



# SCENIC AMERICA

Annual Report

2023  
2024

Photo by Gregory LeBlanc



Photo by Brenda Booth

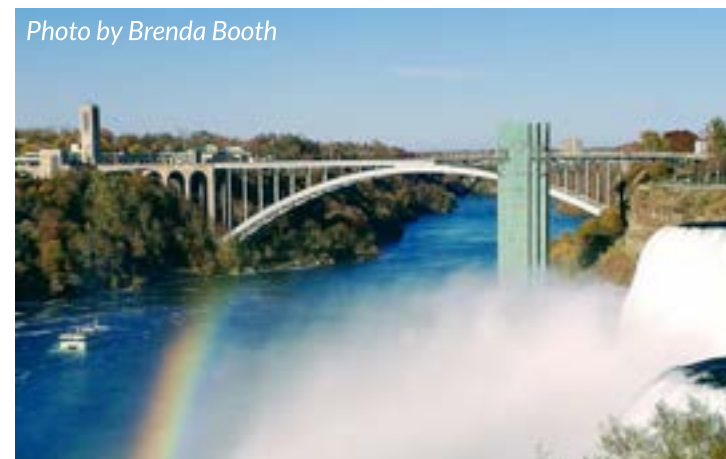


Photo by Mark Krancer



**SCENIC  
AMERICA**

Our mission is to preserve and enhance the visual character and scenic beauty of America.

We advocate for a Scenic America for all people and communities.



Photo by Misty Gage



Photo by Nicolette Tolomeo Germain



Photo by Brenda Jacobs

## Dear Friends,

Another year has passed, and I am truly inspired by the progress that we have made together in preserving and enhancing the visual beauty and character of America. Scenic America's mission has always been clear—to protect the places that make our country unique and ensure that future generations can enjoy the beauty of our landscapes. This year has been one of tremendous growth and achievement, both in terms of our outreach and the impact of our work.

I begin this letter with my sincere appreciation for one of our organization's most treasured individuals, Mr. Ronald Lee Fleming. Earlier this year, Ron made an incredible contribution—a \$1 million gift to Scenic America. This moment marks a pivotal moment for our organization, as his generosity will help us reach broader audiences through national communications and outreach campaigns. It will also provide us with the resources needed to amplify our message and expand our advocacy efforts on a scale we've never seen before. Ron's gift is not just a financial contribution; it is a continuation of his lifetime of leadership in scenic conservation, and we are honored to have his support.

Possibly one of the most significant developments over the last year involves our commitment to reducing the number of billboards along our roads, streets, and highways. Our last national billboard inventory in 2019 counted 263,371 billboards along state routes nationwide. As part of a recent update to this inventory, we recorded 243,682 billboards—a reduction of 19,689 billboards, or a 7% decrease since 2019. This significant decline is a direct result of our efforts to enforce, rewrite, and uphold legislation aimed at curbing billboard proliferation. On the national stage, we have successfully defended the Highway Beautification Act in Congress three times in the past five years, thwarting industry attempts to weaken its protections, preventing legislation that would allow billboard expansion, and ensuring the enforcement of existing laws.

In our legislative efforts, Scenic America continues to be a strong advocate at the local, state, and national levels. Our fight against the clear-cutting of trees for billboard visibility has enhanced significantly. We've worked closely with the Federal Highway Administration and Congressional stakeholders to restore guidelines protecting trees along America's highways. These legislative efforts are essential in preserving the scenic beauty of our nation's roads and ensuring that public interests come before private financial gain.

The past year also saw big wins for the National Scenic Byways Program, as we successfully secured \$7.5 million in federal funding for FY24, marking the fourth consecutive year of investment in preserving America's most cherished roads. This funding not only supports the continued beautification of our byways but also fosters community engagement and economic growth in the regions these roads traverse.



On the ground, our chapters and affiliates have been hard at work protecting and enhancing scenic beauty at the local level. From opposing digital billboard expansions in Los Angeles to expanding scenic byways in Missouri, their efforts have resulted in meaningful victories. Scenic Pittsburgh, for example, transformed underutilized spaces in the city into community-friendly green areas, furthering our mission of integrating scenic beauty into urban environments. Scenic Nevada has been steadfast in protecting Reno's historic billboard ban, with the case now before the Nevada Supreme Court. These stories of local advocacy inspire and strengthen our national movement.

In the realm of utility undergrounding, Scenic America continues to lead the charge. Our work with utility partners like Dominion Energy and Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), and technology innovators like EarthGrid and The Ray, is advancing efforts to bury unsightly power lines, protect wildlife, reduce wildfire risks, and safeguard the natural beauty of America's landscapes. We have also worked alongside other organizations to explore co-locating utilities with highways, which creates new opportunities for renewable energy while minimizing environmental disruption.

This year, Scenic America also expanded our footprint through key partnerships, most notably with BMW North America and the Bureau of Land Management. Through our "Trees for Test Drives" campaign with BMW, we have planted trees in fire-damaged areas, supporting reforestation and environmental restoration. Our partnership with the Bureau of Land Management has enhanced our byways mapping capabilities, making these scenic routes more accessible and promoting responsible travel.

Finally, our digital initiatives continue to grow, as seen in the overwhelming response to our 2023 America the Beautiful Photo Contest. The contest has become a powerful tool in engaging the public and highlighting the beauty that we are working so hard to protect. The incredible images submitted remind us all why our mission is so vital.

As we look ahead to the future, I am filled with optimism. The past year has proven that our collective efforts can and will continue to make a difference. Thank you for your steadfast commitment to our cause and for standing with us in the fight to protect the scenic beauty of our nation. Together, we will continue to build a Scenic America for all.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mark Falzone". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Mark Falzone, President  
Scenic America



Photo by Peter Cheung

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## Staff

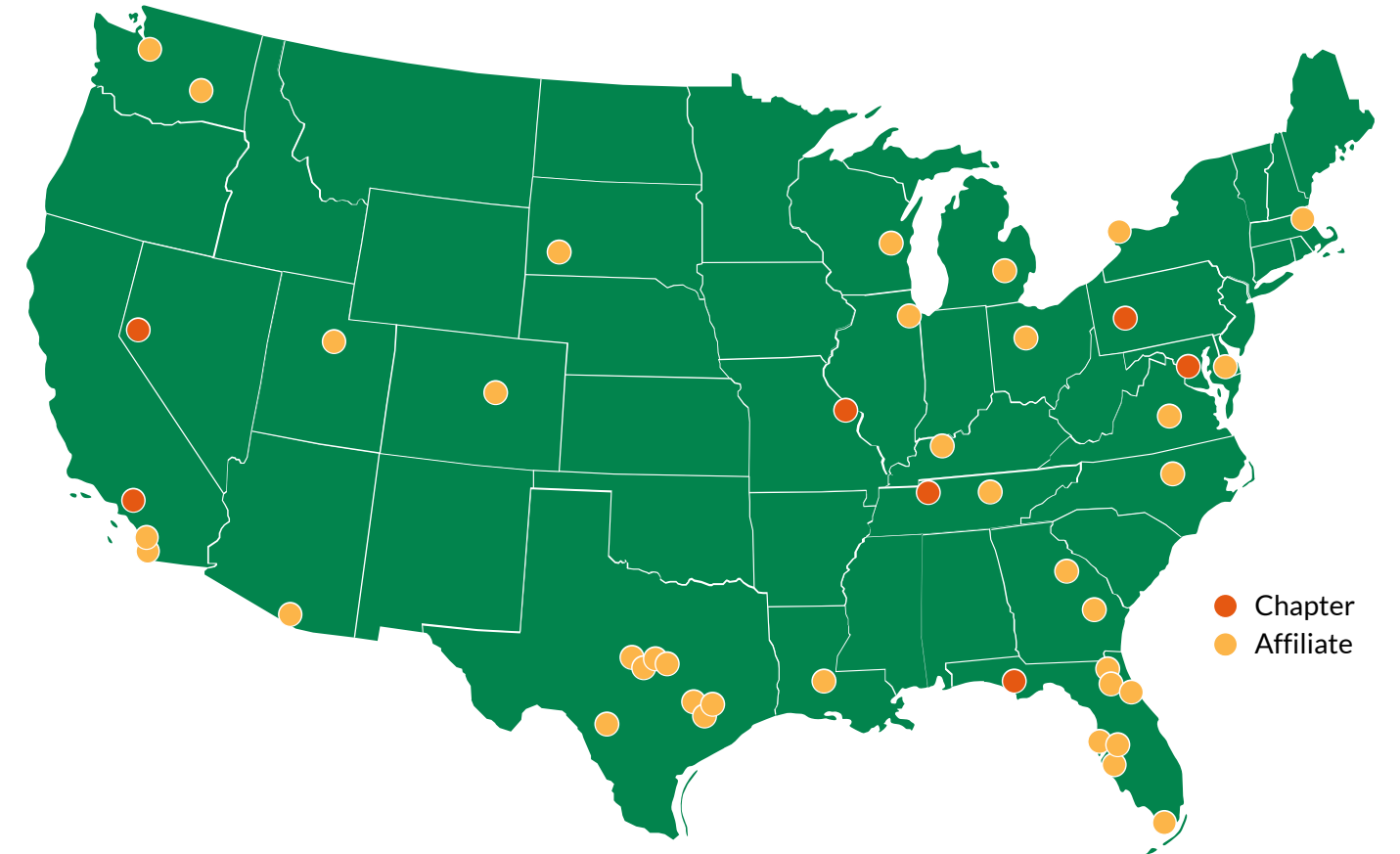
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<b>David Dunn</b> Bradenton, FL	<b>Jonathan Kemper</b> Kansas City, MO	<b>Sally Oldham</b> Portland, ME	

