

**MRRPC**

Providing Planning and Economic Development  
Services to Improve the Region's Environment,  
Economy and Quality of Life

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission  
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La Crosse, WI 54601

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## MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT 2012-2013

*Providing Planning and Economic Development Services to Improve the  
Region's Environment, Economy and Quality of Life*



### SCENIC MISSISSIPPI REGIONAL TRANSIT BUS SERVICE.

For over a year staff has been assisting the Crawford, Vernon and La Crosse County Transportation Coordinating Committees and the City of Prairie du Chien in developing a multi-county commuter bus service. On December 3, 2012 The Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit SMRT bus service began serving commuters and the general public.

The Red route serves Viroqua, Readstown, Soldiers Grove, Gays Mills, Mt. Sterling, Seneca, Eastman, and Prairie du Chien. In late May of 2013 the Red route added an early morning service from Prairie du Chien to La Crosse on U.S. Hwy 35 with six river town stops along the way. Service to Organic Valley in Cashton was also added in May 2013. The Blue and Yellow routes run opposite directions serving Viroqua, Westby, Coon Valley, La Crosse, Stoddard and Genoa. In late May the Blue route added service to Organic Valley in Cashton and the Yellow route began providing late afternoon service from La Crosse to Prairie du Chien on U.S. Hwy 35 with six river town stops.

All bus routes are timed to connect at the hubs in Viroqua, Prairie du Chien and with the City of La Crosse bus system. Two morning and two afternoon routes make the buses convenient for workers, students, shoppers and medical appointments. The buses are handicapped accessible and are equipped with bike carriers. Cost for a one way trip is \$3 with

discount punch cards available. The buses have Wi Fi capability and provide a "Guaranteed Ride Home Service" in case of an emergency. In March, ridership averaged 42 riders daily, this was before the River Route and service to Organic Valley in Cashton began. For route information go to: [ridesmrt.com](http://ridesmrt.com)

**FORT McCOY JOINT LAND USE STUDY (JLUS).** Increasing population, housing growth, use of zoning, large caliber weapon noise, demolition explosions, troop training, state forest lands, environmentally sensitive areas, and farming are the issues analyzed by the Fort McCoy Joint Land Use Study (JLUS). The JLUS planning effort was undertaken to improve communications between the Fort and the surrounding communities, address incompatible development, address Fort activities that negatively impact surrounding communities, and maintain the good relationship between the civilian population and Fort activities. The Study was a joint initiative led by the MRRPC, Monroe County, and Fort McCoy. The Department of Defense (DOD) identified Ft. McCoy as an important installation with possible future encroachment issues. The JLUS report was completed in January 2013. Two of the five recommendations in the JLUS are listed below.

- Maintain the agricultural character of Monroe County and the Towns surrounding Fort McCoy by supporting farm-friendly policies and educating new residents and businesses about the nature of rural life and life near a military installation.
- The towns, Monroe County, and Fort McCoy should investigate what payment options might be necessary in the future to offset property tax revenue that the towns will not receive simply because there is a military installation in their territory.

Fort McCoy has played a key role in foreign wars and conflicts, having deployed more than 140,000 troops since 9/11. The Fort's 4,000 workers, facilities, and training activities for 110,000 troops annually, across 60,000 acres contribute greatly to the regional economy, estimated at over \$1.3 billion in 2011. Having a completed JLUS will make a better case for retaining the Fort and a continuation decision on the Fort in the next round of Base Closure

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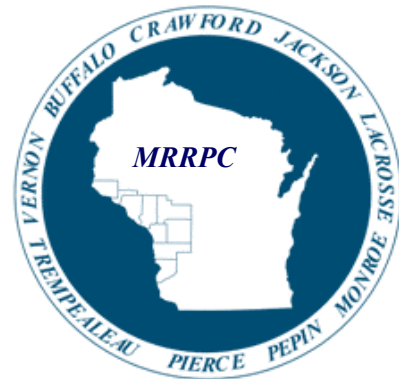
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and Realignment (BRAC) analysis by DOD officials. The JLUS was prepared with financial support from the Office of Economic Adjustment, Department of Defense, Xcel Energy and the MRRPC.

