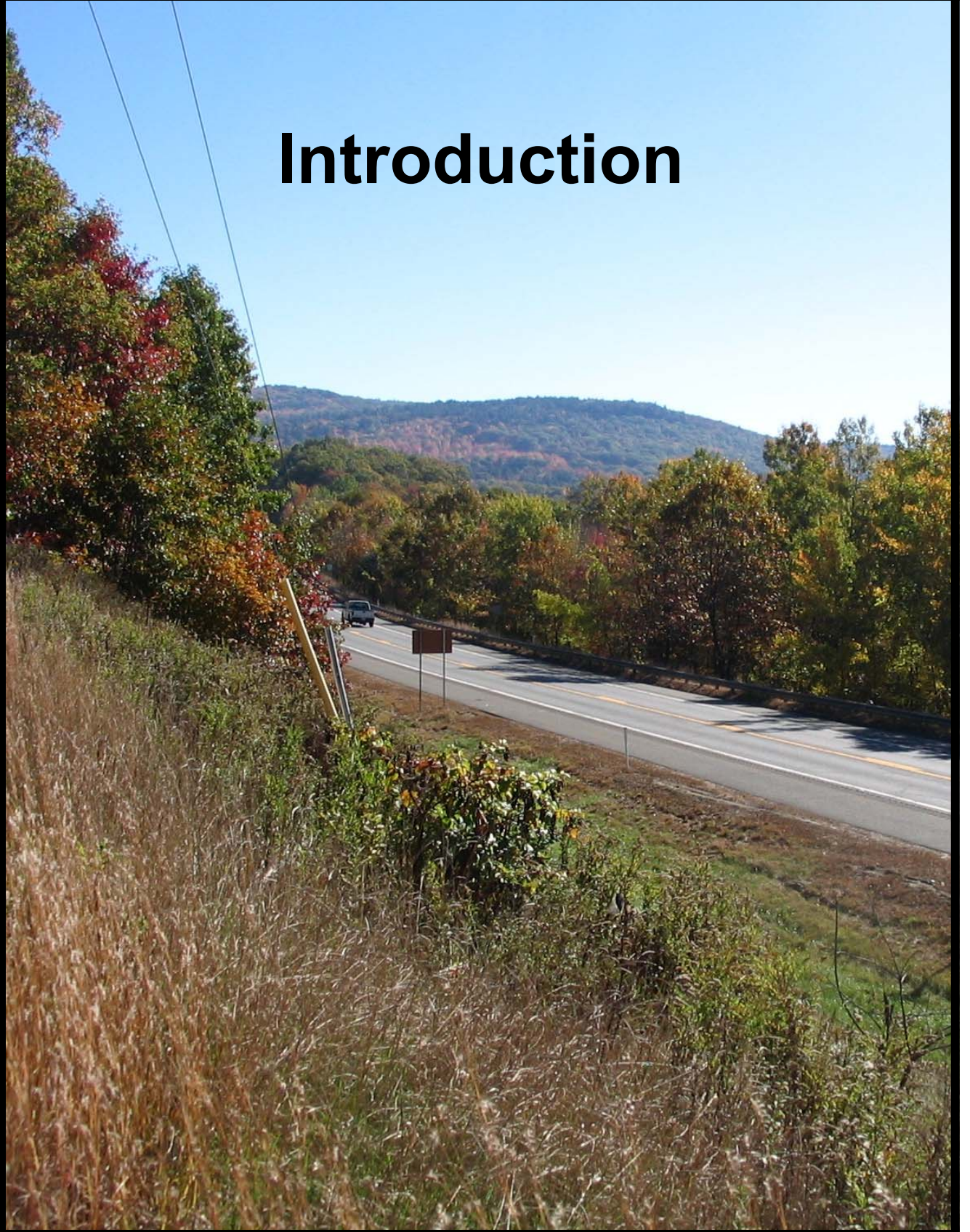


Introduction



Study Background and Purpose

This Corridor Management Plan was completed for the section of the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway from Athol to Greenfield. For the purpose of this report it is referred to as the eastern section of the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway or the Mohawk Trail East. This section of the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway travels on Route 2A through downtown Athol and Orange, Route 2 through Erving and Gill and on Route 2A through downtown Greenfield. The western terminus of the project area (located at the rotary at Route 2A, Route 2 and the Interstate 91 interchange in Greenfield) meets the eastern terminus of the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan that was previously completed in June 2002 for the western section (from Greenfield to Williamstown) of the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway.

The Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway was one of the earliest Scenic Byways in New England, receiving its designation in 1953. The corridor is rich in natural, cultural, and archeological resources. There are a number of historic villages and structures along the route that provide evidence of the Byway's history. The Byway also travels through some of the most beautiful scenic areas in Massachusetts. Significant stretches of the Mohawk Trail follow the Millers River and cross the majestic Connecticut River.

