

# Project Category

NSBF Byway Organization Expanding Knowledge Award

## Project Name

Scenic Protection

## Byway Name

Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway

Designated 2000

Northern 78 miles of Rt. 201 from Solon Maine to the Canadian Border

## Overview

This action project originated outside of Byway parameters, but is a very appropriate response. The project consists of Byway participation in defense of our scenic beauty. A very real threat has been presented in the form of a high voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission line coming from Canada to supply a request made by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The purchased real estate is 300 feet wide and 53 miles long and will accommodate two lines of 100 foot- tall monopole structures. The line will cross the Byway twice and bisect the largest temperate forest in the country. Fifty- three miles of this corridor is new and will be cut through the most scenic byway accessed area. The involvement of the Byway was accidental as a non- profit was formed by the business attempting to construct the project. This new group made a presentation to the OCR Directors describing what a good deal this was for Maine and area recreational industry, as if the project was already completed. The tentacles this project has produced seem to be endless, involving two previous governors, the current one, three countries and three states. Those details however do not address the above task. In short, the Byway directors in entirety joined forces with concerned citizens from all over the state to garner 75,000 signatures to force a referendum next fall. The ballot question would be basically: Do you vote to require the Maine Public Utilities Commission to rescind the Certificate of Necessity and Convenience it granted to Central Maine Power Company? This certificate was granted in the spring of 2019 and is essential for the project to go forward. The project is a good fit for Byways because it raises the importance of Byways in the public conscience, and has acted as a focal point for others opposed to the project.

## Intrinsic Qualities

OCR has all of the mentioned intrinsic values, somewhere on our road. This powerline threatened scenic, natural and historical values along the 53 miles of new construction. There has never been a powerline in this area although it is used extensively for harvest of forest products. The pole line follows a road westward from the Byway, Spencer Road, that accesses over 25,000 acres of public or land purchased for public use. Our travelers and locals use this road to access that land. The powerline crosses this private, open to the public, road five times and can be seen while driving the entire length. The many mountain hikes are made for the view- guess what is now in the view? Exactly what our visitors came here to avoid.

## Byway Best Practice

Defense of our character is critical to maintain intrinsic value. This action has taken defense to the edge of extreme, but the project required stiff and swift action. I do not suggest that this is a best practice for Byways, however there was no choice as the location was not up for negotiation. Our actions may have consequences as just a couple years ago we completed a \$225,000 trail on land of Central Maine Power along two famous Maine waterways, the Kennebec and Dead Rivers. Our Mission Statement provided direction for our action:

***Old Canada Road Scenic Byway will strive, with broad civic and business partnerships, to educate residents and traveling public about the area history, culture, and natural features while promoting traditional scenic integrity.***

You are right we did struggle with the choice of the word “promoting”. The natural choices would have been preserving or protecting - but the fact are we cannot preserve the scenery, it will change over time, but we will do our best to maintain it as best we can.

## Partners

Paramount! No way could the Byway have pulled this off alone. All environmental groups in Maine, some with worldwide affiliation are partners. Tom, Dick, Harry, Suzie and Samantha were also indispensable partners. Over 500 individuals participated, gathering signatures in the cold and rain. Legal folks lead the charge at most of the public hearings however, OCR was also an intervenor in several hearings beginning in Boston in August of 2018.

## Keys to Success

Perseverance and energy from like- minded individuals and business, and unqualified tenacity from the leader of the pack- a music professor from New Hampshire of all places! The proponents helped as well with a plethora of miss-steps in past performance and customer attention. In a nationwide utility rating Central Maine Power came in dead last- yes- behind Pacific Gas and Electric. Another component of success is the fact that Vermont responded to the Massachusetts RFP and already has a permitted line of similar capacity all permitted- and all under water or underground. All the Maine project proponents are in line to make serious money and that appears to be the reason they are unwilling to give up this project- that and the potential for expansion in the unpopulated woodland. The effort has been an unqualified success and we all take great comfort in knowing we are doing the right thing - voters will determine the success of our task.

## Additional Information

### Contact Information

Bob Haynes, Coordinator Old Canada Road  
27 Elm Street  
Skowhegan, Maine 04976

### Project Year(s):

Started July 2018- not yet complete

### Website

[Old Canada Road Scenic Byway - Old Canada Road Scenic Byway \(oldcanadaroadbyway.org\)](http://oldcanadaroadbyway.org)

# Photographs

