

BUILDING BRIDGES TO SUCCESS: THE SEAWAY TRAIL IN NEW YORK

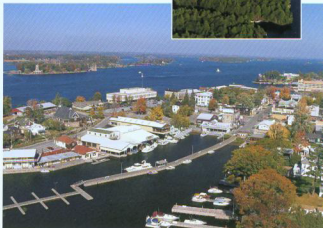
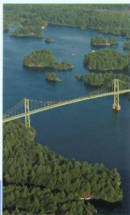
THE PARTNERS

- > Seaway Trail, Inc., and Seaway Trail Foundation
Sackett Harbor, NY
www.seawaytrail.com
- > Black River-St. Lawrence Resource Conservation and Development Project, Inc.
www.ny.nrc.usda.gov/directory/water/our-rcd.html
- > American Automobile Association
Haitheim, FL
www.aaa.com
- > Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, DC
www.epa.gov
- > Federal Highway Administration
Washington, DC
www.fhwa.dot.gov/
National Scenic Byways Program
www.byways.org
Transportation Enhancements Funding Program
www.enhancements.org
- > 77 municipalities along the Seaway Trail
- > National Park Service, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program
Washington, DC
www.nrc.nps.gov/rta
- > New York State Department of Transportation Albany, NY
www.dot.state.ny.us
- > New York State Legislature, Tourism Committee Chairs
- > U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Washington, DC
www.fws.gov



"A byway designation is as important as you want to make it. The more you use it, the more it benefits your organization."

— Teresa Mitchell, Seaway Trail Director



The Setting

MOST RURAL COMMUNITIES LACK LARGE-SCALE, MARQUEE TOURIST ATTRACTIONS. INSTEAD, RURAL AREAS TEND TO BE DOTTED WITH SMALL, DISPERSED SITES THAT OFFER VARYING DEGREES OF INFORMATION,

ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES. HOW CAN YOU PACKAGE YOUR SCATTERED ATTRACTIONS INTO A VIABLE DESTINATION THAT HAS REAL ECONOMIC AND CIVIC IMPACTS? THE SEAWAY TRAIL IN NEW YORK IS ONE OF THE NATION'S MOST SUCCESSFUL NATIONAL SCENIC BYWAYS THANKS TO ITS DEVELOPMENT AS A DESTINATION TRAVEL CORRIDOR.

The Seaway Trail, New York State's National Scenic Byway, is 454 miles of scenic driving along Lake Erie, the Niagara River, Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. Lighthouses have guided voyagers through these waters for hundreds of years. And now, through the broad marketing spectrum of the Seaway Trail, these sentinels of safety have served as another type of beacon—attracting travelers in search of history, recreation, relaxation, and scenic touring to their communities. And when travelers come, economic development follows.

But the real picture of economic development along the Seaway Trail is broader than heritage tourism alone. Over the last two decades since its dedication in 1978, the Seaway Trail has provided the foundation for a strong rural development strategy that encompasses eight major resource themes: coastal recreation, natural resources, history of the coast, peoples of the coast, coastal agriculture, international coastline, water-related industry, and commercial shipping. By partnering with U.S. federal agencies and departments, Seaway Trail has evolved into a long-term tool for economic growth through rural tourism.



The Eisenhower Locks along the Seaway Trail on the St. Lawrence River have 100-foot-deep locks that can accommodate ships up to 740 feet in length from around the globe.



For over 500 miles through New York and Pennsylvania, the Seaway Trail guides travelers past the signature elements of the region: its lighthouses (such as the 1872 Presque Isle Light Station pictured above), its lakes, and its wildlife.



"The mission of Seaway Trail, Inc., is to increase tourism revenues and to enhance the economic well-being and quality of life in New York State's Seaway Trail corridor by managing and marketing it as a leading scenic byway."

— *Seaway Trail Mission Statement*

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

It was the bridge that started it all. The seven-mile Thousand Islands Bridge, dubbed "the bridge from nowhere to nowhere," was built in 1938 to connect Canada and the United States along the most direct land-travel route between Washington, D.C. and Ottawa. Planned as a device to raise revenues through tolls and to increase tourism to the largely unknown Thousand Islands, the bridge put the region on the map and provided a reason for people to pass through the area.

Watching this progress with a keen eye was Vince Dee, a restaurateur in the St. Lawrence Seaway region. Dee recognized an opportunity to capitalize on the tour buses that now plied the route from New York City to Canada along the bustling Thousand Islands Bridge. He was the first person in upstate New York to tap the group tour market out of the city and it led to financial success for his business.

It was many years in the making but Vince Dee developed first his own tourism trade and then turned his attention to his neighbors and the region. Looking across the St. Lawrence River for inspiration, Dee found a great tourism model to emulate: the Canadian Heritage Highway, a travel route stretching from Windsor, Ontario, to the Gaspé Peninsula in Québec. Dee worked with area business owners to establish, in 1978, the 80-mile-long Seaway Trail and

its nonprofit arm, the Seaway Trail Foundation, a 501(c)(3). Dee, who was the trail's acknowledged visionary and its president until his death in 1995, called the Seaway Trail, "A string of jewels showcasing the communities close to the shoreline." Soon after its establishment, wayfinding signs placed by the New York State Department of Transportation marked the route for travelers.



