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Valley recognized as 'byway'

MONTPELIER – The Mad River Valley's name is recognized both inside and out of the state. Now it's been recognized by the federal government, and that means some new signs and kiosks are going up on Route 100.

The Mad River Byway will receive more than \$39,000 from the Federal Highway Administration under a program to for signage and kiosks. Also receiving grants are the Connecticut River Byway Corridor (a joint effort with New Hampshire), the Hartland-Windsor Interchange near Interstate 91 and Route 5 and two Lake Champlain Byways including portions of Route 2 from Charlotte to Essex Junction.

Vermont Agency of Transportation Byway Coordinator John LaBarge described the Byway program as a "program that works from the bottom up." The Mad River Byway stretches from I-89 at Route 2 from Middlesex through Moretown on Route 100B, ending at Route 100.

The funds for the Mad River stretch will establish signage and a recognizable designation logo, said Steve Gladczuk, transportation planner for the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission. The Mad River Valley resident will facilitate the effort of a local committee.

"They have to conform to Agency of Transportation in regards to size (of signage), appearance, and installation," he said. "It's a lot more difficult than you might think."

Two informational kiosks at either end of the four-mile corridor will showcase area history, geographic features, and regional highlights. "We want the residents of the area to be deciding what's going on," said Gladczuk.

The theme for the National Byway Program, said LaBarge, is "come closer," and designated areas use the funds to increase visitor participation and awareness. "They want people to get off the interstate and explore these communities," he said.

"There's also an educational outreach piece to this," said Gladczuk, explaining both area residents and visitors alike will be shown how to enjoy the areas attractions, such as fishing areas, trails and scenic vistas. Though most byways are typically bucolic, LaBarge said some are industrial corridors, like one in Cleveland, Ohio, which chronicles the history and influence of commerce in that area. "It's important, and it's a great marketing tool."

Byway grants have a variety of uses including land preservation, interpretive centers and physical improvements. In the Hartland-Windsor portion, \$108,000 will be used to protect undeveloped forested hillside near the Interstate 91 and Route 5 intersection, while Lake Champlain's byways two grants, approximately \$240,000, will expand Web site development and produce a fold-out interpretive map.

Created in 1991 by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), the National Byways Program's goal was to "identify, designate, and promote byways and to protect and enhance the recreational, scenic, historic, and cultural qualities of areas through which these byways pass." Gov. Howard Dean resurrected Vermont's Scenery Preservation Council in 1993, and from a study completed by the council in 1996 for the state, the Vermont Byways Program was established.

A request for proposal for graphics and manufacturing of signage for the Mad River Byway will be sent out by a local committee, said Gladczuk. Expansion of the Mad River byway, he said, is in the works.

"There is an initiative to extend the (Mad River) byway to Granville Gulch," said Gladczuk, "but that's a way down the road."
