

# M-119 TUNNEL OF TREES

Management Council/Committee Meeting

June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025 at 9:30

**Location:** Readmond Township Hall

**Address:** 6034 Wormwood Ln, Harbor Springs, MI 49740

**Meeting Link:** Zoom Meeting

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/71130648706?pwd=AzLf14vyhFsP0ZbzEc2Wclr4Q1mlht.1>

Meeting ID: 711 3064 8706

Passcode: 3vPiHn



1. Call to Order
2. Additions to Agenda (Action Item - if any)
3. Approval of Previous Minutes: May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025 (Action Item)
4. Chair Opening remarks / Thank you to Joe Tomlinson
5. Public Comment
6. Subcommittee Updates/Recommendations
  - A. Management Plan Review Committee
7. Committee Member Comments
8. Partner Updates
  - A. Networks Northwest
  - B. MDOT:
    - a. North Region (Follow up on ice storm cleanup of M-119 from Ben Dubois)
    - b. Pure MI Byways
  - C. County Representatives:
    - a. Emmet County Planning and Zoning
  - D. Municipal Representatives:
    - a. Friendship Township
    - b. Readmond Township
    - c. Cross village Township
    - d. West Traverse Township
  - E. Organization Representatives:
    - a. Little Traverse Conservancy



b. Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians

9. Public Comment

10. Old Business

- A. Item 1: Use of zoom type access to meetings – viability?
- B. Item 2: 2025 Work plan - Signage repair proposals
- C. Item 3: Ice storm public info session update
- D. Item 4: DALMAC & Zoo-de-Mack updates
- E. Item 5: Begin work on Fiscal Year 2026 Work Plan/Activities
  - a. Management Plan – Planning activities priority list
  - b. Identify FY26 Work Plan Items
- F. Item 7: Leadership discussion – Formalize process for leadership rotation.
- G. Item 8: Website updates review

11. New Business

12. Next Meeting/Adjournment

Next meeting: Tuesday, July 8, 2025 West Traverse Township Hall – 8001 M-119 Harbor Springs, MI 49740 at 9:30 AM.



# M-119 TUNNEL OF TREES

## Management Council/Committee **Draft Meeting Minutes**

May 13, 2025 at 9:30

**Location:** Friendship Township Hall  
3018 S Beacon Hill Ln, Harbor Springs, MI 49740

**Meeting Link:** Zoom Meeting  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2319295012?omn=81076301746>  
Meeting ID: 231 929 5012



### Present

Naomi Singer, Cross Village Township  
Carolyn Sandford, West Traverse Township  
Laurelynn Harris, Cross Village Township  
Joey Arbaugh, West Traverse Township  
Sue Rentrop, Cross Village / Emmet County Lakeshore Association  
Dale Scott, Friendship Township (Chair)  
Garon Gopigian, West Traverse Township  
Franz Neubrecht, Emmet County Lakeshore Association  
Jim Anderson, Friendship Township  
Don Schaplowsky, Readmond Township

Isha Pithwa, Networks Northwest  
Corey Hebner, Friendship Township, Michigan State Police  
Clayton Sigmann, MDOT  
Ben Dubois, MDOT North Region  
Laura Moreau, Emmet County Planning and Zoning Director

### Online presence

James Fisher, Friendship Township  
Jerry Root, Readmond Township  
Ami Woods, Re  
Sherry Jones, Re

### Absent

Joe Tomlinson, Readmond Township - Resigned



## 1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:35 AM by Chair Dale Scott. Attendance was recorded for those present and of online participants.

## 2. Additions to Agenda and Approval of Agenda:

- Jim Anderson has a report regarding the DALMAC Group
- Agenda approval not needed

## 3. Approval of Previous Minutes: April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025 (Action Item)

*Motion by Jim Anderson, supported by Sue Rentrop, to approve the April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2025 meeting minutes. All in favor. None opposed. Motion passed unanimously.*

## 4. Chair Opening remarks (Ref- See attachment)

Dale Scott, Chair reported with opening remarks. See attachment with the meeting minutes.