#### **MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (MRRPC) REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.**

Preparation of the MRRPC Regional Comprehensive Plan is underway. The purpose of this plan is to provide greater awareness of regional needs and opportunities that when analyzed will help the region's communities grow and prosper through better informed planning and economic development decisions. In 2011, a survey was conducted and mailed to over 4,000 households in the region to gauge resident opinions on several issues. Questions were asked on business incentives, shifting of the property tax burden, recreation and tourism opportunities, preferred land use development patterns, alternative energy sources, and how residents view the future quality of life in their community. For survey results visit our website at: <http://mrrpc.com>. Recently the MRRPC staff reviewed county comprehensive plan goals to craft common themes. Based on the common themes, gaps are being identified along with concepts to close the gaps. Regional goals will then be developed that address the themes and gaps that will involve collaborative efforts to build a better quality of life in the region.

**TOWN OF ARCADIA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.** Assistance was provided to the Town of Arcadia (population: 1,779) in updating their comprehensive plan. Background information was updated for all elements of the plan. The plan recommended the designation of a residential growth area around the City of Arcadia with the majority of the rest of the Town designated for agriculture and forest uses. Providing opportunities for housing growth in the Town of Arcadia was a key issue in the planning process with consideration of pursuing development of elderly/assisted living housing in the Town. Several goals in the plan addressed the nonmetallic mining issue. One of these goals was to encourage the Trempealeau County Environmental and Land Use Committee to evaluate the development of a nonmetallic mining overlay district for the County involving standards that define a suitable location for a mine. Criteria could include: adjacent to a state highway, excavation elevation range, encroachment setbacks on residential areas, water resource impacts, etc. Another goal directed at nonmetallic mining was the evaluation of a Town non-metallic mining licensing ordinance involving setting consistent standards for prospective mine operations. The plan also recommended maintaining communication and cooperation with the City of Arcadia on future planning issues.

**TOWN OF HOLLAND PLANNING ASSISTANCE.** MRRPC Staff assisted the Town of Holland with addressing specific recommendations from the Town's Comprehensive Plan by preparing the following planning documents: 1) Standards for rezoning Exclusive Agricultural lands; 2) Requirements for neighborhood plan preparation prior to large tracts being developed; 3) Utilization of

platted lands prior to development of un-platted lands; and 4) Environmental impact assessment checklist. A public hearing was held on February 2013 on all the proposed amendments to the Town Plan.

#### **EQUIPMENT AND METAL MANUFACTURING ASSOCIATION (EMMA) INDUSTRY CLUSTER INITIATIVE.**

The Equipment and Metal Manufacturing Association (EMMA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing resources and information to equipment, machinery, and metal manufacturers in Western Wisconsin, Eastern Minnesota and Northeastern Iowa. Over this past year, the organization held several membership meetings featuring some dynamic speakers as well as a high school robotics team. In December 2012, EMMA organized an Expo where 18 companies set up information booths and a series of panel discussions were held. In January 2013, EMMA sponsored a talk on the federal deficit by David Walker, former U.S. Comptroller-General. Over the past year EMMA provided private grants for forming Lego Leagues in middle schools, raising awareness of manufacturing career opportunities. EMMA provides member companies the opportunity to network with other members and formulate ideas for cooperative and collaborative activities. At general membership meetings, one or two member companies are typically invited to give a demonstration of their production process and products to promote capacity awareness and joint ventures. EMMA membership is open to manufacturers, employees, students, educators, suppliers, or anyone who has an interest in helping to make the region's equipment, machinery, and metal manufacturers more globally competitive and prosperous. Find out more at [emmatristate.org](http://emmatristate.org).

#### **FOOD RESOURCE AND AGRIBUSINESS NETWORK (FRAN) INDUSTRY CLUSTER INITIATIVE.**

FRAN is a network of agribusinesses in Western Wisconsin, Eastern Minnesota, and Northeastern Iowa that share common technology, markets, suppliers or workforce skills. FRAN members work together to improve their competitive advantage through exploring joint ventures that in turn help them reduce costs and increase efficiencies. FRAN members have worked successfully to obtain grants for joint training on workplace safety, leadership training, welding, electronics maintenance, etc. Over the past year, FRAN meetings were held at several agribusinesses, allowing for tours and presentations on food industry issues in which the host company has expertise. For more information on FRAN's activities, please visit [frannetwork.org](http://frannetwork.org).

