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Presented

# Imagine

Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin

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## Scenic Byway at Risk Military Road up for Reconstruction

BY GLENN HELKENN

THREE LAKES | One of Wisconsin's beautiful National Scenic Byways is being threatened by development which does not adequately take into account its scenic and historic character. Military Road in Oneida County is slated for roadwork in the Fall, and citizens from around the state are rallying to preserve it.

Military Road was originally part of an Indian footpath called Lake Superior Trail. In the 1800s the road was used to supply Fort Wilkins on Lake Superior from Fort Howard in Green Bay. It was designated a Scenic Byway by the US Forest Service in 1991. The road has been known to generations of outdoor lovers as "the gateway to the Nicolet National Forest" and makes a lasting

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## Michigan sets Limit on Billboards

New State Law Caps the Number of Roadside Signs in that State

LANSING | A new law signed by Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm in December will curb the proliferation of billboards in that state. Effective January 1, 2007, the law calls a halt to increasing billboard clutter by "capping" the number of billboards in the state. No new billboards may be erected, except one may go up as a replacement for one that is taken down. Existing billboards may remain in place and be operated without restriction. Michigan joins Rhode Island and Oregon as states that have put a cap on billboards. Maine, Vermont, Alaska and Hawaii allow no billboards.

The new law also deals with permits for billboards not yet erected. Roughly 1000 permits are valid for billboards not yet erected. Under the law, those permits will expire in a year; however, by the end of the year they may be turned in and swapped for a reduced number of permits. One permit will be issued for every three permits turned in. There are about 16,000 billboards existing in Michigan now, and since some more will be built with valid permits, the cap is expected to be at about 17,000.

The 16,000 billboards put Michigan second behind Florida for the volume of messages facing motorists, according to Abby Dart, program director for Scenic Michigan, which supported the bill. Dart was a representative on a committee that met many times during the course of last year to work out the provisions of the bill. Also represented on the committee were the outdoor advertising industry, the Department of Transportation, and the Governor. As part of

the negotiations for the billboard cap, billboard companies get a streamlined procedure to trim trees that block the view of their signs. The companies may do this on their own under this law once they submit a plan and get a permit from the state, rather than waiting for the state to do it. Companies had complained that the DOT was unresponsive to requests for trimming of trees.

With about 300 new permits having been issued each year, Dart estimates that the new law will have the effect of preventing 1500 new billboards from being erected over the next five years. She says that the law is more practical than laws that call for a complete ban on billboards because it eliminates the question as to whether an existing billboard may be maintained.

By comparison to the 16,000 billboards in Michigan, Wisconsin has about 12,000 - just as many per capita. Being a neighboring state, Michigan may become a precedent for billboard regulation in Wisconsin.

The principal author and champion of the bill that became law was Senator Tom George, a Republican in a state senate with a Republican majority. Various Michigan officials stretching back at least to former Governor William Milliken have searched for ways to prevent billboards from blocking the state's gorgeous vistas. Governor Jennifer Granholm's Land Use Commission, which Milliken and former Attorney General Frank Kelley led, also saw it as a priority. Now, since Granholm signed the bills, there is some assurance that billboards won't swallow up any more of the view. ●

# A Message from your Executive Director

BY **CHUCK MITCHELL** | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | **CITIZENS FOR A SCENIC WISCONSIN**



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With the advent of electronic billboards, good sign ordinances in our cities and good billboard regulations for our roads are more important than ever.

It seems that the outdoor advertisers see a need for ever bigger and brighter signs to get people's attention. And this is considered progress. If this trend continues, our streets and highways will be lined with signs and billboards. But is more really better? In engineering school, I was taught that the minimum number of components and the least material is the goal for the most eco-



nomical and reliable design. I think a similar principle applies to outdoor advertising.

We are steadily losing our historical sites and buildings and our natural scenery, while most current architecture is not worthy of veneration, and God hasn't been making any new landscapes. So to preserve our sense of place and pride in our community we need good planning to protect what we have – including limits on the signs and billboards.

*Chuck Mitchell*

## Current Scenic Issues

**Limit the number of Billboards along our Highways** To limit the blight on our roadside scenery, Wisconsin should have a cap on the number of billboards visible from our highways. A law effective January 1, 2007, in Michigan set a precedent for this in the Midwest. Under that law, no new billboards may be erected unless one is removed, so the number of billboards does not increase.

**Encourage Cites to enact good Sign Ordinances** A good sign ordinance is an important part of preventing billboard clutter and making sure that a community is attractive. Scenic Wisconsin has prepared model ordinances to guide communities in enacting effective sign ordinances. These ordinances are available on our web site [www.scenicwisconsin.org](http://www.scenicwisconsin.org).

*Scenic Byway, continued from page 1*

impression as it winds its way past heather-carpeted bogs, crosses rippling trout streams, and climbs rolling glacial hills.

Reconstruction plans call for portions of Military Road to be widened from 18 to 20 feet, with ditches on both sides. This will push back the tree line and destroy the forest canopy over the road. 159 large old growth trees and thousands of other trees are to be cut down.

There are better options available, such as raising and strengthening the roadbed without adding ditches.

Anyone interested in helping to preserve Military Road can find more information at <http://savelakesuperiortrail.blogspot.com/> or call the Partnership to Save Military Road at 715-546-3388. ●

*Glenn Helkenn teaches wilderness skills at the Teaching Drum School on Military Road.*

## New Board Member



**DICK LEHMANN** is a semi-retired attorney in private practice with the Madison-based Boardman Law Firm. His areas of specialty are land use and local government operations. He became a member of the Scenic Wisconsin board on January 1.

Dick holds a BS degree in Urban and Regional Planning and a law degree from UW-Madison. Prior to entering private practice in 1981, he was with the State Government and a faculty member of UW Extension. He is certified as a planner by the American Institute of Certified Planners.

At the national level, he serves on the Amicus Curiae Committee of the American Planning Association and on a joint Task Force of the American Bar Association and the American Planning Association currently drafting procedural statutes dealing with zoning administration.

Dick was legal counsel to the statewide coalition of billboard critics that sought state legislative reform in the early 1980's. ●

# Digital Billboard Ahead: New-Wave Marketing Or Distracting Hazard?

EXCERPTS FROM AN ARTICLE BY **LOUISE STORY**

NEW YORK | NEW YORK TIMES JAN/11/2007 | Their very name once told it all: a board to post notices or advertisements. But billboards are getting a make-over.

Billboard companies are adapting digital technology that rotates advertiser images every 6 or 8 seconds – the better to catch the eye. The new billboards look like television screens, although the images do not move.

The problem, safety experts say, is that the new billboards may work too well, adding yet another distraction for drivers.

There are currently 400 digital signs across the country. Within 10 years as many as a fifth of all billboards – about 90,000 – may be converted, according to the Outdoor Advertising Association of America.

The technology has excited both billboard companies, which can generate 3 to 5 times the money from digital signs, and advertisers. Clear Channel Outdoor and Lamar Advertising, which have installed the majority of digital billboards, promote the digital signs as more effective at getting consumers to pay attention.

“There’s a perception in the advertising industry that you have to up the ante,” said David Zald, assistant professor of psychology at Vanderbilt University. “We see so much information coming at us that for it to actually capture our attention, one has to go at a more salient level than before.”

“But,” he added, “there’s a trade-off between the advertiser’s need to grab our attention and the safety implications of that attention capture.”

The digital signs have also revived a debate in towns and cities that dates to 1965, when the Highway Beautification Act was passed, limiting the number of new billboards that could be erected. Billboard critics have long said that the roughly 450,000 billboards in the United States scar the landscape along highways and local roads. Billboard companies counter that they have a right to sell the space.

While the billboard industry says the digital signs are not dangerous, driving safety researchers say there has not been enough research to know for sure. Most driving studies have focused on cell phone use. Still, researchers said that digital signs may tax driver’s awareness more than old-fashioned static signs.

“In my opinion, they are definitely distracting,” said

## Digital Billboards in Wisconsin:

Since last Fall, there are at least nine digital billboards operating in Milwaukee and Waukesha, mostly along freeways. There is one digital in Madison, along the Beltway south of the city.

There are thirteen states across the nation that do not allow digital billboards. Four of them allow no billboards of any kind.



Messages changes every six seconds at this I-94 on-ramp at Hwy. 16 in Waukesha

Deanna Singhal, research associate at the Traffic Injury Research Foundation, a driving safety group in Ottawa. “It will not only keep their eyes away from the road more, but it’s also more cognitively demanding.”

The federal government has also allotted \$150,000 for a future study of digital signs.

Meanwhile the signs are going up fast. Lamar Advertising is converting about 28 traditional billboards to digital each month, and company executives consider new locations in weekly meetings, said Tommy Teepell, Lamar’s chief marketing officer. Profit margins on digital signs can be as high as 70%, while static signs have closer to 45% profit. Digital signs are sold more like TV commercials, ad executives say.