In the War of 1812, Oliver Hazard Perry unfurled the famous battle flag, "don't give up the ship" from the deck of this historic sailing ship, the USS Niagara. Today, the Niagara is the centerpiece of the Erie Maritime Museum in its home port of Erie, PA.

In the early 1980s, the Seaway Trail conducted resource inventories. Through these efforts came the realization that the route contained 27 historic lighthouses, which in turn, caused the trail's marketers to sit up with interest. Brochures were produced to help visitors find and enjoy the lighthouses and, as people began visiting them, the lighthouse managers realized they were part of a dispersed, regional tourism

product. In 1980, Seaway Trail published a guidebook to the lighthouses, the first in a series. Since then, the trail has developed guidebooks to sites pertaining to the War of 1812, a *Wildguide to Natural History* that illustrates the area's flora, fauna, and natural lands, *Along the Trail and Into the Past*, detailing architecture and history along the trail, and trail bicycling adventures. The Black River-St. Lawrence Resource Conservation and Development Project and others contracted with the Natural Resources Conservation Service for assistance in publishing *The Nautical History of Seaway Trail*, a boater's atlas and guide to waterfront services as well as several agritourism guides. The original vision of the Seaway Trail as a multimodal corridor was coming to fruition as these brochures emphasized walking, biking, driving and boating.

A new era for the Seaway Trail began in 1983 when it was accorded National Recreational Trail status by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The following year, the trail was extended to Niagara Falls and then, in 1986, it was extended to the Pennsylvania border, bringing it to a total of 454 miles. For each of these incremental extensions, all the communities had to participate. This required hours and hours of meetings and presentations by the board of directors and the planning staff.

As successful as that effort was, it still did not answer the Seaway Trail's problem of a lack of budget. In 1985, the state legisla-

ture was creating new tourism committees in the senate and assembly. The chairs of these committees were representatives from the St. Lawrence corridor. Matt Murphy, a Democrat from Lockport, and John McHugh, a Republican from Watertown. Vince Dee knew both men. With their support, the Seaway Trail garnered \$250,000 in 1986 from the state. The trail hired staff, including Director Teresa Mitchell, and embarked on an aggressive marketing and development campaign.

From there, the Seaway Trail hit a steady stream of home runs, including 1987's I Love NY summer festival, which the trail sponsored, proving to residents and travelers alike that the region had reached legitimate status as a tourism destination. In preparation for that festival, the town of Oswego, which housed the trail's office at the time, came to the realization that it had no tourism events with which to attract anticipated travelers. The town, rallied by Mayor John Sullivan, his wife Charlotte Sullivan, and community historian Rosemary Nesbitt, went to work and created Harborfest to celebrate its waterfront heritage. More than a decade later, the four-day Harborfest is featured as one of the top New York State events by the American Bus Association with annual attendance in the tens of thousands.

While attending a conference on outdoor recreation in 1989 in Washington, D.C., Mitchell became aware that while the trail was accomplishing much on its own, it had failed to take advantage of potential federal funding sources. She got busy networking and eventually hooked up with officials at the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) who were crafting legislation for the new National Scenic Byways Program. Going back home, Mitchell prompted the Seaway Trail to lobby the New York legislature for a state-authorized byway designation, which then opened the door for federal recognition and a portion of the millions of dollars of available funding.

In 1996, the Seaway Trail was one of the first 20 roads designated as a National Scenic Byway or an All American Road. The U.S. Secretary of Transportation recognizes roads for their outstanding qualities. The corridor must possess distinctive archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational or scenic qualities.



Views of historic boats such as this one can be found at the Antique Boat Museum in Cleyton, NY. The museum, which has one of the finest collections of antique boats in the world, has received support from a variety of sources including the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Since that time, the Seaway Trail has garnered \$1.9 million in grant funds from the National Scenic Byways program. But, funding isn't the only reason an organization should seek federal designation, according to Mitchell. "A byway designation is as important as you want to make it. The more you use it, the more it benefits your organization. We have been able to make good use of the money that is available through the designation, but just as importantly, we have won recognition as being part of a larger, federally sanctioned program. It brings prestige to your organization and helps it build important partnerships."



MAKING THE MOST OF OPPORTUNITIES

Collaborative: The only way that the original trail succeeded was through the collaboration of multiple jurisdictions, organizations, and individuals. As the Seaway Trail has expanded to its full 500-mile length across New York and Pennsylvania, collaborations have developed between the two states, among various public and private entities, and with several federal agencies and departments. Overall success has come about largely through these cooperative efforts.

Find the Fit between the Community and Tourism: Towns and hamlets all along the Seaway Trail embraced tourism from both pride and economic standpoints. For communities that thought they had nothing to offer visitors, the trail emboldened them to turn to their natural and manmade histories and develop tourism infrastructure as well as attractions. In Sackets Harbor, new restaurants and shops handle the influx of visitors.

