



Providing planning and economic development services to improve the region's environment, economy and quality of life.

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission  
1707 Main Street, Suite 435  
La Crosse, WI 54601

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# ANNUAL REPORT

*JUNE 1, 2021 - MAY 31, 2022*



MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL  
PLANNING COMMISSION

## CONTACT US

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*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, 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 makes the activities of the MRRPC possible.*

## 9 COUNTIES

BUFFALO  
CRAWFORD  
JACKSON  
LA CROSSE  
MONROE  
PEPIN  
PIERCE  
TREMPEALEAU  
VERNON



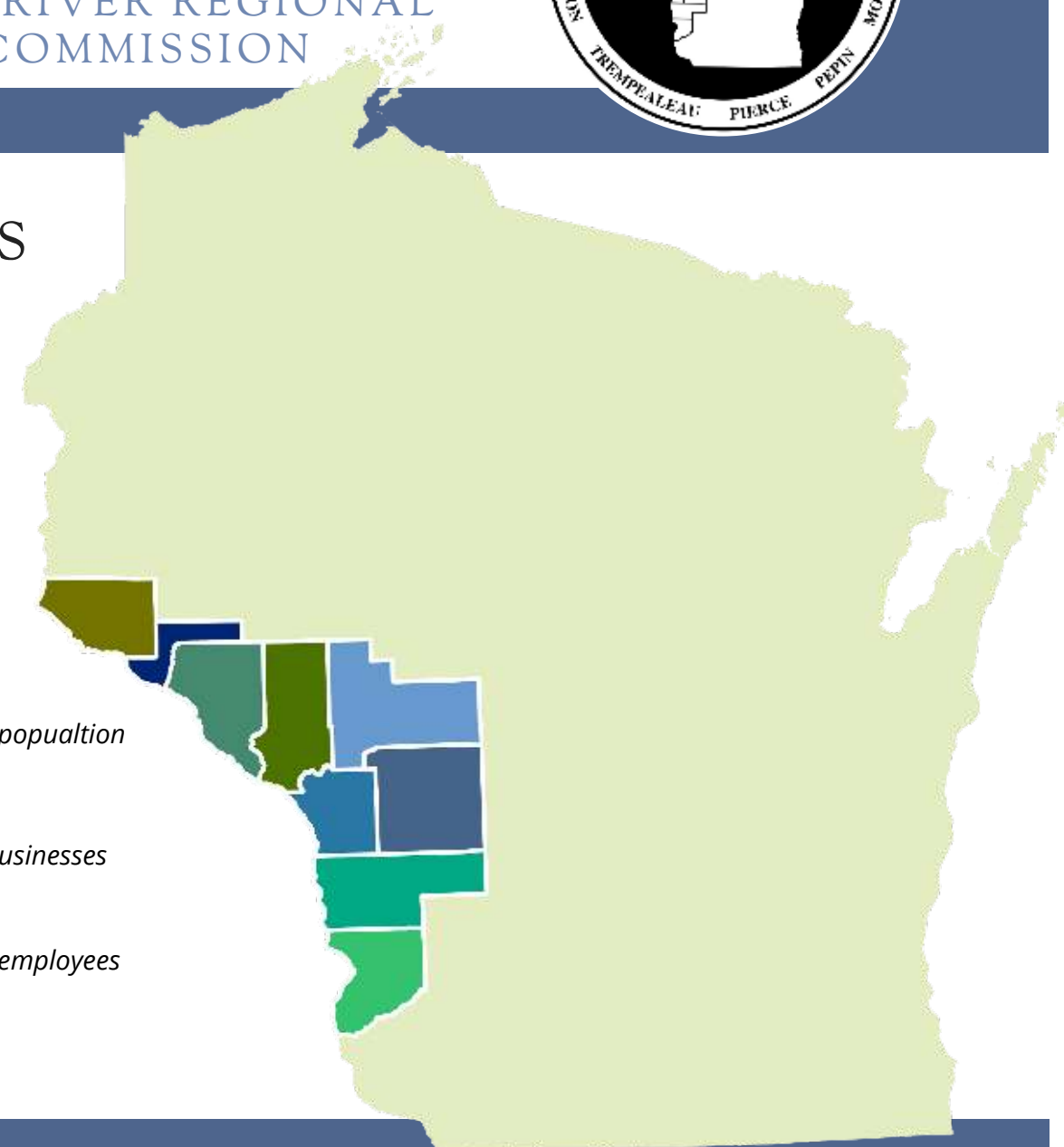
329,994 total population



12,692 total businesses



156,115 total employees



## ABOUT US

The Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission (MRRPC) is a Commission of nine counties located along the Mississippi River in western Wisconsin. The Commission was organized in 1964 under Wisconsin State Statutes to plan for the physical, social, and economic development of the region. MRRPC is a multi-service entity that delivers a variety of federal, state, and local programs. Similar to a municipality, MRRPC is a public entity providing services to member local government units in western Wisconsin.



# SERVICES



## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Comprehensive Planning  
Hazard Mitigation Planning  
Land Use Planning  
Outdoor Recreation Planning  
Farmland Preservation Planning  
Zoning Assistance  
Housing Studies/Reports



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Comprehensive Economic  
Development Strategy (CEDS)  
Revolving Loan Funds  
Disaster Recovery Microloans  
Grant Writing and Administration  
Special Reports



## TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Regional Transportation Planning  
Safe Routes to School Planning  
Corridor Planning  
Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility  
Planning  
Freight Planning  
Transportation & Economic  
Development



## MAPPING AND DATA SERVICES

Custom Map Design  
Interactive Maps and Applications  
EMSI Developer Assistance  
Location Based Data Services  
Land Use Data

## COMMISSIONERS

A group of commissioners oversees the activities of Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission. The Commission is made up of three commissioners from each member county that are a) appointed by the county board, b) appointed by the Governor from a list of persons nominated by the county board, and c) selected by the Governor.

Buffalo County  
Mary Anne McMillan Urell  
Del Twidt  
John Schlesselman

Pepin County  
John Andrews  
Chris Kees Winkler  
James Kraft

Crawford County  
Don Stirling  
Gerald Krachey  
Michael Higgins

Pierce County  
Richard Purdy  
William Schroeder  
Neil Gulbranson

Jackson County  
Ron Carney  
Brad Chown  
Vacant

Trempealeau County  
Margaret Baecker  
Ernest Vold  
Phillip Borreson

La Crosse County  
Vicki Burke  
Sharon Hampson  
Robin Schmidt

Vernon County  
Herb Cornell  
Jo Ann Nickelatti  
Nancy Jaeckel

Monroe County  
Toni Wissestad  
James Kuhn  
Cedric Schnitzler

## STAFF

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## REVOLVING LOAN FUNDS

### MRRPC ACTIVE LOANS 2021-2022



REVOLVING LOAN FUNDS	FUND BALANCE AS OF APRIL 30, 2022 (Total Cash and Receivables, and Other Assets)	AVAILABLE CASH BALANCE AS OF APRIL 30, 2022 (Net of Closed Loans not yet Funded and Committed Loans)
Business Capital Fund I	\$582,765.59	\$193,795.19
Business Capital Fund II	\$252,279.23	\$184,042.21
CMV Growth Development Fund	\$242,665.75	\$132,666.75
La Crosse County Business Fund	\$169,963.38	\$91,386.32
CARES Act RLF	\$1,054,317.86	\$30,276.05
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$2,301,991.60</b>	<b>\$632,166.52</b>

Since 1990

**97** LOANS MADE TO BUSINESSES

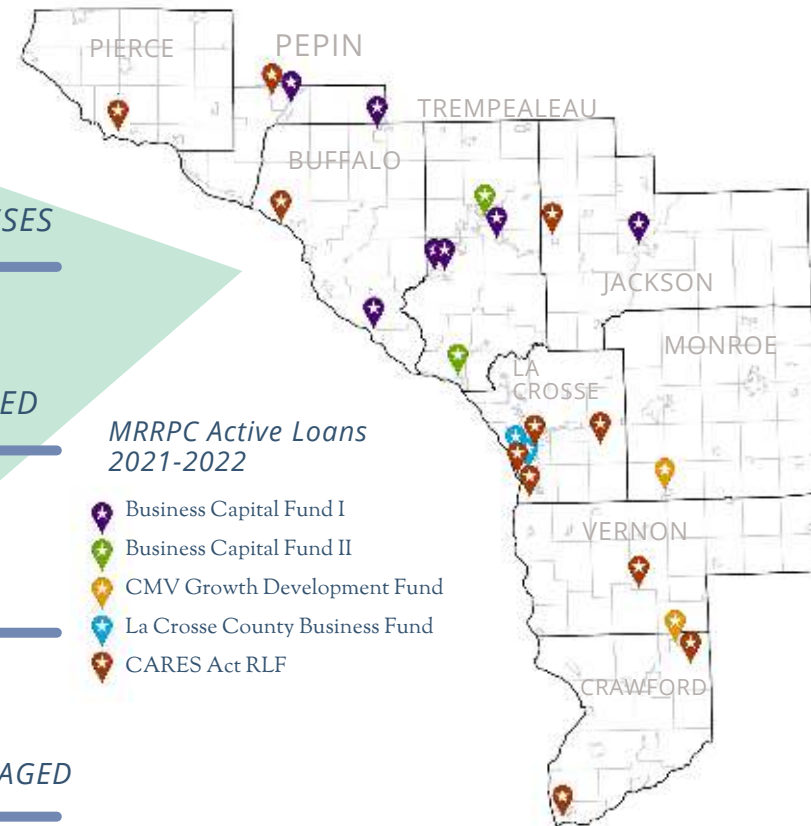
**802** JOBS CREATED OR RETAINED

**\$6.5** MILLION LOANED TO BUSINESSES

**\$51.1** MILLION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDING LEVERAGED

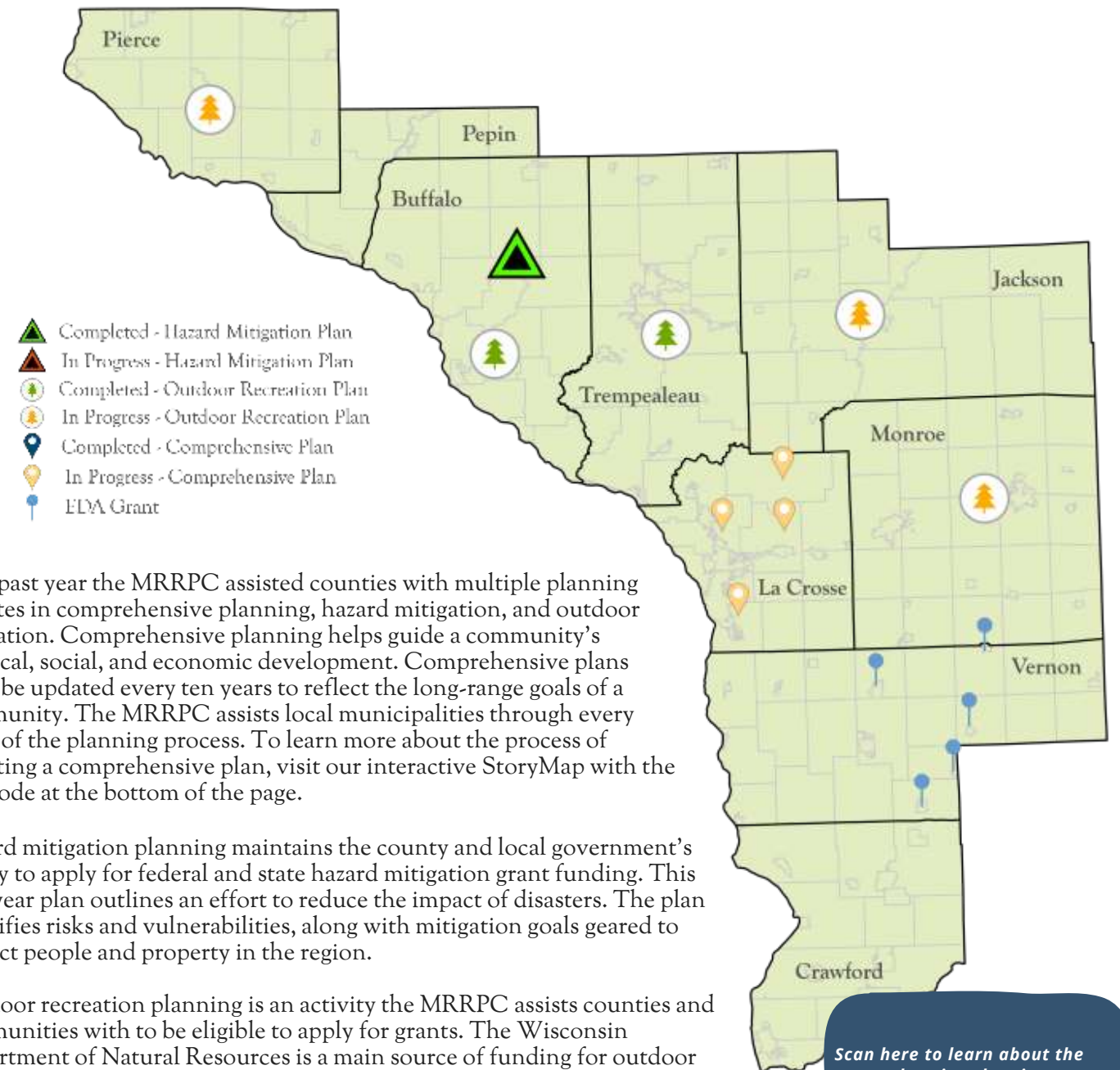
MRRPC Active Loans 2021-2022

- ★ Business Capital Fund I
- ★ Business Capital Fund II
- ★ CMV Growth Development Fund
- ★ La Crosse County Business Fund
- ★ CARES Act RLF



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## HIGHLIGHTED PROJECTS



This past year the MRRPC assisted counties with multiple planning updates in comprehensive planning, hazard mitigation, and outdoor recreation. Comprehensive planning helps guide a community's physical, social, and economic development. Comprehensive plans must be updated every ten years to reflect the long-range goals of a community. The MRRPC assists local municipalities through every stage of the planning process. To learn more about the process of updating a comprehensive plan, visit our interactive StoryMap with the QR code at the bottom of the page.

Hazard mitigation planning maintains the county and local government's ability to apply for federal and state hazard mitigation grant funding. This five-year plan outlines an effort to reduce the impact of disasters. The plan identifies risks and vulnerabilities, along with mitigation goals geared to protect people and property in the region.

Outdoor recreation planning is an activity the MRRPC assists counties and communities with to be eligible to apply for grants. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is a main source of funding for outdoor recreation facilities. The Stewardship Program, administered by the DNR, is a fund designed to provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, protect land sensitive to environmental degradation, conserve and restore wildlife habitat, and protect water quality. As a prerequisite to WDNR funding programs, applicants must first submit an outdoor recreation plan that has been approved by a local governing unit, or a plan of a higher unit of government.

Scan here to learn about the comprehensive planning process!

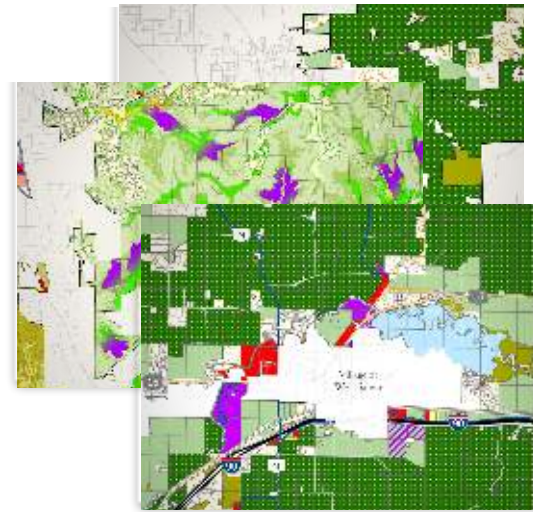


# PLANS and GRANTS

## COMPREHENSIVE PLANS

Comprehensive Plans are created and updated to provide overall strategies for growth and conservation of municipalities. In 2021-2022 the Town of Farmington, Hamilton, Onalaska, Shelby made updates to their 2022-2041 comprehensive plans. The MRRPC staff assisted the Towns with updates to their plans including demographic data, mapping, hosting open houses, and drafting of the plans. All of the towns put a high priority on maintaining their rural character. They will accomplish this by limiting development on existing prime farmlands and creating cooperative agreements with their surrounding municipalities.

Upcoming public meetings will review the draft plans to go to public hearing.



## MULTI-HAZARDS MITIGATION PLANS

The Buffalo County Multi-Hazards Mitigation Plan was completed and adopted in 2022. Hail, lightning, and severe snowstorms are the hazards the counties are most vulnerable to and cause the most physical and financial damage. Many development projects presented are brick and mortar projects, such as the purchase of a backup generator for municipal buildings, the installation of larger culverts, a voluntary buyout of homes and businesses located in the 100-year floodplain, the purchase of electronic moveable road signs for road closures, or bank stabilization on roads to prevent landslides.

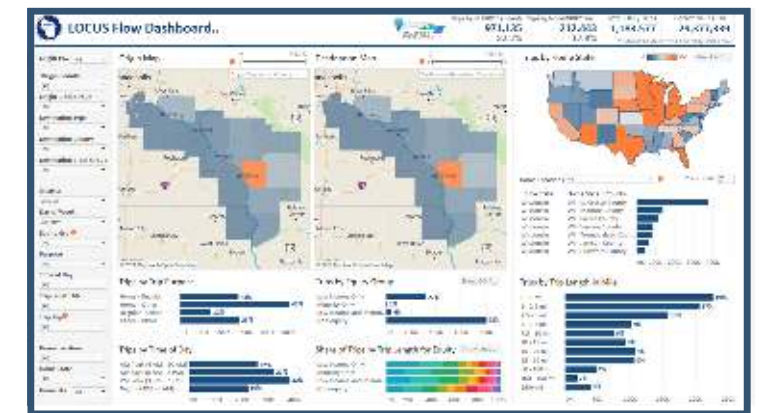
The MRRPC has submitted a grant application to update both Crawford and Vernon County multi-hazards mitigation plans. The plan updates are anticipated to begin in late 2022.



## LOCATION BASED DATA

Starting in early 2021, MRRPC partnered with Cambridge Systematics to develop a location-based services data (LBS) dashboard for the region. The product, LOCUS, collects passively from mobile devices and can provide detailed information about how people are moving, where they are going, and when their travel is occurring throughout the 9 counties. Compared to traditional surveys and travel data, LBS data can be collected for longer periods of time, at more regular intervals, and from a larger sample size.

MRRPC staff continues to explore and devise analyses and better understand effects of COVID restrictions on their communities. LBS data is now available from quarter 4 2019, 2020, and 2021, and are available at the Census block group level. Further, the team has worked to synthesize the extremely large datasets into easy-to-use and comprehend dashboard summaries and graphics.



Attributes of the data include summaries of: Trip Origin, Trip Destination, Time of Day, Length of Trip, Trip Purpose, and Equity Group information. While this data is traditionally used for transportation modeling and planning, MRRPC Staff looks forward to devising unique and insightful trip summaries for organizations in the region.

## REVOLVING LOAN FUNDS



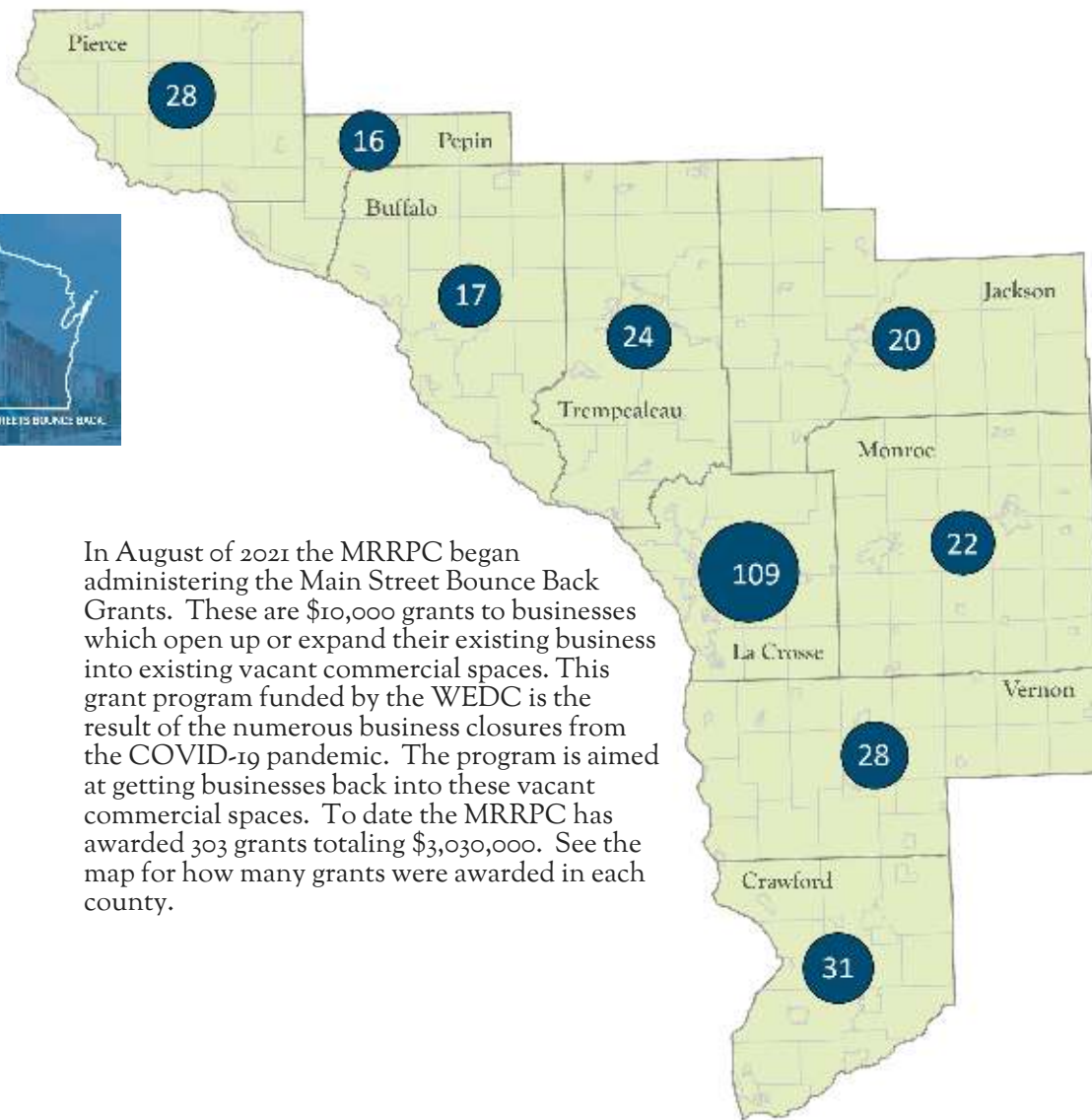
The MRRPC administers four federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) Revolving Loan Funds (RLFs) that provide gap financing to businesses. These are: the Business Capital Fund RLF serving Buffalo, Jackson, Trempealeau, Pepin and Pierce counties, the CMV Growth Development Fund serving Crawford, Monroe and Vernon Counties; the La Crosse Economic Development Fund serving La Crosse County and the Cares Act Recovery Assistance Fund serving all nine of our counties. The Cares Act Recovery Assistance Fund made 8 loans totaling \$924,999. One loan was in Buffalo County, 2 were in Crawford County, 3 in La Crosse County, 1 in Pierce County and 1 in Vernon County. These 8 loans have resulted in the retention or creation of 61 jobs and private investment of \$3,039,233 in our region. For more information about the MRRPC Revolving Loan funds go to our website mrrpc.com.

