

Byway Receives \$99,900 Grant

The USDA Rural Development awarded the Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway a \$99,900 Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) that will support business development and entrepreneurship along Nebraska Highway 2. In partnership with the Byway, the Sandhills RC&D will perform the grant administration duties.

The SJSB will use this grant to contract with a qualified individual (s) to assist them in promoting existing Byway businesses, raise awareness of new business creation opportunities and attract travelers to a rural and relatively underserved region of NE. Funds will be used for marketing, promotion and technical assistance. Targeted counties include Blaine, Custer, Garden, Grant, Hooker, Sheridan, Sherman and Thomas. Specific action items in this one year grant include:

- Build relationships between Byway & business community
- Increase business development training
- Expand Byway communications including press releases, feature stories, website upgrades & bimonthly newsletters
- Develop & implement state & regional media advertising exposure
- Develop presentation regarding Byway amenities, quality of life and business development opportunities
- Develop business directory
- Develop user survey to find traveler's needs & experiences
- Develop & market vacation packages with local attractions & businesses
- Make business opportunity presentations to high school career fairs, college job fairs, chambers of commerce & economic development groups
- Conduct workshops and/or events targeting specific interest groups
- Promote the Byway & businesses at trade shows to increase exposure, boost traffic and create economic development opportunities
- Develop biannual familiarization travel tours for press & media contacts
- Encourage young adults to return to the area to work and live

The promotion of the tourism industry is crucial to the continuing viability of our villages and local businesses that operate along this byway. This grant will assist in the implementation of the long term strategic plan of tourism marketing and business development that is desperately needed to help stabilize current declining population trends in this rural area.

