

Byway Integrity: PRELIMINARY PATTERNS AND PROSPECTS



TELE-WORKSHOP SPOTLIGHT SPEAKER



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Speaker Profile:

During more than 25 years of planning education, research and practice, William "Bill" J. Kelley has taught across the curriculum, directed dozens of studies, and served on numerous community and professional boards. Rural and Small Town Planning has provided the context for much of his experience. He has earned national recognition, including APA's AICP/ACSP Collaborative Research Award and StaR's Planning Excellence Award in 2000. Currently, Kelley is coordinating a project for the National Scenic Byways Program focused on planning for the long-term integrity of scenic byways.

Editor's Note: Following the positive response to his TeleWorkshop presentation, Bill agreed to allow America's Byways Resource Center to reprint portions of his notes here. In addition, Bill will make two presentations during the 2003 National Scenic Byways Conference to augment and update his research results. The Resource Center plans to make the complete report available in late 2003.

A CONFESSION

Before addressing the focus questions for this teleconference, I must confess that I am having the greatest time of my life.

The only one more fortunate than me is you: you live in these great places across America. And where you live is very special. The best of America is on a scenic byway. The best of its qualities are there, both in terms of the outer beauty of natural landscapes and built features and the inner beauty of a culture of care about place, a deep appreciation for history, and recognition of the power of stories.

The most industrious and wonderful people all over America make up the byway community. I'll never forget my first few byway conferences. The level of excitement and exuberance was contagious. If people could capture and bottle just half of that energy, joy, and reflective care about place, they could sell it over the counter and become millionaires. The fact is we are wealthy. I know my life has been greatly enriched with a connection to the byways—thank you, byway community. And now it's time to turn to the work (really, the fun) I've been engaged in.

THE SECRET? FOCUS ON THE RESOURCE

I want to share my single major study finding right out of the chute:

The secret to success and sustainability is to focus on the asset—the resource.

It's the resource that has the magic. It's the resource and the values it represents that we

love. It's the love of the resource that can bring sworn enemies to a common table. We tend to protect what we love—and not just some of us "planner types" or "greens" or "preservationists."

In my travels through a big cross section of America's Byways, I saw a lot of appreciation and love for the resource and it seemed to be growing. And I didn't see many special places on our corridors, however crowded, that, with a tweak or two of management in time and space, couldn't accommodate a bit more "love."

RESOURCES AND ASSETS: RIGHT OR WRONG?

I've spent a good portion of my professional life thinking about the ethical and strategic questions regarding "right and wrong" in relation to community planning. In my mind, Aldo Leopold⁽¹³⁾ offers one of the great "compass" answers, from a perspective of resource ethics:

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the beauty, stability, and integrity of the community. And that community includes the soil, the water, the flora and fauna, as well as the people. A thing is wrong when it tends otherwise."

Professor Leopold must have attached some significance to this piece, because he rewrote it in various forms quite a few times. He wanted to get it right (and I think he did). In this era of growing environmental advocacy, I sometimes have to remind my colleagues and students that Leopold *did not* exclude "people" from the "land and resource community." The integrity of all elements of community—human, biotic, and abiotic—are important.

(continued inside)



What about the strategic aspects of the “universal question” of right and wrong? I am not talking about ethics now, but about a method of framing our perspectives and creating a strategy for addressing important things in our communities. Sometimes we begin with and get stuck on the wrong side of the question. Folks with idealistic views and good intentions can easily focus on the problem side of the question. What’s wrong? How to fix it? When you focus on that side, you’re subject to a great deal of disagreement, dissension, and disillusionment.

In contrast, consider focusing on the other side: what’s right about this place? What do we value? What’s essential? How do we preserve it? How do we honor and celebrate it? That latter frame tends to lead toward a much more agreeable starting point to finding common ground.

Focusing on assets may not be great insight for experienced byway leaders. But a half dozen best-selling planning books today work from the same major theme: *Successful communities, and successful planning efforts, focus on assets.*

In the case of byways, the primary assets are the intrinsic qualities. The secondary assets are the organization and community support system. Byway communities provide some of the best examples of a positive focus on asset management. And for me, that explains a great deal of byway success. Let’s figure out how to sustain that focus, and it could contribute a great deal toward sustaining byways, the communities, and the resources we value.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The central study question for this project was/is: How can you sustain byways for a long time into the future? How should we plan for the long-term integrity of byways?

A sustainable system is one that continues indefinitely. A sustainable byway works to protect its resources, enriches the traveler’s experience, and does not overload its organization or its communities that provide for its needs.

I think the byway community as a whole has many potential answers for byway sustainability. Some of the answers might work in your community, while some might not. Some answers you will figure out on your own just as you have done in the past. The solution will grow organically from your own place.