# CARES ACT SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING

## MAINSTREET BOUNCEBACK GRANTS



In August of 2021 the MRRPC began administering the Main Street Bounce Back Grants. These are \$10,000 grants to businesses which open up or expand their existing business into existing vacant commercial spaces. This grant program funded by the WEDC is the result of the numerous business closures from the COVID-19 pandemic. The program is aimed at getting businesses back into these vacant commercial spaces. To date the MRRPC has awarded 303 grants totaling \$3,030,000. See the map for how many grants were awarded in each county.



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## OUTDOOR RECREATION PLANS

The MRRPC has been assisting Jackson, Monroe, Pierce, and Trempealeau Counties and the Town of Holland with outdoor recreation plan updates. The Trempealeau County plan was completed in 2022. The plan identifies existing County parks and forests with goals and projects the County would like to undertake to improve outdoor recreation opportunities within the county. The highest priorities to residents were to improve and expand on multi-purpose trails and support facilities such as restrooms and picnic shelters. High priority items determined by the County include enhancing public access to public canoe, kayak, and boat launches, creating an advisory group on County recreation activities, and enhancing multi-purpose trails throughout the County.

Updates to the Jackson, Monroe, and Pierce County plans are in progress. Pierce County has a high priority to rip-rap numerous hiking trails at Nugget Lake County Park that are eroding due to extreme flooding from excessive run-off along with regrading erosion prone trails at the park. It is a high priority to reduce sediment in Nugget Lake to promote boating and recreational activities.

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The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) released statistics on November 9, 2021, measuring the outdoor recreation economy for the nation, all 50 states, and the District of Columbia. The new data show that the outdoor recreation economy accounted for 1.8 percent of current-dollar gross domestic product (GDP) for the nation in 2020. This is down from 2.2 percent in prior years.

At the state level, outdoor recreation value added as a share of state GDP ranged from 4.3 percent in Montana to 1.2 percent in New York and Connecticut. The share was 2.3 percent in Wisconsin. The outdoor recreation economy as a share of the total economy was particularly large in the Mountain West states, New England states, Hawaii, Alaska, Florida, and Indiana.

- Decreases in employment supported by outdoor recreation ranged from 27.2 percent in Hawaii to 9.3 percent in Indiana and 11.4 percent in Wisconsin.

# TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS

## EDA GRANTS

### Kickapoo

Communities located along the Kickapoo River have been economically and socially impacted by flooding events for decades. The last major flood took place in 2018 destroying homes and businesses in the communities along the river. In June 2019, the MRRPC staff submitted an application for a U.S. Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant to assist the Villages of Viola, La Farge, Ontario, and Readstown located along the Kickapoo River which have been severely impacted by the flooding. The grant was awarded January 10, 2020. Each Village received \$160,000 grant that was matched by \$40,000 of their money. The MRRPC administered this grant for the Villages. The grant made it possible for these villages to hire consultants to create plans to move their vulnerable business districts out of the floodplain. Relocation plans have been completed and adopted by all of the Villages. These plans identify areas within the Villages where businesses and residences that were in floodplains can be relocated to be out of the floodplain. The plans also identify potential sources of funding to assist the villages with the development of these areas. Each of the villages have begun implementing recommendations from the plans.



