

# NW Regional Development Commission



109 South Minnesota Street, Warren, MN 56762

## Five Year Assessment

2012-2016



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## **I. Introduction**

The Northwest Regional Development Commission (NWRDC) is a seven county regional development commission made up of representatives from local units of government and public interest groups in Kittson, Marshall, Norman, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake and Roseau Counties in northwest Minnesota.

The purpose of the NWRDC is to supplement efforts by local units of government to maintain our economic strength and improve the quality of life in Northwest Minnesota.

## **II. Background of the Evaluation**

The Minnesota Regional Development Act of 1969 (Minn. Stat. 462.393) requires that a self-evaluation of each Regional Development Commission be completed every five years. The section of the Act which deals with the evaluation reads as follows:

“In 2001 and every five years thereafter the commission shall review its activities and issue a report assessing its performance in fulfilling the purposes of the regional development act.

**The report shall address whether the existence of the commission is in the public welfare and interest.”**

The Regional Development Act states the purpose of Regional Development Commissions is to: **“...work with and on behalf of local units of government to develop plans or implement programs to address economic, social, physical, and governmental concerns of each region of the state.”**

The Northwest Regional Development Commission (NWRDC) has undertaken this evaluation to determine if the Commission is meeting the expectations of the public and if improvements can be made for the future.

## **III. Methodology**

The following steps were completed during the evaluation process:

- A. A review of past evaluations was completed.
- B. The NWRDC Board of Directors instructed staff to complete a survey of local units of government and those receiving services from the Commission.
- C. Staff drafted a survey instrument, solicited input on understandability and completed modifications based upon input.

- D. The report includes information gathered by means of the above-mentioned survey, analysis of the survey results, reports on accomplishments in various program areas, obstacles, and financial information for the past five years. The conclusion of the report will include the possible next steps as NWRDC positions itself for the future.
- E. The survey was distributed to members of the Northwest Regional Development Commission by means of email and solicited from members at its annual meeting. A series of questions were asked regarding the performance of the Commission over the past five years, tabulated and assessed on the following pages.

A total of 90 surveys were sent out to respondents. E-mail survey invitations were sent through [www.SurveyMonkey.com](http://www.SurveyMonkey.com). and surveys questions were discussed at annual meetings of Enterprise Fund and the full NWRDC.

#### **IV. Survey Results**

##### **Satisfaction**

The Survey asked its customers to rate their satisfaction as to whether the NWRDC is working with and on behalf of local units of government to develop plans or implement programs to address economic, social, physical, and governmental concerns of the region.

- A. The Performance Assessment Survey was conducted in December of 2016. Commission members and customers were asked a series of questions rating the Commission service provision on a scale of 1-10 with 1 = poor service and 10 = excellent service. (Respondent average rating of 8.5 indicated agreement that customer satisfaction was high).
- B. Survey respondents overwhelmingly stated that the NWRDC “definitely” works with and on behalf of local units of government.
- C. The overall response rate is high enough to assume the results are representative of those surveyed.
- D. All of the programs and service types are well enough represented to assume the survey can be applied to all components of the NWRDC.

#### **V. Program Priorities and Performance**

The NWRDC develops an overall work program each year that must be approved by its Board of Directors and Commission membership. The work program specifies objectives to be accomplished during the upcoming fiscal year and reflects the areas of concern and direction from the Commission. Although much of the work program does not vary markedly from year to year, it does reveal the ongoing operations and programs of NWRDC as well as changes that occur in response to local needs or state mandates for certain program offerings. As an example, state mandates in the Area Agency for Aging

program have precipitated a massive increase in employees as well as creation of several new programs and expanded service areas in the state. Respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of the current work program areas, as well as express which development issues or programs that the NWRDC should pursue in the next five years. Respondents were also invited to provide comments regarding current operations and suggestions that NWRDC should consider to become more efficient and effective.