(Ref- See attachment)

## 5. Public Comment

None

## 6. Subcommittee Updates/Recommendations

### A. Management Plan Review Committee

- Dale Scott reported that the Management Plan Review Committee was formed at the previous meeting, although no formal name was assigned at that time. The committee consists of Dale Scott, Jim Anderson, Naomi, and Garon Gopigian. The group did not meet in person but exchanged information via email. Members reviewed both past and current versions of the Management Plan and identified several priorities for the upcoming fiscal year:
  1. Initiate and/or participate in a session to educate our community concerning the best practices for the continued cleanup and recovery from the Great Ice Storm of 2025
  2. Complete a tree health assessment.
  3. Support and promote outdoor lighting standards (dark skies/night sky viewing).
  4. Maintain the M-119 website and update as needed. Ensure that the website and its content are appropriately accessible.
  5. Schedule educational summits.



(Ref- See attachment)

## 7. Committee Member Comments

- Naomi noted that a historical review of the Management Plans confirmed that the process originated to satisfy requirements for designation as a Scenic Heritage Route and receive approval by legislature. Although the committee's operational efforts may have evolved, the overarching mission has remained consistent. Naomi also clarified that committee members are appointed by their respective township boards and serve in a volunteer capacity. Updates to the Management Plan or over all byways updates are typically communicated back to township boards.
- Garon Gopigian proposed the addition of a sixth priority item:
  6. Reinforce the charter and mission to "Preserve and Protect the Heritage Highway."
 This item is intended to serve as a foundational principle for all planning and project efforts, ensuring alignment with the committee's core values and purpose.
- No further comments or additions were provided by other members.
- See attachment of the email and discussion Re: Management Plan Review Committee

## 8. Partner Updates

### A. Networks Northwest:

- Isha Pithwa reported that, following the April meeting, there were ongoing discussions with MDOT, Emmet County, and Chair Dale regarding several items, including the presentation materials, the Work Plan, updated templates, educational components, recent program changes, and the M-119 website.
- Isha noted that the website is currently not displaying the updated agenda and meeting minutes due to a technical issue. Coordination with LIAA is underway to resolve the glitch, and a meeting with an LIAA representative is planned to assist with implementing website updates and page edits.
- Committee members were encouraged to review the M-119 website and email any suggestions, edits, or updates so they can be incorporated. One of the planned edits includes featuring upcoming meetings, events, or updates more prominently on the homepage.
- Additional materials and updates, including a report from Zoo de Mack, were included in the meeting packet. Further details will be discussed under Item 10.D.A: "Organization Representative Updates – Zoo de Mack Report for May 16–18, 2025." Communications with Regina from Zoo de Mack – shared flyers.
- Lastly, a reminder was provided that the FY2026 Work Plan submission to MDOT is due by July 1st. The draft Work Plan must be finalized and approved at the June meeting.



## B. MDOT:

### a. North Region –

- Ben Dubois provided an update on the planned FY2026 chip seal project for M-119. This project is intended as a maintenance measure to seal the roadway, continuing current work such as filling ruts.
- In response to a question regarding storm debris cleanup, Ben stated that the issue would be discussed with MDOT's resource analyst, and the North Region office in Gaylord would follow up with additional information.
- Garon Gopigian inquired whether this year's chip seal project would include any roadside work, as was done in a previous year when MDOT offered chip seal material to M-119 corridor people. Ben responded that the excess material typically gets brushed off with the initial layer and is then covered by the fog seal. However, he will confirm this with the project team and report back.
- He also noted he would look into whether Tod Neiss, MDOT's resource analyst, could attend the next meeting to provide additional clarity. Garon added that having someone from MDOT present helps the committee better understand what falls under MDOT's responsibility versus other entities involved in roadway management.

