



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

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Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
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MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT 2014-2015

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



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MRRPC Adopts Regional Comprehensive Plan. In December 2014 the MRRPC adopted the Regional Comprehensive Plan titled "Rising as a Region" to emphasize the importance of building greater regional cooperation to raise capacity in dealing with the goals like: better jobs, roads, housing, clean air and water, and high quality recreation opportunities. The Regional Plan contains in depth social, economic, environmental, and land-use information that can be used across jurisdictional boundaries and business sectors to help both public and private sector endeavors. Some of the issues and opportunities identified in the Regional Plan where greater regional capacity resources will be needed over the next 20 years will be planning for:

- An increase of 34,000 more residents
- An increase of 28,000 more housing units
- An increase of 35,000 more people age 65 and over
- An increase of 19,000 more acres of residential, commercial and industrial land uses
- An increase of 30,000 more tons of municipal solid waste generated annually
- The cleaning up of more than 55 impaired rivers and streams from higher than acceptable pollutant levels

WILL THIS GROWTH SHAPE THE REGION OR WILL THE REGION SHAPE THIS GROWTH? Working regionally on these and many other issues identified in this Regional Comprehensive Plan we can begin "Rising as a Region".

SMRT Bus Ridership Continues to Grow and Helps Reduce Demand for Parking in La Crosse. In 2010 the Crawford County Transportation Coordinating Committee completed a feasibility study that showed residents desired a reliable and affordable public transportation service to get people to and from work, to medical appointments, shopping, and social activities. Bus routes were designed based on survey analysis and the Scenic Mississippi River Transit Bus Service was organized to provide a fixed route public transportation system serving Crawford County, southern La Crosse County, and middle/western Vernon County. SMRT bus service began operating in December 2012. The

SMRT bus service has grown from 13,013 rides in 2013 to 18,100 rides in 2014, a 39% increase. Thus far it looks like ridership numbers in 2015 will exceed 2014 levels as well. A survey conducted in February 2015 showed that:

- 98% of riders are satisfied or very satisfied with service
- 64% of riders are female
- 50% of riders are commuting to work
- 30% of riders are using the bus to go to and from school
- 65% of riders are 25-64 years of age

Due to reduced federal funding provided to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation for transit in 2014 the SMRT Bus service reduced routes and service hours by 20%. Route modifications were then made based on evaluating ridership trends. Despite this 20% service hour cut, ridership has continued to climb. A bus stop was also added in La Crosse at the VA River Valley Clinic in 2014 to serve area Veterans.

The SMRT bus routes involve seven round trips per day from Viroqua to La Crosse. The system also has three round trips per day from Prairie du Chien to La Crosse. The SMRT bus stops near the Grand River Station allowing transfers to travel throughout the greater La Crosse urban area. If the SMRT bus attains 20,000 riders annually, the service on average will be reducing over 75 motor vehicles traveling into La Crosse each week day. The bus service is also helping to reduce fossil fuel use, carbon emissions, traffic congestion and need for expensive parking spaces at hospitals, clinics, super markets, colleges, malls, and downtown. This past year staff made presentations on the SMRT Bus service at the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Planning Association Conference in Madison and at the Upper Midwest American Planning Association Conference in Des Moines.

SMRT Bus System Ridership Trends

Year	Riders
2013	13,013
2014	18,100
2015 through April	6,541

New Opportunities for State and Federal Vehicle Uses in Crawford, La Crosse, and Vernon Counties Being Researched.

The MRRPC was awarded a research grant from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to inventory and analyze all the state and federally funded transit-related vehicles in La Crosse, Vernon and Crawford counties. The inventory will involve recording vehicles ages, miles driven, times of use, location of vehicles, etc. The project will analyze the potential and barriers to vehicle sharing to aide maximum vehicle use throughout the region. With federal and state public transportation dollars continuing to decrease the need to emphasize transportation cost sharing and resource pooling will benefit the providers of these vehicles. Being able to document past efforts of maximum use through coordination will benefit them when applying for future funding for vehicles or operating assistance.

