

CHAPTER VIII: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

First Public Meeting



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On Thursday July, 29th 2010, the first of four public meetings for establishing the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail as a national byway was held at the Southwest Virginia Community College. In attendance were: *Barbara Altizer (Eastern Coal Council), Bill & Loretta Bledsoe (Virginia Mining Association), Ginger Branton (Richlands Area Chamber), Margie Douglass (Tazewell County Economic Development), Sarah Drakulich (Upper TN River Roundtable), Joyce Kinder (SWCC/SBDC), Samantha Ladingham (Heart of the Appalachia), Jack McClanahan (Southwest Regional Recreation Authority – Spearhead Trails), Sarah Love McReynolds (Wise County), Heather Powers (The Lebanon News), Marsha Presley (Eastern Coal Council), Randall Rose (Virginia Tourist Corporation), Stacy Rose, Arthur Scott (Town of Pocahontas), Debby & Steve Spencer (WMTH Corporation), C. Brandon Stacy (Tazewell Free Press), Jim Talbert (Richlands News), Linda Tate (Russell County).*



Randall Rose with Virginia Tourism Corporation opened the meeting and provided a brief history of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail initiative and how far it has come in three short years and where they hope it to progress to through these current efforts.

Linda Tate, chairman of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail Advisory Committee spoke about the process the committee took to hire a firm to conduct a corridor management plan for the trail as well as recent activities by the organization, plans for fund raising and goals for the future.

Debby Spencer with WMTH Corporation, the company chosen to help develop the corridor management plan for the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail, described the value of becoming a national byway and what is entailed to achieve this status.

Major points made:

1. National Byways can become major marketing draws to entice visitors to “travel the roads less traveled” and stop in areas they may not visit otherwise. This can become a great marketing tool to draw more tourists to your communities.
2. National Byways can also help to educate people on the history of an area which the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail has a huge opportunity to do.
3. National Byways can also protect sections of roads and the **intrinsic*** qualities along the route from being destroyed or covered up by other development.
4. The advantages of becoming a National Scenic Byway includes:
 - a. Greater marketing opportunities
 - b. Potential for federal funding



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For a state byway to obtain national status, a corridor management plan must be developed and adopted by all communities involved. This means a plan must be developed in which all seven counties and the City of Norton must agree upon as well as the small towns in which the trail travels. No small feat but through the participation of all along the route, this can indeed be accomplished.

COMMENTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Some of the discussions and comments during the 1st Public Meeting of what those in attendance felt needed to be addressed in the corridor management plan (CMP) included the following:

1. Try to encourage the byway to go through communities so financial benefit can be gained by some of the businesses along the route.
2. Make the route driver friendly, with safe pull-offs for folks to see.
3. There needs to be loops & side loops to see special cultural, historical, educational, & geographic sites.
4. There also needs to be “tips” on where to look and what one might see (IE: look up to see “Stone Face”).
5. Oral Histories added to sites (McGee’s Oral histories). Perhaps Cell-phone Oral histories at wayside exhibits.
6. Historical photos could be exhibited at sites depicting what once stood at this site or how this area once appeared.
7. Bring the route to light from a personal nature. Provide personal stories of days gone by.
8. Provide information on the modern changes in technology of how coal is extricated from the earth and how it is used.
9. Multiple organizations are working to promote byways & other trails
10. Technology in regards to navigating the trail... GPS Coordinates... especially as technology improves and more people have access to tracking devices.
11. Educational aspects for coal as an energy source.
12. Potential for restoration input of some of the buildings and structures through partnerships.
13. Economic Impact—more visitors = more \$ to region & what could occur as more visitors come to area.
14. Measure of economic impact and how it will be done.
15. What parts relate to history verses currently operating mines?
16. Coke oven locations with interpretive information to explain their purpose.
17. Potential for developing a Geo-Caching challenge to find unique features along the route.
18. Kudzu needs to be addressed.
19. Any directions or \$ available to “clean up” some of the areas? Potential Sponsors, Chamber of Commerce to support & encourage.
20. Education is a big component including Watershed & Bio-Diversity, clean-up & reclamation of lands related to coal.
21. Identifying with “who we are” related to the coal industry.

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22. Does National Scenic Byway designation bring limitations on land use in the corridor? Response: *No, the Corridor Management Plan developed for the scenic byway and adopted by each of the communities along the route is what establishes any limitations. Although one issue that will need to be addressed are billboards which are quite prolific in some areas and actually take away from the scenic beauty of the trail in those areas.*
23. Will other coal communities addressed that are located off the trail? Response: *No, the focus should be on what lies along the trail itself. But these other sites should be included on the coal web page and possibly noted on a map. Don't limit.*
24. Mines will be protective of their operations with regard to sensationalizing what they do. Response: *UP to this point, all feedback from mine and coal operations has been positive. Let's sell this plan!*
25. CMP (Corridor Management Plan) adoption is not the end... it needs to be continually updated.
26. Potential for creating a Three-State byway which includes Virginia, West Virginia and Kentucky is the reason some of the byway signs currently direct people into Kentucky.
27. Engage the communities the trail passes through. Do they want the traffic? What are the benefits? Need to work through this.