#### **ECONOMIC MODELING SPECIALISTS INC (EMSI)**

**SOFTWARE SERVICES.** The MRRPC and the other Regional Planning Commissions in the state are partnering with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to provide economic development analysis to the region's

#### **2012 MRRPC AUDIT**

Mr. Michael Temp, CPA, Tostrud and Temp, S.C. reported the findings of the 2012 Audit at the April 10, 2013, Commission meeting. Mr. Temp stated that the MRRPC was given an unqualified audit opinion, meaning they found that the MRRPC followed generally accepted accounting principles in the preparation of its financial statements and that the financial statements can be relied upon to provide an accurate picture of the Commission's finances. The audit showed 2012 operating revenues of \$468,792 and operating expenses of \$438,868. The audit also reported total assets of \$313,151 (not including business revolving loan funds) and total liabilities of \$49,401 resulting in the MRRPC having net assets valued at \$263,750 on December 31, 2012. The audit included reports on the four business revolving loan funds the Commission administers. These reports indicated that since the four revolving loan funds' inception dates, \$4,459,590 has been loaned to businesses and \$575,228 is presently owed to the respective revolving loan funds from businesses.

#### **MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION PROFILE**

The Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission was created in 1964 under Wisconsin Statute 66.0309 to provide cost-shared planning and economic development services to the Western Wisconsin county governments of Buffalo, Crawford, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Pepin, Pierce, Trempealeau and Vernon, and the communities and businesses within these counties.

The Region covers over 6,000 square miles and in 2010 had a population of over 317,068. The Region makes up 11% of Wisconsin's land area, 5.6% of the State's population and 4% of the State's real estate equalized value.

The MRRPC meetings are held bimonthly on the second Wednesday of even-numbered months. The meetings are usually held in La Crosse, due to its central location within the Region.

Each of the nine counties is represented by three commissioners. One commissioner from each county is appointed by the county board, another commissioner from each county is appointed by the Governor, and a third commissioner from each county is appointed by the Governor selected from a list of two or more persons nominated by the county board. The commissioners serve six-year terms and make policy, staffing and budgetary decisions of the MRRPC. The following is a list of current MRRPC commissioners.

#### **COMMISSIONERS**

##### **Buffalo County**

John Schlesselman, Kathleen Vinehout

##### **Crawford County**

Gerald Krachey, Ron Leys, Greg Russell

##### **Jackson County**

Ron Carney, James Christenson, Eugene Savage

##### **La Crosse County**

Vicki Burke, James Ehram, Tara Johnson

##### **Monroe County**

Sharon Folcey, James Kuhn, Cedric Schnitzler

##### **Pepin County**

Mike Murray, Bruce Peterson, David Smith

##### **Pierce County**

Richard Purdy, James Ross, William Schroeder

##### **Trempealeau County**

Margaret Baecker, Phillip Borreson, Ernest Vold

##### **Vernon County**

Nancy Jaekel, Jo Ann Nickelatti

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission would like to thank the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Wisconsin Department of Administration, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, The Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce - Economic Development Administration, Wisconsin Emergency Management, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Department of Defense, and most of all the County Boards of Supervisors of Buffalo, Crawford, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Pepin, Pierce, Trempealeau and Vernon for their cooperation and involvement. The combined resources of these local, state, and federal government partners provide the funding that make the activities of the MRRPC possible.

#### **ANNUAL REPORT DEDICATED TO PAST VICE CHAIRMAN JAMES SCHOLMEIER**

We would like to acknowledge and thank James Scholmeier, Vice President of the MRRPC who recently resigned after 15 years of service. James also served as Mayor of Fountain City, Buffalo County Board Chairman, and Chairman of Wisconsin Counties Association. During this extensive public service career he also owned and operated a commercial refrigeration business. We will miss his up beat attitude and humorous ways to describe experiences, conditions, events and people that would act as an icebreaker for almost any conversation or issue being deliberated.