To date, the MRRPC has received a listing of vehicles purchased with State or Federal funding from WISDOT and has contacted local operators to locate any additional state and federal funded vehicles. A vehicle survey was mailed to all the operators requesting vehicle information on: vehicles ages, annual miles driven, days and hours of operation, and the location of vehicle when not operating. Another survey was mailed to the operators requesting opinions on vehicle sharing amongst providers and potential barriers or issues with vehicle sharing. It is expected that late this summer a report will be completed with analysis and recommendations on regional vehicle sharing opportunities.

Village of Cashton Downtown Revitalization and State Highway 33 Corridor Plan is Nearing Completion.

With MRRPC assistance the Village of Cashton was awarded the designation of a “Connect Community” by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation in 2013 and has since received a \$15,750 Community Planning grant to develop a downtown revitalization and State Highway 33 corridor plan. Staff has been assisting the village in preparing this plan. As part of the planning process a market study was conducted consisting of a business survey, consumer survey, and economic data analysis. During the planning process staff also conducted approximately twenty business interviews and held several meetings with downtown businesses. Input received indicates that businesses and residents would like to see: a regular farmers market established, redevelopment of vacant or underutilized Main Street properties, enhance the Front Street/State Highway 33 intersection, and improvements to downtown streets that would include curb bump outs at specific intersections to make the downtown area more pedestrian friendly with landscape enhancements throughout the downtown area. The overall goal is to create a quaint and vibrant downtown by making and promoting downtown Cashton as a fun place to shop and be.

Golden Shovel Program Launches. The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation’s (WEDC) Certified Sites Program pre-certifies larger industrial sites across the state as “Development Ready”. Another program being rolled out in Western Wisconsin

this spring is called “Golden Shovel”. This program involves identifying business sites that are development ready and can be closed on quickly. “Development Ready” means decisions on price and zoning have been made and any development restraints such as floodplain, environmental concerns, historical issues, public infrastructure, and compatibility with surrounding landowners and uses have been resolved and are documented in writing by the proper authorities. The MRRPC has been designated as the Golden Shovel Site Reviewer to make sure all the sites submitted for the Golden Shovel designation meet the criteria to prove they are development ready. Once designated a Golden Shovel Site, the 7 Rivers Alliance will market the site. La Crosse County was awarded a WEDC grant to be a pilot project for the Golden Shovel Program. The 7 Rivers Alliance will provide a consultant to work with La Crosse County to collect the necessary information and provide any technical assistance needed during the verification process. A Site Selection Summit will be held in the summer by 7 Rivers Alliance to share the results of the project with peer communities who will be invited to participate in Golden Shovel Phase II to increase the inventory of “Development Ready” sites in the region.

Buffalo County Multi-hazard Mitigation Plan Update is Underway.

Staff is assisting Buffalo County in updating its existing Multi-hazard Mitigation Plan. The purpose of the plan is to help reduce costs and losses from natural disasters by identifying the county’s vulnerabilities to various types of disasters. The plan will include an inventory of all critical facilities and structures located in the county. Some examples of critical facilities are facilities needed during a disaster such as police, fire and hospitals. These facilities need additional protection because of the role they play in disasters. Projects and strategies will be developed as part of the planning process to help mitigate losses from future disasters. Staff attended the January County Towns Association meeting to discuss the planning process and to receive input on needed projects. Two separate surveys were sent out to every municipality. The first survey is intended to obtain each municipality’s rating on a high, medium or low scale of how each of nineteen different hazards affects their community. The second survey was sent to identify specific projects for each municipality. In addition to natural hazards the county is including manmade disasters of train and lock and dam hazards in this plan update. This will be the first county mitigation plan in the region to include these two hazards. An approved multi-hazard mitigation plan maintains the county and other participating local governments’ eligibility for Federal and State Hazard Mitigation Grant programs.

La Crosse County Adopts Multi Hazard Mitigation Plan. The La Crosse County Multi Hazard Mitigation Plan was approved by the County Board in January, 2015. Nine towns, and all villages and cities also adopted the plan. The plan was also approved by Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) and the Federal

Table 3. Top Ten Industries Contributing Most to the Gross Domestic Product by County 2013, (Millions of \$’s)

County	Crop & Animal Production	Transpor & Warehouse	Utilities	Other Non Industries	Manufacturing	Wholesale Trade	Finance & Insurance	Retail Trade	Real Estate, Rent, Lease	Construction	Total Top 10 Indus. Contrib.to GDP
Buffalo	74	66	43	42	41	30	30	25	21	19	391
Crawford	Manufacturing 208	Retail Trade 91	Health Care & Social Assist 51	Crop & Animal Production 46	Other Non Industries 42	Real Estate, Rent, Lease 35	Finance & Insurance 29	Information 23	Wholesale Trade 19	Accom & Food Services 18	562
Jackson	Manufacturing 89	Crop & Animal Production 80	Construction 78	Transpor & Warehouse 68	Health Care & Social Assist 57	Other Non Industries 55	Retail Trade 40	Mining & Quarrying 34	Real Estate, Rent, Lease 33	Finance & Insurance 20	554
La Crosse	Health Care & Soc Assist 922	Manufacturing 830	Wholesale Trade 420	Retail Trade 388	Finance & Insurance 375	Real Estate, Rent, Lease 355	Other Non Industries 342	Construction 245	Transpor & Warehouse 190	Mgmt of Companies & Enterprises 156	4,223
Monroe	Manufacturing 318	Crop & Animal Production 145	Transpor & Warehouse 140	Other Non Industries 115	Retail Trade 99	Health Care & Social Assist 93	Construction 80	Finance & Insurance 65	Wholesale Trade 63	Real Estate, Rent, Lease 57	1,175
Pepin	Crop & Animal Production 31	Wholesale Trade 25	Other Non Industries 21	Retail Trade 19	Health Care & Social Assist 16	Construction 14	Manufacturing 13	Finance & Insurance 12	Real Estate, Rent, Lease 9	Information 6	166
Pierce	Manufacturing 157	Other Non Industries 105	Crop & Animal Production 96	Real Estate, Rent, Lease 70	Finance & Insurance 53	Retail Trade 50	Transpor & Warehouse 39	Construction 36	Health Care & Social Assist 35	Wholesale Trade 27	668
Trempealeau	Manufacturing 418	Crop & Animal Production 108	Other Non Industries 79	Real Estate, Rent, Lease 71	Health Care & Social Assist 49	Retail Trade 46	Wholesale Trade 44	Finance & Insurance 40	Construction 28	Information 23	906
Vernon	Crop & Animal Production 129	Wholesale Trade 94	Health Care & Social Assist 81	Manufacturing 70	Other Non Industries 69	Retail Trade 58	Utilities 45	Finance & Insurance 40	Construction 26	Information 224	836
Region	Manufacturing 2,144	Health Care & Social Assist 1,314	Other Non Industries 870	Retail Trade 816	Crop & Animal Production 767	Wholesale Trade 741	RE, Rent, Lease 665	Finance & Insurance 662	Transpor & Warehouse 597	Construction 540	9,116
Wis	Manufacturing 56,902	Finance & Insurance 22,977	Health Care & Social Assist 22,747	Wholesale Trade 17,454	Other Non Industries 17,398	Retail Trade 15,082	Real Estate, Rent, Lease 14,952	Professional & Scientific Services 10,845	Construction 10,810	Information 8,965	198,132
U.S.	Manufacturing 321,502	Finance & Insurance 171,105	Health Care & Social Assist 143,893	Wholesale Trade 128,389	Professional & Technical Serv 117,107	Other Non Industries 115,435	Real Estate, Rent, Lease 115,018	Retail Trade 95,683	Construction 67,387	Information 64,014	1,339,533

Source: EMSI Analyst - EMSI Q1 2015 Dataset using two digit North American Industry Classification Code System (NAICS)

2014 MRRPC AUDIT

Mr. Michael Temp, CPA, Tostrud and Temp, S.C. reported the findings of the 2014 Audit at the April 8, 2015, 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 2014 operating revenues of \$393,518 and operating expenses of \$406,907. The audit also reported total assets of \$282,495 (not including business revolving loan funds) and total liabilities of \$49,461 resulting in the MRRPC having net assets valued at \$233,034 on December 31, 2014. 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 \$399,285 is presently owed to the respective revolving loan funds from businesses.

MRRPC COMMISSIONERS

- Buffalo County**
Daniel Barr, Del Twidt, Mary Anne McMillan Urell
- Crawford County**
Gerald Krachey, Ron Leys, Greg Russell
- Jackson County**
Ron Carney, James Christenson, Eugene Savage
- La Crosse County**
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- Pierce County**
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- Trempealeau County**
Margaret Baecker (Vice Chairman), Phillip Borreson, Ernest Vold
- Vernon County**
Nancy Jaekel, James Neubauer, Jo Ann Nickelatti

- Housing growth has slowed in the region and the median price for housing is not yet at pre-recession levels for Buffalo, Crawford, Pierce, Trempealeau and Vernon counties.
- The region's per capita income is typically lower than state and nation but on a percentage basis is now growing at a faster rate than the state and nation.
- Manufacturing has the largest number of private employees in the region and the state.

The CEDS also has an analysis of the strength of employment sectors in the region. Table 1 measures this strength by employment location quotient (LQ). LQ is a way of quantifying how concentrated a particular industry, cluster, occupation, or demographic group is in a region compared to the nation. For example the 84.57 location quotient for the region's Non-upholstered Wood Household Furniture Manufacturing means that on a percentage basis the region's workforce in this industry is 84.57 times more than the nation as a whole; meaning we have an extremely strong specialty niche for this industry. Industries with high LQ's typically have a strong affinity to export bringing capital into the region that is shared by many other business sectors. A location quotient of 1.0 means the workforce in a region on a percentage basis is on par with the workforce of the U.S. as a whole in that particular industry.

NAICS	Description	2014 Jobs	2014 National Location Quotient
337122	Nonupholstered Wood Household Furniture Mfg	3,676	84.57
327910	Abrasive Product Manufacturing	701	65.47
212322	Industrial Sand Mining	325	62.59
311514	Dry, Condensed, & Evaporated Dairy Prod. Mfg	769	47.76
311513	Cheese Manufacturing	979	21.74
311423	Dried and Dehydrated Food Manufacturing	247	21.34
332410	Power Boiler and Heat Exchanger Mfg	521	20.23
333415	Air-Conditioning & Warm Air Heating Equip. & Commercial and Industrial Refrig. Equip. Mfg	1,661	18.40
325314	Fertilizer (Mixing Only) Manufacturing	135	16.57
321912	Cut Stock, Resawing Lumber, and Planing	237	16.46
333999	All Other Misc. General Purpose Machinery Mfg	677	15.55
327215	Glass Product Mfg Made of Purchased Glass	710	15.17
321992	Prefabricated Wood Building Manufacturing	205	14.59
312120	Breweries	501	12.76

Source: EMSI Analyst- EMSI Q1 2015 Data Set:

Harvard Industry Cluster Mapping Project Shows Region's Economic Strengths. Staff used another tool to analyze the Region's economy in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy discussed above. This tool was an online program made available from the U.S. Cluster Mapping Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness, Harvard Business School. This program can identify a region's traded clusters or clusters of related industries

that serve markets beyond the region in which they are located and are considered essential for a region to grow and maintain a vibrant economy. Table 2 identifies the top ten Traded Clusters in the Mississippi River Region using this online program. For further information on the Harvard Cluster Mapping Project go to: <http://clustermapping.us>.

Cluster	Jobs
1) Transportation and Logistics	4,758
2) Furniture	4,445
3) Food Processing and Manufacturing	3,905
4) Metalworking Technology	2,282
5) Automotive	1,870
6) Wood Products	1,859
7) Printing Services	1,629
8) Plastics	938
9) Downstream Metal Products	800
10) Live Stock Processing	760

Economic Modeling Software Analysis Shows Top 10 Industries Contributing the Most to the Gross Regional Product by County. The MRRPC and the other Regional Planning Commissions in the state have partnered with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation to provide economic development analysis to the region's communities. Through this partnership and the use of modeling software called Analyst, developed by Economic Modeling Specialists International (EMSI) the MRRPC can conduct economic trend and what if project impact analysis. This analysis can be done on a county, multi county, zip code area, or statewide basis. Table 3 is EMSI generated data showing the top ten industries in each county contributing the most to the nation's gross domestic product by county, region, and state. While manufacturing, healthcare, and retail are the top three regional contributors the variance from one county to another in second through tenth place industries is noteworthy. EMSI Economic Base reports for each county can be downloaded from our website at www.mrrpc.com. We can also tailor a report to your specific need.

Thank You Bryan Law, Transit Planner, City of Rochester, MN. This past year Bryan Law, the Commission's Economic Development Planner accepted a Transit Planning position with the City of Rochester, MN. Bryan's planning and economic development work for the region was exceptional and covered comprehensive planning, grant writing, economic development planning, and revolving loan fund administration. We acknowledge and thank Bryan for his high quality and quantity of work for the Mississippi River Region during his five years here. We wish him great success in his new position as well!

Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The plan analyzes the county's vulnerabilities to various types of disasters and inventories and maps critical facilities and structures located in floodplains. Flooding events not surprisingly is the number one natural hazard the county officials thought the county is most vulnerable to and ranked the highest in future threats to life, property, and economic losses. Some projects identified are: voluntary buyouts of homes/businesses located in floodplain; purchase backup generators for various police, fire, and government centers to keep these facilities operating during events with power outages; construct storm shelters for mobile home parks; raise roads and increase culvert sizes to prevent flood waters from closing roads; purchase weather radios; and install living snow fences to prevent drifting over roadways. The plan will help reduce future costs and losses from natural and manmade disasters. The approved Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan makes the county and other participating local governments eligible for Federal and State Hazard Mitigation Grant programs.

Town of Holland Develops Road Access Criteria for U.S. Highway 53 and Criteria for Protecting Agricultural Lands. Staff assisted the Town of Holland in La Crosse County in implementing action items contained in the Town's comprehensive plan. This involved developing storm water runoff/landscaping guidelines, U.S. Highway 53 Commercial Corridor access recommendations, and protecting productive agricultural lands. Guidelines were developed for parking areas and "Bioretention Landscape Elements" such as bioswales and designed wetlands are to be used when applicable. U.S Highway 53 Corridor recommendations include that new commercial development originate from U.S. Highway 53 access intersection nodes and when applicable be required to provide access to commercial and housing developments by a frontage road. To protect productive agricultural land, guidelines state that new residential development be evaluated based on development criteria when proposed to be located in or adjacent to areas designated as "Active Agriculture" or "Large Lot Development" on the Town of Holland Future Land Use Map. These changes to the Comprehensive Plan were approved by the Town Board in March of 2015.