## **VI. Conclusions and Recommendations**

***“NWRDC is functioning better today than at any time in past 20 years...but there is always more that can be done.”***

*Comment from Survey Respondent*

### **Conclusions**

1. The existence of the Commission is in the public welfare and interest. This statement is made in consideration of the costs and benefits of the services provided by the NWRDC.
2. The NWRDC is fulfilling its purpose of working on behalf of local units of government to address economic, social, physical, and governmental concerns within its region.
3. Local units of government and other stakeholders receiving services feel the programs and services of the NWRDC are high quality in nature.
4. No major shifts in direction or corrective measures are needed to respond to public concerns.

### **Recommendations**

1. Staff, Commission and Committee members should make an extra effort to provide information about the Commission when the opportunity is presented. Providing understandable information to the public, local units of government, and especially township representatives should be an ongoing priority.
2. Individual programs should review the results of the evaluation to incorporate public perceptions and priorities.
3. Appreciation should be expressed to Commission members, committee members, staff, and our many partners for their efforts providing service to the public.

## VII. Economic Development

The NWRDC represents Region One as a federally designated Economic Development District (EDD) through the Economic Development Administration. The Economic Development Administration (EDA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce awards a 3 year Partnership Planning Grant to NWRDC to work with local units of government and other stakeholders to develop and implement a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) that addresses economic distress and concentrates on issues of local significance and concern. NWRDC provides a pathway for local governments to apply for other EDA funding opportunities such as Public Works and Technical Assistance programs.

The NWRDC has been among the first Economic Development Districts in the country to be upgraded from a 1 year to a 3 year planning grant and is consistently recognized for its effective administration of the EDD and other fiscal programs that it offers. Listed below are some of the activities that NWRDC has engaged in over the past five years relating to economic development:

### Revolving Loan Fund

The NWRDC operates a region-wide loan fund for the counties of Kittson, Roseau, Marshall, Pennington, Red Lake, Polk, and Norman. The first loan from the fund was made in 1986. As of December 31, 2016, the RLF had a principal balance of \$2,082,356.05. There were two loans committed but not yet disbursed for a total of \$250,000.00 leaving \$783,992 available for lending at the end of 2016. From 2012-2016, NWRDC RLF closed 24 loans totaling \$2,302,715 and leveraging \$19,401,162 in private investment.

### EDA Public Works Grants

NWRDC assisted the City of Roseau on \$4 million grant application to Economic Development Administration to complete a dike/levee water control & diversion project that protects the community during flood events. The diversion protects the city of 2,700, including Polaris Industries, a \$1+ Billion company employing 1,800 people.

### EDA Technical Assistance Grants

Assisted Roseau County and Roseau Electric Cooperative with a TA Broadband Grant



Andrew Peralta  
Owner of TRF Dairy Queen

application that will pay for a feasibility study to determine whether high speed broadband can be placed on existing electrical infrastructure in the rural electric cooperative system.

**Northstar Agri-Industries (now CHS, Inc.)**

NWRDC organized additional consultant expertise in identifying ancillary business development in Kittson County that complements the privately financed \$168 million canola processing plant that creates 45 jobs and an initial \$3.5 million annual payroll. Business development that occurred in Hallock included a much-needed diesel truck repair business and a laundromat. Since then, the community has added a craft brewery in an old architecturally unique gas station, and a liquor distillery in rural Hallock.

**MADO & DevelopMN**

NWRDC collaborated with Minnesota Association of Development Organizations to develop a Greater Minnesota Development Strategy, an outgrowth of the regional CEDS (Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy) plan. DevelopMN focuses on areas of strategic importance and provides an action plan and measurement metrics to gauge performance and success.

**Housing Study**

NWRDC assisted the Community Growth Partnership with grantwriting to complete housing studies for nine area communities. The studies helped to recognize opportunities and development issues facing the rural communities.