**Table 1. Low Income Households, Less than 50%, and Moderate Income Households 50-80% of County Median Income**

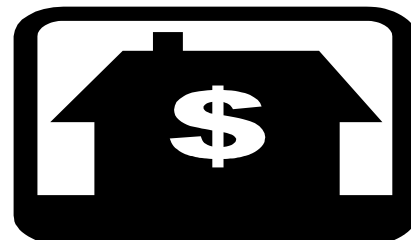
Jurisdiction	2007-2011 Total Households #	2007-2011 Median Household Income \$	2007-2011 # and % Low Income Households	2007-2011 # and % Moderate Income Households
Buffalo	5,754	\$46,073	1,213 / 21%	963 / 17%
Crawford	6,785	\$40,933	1,520 / 22%	1,132 / 17%
Jackson	8,145	\$44,106	1,874 / 23%	1,334 / 16%
La Crosse	45,704	\$50,510	11,177 / 24%	7,147 / 16%
Monroe	17,302	\$48,306	3,582 / 21%	3,237 / 19%
Pepin	3,069	\$48,717	739 / 24%	522 / 17%
Pierce	14,960	\$61,443	3,437 / 23%	2,497 / 17%
Trempealeau	11,513	\$47,437	2,459 / 21%	2,051 / 18%
Vernon	11,831	\$44,058	2,654 / 22%	2,092 / 18%
<b>Region</b>	<b>125,063</b>	<b>\$47,954</b>	<b>28,655 / 23%</b>	<b>25,129 / 17%</b>
<b>State</b>	<b>2,279,738</b>	<b>\$52,374</b>	<b>531,064 / 23%</b>	<b>346,411 / 16%</b>
<b>Nation</b>	<b>114,761,359</b>	<b>\$52,762</b>	<b>28,291,021 / 25%</b>	<b>16,341,971 / 16%</b>

**Table 2. Medium Income Households With Income levels of 80 –120% of County Median Income and Higher Income Households with Income over 120% of County Median Income**

Jurisdiction	2007-2011 Median Household Income	2007-2011 Medium Income Households	% Medium Income Households	2007-2011 Higher Income Households	% Higher Income Households
Buffalo	\$46,073	1,263	21.95	2,315	40.23
Crawford	\$40,933	1,282	18.89	2,851	42.02
Jackson	\$44,106	1,601	19.66	3,336	40.96
La Crosse	\$50,510	8,313	18.19	19,067	41.72
Monroe	\$48,306	4,113	23.77	6,370	36.82
Pepin	\$48,717	556	18.12	1,252	40.80
Pierce	\$61,443	2,900	19.39	6,126	40.95
Trempealeau	\$47,437	2,216	19.25	4,787	41.58
Vernon	\$44,058	2,106	17.80	4,979	42.08
<b>Region</b>	<b>\$47,954</b>	<b>24,350</b>	<b>19.47</b>	<b>51,083</b>	<b>40.85</b>
<b>State</b>	<b>\$52,374</b>	<b>420,136</b>	<b>18.43</b>	<b>954,168</b>	<b>41.85</b>
<b>Nation</b>	<b>\$52,762</b>	<b>19,458,629</b>	<b>16.96</b>	<b>49,086,684</b>	<b>42.77</b>

**Regional Housing Stats**

Total Occupied Housing Units	125,063
Total Occupied Low Income Units	28,655
Total Occupied Moderate Income Units	20,975
Total Occupied Medium Income Units	24,350
Total Occupied Higher Income Units	51,083
Total Occupied Units Lacking Complete Kitchen or Plumbing Facilities	3,462