## Chapters & Affiliates

Scenic America has 43 active chapter and affiliate organizations across North America. As the national leader for scenic conservation, we provide research, guidance, and resources while our chapters and affiliates work on the ground at the state and local level. Scenic chapters and affiliates also act as resources for us and each other, creating a nationwide network of experts and advocates who support and amplify the work of each other. Chapters of Scenic America work in close collaboration with the national office on fundraising, advocacy, research, communications, and other initiatives.



### Chapters

- Scenic Los Angeles
- Scenic Missouri
- Scenic Nevada
- Scenic Pittsburgh
- Scenic Prince George's
- Scenic Tennessee
- Scenic Walton

### Affiliates

- Scenic Arizona
- Scenic Oceanside
- Scenic San Diego
- Scenic Colorado
- Scenic Delaware
- Scenic Florida
- Scenic Clearwater
- Scenic Jacksonville
- Scenic Manatee
- Scenic Miami
- Scenic Pinellas
- Scenic St. Petersburg
- Scenic Georgia
- Scenic Chatham
- Scenic Illinois
- Scenic Kentucky
- Scenic Lafayette
- Scenic Massachusetts
- Scenic Michigan
- Scenic North Carolina
- Scenic Ohio
- Scenic Ontario
- Scenic Knoxville
- Scenic Texas
- Scenic Austin
- Scenic Comal County
- Scenic Dallas
- Scenic Fort Worth
- Scenic Galveston
- Scenic Hill Country
- Scenic Houston
- Scenic San Antonio
- Scenic Utah
- Scenic Virginia
- Scenic Washington
- Scenic Wisconsin

# Ron Fleming's Transformational Gift to Scenic America

*Renowned planner and urban designer has dedicated his life to scenic beauty. His recent gift to Scenic America cements his legacy.*

**Ronald Lee Fleming, FAICP, has long been a beacon of inspiration and leadership in the scenic conservation movement. His recent \$1 million gift to Scenic America marks a turning point in our organization's history.**

Ron's monumental contribution will fund communications and outreach campaigns which will help position Scenic America at the forefront of the national conversation on scenic conservation. Thanks to Ron's generosity, our ability to impact the future of America's scenic beauty has been strengthened in ways previously unimaginable.

Ron has been an integral part of Scenic America's story since its early days. As a passionate advocate for the preservation of America's natural beauty, historic landscapes, and community character, he has built a career dedicated to promoting a more visually appealing environment. His work as a planner, urbanist, and writer has influenced countless communities and civic leaders, encouraging them to take up the mantle of scenic conservation. As the founder of the Townscape Institute, Ron pioneered ways to make the visual enhancement of cities and towns a priority for communities across the country. His efforts have spanned the intersection of urban planning, art, and public policy, showcasing his unwavering commitment to improving life through better design.

Over the years, Ron has been more than a supporter of Scenic America; he has been a steadfast ally and a visionary. His dedication to our mission has helped shape the direction of the organization, and his legacy is interwoven with our growth and success. His leadership on Scenic America's board, combined with his active engagement in numerous projects, has strengthened our ability to tackle some of the nation's most pressing scenic challenges.

This latest, organization-altering gift represents more than a financial contribution—it is a continuation of Ron's lifetime of advocacy for scenic conservation. With his support, we will be able to fund a comprehensive series of communications and outreach campaigns, extending our message to a broader national audience. We will leverage this opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of protecting America's scenic landscapes, fostering more community involvement, and advocating for public policies that prioritize beauty in public spaces.

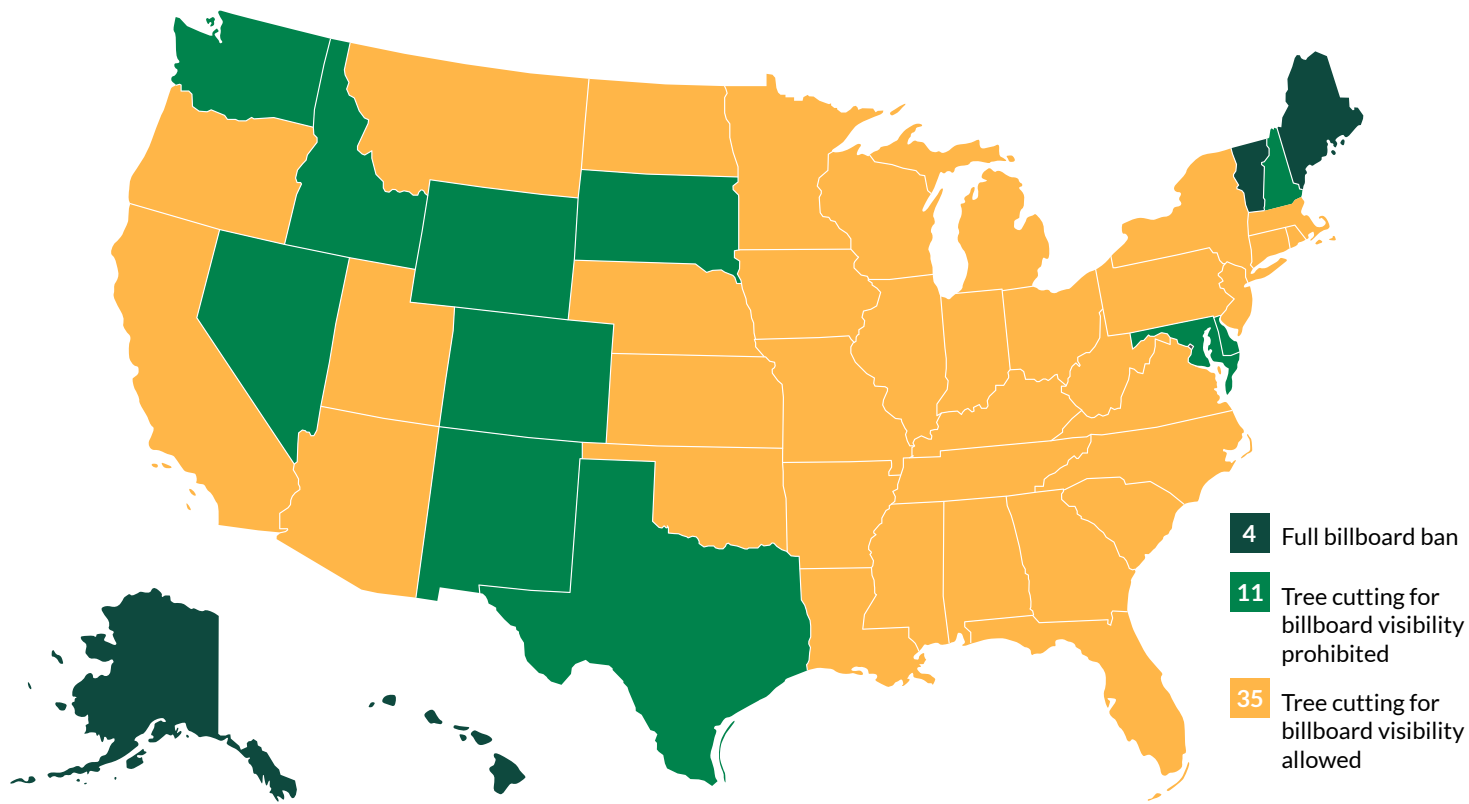
Ron's generosity will allow Scenic America to expand its influence and visibility like never before, ensuring that our message resonates with new generations of advocates. The gift will fuel the production of impactful content, fund public service announcements, and allow us to engage with millions of Americans who share our passion for preserving scenic beauty.

