

## Establishing “Regional or National Significance” of Intrinsic Qualities

- **The National Scenic Byways Program Definition and Levels of “Significance”**

For byways seeking designation under the National Scenic Byways Program, it is necessary to demonstrate that your route has “regional or national significance.”

The Interim Policy for the National Scenic Byways Program defines **regional significance** to mean *“characteristics that are representative of a geographic area encompassing two or more states.”* (FHWA Interim Policy, May 18, 1995)

The National Scenic Byways Program recognizes two levels of significance in the designation of National Scenic Byways and All-American Roads, and the requirements for each:

- **(Regional Significance): National Scenic Byways**

To be designated as a National Scenic Byway, a road or highway must significantly meet at least one of the six scenic byways intrinsic qualities. The characteristics associated with the intrinsic qualities are those that are distinct and most representative of the region. The significance of the features contributing to the distinctive characteristics of the corridor's intrinsic quality are recognized throughout the region. (FHWA Interim Policy, May 18, 1995)

- **(National Significance): All-American Roads**

In order to be designated as an All-American Road, the road or highway must meet the criteria for at least two of the intrinsic qualities. The road or highway must also be considered a destination unto itself. To be recognized as such, it must provide an exceptional traveling experience that is so recognized by travelers that they would make a drive along the highway a primary reason for their trip. The characteristics associated with the intrinsic qualities are those which best represent the nation and which may contain one-of-a-kind features that do not exist elsewhere. The significance of the features contributing to the distinctive characteristics of the corridor's intrinsic quality are recognized nationally. (FHWA Interim Policy, May 18, 1995)

- **Demonstrating the Regional Significance of your Byway**

There are three general ways in which to support your argument for regional significance. You can demonstrate that the byway is already recognized for the intrinsic qualities that you have identified; demonstrate that the resources along the byway have exceptional significance; or you can create an interpretive story that ties together the byway and its resources to create a unique or outstanding experience for the traveler. To the extent possible, you should try to use all three approaches, since each will reinforce the others and help you make the strongest case possible.

Following is a discussion of each of these demonstrations of regional significance:

1. **Previous Recognition of the Byway:**

You may need to begin by distinguishing between recognition of the byway and recognition of the resources along the byway. Your inventory effort identified important resources and related them

to the overall byway corridor. The focus at this stage is to identify whether the byway itself is recognized as an entity distinct from, although based on, the resources within its corridor.

To begin, find out if the byway was previously evaluated and found to be significant at either the regional or national level. This might include designation of the road by a federal agency or an award or particular status conveyed to the roadway by an established State or Indian tribe program or private organization.

Recognition in any professional or local literature could also demonstrate significance. Look for byways or intrinsic qualities that have been studied and written about by academicians.

Don't be discouraged if you cannot demonstrate previous recognition of the byway; you may have a hidden jewel that hasn't been discovered.

## 2. Significance of the Resources

All proposed byways should be able to demonstrate that they contain a combination of resources that are significant on their own merit and that together constitute a coherent whole along the byway.

You can also evaluate your byway and make the case for significance using these ideas:

- **Distinctiveness:** Demonstrate that the road offers a travel experience relative to its intrinsic qualities that is unique or outstanding in the United States or in its region. If a byway provides a one-of-a-kind experience, then this would be significant. If the experiences can be found elsewhere at the same level of quality, then the byway is not distinctive.
- **Intactness:** Demonstrate that the intrinsic qualities along the byway represent a state of intactness that is unique or outstanding in the United States and/or the region. This relates to distinctiveness in that the deteriorated remains of a distinctive experience or resource may be less significant than those that are intact.
- **Relevance:** Describe an experience that is significant due to its unique or outstanding relevance both to the traveling public and to local residents. Topics with limited appeal or with no links to regionally or nationally important events, sites, or people have less relevance.
- **Frequency:** Record how the byway offers travelers exceptional experiences within a reasonable distance or time frame. In all cases, the density or frequency of the sites along the byway is important. A unique or outstanding site will lend significance only to the length of the road that lies within the viewshed of the site. That is why the majority of the roads need to offer immediate access to the unique or outstanding sites.

There is no hard and fast rule concerning the minimum number or frequency of experiences, sites or views that qualify a road for the National Scenic Byways Program. However, it is important that you consider and demonstrate such things as: how long the byway will engage the traveler, how often interesting sites or interpretive information will be encountered, and how much of the byway offers few or no experiences with one or more of the six intrinsic qualities. Generally, a roadway will be considered significant if:

- Resources and experiences are of high quality and are sought out by travelers from outside the region
- The story is of interest to a broad segment of the traveling public, and
- The experiences related to the story occur with frequency along the byway.

### 3. Quality of the Interpretive Story

The quality of your byway's story is critical for success. The creativity and quality of the interpretive story or program will reflect the rich significance and experience the byway has to offer.

In limited situations, byway groups may meet the regional significance test only by demonstrating that their byway tells a unique or outstanding story that is an important part of the American story and that this byway is unusually well qualified to relate this information. To meet this requirement, the story should be:

- inextricably linked to the byway,
- regionally or nationally relevant and interesting and,
- communicated effectively.

A byway may not meet this requirement if other roads in the America's Byways® collection already tell the story, if the story is not of national interest in some significant manner, or if the interpretive program could clearly be significantly improved and thus does not represent outstanding quality.

#### ▪ Demonstrating the National Significance of Your Byway

For byways considering nomination to the National Scenic Byways Program as an All-American Road, it is important to remember that the demonstration of significance increases dramatically from the regional to the national level. All-American Roads must meet the criteria for at least two of the intrinsic qualities, and the significance of the features contributing to the distinctive characteristics of the corridor's intrinsic qualities must be recognized nationally.

All of the considerations for demonstrating regional significance should be thoroughly evaluated, but in addition, the argument for national significance should also evaluate and demonstrate the following points:

- How the road or highway is considered a destination unto itself.
- How the road provides an exceptional traveling experience that is so recognized by travelers that they would make a drive along the highway a primary reason for their trip.

- How the characteristics associated with the intrinsic qualities are those which best represent the nation and which may contain one-of-a-kind features that do not exist elsewhere