

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 2013-2014

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

50th
Anniversary
1964-2014

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KICKAPOO VALLEY STUDY REPORTS HEATING COST SAVINGS IN \$ MILLIONS BY SWITCHING FROM PROPANE, HEATING OIL, AND ELECTRICITY TO WOOD PELLETS.

The forest and wood products industry is a major economic driver of the Mississippi River Region's economy. To help further build this industry a collaborative effort with the Kickapoo Valley Regional Economic Development Initiative (KVREDI), Kickapoo Woods Cooperative, and the Village of La Farge ensued on the concept of making better use of the region's overstocked and underutilized forest resource. This led to designing a study that was completed in January 2014 titled: Kickapoo Valley Solid Biofuel and Wood Product Feasibility Study. The Study was prepared by Short Elliot Hendrickson and Renewable Resource Solutions through grant awards to the MRRPC and the Village of La Farge from the U.S. Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration and the Wisconsin Department of Administration. The Study's findings and recommendations included:

- A small 10,000 ton per year pellet plant is recommended for the Kickapoo Valley—four county region that ideally should be located near a wood processor that utilizes dry residues as feedstock.
- The region's overstocked forests have an adequate supply of woody biomass sustainably available for a 100,000 ton per year pellet plant or larger. This size of a plant could be supplied by utilizing only 12% of the net annual forest growth or 21% of the forest's annual mortality in the primary and secondary procurement market areas.
- A 10,000 ton per year pellet plant would generate 18 jobs and more than \$2.3 million of economic impact to the region through jobs and fuel savings.
- A 100,000 ton per year pellet plant would generate over 136 jobs and more than \$9.3 million of total annual economic impact to the region through jobs and fuel savings.
- If 20% of the households in the four county Kickapoo Valley area using propane, fuel oil, or electricity for heating switched to wood pellet heating, carbon dioxide emissions would be reduced by over 27,000 tons per year; the equivalent to

removing 5,000 cars from the road or conserving 2.7 million gallons of gasoline per year.

- Estimated annual cost savings on heat if 20% of occupied households in the nine county Mississippi River Region using propane, fuel oil, or electricity for heat switched to wood pellets: \$8 Million.
- Estimated annual cost savings on heat if 20% of occupied households in the state of Wisconsin using propane, heating oil, or electricity switched to wood pellets: \$107 Million.

The above savings were calculated based on energy prices in October 2013, well before propane prices sky rocketed during the winter of 2014, while wood pellet prices remained about the same. Rural households were the hardest hit by the spike in propane and are the ones that will benefit the most by switching to wood pellets. The Study encourages a pilot project through the Department of Administration's Low Income Heating Assistance Program. Through this program low income households would be given the option to switch their heating source to wood pellets through installation of a pellet stove or furnace paid through this program. For more detailed information on this Study go to the MRRPC website www.mrrpc.com and click on the link at the bottom of our home page.

DRAFT OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGION'S RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT COMPLETED.

MRRPC staff recently completed a draft of a report that analyzes the region's energy production, consumption, and its economic development potential from renewable energy sources. The report inventories sources and uses of energy. It is estimated that the region consumes about 3.4 billion kilowatt hours (KwHs) of electricity annually. The region also produces more energy than it consumes due to the powerful coal fired stations operated by Dairyland Power Company in Alma and in Genoa, however not all this electricity produced by these stations is necessarily consumed in the region. Electricity produced in the region from renewables (biomass, hydro, biogas, wind, and solar) is estimated at 245 million KwHs or seven percent of the region's electricity demand. This small percentage shows the great challenge in overcoming the region's dependence on fossil fuels for electricity. Most of the region's

renewable energy production comes from the waste to energy or biomass, followed by hydro power, wind, biogas, and solar in that order of production.