Ron's support will echo through time, as we are now better equipped to inspire change and rally communities across the United States to our cause. His commitment underscores the belief that America's scenic beauty is not only worth preserving, but that it can and must be a priority for generations to come.

This transformative contribution sets the stage for a brighter future, where Scenic America can make a tremendous impact on the nation's landscape, continuing the work Ron has championed throughout his career. We are profoundly grateful for his leadership, dedication, and generosity, which will shape Scenic America's mission now and into the future.

Thank you, Ron, for being a key part of our journey and for giving us the tools to make an indelible mark on America's scenic heritage. With your help, we will continue to inspire and protect the beauty of our country for generations to come.





# Speaking for the Trees: Scenic America's Fight Against Clear Cutting for Billboard Visibility

*35 states currently allow for the removal of trees by the billboard industry solely for the purpose of increasing billboard visibility. We want to put an end to this unnecessary, ugly, and destructive practice.*

Scenic America is intensifying its efforts to address a growing issue in the outdoor advertising industry: the cutting of trees along public rights-of-way for the sole purpose of improving billboard visibility. This practice, which sacrifices scenic beauty and the public's interest for private financial gain, has long been a concern for Scenic America and is an ongoing violation of the principles of the Highway Beautification Act (HBA).

The Highway Beautification Act was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 as part of his broader vision for a more aesthetically pleasing

America. Championed by First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson, the act aimed to limit billboards, junkyards, and other unsightly intrusions along the country's growing interstate highway system. The legislation was designed to protect scenic beauty and ensure that America's highways remained pleasant and visually appealing, reflecting the importance of nature and the environment in daily life. Over the years, the HBA has been a critical tool in preserving landscapes from visual blight, though enforcement has waned in recent decades.

Historically, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) prohibited tree cutting for billboard visibility. However, under pressure from the outdoor adver-

tising lobby, the FHWA rescinded its guidelines and left it up to individual states to regulate tree cutting within highway rights-of-way. The outcome has been troubling: 35 out of 46 states now permit vegetation trimming or outright tree clearing for billboard visibility, often times with little to no regulation. This lack of oversight endangers the scenic landscapes that define much of America's roadways and undermines the public good for private advertising interests.

Scenic America firmly believes the current practice contradicts the foundational purpose of the Highway Beautification Act. Under 23 CFR §1.23, all activities within highway rights-of-way are mandated to serve public purposes rather than private interests. Cutting trees to increase the visibility of billboards not only diminishes the natural beauty of the landscape but also contradicts this public trust.

In response, Scenic America has made this issue its top legislative priority. The organization is working closely with FHWA and key Congressional stakeholders to restore federal guidelines that protect public scenery from unnecessary destruction. After initial resistance from FHWA, we are confident that a legis-

lative breakthrough will be coming as a result of our efforts and dedication to this issue.

Despite these efforts, Scenic America recognizes the slow pace of federal change. Legislative processes, particularly those involving the FHWA, often lack definitive timelines. However, Scenic America is undeterred. Over the past five years, the organization has secured twelve major wins in Congress, three of which specifically involved billboard-related victories. Scenic America's advocacy has shifted the balance of power in Washington, ensuring that the interests of the billboard industry no longer dominate discussions on Capitol Hill.

The fight to protect America's scenic landscapes from commercial encroachment is far from over, but Scenic America is well-prepared for the challenge. By holding the FHWA accountable and working to ensure that public rights-of-way are managed in the public's interest, Scenic America is leading the charge to preserve the natural beauty of the nation's highways.



A billboard stands tall above the remnants of cleared trees in Charlotte, NC. Photo from Charlotte Observer

# Standing Tall: Scenic America's Fight Against 'Big Billboard'

*Scenic America remains at the forefront of the battle against billboard blight, advocating for stricter regulations and highlighting the many costs of visual pollution across America.*



Photo by Ruize Li

**Scenic America remains steadfast in its mission to combat billboard blight and protect the visual integrity of our natural landscapes. Despite the diverse array of priorities that Scenic America tackles, the issue of billboard control continues to be a central focus, with progress made at both local and national levels. Here's an overview of several of our recent efforts at the national and local levels:**

## A 20,000 Reduction in Billboards

Scenic America's advocacy efforts have resulted in measurable progress in reducing the number of billboards nationwide. Our 2019 national billboard inventory reported 263,371 billboards along state routes. In our most recent inventory, we recorded 243,682 billboards along these same routes—a reduction of 19,689 billboards, representing a 7% decrease since 2019. This remarkable decline is the direct result of Scenic America's work to enforce, rewrite, and uphold legislation designed to limit the proliferation of billboards. At the national level, we have defended the Highway Beautification Act against three separate attempts by the outdoor advertising industry to weaken its protections in Congress over the past five years. By blocking these legislative threats, pre-

venting the spread of billboards, and ensuring the enforcement of existing laws, Scenic America continues to drive meaningful change at both the national and local levels.

## Highlighting Environmental Impact

In concert with our efforts to document billboard proliferation across the country, Scenic America has begun focusing on the environmental consequences of billboard-related tree removal. We are developing tools to calculate the impact on carbon sequestration, using state-specific data on tree cutting clearances and forest cover. This initiative will highlight the broader environmental degradation caused by billboards, including habitat loss and contributions to climate change.

## Continuous Research and Advocacy

Scenic America is also conducting extensive research on billboard regulations across major U.S. cities to understand and advocate for effective billboard control measures. This ongoing research informs our strategies and supports our local and national campaigns against outdoor advertising.