**Table 3. Regional Housing Affordability Gap**

	<sup>(1)</sup> Mo. Income Available for Housing for Low Income Household	Mo. Median Gross Rent	Difference or Rental Affordability Gap for Low Income Hshld	<sup>(2)</sup> Mo. Income Available for Housing for Moderate Income Household	Difference or Rental Affordability Gap for Moderate Income Hshld
Buffalo	576	683	-107	921	238
Crawford	512	560	-48	819	259
Jackson	551	571	-20	882	311
La Crosse	631	690	-59	1,010	320
Monroe	604	706	-102	966	260
Pepin	609	543	66	974	431
Pierce	768	762	6	1,229	467
Tremp	593	575	18	949	374
Vernon	551	581	-30	881	300
<b>Region</b>	<b>599</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>-31</b>	<b>959</b>	<b>329</b>
<b>Wis</b>	<b>655</b>	<b>735</b>	<b>-80</b>	<b>1,047</b>	<b>312</b>
<b>U.S.</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>871</b>	<b>-211</b>	<b>1,055</b>	<b>184</b>

(1) 30% of 50% of Median Household Income; (2) 30% of 80% of Median Household Income

**Table 4. Occupied Housing Units Lacking Complete Plumbing/Kitchen Facilities**

Jurisdiction	Total No. of Occupied Housing Units	Housing Units Lacking Complete Plumbing Facilities	Housing Units Lacking Complete Kitchen Facilities	Total	%
Buffalo	5,754	32	93	125	2.2
Crawford	6,785	74	81	155	2.3
Jackson	8,145	199	182	381	4.7
La Crosse	45,704	100	307	407	0.9
Monroe	17,302	423	455	878	5.1
Pepin	3,069	147	104	251	8.2
Pierce	14,960	30	19	49	0.3
Trempealeau	11,513	161	203	364	3.2
Vernon	11,831	400	452	852	7.2
<b>Region</b>	<b>125,063</b>	<b>1,566</b>	<b>1,896</b>	<b>3,462</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<b>State</b>	<b>2,279,738</b>	<b>10,910</b>	<b>18,277</b>	<b>29,187</b>	<b>1.3</b>
<b>Nation</b>	<b>114,761,359</b>	<b>639,418</b>	<b>1,000,070</b>	<b>1,639,488</b>	<b>1.4</b>

Source: Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Yr Est.

**Table 5. Subsidized Housing Unit Inventory**

Jurisdiction	Total Units	Low and/or Moderate Income Units	Elderly Units and/or Special Needs Disabled Units
Buffalo	148	128	24
Crawford	378	362	167
Jackson	250	231	162
La Crosse	2,208	1,908	1,035
Monroe	435	418	227
Pepin	134	93	63
Pierce	803	648	340
Trempealeau	683	499	295
Vernon	429	259	154
<b>Region</b>	<b>5,468</b>	<b>4,546</b>	<b>2,467</b>

communities. The MRRPC has received an economic modeling software license called Analyst, developed by Economic Modeling Specialists International. The software program provides industry and occupation reports, economic impact assessments and economic base reports by county, zip code or a region defined by multiple counties or zip codes. To learn more about the types of reports, order a report, or view your county's economic base summary reports, go to: [http://mrrpc.com/EMS\\_Home.html](http://mrrpc.com/EMS_Home.html) MRRPC staff will receive formal training in June 2013. If you have questions please contact Bryan Law, Economic Development Planner at 608.785.9396 or [bryan@mrrpc.com](mailto:bryan@mrrpc.com).

**WESTERN WISCONSIN REGIONAL REVOLVING LOAN FUND INITIATIVE.** The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) is encouraging the consolidation of 12 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Revolving Loan Funds (RLFs) in the MRRPC region into one regional fund to increase the flexibility and use of these funds by businesses and reduce the administrative burden on local RLFs and WEDC. WEDC reports that approximately \$3 million is available for lending in the region, and another \$5 million is owed to the region's 12 RLFs. Throughout the past year MRRPC staff have participated in Western Wisconsin RLF organizational meetings. The proposed benefits of a regional RLF include access to a larger pool of capital, ability to spread the risk of lending over a greater area, ability for local governments and economic development entities to collaborate on opportunities, and a broader range of innovative investment and financing opportunities for businesses. MRRPC staff are assisting in the preparation of a Regional RLF Administrative Manual and developing a threshold formula to ensure equitable funding throughout the region. Input for the administrative manual and threshold formula came from 10 regional meetings involving municipalities, counties, and the WEDC. The goal of the Regional RLF will be to stimulate the economy by providing funding for business opportunities that create jobs, increase the regional tax base, and improve business climate and innovation. Loans through the Western Wisconsin Regional RLF will include micro loans, loans for downtown façade/historic improvements, retention—efficiency, innovation, and conventional loans.

