

2013 Annual Report

WMSRDC
WEST MICHIGAN SHORELINE
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION



Leadership Message



James Maike, Chairperson
Newaygo County Commissioner



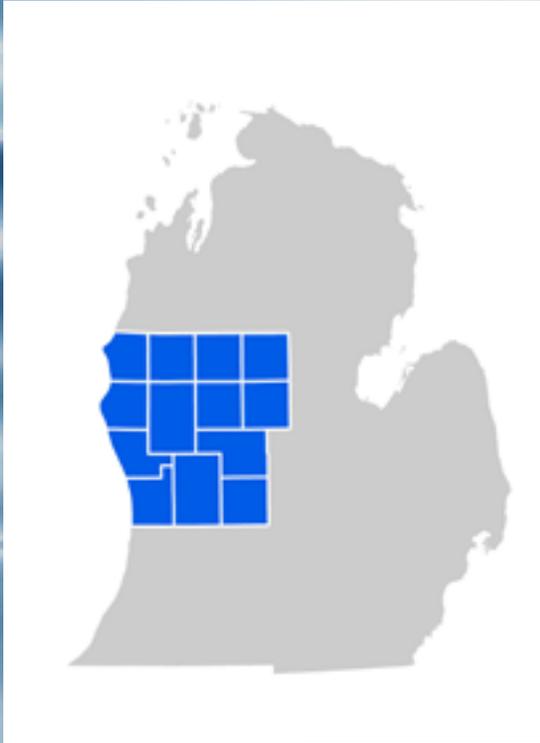
Sandeep Dey, Executive Director

Since the creation of the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) in 1970, there have been several milestones in the evolution of the Commission. One was certainly in 1992 when the Commission realigned its boundary from three to five counties with approval from the Governor. The others were in 2003 when northern Ottawa County became a part of the Muskegon/Northern Ottawa County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO); and 2007 when the Commission began administering and managing the thirteen (13) county homeland security program in West Michigan. In more recent years, the Commission has embraced the concept of Region Without Borders where WMSRDC's programs, partnerships and borders purposely fluctuate to meet the ever changing needs of the West Michigan area.

The Commission manages and administers regional development programs in homeland security, economic development, transportation planning, environmental planning, community development, local government services and other special projects; serving 1.4 million residents in thirteen (13) West Michigan counties. Presently, the Commission is in the process of creating the New West Michigan Region by redesigning, modernizing and retooling West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission to meet the challenges and opportunities of the new global economy.

We invite you to review our project based annual report which highlights many of our accomplishments on behalf of local communities. We would also like to thank our many partners for their support and assistance.

Who We Are



The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission is a federal and state designated regional planning and development agency serving 1.4 million residents in the West Michigan counties of Clare, Ionia, Isabella, Kent, Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, and Ottawa. WMSRDC administers regional development programs in homeland security, transportation planning, economic development, environmental planning, community development, local government services and other special projects.

As a Region Without Borders, WMSRDC's programs, partnerships, and borders purposely fluctuate to meet the ever changing needs of the West Michigan area.



Economic Development Strategies

WMSRDC implemented the 2013 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document by working with local economic development professionals, local government officials, and higher educational institutions with projects that meet the CEDS goals and objectives. **Some of these projects are the future development of a Muskegon Community College Technology Center in downtown Muskegon, increased utilization of the Muskegon Port, and the potential development of a Lake County Economic Development Corporation.**

In addition, WMSRDC and partners developed the 2014 CEDS document during the fall of 2013. The CEDS development process includes working closely with the federally required CEDS Committee and local community leaders, economic development professionals, and local government officials to update the economic and demographic profiles presented in the document, develop regional goals and objectives, identify regionally significant economic development projects, and develop a detailed work plan for implementing the document.

The year 2013 also marked the successful completion of WMSRDC's three-year Economic Development Administration (EDA) Partnership Planning Grant. Due in part to this success, WMSRDC also completed and submitted a grant application to EDA for the 2014-2016 Partnership Planning Grant. Approval of the grant application is expected to be announced in early 2014.