## Regional and Local Efforts

Scenic America is actively involved in several local initiatives to mitigate billboard impacts:

- **Miami, FL:** In 2023, Scenic America took action against the Miami City Commission's decision to lift a cap on freestanding digital signs, a change that led to the installation of a massive digital billboard next to the Pérez Art Museum Miami. The sign, operated by Orange Barrel Media, has been displaying ads for products and services not available at the museum, potentially violating Florida's outdoor advertising regulations. Scenic America has been working closely with local leaders and the Florida Department of Transportation to ensure that this sign either complies with the law or is removed.
- **Raleigh, NC:** Scenic America played a crucial role in preserving Raleigh's ban on digital billboards. When a proposal surfaced to lift the ban and allow digital signage downtown, we mobilized local advocates and educated city officials on the environmental, safety, and aesthetic downsides of digital billboards. Our efforts included submitting expert testimony, conducting public awareness campaigns, and coordinating participation in city council hearings. The Raleigh City Council's unanimous decision to maintain the ban marked an important and symbolic victory for the community and scenic conservation.
- **Los Angeles, CA:** Scenic America, in partnership with Scenic Los Angeles, has been actively opposing the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (Metro) proposed Transportation Communication Network (TCN), which aims to introduce digital billboards along freeway-facing Metro-owned land. This initiative would undermine the city's long-standing ban on new billboards. Scenic America has led a comprehensive campaign against TCN, involving public advocacy, legal opinions, and grassroots mobilization. Despite the City Council's initial approval, our efforts have delayed implementation and pushed for further scrutiny by the City's Budget, Finance, and Innovation Committee. At publication, Metro's TCN project continues to be blocked in committee by Scenic America's efforts.

- **Texas:** In May 2024, Scenic America responded to concerning updates proposed by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to the state's sign laws. These changes would have undermined local regulations by allowing digital billboards even in areas that had explicitly banned them, reducing the commercial activity requirements for billboard placement, and providing credits for relocating signs. These provisions would have facilitated a significant increase in billboard numbers, particularly digital ones, across Texas, including rural areas. Scenic America collaborated with Scenic Texas to submit detailed comments opposing these changes. Their advocacy was successful in preventing these provisions from being enacted, ensuring that local communities retain the authority to regulate outdoor advertising and maintain their visual environments.
- **Utah:** Scenic America and Scenic Utah have faced multiple challenges from the outdoor advertising industry. In Millcreek, we opposed changes to local ordinances that would allow additional digital billboards, achieving a compromise that limited new signs. At the state level, we fought against legislation that would undermine local control over scenic byway designations, which would pave the way for more billboards along Utah's roads. Despite our efforts, the bill passed, but Scenic America remains committed to advocating for Utah's scenic beauty.
- **Missouri:** Scenic America and Scenic Missouri collaborated to propose a five-year moratorium on new billboard installations along Interstate 70, known for its heavy billboard presence. This initiative aimed to protect Missouri's natural beauty and enhance road safety. Although the resolution did not pass in its first attempt, Scenic America is determined to continue advocating for reduced billboard proliferation along Missouri's highways.

Scenic America's commitment to reducing billboard blight is unwavering. While we tackle a range of issues, our dedication to fighting the proliferation of billboards remains a top priority. Through our combined efforts at the federal, state, and local levels, we aim to enhance America's scenic beauty and ensure that our landscapes remain free from visual pollution.



Death Valley National Park. Photo by Fan Zhou

# The Road Ahead: Supporting America’s Byways Through a Challenging Political Climate

*Scenic America maintains its position as the foremost advocate for our nation’s byways despite uncertainty and frustration in Congress.*

**For the fourth consecutive year, Scenic America and byways partners were successful in advocating for continued funding for the National Scenic Byways Program (NSBP) at the federal level. The FY24 Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development (THUD) appropriations bill, signed into law by President Biden on March 9, 2024, allocated \$7.5 million for the NSBP for the 2024 fiscal year.**

This year’s appropriations process was fraught with delays and political maneuvering. The House of Representatives faced numerous obstacles, causing uncertainty and frustration among many advocacy groups. However, Scenic America remained stead-

fast in its commitment to the National Scenic Byways Program. Through continuous engagement with legislators and a robust advocacy campaign, Scenic America worked tirelessly to keep the program a priority in the appropriations discussions.

This year’s process for securing critical byways funding was marked by significant hurdles in the congressional appropriations process, particularly in the House of Representatives. Despite these challenges, Scenic America played a pivotal role in advocating for and ensuring that funding was secured to preserve and enhance the beauty of America’s most cherished roads.

Prior congressional funding for the NSBP came in at

\$20 million for FY23, \$6 million for FY22, and \$16 million in FY21 to jumpstart the dormant program. This year’s funding brings the total amount allocated to the NSBP to just shy of \$50 million, \$22.8 million of which has already been distributed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in the form of byways grants.

In July 2023, we learned that the Senate would continue to be a strong ally for the NSBP, as the Senate Appropriations Committee included \$20 million for the program in its FY24 appropriations bill. According to Scenic America President Mark Falzone, “The inclusion of \$20 million in the Senate appropriations bill is a crucial step forward for America’s byways. It reflects the hard work of our advocates and the bipartisan support for preserving the scenic beauty of our nation’s roads.”

Despite the positive news from the Senate, the road ahead was still uncertain. On November 2, 2023, the Senate officially approved the \$20 million funding for the National Scenic Byways Program in the FY24 appropriations bill. This approval marked another significant achievement for Scenic America. Falzone remarked, “Senate approval of this funding underscores the importance of the National Scenic Byways Program. It ensures that we can continue to protect and promote these vital routes.”

Unfortunately, the House of Representatives would prove to be the primary roadblock in securing significant funding for the NSBP. The approved FY24 House appropriations bill included \$0 for the program, a trend that would continue through the next appropriations process.

The final appropriations bill, passed on March 12, 2024, allocated \$7.5 million to the National Scenic Byways Program for FY24. While this amount was lower than the initially proposed \$20 million, it marked the fourth consecutive year of federal investment in America’s byways. Falzone noted, “Securing \$7.5 million for byways in this challenging fiscal environment is a significant accomplishment. It demonstrates the sustained commitment of Congress to our scenic byways and the effectiveness of our advocacy efforts.”

Scenic America would like to extend its gratitude to our Coalition partners, byways organizations, our

supporters across the country for amplifying our voice through advocacy efforts, and our champions in Congress for ensuring continued support of America’s byways. Specifically, we would like to thank Sens. Brian Schatz (D-HI) and Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Reps. Tom Cole (R-OK- 4) and Mike Quigley (D-IL-5), and supportive members of the Senate and House appropriations THUD subcommittees.

As we look to the future, Scenic America remains dedicated to advocating for the National Scenic Byways Program. The successes of FY24 highlight the power of persistent advocacy and the importance of building bipartisan support for preserving our nation’s scenic treasures. We are grateful to our supporters and legislators who recognize the value of America’s byways and will continue to champion their preservation for years to come.

FY24 was a challenging year for the appropriations process, but Scenic America’s advocacy ensured that the National Scenic Byways Program received crucial funding. As we celebrate these victories, we remain committed to our mission of preserving and enhancing the scenic beauty of America’s roads. Together, we can continue to protect these invaluable resources for future generations.

## FY24 National Scenic Byways Program Funding Timeline

### July 2023

Senate Appropriations Committee includes \$20 million for National Scenic Byways Program in FY24 THUD appropriations bill

### November 2023

Senate votes to approve \$20 million for NSBP in their FY24 THUD funding bill, as House of Representatives includes \$0 for byways in their respective bill

### March 2024

President Joe Biden signs FY24 funding bill including \$7.5 million for National Scenic Byways Program in THUD budget



# The Power Beneath: Our Leading Role in Utility Undergrounding for a Safer, Greener Future

*Scenic America is leading a national push to underground utilities, enhancing landscape beauty and reducing wildfire risks.*

Over the past year, Scenic America has positioned itself as a leader in advocating for the undergrounding of utility infrastructure, a solution that enhances landscape beauty, mitigates wildfire risks, protects wildlife, and improves power grid resilience. This initiative, born out of a desire to protect America's scenic views, has grown into a movement supported by key industry stakeholders, environmental groups, and tech innovators. Scenic America's influence now spans across major partnerships, technological breakthroughs, and regulatory successes that are transforming how the future of energy infrastructure is imagined in the United States.