But I have to caution: The byway community is pretty young. We should look at some patterns of integrity from other organizations that have been around longer. If we proceed with that reasoning, in geologic time, human societies are pretty young, so maybe we have to look to long-lived natural systems.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

Over the past several months, I’ve scribbled countless notes on potential patterns, including long-lived natural systems. I received loads of help and “borrowed” from lots of sources. During visits to about half the NSB byways and an equal number of state ones, I interviewed byway leaders. I attended byway celebrations (having fun again!) and I sat in on last year’s panel review and designation ceremony in Washington, D.C.

Along the way, I’ve had access to the Resource Center in Duluth, Minnesota and NSB folks at the Federal Highway Administration in Washington, D.C. I’ve also been coached by knowledgeable byway leaders serving on this project’s working group.

With only four months until the 2003 National Scenic Byways Conference, I still have a great deal of information to mull over. The best I can offer right now is to share a few preliminary patterns.

PATTERN #1

BYWAYS ARE UNIQUE, SOME ARE COMPLEX, AND ALL ARE SUCCESSFUL.

No two byways are exactly comparable. Their organizations and community context can vary in complexity. Some byways have one or two major resources on lands managed under one jurisdiction. Other byways have four or five resources on lands managed by ten jurisdictions. To me, they all may be successful. The bigger question: Are the resources and the organizations protecting them sustainable?

PATTERN #2

RECOGNITION IS A SOURCE OF PRIDE, MOTIVATION, AND, FOR SOME, A POWERFUL TOOL.

Anyone who has participated in a designation ceremony can certainly attest to the sense of pride and accomplishment among recognized byways. In a recent byway

survey, about half the byways and almost all new ones pointed to designation as a major success. All byways use recognition to advance their causes. Some byways cleverly leverage that recognition into significant political clout and/or publicity that yields greater access to resources, stronger response from the public, or greater market visibility among potential visitors.

PATTERN #3

BYWAYS ARE ACTION-ORIENTED AND GUIDED BY A PLAN.

All the national byways and many of the state ones have completed CMPs (corridor management plans). Many of the byways also have specialized plans for signage, interpretation, and marketing. All the plans I’ve looked at are certainly adequate and many are excellent in terms of building from a strong sense of resources. They identify a strong rationale and clear intent. Most include a strong action ele-

ment. What’s amazing to me is the degree of project activity given the limited resources and volunteer aspect of many byways. In a recent survey, over 90% of the byways had one or more developmental projects in progress, and 30% had five or more projects underway. This is another trait among successful communities and planning efforts: There is not one plan but many; there is not one developmental project but several.

PATTERN #4

A CORRELATION EXISTS BETWEEN THE NUMBER OF PROJECTS AND THE NUMBER OF PARTNERS.

When you look at the grant data, surveys or talk to byway leaders, a pattern emerges: byways with lots of partners also have lots of projects. Conversely, byways with fewer partners have fewer projects. I don’t know which comes first—the partners or the projects.

PATTERN #5**MOST BYWAYS FACE THREATS.**

For some byways, the resource integrity faces threats, such as inappropriate land use, sign pollution, or design that is insensitive to context. For other byways, the threat is to the organization, such as a tired volunteer force or shrinking funds. Still other byways find the greatest threat in sustaining their communities' economic viability. For some public land byways, the threats come from nature—fire, insects, invasive plant species, etc.

PATTERN #6**SUCCESS GENERATES SUCCESS.**

Where there is one or two successful byways, soon you see a cluster of successful byways. State coordinators certainly deserve some credit, if not major credit, for their nurturing. It's also true that you can find similar patterns in nature and in business.

PATTERN #7**BYWAYS STRETCH AND PULL DOLLARS, AND RAISE COMMUNITY SPIRIT.**

Data from the grant program indicates that sometimes the local match for a byway improvement project can be 50/50 or even higher. That's a lot of leveraged dollars. I marvel at how much hard stuff (visitor centers, portals, pullouts, etc.) and soft stuff (planning, brochures, interpretation, etc.) that \$24 million produces around the country each cycle. And it is not just the dollars that measure value. When you are in outback Colorado, say, and some elderly leader tours you around, beaming with great pride in the byway's new Visitor Center, it's easy to see the non-dollar benefits of lifting community spirit in rural America.

I know another illustrative community spirit case: the North Pend Oreille Scenic Byway in northeast Washington—a nominee for 2001 Best Practices. Picture a beautiful rural, sparsely populated county with one of the highest unemployment rates in the state. In the late 1990s, the area developed a CMP and submitted a NSB grant application. I witnessed up-close how a couple of hundred thousand dollars of NSB monies could do so much good. Those funds leveraged two to three times that amount in local, state, and private dollars. A historic fixture, the oldest building in the county, reopened for the first time in 20 years as a visitor center. I was

there that day and heard the countless stories passed on to grandchildren by the community's elders. I saw the community's pride rekindled by that great project.

