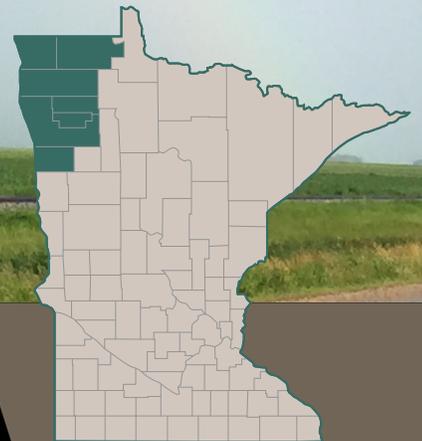




**NORTHWEST**  
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
COMMISSION



# ANNUAL REPORT 2025

[www.nwrdc.org](http://www.nwrdc.org)

**Serving the counties of Kittson, Marshall,  
Norman, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake and Roseau.**

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2025 COMMISSION MEMBERS ATTENDING ANNUAL MEETING: FRONT ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT) – GARY KIESOW, GERALD AMIOT, LOREN LUSIGNAN, WARREN STRANDELL, JESSE LEE, DARYL WICKLUND, MIDDLE ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT) – SARAH FINSETH, JUDY JONES, KATHY TWITE, NORMA COMPOS, KIETH SISTAD, DEB WISKOW, KIM JOHNSON, LOREN YOUNGGREN, DAVID TRUEMER; BACK ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT) – JOHNNY BARBOSA, CHUCK FLAGE, KEVIN REICH; TOBY STROM, RON WEISS, GUS BOOTH, BRUCE LAWRENCE, DARIN JOHNSON

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON

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GARY KIESOW, COMMISSION CHAIRPERSON

Dear Board Members and Stakeholders,

As we reflect on 2025, I am proud to share the progress and impact of the Northwest Regional Development Commission's (NWRDC) work across our region. This year has been a testament to the strength, resilience, and ingenuity of our rural communities. In every initiative we've undertaken, we've seen firsthand how collaboration and local leadership drive meaningful changes.

Here are some major projects that exemplify our mission in action:

## Community Development

This past year has been busy in Community Development. A new Discovery Place Childcare Center site was completed and held a ribbon-cutting ceremony in August. When fully operational, this new site will add 156 childcare slots for the community. NWRDC has supported this grassroots effort in the Thief River Falls community for the past three years. In April, NWRDC supported an Advance Thief River application to Age Friendly Minnesota for 55+ Active Adult housing. This project strives to create expanded housing options for older adults in the broader community.

## Economic Development

The City of Crookston has been awarded a \$3,312,233.15 grant from the Federal Economic Development Administration as part of a \$7,112,000.00 project to build out infrastructure in the city's industrial park.

## EDA Revolving Loan Fund

In 2025, the Revolving Loan Fund Program closed 4 loans for a total of \$510,000. An additional loan of \$100,000.00 was approved and is set to close in 2026.

We successfully expanded our Economic Development Administration (EDA) Revolving Loan Fund, increasing access to capital for small businesses and entrepreneurs. This initiative has already supported multiple startups and business expansions, fostering job creation and economic resilience in our rural towns and communities.

## Transportation Planning

The NWRDC was once again active in assisting local communities with transportation planning. Staff continued to assist local government units with implementation of previous planned projects that received grant funding. New transportation grants were awarded to Warroad and Thief River Falls in 2025. These will provide assistance in developing sidewalks and trails in these communities that will give pedestrians and bicycles a safe way to travel. Staff continue to work with other communities planning future projects and assisting them in securing funding options. The NWRDC also assisted the Red Lake Falls and Grygla communities in completing a Safe Routes to School plan. These plans will assist the communities in prioritizing local projects and hopefully lead to

funding assistance. The NWRDC is currently working with the Thief River Falls school to develop a Safe Routes to School plan that will be completed in 2026.

## Regional Transportation Coordinating Council

Northwest Regional Transportation Coordinating Council moved from planning to action, launching new community pilots, strengthening county forums, and helping more residents navigate their transportation options across our seven-county region.

## Aging Initiatives

Aging has had another busy year. We closed out a pilot project with additional funding for adult protection. Thank you to our partners at the county who supported us with referrals. Our team worked closely with the Northwest Minnesota Foundation and did listening sessions and conducted a needs assessment. Our Minnesota Aging Pathways, formally known as the Senior Linkage Line, is offering the same great support and serving record numbers this year in open enrollment. Cost savings for the state were over 6 million dollars.

We are deeply grateful for the dedication of our board members, partners, and communities, and we look forward to the important work ahead.

Best Regards,  
Gary Kiesow

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



DARLA WALDNER  
NWRDC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends, Partners, and Community Members,

As we reflect on the past year, I am proud to share the progress, resilience, and innovations that have defined our work with rural communities. These regions, often overlooked, continue to demonstrate extraordinary potential and strength. From economic development initiatives to infrastructure improvements, we've seen firsthand how targeted efforts can spark meaningful change.

Our mission to support and uplift rural communities has never been more critical. This year, we've expanded partnerships, secured new funding opportunities, and launched programs that directly address local

needs—from workforce development, housing, and daycare to Age Friendly Communities. These efforts are not just investments in projects; they are investments in people.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our exceptional staff. Their commitment, creativity, and tireless work have driven our success. Whether navigating complex challenges or celebrating small victories, our team has consistently gone above and beyond. I want to extend my deepest gratitude to each of them for their contributions and for embodying the values that guide our organization.

Looking ahead, we remain focused on building strong and resilient rural communities. We will continue to listen, learn, and lead with purpose—to ensure that every initiative reflects the voices and visions of those we serve.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership. Together, we are creating a future where rural communities thrive.

All the best,  
Darla Waldner  
Executive Director

## 2025 COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP

### Kittson County

Kimberley Johnson	Kennedy	Townships
David Treumer	Hallock	Municipalities
Loren Younggren*	Hallock	Counties

### Marshall County

Gary Kiesow**	Goodridge	Counties
Loren Lusignan	Grygla	Townships
Loyal Lefrooth	Strandquist	Municipalities

### Norman County

Jesse Lee*	Ada	Counties
Darin Johnson	Halstad	Municipalities

### Pennington County

Jason Bitzer	Thief River Falls	Townships
Judy Jones	Goodridge	Municipalities
Bruce Lawrence*	Thief River Falls	Counties
John Syvertson	Thief River Falls	School Board

\* Board Members    \*\* Chairperson

### Polk County

Gerald Amiot	Crookston	Labor
Johny Barbosa	Warren	Diverse Cultures
Norma Campos	East Grand Forks	Diverse Cultures
Sarah Finseth	Warren	Young Adult
Keith Sistad	Fosston	Townships
Warren Strandell*	East Grand Forks	Counties
Toby Strom	McIntosh	Municipalities
Kathleen Twite	East Grand Forks	Business

### Red Lake County

Jim DuChamp	Plummer	Municipalities
Anthony "Chuck" Flage*	Red Lake Falls	Counties
Kevin Reich	Red Lake Falls	Townships
Ronald Weiss	Red Lake Falls	Watershed District

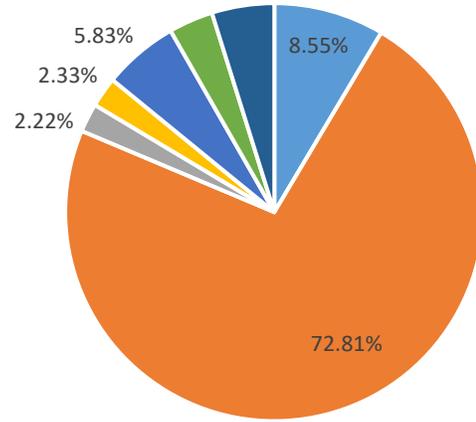
### Roseau County

Gus Booth	Warroad	School Board
Dan Fabian	Roseau	Municipalities
Daryl Wicklund*	Badger	Counties
Debra Wiskow	Greenbush	Townships

# CALENDAR YEAR 2025 FINANCIALS & 2026 BUDGET

## CALENDAR YEAR 2025

### Actual 2025 Revenue Sources



■ Levy ■ Aging ■ EDA ■ Energy ■ MNDOT ■ RLF ■ Misc.