In 2023, Scenic America celebrated a series of great achievements and developments in undergrounding, most notably its involvement in **Pacific Gas and Electric's** (PG&E) ambitious undergrounding project. PG&E, one of the largest utilities in the country, launched a plan to underground 10,000 miles of overhead lines in response to the devastating wildfires that have plagued California in recent years. Scenic America played a pivotal role in securing the necessary regulatory support for this plan through its engagement with the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC).

In September 2023, PG&E's General Rate Case (GRC) application faced opposition, which would have reduced the original proposal to underground 2,100 miles to just 200 miles. Scenic America quickly mobilized its constituents to submit public comments in support of the undergrounding effort and submitted a letter directly to Alice Reynolds, the president of CPUC. Thanks to these efforts, the final decision

approved 1,230 miles for undergrounding, marking a major regulatory victory that demonstrates the power of grassroots advocacy in shaping critical infrastructure projects.

Scenic America's partnership with **Dominion Energy**, which has the second-largest undergrounding program in the United States, has also made waves. Dominion's approach, which focuses on residential undergrounding, stands out for its use of directional boring, a technology that minimizes surface disruptions and tree cutting. Additionally, Dominion's extensive community outreach campaigns have gained widespread public support. Scenic America collaborated with Dominion to produce a comprehensive case study on their undergrounding program, which outlines the technical considerations, regulatory hurdles, and customer communication strategies that have contributed to its success. This case study is now being used as a model for other utilities seeking to launch similar programs.

The technological advancements driving these undergrounding efforts are equally impressive. Scenic America has been closely working with organizations like **S&C Electric** and **EarthGrid** to highlight cutting-edge technologies that make undergrounding more feasible and cost-effective. For example, S&C Electric's EdgeRestore system has revolutionized underground distribution by enabling faster fault detection and power rerouting, reducing outages, and ensuring greater grid reliability. Likewise, EarthGrid's plasma-powered boring technology has drawn attention for its ability to bore through rock without the use of chemicals, minimizing surface disruptions and preserving landscapes in urban and environmentally sensitive areas.



EarthGrid's plasma boring technology blasting through limestone. Photo from EarthGrid

Scenic America's collaborations extend to **SOO Green**, a project that is pioneering the undergrounding of high-voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission lines. By placing these transmission lines along existing railroad rights-of-way, SOO Green minimizes environmental disturbances and accelerates permitting processes. Scenic America's forthcoming case study on this project will detail the unique methods used to bring renewable energy from Iowa to Illinois, a significant step in supporting the country's transition to a cleaner energy grid.

Another key partnership in Scenic America's undergrounding campaign is with **The Ray, NextGen Highways**, and **Environmental Defense Fund**, all of which are exploring innovative ways to co-locate utility infrastructure alongside highways. These initiatives not only protect the environment by reducing the need to disturb new land but also create new opportunities for renewable energy generation. The Ray's work in Walton County, Florida, has already demonstrated the potential of these "highway ecosystems," where underground transmission lines coexist with pollinator habitats and renewable energy projects.

Scenic America's advocacy efforts are not just about pushing for technological innovation or influencing policy. They are about protecting the natural beauty of the American landscape while simultaneously addressing public safety and environmental sustainability. Undergrounding not only prevents wildfires and reduces power outages but it also protects habitats, reduces tree cutting, and preserves the visual integri-

ty of our most treasured vistas.

As the organization continues to build relationships with stakeholders, including utility companies, technology innovators, and environmental advocates, Scenic America's role in promoting undergrounding will only grow. The organization's work has already led to several critical successes, and its continued efforts promise to make undergrounding a central part of America's infrastructure future.

In addition to the partnerships with utility companies like PG&E and Dominion, Scenic America's long-standing relationship with the **Power Delivery Intelligence Initiative** (PDI<sup>2</sup>) has been integral to the organization's influence within the industry. PDI<sup>2</sup>, which provides technical expertise on undergrounding, has recently reviewed and approved Scenic America's economic impact report. This report serves as a key tool in persuading utilities and regulators that undergrounding is not only beneficial for the environment and public safety but also economically viable.

As we look forward to the next phase of this ambitious initiative, Scenic America is poised to continue shaping the undergrounding landscape. With ongoing projects in transmission undergrounding, innovative urban solutions, and increased regulatory engagement, the organization is helping to lay the groundwork—literally—for a safer, more beautiful, and more resilient future.



**2023 Best in Show**  
**Best in Class - Highways, Roads, and Byways:**  
*Curves* by Sue Mangan

# America's Scenic Beauty in Focus

*Third-annual 'America the Beautiful' Photo Contest celebrates scenic beauty through the lens of everyday Americans.*

Scenic America's 2023 *America the Beautiful* Photo Contest once again brought into focus the breathtaking beauty of our nation. Submissions poured in from across the nation, with entries spanning mountains, rivers, urban parks, and historic landmarks, showcasing the diversity and magnificence of the American environment.

Our 2023 contest saw over 800 submissions from over 300 different photographers of every skill level. The People's Choice category, which was a public vote, saw over 1,400 people participating and casting votes for their favorites, making this year's contest one of the most popular yet. The surge in participation is a testament to both the contest's growing visibility and the collective desire of people to highlight the scenic treasures found in their own backyards. Our judges were tasked with selecting winners that captured scenic beauty and embodied the spirit of the places Americans hold dear. These images serve as powerful reminders of the natural and built beauty that unites the country.

Max Duchaine, Scenic America's communications director, spoke on the significance of engaging the public in this effort to document America's beauty. "There's something special about seeing America's beauty through the eyes of its people," Duchaine said. "Every photograph is a testament to how deeply people are connected to their landscapes and communities. This contest is more than just about stunning imagery; it's about capturing the essence of the places that make America unique and worth preserving."

As Scenic America continues to promote conservation and the preservation of scenic beauty, the growth of the America the Beautiful Photo Contest marks a powerful way for the public to become involved in this mission. By sharing their personal perspectives of beauty, participants help inspire others to appreciate and protect the very landscapes that define the nation's identity.