One other pattern I've noticed from reviewing the grant program data is that most byways are not greedy. They are smart. As byways initially begin, certainly they rely on NSB funds to jump-start their efforts. As byways mature and grow, they find other sources and go to NSB infrequently.

PATTERN #8**LIKE ANY SYSTEM, BYWAYS CHANGE, EVOLVE, AND ADAPT OVER TIME.**

As you know, the larger byway community is quite young. The national program is only about ten years old. In talking to the more mature byways, they all agree they have gone through more than one major permutation. According to some, there are three stages: Product Promotion (marketing), followed by Product Development (interpretation), followed by Product Protection (conservation). Others simply recalled bursts of growth and change followed by periods of homeostasis. The latter is certainly a pattern found in natural systems.

I'll continue to refine these and bring into focus other patterns developed from the primary sources, including interviews, tours, surveys, and grant profiles. Here are a couple of other applicable patterns from secondary sources:

PATTERN #9**SUCCESSFUL BYWAYS SHARE CERTAIN CHARACTERISTICS.**

The project profiles and lessons learned from the Best Practices report⁽¹⁾ are a great resource. They reveal similar successful ingredients from a diverse set of byways and their projects. Members of my working group for this study also contributed lists of successful byway patterns. My rendition from the combined sources include:

- Construct a compelling story
- Build a big vision from resource inventory
- Create inclusive framework early in process
- Develop incentives for being at table
- Have creative approaches to marketing and visualization
- Provide a strong focus on enhancements and interpretation

- Balance competing goals (protection/promotion)
- Give equal attention to "big picture" and design details
- Provide strong leadership (one big personality or collective voice)
- Forge connections to capital (funding, political)
- Drive group motivation with a passion for the resource
- Selectively create working partnerships

Similar, if not exact, elements of these successful byway traits are also identified in recent literature on successful communities and their planning efforts^(2,8).

PATTERN #10**SUCCESSFUL CORPORATIONS OFFER LESSONS IN ADAPTABILITY.**

Much business literature focuses on organizational integrity and sustainability, particularly emphasizing lessons from "natural system" patterns. One of my favorites⁽⁶⁾ balances research and experience-driven findings in supporting a central argument that organizations should be viewed as living organisms. Organizations grow and change, and the successful ones learn and adapt without relinquishing their core values. Factors that seemed to condition their "living-learning" capacity included:

- a sensitivity to environment
- cohesion and strong sense of identity
- a high degree of tolerance
- frugal management of capital

PATTERN #11**SELECTED PATTERNS OF INTEGRITY IN NATURAL ORGANISMS PROVIDE CLUES FOR BYWAYS.**

Many traits contribute to the integrity or resilience of natural organisms. A few central characteristics that are somewhat translatable to social systems^(17,15) are listed below:

- They are interconnected
- They are interdependent
- They absorb, conserve, convert, and recycle energy
- They grow and yet maintain a balance
- They adapt

Another key pattern for maintaining natural community resilience or health is diversity.

THE NEW BYWAY GAME

Remember how recognition was a big motivator in the old game? What about the new game? How long can you parlay that recognition factor? How can your former success be sustained? One sound set of directions for new and advanced byways is the *Self-Assessment Guide* developed by the Resource Center. Another great resource, particularly for new byways, is the Center's new report on alternative organizational structures, entitled *Making the Grassroots Grow*.

As I noted in the beginning, I think we have to focus and refocus on the resource. Just like Leopold, it takes a while to get it right. Think of the resource-appreciation spectrum suggested by one byway leader: first comes awareness, then knowledge, then appreciation, then more knowledge and familiarity, then love, then protection. It's an iterative process. Keep refining!

On a psychological level, remember the resource has "the magic." Expose the community and its leaders to that magic.

We have to balance attention on the resource with equal attention to the organization and the community. The community serves our visitors, supports our resource stewardship activities, and fuels much of our organizational energy and social capital. The organization nurtures, plans, and coordinates those efforts. Interconnect community, organization, and resource in strategic thinking about long-term integrity.



Byway Beginnings and some of the interpretive training material stress the importance of resource continuity, coherence, and intactness. At the 2003 National Conference, we'll talk more about another important factor: congruence. Congruence is simply agreement and authenticity between the resource, the organization, the byway story, the community and its sense of place.

Finally, I would simply note that many of the successful byways that appear to be sustainable, from my view, exhibit some of the resilient traits of natural organisms suggested earlier: connections, diversity, growth, and balance.