**Partnerships**

NWRDC partners with several outside organizations across the spectrum of its program delivery in order to further the mission of its regional economic development strategy. Examples include: MN Workforce Center, Northwest Private Industry Council (NWPIC) - NWRDC serves as Locally Elected Officials Board for the PIC, Rural MN CEP (Concentrated Employment Program, Inc.) for employment and training.

Additionally, NWRDC RLF partners with the Northwest Minnesota Foundation and several local community economic development authorities in order to provide gap financing for small business development and entrepreneurial assistance in the seven county region.

## Impact 20/20

NWRDC also participates in Impact 20/20, an influential group of area leaders helping to grow the area economy with priorities in Workforce Training, Education, Broadband, and Housing. Workforce priorities include increasing career success skills and talent development; Education priorities are to increase graduation rates and develop college/career readiness; Broadband priorities are to achieve high-speed access across the region and provide business training; Housing priorities are to overcome obstacles to meet area housing needs and to provide a more diverse housing environment.



## Housing Institute

NWRDC staff participate in training opportunities with a regional Housing Institute sponsored by Minnesota Housing Partnership and Greater MN Housing Fund, as well as collaborating with regional developers in a Housing Action Network which addresses local issues.



Finally, NWRDC works with Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Economic Development Administration (EDA), Minnesota Board on Aging (MBA), Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), MN Department of Agriculture (MDA), MN Department of Homeland Security & Emergency Management (HS/EM) and MN Department of Transportation (MnDOT), all of which are crucial to developing a resilient region in northwest Minnesota.

## Special Event

A regional Housing Summit was held in November 2016 at University of Minnesota Crookston, focused on connecting communities with resources for housing development, including developers/builders/programs that provided information and best practice case studies to enhance housing opportunities in rural areas of the state. This brought together statewide agencies, including Minnesota Housing Partnership and Greater MN Housing Fund, as well as private developers, local EDAs, USDA, and communities to explore rural needs and define those practices which would likely lead to more diversity and availability of housing in the region.



## **VIII. Community Development**

NWRDC provided assistance on a number of community planning projects throughout the region over the past five years. Funding for these projects includes federal, state, and local resources, as well as private foundation investments that encourage community planning. Apart from its service-type programs, a majority of survey respondents indicated that things like community development, comprehensive planning, arts promotion, trails planning, and broadband development are priorities that must be addressed in the coming years in order to attract talent, workforce, entrepreneurs, and business to the region. Good infrastructure is important for development, but high quality of life and amenities are just as important to attracting workforce and talent to the region.

### **Comprehensive Planning**

Oslo, Ada, Fisher, Warren, Gary—NWRDC assisted these communities with comprehensive planning and mapping efforts that addressed recreation, business retention and expansion, land use, human services, zoning, and economic development.

### **Broadband Development**

NWRDC partnered with the Blandin Foundation’s Community Initiative to promote and encourage expansion of internet services and usage in the rural areas of northwest Minnesota. This involved a pilot program in the Thief River Falls area, “Computers For Our Communities,” that distributed computers directly to low-income families for the purpose of getting people technologically connected and trained, reducing the “digital divide.” Used computers were donated from local businesses and Northland Technical College, refurbished and distributed to families.

### **Safe Routes to School**

NWRDC staff assisted with applications for SRTS planning for the cities of Ada and Halstad in Norman County. This planning makes communities eligible to apply for federal funding to improve routes that children use to walk and bike to school safely. Ada School District was awarded an SRTS grant that will enable children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bike to school. It will make biking and walking a safer and more appealing transportation alternative that encourages a healthy and active lifestyle. Improving safety and reducing traffic are the end result of the planning efforts.

### **Scenic Byways**

NWRDC staff provided assistance to local groups to promote the Waters of the Dancing Sky Scenic Byway in Roseau and Kittson Counties. Staff also worked with the King of Trails Scenic Byway to promote communities in Kittson, Marshall, Polk and Norman Counties. King of Trails stretches from the Minnesota/Canada border to the Texas/Mexico border. NWRDC staff from Transportation, Arts, Economic and Community Development

collaborated with local stakeholders and MN Dept. of Tourism on ways to effectively market the trails and improve tourism.