**Animals - Best in Class**  
*Indigo Bunting in the Sunflowers* by John Zgonina



**Beaches - Best in Class**  
*Cape Disappointment* by Kris Schmidt



**Cities and Towns - Best in Class**  
*Kerry Park in Seattle* by Mark Krancer



**Mountains - Best in Class**  
*Tunnel View Sunset After Snow Storm* by Bill Dodd



**Trees - Best in Class**  
*Spring Morning on Lake Dauetrive* by Gregory LeBlanc



**Rivers - Best in Class**  
*Deception Sunset* by David Demarest



**People's Choice - Winner**  
*Sunset Splendor* by Patti Cantrell



**People - Best in Class**  
*Sylvania Wilderness* by Larry Farley



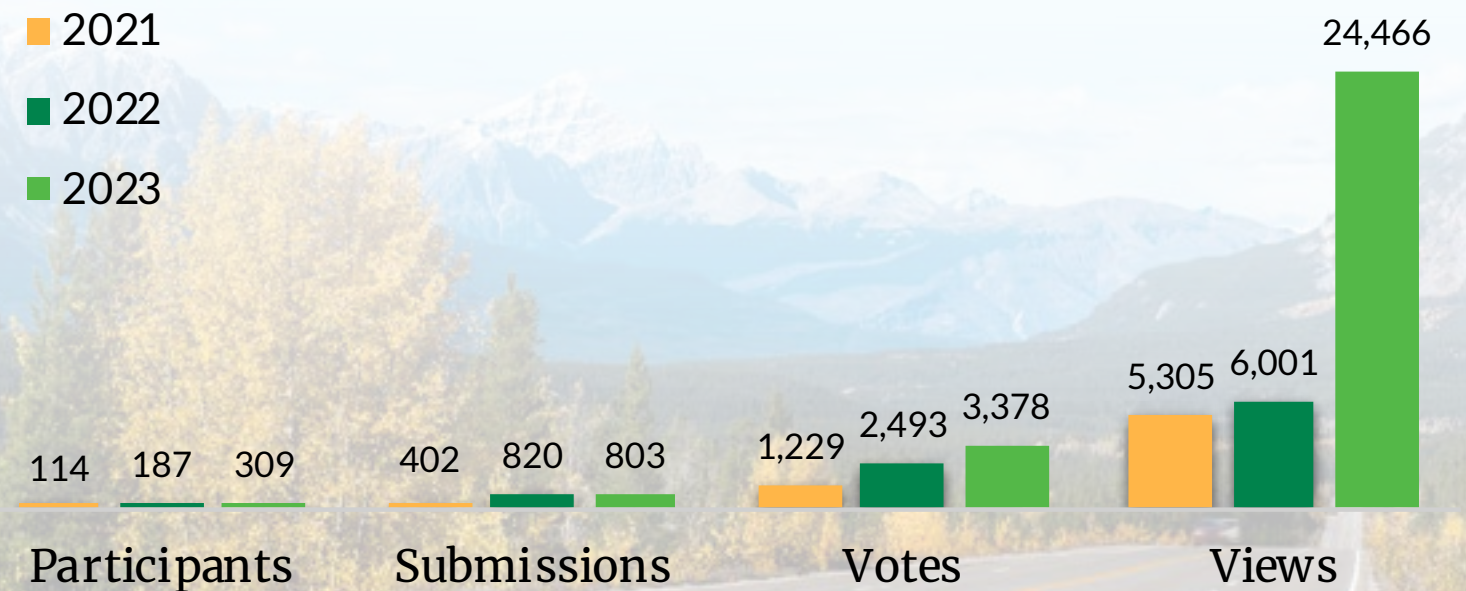
**SCENIC  
 AMERICA**



**Parks and Open Spaces - Best in Class**  
*On the Wisecarver Farm* by Sue Wisecarver

## Contest Growth

The third edition of our *America the Beautiful* Photo Contest saw continued growth in participants, votes, and views, proving to be the most successful contest yet.



## All 2023 *America the Beautiful* Photo Contest Winners

You can see all winners of the 2023 photo contest online at [scenic.org](https://scenic.org).



Photo by Alan Terwilleger

# Updates from Scenic America Chapters

*Our closest organizational partners across the country enjoyed a year marked by growth and big wins.*

**Scenic America’s seven chapter organizations have been hard at work promoting scenic conservation issues in their respective communities. Their efforts have increased the awareness of scenic issues and have resulted in victories and developments that tell a tale of commitment, dedication, and stewardship. We are proud to work with our partners in Los Angeles, Missouri, Nevada, Pittsburgh, Prince George’s County, MD, Tennessee, and Walton County, FL.**

## Scenic Los Angeles

Over the past year, Scenic Los Angeles has been at the forefront of a critical battle against the expansion of digital billboards across the city. In particular, the chapter has focused its efforts on opposing Metro’s Transportation Communication Network (TCN), a project that aims to install digital billboards along freeway-facing Metro-owned properties. Scenic Los Angeles has raised significant concerns regarding the negative impact these signs would have on traffic

safety, public finances, and the visual integrity of the city. They have worked tirelessly to demand independent analyses on the project’s financial and safety impacts, emphasizing that City Hall must prioritize public interest over private advertising profits. Scenic Los Angeles’ advocacy has gained momentum, with legal opinions and statements challenging the TCN’s compliance with city ordinances and calling for greater transparency from both Metro and the city government.

In addition to its fight against the TCN, Scenic Los Angeles has continued to address the ongoing issue of illegal billboards throughout the city. The chapter has exposed numerous instances where billboards have been installed without permits or in violation of local regulations, contributing to visual blight and undermining the city’s aesthetic values. Through public awareness campaigns and legal actions, Scenic Los Angeles has pressured the city to enforce its billboard laws more rigorously and hold companies accountable. Their efforts have drawn significant me-

dia attention, sparking citywide conversations about the long-term impacts of unchecked billboard proliferation on both public spaces and community safety. Scenic Los Angeles remains committed to preserving the unique visual character of the city by ensuring that regulations are upheld and public interests are protected.

## Scenic Missouri

With the approval and completion of the Ozark Run Scenic Byway project, the Missouri Department of Transportation (MODOT) began installation of signage along the 78-mile scenic and historic route. Before it was even completed, other counties asked to be included. And so, Scenic Missouri has been preparing phase II—the expansion of the byway. This phase adds 257 driving miles to the existing byway, creating a route that spans 335 miles. The corridor management plan for this expansion has been submitted to MODOT, and the official review process has begun.



With the recent approval of the \$2.8 billion Improve I-70 project, which will widen the highway from four to six lanes across the state, Scenic Missouri has been involved in advocating for landscaping and beautification elements to be included in the designs. We have been focused for many years on this issue, because Missouri’s stretch of I-70 boasts 2.5 times more billboards per mile than any other state on the 2,151-mile highway between Maryland and Utah.

In conjunction with the Improve I-70 efforts, Scenic Missouri introduced a resolution in the Missouri House of Representatives proposing a five-year moratorium on the construction or upgrade of billboards along I-70 during the construction period. MO-HR-4119 also recommended that the governor set up a select committee to review designs and to suggest standards that would favor beautification along the roadway.

## Scenic Nevada

Earlier this year, a Washoe County district court judge in Reno agreed to prohibit two of three tall signs Scenic Nevada opposed in a lawsuit that was filed against the city of Reno and property developers looking to remake a large section of west downtown Reno. Scenic Nevada argued that the signs proposed for the development violated the city’s billboard ban and didn’t meet sign code requirements.



Their ongoing fight continues because the city and developers have appealed the judge’s order. Most of the last year has been spent fighting to uphold Reno’s sign codes and the billboard ban, which was authored by Scenic Nevada and approved by the voters over 20 years ago. The appeal is now before the Nevada Supreme Court and we’re hoping for a favorable decision sometime in 2024.

## Scenic Pittsburgh

Over the past year, Scenic Pittsburgh has made great progress in enhancing the city’s landscape and preserving its scenic beauty. A key achievement was the completion of the Colwell Connector greenspace project, which transformed an underutilized area in Pittsburgh’s Hill District into a vibrant, community-friendly space. This restoration effort underscores Scenic Pittsburgh’s commitment to revitalizing urban areas with green infrastructure that benefits both the environment and the residents. Another notable project was the ongoing restoration of the Allegheny River Boulevard Scenic Byway. Scenic Pittsburgh collaborated with local stakeholders to remove invasive vegetation and improve scenic vistas along the route, preserving the historic byway’s natural beauty and ensuring that future generations can enjoy its views.

## Scenic Prince George's

Scenic Prince George's continued its work with local and community organizations to beautify and protect urban and public spaces with tree planting initiatives and advocacy campaigns for smart and sustainable development. We concluded our partnership with Joe's Movement Emporium which brought new trees to urban spaces in Prince George's County through community outreach and participation in neighborhood events. This also expanded Scenic Prince George's presence in the community, which will have a positive impact on future efforts.

We also maintained a presence at Prince George's County government meetings and proceedings regarding a shortsighted proposal to relocate a homeless shelter near a residential development. We pressed the County to consider more accommodating locations closer to vital services and employment opportunities for the shelter's residents, which were lacking in the original proposal. These efforts have created a positive relationship between Scenic Prince George's and other likeminded organizations through participation in the Coalition of Central Prince George's County Community Organizations.

