DESERT
MANAGERS GROUP

DRAFT
Meeting Summary

Meeting: Scenic Byway Feasibility Meeting

Location/Date: July 13, 2005, Joshua Tree National Park HQ, Twentynine Palms, CA

Purpose: Assess the feasibility and scope of establishing national scenic byways on selected routes in the California deserts

Particpants:

- Craig Mattson (State Parks)
- James Woolsey (NPS-MOJA)
- Ernie Figuroa (Caltrans)
- Pat Flannigan Mojave Desert Land Trust)
- Karin Messaros (NPS-JOTR)
- Curt Sauer (NPS-JOTR)
- Brad Mastin (BLM-Barstow)
- Christina Dooley (29 Palms Chamber of Commerce)
- John Hamill (DOI/DMG)
- Clarence Everly (DOD/DMG)

Results/conclusions:

1. Ernie Figuroa provided an overview of the State and National Scenic Byway Program/process. He explained that State designation is a prerequisite to Federal designation. A number of potential routes in the Cal deserts were identified in 1964 but only a few have been designated as either State or Federal byways (need map). Erinie indicated that TEA funds may be available to conduct the feasibility assessment and prepare a scenic highway/byway proposal. The feasibility assessment/proposal would include a visual assessment of scenic quality and intrusions, resolution of intent, a corridor protection/management plan, maps and video of the route, etc. The proposal would need to be reviewed and approved by Caltrans staff, a DOT scenic highway committee, and the state legislature. This process could take several years; dedicated staff is needed to guide the process. County government support was critical to the process.

2. Benefits of a scenic byway include:
   - attract recreational visitors
   - protects the scenic corridor from future development
   - provides economic beefits to local communities and business by drawing more tourists to the area

- provides access to grant funding for information and educations projects, visitor centers, kiosks, etc
- creates broad awareness of the vluae of the desert
- the process helps increase dialogue and pull communities together

3. Designation is often controversial for several reasons:
   - restricts development within the scenic corridor
   - constrains future road expansion to accommodate increased traffic

4. The groups discussed several potential routes. The most promising route would link the three national park units. It would start at I-10 in Riverside County proceed north through JOTR, 29 Palms, Amboy (route 66), Mojave National Preserve (Kelso Depot), Baker, Amargosa River, Shoshone, Death Valley Junction, and connect to the existing scenic byway in DEVA. The group also discussed the possibility of linking the above route to the Salton Sea and Anza Borrego State Park. Areas within and adjacent to towns would be excluded from designation to avoid land use conflicts. The route could also link up with designated "backcountry byways" on BLM and/or NPS lands.

5. Next steps/recommendations:
   - The Group supported the designation of scenic byways as a way to promote tourism, awareness of the desert, and preserve scenic corridors in the desert.
   - County support is critical to the process. Paul Smith and Pat Flannigan will meet with San Bernardino County Supervisor Bill Postmus to assess his interest and concerns related to scenic byway designation
   - Assuming support by SB county, a broader meeting involving all potential agencies stakeholders and communities would be held to assess the interest and concerns
   - Local agencies and groups should have primary lead for moving the process forward. Federal and state agencies (and the DMG) should actively support but not lead the effort.
   - NPS/BLM may want to pursue designations on there lands if San Bernardino County does not support he effort.
   - Outside funding and staff support would be required to pursue scenic byway designations in the desert. Assuming SB County support Caltrans would help develop a TEA funding request to hire the staff to develop the scenic byway proposal. Ernie will check on the grant application deadline.
   - Craig Mattson will provide and update on the project the the next DMg meeting