### b. Pure MI Byways - Program updates (30 mins– presentation)

- Clayton Sigmund gave a presentation on the Pure Michigan Byways Program. (See attached presentation for details).
- (Ref- See attachment)
- Topics covered included:
  - o Program History & Overview
  - o Management of Byways
  - o Overview of the M-119 Byway
  - o Benefits of a Byway Designation
  - o Roles and Responsibilities
  - o Best Practice Examples
- Discussion:
  - o There was a discussion about the start and end points of the M-119 Byway designation—specifically whether Harbor Springs was included. Naomi provided background on how the townships were incorporated into the designation.
  - o Garon G. raised concerns about state responsibilities, stating that although the state does a good job with branding and promotion, they collect substantial revenue from the Byway yet provide little support in terms of patrolling, safety enforcement,





preventing parking on private property, trash cleanup, or funding for portable restrooms. Clayton clarified that these concerns fall under the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC).

- The discussion continued regarding law enforcement presence. Garon shared that he had made multiple calls about parking and patrolling but received no response from the police. In response, Corey H. explained that the state police actively patrol the area daily. He mentioned that he lives in the area, patrols the issues as well as had given tickets.
- Dale concluded by emphasizing that this marks a new chapter in collaboration with the Byways Committee. He stated that while current practices don't need to be completely overhauled, it is essential to build a cooperative relationship with the state program and all stakeholders moving forward.

### C. County Representatives:

#### a. Emmet County Planning and Zoning (10 mins– presentation)

- Laura M. gave a presentation on Marketing and Outreach for M-119 TOT and website (See attached presentation for more details)
- (Ref- See attachment)
- Topics covered included:
  - Talked briefly about messaging and outreach for the byway and its importance and what it does.
  - Emphasizing marketing as a tool for education and communication, rather than promotion.
  - Suggestions for short- and long-term next steps for messaging to Tunnel of Trees visitors, including development of a visitor guide, updates to website content, and linking the Pure Michigan Byways website to official M-119 website instead of Facebook page.
- Discussion:
  - The group agreed with the presentation's recommendations, particularly the short-term action items such as updating the website. Members emphasized that the M-119 website should appear at the top of search engine results.
  - Isha asked the group to review the M-119 website and send her suggested edits, additions, or deletions via email so minor updates can be made promptly.
  - Isha will also contact LIAA to inquire whether the M-119 website can be prioritized in search engine results over the Facebook page. Work with reorganize the site and ensure it effectively communicates the corridor's message.

*Motion by Naomi S., supported by Garon Gopigian, for Isha to request that the Pure Michigan Byways website update its current link from the Facebook page to the official M-119 website. All*



*in favor. None opposed. Motion passed unanimously.*

- Other comments - Laurelynne shared a comparison between M-119 (Tunnel of Trees) and a similar scenic route—Highway 89A between Prescott and Jerome, Arizona. While the Arizona route involves a steep mountain climb, there are notable similarities such as popularity among motorcyclists and cyclists, narrow winding roads, and safety concerns. She highlighted user-generated content from RV Magazine, Airstream Club, and various YouTube reviews. Laurelynne suggested that examining how the Prescott–Jerome corridor manages similar issues could offer useful insights for M-119 planning and communication efforts. (Ref- See attachment)

**D. Municipal Representatives:**

- a. Friendship Township - None
- b. Readmond Township - None
- c. Cross village Township - None
- d. West Traverse Township - None

**E. Organization Representatives:**

- a. Little Traverse Conservancy - None
- b. Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians - None

**9. Public Comment**

- Clayton Sigmund noted that, during the last meeting, someone mentioned that Readmond Township was exploring the development of a recreation plan f M-119. He shared that he recently met with the Office of Rural Prosperity and brought up the idea of a recreation plan. They informed him that grant funding opportunities will be available in approximately two weeks, should there be any interest in pursuing them. Dale responded that this topic could be discussed further under Item 10.B, Item 2: Readmond Proposals Concerning Restroom Facilities.
- No other Comments

**10. Old Business**

**A. Item 1: Ice Storm Updates & Possible Arborist Public Session.**

- Dale noted that several committee members have suggested it would be beneficial to organize a symposium or public informational session—possibly in June or July—focused on the aftermath of the ice storm and its impact on trees along the Tunnel of Trees corridor and in the broader community.





- The proposed session would feature an arborist to provide guidance on tree health, remediation strategies, appropriate species for replanting, and long-term restoration efforts. The idea is to support both education and community engagement on how best to care for and restore damaged trees along the corridor as well as larger to community. Carolyn expressed support for the idea and reinforced the need for community guidance and technical input.
- During the discussion, it was noted that the City of Petoskey has a qualified arborist who could be a potential speaker. Additionally, Paul Mathews was mentioned as a possible contact. Joey Arbaugh volunteered to reach out to Paul, and Carolyn offered to assist.

## **B. Item 2: Readmond proposals concerning Rest Room Facilities**

- Dale introduced the topic and noted that one of the townships had previously brought it up. He asked Jim Fisher to elaborate. James Fisher shared that, there was insufficient information provided by the township to support or evaluate the proposal. Opinions on the idea were mixed—some felt it was worthwhile, while others were unsure or opposed. Overall, there was not enough detail available for Friendship Township or other townships to consider contributing funds at this time. Dale asked if there were any additional comments or discussion. None
- Clayton added that the Office of Rural Prosperity may have grants available—potentially up to \$50,000—that could support the development of a recreation plan. However, the initiative would need to come from the township. If townships are interested, they can contact him for more information. Dale acknowledged the information and suggested tabling further discussion for now until more details are available.

## **C. Item 3: Adopt-a-highway Program**

## **D. Item 4: Zoo-de-Mac**

### **a. Report for May 16, 17, 18, 2025 event**

- Isha Reached out and received a report from Regina from Zoo-de-Mack. See details below:

#### Zoo-De-Mack Report:

- Approximately 30 Port-a-Jons will be placed along the route, with Ski Patrol/safety staff stationed at some locations. Extra units will be placed at Trillium, Good Hart, Pond Hill, Legs Inn, and Cecil Bay Camp Store.
- Coordination has been made with the Sheriff's Department (some officers will be participating in the ride), and all major/busy intersections will be covered.
- As of today, 25 yard signs have been placed throughout the main Tunnel of Trees corridor—from Pond Hill Farm to Cross Village—to alert local residents of the upcoming bike event on Saturday and advise alternate routes.
- Riders are expected to pass through the area between 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m., in



your “neck of the wood” with a few stragglers continuing after that.

- SAG (Service and Gear) vehicles will be available to assist any stranded riders with issues like flat tires, etc.
- Twenty first aid-certified ski/bike patrollers will be deployed in waves to provide safety support along the route.
- Last year they printed new bright yellow signs to remind people to STAY RIGHT when riding and to allow cars to pass
- “Slow Your Roll” signage has been added to alert riders to slow down on steep hills for safety.
- Zoo-de-Mack has been in contact with Brent at the Road Commission to assess road conditions following the ice storm. Brent confirmed that aside from a few potholes, there are no major branches or obstacles on the main roads being used.
- A digital and printed weekend handout is also being distributed with all registration packets, including rules for riders and reminders to respect local private property.
- Zoo-de-Mack expressed that conditions and rider behavior have improved over recent years, and efforts continue to be made each year to enhance safety and minimize community impact.

## **E. Item 5: Review of FY2025 Budget**

### **a. Update on Sign Improvements**

- Dale asked Naomi for an update on the sign improvements or any further communication. Isha mentioned that she had reached out to the contractor, Ken Harris, but had not received a response yet.
- Isha also inquired about a formal contract for the signage work. During her discussion with Ken last year it was mentioned that a final invoice would be provided, which would include all details of the work performed and the agreement terms. Dale emphasized that all of this needs to be completed before the end of September. Clayton noted that the committee should ensure the contracting process follows NN’s official contracting procedures. Isha confirmed that she will follow up with NN staff to gather more information on the appropriate contracting process, as this was not previously clear.

### **b. Printing**

### **c. Website – NN updates**

- Isha contacted LIAA to schedule a meeting for assistance with website changes and resolving issues related to file uploads. Additionally, referring to Laura’s presentation, Isha reminded the committee to review the current M-119 website and email her any suggested edits—such as content updates, additions, or removals—that can be implemented as part of a short-term fix. Dale requested that whenever Isha makes updates to the website, she notify the committee so members have an opportunity to review the changes.



- She will reach out to LIAA about how to improve the website's visibility in internet search results so that the official M-119 website appears first instead of the Facebook page (this might include some cost associated and could be potentially included into planning activity for FY26).

#### **F. Item 6: Begin work on Fiscal Year 2026 Work Plan/Activities**

##### **a. Management Plan – Planning activities priority list**

- Dale referenced the six bullet points previously discussed as potential planning grant activities, including website improvements, as outlined in Item 6.A: Management Plan Review.
- Naomi also suggested that the proposed symposium with arborists could potentially be included in the work plan, as it may involve costs such as printing handouts and other outreach materials.

##### **b. Identify FY26 Work Plan Items**

- Isha reminded the group that these items should be finalized during the June meeting, when the committee will need to draft and approve the FY26 Work Plan in order to meet the July 1 submission deadline. – She also encouraged the group to review the draft work plan template that was previously shared, so the discussion can move forward effectively at the next meeting.

#### **G. Item 7: Leadership discussion**

- Dale noted that a new Chair will need to be appointed beginning October 1, 2025 (FY26), and asked for suggestions on how to approach the process.
- Isha suggested that the group first review the committee's bylaws or consider developing formal bylaws, as they could help guide the process for appointing a new Chair and clarify other procedural matters. She asked if the group would be interested in forming a subcommittee to work on this.
- Dale suggested that reviewing sample bylaws could help and could discuss this next. However, Chair appointment methodology would be a separate issue which still needs to be done regardless of the bylaws.

## **11. New Business**

### **Jim Anderson: DALMAC communications**

- Jim Anderson has been in communication with a representative from the DALMAC bike group. He shared that a representative from DALMAC be invited to attend the next meeting June. Jim encouraged committee members to prepare any questions they may have in advance for the representative.
- DALMAC riders are expected to travel along the corridor from Petoskey to Harbor Springs beginning August 31.

Laurelynn expressed appreciation to the state police assistance and patrolling during the Zoo-de-Mack events.



## Please Sign-In

[illegible]

## Chair Opening Remarks

*Thank Laurel for letters to Kent City +*

Welcome to the May 2025 meeting of our evolving TOT Committee. The times they are a changin'. Not unlike Emmet County, where for as long as I know, we have lived with the feeling that we do not have natural disasters. Well, things have changed. Ten feet has been removed from the canopies of our forests and our roads and yards have been filled with rubble from the storm.

As we move forward as a committee, no one, not Clayton Sigmann from MDOT, who is here with us today, not any of our municipalities, nor I will possibly consider minimizing the efforts of our TOT committee members over the past 20 plus years to further the mission to protect and enhance the beauty and heritage of the corridor or its surrounding areas.

We will, however, over the next 12 to 18 months be making updates and changes to how this committee of concerned citizens operates. During the past 10 to 15 years, our Scenic Heritage Route partners have evolved and we need to do the same with them. The Byways Program, of which we are a part, realizes that it has fallen short in its responsibility to keep our committee abreast of the Program's evolution from the year 2003 to today and is willing to bring us along in a comfortable fashion to a committee that will function within guidelines more befitting of 2025 and the future.

We need not fear that our passion for our mission must change. It is our responsibility to ensure that this does not happen. There are just some adjustments that need to be made so that we can accomplish our mission down the road, so to speak. For example, the term marketing, will no longer refer to an attempt to bring more people to our area, but instead refer to our efforts to bring an awareness of our mission to those who do come.....they will come on their own! As we transition, we may also gain real authority as a committee through modifications to how our members are appointed by and how they communicate with their respective elected township governments.

I am hoping that moving forward from here we as a group of dedicated citizens can forge these changes in the historically cooperative and energetic way that has driven us in the past.

Onward and upward!

