



**Economic Assessment of the  
*Scenic Sumter Heritage Byway*  
in Sumter County, Florida**

Final Report

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Florida Scenic Highway Program

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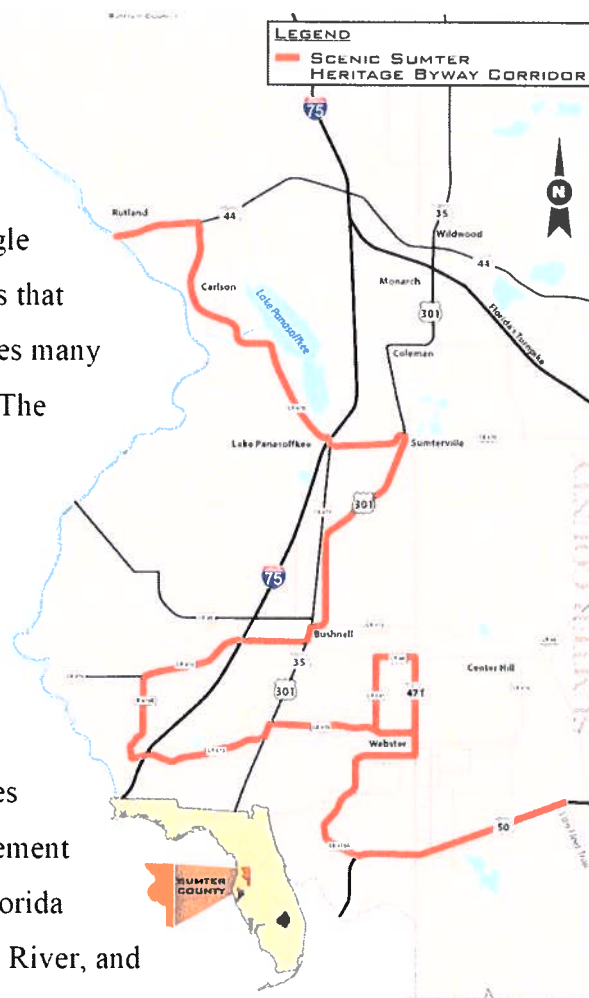


This study was produced under contract by Alan W. Hodges, PhD and Christa D. Court, PhD, University of Florida-Institute of Food & Agricultural Sciences, Food and Resource Economics Department, Gainesville, Florida

## Executive Summary

Numerous scenic highways have been established in the United States since the creation of the National Scenic Byways Program (NSBP) in 1991, initiated under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). In 1993, State legislation was passed to enable the State, through the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), to establish an official program for scenic highways. In 1994, the Department applied for and received a Scenic Byways Grant from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to develop a Florida Scenic Highways Program (FSHP) that was officially rolled out in 1996. The State of Florida has since designated 26 scenic highways, including six that are nationally recognized. Economic assessments conducted for scenic highways in other states have demonstrated their significant economic contributions, however, no definitive economic assessments have been performed for scenic highways in the State of Florida.

This study was commissioned by the FDOT District Five to assess the economic impacts of the Scenic Sumter Heritage Byway (SSHB) in Sumter County, designated in 2013. This byway was chosen for this investigation because it is within a single county, has strong local support, attractions and events that are suitable venues for conducting surveys, and features many resources common to other scenic byways in Florida. The roads that comprise the 62-mile Byway traverse rural communities, pastoral farmlands, cattle ranches, parklands lush hardwood hammocks, and floodplain forests within the Withlacoochee River watershed. The corridor highlights the scenic views and rich heritage of Sumter County through byway travel. Attractions along the Byway include the General James Van Fleet Trail State Park, Richloam Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Dade Battlefield Historic State Park, Florida National Cemetery, Lake Panasoffkee, Withlacoochee River, and the Half Moon Wildlife Management Area.



