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ORGANIZATION BUILDS A COALITION, PUTS VIRGINIA ON THE MAP
Commonwealth's four Parkways finally designated as National Scenic Byways

Richmond, Va. As project coordinator since 2002 of the effort to secure the National Scenic Byways designation for Virginia's four federal Parkways, Scenic Virginia was more than ready to experience the thrill of victory last week when the Federal Highway Administration finally announced the newest list of roads to be designated *America's Byways*TM.

"Virginia has long been absent from the National Scenic Byways map and website, and we are finally going to be included," says Scenic Virginia president Eugenia Anderson-Ellis. "The Federal Highway Administration announced the nation's newest Byways on Thursday at a beautiful ceremony at Union Station in Washington, D.C., and we are thrilled that the Blue Ridge Parkway, Skyline Drive, George Washington Memorial Parkway, and Colonial Parkway are finally going to be a part of this distinguished program."

The success of all four roads represents the culmination of three years of hard work by a public-private coalition composed of representatives from Scenic Virginia, the National Park Service, the Federal Highway Administration, the four federal Parkways, VDOT, Virginia Tourism Corporation, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Blue Ridge Parkway Association, and numerous local groups and attractions (e.g. Luray Caverns and Colonial Williamsburg). "All of us immediately understood the value of the National Scenic Byways program," says Scenic Virginia's Executive Director, Leighton Powell, "so it's been a joint effort -- which in itself is unusual -- since Day 1."

Powell explains that in 2002 the Virginia General Assembly unanimously supported Delegate John O'Bannon's bill giving the four parkways the required *state* scenic designation, and Governor Mark Warner signed it into law soon after. "Since then," she says, "coalition members have worked to help along each Parkway's nomination while we waited for the FHWA's call for nominations, which happens every two years. It finally came, and in April 2005 we submitted the four nominations as a package -- not separately -- with a cover letter from Governor Warner, and with support letters from Senators Warner and Allen, each parkway's Congressional representatives, the heads of Virginia agencies, and many local organizations. Our packaging showed the tremendous support for all four nominations and pointed out -- in a most unusual twist -- that the parkways themselves were unselfishly supporting their rivals for the designation."

Powell is convinced that the obvious statewide reach of the effort aided the four nominations for National Scenic Byways. "It's very rare for a state to be awarded four *America's Byways* in the same year," she says, "and it's even more impressive that Virginia received four on our first attempt." She adds, "The way we did this is not typical. I attended last week's two-day designation event in D.C., and it became clear rather quickly that a coalition such as ours is extremely uncommon."

Asked about what the *America's Byways* designation means for Virginia, President Anderson-Ellis notes it is a honor for the Commonwealth but equally important is the exposure that the distinction brings. "Virginia's absence from the *America's Byways* map and website has prevented the Commonwealth from taking advantage of free tourism marketing and publicity. Now we're already included on the *America's Byways* website at www.byways.org, and we'll have four roads featured in the upcoming Byways road map. No longer will tourists wanting to tour the Blue Ridge Parkway look at the Byways map and think that it winds through North Carolina and dead-ends at the Virginia border!"

All agree that the timing is perfect for the designation of four *America's Byways* roads for Virginia. "The 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown is less than two years away," Anderson-Ellis notes, "and Virginia has been hard at work preparing for the visitors we expect to receive in 2007. Jamestown will be the initial destination for most, but we need to encourage visitors to explore other areas of the state. These four *America's Byways* will connect the Commonwealth and offer our tourists a scenic alternative for discovering our history, culture and natural beauty."

Scenic Virginia is a statewide private nonprofit whose mission is to preserve, protect and enhance the scenic beauty and community character of the Commonwealth. To obtain high-resolution photographs of the newly-designated roads, please contact Executive Director Leighton Powell at 804.363.9453, or visit www.byways.org and click on Virginia.

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