Hydro power on dams on the Mississippi River show potential and have been studied for their kilowatt capacity by both the U.S. Department of Energy and private hydro power companies. Sanitary landfills and manure digesters on dairy farms show they can produce methane to generate both heat and electricity. Increased use of manure digesters will also help solve an environmental disposal problem and help create jobs since manure digesters are manufactured in the region. When inventorying the region's renewable energy production capabilities we found that developing the region's solar and wind power will be more challenging for the Mississippi River Region than in other parts of Wisconsin and other Midwest states because of the region's more northern location and hilly topography creating less sunshine and dependable winds. The region's businesses, local governments, utility companies, and homeowners have already successfully generated electricity or heat from all of the sources of renewable energy available; what is lacking is quantity. A higher quantity of renewable energy in kilowatt hours for electricity and BTUs for heat will provide energy savings and move the region towards energy independence from fossil fuels. Research shows that those regions or states that produce most of their energy, pay less for it, create jobs, save more, and are more energy secure.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGION'S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IS NEARING COMPLETION. Preparation of the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission (MRRPC) Comprehensive Plan continues. The complete draft is expected to be completed this summer and then public input meetings will be held on it throughout the region. Some of the findings and draft recommendations developed thus far include:

- The region's present population of 319,369 is projected to grow by an additional 37,000 over the next 20 years.
- The 140,000 housing units in the region are projected to grow by over 4,300 units over the next 20 years.
- There are 28,655 low income households in the region earning 50% or less than their respective county's median income.
- There are 806 federal low and moderate income housing vouchers in the region but only 593 are leased and there is an application waiting list of 435.
- Buffalo County had the 8th highest per capita income level of all 72 Wisconsin counties with \$43,733, exceeding both the region's per capita income average of \$37,546, the statewide average of \$42,121, and just two dollars shy of the national average of \$43,735.
- There are 7,359 subsidized low income housing units, and elderly and/or special needs disabled housing units in the region.

- There are 11,661 miles of U.S., State, County, Town, Village and City roads in the nine county region. Monroe County has the most with just over 1,717 miles of roads and Pepin County the least with 481 miles of roads. The average among the region's nine counties is 1,296 miles of road.
- Annual motor vehicle miles traveled in the region has stayed about the same since 2001 with 3.6 billion miles traveled versus 3.7 billion motor vehicle miles traveled in the region in 2011.
- There are 259 miles of bike trails in the region.
- There are 255 miles of hiking trails in the region.
- There are nine airports in the region available for public use.
- There are six river barge terminal sites in the region.
- There are 73 municipal wastewater treatment plants in the region serving a population of 165,000 or about 52% of the region's 319,000 population.
- The region's municipal wastewater treatment plants averaged 79 gallons of water per capita per day.
- The region's average 2012 wastewater treatment plant Compliance and Maintenance Annual Report Grade Point Average of all 73 systems was 3.76 on a four point scale.
- The region has 71 public water supply systems with 145 wells that serve a population of 185,000 or 58% of the region's 319,000 population.
- The region's municipal water system produced on average 89 gallons of water per capita a day in 2012.
- There are over 282,000 acres of county, state, and federal recreation lands with facilities in the nine county region.
- There are 12,728 farms in the region, 3,835 of these farms are "other crop farming operations", 2,379 are beef cattle farms, 1,973 are dairy farms, 1,964 are oil seed and grain farms, and 813 are animal aquaculture and other animal product farms.
- The region has over 1.6 million acres of land in forests.
- There are 15 frac sand mines operating in the region, 10 of these have processing plants.
- There are 11 proposed or permitted frac sand mines that are not operating yet.
- There are 12 proposed or permitted frac sand processing plants not operating yet.
- There are 41 prominent historic and cultural resources in the region.

Equipment in Prairie du Chien and Brian Akervik with Mc Neilus Steel in Dodge Center. Membership in EMMA 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 emmatrstate.org.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION BUSINESS FINANCING GUIDE HAS BEEN UPDATED.

The Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission's Business Financing Guide was updated this past year. The guide provides important information on the less well known to the most prominent and useful business financing programs, so businesses, lenders, economic development professionals and local officials have ready access to key facts and contacts. The Guide has easy to view tables that help the reader browse the numerous programs available that include:

- 8 Municipal Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) programs
- 6 County RLFs
- 4 Regional RLFs
- 16 SBA loan programs
- 8 USDA loan programs
- 3 Energy related loan programs in the 2014 U.S. Farm Bill
- 8 Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation loans or grants
- 7 Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority loans and one tax credit program
- 2 Touchstone Energy Cooperative programs
- 1 Wisconsin Transportation Economic Assistance program
- 2 IRS business tax credit programs
- 5 U.S. Department of Energy tax credit programs and one loan program
- 4 Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation tax credit programs
- 8 Wisconsin Department of Revenue tax credit programs
- 4 Wisconsin State Energy Office tax credit programs

The Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission Business Financing Guide can be viewed and downloaded at: <http://www.mrrpc.com>.

2013 MRRPC AUDIT

Mr. Michael Temp, CPA, Tostrud and Temp, S.C. reported the findings of the 2013 Audit at the April 9, 2014, 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 2013 operating revenues of \$441,423 and operating expenses of \$458,750. The audit also reported total assets of \$307,923 (not including business revolving loan funds) and total liabilities of \$61,500 resulting in the MRRPC having net assets

valued at \$246,423 on December 31, 2013. 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, \$4,519,590 has been loaned to businesses and \$466,459 is presently owed to the respective revolving loan funds from businesses.

50TH ANNUAL REPORT DEDICATED TO EUGENE SAVAGE, IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIRMAN

Commissioners and staff would like to acknowledge and thank Eugene Savage, immediate past Chairman of the MRRPC. He has served continuously as a commissioner from Jackson County since 1989. During this 25 year period he was elected Secretary/Treasurer, Vice Chairman, and Chairman. During this time Eugene also served as President of the Business Capital Fund, a regional revolving loan fund providing affordable gap financing to businesses. He recently declined to accept another nomination as Chairman, which is a real change after so many years relying on his leadership and skills. Fortunately his public service will continue as he is willing to serve out his six year term as commissioner until 2017. This will aid in a smooth transition for the MRRPC to help it continue in providing cost shared planning and economic development services.

MRRPC COMMISSIONERS

Buffalo County

Daniel Barr, John Schlesselman, Del Twidt

Crawford County

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Jackson County

Ron Carney, James Christenson, Eugene Savage

La Crosse County

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Trempealeau County

Margaret Baecker, Phillip Borreson, Ernest Vold

Vernon County

Nancy Jaekel, James Neubauer, Jo Ann Nickelatti

Corporation (WEDC) to provide economic development analysis to the region's communities. With this partnership, the MRRPC has received an economic modeling software license called Analyst, developed by Economic Modeling Specialists International (EMSI). This web-based tool provides access to key regional information on human capital, industries, and occupations. 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/EMSI_Home.html.

BUSINESS LOANS AVAILABLE. During this past year staff continued to administer several revolving loan funds that have the ability to provide gap financing for businesses in the region. The Business Capital fund (BCF) can provide gap financing to businesses located in Buffalo, Jackson, Pepin, Pierce or Trempealeau Counties. Since its inception the BCF has made a total of 59 loans totaling \$3,433,629, helped create or retain 480 jobs, and leveraged over \$36 million in private-sector sources. The CMV Growth Development Fund can provide gap financing to businesses located in Crawford, Monroe, or Vernon County and since its inception this fund has made a total of six loans totaling \$250,000, has created or retained 29 jobs, and leveraged over \$1.8 million in private investment.

Business in need of gap financing in La Crosse County should look to the La Crosse County Economic Development Fund. This fund is comprised of three separate fund pools; Federal-EDA, State CDBG, and County funds. The fund has made over \$7 million in loans, created or retained over 800 jobs, and leveraged over \$20 million in private financing. This past year a \$20,000 loan was approved for a retail establishment in the City of La Crosse. MRRPC Staff also assist Monroe County in the administration of the Monroe County Revolving Loan Fund. 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.

These revolving loan funds are a valuable asset in the region, providing gap financing to businesses. More information on these funds can be found at www.mrrpc.com. Loan funds are available, so if you know of a business in need of gap financing, please contact our office.