Scenic Sumter Heritage Byway Map

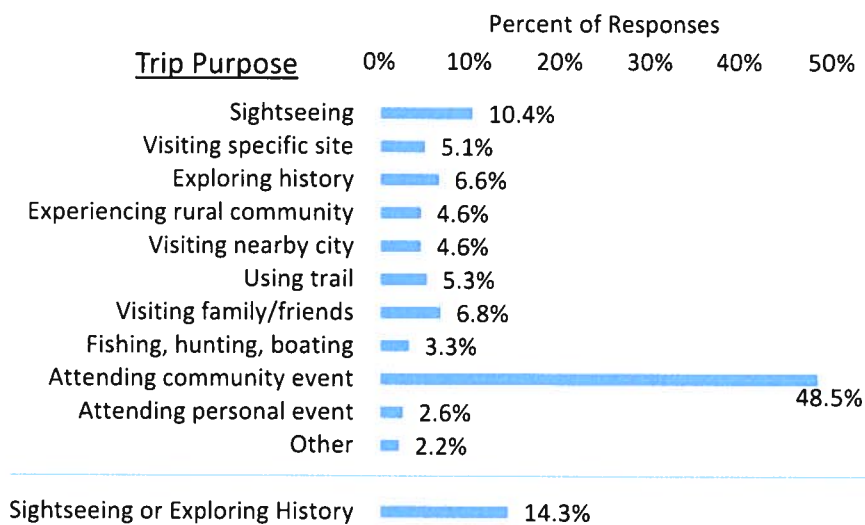
As a “grass-roots” based program, the FDOT requires the establishment of a byway organization composed of community stakeholders and partners committed to implementing the approved byway management plan (BMP) associated with their scenic byway designation. This BMP identifies the

mission, vision, goals and objectives of the organization. The Scenic Sumter Heritage Byway Organization is a grass-roots organization committed to attaining their vision for the byway based on a multi-year work plan. The Scenic Sumter Heritage Byway Organization consists of volunteers who are passionate about the heritage, traditions, recreational and scenic resources of their community. They work with their partners to showcase these resources, educate the community and advocate for community-based decision making that protects and enhances these resources.

Currently, there are no dedicated funding sources available through the federal government to support scenic highway programs. The FDOT has identified funding to maintain a basic program; however, additional funding is needed. Thus, volunteer-based non-profit byway organizations such as SSHB have attempted to seek out alternative funding sources to accomplish their mission. Assessment of the economic benefits of a FSHP designation is needed to help garner continued private and public support in the face of competing interests for limited funding.

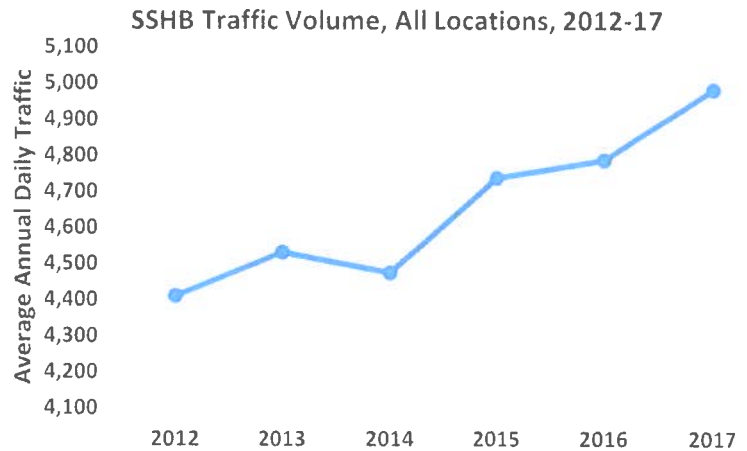
To help assess the current economic impacts of the Scenic Byway designation in Sumter County, a combination of methods involving public surveys, traffic count analysis and regional economic modeling were utilized by the University of Florida research team. Between November 2017 and March 2018, a community focus group, an online survey, personal interviews, and field surveys were conducted at eight byway locations, with 495 respondents.

Results of the survey indicate that 23.8% of respondents were aware of the Scenic Byway and 44.5% learned about the Byway from social media or maps. Respondents reported engagement in a variety of activities, including motorcycle and bicycle riding, antique and sport car driving, and hiking and horseback riding along adjacent trails. About 14.3% of respondents said they considered traveling on the byway for sightseeing or exploring historic sites (could choose more than one purpose). Respondents spent an average of \$135 to \$170 per day visiting sites along the byway. About 76% of respondents were very or moderately satisfied with the attractiveness of the area, and nearly 80% of respondents indicated that they would be very likely to visit the area again.