I don't think there is any specific set of answers geared for byways. Perhaps there are some patterns to indicate clues or at least help frame the questions in a way to find some answers. The challenge, of course, is to bring those patterns into focus. For that, I need all the help I can get. I look forward to your feedback and assistance in review of these working draft notes. ♦



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Q&A

Q. Byways are relatively young. What other systems are you looking at?

A. Thousands of management books have been written, and maybe a half dozen have lessons for byways about sustainability. Bill said one striking thing from a 1980s survey of the world's major organizations is that only about 40 had been around more than 100 years. Sustainability in byway organizations isn't about generation to generation to generation. There isn't a lot to evaluate in terms of time. He expects to continue to look at scholarly management books, especially those with a government or public sector focus.

Q. What are some early recommendations you could offer?

A. The most vulnerable time for byway organizations—and for any organism or organization—is at the beginning or start-up. Bill mentioned that the blues musician adage, “Dress sharp, show up on time and rehearse,” may be part of the answer. With an attitude that says, “We’ll not surrender,” the byway can keep plugging along and leap over hurdles. When the leadership runs out of steam, especially if it's operating in a vacuum, the start-up organization floun-

ders. Of course, there are problems for all organizations at all stages. Diligence and persistence are important. Go slow and get partners!

Q. It's easy enough to get start-up funding and infrastructure, but what about maintenance and development over time? Isn't that where the barriers are?

A. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), partnerships, and fees are some solutions. For example, the USDA Forest Service has felt the crunch and is charging user fees as part of the solution. Cheryl Newman, a Byways Resource Specialist, noted that the upcoming ABRC publication, *Making the Grassroots Grow*, offers case studies of byway groups over time. She said most begin as informal groups. Then at some point, they institutionalize their organizations. “It's like marriage,” she said, “Love sustains the marriage in the beginning. Later, the marriage structure sustains the love.” Bill noted that each byway is unique. Some have multiple elements. The Acadia National Park has a large agency, a byway organization and a friends group—all working cooperatively.

Q. Do you have examples of good MOUs?

A. Usually visitor centers on public /municipal lands have MOUs regarding joint maintenance of the facilities. The Appalachian National Scenic Trail and Dick Hamilton at the White Mountain Trail can provide insights to large-scale maintenance issues. In addition, the Santa Fe Trail Association has MOUs or agreements with private landowners about responsibilities of property owners and the National Park Service regarding maintenance, limited access, and other issues.

Q. It seems that long-term sustainability would include some method of assessment or review. Have you found many byways reviewing their progress and adjusting their plans?

A. The Seaway Trail uses a five-year action plan that incorporates program review elements. Specifically, according to the Seaway Trail representative, the organization uses the Self-Assessment document from the America's Byways Resource Center. The New York group is looking at augmenting the evaluation with a score card or grading system to track its progress.

INSTRUCTIVE SNAPSHOTS: SOME FAVORITE BYWAY LEADER QUOTES

“I don't know about all this planning and organizational theory. I do know that byways have to deliver in order to secure and maintain community acceptance. They deliver two things: economic improvement and resource protection.”

“I love all my visitors: Some when they are coming, some when they are going.”

“The better we tell the story, the more pleasurable and rewarding is the visitor experience. The better we tell the story, community awareness grows and appreciation grows. Eventually love grows and the community protects what it loves.”

“The strategic steps for preserving our resource are pretty straight forward:

- *Identify all the potential important areas*
 - *Do the detailed mapping and/or analysis*
 - *Analyze and assess those with high resource value*
 - *Conduct risk assessment of potential threats (development potential, vulnerability)*
- Then you focus on protecting those high resource values that are most threatened.”*

America's Byways Resource Center

provides information, connections and expertise that help build better byways. State coordinators, local groups, volunteers and organizations with ties to nationally designated scenic byways look to us for hands-on assistance in planning, preserving, promoting and managing scenic byways.

2003 Tele-Workshop Topics

America's Byways Resource Center asked byway leaders for their suggestions for topics for the 2003 Tele-Workshops. In response, this year's training discussions focus on four major areas—marketing, funding, sustainability, and interpretation. Call America's Byways Resource Center for your passcode to these valuable learning opportunities, each presented on the first Wednesday of every other month at noon CST:

February 5

Byway Integrity: Preliminary Patterns and Prospects
William J. Kelley, Eastern Washington University

April 2

National Heritage Area Program and How It Affects
Byways
Brenda Barrett, National Heritage Area Program

June 4

A User-Friendly Guide to Tourism Research
Judy Randall, Randall Travel Marketing

August 6

Sustainability
Guest to be announced

October 1

Is Your Byway Interpretation Going to Be Sustainable?
John Veverka, Certified Interpretive Planner

December 3

Scenic Conservation Strategies for Byways
Meg Maguire, Scenic America

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