Outdoor Recreation Planning Contributes to the Region's Quality of Life. It goes without saying that the Mississippi River Region is blessed with an extremely high quality natural resource base. Developing outdoor recreation amenities and facilities therefore play an important part in providing positive quality of life experiences for residents and attracting tourists that many communities and businesses depend on. The MRRPC helps counties and communities with recreation amenity and facility development by preparing outdoor recreation plans that inventory recreational assets, values, and needs that lead to public supported outdoor recreation projects. Having an up to date outdoor recreation plan keeps communities and counties

eligible for Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Grants and State Stewardship Grants that help fund outdoor recreation projects. Millions of dollars in grants have been awarded to communities and counties in the region as a result of outdoor recreation planning. This past year staff met with local officials from Jackson, Pierce, Vernon, Crawford, Buffalo and Trempealeau Counties to discuss updating their respective plans. The following summarizes some of the recreation planning activity we have been involved in this past year.

Pepin County Planning for More Recreational Trails. Pepin County adopted their recreation plan in March 2015. The plan describes existing outdoor recreation facilities or programs and identifies specific projects the county would like to accomplish to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities. Pepin County provides a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities such as: sailing, boating, fishing, camping, hiking, hunting, sightseeing, biking, horseback riding, and picnicking. The Mississippi River and Lake Pepin is a major recreational attraction. There are also two State Wildlife Areas, four State Natural Areas and two county parks providing outdoor recreation opportunities. Numerous civic organizations such as Rod and Gun Clubs, Lions Clubs and Ducks Unlimited also help meet the county's outdoor recreational needs. Some of the proposed projects identified in the plan are: Construct a walking/hiking trail at the county park; Repair the paved Chippewa River State Trail; Develop an outdoor recreation curriculum and program in the schools; Install volleyball courts in Arkansas Creek Park; Develop tour maps of local public art galleries; Develop signage for access areas to public hunting and fishing areas; and develop additional trails.

Village of Chaseburg Planning for a Canoe Landing, Educational Wetland, and Trail Loop. Staff assisted the Village of Chaseburg in Vernon County with an update to their outdoor recreation plan. The village has two parks and a nature trail. The parks contain: ball field, picnic pavilions, playground equipment, handicapped trout fishing piers, a pond, horseshoe pits, and charcoal grills. The nature trail is paved and is approximately two miles in length. The updated outdoor recreation plan calls for making improvements to the Chaseburg Community Park including construction of a new handicapped accessible multi-use building and upgrading the ball field. Improvements identified at the Chaseburg Memorial Park include the development the existing wetland area into an "Education Wetland" site; construction of an information gazebo to provide information on the history of the area; improving trout fishing opportunities; and adding playground equipment. Other projects include construction of a canoe landing along Coon Creek, improve handicapped fishing piers by installing railings, and connecting two trails to form a complete loop.

Village of La Farge Developing Educational Forest, Fishing Pond and Disc Golf Course. Staff has been assisting the Village of La Farge, Vernon County with developing projects prioritized in their recreation plan. These projects include: developing an educational forest/trail and enhancing access to an existing pond by dredging and constructing a handicapped accessible pier. In addition staff assisted in site preparation, planning, sign development, and facility recommendations for the educational forest and fishing pond area. A disc golf course is also being developed and will be located on acquired floodplain properties near the Kickapoo River. Staff also continues to assist the Village in identifying funding sources for their projects.

Crawford, Pepin and Trempealeau County Farmland Preservation Plans Being Updated. Counties are required to update their farmland preservation plans to meet the requirements of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Protection Working Land's Initiative Program. For landowners to be eligible to receive Farmland Preservation Tax Credits, counties are required to designate farmland preservation areas in their county. A Farmland Preservation Area must meet the following criteria: Lands identified in the farmland preservation area must either be devoted to primarily agricultural use, and/or primarily agriculture-related uses; natural resource and open space areas may also be included.

In Trempealeau County, staff has compiled data on population, housing, land in farms, forest land, agriculture land, types of farms, farm values, types of farm organization, livestock data, types of crops, market value of products, farm expenses, farm income, grain storage capacity, and number of organic farms. Goals have also been drafted pertaining to public participation, residential and commercial growth, commercial uses, industry uses, public facilities, recreation, and land conservation. These are now being reviewed by Trempealeau County officials. Later this year staff will be working with the towns to designate their farmland preservation areas and update their town land use maps.

