

Project Category

NSBF Byway Community Award: Leveraging Resources

Project Name

NSBF Award Application

Byway Name

Sandhills Journey National Scenic Byway

Distance: 272 miles

Designation:2021

Overview

The idea for a fundraising effort for our byway was created in October, 2007, when Sandhills Motel owners, Mitch and Patty Glidden, Mullen, NE organized the Polar Bear Tank Race (PBTR), It's primary purpose was to put 'heads in beds during slack tourism season' The 2nd purpose was as a fundraiser for the Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway, (now National byway) which Mullen is on. A soup cook-off on the night before the race has been an integral part since it began. 2022 will be the 14th annual PBTR. Awards are given during the soup supper, and then after the race on Saturday evening. Besides Glidden's motel, participants are booked at the Roadside Inn, 30 minutes away in Thedford, thus helping both communities.

Intrinsic Qualities

The PBTR ties in well with our recreation, natural, scenic and cultural intrinsic qualities. The PBTR is on the Middle Loup River. Teams as they race or float, enjoy the views of the Sandhills along the river, the wildlife they see - such as deer and turkeys. Bald eagles sometimes are seen as well as other birds. Landowner's cattle and horses look at the strangers in the tanks and vice versa. The Middle Loup River is part of the Loup River System, the most constant flowing river system in the world. It does not freeze due to being spring fed from the Ogallala Aquifer. The tanks used are like those used by the ranchers to hold water for their livestock. Teams decorate themselves and their tanks adding to the fun. Mitch Glidden started sending tanks down the river, as well as kayaks, canoes and tubes to add to his motel business. He is considered the 'father' of tanking in Nebraska. It is an original Nebraska river recreation - great family bonding time in the summer, when not racing in the winter.

Byway Best Practice

2022 will be the 14th annual PBTR. It was held in 2020 a week before the mandated Covid shut down. Covid prevented it from happening in 2021. Teams of 4 to 6 can either race or float in the tank. Over the years, teams have come from Kansas, South Dakota, Colorado, Arizona. Eastern Nebraska has several teams come every year. Many have become like family, and never hesitate to stop and visit other times of the year when they are traveling to Mullen. Several have brought their families back in the summer and tank when the weather is much better. A 2 1/2 hour trip makes for great family bonding time, as cell phone service, wifi on the river is spotty, Racers have completed that same journey in just over an hour.

Keys to Success

Our byway organization is made up of grass-roots volunteers. Since this is the major fundraiser, our members come and assist the Glidden's. We make soups for the soup cook-off, dressing up our tables as well as ourselves. We take photos and make a video that is shown at the awards supper on Saturday so the racers can see the complete day of fun.. We run stop clocks, the men help get the tanks off the river at the finish line. After all expenses, the Gliddens have gifted the SJSB every year \$6000 to \$7500. This will be the first PBTR as a National Scenic Byway. In 13 years, our byway has been gifted over \$80,000 total which we have used for matches of grants in our marketing, promotion campaigns and covering expenses to trade shows.

Additional Information

Contact Information

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Project Year(s):

2008-2022

Website

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Photographs