REVENUES	CY'2025 BUDGET	CY'2025 ACTUALS	CY'2026 BUDGET
Local Tax Levy	\$345,371	\$339,139	\$355,732
MN Board on Aging/Department Health	\$2,859,544	\$2,889,405	\$2,997,278
Economic Development Admin/USDA	\$85,945	\$88,119	\$72,400
Energy	\$104,530	\$92,640	\$182,225
MN Department of Transportation	\$240,086	\$231,277	\$270,260
NW Minnesota Enterprise Fund	\$129,621	\$136,283	\$146,834
Dancing Sky AAA County Match	\$66,163	\$66,162	\$68,149
Local Contracts/ Miscellaneous	\$114,784	\$125,545	\$32,000
Regrant Revenue	\$4,097,027	\$4,074,911	\$3,027,527
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$8,043,071</b>	<b>\$8,043,481</b>	<b>\$7,152,405</b>

EXPENDITURES	CY'2025 BUDGET	CY'2025 ACTUALS	CY'2026 BUDGET
Salaries and Fringe	\$2,634,336	\$2,631,485	\$2,837,757
Professional Services	\$721,311	\$719,712	\$791,370
Travel	\$103,774	\$110,522	\$173,229
Printing/Postage	\$31,154	\$30,468	\$33,900
Supplies	\$42,186	\$35,390	\$42,892
Rent/Maintenance	\$84,333	\$93,483	\$71,602
Other	\$328,950	\$186,091	\$174,128
Grants/Contracts	\$4,097,027	\$4,074,911	\$3,027,527
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$8,043,071</b>	<b>\$7,882,062</b>	<b>\$7,152,405</b>

### CY'2024 AUDIT

The CY'2024 Audit was conducted by Brady Martz, Certified Public Accountants and Consultants in Crookston, Minnesota. The auditor's report expresses an unqualified opinion on the General Purpose Financial Statements of the Northwest Regional Development Commission.

### COST ALLOCATION

CY'2025 Actual  
Leave Rate:  
**18.54%**

CY'2025 Actual  
Fringe Rate:  
**39.38%**

CY'2025 Actual  
Indirect Rate:  
**14.98%**



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# NORTHWEST REGIONAL ENTERPRISE LOAN FUND

**PURPOSE:**

To strengthen and diversify the economy by providing a source of low interest financing to businesses when credit is not otherwise available from other sources and to ensure the successful completion of activities to be financed.

**SERVICE PRIORITIES:**

Financing for-profit businesses which create or retain jobs, especially for the long-term underemployed or unemployed.

## Loan Inquiries and Applications Bounce Back

**The 2025 new loan volume has increased from the 2024 lows and rebounded to pre-COVID averages.**

The Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) program closed four loans totaling \$510,000.00 in 2025 and approved an additional loan of \$100,000.00 that is set to close in 2026.

The volume of inquiries continues to increase in the program but not all result in loans made by the NWRDC. The primary reasons projects do not move forward with NWRDC gap financing continue to be the same as previous years such as the project didn't fit the program guidelines and had to be referred elsewhere, or was in a location that had cheaper money available through local revolving loan funds.

The types of loan requests in 2025 were a fairly even mix between business startup, business

expansion, business succession, and working capital requests. This even mix of requests can be an indicator that the regional economy, as a whole, may be normalizing after the COVID and inflationary periods we experienced in previous years.

In addition to opening new loans, other loan fund activities included loan restructuring, payoffs, loan assistance to community Economic Development Agencies, and technical assistance to potential borrowers.

We continue to provide technical assistance in the form of information and referral to other organizations and agencies, including, but not limited to, a Small Business Development Center, EDA University Center, Agricultural Utilization Research Institute, Department of Employment

and Economic Development, Headwaters Regional Development Commission, NW Minnesota Multi-County HRA and Northwest Minnesota Foundation.

**Historical Loan Activity**  
*(period ending 12/31/2025):*

Total Loans	254
Active Loans	58
Total Loan Amount	\$20,447,229
Other Financing Leveraged	\$101,560,592
Jobs Created/Retained	2,293
Total Project Costs	\$140,317,184

**Historical Loan Activity by County**  
*(period ending 12/31/2025):*

County	# of Loans	Amount
Kittson	25	\$1,389,120
Marshall	47	\$3,437,045
Norman	21	\$1,239,248
Pennington	35	\$3,426,850
Polk	78	\$6,858,475
Red Lake	16	\$1,190,615
Roseau	32	\$2,905,875



# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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**PURPOSE:**

To assist communities in discussing and developing solutions to rural issues and problems which are common in Northwest Minnesota.

**SERVICE PRIORITIES:**

Assist local units of government with comprehensive planning, infrastructure needs, area promotion, housing and other issues that contribute to strong quality of place.

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## 2025 Community Development Highlights

D4CR Northwest MN is a collaborative process of engaging communities in Northwest MN in imagining and planning a thriving and resilient future. The purpose is to prioritize regional and local projects for funding opportunities. It is facilitated by a University of Minnesota team and partners working with communities. NWRDC Community and Economic Development staff along with University of Minnesota faculty facilitated this year-long outreach effort to determine future priorities for regional planning activities.

### Discovery Place Childcare Center Expansion to Valley Home – August 2025

A second location for Discovery Place Childcare Center celebrated a ribbon-cutting ceremony on August 6, 2025. The \$2.5 million expansion created 156 new childcare slots, strengthening workforce stability and access to early childhood care in the community. NWRDC has supported this initiative over the past three years through participation on the Childcare Taskforce Steering Committee. The project was made possible through generous employer and community philanthropic contributions.

### “THRIVE IN THIEF RIVER”

#### Planning the Future of Housing for 55+ Residents

NWRDC Community Development is partnering with Advance Thief River Falls on an Age Friendly Minnesota grant focused on housing for older adults. The project aims to identify housing options that best meet the needs of active adults age 55 and older as they age within the community. Findings from a 2024 housing study identified a significant shortage of age-appropriate housing in the Thief River Falls primary housing market. With support from the University of Minnesota Extension and extensive focus group engagement, this effort brings stakeholders together to identify opportunities that support active lifestyles and help retain older adults in the community.





[www.nwrdc.org](http://www.nwrdc.org)

## Regional Foods Business Center (RFBC)

### PURPOSE:

To provide technical assistance to small to medium-sized farm businesses, food processors, and distributors in the food supply chains.

### SERVICE PRIORITIES:

Improve profitability of existing direct market farms, increase the number of direct market farmers, and help food processors access capital.

## Strengthening Regional Food Systems in 2025: Expanding Opportunities for Farmers, Processors, and Communities

In 2025, the Food Systems Manager continued to provide technical assistance and capacity-building support to local food businesses, farms, and community organizations across the region. In January, he worked with dozens of direct-market farms to increase awareness of and support applications for the Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops grant, a one-time subsidy program for fruit and vegetable producers. Qualified growers received payments equal to approximately one percent of gross income, distributed in two installments in May and August.

Throughout the year, the Food Systems Manager supported value-added agriculture and processing efforts, including assistance to Ketter's Meats in Frazee to procure and install a hamburger grinder using funds from a Meats, Poultry, and Milk Processing Grant administered by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. He also provided technical assistance to apple growers in the Fergus Falls area and to strawberry producers in Otter Tail and Clay Counties.

In addition, ongoing support was provided to Farm in the Dell of the Red River Valley, an organization that creates employment opportunities for adults with disabilities in the Fargo–Moorhead region. Assistance focused on pumpkin, sweet corn, and strawberry production, contributing to an estimated \$10,000 increase in farm sales.

During the summer growing season, much of the Food Systems Manager's work centered on supporting immigrant farmers and gardeners in the Moorhead area. He assisted with the New Roots incubator farm located north of Moorhead, where 15 immigrant farmers cultivated individual plots measuring 50 by 100 feet to develop skills in commercial vegetable production. Many of the New Roots participants are originally from Burundi. He also organized and supported the immigrant community garden in south Moorhead, which primarily served gardeners from Iraq and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The community garden included 40 plots and supported approximately 200 individuals.



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# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## PURPOSE:

To maintain and increase the population level and job base in the seven counties of Northwest Minnesota.

## SERVICE PRIORITIES:

Business development, labor force development, renewable energy, promotion, and planning.