WESTERN WISCONSIN REVOLVING LOAN FUND INITIATIVE. In mid 2012 the MRRPC began working with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) on the Western Wisconsin Revolving Loan Fund Initiative. WEDC was 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 reported there was approximately \$3 million available for lending in the region, and another \$5 million is owed to the region's 12 RLFs. 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 assisted in the preparation of a Regional RLF Administrative Manual and developing a threshold formula to ensure equitable funding throughout the region. Several counties passed resolutions approving their participation in the proposed regional RLF, however this past year administration of the State's CDBG funds was transferred to the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA). The MRRPC will continue to work with DOA on this initiative in the coming year. The purpose of the Regional RLF is to help businesses sustain themselves or expand through more flexible funding programs that are not available today and keep the region competitive with other regions' business financing programs. Proposed types of financing that would be made available include: micro loans, loans for downtown façade/historic improvements, retention, innovation, and equity investments.

EQUIPMENT AND METAL MANUFACTURING ASSOCIATION (EMMA) HOLDS INDUSTRY CLUSTER EVENT. EMMA is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing resources, networking, and joint venture opportunities to equipment, machinery, and metal manufacturers in Western Wisconsin, Eastern Minnesota and Northeastern Iowa. On May 15, 2014, EMMA held an industry cluster event in La Crosse that started with a tour of Mid-City Steel. This was followed by company profile and joint venture opportunity presentations by Kurtis Bear, Business Development Leader with Mid-City Steel, and Daniel Schmitz, Chief Operating Officer with Northern Engraving. The main speaker for the event was Steve Salters, PE, Director, Project Lead The Way (PLTW) at Milwaukee School of Engineering. Steve discussed how PLTW is making its way into middle schools' and high schools' math and science curriculum across Wisconsin and the nation. Their curriculum is turning out more high school graduates who succeed in college as science, technology, engineering, and math majors.

The final presentation was on Gold Collar Career Certification by Shelly Gruber with 3M in Prairie du Chien and Craig Woodhouse, Coordinator, Manufacturing Skills Standards Council, Southwest Technical College. The Gold Collar Career Certification provides students who do not go on to college with classroom and shop floor training paid for by private companies. PLTW curriculum helps potential new employees with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed working for a manufacturer.

EMMA concluded their industry cluster event with elections. Two new board members were seated, Tony Schaub with Dillman

- The region's highest private employment sector in terms of jobs in 2013 is manufacturing with 22,786 employees, providing annual earnings per worker of \$53,981.
- The region's second highest employment sector was health care and social assistance with 22,723 employees providing annual earnings of \$50,579 per worker.
- The region's third highest employment sector was retail trade with 16,771 employees, providing annual earnings of \$25,973 per worker.

PEPIN COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMPLETED.

Staff assistance in preparing the Pepin County Comprehensive Plan concluded with its adoption by the County Board in September 2013. The plan projects the County's population will increase by about 1,500 people by 2033 or 20%. Housing units are expected to increase by over 165 units during this same time period with 60% or more constructed in towns and the remaining amount expected to be constructed in villages and cities. Low and high end land consumption projections were made ranging from 574 acres to just over 1,500 acres needed to convert for future residential, commercial, and manufacturing growth by 2033. The plan points out the county's economic base is tied to Education, Health and Social Services; Manufacturing; Retail; and Agriculture. The County's unemployment rate is traditionally better or lower than the state rate but the County's per-capita income is traditionally lower than the state. Some of the goals and actions in plan are: Provide adequate amount and diverse housing choices; Encourage further development of low-to-median income housing; Consider the use of Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) and Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) programs as a farmland preservation tool; Prohibit development on slopes greater than 30% to preserve bluffs and minimize soil erosion; Encourage/incentivize conservation cluster developments to protect the environment; Discourage development on prime agricultural land; Improve and protect surface and groundwater quality; Encourage development patterns that preserve farmland; Develop a long-term area strategy based on sustainable economic development principles; Develop a regional marketing strategy for local agricultural products; Maintain the rural character of the county; and Explore/facilitate/identify opportunities for shared services for EMS, fire, police, etc.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLANNING STARTING IN TREMPLEAU AND CRAWFORD COUNTY. Trempealeau County needs to update its Farmland Preservation Plan by December 2016 to meet requirements of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Protection's (DATCP) Working Lands Initiative Program. MRRPC staff assisted the County in a successful grant application to update their Plan. Planning for long term farmland preservation will help to maintain the vital agricultural economy in the county. Once the Plan is completed

the Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative provides landowners with an opportunity to claim farmland preservation tax credits that are applied against their tax liability. Staff will be assisting the county in this update in the coming months. The Plan is expected to be completed by the end of 2015.

Staff is also beginning to work with Crawford County on their Farmland Preservation Plan that must be updated by December 2015. Farmland Preservation Plans must be consistent with each County's Comprehensive Plan.

ALL NINE COUNTIES' FIVE-YEAR PUBLIC TRANSIT HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLANS UPDATED IN 2013.

The recently passed Federal Transportation Bill "Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century" (MAP 21) requires certain planning requirements be met for grantees to receive funding under the Elderly and Disabled Transportation Program (s85.21), and 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Programs. Federal transit law requires that projects selected for funding under these programs be derived from a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan. In 2006 and 2008 MRRPC staff assisted each of the region's nine counties to develop their Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plans. Now five years later each of these plans are required to be updated. The public planning process involved representatives of public, private, and non-profit transportation and human services providers with public input received during information sharing meetings. A regional public transportation coordination meeting was also facilitated by the MRRPC in July 2013 to gather additional input into the plans. All the plans were completed by December 2013. These plan updates allow the counties to maintain their eligibility for various transit funding programs that mostly serve the low income, handicapped, and elderly population.

The goals were intentionally broad in scope in an effort to address and be consistent with existing and future federal and state policies and programs. The five goals in order of priority are: (1) Develop/expand/continue transportation services; (2) Increase transportation options for the transportation disadvantaged; (3) Strive to increase transportation funding to create sustainable transportation services; (4) Maximize the efficiency of transportation services through technology, innovation, and coordination; and (5) Develop and improve access to information and increase awareness of transportation services (marketing/educational outreach). Specific activities describing how each goal is to be implemented are also listed in each county plan.

SCENIC MISSISSIPPI REGIONAL TRANSIT BUS SERVICE (SMRT) CONTINUES TO GROW. A unique multi-county vision for a collaborative bus service began in 2011 and became a reality in December of 2012 and continues to grow. The SMRT

Bus is a public transportation service used by the general public that provides affordable, efficient, and accessible fixed route daily public transportation service. Four times a day the Yellow Route Bus leaves Viroqua on its round trip service to La Crosse with stops along the way at Westby and Coon Valley. Three times a day the Blue Route Bus also leaves Viroqua on its round trip service to La Crosse with the same stops at Westby and Coon Valley. Three times a day the Red Route Bus leaves Prairie du Chien on its round trip service to La Crosse with stops along the way at Lynxville, Ferryville, Genoa, DeSoto and Stoddard. All three routes make the same eight stops in La Crosse during the Monday through Friday work week.

The buses are handicapped accessible, equipped with bike carriers and have WI Fi capability. SMRT Bus System ridership for the first quarter of 2013 was 2,287 trips and by the fourth quarter of 2013 ridership had almost doubled to 4,372 trips. The growth has continued in 2014 with monthly ridership totals exceeding all previous months. Funding from federal sources, local government, health care institutions, and private businesses, made the SMRT Bus Service fare of \$3.00 no matter how far you go possible. MRRPC Staff along with City of Prairie du Chien staff will be making a presentation on the success of the SMRT Bus Service at the annual State of Wisconsin American Planner's Association Conference in Madison on June 12, 2014, as well as the APA Midwest Conference in October 2014 in Mason City, IA. For more information on the Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit Bus Service go to: www.ridesmrt.com or contact the MRRPC staff.