Throughout this planning process the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway Advisory Committee and the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) worked to

recognize, interpret, preserve and promote the unique scenic, natural, recreation, historic, cultural and archeological resources of the Mohawk Trail in Franklin and Worcester Counties through the development of a Corridor Management Plan and the accompanying public participation process. The FRCOG received funding to complete this Corridor Management Plan through the Federal Scenic Byway Program. The more specific purposes of this project were to:

- Identify and develop strategies to preserve the unique scenic, natural and cultural resources along the Byway;
- Expand economic opportunities related to heritage and recreational tourism along the Byway;
- Develop a land protection program for scenic and historic landscapes along the Byway;
- Develop a recreational program that identifies and establishes linkages to hiking trails, state forests, river access points and other cultural and recreational features along the byway; and
- Involve the public, through regional advisory committees and a participatory planning process, in the shaping of a Corridor Management Plan for the Byway.

The FRCOG's role in the development of this Corridor Management Plan for the eastern section of the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway was to gather pertinent information about the Mohawk Trail and facilitate its development by working with local residents, officials, and other interested stakeholders. The

FRCOG worked closely with the Mohawk Trail East Scenic Byway Advisory Committee throughout the process. As discovered during the development of Corridor Management Plan, the communities along the corridor share several common interests and concerns, and this plan reflects the common goals of those communities. This report details the information gathered, conclusions that were reached and the recommendations that were identified during the process.

Corridor Description

This eastern section of the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway corridor travels through the communities of Athol, Orange, Erving, Gill, and Greenfield. The mile wide Byway study area (1/2 mile on each side of the Byway) also in portions of the Towns of Wendell and Montague, which have been included in this report. The total length of the Byway is 28 miles. Athol is located in Worcester County, and Orange, Wendell, Erving, Gill, Montague and Greenfield are located in Franklin County. The eastern terminus of the study area is on Route 2A in Athol at the intersection of Route 2A and Route 2 to the east of the downtown area. The Byway travels along Route 2A through the downtowns of Athol and Orange and a small portion of Erving. East of Erving Center the two roads merge continuing as Route 2 through Erving, Gill into Greenfield. At the Adams Road intersection in Greenfield the Byway travels onto Route 2A (also referred to as the French King

Highway). The Byway follows Route 2A (French King Highway) which turns into High Street to downtown Greenfield. Route 2A turns onto Main Street in downtown Greenfield and the Byway follows this route to the rotary at Route 2A, Route 2 and the Interstate 91 interchange where the study area for this Corridor Management Plan terminates.

The eastern terminus of the Byway is located at the intersection of Routes 2A, 202 and 2 in Athol. The Byway travels through the historic “Uptown Common” of Athol, which has fine examples of 18th and 19th century two and three story clapboard homes. Then it passes through downtown Athol, which has large 19th and 20th Century mill buildings many of which are still in use. In addition, travelers will see historically significant structures including the Town Hall and the Pequoig Hotel both of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the historic “Millers River National Bank” building, and the Athol Veterans Plaza, which has significant historic mill buildings to the south and west.

Next, the Byway travels through downtown Orange on Route 2A. The streetscape in Orange reflects the scale and character of a town from the industrial revolution. There are a number of significant historic buildings that have survived from this period including the Eastern Star Home, the Wheeler Memorial Library, the 1880 House and the Masonic Lodge. The Byway travels through the Orange Center Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Downtown Orange is

pedestrian-friendly with a historic streetscape, sidewalks and parks. In the town center there are significant historic two-and-three story buildings including Putnam Hall and the former Minute Tapioca Factory (now the Bedroom Factory). Traveling west from downtown Orange the Byway travels along a scenic stretch of Route 2A located next to the Millers River.

In the Town of Erving the Byway joins Route 2 east of Erving Center. The road travels along a newly constructed section of Route 2 and north of the Erving Paper Mill complex. The route continues on to the commercial, “main street” section of Erving Center. Most of the residential section of town is above the village center on the north side of the Byway. On the south side of the roadway, there are an historic railroad depot and freight house, and a truck yard. The Millers River runs behind them and is the town line between Wendell and Erving.

The Byway continues along a 2½-mile segment that is located right along the Millers River and is very scenic. Apart from two or three farmhouses and the railroad track on the south side of the Byway and the river, there is no development. It is forested on both sides of the road/river. At various places there are long views of the river rapids and large cobblestones to the mountains in Wendell. The Erving cliffs (Farley Ledges) are on the right above the roadway.

Next the Byway wends its way over a gently rolling landscape in Erving with views of the mountains in Wendell and the village center of Farley. Then the

landscape changes to forested lands where the only development is an occasional farmstead. There are many long and panoramic views of mountains to Wendell and Gill and of the Connecticut River Valley in the distance.

Just east of the French King Bridge and the Gill town line is a forested section of the Byway where there is some development which includes the Town Police Station, the state garage, and the French King Motel. As the Byway passes over the Connecticut River on the French King Bridge it offers spectacular views up and down the river. The most stunning is the northern view to Northfield, Gill and Erving and the states of Vermont and New Hampshire.

In Gill, the Byway has a more rural feel with views of the Barton Cove section of the Connecticut River, some distinctive long views of the River through trees to Montague, farm fields, and farmsteads, and a gently rolling landscape. There are a number of pull offs where travelers could picnic, rest and get a better view of the Connecticut River. There is some commercial and residential development interspersed with the recreational, forest and agricultural lands.

