

May 18, 2006

Toni Seger  
4 Lovell Landing Road  
Lovell, Maine 04051

Dear Toni:

In response to landowner concerns raised along the proposed scenic route over Route 113 from Standish to Gilead and Route 2 from Gilead to Bethel, I offer the following clarifications that may provide answers to address those concerns.

The Maine Scenic Byways program is a voluntary, grass roots, community based consensus and partnership program administered by the Maine Department of Transportation. It recognizes and supports outstanding roads. It provides resources to help manage the intrinsic qualities within the broader Byway corridor to be treasured and shared.

By designating roads as Scenic Byways the host communities seek to identify and conserve intrinsic resources, promote economic development, and provide a mechanism for leveraging funds for improvements. The intrinsic resources are cultural, historical and archeological, recreational, natural, and scenic. Recognition as a Maine Scenic Byway means inclusion on state Byway maps, web pages, and brochures, which in turn can lead to economic development by increasing tourism. Designation does not hinder the primary purpose of the roadway, which is to move people and goods in a safe and efficient manner. The program is about recognition, not regulation.

The Program is divided into a 3-phase process. The first phase, the Eligibility Phase, is initiated by forming a Corridor Advisory Group (CAG) that will act as the applicant under the Maine Scenic Byways Program. Any interested individual or group of individuals can be a part of the CAG. The CAG must include representation from each municipality through which the corridor passes. A Lead Sponsor of the project must be designated. This can be a town on the Byway, the regional planning organization or a nonprofit non-governmental organization, such as Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments (AVCOG) or a joint effort by any of these groups. The makeup of the CAG is not static and additional members can be recruited throughout the process. In addition to community representatives, participation of major land holders, major industries, chambers of commerce, and interested citizens is encouraged. This broad based participation will ensure that the vision for the Byway is locally developed and reflects the wishes of the CAG on how best to manage the resources of the Byway.

The CAG defines the corridor and its resources so that the Commissioner of MaineDOT can make an official designation of the Byway. Intrinsic qualities are identified and would include traditional industries, such as lumbering, farming, and guiding. These industries' impact on shaping the Byway would be recognized, valued, and promoted as part of the cultural and educational experience. Future projects would include developing interpretive materials for visitors to explain how traditions have impacted the development and land use practices that shaped the Byway's character. Essentially it tells the history of the corridor, how it was shaped, and how much of the current practices are a continuation of those valued traditions.

It is important to note that although there may be many wonderful and valuable resources along the proposed corridor that are treasured by the Byway communities, there is no assurance that the Commissioner will find the corridor eligible for designation. This is only the first step toward that determination, and it is critical that a well developed application demonstrating strong local support for Byway designation be submitted if the Commissioner is to consider the corridor eligible.

It is also important to recognize, and worth repeating, that Byway Designation is voluntary and does not mean that zoning or stringent regulatory controls must be adopted by each town. Protection of Byway assets can be accomplished in many ways, through a combination of property owner agreements, easements, and standards for planning board review of proposed developments.

A limited amount of funding for the Eligibility Phase is being provided by the Maine Department of Transportation through contracts with the Regional Planning Organizations. This assistance will most likely be in the form of staff support to the CAG and the communities to assist in collecting and evaluating information on local points of interest, historical sites, land use issues, existing community planning documents, and generally helping to increase awareness of what Scenic Byway Designation is and what it is not.

Once a Byway is designated the Corridor Management Plan (CMP) is developed with input from the Corridor Advocacy Group (CAG). The CMP will identify and prioritize values, and decide how best to preserve these values. Once the CMP has been developed and signed by the Commissioner of MaineDOT, it is then presented to the local municipalities to be adopted as part of their overall comprehensive plan. The CMP is locally developed and reflects the wishes of the CAG on how best to manage the resources of the Byway.

Once a Byway receives state designation it is eligible to apply for Federal Scenic Byway grants. Grants can be used to develop improvements within the Byway corridor such as the CPM, interpretive materials or facilities, improvements or new turnouts, upgrades to pedestrian and bike facilities like paved shoulders, and funds for administration. Designation will also make the Byway part of a larger group of state Byways that have yearly meetings, exchange information and work collaboratively to promote all Maine's Byways.

Through this letter I have attempted to provide adequate assurances as to the nature of the Maine Scenic Byways Program. I view this as an opportunity for communities and the natural resource based industries of the western mountain region to highlight not only the scenic beauty of the area but to bring a larger number of people to a greater understanding of how the nature, industry, and culture of the region are intertwined and that this symbiotic relationship is one that is held proudly.

If I can assist you in anyway on this project, please let me know. I am more than willing to attend some of the meetings or to field calls and answer questions about the project. Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with this information. If you need further assistance please contact me.

Sincerely,

Robert LaRoche  
State Scenic Byway Coordinator  
16 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333  
207-624-3094