**KICKAPOO VALLEY BIOFUEL AND WOOD PRODUCT FEASIBILITY STUDY.** The MRRPC is pursuing opportunities to develop the wood and forest products industry, an economic driver in the region. The wood and forest products industry is a major industry cluster in the Mississippi River Region, with over 100 companies and thousands of employees. The Kickapoo Valley, like most of the Driftless Area, has overstocked forests with potential for biofuels and finished wood products. The MRRPC and others have a mutual interest in studying the

feasibility of a wood-pellet and/or wood chip production facility in the Kickapoo Valley that could reduce the valley's dependence on fossil fuels, create green jobs, and also retain energy dollars in the region. Through collaboration with the Kickapoo Valley Regional Economic Development Initiative (KVREDI), Kickapoo Woods Cooperative, and the Village of La Farge, a contract was approved with Short Elliot and Hendrickson (SEH) Inc. in April 2013 to prepare a Kickapoo Valley Biofuel and Wood Product Feasibility Study. The study will address and complement existing research to build on this natural economic asset in the region. The study will look at the feasibility of regional harvesting, production, consumption and distribution of solid biofuels and other wood products to create a more sustainable economy in terms of improving quality jobs and income levels in the region. The geographical area of study will generally include woody biomass and economic development opportunities in Crawford, Vernon, and Monroe Counties but the findings will be applicable to many other areas in tri-state area. Funding for this project is provided through a State of Wisconsin Planning Grant and a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration.

**FARM TO FORK: NETWORKING ACROSS THE SUPPLY CHAIN CONFERENCE.** On February 20-21, 2013, MRRPC staff assisted the UW-Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (UW-CIAS) with the "Networking Across the Supply Chain" conference held in La Crosse. The conference offered networking opportunities among food growers, producers, distributors, wholesalers, retailers — all the links along the supply chain. The idea of the conference was for members of this farm-to-fork supply chain to identify shared interests and develop joint ventures and cooperative solutions to issues and obstacles they face. The conference was a success, with 100 farmers, suppliers, distributors, and researchers from a multi-state region in attendance. The conference provided an opportunity for informative discussions on challenges, opportunities, and innovative solutions regarding local food production, distribution, and consumption. UW-CIAS will prepare a report on the findings of the conference this summer that will outline next steps to better improve the opportunities and efficiencies of the farm-to-fork supply chain network.

**VILLAGE OF CASHTON DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION.** Connect Communities, a Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) program, offers technical assistance and networking opportunities to local leaders interested in revitalizing their downtowns. In December 2012 MRRPC Staff assisted the Village of Cashton in a successful Connect Communities application. Once designated, Connect Communities have access to a wealth of resources and training materials developed for Wisconsin Main Street communities. Connect Communities helps planners leverage the unique assets of their downtowns

and urban districts. As an example in May 2013, MRRPC staff assisted the Village in applying for a Wisconsin CDBG Planning Grant to assist with their downtown revitalization and State Highway 33 Corridor Plan. The project focuses on creating a vision for the downtown through a business district revitalization plan. The Plan will identify aesthetic improvements, infrastructure improvements, and business attraction and retention activities. Another key planning element is conducting a market analysis and needs assessment. The State highway corridor plan component will recommend multimodal bicycle, pedestrian, and buggy accommodations be incorporated into the Wisconsin DOT project on STH 33 that serves the downtown area.

**PEPIN COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.** Over the past year MRRPC staff has been assisting Pepin County with preparation of a Comprehensive Plan. The plan is now nearing completion. Goals have been developed and a draft implementation schedule has been created. Some of the goals established are: Encourage opportunities for a housing supply that meets existing and future needs of all residents; Preserving agriculture, the environment, and the rural landscape; Promoting agriculture and agricultural enterprises so farming remains economically viable; Protecting steep slopes, floodplains, shore lands, forest lands, natural areas, wildlife areas, wildlife habitat, and threatened and endangered species; Promoting multimodal transportation facilities like bicycling-pedestrian lanes or trails and scenic overlooks to enhance recreation and tourism opportunities; and improve technology opportunities for high-speed internet access for businesses and residents in rural areas.