### **Corridor Development**

The NWRDC partnered with MN Dept. of Tourism and the NW Regional Sustainable Development Partnership to re-establish the Red Lake River Corridor Group which will help the communities lying along the Red Lake River to be eligible for Legacy Act funding.

### **Rail Abandonment Trail Purchases**

Staff are working with county and local stakeholders to purchase the abandoned rail line from Perley to Shelly, which will connect the 19 mile segment with the Heartland Trail in Moorhead, eventually creating an international bike route paralleling the Red River of the North and into Canada.

## **IX. Homeland Security/Emergency Management Planning**

NWRDC staffs the 14 county Joint Powers Board and perform a variety of work tasks that aid in the regional progression of emergency management and mitigation strategies, projects, and capabilities. NWRDC also serves as fiscal agent for HS/EM Region 3. Projects included State Homeland Security Program (SHSP) investments that addressed:

1. Mass Care
2. Chemical, Biologic, Radiologic, Nuclear, and Explosive (CBRNE)
3. Community Preparedness
4. Strengthen Planning

Other projects involved Senior Disaster Preparation presentations, Emergency Operations Plan Template creation, participating with Minnesota National Guard in a mass sheltering exercise, meeting with Manitoba emergency management personnel to partner on future initiatives and disaster response, updates to Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Plan (THIRA), pet sheltering, creation of a regional resource manual, credentialing, and regional response exercises.



2014 Karlstad Wildfire

## **X. Transportation**

The NWRDC contracts with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to provide transportation planning services within Region 1. A number of activities are involved, including solicitation and prioritization of local project applications for federal funds, transit planning and programming, coordination of regional Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) activities, and providing regional transportation planning and mapping services.

Region 1 is located within MnDOT District 2 planning area.

### **Transit Plan**

The NWRDC Transit Plan follows Federal transit laws under the FAST Act, which requires that projects selected for funding under the Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities program be included in locally developed and coordinated public transit/human services transportation plan. The plan was developed through a process that included seniors participation, individuals with disabilities, representatives of public/private/non-profit transportation and human services providers and other members of the public.

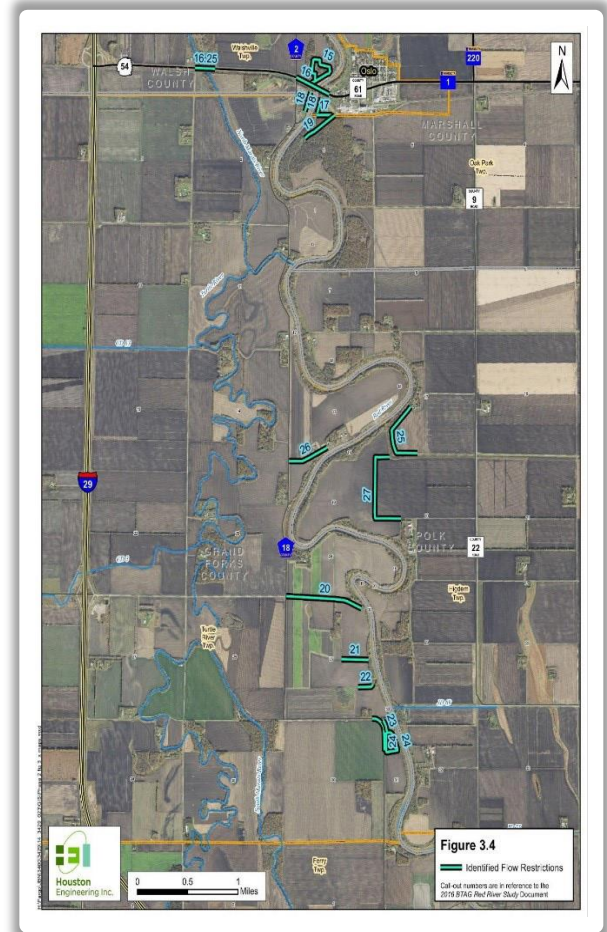
### **MnDot Freight Plan**

NWRDC assisted MnDOT with 2014-15 Statewide Freight System Plan by gathering local data and sharing with state planning staff. Activities included