Improving Transportation Infrastructure

The Muskegon and Northern Ottawa County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which is responsible for transportation planning in the Muskegon and northern Ottawa County area, is now working under an approved FY2014-2017 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP is a cooperative effort between federal, state, and local officials and serves as the final link in the transportation planning process. Its primary purpose is to identify transportation programs and projects to be funded with federal aid in accordance with federal law and regulations. This plan is an outline of the transportation needs of Muskegon County and Northern Ottawa County for the next four years. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) officially approved the new TIP in November of 2013.

The TIP includes over 100 new projects and it is expected that many more will be added as funding becomes available. Approximately \$90,260,348 in federal, state, and local funding is programmed to be spent on projects included in the new TIP.

The TIP is considered a living document, and it is expected that there will be several amendments and changes to the document over the next several years. The document is posted on the WMSRDC website, as well as all amendments and modifications, and minutes from the MPO meetings.

A red aircraft simulator is engulfed in bright orange and yellow flames on a tarmac. Firefighters in full gear are positioned around the burning aircraft, with one firefighter in the foreground. The background shows a clear blue sky with some light clouds.

Region 6 Homeland Security Prepares and Protects West Michigan

During the past 15 months, WMSRDC, the designated fiduciary for the Region 6 Homeland Security Planning Board and the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Medical Response System (GRMMRS), assisted the Region 6 Planning Board and its committees in developing training and exercise projects designed to prepare and protect the citizens of West Michigan from a host of potential life-threatening incidents.

In October 2013, Region 6 Homeland Security and over 200 Muskegon County Police officers, firefighters, emergency medical services personnel, and others, posing as victims, participated in an active shooter exercise at the former Muskegon General Hospital building. Muskegon County is better prepared in the event of an actual mass shooting incident, with the lessons learned during the active shooter exercise.

An example of training conducted by the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Medical Response System occurred on October 31, 2012 through November 2, 2012 in the form of a Live Fire Aircraft Rescue Firefighter Training held at the Gerald R. Ford International Airport Fire Station. The training was a huge success, with over 200 first responders taking part in the three day event, including 186 firefighters representing 23 different fire departments in the Kent County region. Kellogg Community College Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting (ARFF) Training Program presented the course and provided the aircraft simulator.



Lake Michigan Water Trail

WMSRDC is a strong advocate for regional cooperation and coordination. In 2013, WMSRDC convened an advisory group to develop the Lake Michigan Water Trail in Michigan. The group coordinates with a four-state collaborative water trail effort and includes four Regional Planning Councils, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the National Park Service. The MDEQ Coastal Zone Program awarded a \$86,257 grant to Land Information Access Association and the Regional Planning Councils to produce the Lake Michigan Water Trail plan for Michigan's coastal communities.

During 2013, WMSRDC trained 35 volunteers to perform access inventories along the Lake Michigan shoreline and in West Michigan's connecting rivers and harbors. With help from paddling enthusiasts and the Muskegon County Convention and Visitors Bureau, data was prepared for the Michigan Great Lakes Water Trails website. In 2014, WMSRDC will produce the Lake Michigan Water Trail Plan in support of local government efforts to improve access sites for paddlers and to establish a National Water Trail in the future. The project meets goals of the Lake Michigan Lakewide Action and Management Plan by improving the sharing of information between regions along the Lake Michigan coastline, improving public understanding of coastal access availability, and by increasing the visibility and marketing of local trails to a broader audience in Michigan and in other states. The project will drive increased opportunities for tourism, recreation and related economic development through sustainable practices.



Muskegon Area-wide Plan Update

In October 2013, WMSRDC completed the two-year planning process to update the Muskegon Area-wide Plan (MAP). The update process, lead by WMSRDC, was made possible by a grant from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) Pollution Prevention grant program to the County of Muskegon. WMSRDC coordinated the update process, which included an update of the demographic and economic community profile, incorporating sustainable practices in the document, gathering community input through five large-scale community forums, identifying and updating the implementation strategies, and establishing evaluation criteria to measure the successful implementation of the MAP.