**VILLAGE OF LA FARGE RECREATIONAL TRAIL AND HANDICAPPED FISHING PLATFORM.** In 2012 MRRPC staff assisted the Village of La Farge Plan Commission develop an Economic and Recreation Development Plan. Some of the projects included in the Plan are a one-mile trail connection to the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, a handicapped-accessible educational forest trail, pond amenities, handicapped fishing platform, handicapped parking area and canoe landing on the Kickapoo River. In the Spring of 2013, MRRPC Staff assisted the Village in implementing some of the projects by writing a grant application for a Wisconsin DNR Stewardship Grant to help fund the handicapped fishing platform and educational forest trail amenities, totaling \$20,000. Next year's grant application will be used to fund a trail connection on the old Stump Dodger railroad bed from the forest educational trail and handicapped fishing platform area to the Kickapoo Valley Reserve one mile to the north.

**UPDATE OF JACKSON AND LA CROSSE COUNTY MULTI-HAZARD MITIGATION PLANS.** Multi-hazard mitigation plans are prepared by counties to reduce costs and losses in the event of natural disasters. The plans include a listing of hazard mitigation projects

intended to reduce losses to life and property in the event of a natural disaster. This past year MRRPC staff began updating plans for Jackson and La Crosse Counties. Background data was updated for both plans, hazard assessment surveys were mailed out, and responses from those surveys were compiled. Hazard mitigation projects surveys were also mailed out. Inventorying and mapping of structures within the FEMA 100-year floodplain has been completed for both counties. Staff is continuing to meet with municipalities to finalize the listings of mitigation projects. When the updates are complete, the plans will meet all state and federal requirements. Mitigation projects identified in Jackson County multi-hazard plan include: Identifying and upgrading/improving or replacing existing culverts and bridges within the County causing flooding issues or concern; annually reviewing and upgrading the County's communications capability, specifically the wireless capability; encouraging the burying of electrical lines and telecommunication lines; purchase NOAA All Hazards radios; raising Old Highway 54 to mitigate flooding; installing culverts on several town roads to improve drainage; and installing an additional water well and tower in the Town of Brockway.

**COUNTY COMMUNICATIONS INTEROPERABILITY COMMUNICATION PLANNING.** WISCOM is a shared system that first responders from all parts of the State will use to communicate during a major disaster or large-scale incident. Over the past year staff has begun work on Tactical Interoperability Plans for Pepin, Pierce, Monroe and Trempealeau Counties. These plans involve inventorying interoperability communication, equipment, policies and procedures by county. MRRPC staff is being trained to be the first point of contact regarding WISCOM for the region.

**OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN UPDATES.** Recreation planning is an activity the MRRPC assists counties and communities with annually. By preparing and updating outdoor recreation plans local governments are eligible to apply for grants under the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Wisconsin Stewardship Grant Program. Outdoor recreation opportunities contribute greatly to a community's quality of life and play an important role in attracting business and a high quality workforce. This past year staff updated outdoor recreation plans for the City of Prairie du Chien (Crawford County), Village of La Farge (Vernon County), and Village of Coon Valley (Vernon County). Staff is also updating outdoor recreation plans for member counties to reflect the most recent data from the 2011-2016 Wisconsin Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).

#### BUSINESS LOANS

**Business Capital Fund (BCF):** During this past year the BCF continued to market its availability to provide gap financing for businesses. Reduced commercial lending the past several

years affected the BCF, since private-sector funding must be at least two-thirds of the total financing before the BCF can participate in a loan. However in 2013 a \$40,000 loan was made to a grocery store in the City of Arcadia. Since its inception, the BCF has made a total of 59 loans, totaling \$3,433,629. These loans have leveraged over \$36 million from private-sector sources, and have helped create or retain 480 jobs. The BCF has been a valuable asset in the region, providing gap financing to businesses. More information on this fund can be found at [www.mrrpc.com](http://www.mrrpc.com). Loan funds are available, so if you know of a business in Buffalo, Jackson, Pepin, Pierce, or Trempealeau County in need of gap financing, please contact our office.