## Scenic Tennessee

Scenic Tennessee spent most of 2023 developing a proposal to reestablish the Tennessee Vistas project through a partnership with the Tennessee Department of Transportation. The proposal, which will bring together Scenic Tennessee and Scenic America, will spotlight scenic vistas from around the state on an interactive digital map. The interface will allow users to identify the closest scenic views in their area, nominate other views for inclusion in the program, and learn about efforts to maintain these views. Work is expected to begin on this project in 2024 and continue through 2025.

## Scenic Walton

Over the past year, Scenic Walton has made great progress in enhancing the visual and environmental quality of Walton County, FL. One of the organization's most visible successes was the launch of a specialty license plate featuring the iconic 30A logo, which has already raised \$84,000 to support local beautification and preservation efforts. The funds from these plates are being allocated to a variety of community projects, including Gateway Landscape Projects along US 98, aimed at improving the aesthetics of entry points to Walton County. Additionally, Scenic Walton celebrated Florida Arbor Day in Miramar Beach by organizing tree plantings and community events, further emphasizing the importance of scenic beauty and environmental stewardship.



Scenic Walton has also been actively involved in infrastructure improvements and policy advocacy to protect the scenic character of the region. The Inlet Beach underpass project and the East Camp Creek Lake right-of-way improvements are key developments enhancing safety and visual appeal along major roadways. Meanwhile, the organization championed the DeFuniak Springs billboard ordinance, which strengthens regulations on outdoor advertising to preserve the area's scenic views. Scenic Walton's utility undergrounding initiative is another transformative effort, with long-term goals of reducing visual clutter and enhancing hurricane resilience by burying unsightly power lines. Through these initiatives, Scenic Walton continues to elevate the natural and built environments of Florida's Gulf Coast communities.

# Expanding Impact: Partnerships for Growth and Success

*Scenic America expands its national impact through strategic partnerships to preserve and enhance America's scenic beauty and promote sustainable development.*

**Over the last year, Scenic America significantly expanded its footprint and elevated its brand awareness and outreach by forming and deepening strategic partnerships with key businesses, corporations, and federal agencies. These collaborations provided and extended access to additional resources to amplify our efforts and furthered our mission of preserving the scenic beauty and character of America's landscapes and communities.**

## Trees for Test Drives: Replanting American Forests with BMW

One of the most prominent examples of strategic partnership at work is our ongoing collaboration with BMW North America through our "Trees for Test Drives" campaign. To date, Scenic America and BMW have partnered for three campaigns—two in 2023

and one thus far in 2024—allowing participants to test drive BMW electric vehicles (EVs) while contributing to critical reforestation efforts. For every test drive, a tree is planted, and through these three individual campaigns, 30,000 trees have been planted. Many of these trees have been used to help restore forests in fire-damaged areas, making this partnership a key contributor to environmental restoration efforts.

The BMW partnership has expanded Scenic America's footprint and profile. Through this initiative, Scenic America's name and branding have been prominently featured on the BMW website, bringing national attention to our conservation efforts. The partnership also creates new relationships with electric vehicle owners—a growing demographic that shares Scenic America's commitment to sustainability—and with BMW dealers across the nation. Scenic America's mission is now reaching BMW dealerships throughout North America, allowing us to tap into new audiences and promote our values of environmental stewardship and scenic conservation in fresh and impactful ways.



## Mapping America's Back Country Byways with the Bureau of Land Management

Scenic America also began a partnership with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to launch the Back Country Byways and Byways on BLM Land Project, which has become a key initiative in expanding Scenic America's byways mapping capabilities. This three-year project will create GPS-enabled maps of 54 BLM-designated back country byways, along with 35 state and national scenic byways that pass-through BLM lands. The project greatly enhances Scenic

America's GIS and mapping portfolio, as it contributes to the organization's larger goal of mapping all scenic byways across the country.

Through this partnership, Scenic America will provide travelers with detailed route information for some of the nation's most scenic and remote byways, increasing access to these natural treasures while promoting safe and responsible travel. The digital maps will be available on Scenic America's newly launched scenic-byways.org website and will be shared across both the BLM and Department of the Interior (DOI) websites, greatly expanding Scenic America's reach to federal audiences and public lands enthusiasts.

This collaboration with the BLM also reinforces Scenic America's role in making scenic byways more accessible to a broader audience, particularly in underserved rural communities. As such, Scenic America will not only provide the public with travel information but also guide new visitors to areas that can benefit from increased tourism and economic growth. For example, we are collecting and mapping features along each byway that support DEIA initiatives. The project aligns with the BLM and DOI's priorities of promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, and helps to bring Scenic America's conservation message to a wider and more diverse set of stakeholders.



Photo by Amy Abernethy

## Promoting Placemaking with the National Trust for Historic Preservation

Another example of partnership for scenic conservation is our continued collaboration with the National Trust for Historic Preservation on a project titled "Placemaking in America: Case Studies for Communities with Character." This initiative focuses on developing case studies that highlight how communities can preserve their character while evolving to meet the needs of both residents and businesses. The project places a particular emphasis on diverse community leaders who are driving these efforts.

Through this placemaking project, Scenic America will develop six case studies showcasing communities with a range of socioeconomic and physical diversity. The coming batch of case studies will focus on Carlisle, PA, Easton, MD, Abingdon, VA, Athens, GA, Fredericksburg, TX, and Olympia, WA.

Each case study will include a detailed community profile, enriched with historical images and before-and-after photos, as well as profiles on community preservation and design leaders. These case studies will serve as a resource for civic leaders, providing them with tools, templates, and best practices for thoughtful community development.

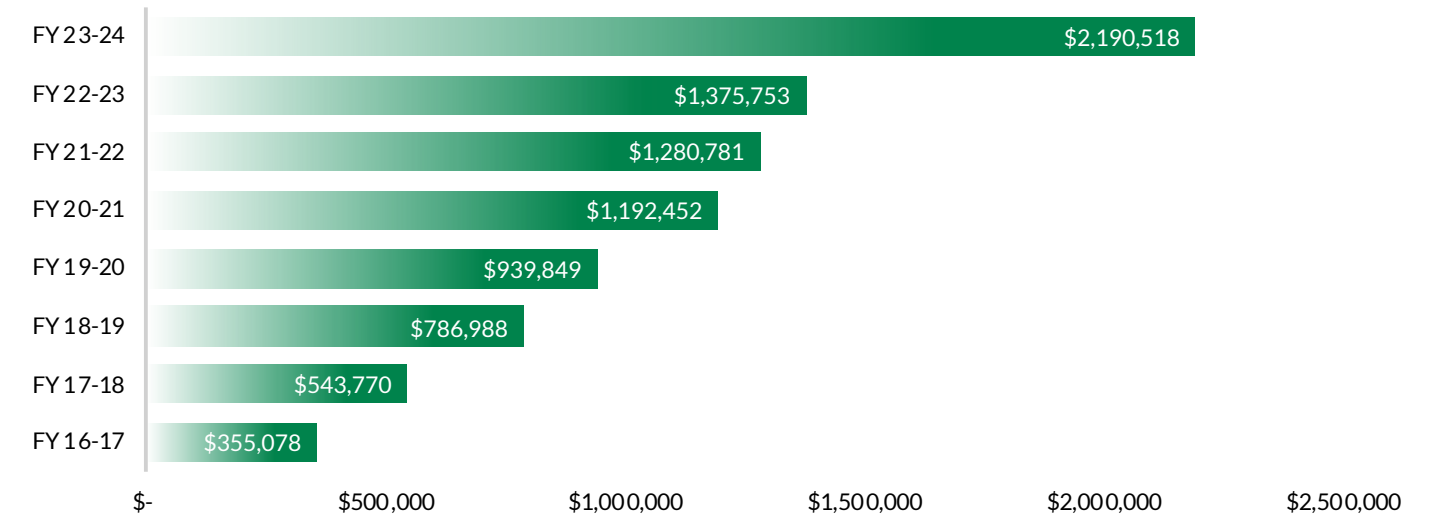
The scope of this project addresses critical issues such as planning and zoning codes, adaptive reuse ordinances, and mixed-use developments, all while emphasizing the needs of marginalized communities that are disproportionately affected by visual blight. Scenic America's case studies will offer actionable tips, tools, and downloadable resources that can guide communities toward equitable and inclusive development.