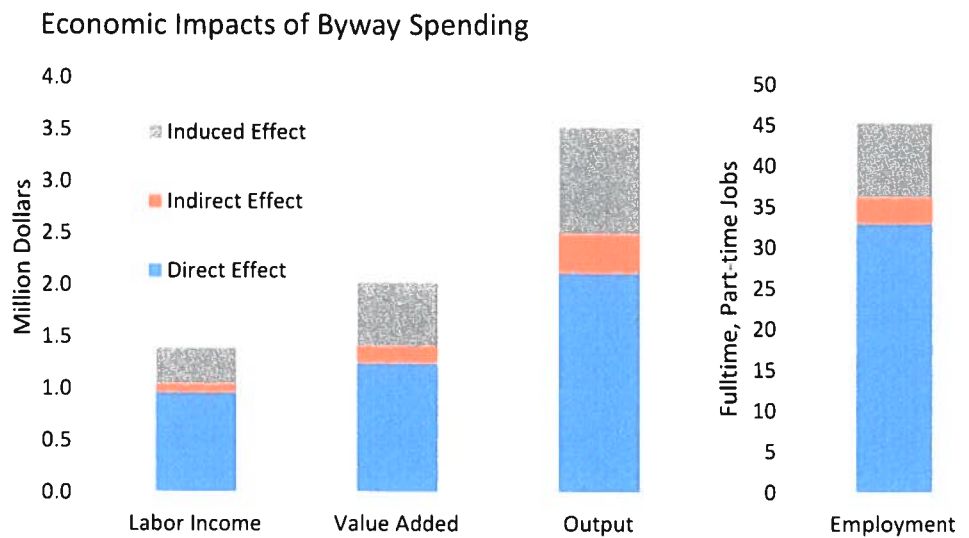
Comments made by respondents confirmed a preference for the rural, wholesome and historic character of the area, scenic beauty, warm winter weather, lack of traffic congestion, and the opportunity to experience authentic “Old Florida.”

A traffic count analysis evaluated traffic volumes on highway segments on the Scenic Byway. The analysis indicated an increase of 13.0% in average traffic volumes across 20 locations since 2012. While much of this increase can be attributed to the County’s overall growth rate it can be assumed that a portion is attributable to byway designation. The



2017 average daily traffic volume (4,985) was multiplied against the average spending per day by nonresident parties (\$134.62), the share of survey respondents who were nonlocal resident visitors from outside Sumter County (59.0%), the share who reported sightseeing or exploring history as their primary trip purpose (14.3%), and the share of nonresidents who were aware of the byway (17.2%) to calculate total annual spending of \$3.55 million as an estimate of final demand attributable to the byway.

A regional economic model was created for Sumter County for economic impact analysis with the IMPLAN economic impact and social accounting software, and associated county dataset for 2016, to analyze



applicable visitor spending across all industry sectors. The total annual economic impacts attributed to the Scenic Byway were estimated at 45 full-time and part-time jobs, \$1.39 million in labor income, \$2.02 million in value added or Gross Regional Product of the county, and \$3.52 million in industry output or business revenues, including direct, indirect, and induced regional multiplier effects. The largest impacts were in the accommodation and food services, and retail trade sectors. Tax revenue

impacts to state and local governments, including sales tax, property tax were \$243,000, and federal government tax revenues were \$349,000, including payroll and personal income taxes.

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a concept applied to the passion of volunteers who proudly represent their communities. Volunteer organizations like the Scenic Sumter Heritage Byway organization are primarily focused on education and protection. While SROI does not fit directly into the economic model used for this study, it is a key component of the economic impacts of a byway designation to a community. The SROI to Sumter County for the Scenic Byway was calculated using the value-added impact of visitor spending as the benefit, and the cumulative expenses to maintain the designation as well as the imputed value of byway volunteer time as the investment. The ratio of net annual benefit to investment (3.5:1) indicates a very attractive return when compared to many other public projects, and clearly justifies continued investments by state and local stakeholders.

Safe and reliable roads and other transport investments such as trails help reduce barriers to growth and create opportunities for people and communities. Although this report does not specifically measure the ROI of transportation projects and their impacts to the community, it's important to note that FDOT and Sumter County have numerous transportation projects under development in the general vicinity of the Byway. These investments are testaments that the area is growing, and is attractive to visitors to Sumter County.

In conclusion, the Scenic Sumter Heritage Byway organization has been successful in its mission to promote tourism, showcase the outstanding natural beauty, recreational and historical resources of the area, and create a unique sense of place. The study results indicate that there is substantial awareness of the Byway, that it attracts many visitors to the area who are satisfied with their experience and likely to visit again, and whose spending contributes significantly to the local economy. This success is attributable, in great part, to the dedicated efforts of community-minded volunteers.