## U.S. Department of Commerce Invests \$3.31 Million in the Region

As part of the Economic Development Administration’s Public Works program, the City of Crookston has been awarded \$3.31 Million to add road, water, and wastewater infrastructure to the expanded industrial park.

The project is intended to bring infrastructure into the park and allow for buildable lots within the new industrial park space. The infrastructure will extend all the way to the new railroad spur that was funded by the state of Minnesota and will be operated by Minnesota Northern. The EDA project will allow public access to the new rail spur that began construction in 2025.

Additional phases of the rail spur will apply for funding in 2026. This will either consist of additional track parallel to the existing track, or additional track as an extension of the existing track depending on need at the time of application to the Minnesota Rail

Service Improvement (MRSI) program.

Access to rail within the industrial park makes the park more appealing to developers, but also allows an access point for potential users from outside the park who may have preference to move cargo by rail rather than trucking long distances.

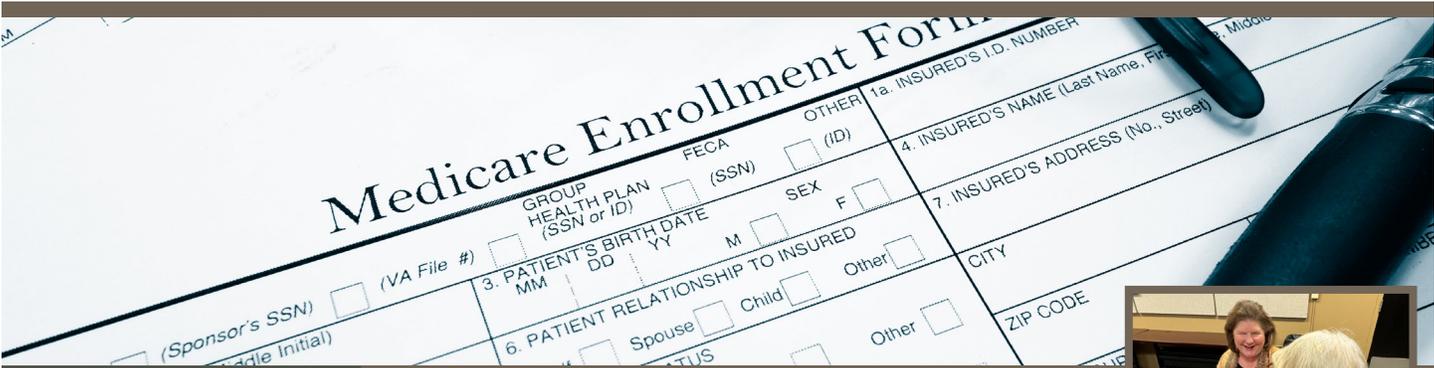
Additional Applications to the Federal Economic Development Administration (EDA):

The EDA currently has a disaster Notice of Funding Opportunity open for the counties of Kittson, Roseau, Marshall, and Norman in the NWRDC Region. This program is designed for communities to respond and recover from Federal disaster events declared in 2023 and 2024.

The NWRDC and Headwater’s Regional Development Commission have completed

the final year of their partnership with the EDA University Center at University of Minnesota, Crookston to gather regional partners in efforts to further implement the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) strategies within each region. Going forward, the Economic and Community Development staff will use the information that was gathered over the previous years to inform and develop the next Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) due in 2027.





www.dancingskyaaa.org

# DANCING SKY AREA AGENCY ON AGING



**Dancing Sky**  
Area Agency on Aging



### PURPOSE:

The Dancing Sky is 1 of 7 Minnesota Area Agencies on Aging. Our goal for the people of Minnesota is simple, to work with rural communities to help older adults stay in control of their choices. We envision vibrant communities invested in their elders as well as older adults and caregivers planning for the future. Together, older adults and communities thrive.

### SERVICE PRIORITIES:

Nutrition - congregate and home delivered meals, legal services, homemaker and chore services, home modification, assisted transportation services, health promotion and prevention programs, medication management, dementia friendly and age friendly communities.

## Senior LinkAge Line Rebrands Name to Minnesota Aging Pathways

### Resource Coordination

Resource Coordinators help older adults remain safely in their homes by connecting them to community-based services, caregiving support, assistance programs, housing options when needed, healthy aging workshops, and other resources. Coordinators also provide follow-up visits and phone calls to support successful aging in the community.

### Resource Specialists

Resource Specialists assist older adults and caregivers by responding to calls seeking information and guidance on topics such as Medicare, housing, transportation, financial services, community supports, prescription drug costs, billing issues, fraud prevention, and other complex decisions.

### Medicare Open Enrollment

Through free, unbiased, and comprehensive assistance, trained Minnesota Aging Pathways staff help older adults compare Medicare plans and select coverage that best meets their health and medication needs for the coming year.

### Outreach Events

In 2025, Dancing Sky AAA staff delivered presentations throughout the region at senior centers, churches, libraries, and community events. Presentation topics included healthcare fraud, waste and abuse, Medicare 101, New to Medicare, and how Minnesota Aging Pathways can help. Dancing Sky AAA also partners with Arrowhead AAA to offer Medicare 101 virtually every third Thursday, serving participants statewide. Staff further supported outreach efforts by hosting booths at health and resource fairs across the region's 21 counties in partnership with the Development Team.

### Resource Coordination & Aging Services Impact – 2025



**1,159**

Resource Coordinator Applications Created



**\$713,284**

Saved Through Medicare Plan Assistance



**6,198**

Callers Assisted in the Dancing Sky AAA Region

# Development Team Highlights

## Needs Assessment Project

The Dancing Sky Development Team received funding from the Northwest Minnesota Foundation to do a Needs Assessment Project to identify aging program and service gaps in the Foundation's 12-county/2 Tribal Region service area. Dancing Sky staff created a comprehensive survey which was provided to older adults, caregivers, and providers of services to older adults. Focus Groups were also held in 5 communities to further assess the community needs. A final project report and a survey summary were then created and shared with the Foundation. The data will assist the Foundation in determining the direction of funding projects for older adults in their region and will guide Dancing Sky's ongoing development work to address service gaps for older adults.



Clearbrook Focus Group for Northwest Minnesota Foundation Project

## Age Friendly MN

The Dancing Sky Development Team as a Technical Assistance Provider for Age Friendly MN (AFMN) hosted an AFMN Regional Exchange in Park Rapids which featured a showcase of Age Friendly funded projects from around our region, as well as Age Friendly updates from the state, and a panel of local and regional experts discussing the importance of Age Friendly communities.



Age Friendly Regional Exchange - Park Rapids

## 2025 AGING GRANTEEES

### Agency - Program

#### Title III-B Awards

Legal Services of NW Minnesota - Legal Assistance  
 Clear Waters Life Center- Asst Transportation  
 Living at Home of Park Rapids - Homemaker  
 Groceries Plus LLC - Grocery Delivery  
 Wilkin County Public Health - Homemaker  
 Lake Region Healthcare - Medication Mgmt  
 Tri-Valley Opportunity Council - Asstd Transportation  
 Tri-County Community Corrections - Chore Services  
 Northwest Sentence to Serve - Chore Services  
 West Central Community Action - Asstd Transportation  
 Community Resource Connections - Information & Assistance  
 Northwoods Caregivers - Chore/Home Mod  
 Mahube-Otwa (Becker County) - Information & Assistance  
 Lakes and Prairies CAP (Clay County) - Information & Assistance  
 Douglas County - Information & Assistance  
 Western Prairie Human Services (Grant/Traverse/Pope) - Information & Assistance  
 Wilkin County - Information & Assistance  
 Otter Tail County - Information & Assistance

#### Title III-C Awards

Nutrition Services Inc. - Nutrition

#### Title III-E Awards

Barnesville Helpers - Caregiver & Respite  
 Central MN Elder Network - Caregiver & Respite  
 Northwoods Caregivers - Caregiver & Respite  
 Living at Home of Park Rapids - Caregiver & Respite  
 Lutheran Social Services - Caregiver & Respite  
 Western Prairie Human Services - Caregiver & Respite  
 Otter Tail County - I&S for Caregivers  
 Elevate - Caregiver & Respite  
 Frazee Neighbor to Neighbor - Caregiver & Respite  
 Vivie - Caregiver & Respite