La Farge - Flooding 2018



Ontario - Flooding 2018



Westby Industrial Park Site

### Westby Industrial Park Expansion

The MRRPC staff submitted a grant proposal to the Economic Development Administration (EDA) on behalf of the City of Westby in October 2019 for an industrial park expansion project. This project came to light in lieu of persistent flooding issues in the area negatively affecting the local economy. In April 2020, EDA awarded a \$3.5 million grant to the City of Westby, to make critical infrastructure improvements needed to expand the city's industrial park and protect businesses from severe weather events. The EDA grant, to be matched with \$868,800 in local investment, is expected to create 49 jobs and spur \$15.6 million in private investment. MRRPC staff continues to assist in the administration of this project as construction nears completion in Summer 2022. 61% of funds have been expended at this time.

Key steps of the marketing plan included:

- Developing marketing materials for use inside and on the transit vehicles.
- Developing marketing materials to deploy to current and primary user groups. Currently this includes: Tomah Veteran's Administration Hospital, Gundersen Health System, Mayo Clinic Health System, and Vernon Memorial Hospital.
- Developing social media materials to be deployed on community websites and ridesmrt.com.
- Increasing web and digital presence through other means, exploring mobile-friendly options to suit the range of socio-demographic backgrounds of riders.

The team is currently exploring:

- Identifying optimal signage locations at pickup locations and means of funding installation and maintenance of them.
- Exploring potential revenue streams from sponsored advertising, such as bus wraps
- Exploring innovative joint-marketing opportunities with related services in the region. This can include agencies such as Aging and Disability Resource Centers, Higher Education Facilities, Medical Facilities, La Crosse Municipal Transit Utility, and others.

## SMRT BUS MARKETING PLAN

In April 2021, MRRPC contracted with La Crosse firm Vendi Advertising to produce a marketing plan for the SMRT (Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit) Bus Service. The SMRT Bus was established in 2012 as fixed route public transportation commuter bus service that operates in western Wisconsin serving four counties (Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe and Vernon). Within the counties, the SMRT bus serves fourteen cities and villages operating approximately 13 round trip routes a day (Mon-Fri) through the region. SMRT Bus service operates from approximately 6:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. SMRT is funded from three primary sources; an annual state/federal public transit grant, farebox revenue, and local matching funds. Local matching funds come from a variety of sources (counties, cities, villages, businesses, additional grant opportunities) and are the key to SMRT Bus service and its continued operation.

The project committee includes officials from La Crosse County, Running, Inc., MRRPC, and the La Crosse Area Planning Committee. Currently, the project is in a discovery phase. The team is currently working on last steps of the plan.



BUILD GRANT

In late 2020, MRRPC was notified that it received one of twelve USDOT BUILD 2020 planning grants. BUILD, formerly known as TIGER, has awarded over \$8.935 billion in grants to projects in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico since 2009. The focus of the MRRPC planning project is to devise a Multimodal Freight Strategy for the 9-County Region. The project kicked off in January 2022 and includes developing background information on rail, truck, barge, and air freight transportation in the region, generating freight growth projects and system performance for major commodities in the region, and creating content to incorporate into County and local comprehensive plans. The project seeks to support growing and traditional regional industries in a rural area known for agriculture, mining, energy, food production, and industrial commodities. The project will also assess community and environmental impacts of freight movement, including conflicts between passengers and freight, to identify potential safety improvements. Lastly, the project will identify roadways that face disproportionate heavy truck use to better inform state of good repair decisions.

MRRPC is collaborating with WisDOT and FHWA to administer the project, and selected SRF Consulting to complete the workplan. The project is on schedule and should be nearly complete in late 2022.

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