MINNESOTA’S THREE BIOMES:
Minnesota contains parts of the three separate biomes of the North American continent, the northern coniferous forest, deciduous forest, and the tall grass prairie. Plant and animal communities are particularly diverse at the points where these different plant communities meet.

The Minnesota River traversing through this varied landscape makes it of special interest to visitors to the region as well as to state inhabitants. The Minnesota River was historically flanked for nearly its full length by prairie. This combined with the natural topography of the Minnesota River bluff has managed to preserve patches of natural prairie on the steep “loess” slopes along the river. Some of these prairie remnants are now part of the Department of Natural Resources Native Prairie Bank Program providing an additional layer of history to interpret along the Minnesota River Trail.
GLACIAL LAKE AGASSIZ & THE MN RIVER VALLEY:

During the final retreat of the Wisconsin Glacier, about 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, the ice mass in Canada prevented normal drainage of the Red River through Hudson Bay and into the Atlantic Ocean. The continental divide in western Minnesota prevented the melt water from draining southeastward into the Mississippi River. As a result, the huge Glacial Lake Agassiz formed along the Minnesota – Dakota border and extended eastward and northward many hundreds of miles. The level of Lake Agassiz eventually rose high enough that it began to drain over the top of the moraine dam near Browns Valley. The Glacial River Warren, which formed from this drainage, carved what is now the valley of the Minnesota River.

BROWNS VALLEY

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

EXTENT OF GLACIAL LAKE AGASSIZ

TWIN CITIES METRO AREA

MINNESOTA RIVER
MN RIVER VALLEY SCENIC BYWAY:
The scenic byway starts at Belle Plaine and extends west along the Minnesota River to Browns Valley. This route takes the visitor through the landscape of floodplains, tributary rivers, bluffs, historic communities, and rich agricultural land. The culture, history and landscape features along the byway are interpreted by markers and kiosks. In addition to the main byway, alternate routes are designated in the Ortonville, Granite Falls, Redwood Falls, and Mankato areas.

The Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway was fully designated in 1996 by Minnesota State Scenic Byway Commission. The byway was nominated by many groups and individuals including:

- Western Minnesota Prairie Waters Tourism Coalition
- Minnesota River Valley Task Force
- Region Nine Development Commission
- Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission

The counties, cities, townships, and state agencies along the byway.

The Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway Alliance was formally organized as a Minnesota non profit corporation (according to Minnesota Statute Chapter 317A) in February 1997. The Alliance continues to meet monthly to “promote and develop the scenic byway along the Minnesota River.”