#### Title III-D Mini Awards - Agencies

Alexandria YMCA	REACH of Hawley
Barnesville Helpers	Regents of UMN - RSVP of RRV
Bemidji Senior Center	RiverView Health
Life Care Medical Center	Vivie
Lutheran Social Services	Warren SOS
Mahube Otwa	West Central MN CAP
Northwoods Caregivers	Western Prairie
PARTNERS	Wilkin County Public Health
Perham Area Community Center	



# TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

**PURPOSE:**

To ensure safe and efficient movement of people and commodities and provide an on-going forum for important transportation issues in the region. To assist MnDOT and provide input with planning and programs.

**SERVICE PRIORITIES:**

Direction setting, comprehensive regional planning, legislative advocacy and MnDOT project coordination.

## Local Communities Benefit From Transportation Planning

The NWRDC team assisted several local communities with planning transportation projects in 2025. Working with local partners to develop plans and secure funding for projects is a very rewarding process that the NWRDC is honored to assist with. Several local projects will be implemented in the seven-county service area each of the next five years in part to collaborative efforts with local units of government. These projects will receive grant funding from State and Federal programs and will require local financial commitments as well. The grants make it possible for small rural communities to be able to afford high-cost construction projects.

### Two major projects received funding commitments in 2025

The city of Warroad received a \$636,000 Alternative Transportation grant from MnDOT. This is a State funded grant. This grant will fund a sidewalk/trail connecting the northeast part of the city to the downtown and school area. This will provide a safer route for walking and biking through part of the city. This project will be very beneficial in providing students with a safe route to school.

The city of Thief River Falls will receive a \$760,000 Transportation Alternatives grant from the Federal government through MnDOT. This grant will assist the city in developing a trail from the Lincoln school area to the apartments and housing on the west side of the city. This will connect existing sidewalks and trails and will be

great for people who want to walk or bike to that part of the community. This will also provide a safer route for students to travel to school.

The planning process with several communities has been ongoing in 2025. This process has led to the development of grant applications that will be determined in 2026. Several exciting projects will be constructed soon because of the planning process and grant assistance that the transportation team has assisted with.

### Safe Routes to School

An exciting part of the NWRDC Transportation department is working with schools and their respective communities to develop Safe Routes to School Plans.

In 2025 the NWRDC developed plans with the Red Lake Falls and Grygla school districts. Each community had a committee of local residents representing a wide variety of interests, that met regularly to develop a plan tailored to their community. Both communities now have plans for projects that help with the health and safety of future students. Researching funding opportunities for the projects will be an ongoing process. The NWRDC is currently working with the Thief River Falls school district and the community to develop a Safe Routes to School plan. This plan will be completed in May 2026.



[www.nwrdc.org](http://www.nwrdc.org)

## Northwest Regional Transportation Coordination Council (RTCC)

### PURPOSE:

To support improved access and options for transportation services in northwestern Minnesota through communication and creative partnerships.

### SERVICE PRIORITIES:

The workplan consists of seven tasks identified by the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access.

## Building Community Connections Across Northwestern Minnesota

This year, our focus was on turning community conversations into concrete action.

Across our seven-county region, we continued to help riders and providers navigate complicated transportation landscape. Every week we hear from people who are unsure where to start. Sometimes it is a senior who needs a ride to the doctor. Other times it is a caregiver trying to coordinate trips for a family member who no longer drives. Through our website, phone calls, and local partners, we connect people to public transit, volunteer drivers, and other community options so they can get where they need to go.

Listening has been a big part of this year's work. The RTCC hosted county transportation forums and met with providers, local leaders, and community members to talk about what is working and where the gaps are. These conversations confirmed what we hear every day. Transportation is not just about getting from point A to point B. It is about staying healthy, staying social, and staying connected to community.

The feedback from these meetings is guiding our next steps and helping us design projects that truly fit local needs.

One of the major efforts this year was moving the Pony Express project forward through the Moving Greater Minnesota Forward grant. The Pony Express will use a Neighborhood Electric Vehicle and volunteer drivers to help older adults in Warren access groceries, appointments, and social activities within the community. Behind the scenes, this meant coordinating with partners, working through the state procurement process, and setting up a simple system that volunteers, housing staff, and residents can use. It is a new way of thinking about transportation that is small, local, and personal.