Make Sites and Programs Come Alive: Activities that celebrate the trail's natural wonders, such as fishing, boating, agritourism and bird watching, are enhanced by Seaway Trail guidebooks. While at the many historic sites along the route, interpreters and reenactors demonstrate 18th- and 19th-century ways of life, ranging from Colonial infantry drills to 19th-century-style gardening.



The Seaway Trail's restoration of the 1817 Green Hotel in Sackets Harbor resulted in the Seaway Trail Discovery Center.

Focus on Quality and Authenticity: The Seaway Trail contains myriad authentic resources from coastal wildlife habitats to scenic vistas, forests to farms, and historic architecture to cultural activities from a diverse international population. From marketing materials and trailblazing signs to official guidebooks and *Journey*, the trail's annual periodical, the Seaway Trail's assets are represented to the public with excellence.

Preserve and Protect Resources: By drawing attention to the area's vast natural and manmade resources, Seaway Trail has urged and promoted their preservation. Public and private organizations and individual citizens all along the 454-mile trail in New York have taken measures to preserve and protect resources ranging from lighthouses to wildlife refuges, and War of 1812 forts to swamps and wetlands. Leading by example, the Seaway Trail undertook the rehabilitation of the 1817 Union Hotel in Sackets Harbor's main square for use as offices and an information center.

RESULTS

➤ The Seaway Discovery Center, which opened in July 2000, attracted 3,000 visitors in its first half year, raising \$7,000 in admissions and \$27,000 in gift shop revenues.

➤ The bipartisan support that created the Seaway Trail line item in the state budget has continued since 1986 to the present because the trail is seen by legislators as one of the state's major tourism success stories.

➤ Partnerships with renowned national organizations have helped Seaway Trail develop sought-after tourism programs. Working with the American Automobile Association, the trail has developed a "participating retailer" effort that offers discounts at trail sites for card-carrying AAA members. Pairing with Elderhostel, the Seaway Trail is sponsoring a variety of travel programs aimed at that organization's members, who are all 55 years of age or older. In return, Seaway Trail is able to market to Elderhostel's membership of 175,000.

➤ An agreement in 1996 with the State of Pennsylvania authorized use of the name "Seaway Trail" through the 50-mile route along Lake Erie to the Ohio border. In December 2000, representatives from convention and visitors bureaus in Ohio approached the folks at the Seaway Trail for advice on creating or extending the trail through their state along Lake Erie. Mitchell says it is not inconceivable that in the not-too-distant future a trail may extend all the way around the Great Lake shores to Duluth, Minnesota. All participating states and trails could take advantage of the important Scenic Byways designation and work on cross-promotions of their subsections of the trail.

➤ Agritourism along the trail is a growing industry. It promotes tourism to farms, festivals, historic farm sites, museums, and agricultural gift shops.



SCENIC BYWAY DESIGNATIONS

Scenic byways can be designated at the local, state, or national level. Some are called heritage routes. Others may be called rustic roads or backcountry byways, although some of these designations differ slightly. The U.S. Forest Service began a National Forest Service Scenic Byway designation program in 1988. In 1991, the U.S. Department of Transportation established its National Scenic Byways Program, whereby roads may be designated as National Scenic Byways or All-American Roads, and now are promoted collectively as America's Byways. U.S. DOT also provides grants to states for byway projects and development of a state byway program. For more information call 1-800-4BYWAYS or check out www.byways.org.

Ashley River Road is an 11-mile National Scenic Byway just outside Charleston, South Carolina. The byway traverses a National Register Historic District that traces the history of European and African settlement, commerce, and industry from colonial times to the present. Citizens, landowners, businesses, and historic foundations have come together to safeguard the road and the special resources along it from encroaching growth and development. Contact the Ashley River Coalition at (843) 769-2600 or check out www.ashleyriver.org/misakv.html.



Crowley's Ridge Parkway is a 212-mile National Scenic Byway located in northeast Arkansas and southeast Missouri. The byway follows a natural ridge created during the Ice Age by action of wind and water. Rock was eroded and windblown loess collected on the ridge, forming this unique land form. A partnership among universities, businesses, and citizens to tend the 198-mile Arkansas portion of the byway is led by Arkansas Delta Byways, headquartered at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro. The Regional Commerce and Growth Association in Cape Girardeau is the principal contact for the 14-mile portion in Missouri. Check out www.deltabyways.com, or for more information about the Arkansas segment, call (870) 910-8080. For more information about the Missouri segment, call (573) 334-4142.

Volcanic Legacy Scenic Byway is a 140-mile byway in south central Oregon. This diverse All-American Road skirts lakes and wetlands, traverses ranches and croplands, and takes travelers to the "top of the world" on the rim of Crater Lake (National Park). The byway was created by a unique group of partners and stakeholders that include representatives of tourism, transportation, national forests, Klamath Tribes, recreation, natural resources, and other community interests. The Winema National Forest has been instrumental in providing leadership and support for the byway steering group. For more information call (541) 883-6714 or check out www.sevi.org/volcanic.