CITY OF CASHTON RECEIVES "CONNECT COMMUNITIES" DESIGNATION AND GRANT AWARD.

Connect Communities, a Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) program, offers technical assistance and networking opportunities to local officials interested in revitalizing their downtowns. In December 2012 MRRPC staff assisted Cashton officials in preparing a successful application to become designated as a "Connect Community". This led to the successful preparation of a Community Development Block Grant award to assist with downtown revitalization planning that is now called the Cashton Downtown Revitalization and State Highway 33 Corridor Plan. An open house meeting was held on May 22, 2014 to provide information about the project and gather input from business owners and residents. A market analysis will also be conducted to help guide long term sustainability for the downtown. The Plan will address complete street issues involving motor vehicle, pedestrian and bicycling, aesthetics, schools, and park and recreation needs that when completed will make Cashton a "connected community".

VILLAGE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION ASSISTANCE PROVIDED TO LA FARGE. In 2012 MRRPC staff assisted the Village of La Farge in developing an Economic and Recreation Development Plan. The village is now working on implementing three projects in

that plan. The projects include a one-mile trail connection to the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, an educational forest trail, and pond dredging. 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. In 2014 MRRPC staff assisted the Village with a grant application to TORO Company for assistance in dredging the pond. The Village Plan Commission is developing signs for the project and the Village is also working with Vernon Trails to develop a disc golf course in the project area.

FRAC SAND MINING LEADS TO UPDATE REQUEST FOR TOWN OF UNITY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN. Assistance is being provided to the Town of Unity in Trempealeau County, population 506, in updating their comprehensive plan. This update of their comprehensive plan addresses frac sand mining. The draft of the town plan was approved by the town planning committee and submitted to the town board for approval. Recently Trempealeau County placed a moratorium on frac sand mines and the town is waiting to see what action the county takes regarding regulating frac sand mines that are consistent or inconsistent with the draft update of their Comprehensive Plan. The county moratorium expires in the fall of 2014. Land use was viewed as the most critical element of their plan. Some of the draft's updated goals are: (1) Preserve the prime agricultural land and protect the farmers "Right to Farm", (2) Preserve and enhance the environmental quality of the town, (3) Manage the location and density of non-farm developments, (4) Reduce land use conflicts, and (4) Preserve the rural character of the landscape.

JACKSON COUNTY MULTI HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN PRESENTED AT PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING.

Staff assisted Jackson County with the update of their Multi Hazard Mitigation Plan during the 2013-2014 time period. The plan identified the top threats to health, public safety and property as: Heavy snow storms, extreme heat, thunderstorms, hail storms, tornado/high winds, and extreme cold and ice storms. Some of the hazard mitigation projects identified to reduce the losses from these hazards include: identify buildings that could be used as shelters with appropriate heating and air conditioning for housing vulnerable populations in events of extreme heat and cold; annually write letters to owners of flood prone competitive loss structures to inform them of techniques and federal/state resources available to reduce further flood losses; develop a pandemic flu plan identifying specific population isolation actions to prevent spreading and how to institute the needed emergency authorizations. The plan was recently reviewed and approved by Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) and forwarded on to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for their review. Once the plan is approved by FEMA the plan will be presented to the county board for approval.

LA CROSSE COUNTY MULTI HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN PRESENTED AT PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING. With staff assistance a draft of the La Crosse County Multi Hazard Mitigation Plan was presented at a public information meeting in May 2014. Hazards identified in the plan as having the highest threats to health, public safety and property were: heavy ice storms, snow storms, hail storms, thunderstorms, tornado and high winds, flooding, and ice storms. Some of the hazard mitigation projects identified to reduce the losses from these hazards include: Investigate the concept of a voluntary floodplain property buyout program through a survey of floodplain property owners; Develop evacuation plans for areas within the floodplain; Annually review and upgrade the County's communications capability; Install security and operation monitoring systems at all public safety radio tower sites; Identify buildings for the public's protection in the event of a tornado or high winds; Purchase mobile and portable amateur radios for Skywarn storm spotter; and Construct a regional salt storage building to increase capacity and availability of salt. Major municipal projects identified are: Construct new Emergency Operation Center – to be shared with surrounding communities (Bangor); Establish the Rockland Fire Station as a cooling station for village residents (Rockland); and fix neighborhood flooding at 18 different locations (La Crosse). Once the county multi-hazard mitigation plan is approved by the county, cities, villages, towns, Wisconsin Emergency Management, and FEMA the participating local governments are eligible for funding from FEMA through the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Assistance and Hazard Mitigation Grant Programs. The plan is presently being reviewed by Wisconsin Emergency Management.