Scenic America's growing network of partnerships is a reflection of the organization's expanding influence and ability to drive change. With each partnership, Scenic America is better equipped to protect America's scenic beauty and enhance the quality of life for communities across the country. As the organization looks forward to 2025, these partnerships will continue to play a crucial role in achieving Scenic America's goals and preserving the places that make our nation special.

# Growing Forward

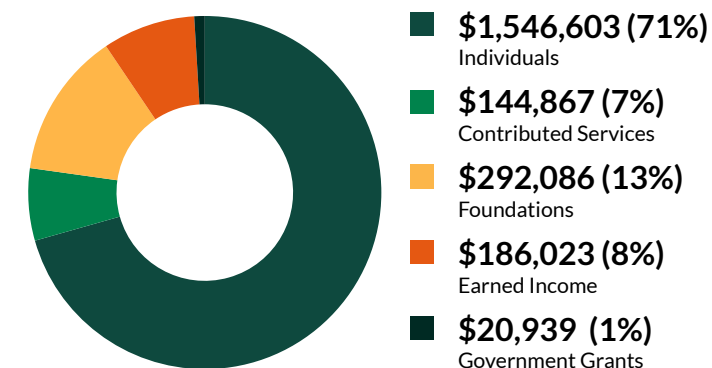
The 2023-2024 fiscal year was Scenic America's strongest ever with revenue exceeding \$2 million. Thanks to record-breaking fundraising, this growth represents a nearly 60% increase from the previous year, and a nearly 180% increase over the last five years.

## Revenue Year-Over-Year

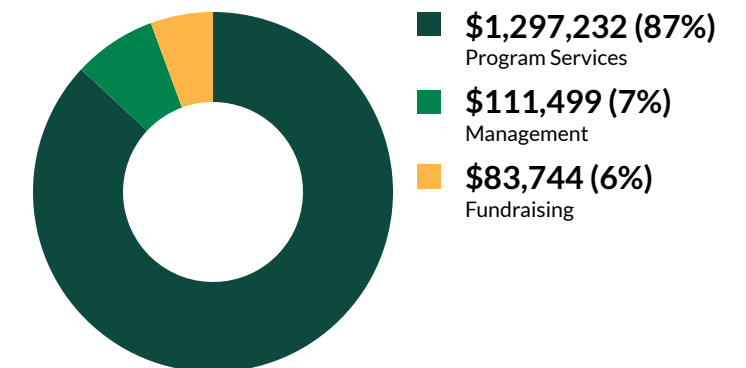


## Financials: Fiscal Year 2023-2024

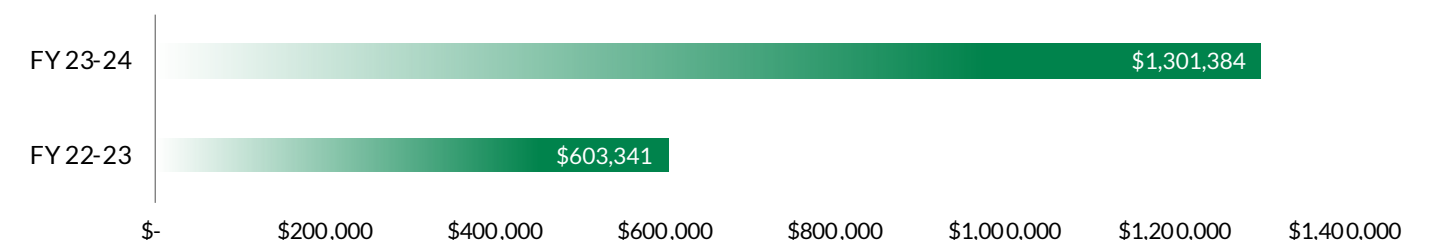
### Total Revenue: \$2,190,518



### Total Expenses: \$1,492,475



### Net Assets: \$1,301,384



# Create Your Scenic Legacy: Our *Planned Giving Society*

*Scenic America offers a new way for supporters to make a lasting impact on scenic conservation.*

America's scenic beauty, historic sites, and cherished vistas are constantly under threat from development and environmental challenges. Supporting Scenic America through a planned gift is one of the most impactful ways to ensure that these irreplaceable treasures are preserved for generations to come.

Scenic America's *Planned Giving Society* was formed to recognize those who include Scenic America in their estate plans. Established in honor of Cornelius "Neil" Ridgely, a lifelong advocate for scenic conservation and a devoted supporter, who named Scenic America in his will before passing in 2023. This generosity and enduring dedication inspired us to launch the *Planned Giving Society*, ensuring that others can follow his example.

Members of the *Planned Giving Society* can contribute through various means, including bequests, gifts of retirement assets, or life insurance policies. We provide sample legal language and personalized assistance to help supporters craft a legacy that aligns with their philanthropic goals.

We are honored to count Martha Fuller Clark among our inaugural *Planned Giving Society* members. "I am committed to continuing my mother's legacy through my involvement with Scenic America, the organization she helped form," said Fuller Clark, a member of Scenic America's Board of Directors and a former New Hampshire State Senator. "This dedication has been a lifelong endeavor, which is why I've taken steps to ensure this commitment endures beyond my time."

Ardis Wood, Chair of Scenic Chatham and former Scenic America Board Member, also chose to support Scenic America through her estate plans. "The inspiration I derive from beauty fuels my passion for supporting Scenic America's mission," said Wood. "This organization's unique focus on preserving the visual environment resonates deeply with me, as it contributes to a sense of patriotism and inspiration."

Through planned giving, individuals can make a lasting difference by ensuring the preservation of America's most treasured landscapes. Membership in the *Planned Giving Society* allows supporters to continue safeguarding the country's scenic beauty, enhancing its character, and protecting places that inspire all who experience them.

We invite you to consider joining the Scenic America *Planned Giving Society* to leave a legacy of scenic beauty that will endure for generations to come. For more information, please visit our *Planned Giving* webpage at [scenic.org/planned-giving](https://scenic.org/planned-giving).

# Support Our Work

Our work is not done. Every day, we learn of new threats to the scenic beauty we strive to preserve and protect. To continue to grow and advance our mission in a challenging political environment, we rely on contributions from individuals and corporations who share our vision for America the Beautiful.

Your contribution will assist Scenic America in our mission to help citizens safeguard the scenic qualities of America's roadways, countryside, and communities. Support Scenic America by donating online at [scenic.org/donate](https://scenic.org/donate) or by mailing a check to the address below. Learn about our *Planned Giving Society* at [scenic.org/plannedgiving](https://scenic.org/plannedgiving).

Scenic America  
1012 14th Street NW  
Suite 1108  
Washington, DC 20005



One of the simplest and most efficient ways to support Scenic America is by donating at work through Earthshare, a network of more than 400 local, state, national, and international environmental and conservation organizations.

Learn more at [earthshare.org](https://earthshare.org)

All contributions are 100% tax-deductible. For questions about gifts of appreciated stock or estate planning please contact us at 202.792.1300.

Photo by Brian Smith



Photo by Virgil Warner



Photo by Shanna Stawicki



Photo by Bill Dodd



Photo by Thomas Cluderay



Photo by Carolyn Silvernail



Photo by Lee Ann Van Cour



Photo by Robbie Hickman



Photo by Robert Makley



Photo by Safata Safotu





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Cover photo:  
*Curves* by Sue Mangan  
2023 Photo Contest *Best in Show*

Photos featured on inside covers all received  
honors from our 2023 Photo Contest