significant story or event on a roadside scale.	\$1,500 average
General byway brochure	pg. 106	To promote awareness of the byway.	\$3,000 per 15,000 copies
Travel guide booklet	pg. 110	A traditional way for many visitors to negotiate the byway.	\$12,500 per lots of 10,000 booklets
Website design and social media development	pg. 114	Reaches a large audience; is easily updated.	\$35,000-\$50,000
Byway mobile tour development	pg. 122	A great tool for incorporating sound and visuals to make stories come alive.	\$35,000

APPENDIX



WESTERN SKIES SCENIC BYWAY VISIONING MEETING RESULTS

On April 7, 2014, Schmeeckle Reserve Interpreters conducted a visioning meeting with Western Skies Scenic Byway stakeholders at the community center in Panora. The purpose of the meeting was to gather information about the places, activities, and stories that should be interpreted along the byway.

During this meeting, participants were asked to respond to the following questions by using a nominal-group process.

1. What compelling stories and meanings should visitors take away from their byway experience?
2. What is your vision of a successful Western Skies Scenic Byway?

Participants were then asked to vote on the responses. Vote totals are listed in parentheses to the first three questions. If no total is given, the response received no votes.

The responses were recorded, organized, and sent to Golden Hills RC&D for review and dissemination. The final results are included below.

1. What compelling stories and meanings should visitors take away from their byway experience?

- Cultural story – Danish and German settlement, immigrant stories and farms (7 votes)
- Community pride – infrastructure such as downtowns and squares (5 votes)
- Changing agricultural methods – where food comes from
- Hamlin Park mural, windmills, corn cribs to grain elevators (4 votes)
- Sustainability – agriculture, building (3 votes)
- Hilly, diverse landscape – unexpected (3 votes)
- Importance of wind throughout history – wind mills and renewable energy (3 votes)
- John James Audubon story – county and town (2 votes)
- Bonnie & Clyde story – last bank robbery (2 votes)
- Importance of historic railroads – or in spite of them (Westphalia) (1 vote)
- Stories of downtowns and

developments (1 vote)

- Terra forma – earth has been shaped to our use
- Natural scenic vistas
- Religious/church importance
- Agricultural story – No. 1 pork in Iowa and possible visitor center
- Barn quilt tours – stories of families
- Community togetherness
- Mining stories – coal (Lake Panorama)
- Local foods – Culinary Passport

2. What is your vision of a successful Western Skies Scenic Byway?

- Economic growth (8 votes)
- Unique experience (7 votes)
- Travel the whole byway – worth time and money spent (5 votes)
- Unified experience & stories, a whole bridge, the communities like chapters in a book (4 votes)
- Buy-in from communities, what it is and why they should care (4 votes)
- Showcases resources as a partnership/equal (3 votes)

- Public awareness in communities and among tourists (3 votes)
- Creating a great story along with our resources about land use, wind energy, and ethnicities (3 votes)
- Preservation of the byway and the land (ex: signs in viewshed not allowed) (3 votes)
- It's about the land – understand agriculture, natural resources, sustainability (2 votes)
- Experience all four seasons

Other questions asked at the meeting that were not voted on using nominal-group process were:

What are some important and unique resources along this byway that visitors should experience?

- Danish windmill and accompanying on-site attractions
- Sister Village in Kimballton and Hans Christian Andersen site
- Albert the Bull in Audubon and large number of purebred animal farms
- Guthrie County Historical Village
- Saints Center in Stuart (culture/arts)
- John James Audubon Bird Walk with mosaics

- Sutcliffe Woodlands
- Freedom Rock in every county
- Harrison County Historical Society and Welcome Center
- Raccoon River Valley Trail
- Prairie Rose State Park
- Woodbine Main Street and sculptures
- Littlefield Recreation Area
- Danish Immigrant Museum
- Agriculture workshops – how a farm works
- Dinesen Prairie
- Sheeder Prairie
- Stuart First National Bank
- Stuart Hotel renovation
- Westphalia Catholic Church, St. Boniface
- Museum of Religious Arts
- DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge
- T-Bone Trail – Audubon trailhead
- New Century Art Guild
- M&M Divide
- Penny's Diner – Missouri Valley
- Rock Island Railroad Depot
- Tenderloin Trail – food
- Nathaniel Hamlin Park & Museum