BUFFALO COUNTY AWARDED HAZARD MITIGATION GRANT.

Multi-hazard mitigation plans are prepared by counties to reduce costs and losses in the event of natural disasters. This past year MRRPC staff assisted Buffalo County in preparing a successful \$40,000 planning grant application. In May 2014 the county received notice their planning grant was approved by Wisconsin Emergency Management and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Staff will begin working with the county in June in updating their Hazard Mitigation Plan to meet all state and federal requirements.

OUTDOOR RECREATION PLANNING CONTRIBUTES TO REGION'S QUALITY OF LIFE. Recreation planning is an activity the MRRPC continually assists counties and communities with. 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. A state policy calls for plans to be updated every five years. MRRPC staff prepared updates for Jackson, Pepin and Vernon County outdoor recreation plans this past year and the counties are now in the process of reviewing those draft plans. Jackson County's action plan presented key projects that include the concept of a visitor's center and the construction of a paved bicycle trail from Wazee Recreation area to the City of Black River Falls. Vernon County's action plan included the development of two abandoned roads

(former State Highway 131 and old CTH "P") into multipurpose recreational trails that would provide approximately 4.5 miles of motor vehicle free bicycle trail between La Farge and Rockton. Disc golf course development, an outdoor recreation activity gaining more popularity, was also identified as an action plan project for Duck Egg County Forest, Esofea/Rentz Memorial Park, and Wayside County Park and Coon Prairie Trail.

REGION, STATE AND NATION'S MANUFACTURING EMPLOYMENT GROWING. The recently completed 2014 update of 2012 –2017 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy shows that the population of the Region is increasing at a rate faster than the state's but slower than the nation's. The number of housing units in the Region is also growing, at a rate slower than the state's but higher than the nation's. When adjusted for inflation, per capita income in the Region increased by 6.1% between 2008 and 2012, a rate faster than the state's and the nation's. Median household income, however, when adjusted for inflation, tells a different story: it decreased in the Region by 4.8% between 2008 and 2012; but this decline was less steep than both the state's and the nation's. The region's unemployment rate continues to fall from its heights in 2009, with the Region's rate in 2012 at 5.9%. More encouraging than simply a decline in unemployment was that more people were employed than in the previous year — meaning that the unemployment rate is dropping because more people are finding work, not simply because so many people are leaving the workforce.

A large part of that increase in employment is due to the diversity and resiliency of the region's manufacturing sector. Manufacturing employment in the Region was strong in the decade before the Great Recession — quite different from state and national trends. Manufacturing employment in the region has been increasing since 2010. But in 2011 and 2012, for the first time in many years, manufacturing employment also increased in the state and the nation. The Mississippi River Region is particularly strong in manufacturing, and it remains the second-highest employment sector. When manufacturing was enduring such hard times throughout the state and nation, comparatively it was a little-heralded success story in the region. Now that the state and nation are beginning to show signs of improvement in manufacturing, manufacturers and business services in the region are poised to benefit. Manufacturing is similar to a rising tide. Instead of raising ships of all sizes its consumption and production attributes increase business opportunities for all types and sizes of businesses both directly and indirectly - benefiting retailing, financial services, construction, lodging, and entertainment. A copy of the complete CEDS can be viewed and downloaded from the MRRPC web site at http://mrrpc.com/CEDS_Report.html.

ECONOMIC MODELING SOFTWARE ANALYSIS AVAILABLE. The MRRPC and the other Regional Planning Commissions in the state partnered with the Wisconsin Economic Development