Opening Remarks May 13, 2025

Dale Scott – Current Chair

## Subcommittee Updates Re

Naomi Singer <singernaomi@gmail.com>

5/9/2025 10:13 AM

Re: Management Plan Review

To Dale Scott <dscott@trueaccountingcorp.com> Copy garon gopigian <49740@att.net> •  
jim anderson <jcander1@wisc.edu>

Hi all! I reviewed the updated management plan. I feel we actually did a pretty good job looking back 👍. I like Dale's comments. I would add, Under Objective #1 the third bullet down..." monitor potential tree diseases", I think this could be a bigger concern. How about strengthening it with ....examine potential fire hazard, safety and environmental impact from the recent ice storm. This could tie into educating property owners and other community members with the symposium idea or possibly joining other organizations with an educational program. I think this is going to be a huge issue and we could certainly join forces or support what our township and county leaders are doing-even our partners. In summary, I would suggest adding the destruction to the trees along the road and other environmental issues caused by the storm as a priority this year. In my opinion, this is not the time to begin new promotion efforts. Hope this helps. PS As I stated earlier, I think the plan is pretty much on target Thanks, all.  
Sent from my iPhone. Naomi Singer

On May 8, 2025, at 12:48 PM, Dale Scott <dscott@trueaccountingcorp.com> wrote:

Hi All,

Naomi, my apologies for not contacting you earlier after our 4/22/25 TOT meeting. During that meeting we, rather meekly, formed a committee to look at our Management Plan and determine what if any of the Action Steps or Management Measures listed therein could be included in our 2026 work plan and/or budget. Garon, Jim Anderson and I were nominated and appointed to this committee. I was instructed to contact you and ask if you would also participate. I am asking you now and hoping that you can help out.

To all of you:

I am looking at the 2023 Plan Update and see the following:

1. Initiate and/or participate in a session to educate our community concerning the best practices for the continued cleanup and recovery from the Great Ice Storm of 2025.
2. Complete a tree health assessment.
3. Support and promote outdoor lighting standards (dark skies/night sky viewing).



4. Maintain the M-119 website and update as needed. Ensure that the website and its content are appropriately accessible.
5. Schedule educational summits.

If you could all take a look as well and add to or enhance the above list, I would appreciate it.

We can then give a brief report at the May meeting and use the list to help us prepare our fiscal 2026 budget.

Thanks much.

Dale

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## Re: Tunnel of Trees Committee- How Could We Help?

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**Laurelynn Harris** <harris.laurelynn@gmail.com>

Tue, May 13, 2025 at 7:36 PM

To: Dale Scott <dscott@trueaccountingcorp.com>

Cc: Carolyn Sandford <clsandfo@charter.net>, Jerry Root <groot@lssu.edu>, James Fisher <Lakepilot33@gmail.com>, Naomi Singer <singernaomi@gmail.com>, Sue Rentrop <srentrop@rentropmorrison.com>, Joe Tomlinson <smokinjo44@gmail.com>, "anderson, jim" <jcander1@wisc.edu>, Don Schaplowsky <donschap12@gmail.com>, Franz Neubrecht <franz@franzrx.com>, Garon Gopigian <49740@att.net>, Joey Arbaugh <jnarbaugh@gmail.com>, Isha Pithwa <isha.pithwa@networksnorthwest.org>, Tammy Doernenburg <tdoernenburg@emmetcounty.org>

Today I mentioned the road from Prescott AZ to Jerome. It differs from the ToT in that it is up a mountain. IMO, however, there are enough similarities (motor cycle and bicycle events among others) to take a look at some of their info/reviews.