#### **Crawford, Monroe, Vernon (CMV) Growth Development Fund:**

During the CMV's annual meeting in December 2012, the Board acted on a \$20,000 loan to a manufacturer in the City of Sparta. The CMV has made 6 loans, totaling \$250,000, which have leveraged \$1,802,849 in private investment and created or retained 29 jobs. Loan funds are available, so if you know of a business in Crawford, Monroe, or Vernon County in need of gap financing, please contact our office.

**La Crosse County Economic Development Fund:** This business loan fund is comprised of three separate fund pools; Federal-EDA, State CDBG, and County funds. The County fund was capitalized in the early 1990s through the sale of county property. The fund has made over \$7 million in loans and created or retained over 800 jobs and leveraged over \$20 million in private financing. The fund provides affordable gap financing up to one-third of a project's costs. The LCEDF has loan funds available, so if you know of a business in La Crosse County in need of financing please contact our office.

**Monroe County Revolving Loan Fund:** The Monroe County RLF recently revised its administrative manual to better reflect the requirements of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Since its inception, the Monroe County RLF has made 11 loans, totaling \$1,179,692, which have leveraged \$9,521,106 in private financing and created or retained 149 jobs.

#### **2013 COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS) UPDATE.**

At the April 10, 2013, MRRPC bimonthly meeting, the Commission approved the 2013 update to the 2012-2017 CEDS. The CEDS outlines economic development strategies and projects, and maintains the eligibility of local governments and institutions in the Region for federal funding from the U.S. Department of Commerce—Economic Development Administration. The major economic development goals and objectives of the region that are in the CEDS can be found at [http://mrrpc.com/CEDS\\_Report.html](http://mrrpc.com/CEDS_Report.html).

#### REGIONAL HOUSING AFFORDABILITY TRENDS

As part of the MRRPC's Regional Comprehensive Plan, housing conditions are being analyzed. Recent estimates prepared by MRRPC staff show the region is comparable on a percentage basis to the state and nation regarding: the percentage of low income households with income of 50% or below the median income, moderate income households, medium income households and higher income households, with incomes over 120% of median income, Table 1 and 2. The term higher income household here means a higher income household than a medium income household. The region's median household income of \$47,954 based on the American Community Survey 2007-2011 was less than both the state and nation that had incomes of \$52,374 and \$52,762 respectively, Table 1.

Housing is considered "affordable" by Federal standards if a household spends no more than 30 percent of its income on housing costs such as rent, principal, interest, mortgage insurance, taxes, and utilities. Based on this premise, a moderate-income household in the region with income of 80% of its county median income is likely paying rent within the 30 percent affordability threshold if they pay rent at or below their county's median gross rent figure, Table 3.

Low income households with income of 50% of the county median income exceed the 30% affordability housing rent expenditure threshold in five counties if they pay rent at their county's median gross rent. While it is unlikely a low income household is paying their County's median rent, these figures give one appreciation on how challenging finding affordable housing may be. Table 3 shows the surplus or deficit each county has using the 50% and 80% household median income as a measure. The region's housing condition is also analyzed through the adequacy of kitchen and plumbing facilities. Table 4 shows 2.8% of the region's occupied housing units lacked adequate plumbing and kitchen facilities. This was twice the percentage than the state and nation.

The number of subsidized housing units and housing vouchers available to low and moderate income individuals in the region are also being inventoried. So far we have identified over 5,400 subsidized housing units in the region and are waiting for information on vouchers. Subsidized housing units include: 1) Public Housing— established to provide decent and safe rental housing for eligible low income families, the elderly and persons with disabilities; 2) HUD Section 8/Housing Voucher Program—rental subsidies; 3) Rural Development Section 515 loans made to provide affordable multifamily rental housing for very low-, low, and moderate income families, elderly and disabled; 4) Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) for investing in affordable rental housing; 5) HUD Section 202- supportive housing for elderly program; 6) HUD Section 811— supportive housing for persons with disabilities and 7) Housing under authority of Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs).