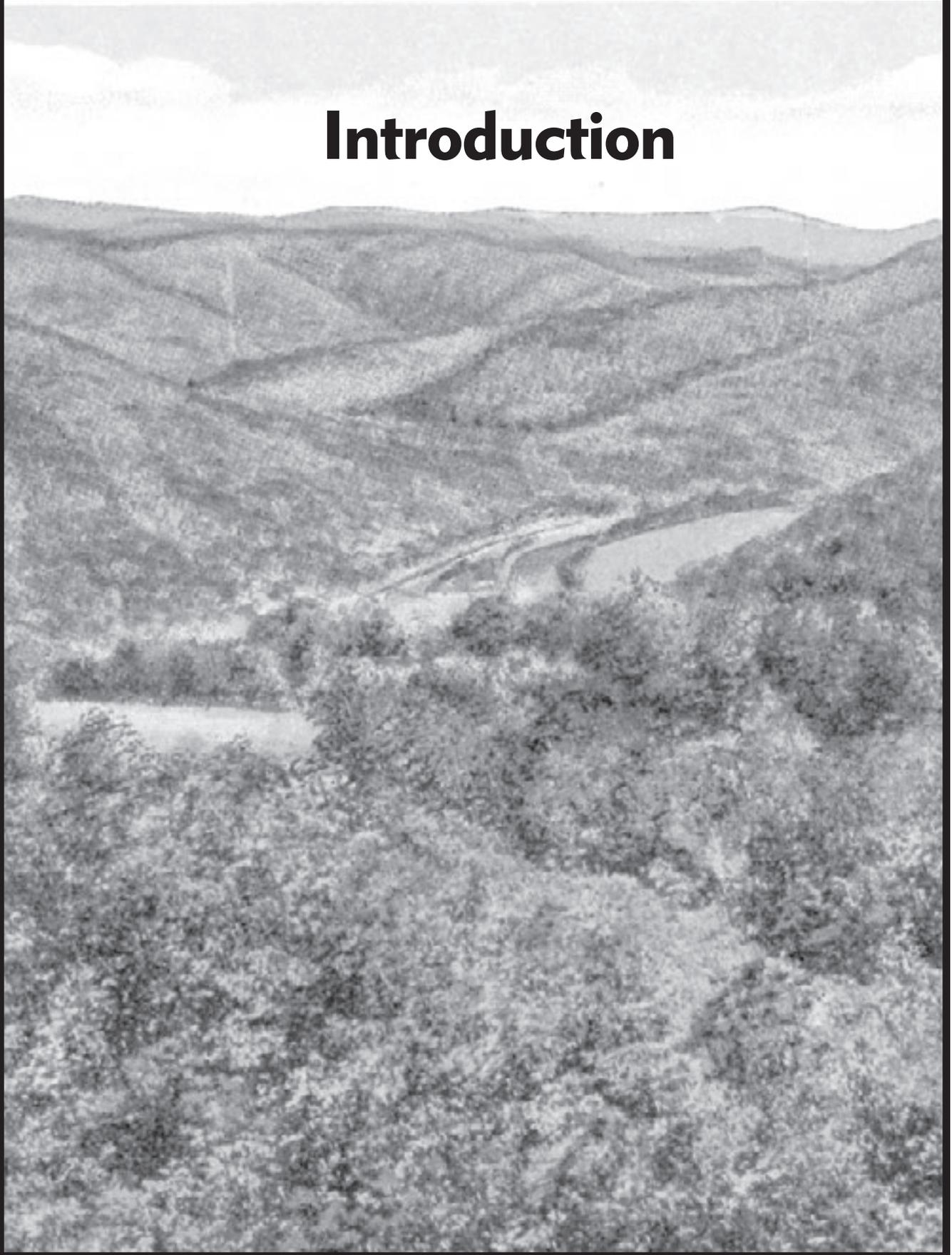


# Introduction





*A historic postcard depicts the early years of the Mohawk Trail.*

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## **Study Background and Purpose**

The Mohawk Trail of western Massachusetts, also known as state highway Route 2, was one of the earliest Scenic Byways in New England, receiving its designation in 1953. The road was the first state road to be designed and constructed as a scenic tourist route, opening amid much fanfare in 1914. The road quickly became a popular destination for travelers during the early auto touring days of the 1920s and 1930s, and its popularity increased as automobiles became more common. The Mohawk Trail is still a popular route particularly during the fall foliage season, but tourism has decreased from its historic levels in the 1940s and 1950s.

The corridor is rich in natural, cultural, and archeological resources.

There are a number of historic villages and structures along the route that provide evidence of the Byway's history. The Byway also travels through some of the most beautiful scenic areas in Massachusetts. Significant stretches of the Mohawk Trail follow the Deerfield River, and parallel the Mahican-Mohawk Trail, a former Native American trail linking the Hudson and Connecticut River Valleys. This original trail is currently being reestablished as a recreational trail in Franklin and Berkshire counties.

In 1998, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) and the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) embarked on a cooperative project to recognize, interpret, preserve and promote the unique scenic, natural, recreational, historical, cultural and archeological resources of the Mohawk Trail in Franklin and Berkshire Counties

through the development of a corridor management plan and the accompanying public participation process. The FRCOG and the BRPC sought and received funding through the Federal Scenic Byway program to complete a corridor management plan for the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway between Greenfield and Williamstown in Massachusetts. The more specific purposes of this project are to:

- Identify and develop strategies to preserve the unique scenic, natural and cultural resources along the byway;
- Expand economic opportunities related to heritage and recreational tourism along the byway;
- Develop a land protection program for scenic and historic landscapes along the byway;
- Develop a recreational program that identifies and establishes linkages to hiking trails, state forests, river access points and other cultural and recreational features along the byway; and
- Actively involve the public, through regional advisory committees and a participatory planning process, in the shaping of a corridor management plan for the Byway.

FRCOG's and BRPC's role in the development of the *Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan* (also referred to as the *Corridor Management Plan*) was to gather pertinent information about the Mohawk Trail and facilitate its development by working with local residents, officials, and other interested stakeholders. In general, FRCOG took responsibility for compiling and analyzing information on the corridor in Franklin County, between Greenfield and Charlemont, and BRPC took responsibility for the corridor in Berkshire County, between Savoy/Florida and Williamstown. As discovered during the development of *Corridor Management Plan*, the com-

munities along the corridor share several common interests and concerns, and this plan reflects the common goals of those communities.

### **Corridor Description**

The Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway corridor includes the communities of Greenfield, Shelburne, Buckland and Charlemont in Franklin County; and Savoy, Florida, Clarksburg, North Adams and Williamstown in Berkshire County. The study area includes Route 2 and a one-half mile buffer strip along each side of the road. The total length of the Byway is approximately 41 miles, with 22 miles in Franklin County and 19 miles in Berkshire County.

The eastern approach to the Byway begins in Greenfield, at the rotary at the intersection of Interstate 91, Route 2 and Route 2A. Heading west along the Mohawk Trail, the road ascends approximately 400 feet through spectacular rock outcrops and hemlock forests of Greenfield Mountain. At this location, which is the highest area in Greenfield at an elevation of 874 feet, there is a panoramic view of Greenfield and the Connecticut River Valley.

Upon entering the town of Shelburne, the Mohawk Trail meanders past forests,

*A view of the ascent up Greenfield Mountain from the Long View Tower.*





*A view along the Mohawk Trail in Shelburne.*

farms and hills. The village of Shelburne Falls is included in the project study area. Shelburne Falls is located to the south of the Mohawk Trail in Shelburne and Buckland on Route 2A. Shelburne Falls is comprised of the downtown areas of Buckland and Shelburne and is a National Register Historic District. The village is home to a number of natural points of interest including Salmon Falls, the Bridge of Flowers and the Glacial Potholes.

The Mohawk Trail travels through the town of Buckland for a short distance and passes over the Deerfield River before entering Charlemont. In Charlemont, the Byway closely follows the scenic Deerfield River and agricultural fields, passes through the village center National Historic District, and enters the Mohawk Trail State Forest. The Mohawk Trail State Forest, encompassing approximately 6,500 acres, is a striking natural resource area with an extensive old growth forest. In addition, the Cold River, a branch of the Deerfield River, provides beautiful scenery along this portion of the Mohawk Trail.

Leaving Franklin County, the Mohawk Trail enters the towns of Savoy and Florida, which are adjacent to the Cold

River and Manning Brook, ascending steeply into the Hoosac Range. This section of the Byway, still within the Mohawk Trail State Forest, rises over 640 feet in approximately three miles. The route here is very rugged and scenic, following a mountain stream, which is characterized by rapids and small waterfalls.

At Drury, the rural crossroads community in Florida, the Mohawk Trail travels past scattered residences, small commercial establishments and community facilities. As the Byway proceeds towards North Adams, the vegetation is characteristic of that found in the higher elevations of the Green Mountains of Vermont. The pockets of commercial development include establishments dating from the earliest days of automobile touring such as Whitcomb Summit, Western Summit and the Hairpin Turn. Whitcomb Summit includes a tower where visitors may view the spectacular mountains and valleys encompassing four states: Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire and New York.

As the Byway leaves the rural community of Florida, two other state forests, Savoy Mountain and Florida State Forests, are either adjacent to or within a few hundred feet of the Byway. Both are located on the crest of the Hoosac Range. At the Western Summit, with an elevation of approximately 1800 feet, the traveler enters the eastern boundary of the City of North Adams. The Mohawk Trail then descends the sharp western face of the Hoosac Range, passing briefly through a section of Clarksburg at the Hairpin Turn and then entering the urban area of North Adams. In two miles, the Byway descends 700 feet with wonderful views of the Hoosac Valley. The Green Mountains of Vermont are visible to the north and the Taconic Range can be seen to the west, marking the Massachusetts/New York border. Downtown North Adams, situated along the Hoosac River, is visible below.

Following the steep descent from the Hoosac Range, the Byway traverses a

short stretch of residential and business development before entering the core of North Adams. North Adams was a center of industrial activity from the early nineteenth century until the recent industrial downsizing and restructuring in the 1970's and 1980's. The Mohawk Trail as it travels through the center of the city is lined with historic mill buildings, residential neighborhoods and a distinctive commercial district. Within close proximity to the Byway are Natural Bridge State Park, the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASSMoCA), located in the former Sprague Electric Company complex of mill buildings. Western Gateway Heritage State Park and the beginning of the Mount Greylock Scenic Byway are located two blocks south of the Mohawk Trail on Route 8 within the Byway Corridor Study Area.

After leaving North Adams, the Mohawk Trail enters Williamstown, where the town center is distinguished by the campus of Williams College lining both sides of Route 2. In addition to Williams College, Williamstown is home to the Clark Art Institute and the Williamstown Theater Festival. Field Park, a public green

at the intersection of Route 2 and Route 7, marks the end of the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway Study Area.

## **Public Participation Process**

A successful scenic byway program depends on the commitment, enthusiasm and support of community members and municipal officials. A corridor management plan is intended to reflect the vision for the Byway and the surrounding area as developed collectively by the communities along the Byway.

During the development of the *Corridor Management Plan*, the FRCOG and BRPC worked closely with the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway Advisory Committee, which is comprised of municipal officials, landowners, business owners and interested citizens from the towns along the Byway, to develop the corridor management plan and prioritize recommendations for implementation. The Massachusetts Highway Department (also referred to as MassHighway or MHD), the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management (DEM), the Mohawk Trail Association, the Shelburne Falls Area Business Associa-



*Driving west on the Byway at the Franklin/Berkshire County line.*

# BYWAY VISION STATEMENT AND GOALS



The Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway Advisory Committee adopted the following vision statement and goals.

*A historic panoramic view postcard of the Deerfield Valley.*

## Vision Statement

The Mohawk Trail is an historic and scenic corridor that provides travelers and local residents access to abundant natural, recreational and cultural opportunities as well as regional commerce. Promoted as a scenic automobile-touring route as far back as the early 1900's, the road was one of the earliest in America to receive a scenic byway designation. Our vision is to expand economic opportunities along the Byway, particularly related to heritage and recreational tourism, while preserving the unique scenic qualities, natural resources, historic structures and communities that prompted its designation as a scenic byway in 1953.

## Goals

- Preserve the rural scenic character of the corridor and protect important viewsheds.
- Protect the character of historic districts and village centers along the corridor.
- Preserve and enhance the natural resources along the route.
- Promote a low impact approach to tourism based on recreational, historic and cultural resources that minimizes traffic congestion.
- Promote greater awareness of the Byway and its recreational, historic, and cultural resources.
- Promote safety measures for roadway users including motorists, pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles.
- Enhance transportation safety, efficiency and comfort, without compromising the rural qualities of the roadway.
- Maintain and enhance the quality of recreational experiences available to Byway users.
- Increase universal access to recreation areas and associated facilities.
- Explore appropriate design standards for commercial development along the Byway.
- Promote educational opportunities for students and the general public related to Byway resources.

tion, Deerfield River Watershed Association and the Friends of the Mohawk Trail State Forest also participated on the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway Advisory Committee. The Byway Advisory Committee met regularly throughout the two-year period in which in the plan was developed. In addition, public forums were held in June 2001 and June 2002 to gather input from a wider group of participants. The public par-

ticipation process was intended to ensure that the *Corridor Management Plan* belongs to the local communities through which the Scenic Byway travels. FRCOG and BRPC greatly appreciate the hard work, advice and guidance that the Byway Advisory Committee provided throughout the development of this Plan. The dedication they have shown to this project is truly invigorating.