We also continued to build on partnerships with volunteer driver programs and local providers. These relationships make it easier for someone who calls our office or visits our website to be matched with the right option. In some cases, we helped connect a rider with public transit one way and a volunteer driver for the return trip. In

others, we brought agencies together to talk about sharing vehicles, coordinating schedules, or planning future pilots. Each connection adds another piece to the regional transportation puzzle.

At the heart of this work are the people who ride. One rider recently shared that having a coordinated trip to medical appointments and the grocery store in a single day meant they could stay in their home longer and remain more independent. Stories like this remind us why RTCC exists. Our role is to listen, to connect, and to work with partners to create practical solutions that make everyday life a little easier for the people who call Northwest Minnesota home.



# PLANS & PUBLICATIONS

## PREPARED BY THE NWRDC

### PLANS:

**2025-2028 Aging Area Plan** – Includes senior and provider input as well as demographic data to establish priorities for the use of Title-III Older Americans Act funds. Includes information on the unique characteristics of our region, demographics, accomplishments, program outcomes, and budget information.

### Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) –

The 2022–2026 CEDS has taken a little different shape to more closely resemble that of each of the other Economic Development Regions of Greater Minnesota. The Economic Development Regions have agreed upon four key cornerstones to economic development: Human Capital, Economic Competitiveness, Community Resources and Foundational Assets. Each region has based their CEDS on these cornerstones and developed their own unique goals and strategies. The 2022-2026 CEDS does maintain previous priorities of Planning, Promotion, Business Development, Labor Force Development and Renewable Energies with added emphasis on workforce related issues such as housing, child-care, training and business succession planning.

**Revolving Loan Fund Plan** – Consists of program elements and guidelines.

### PLANS:

**Government Units of Service Directory** – A listing of service agencies and government offices from the township and legislative levels.

**2024 Annual Report** – A report sent to local officials and legislators on funding and work activities of the NWRDC.

**NW MN Visitor & Recreation Guide** – A guide of attractions highlighting services and recreational opportunities in Northwest Minnesota communities.

**Safe Routes to School** - Red Lake Falls and Grygla School Districts

### WEBSITES:

- [www.nwrdc.org](http://www.nwrdc.org)
- [www.dancingskyaaa.org](http://www.dancingskyaaa.org)



# 2025 NWRDC TEAM



**Darla Waldner**  
NWRDC Executive  
Director



**Anne Joppru**  
Financial Director



**Carol Kilen**  
Financial Assistant



**Amanda Russell**  
Office Manager



**Amy Trudell**  
Admin & Communica-  
tions Specialist



**Sean Ranum**  
Loan Fund Manager/  
Economic Development



**James Retka**  
Community  
Development Director



**Tim Finseth**  
Transportation  
Planning Director



**Lynnell Simonson  
Popowski**  
Regional Transportation  
Coordinator



**Tori Peterson**  
RTCC Mobility Manager



**Thaddeus  
McCamant**  
Food Systems Planner



**Heather Pender**  
Dancing Sky AAA  
Director



**Amy Dallmann**  
Development  
Supervisor



**Melissa Hoefl**  
Contact Center  
Manager



**Judi Weiss**  
Grant & Contract  
Manager/Program  
Developer



**Valerie Mattison**  
Program Developer



**Stephanie Aassness**  
Program Developer



**Marlene Dahlquist**  
Minnesota Aging  
Pathways Supervisor



**Emily Erickson**  
Resource Coordinator



**Nancy Finstrom**  
Resource Coordinator



**Jane Stumbo**  
Resource Coordinator



**Mary Krueger**  
Resource Coordinator



**Tanya Hagen**  
Resource Coordinator



**Kristen Anderson**  
Resource Coordinator



**Kim Anderson**  
Resource Specialist



**Kathy Hanson**  
Resource Specialist



**Renee Lorfald**  
Resource Specialist



**Tami Miller**  
Resource Specialist



**Patrick Amiot**  
Resource Specialist



**Anne Larson**  
Resource Specialist



**Gina Zerr**  
Resource Specialist



**Carol Sorensen**  
Finance