Billboard companies generally have to obtain permits from local governments to convert their boards to digital. Some towns have turned them down. Others have negotiated quotas and limits on brightness. The American Planning Association and National League of Cities have publicly accused the billboard industry of aggressively suing cities and towns over their billboard regulations. ●

## Mitchell Retiring as Executive Director Charley Weeth to Assume the Role

WAUWATOSA | Last December Chuck Mitchell gave notice to the Board of Directors that he wants to retire by the end of the year 2007. Mitchell turns 65 February 2, 2008.

Mitchell says he will spend more time at his lake home in Eagle River and traveling outside the country. A handy-man, he will also catch up on dreamed-of home renovations.

Mitchell will remain active on the Board of Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin. A founder of Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin, he remains dedicated to the principles and objectives of the organization. He is particularly interested in advancing Scenic Byways - a program administered by the DOT that allows sections of highway that have outstanding scenery to be managed by communities along the highway to protect that scenery.

The board formed a committee to seek a replacement for Mitchell. At the board meeting April 6, the committee recommended Charley Weeth for the position. With his experience running Liveable Neighborhoods in Lacrosse, Charley is well-suited for the job. Charley will take over as executive director on June 8th. ●

## President's Message

In 1999 Chuck Mitchell contacted Scenic America members in our state about creating a Wisconsin affiliate of the national organization. This need had existed for years and I was happy to sign on as a founding director. I have gotten to know Chuck during these past seven years and have seen first hand how blessed we are to have someone of his intellect, administrative ability and maturity as the public face of our organization.

I feel equally pleased that board member Charley Weeth has agreed to assume the role of Executive Director as Chuck retires. Charley brings to the role his energy, ideas, and above all - a passion for highway beautification. I look forward to working with both men in the coming years.

*Vernie Smith, President*

## Scenic Awards Presented Call for Awards in 2007

BY BARBARA THOMAS & LOWELL KLESSIG

MENOMONIE | It's the small things that count. That was the underlying message of the Scenic Beauty Award to Jo and LeRoy Keenlyne in Menomonie March 29. The presentation was part of the evening festivities of the West Wisconsin Land Trust annual membership meeting. The Keenlyne family has provided very discrete view clearances on their farm on Holly Smith Hill in rural Eau Galle, west of Menomonie. These small visual invitations allow the occasional traveler a grand views of beautiful Dunnville Bottoms, Hay Creek, the Mounds, and the small community of Durand. Holly Smith Hill itself is historically significant, containing sites such as the hollowed out rock the Sioux used for fires to send smoke signals. This award is a fine example of small but significant steps a citizen or family can take to promote scenic beauty in our lovely Wisconsin.

In 2006 Scenic Wisconsin launched an awards program to recognize and reward organizations and individuals that are active in promoting the beauty of broad landscapes or particular sites or even buildings and grounds. Both private and public organizations are eligible. Individual residences are not eligible, however individual actions leading to broad public benefits are eligible.

In 2006 we recognized riverfront projects in the cities of Beloit and La Crosse, the Keenlyne Family in western Wisconsin and the Land Legacy Report by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

The award to the City of Beloit was made by Lowell Klessig to appreciative city officials March 10 at a program put on by Friends of the Riverfront.

The Awards Committee invites anyone to submit nominations for awards in 2007. The criteria remain the same: Impact on the attractiveness of the State of Wisconsin. Potential to be used as a model by others. Uniqueness. Effort relative to the size of the organization.

Please send us a letter of description and a picture by August 1. The nomination does not have to meet all four criteria. Please send the nomination to: Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin, 7525 Oakhill Avenue, Wauwatosa WI 53213 or mail@scenicwisconsin.org. ●



Barb Thomas presents the award to Jo and LeRoy Keenlyne.

## Governor's Conference on Tourism

BY CHARLEY WEETH

APPLETON | Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin was present at the Wisconsin Governor's annual Conference on Tourism in Appleton, March 4-6. CSW had a booth with scenic photos and a continuous video presentation. The theme this year was ecotourism, which fits right in with our mission.

Shirley Mattox and I met with folks from across our lovely state and answered questions about who we are and what we do. We were pleased with the positive response of other attendees

- many of them knew CSW and are supportive of our efforts. The folks from Door County are proud that they've controlled billboards to keep their charming peninsula intact. We also heard many comments about the appalling number of billboards and other blight along US Highway 41.

People were pleased to hear us speak in favor of more logo signs at freeway exits and other types of small signs to communicate with motorists that are less intrusive on the landscape. ●