1. Stakeholder Engagement
2. Data Synthesis and Baseline Assessment
3. Establish freight system network and multi-modal transportation goals and policies
4. Project Development Guidance - Identify system needs, issues and opportunities and provide performance metrics.
5. Implementation Plan - List strategies for action in the near term.

## Hydraulic Flood Modeling

The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) worked with Houston Engineering and residents from the Oslo area to study the hydraulic characteristics and flood modeling of the Red River of the North near Oslo. The project will evaluate existing agricultural levees, effects of removing identified potential flow restrictions and a proposed setback levee alternative alignment. The project includes joint efforts from state and local governments from both Minnesota and North Dakota.



Oslo Flood Modeling Project  
(The green features indicate potential flow restriction areas for removal.)

## Transportation Special Studies, Committees, Task Forces, & Highlights

Updates to Waters of the Dancing Sky and King of Trails Scenic Byway planning groups.

### Functional Road Classification Project

Collaborated with MnDOT to develop hierarchical classification of roadways in Region 1 for determining federal funding.

### Red Lake River Corridor Development

Partnering with Dept. of Tourism and NW Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships (NWRSDP) to re-establish a recreation corridor on Red Lake River.

### Multimodal Transportation Plan

Staff served on Accountability, Transparency and Communications Workgroup.

### Kittson, Marshall, and Roseau Counties

Toward Zero Deaths program development focusing on traffic safety.

## **Rail Abandonment Purchase Coordination in Norman and Roseau Counties**

### **Corridor Investment Management Strategy**

Identifying needs and opportunities for collaborative and innovative investments in major corridor routes in Northwest Minnesota: MN 11, US 2, and US 59/MN 32. These investments include freight movement improvements, safety improvements and allowing for bicycle routes.

### **XI. Area Agency on Aging**

NWRDC serves as the host agency and fiscal agent for the Land of the Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging (LDSAAA), covering 21 counties in northwest and west central Minnesota. The program is committed to supporting the dignity and independence of older adults through a variety of services and programs.

Services include: providing advocacy and leadership in the development and support of community-based services that reduce isolation, improve access to services, and help older adults remain independent and safe in their homes for as long as possible.

Priority areas are: Nutrition, Congregate and Home-Delivered Meals, Legal Services, Housekeeping, Chores, Home Modification, Transportation, Disease Prevention/Health Promotion, Early Memory Care, Medication Management, Fall Prevention, Tai Chi, Matter of Balance, Chronic Disease Prevention, Respite Care and Caregiver Supports.

***“I am proud to be associated with the NWRDC. The staff at the NWRDC are recognized statewide as leaders in their programs and areas of expertise, and are often asked for assistance and help from their colleagues around the state.”***

*Comment from Survey Respondent*

### **Aging Programs**

The Aging Program has responded to state and federal mandates through the Older Americans Act to provide programming and services to a rapidly growing older adult population. Spending dollars through these programs and services will actually serve to reduce costs to the public in the long run as older adults are helped to remain in their homes safely for as long as they are able.

**Powerful Tools for Caregivers**

Develop PTC Master Trainers who are able to “train the trainer” in various communities that teach self-care, management of emotions, self-efficiency, and use of community resources.

**Chronic Disease Self-Management**

Evidence-based curriculum that provides older adults the tools to manage day to day aspects of their disease.

**Matter of Balance**

Facilitation of classes and training workshops for older adults at risk for falls.

**Live Well At Home**

Rapid screen assessment that targets high risk medically frail older adults and links them to risk management programs and community services. The goal of the program is to delay or avoid spending down assets to Medical Assistance.