As the Byway approaches the eastern section in Gill a panoramic view of the Village of Turners Falls and its historic industrial landscape is visible across the Connecticut River and the Power Canal. Quite often travelers can pull off the Byway at a rest area to see a torrent of water coming over the power dam.

In Greenfield, the Byway travels through a forested area near Factory Hollow which is hidden from view but includes the remains

of a mill village and historic markers. At Adams Road the Byway again turns onto Route 2A and travels towards downtown Greenfield. The streetscape on High Street as the Byway approached Main Street is that of a residential district of older historic homes on mature tree lined streets.

Next the Byway passes through the historic downtown of Greenfield. Downtown Greenfield has a lively pedestrian oriented business atmosphere. The Main Street historic block is bounded by Main Street at Court Square and Bank Row, Chapman Street and Hope Street. This section of the Byway travels past 96 buildings that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places including the First Franklin County Courthouse (15 Bank Row), the First National Bank and Trust (9 Bank Row), Garden Theatre Block (353-367 Main Street), Leavitt-Hovey House (402 Main Street), and the U.S. Post Office – Greenfield Main Branch (442 Main Street). Other important tourist resources for visitors to explore and which are within the half-mile corridor include the Energy Park and railroad and the many mill buildings just off Main Street. These remarkable structures and facilities represent Greenfield’s industrial heritage.

The Byway study area terminates at the rotary where Route 2A joins with Route 2.

Public Participation Process

A successful scenic byway program depends on the commitment, enthusiasm and support of community members

and municipal officials. A Corridor Management Plan is intended to reflect the vision for the Byway and the surrounding area as developed collectively by the communities along the Byway.

During the development of the Corridor Management Plan, the FRCOG worked closely with the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway Advisory Committee, which was comprised of municipal officials, landowners, business owners and interested citizens, to develop the Corridor Management Plan and prioritize recommendations for implementation. The Byway Advisory Committee met quarterly throughout the three-year period in which in the plan was developed. The public participation process was intended to ensure that the Corridor Management Plan belongs to the local communities through which the Scenic Byway travels. The draft chapters were reviewed by the Advisory Committee throughout their development. In addition, the chapters were posted for public review on the FRCOG’s website throughout the process. The complete draft report was presented at a public review meeting on May 14, 2009. A 30 day public comment period was held from May 22nd through June 22, 2009, which was advertised in the *Greenfield Recorder* and *Athol Daily News*.

FRCOG greatly appreciates the hard work, advice and guidance that the Byway Advisory Committee provided throughout the development of this Plan. The dedication that the committee members have shown to this project throughout the process is truly invigorating.

BYWAY VISION STATEMENT AND GOALS

Vision Statement

A Corridor Management Plan is a tool that provides an inventory and assessment of important resources and articulates specific strategies and actions designed to achieve identified and measurable results. In order to get to specific actions it is important that the common direction of the Byway be stated. This is done through the use of a Vision Statement and goals. A Vision Statement is a broad statement that identifies an ideal that everyone can agree with. The Committee overseeing the creation of the Mohawk Trail East Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan has adopted the following vision statement for the Eastern section of the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway:

The Mohawk Trail East Byway (State Highway Route 2 and 2A in Athol, Orange, Erving, Wendell, Gill, Montague and Greenfield) in Massachusetts is one of the earliest and most recognized Scenic Byways in New England. It is a key east-west transportation corridor for Massachusetts. This travel corridor was originally used by the prehistoric inhabitants and explorers of the area, paralleling the natural water courses of the greater Connecticut River Valley. The travel corridor continues to be an important tourism and commercial route along the Northern Tier of Massachusetts. The corridor is rich in historic, cultural, architectural, natural, and recreational resources. The Mohawk Trail links to several other Scenic Byways in the region and also provides for the region's economic growth.

Our vision is to expand economic, tourism and recreational opportunities along the Byway while educating people about the Byway and preserving its unique scenic qualities, natural resources, historic structures/places, industrial and agricultural heritage and community character.

Goals

- Preserve and enhance the character of the corridor by acquiring land from willing property owners and protecting important viewsheds and natural resources.
- Maintain, protect, and enhance the historic resources, villages and districts within the project area.
- Promote a low impact approach to tourism based on natural, recreational, historic and cultural resources that minimizes traffic congestion.
- Enhance and develop information resources available for sites located in the greater Byway area such as an information center, directional sign system and other promotional materials (including maps and/or websites).
- Support, maintain and enhance the quality of outdoor recreational experiences (such as hiking, picnicking, kayaking or canoeing) available to Byway users.
- Increase universal accessibility to recreation areas and associated facilities.
- Promote educational opportunities for students and the general public related to Byway resources.
- Link the Byway with community development and preservation by utilizing resources such as heritage and eco-tourism, and marketing local products.
- Promote and enhance roadway safety while taking into consideration the rural qualities of the Byway, and continue to support improvements that are being completed by MassHighway.
- Support projects such as scenic pull-off areas, sidewalks, crosswalks, and other facilities appropriate to roadway conditions to improve the safety of motorists, pedestrians, and non-motorized vehicles along the Byway.