- Solar and Thermal PV panels
- Barn quilts
- Loess Hills
- National Historic Registry buildings
- Springbrook State Park
- Wisecup Farm Museum
- Plow In the Oak
- White Pole Road
- Willow Lake Recreation Area
- Heritage Rose Garden
- German Heritage Park
- Westphalia Taco Night
- Jens Jensen Prairie Landscape Park
- South and Middle Raccoon River
- Lake Panorama
- Electric car charging stations
- Whiterock Conservancy
- Windmills and wind farms
- Danish Inn
- Kimballton Lutheran Church
- Nation's Bridge Park
- Dale Valley Vineyard
- Danish Wines and Vines
- Guthrie County Fair and all other county fairs
- Golf courses including championship

- Elk Horn Creek Recreation Area
- Elevator painting in Woodbine
- Taylor Hill Hunting Lodge
- Veterans Memorial Mural – Elk Horn
- Lincoln Highway longest stretch of brick
- Egg Crate – Elk Horn
- Exira Courthouse Museum
- Mural in Audubon post office – treasury dept.
- Farm Sweet Farm
- Barn re-use—collective, church, lodge, gift shop

Who are the primary target audiences for interpretive media on this byway?

- Families
- Foreign visitors – Ex: Denmark, Germany
- People researching family history
- Bicyclists
- Outdoor enthusiasts
- Campers
- Paddlers
- Researchers/educators
- Motorcyclists
- Baby Boomers/seniors
- Empty-nesters

- Urban visitors
- Businesses in communities
- Children who live in communities
- Younger local residents who have moved in
- Golfers
- Moms

Who are some key people we should interview who know the cultural and natural history of this site?

- County conservation boards
- Historical centers have lots of volunteers with stories
- Albert the Bull: Tom Nielsen, Lyle Hansen, Duane Schmidt
- John James Audubon Bird Walk: Pat Curtis
- Kimballton – Hans Christian Andersen Sculpture Park: Annette Andersen, Kimballton
- Elk Horn: Mortensons
- Shelby Historical director
- Lisa Riggs – Danish Windmill
- Terri Johnson – Museum of Danish America
- Natural History: Joe Hanner and Brad Halterman, Guthrie County Conservation

- History: Kristine Jorgensen, Guthrie Co. Historical Village; and Linda Burgess, Panora.

What are some key print and digital resources we should review as we continue to learn about this byway?

- County cultural history books
- See brochures
- auduboncounty.com
- Western Iowa tourism site
- “I have various images from our centennial pageant in J. Peq. (on his computer, we can download” – Bob Mortenson

COMMUNITY MEETING RESULTS

On June 26, 2014, Schmeeckle Reserve Interpreters held a community meeting at the Museum of Danish America in Elk Horn. Stakeholders and interested community members were invited to share input for the interpretive planning process.

During the meeting, participants were asked to respond to the following questions.

What are some “must see” places, things, or activities that a Western Skies tourist should experience when they travel the byway?

- Danish Windmill
- Museum of Danish America (also added prairie plants to their green roof on their new addition – possibly first in Iowa)
- Albert the Bull and purebred Herefords association.
- Audubon bird walk and Audubon statue
- Lake Panora, private lake but 2 of 3 golf courses are public and are nationally acclaimed

- Restaurant at clubhouse open to public, another restaurant at marina – known for good food
- Raccoon River Trail, already expanded once and planning another expansion
- Hybrid Corn Museum open by appointment at Earling

What significant stories about this region of Iowa would you share with byway travelers?

- Purebred cattle and horses -- era from 1900 to 1910. Audubon also was home to Hereford Association. Contact Nathan Buman, director of Shelby County History Museum in Harlan.
- Harvesting nature’s bounty: from the ground, from the wind, the sun
- Dinesen Prairie and Sutcliffe Woodlands: County Conservation Board
- Nations Bridge Park: Farmer build bridge over creek, and his name got attached to the park

What documents, people, or other resources will help us learn about the cultural and natural stories of this area?

- Ron and Maria Rosmann, owners of Farm Sweet Farm, 2 miles west of 59/44 interchange and 1.5 mile north. All organic. Good store that stocks only natural and organic products.
- Margee Shaffer, Audubon economic development
- Audubon Conservation Board (maintain T-Bone Trail that crosses byway)
- Stuart contact: Kristine Jorgenson
- Stuart mayor or city clerk or council member have attended economic development meetings
- Shelby County Board of Supervisors: Steve Kenkel, has Hybrid Corn Museum open by appointment at Earling (wants to tell story that a lot of hybrid corn was developed in Iowa); and Roger Smith
- Shirley and Shawna at Western Iowa Tourism
- Twila: MINK out of Sidney, four-state organization.