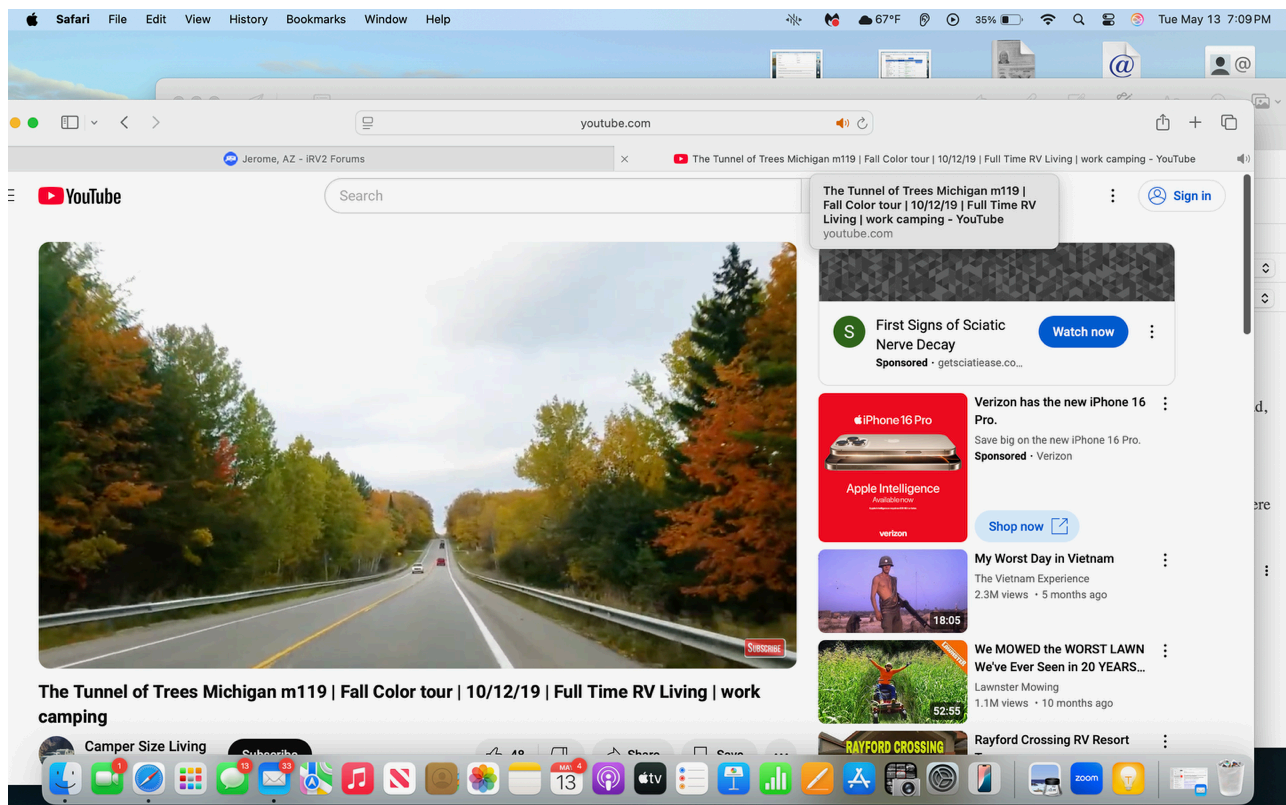
"When coming from the direction of Prescott, Arizona, the travel route to Jerome Ghost Town is a steep winding climb up the mountain that will test the ability of any vehicle or driver. This scary two lane section of Highway 89A snakes through the mountain canyons and there are several steep drop offs close to the shoulder of the road, so the view from the passenger side window can be nerve wracking at times

The challenging drive up the mountain is why so many hot rod and motorcycle rally organizers choose Jerome Ghost Town as a destination." [Learn more](#)

"There is a length limit for vehicles traveling on AZ-89A between Prescott and Jerome . Some sources suggest it may primarily apply to commercial vehicles, but it has been reported that pickups towing utility trailers have also been turned around. Driving large RVs through Jerome itself can be challenging due to the narrow, winding roads and potential for parked vehicles."

I found RV Magazine, Airstream Club, and YouTube commentaries about driving M-119 in the fall. Every one said leave your trailer at the campground. Vehicle only on the road. They all complained about the buses and motorcycles. Most said it is more like a one lane road. Plan to go slow. No stopping places etc. That information was factual, more in line with our thinking, and evidently what those groups felt important for others to know.

Here is a rather long example:



Laurelynn Harris  
[harris.laurelynn@gmail.com](mailto:harris.laurelynn@gmail.com)

[Quoted text hidden]