**Caregiver Consultant**

Research-based 1:1 assistance given to caregivers to develop a person-centered plan for their own caregiver journey. Tools and assessments are provided to manage the day to day challenges of caregiving.

**Communities for a Lifetime**

Provide information and best practices which educate communities on the Baby Boomer Age Wave and encourages communities to develop plans to accommodate the emerging needs of the number of older adults needing access to services.

**Senior LinkAge Line®**

Provide assistance to thousands of contacts for issues with Medicare Part D plan signup, problems with accessing services, housing options, Long Term Care options counseling, resolving issues with insurance companies, calling prescription plans, etc.

**Community Living Specialists**

Highly trained nurses and social workers who work with discharge planning staff and/or nursing home social workers, and provide follow up services in the community to sustain the transition back to the community.

**Pre-Admission Screening**

Provide telephone-based screening for nursing facility placement.

## **XII. Arts Promotion/NW MN Arts Council**

The NWRDC is host and fiscal agent to the Northwest Minnesota Arts Council. The purpose of the program is to promote, develop, and encourage artistic growth and excellence of arts organizations and individual artists in the region by conducting programs, awarding grants and providing services.

### **Northwest Minnesota Art Exhibition**

Staff coordinate an annual spring exhibit at a designated community each spring, followed by an artist reception at the end of the showcase. A mini-exhibit features up to 15 artists and tours the community libraries in several towns from May-December.

### **River Walk Artists Shop and Gallery**

The Gallery is located in East Grand Forks and features a student art showcase and annual Holiday Show, along with art presentations from local artists throughout the year.

### **Art and Wine Walk**

Thousands of guests have attended the Art and Wine Walk in East Grand Forks over the last several years. Exhibits include paintings, prints and drawings, woodcarving, photography, ceramics, mosaics, and many, many more. Artists from around the region showcase their talents and attracts tourists and residents.

### **Community Supported Art**

40 boxes of art, containing 35 pieces of artwork each, were sold to patrons to advance and promote new artists in the region.

### **Business Skills for Artists Workshops**

Series of 10 workshops by Springboard for the Arts staff on a variety of topics for artists who are creating a business in their art form. More than 20 people attended the once a month sessions at East Grand Forks Public Library.



Jeanne O'Neil, EGF, printmaking series

### **XIII. Next Steps**

While survey respondents generally agreed that the NWRDC is fulfilling its role, several of the comments indicated that the Regional Commission still needs more visibility, better communication with constituents, and educational efforts to promote awareness of the Agency. The NWRDC will therefore increase the number of activities that it undertakes, including presentations and visits to local units of government, more economic/community development forums, celebrations of staff and agency achievements, improvements and expanded presence through its websites, social media and regular media outlets. This will help provide a better understanding of NWRDC programs and services.

The NWRDC will continue to build upon existing programs and the expanding services it has undertaken through state mandates. Recent years have seen a notable expansion in the Aging Program, especially, but also in Transportation and Economic Development to a lesser extent. Dramatic growth in the Area Agency for Aging Program has vastly increased our budget, programs, and staff, and the Program/Agency relationships and issues that develop as a result of rapid growth will be self-assessed in an ongoing manner.

The 5 year assessment is one of many planning initiatives and tools that the NWRDC uses to stay on top of issues that are vital to the region and its people. The CEDS (Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy) is another document that is continuously reviewed and revised to meet the needs of the region. Several priorities have been set by our committees and Commission members that include more emphasis on the development of workforce housing, including both affordable and market-rate housing development. More attention will be given to increasing the availability and affordability of quality child care in the region. Staff will continue to promote the two scenic byways in the region, and work to include the opportunities that have arisen from the construction of flood impoundments and the abandoned railways in the region...both of these lend themselves to tourism possibilities with birding, nature watching, and trails development. Technical Assistance and Business Assistance to artists, value-added entrepreneurs, tourism efforts and other recipients will help to build relationships and foster more economic activity across the board.

