

Scenic Byway

Definition and Designations



What Is A Scenic Byway?

A scenic byway is a public road having special scenic, historic, recreational cultural, archeological, and/or natural qualities that has been recognized through legislation or some other official declaration.

Scenic byway refers not only to the road itself but also the corridor through which it passes. The distance the corridor extends from the road may vary with the different *intrinsic qualities* associated with its scenic byway designation. The features associated with the *intrinsic qualities* are considered to be representative, unique, irreplaceable or distinctly characteristic of the area, region or country.

State Scenic Byways

In 1910, Massachusetts enacted legislation authorizing cities or towns to designate scenic roads. Later in the 1900's, at least two states – Arkansas and Mississippi – designated scenic routes legislatively. Still more states, such as California, Colorado, New York, Washington and Wisconsin (Rustic Roads) – established well-developed scenic byway programs.

There are about 900 state scenic byways nationwide. The majority of these roads are signified primarily by green dots along the route on a highway map.

Other state scenic byways are embraced at the grassroots level. Local byway organizations typically embody a partnership – informal or formal – of citizens, non-profit organizations, business, and public entities. These individuals and organizations work together towards achieving a shared interest at the corridor or regional level. They strive to continuously create and enhance an authentic visitor experience.

Scenic byways offer unique travel experiences because they tell stories to visitors about people and places and empower local communities to promote, enhance, preserve and protect critical resources. For example, the story may be about coastal wilds, the landscape and geology of a prehistoric natural catastrophe that created a region, westward migration of settlers, the history of pueblo peoples, bird habitats and flyways, historic places and socio-political movements or the history of an American war, e.g., the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 or Civil War.

National Scenic Byways

In 1965, the White House Conference on Natural Beauty included panel discussions on scenic roads. The conference was instrumental to enactment of the Highway Beautification Act of 1965, widely recognized for establishing limits on billboards. This law also called for scenic development and road beautification of the Federal-aid highway system.

National Forest and BLM Byways

More national commissions, studies, and recommendations followed, then action:

- In 1988, the U.S. Forest Service established a scenic byway program, resulting in the designation of the 144 National Forest Byways.
 - In 1989, the Bureau of Land Management established its scenic byway program, resulting in the designation of 54 BLM Back Country Byways.
 - The Forest Service and BLM programs were designation/recognition programs. No associated funding was provided.
 - The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 established an Interim National Scenic Byways Program authorizing the U.S. Secretary of Transportation to designate National Scenic Byways and All-American Roads, as well as providing dedicated funding for byway projects. From 1992-2012, the Secretary made 150 such designations and provided \$507 million for 3,174 projects.
- The U.S. Department of Transportation has promoted the collection of National Scenic Byways and All-American Roads under the umbrella of America's Byways®.

[References on second page](#)



REFERENCES

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Interim Policy for the National Scenic Byways Program; Federal Highway Administration, May 18, 1995 , <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-1995-05-18/pdf/95-12211.pdf> . This policy establishes the designation criteria for roads as National Scenic Byways or All-American Roads based upon their scenic, historic, recreational, cultural, archaeological and/or natural intrinsic qualities, and the required 14 points (17 points for All-American Roads) to address in a corridor management plan.

BLM Byways Program – http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/Recreation/recreation_national/byways.html