MRRPC staff is also assisting Crawford and Pepin County update their Farmland Preservation Plans. In Crawford County staff has compiled population, housing, land in farms, forest land, agriculture land, types of farms, farm values, types of farm organization, livestock data, types of crops, market value of products, farm expenses, and farm income data. In Pepin County this information will be compiled in the first part of 2015. Goals for public participation, residential and commercial growth, commercial uses, industry uses, public facilities, recreation, and land conservation are being drafted and will be presented to county officials in July 2015. In addition staff will meet with both Pepin County and Crawford County Town Associations in 2015. After the initial meeting with the Towns Associations, staff will begin meeting with each town to present the initial findings and analysis in the summer and fall of 2015.

Contract to Prepare Zoning Ordinance for Buffalo County Approved. At the MRRPC's April 2015 meeting the Commission approved a contract with Buffalo County to prepare a new zoning ordinance and zoning maps. Buffalo County adopted a Comprehensive Plan in 2013 and updating the county's zoning ordinance was a key recommendation of the plan. Wisconsin Statutes call for zoning ordinances to be consistent with a comprehensive plan so close attention will be made of this past planning work. The MRRPC will be meeting with the county zoning committee and the towns numerous times over a two year ordinance development period. The contract calls for completing the zoning ordinance and maps by August 2017.

Tactical Interoperability Planning. Tactical interoperability plans are plans that identify existing interoperability communication assets, staff, and policies. Staff has assisted Pepin, Pierce and Trempealeau counties with the preparation of their tactical interoperability plans. This assistance involved updating the existing Pepin County plan, holding the initial meeting of the Pierce County interoperability committee, and having a meeting with the Trempealeau County Emergency Management Coordinator to discuss and explain the updating procedure and requirements. This detailed inventorying and planning of emergency resources at the local level needs to be shared with other local, state, and federal governments to achieve a higher level of emergency response success. To assist with this staff was involved in conducting the West Central Wisconsin Regional Interoperability Council meetings. Six Regional Interoperability Councils have been created across the state to serve as a liaison for information regarding interoperability communications between the state and counties. They were formed to give local units of government a recognized way to have their concerns voiced to state officials and departments and to give the state an established way to communicate and provide information to the counties collectively. This planning activity involved: attending regional coordinators meetings/teleconferences with the Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance; participation in statewide Communication Interoperability Plan working sessions; and participation in Community Asset Survey Methodology training.

First Responder Network Authority - FirstNet. The First Responder Network Authority or FirstNet is a federal program with a mission to build, operate, and maintain the first high-speed nationwide wireless broadband network dedicated to public safety. FirstNet will provide a single interoperable platform for emergency and daily public safety communication. FirstNet was approved by Congress and signed into law in February 22, 2012. The law gives FirstNet the mission to build, operate and maintain the first high-speed, nationwide wireless broadband network dedicated to public safety. FirstNet will provide a single interoperable platform for emergency and daily public safety communications. This broadband network will fulfill a fundamental need of the public safety community and implement recommendations of the 9/11

