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Regional Development Authority Launches U.S. 12 Scenic Byway Initiative

New initiative aims to capitalize on Northwest Indiana's twin National and State parks to drive business and revenue into local communities.

CROWN POINT, IN (March 16, 2026) – The Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (RDA) is launching a regional initiative to advance the designation of U.S. Highway 12 as a scenic byway along the southern shore of Lake Michigan. This initiative was identified by the RDA's 2025 comprehensive strategic plan as an important opportunity to strengthen tourism, enhance access to the Lake Michigan shoreline, and support economic development across Northwest Indiana.

“The redesignation of what was a national lakeshore to a national park, along with the increased access offered by the finished double track project, have turned some existing opportunities into low-hanging fruit when it comes to making our shoreline into a premiere attraction,” Sherri Ziller, RDA President and CEO, said. “We want do everything we can to encourage visitors to not just enjoy our trails and beaches and dunes, but to spend money in our shoreline communities while they are here.”

While Northwest Indiana's lakefront is small in comparison to neighboring states, it contains two of the Midwest's most valuable natural and tourism assets, the Indiana Dunes National Park and Indiana Dunes State Park. The new Indiana Dunes National Park, the 61st in the nation, ranks 13th in annual visitation with more than 2.8 million visitors each year, while the adjoining State Park remains one of the state's premier outdoor destinations. A scenic byway designation will provide a powerful tool for shoreline communities to bolster tourism and local economies

through coordinated efforts and investments that enhance the visitor experience and expand access to and use of the lakeshore and the state and national parks.

In parallel with the scenic byway project, the RDA will work with the municipalities along the shoreline to improve and augment iconic entrances to the National and State Parks. These enhanced strategic access points will augment the tourist experience with support services such as outfitting, retail, and lodging that will benefit National or State Park visitors and draw even more tourists into these communities. The initiative also aligns with the RDA's statutory mandate to advance transformative regional investment in shoreline redevelopment, transportation infrastructure, and economic development in Lake and Porter counties.

More details about the scenic byway initiative and the 2025 update to the RDA's comprehensive strategic plan can be found at <https://www.nwitdd.com/rda-strategic-plan>

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About the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority

Established in 2006 through a bipartisan effort including former Governor Mitchell E. Daniels, Congressman Peter J. Visclosky, key state legislators, and local elected officials, the RDA is quasi-governmental development entity entrusted to make public investment decisions within a regional framework for supporting catalytic infrastructure projects and inducing private sector investment. Years of successful results have made it a trusted and tested partner for growth in Northwest Indiana. For more information, visit www.nwitdd.com or www.in.gov/rda