Commission. Congress allocated valuable spectrum of 700 mega hertz and up to \$7 billion in funding for the construction of FirstNet. To create a nationwide network, all 56 U.S. states and territories must have a radio access network that is connected to the FirstNet core network. FirstNet will bring 21st technology tools to millions of organizations and individuals that respond to emergencies at the local, state, tribal, and federal levels. To contain costs, FirstNet is tasked with leveraging existing telecommunications infrastructure and assets. This includes exploring public/private partnerships that can help support and accelerate the creation of this new advanced wireless network. As this program moves forward each state will have the option of opting into the network and work with FirstNet, or opting out and creating their own network. In June of 2015 FirstNet will have an initial consultation with Wisconsin state officials and potential users of FirstNet. Topics of discussion will include: construction of core network and any radio access network – RAN build-out; placement of towers; coverage areas of the network whether at the regional, state, tribal, or local levels; adequacy of hardening, security, reliability, and resiliency requirements; assignment of priority of local users; and assignment of priority and selection of entities seeking access use of the nationwide interoperable public safety broadband network and training needs of local users. The goal is to ensure there is service in all 50 states, five territories, and the District of Columbia by 2022. MRRPC Staff has been involved in the State's strategic planning sessions. This has involved disseminating FirstNet information to the West Central Regional Interoperability Council, reviewing data to be collected by FirstNet for accuracy, distributing a survey on interoperability assets, and participating in conference calls to discuss agenda items for the June 2015 consultation. Assisting with the development of a Power Point presentation to regional councils, counties and other interested organizations was another service staff provided in planning for FirstNet this past year.

Business Loans to a Wood Product Manufacturer and a Bar and Restaurant Approved. The MRRPC serves as the custodian and administrator of U.S. Department of Commerce - Economic Development Administration grants that funded four revolving loan funds (RLFs) in the region. These funds were designed to provide affordable gap financing for businesses in the region that involves participation from banks and /or equity investors. This past year RLF loans were made to a forest and wood product industry near Fountain City that needed additional financing to help it recover from a fire, and to a bar and restaurant in Whitehall. Since the inception of these RLFs they have made over 65 loans totaling over \$3.9 million that have created over 500 jobs and leveraged over \$40 million in private financing. 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 the MRRPC office. MRRPC Staff also assisted Monroe and La Crosse County with administering their Community Development Block Grant Revolving Loan Funds; they both have funds available for additional business lending as well.

Equipment and Metal Manufacturing Association (EMMA) Promotes Manufacturing. EMMA is an organization providing resources, networking, and joint venture opportunities to the equipment, machinery, and metal manufacturers in Western Wisconsin, Eastern Minnesota, and Northeastern Iowa. The MRRPC serves as a liaison for EMMA providing logistical support for members, potential members, government agencies, and others desiring to find out more about EMMA or are interested in discussing networking ideas regarding excess capacity, workforce development, and joint product development. Most joint venture success to date has been in employee training savings and making use of under used equipment among companies. Labor force sharing has also occurred where one company needs additional employees to undertake a job and utilize another company's employees. EMMA has also initiated grants to form Lego Leagues in schools, and held a Manufacturing Expo, where manufacturers in the region could display their products and attend seminars on manufacturing related topics. In October 2014 EMMA sponsored a bus trip to tour McNeilus Steel Inc., a full-line metal services center, located in Dodge Center, Minnesota. The tour gave participants an appreciation for the logistics of getting raw steel to the Midwest and then distributed to the region's manufacturers. It also afforded opportunity for participants to network. To find out more about EMMA please visit their web site at: emmatrstate.org. The equipment and metal manufacturing industry is a major economic driver of the Mississippi River Region and benefits many other sectors of the region's economy.

Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Report Shows Total Employment in the Region Nearing Pre-recession Employment Peak and Manufacturing as the Leading Job Creator with 23,600 Jobs. The annual update for the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission's CEDS Report was completed in April 2015. The update maintains the region's economic development district designation allowing local governments, institutions and businesses in the region to qualify for U.S. Department of Commerce-Economic Development Administration grant and loan assistance programs. The update provides an assessment of past year's economic development activities towards meeting regional economic development goals and describes economic trends. Some of the trends reported are:

- The region's population on a percentage basis is growing faster than the state but slower than the nation. Two counties in the region, Buffalo and Crawford counties lost population between 2000 and 2014.
- The region's population cohort of 65 years or older is growing faster than both the state and the nation and by the year 2034 it is projected that about 25% percent of the region's population will be age 65 or older.
- The region's total employment now is 166,873, slightly less than the 2008 168,458 employment peak.
- Manufacturing was the leading employment sector in 2014 with over 23,600 employees.