A twenty-five member advisory committee oversaw the update process by providing valuable input during the two-year planning process. The committee consists of community leaders from a variety of sectors including local elected officials, higher education, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector. The MAP Advisory Committee has committed to continue meeting on a regular basis to assist and evaluate the MAP implementation process.

A survey tool was developed to assist in measuring the successful implementation of the MAP. The survey will be presented to the community at an annual public meeting and completed by attendees through electronic voting equipment and software. The results of the survey will then be analyzed and measured on a yearly basis. The updated MAP can be viewed on the WMSRDC website.



Initiatives and Regional Forums

The State of Michigan announced the Regional Prosperity Initiative (RPI) during 2013. One of the goals of the initiative is to encourage increased cooperation and coordination amongst a variety of sectors to promote and foster economic development around the state. Those sectors include regional planning agencies, metropolitan planning organizations, workforce development agencies, higher education institutions, private sector business, and business development agencies, etc. WMSRDC hosted the West Michigan RPI meeting in September 2013. Representatives from the State of Michigan and the Governor's Office presented and discussed the Governor's initiative during the meeting.

Each year WMSRDC hosts a series of regional forums focussing on topics of interest to local planners, environmentalists, government officials, and other interested parties. This year's regional forums covered the following topics:

- 1) A panel of experts lead a community conversation about Complete Streets in West Michigan. Complete Streets are streets designed and operated to enable safe access for all users including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and public transportation users of all ages and abilities.
- 2) The Water, Woods, and Wetlands Regional Forum featured case studies and explored how creative community partnerships have used grant funds and best practices to restore and protect West Michigan's valuable natural resources.



Muskegon Lake Shoreline Restoration

WMSRDC completed the Muskegon Lake Shoreline Fish and Wildlife Habitat Restoration Project with support from a three-year, \$10 million dollar National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)-ARRA/Great Lakes Commission grant. The project restored 50 acres of shoreline on Muskegon Lake with the removal of sawmill debris, foundry fill, broken concrete and invasive plants. It restored 30 acres of open water and emergent wetland habitat and 20 acres of native plant buffer along 13,000 feet of shoreline. Four private landowners and three public landowners provided protection for the restored properties with conservation easements and landowner agreements.

The Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership (MLWP), Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program, Muskegon Public Schools, Alcoa, Consumers Energy, United Way of the Lakeshore, and 3,500 local volunteers contributed their time and talent to the Muskegon Lake Shoreline Restoration Project.

In addition, Muskegon County and the City of Muskegon received grants from the Community Foundation for Muskegon County and Muskegon River Ice Mountain for the restoration project. Grand Valley State University and Annis Water Resources Institute performed monitoring to assess fisheries, wetland and socio-economic benefits. The project is yielding a 6:1 return on the investment. The Great Lakes Commission, WMSRDC, and the Muskegon River Watershed Assembly performed public education and outreach, including newsletters, presentations and 15 interpretive signs. WMSRDC is continuing to work with various partners to complete the final cleanup and restoration projects needed to remove Muskegon Lake from the list of Great Lakes Areas of Concern.



Regional Transportation & Rural Task Force

In 2013, the five-county Rural Transportation Task Force, administered by WMSRDC, met multiple times to approve changes to transportation projects and to discuss rural transportation issues. WMSRDC also participated in the annual training session for the Rural Task Force program.

At the recent training, WMSRDC received direction from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) on procedures for moving forward. MDOT provided a set of guidelines and operating procedures and WMSRDC will be informing task force member of these changes as soon as the MDOT formally releases the documents.

In addition to administering the required Task Force items for MDOT, WMSRDC is also responsible for regional transportation planning within Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana Counties. As part of this program WMSRDC undertakes an annual Asset Management program. Each year, WMSRDC, along with MDOT and a county road commission employee, collects data for approximately half of all the federal aid roads within the Region. The data collection effort requires the collection of a visual rating assessment system that rates the road surface condition on a scale of 1-10. This data collection process is part of an ongoing statewide program to evaluate the condition of the state's road system.



Hazard Mitigation

In 2013, significant progress was made towards updating the Hazard Mitigation plans for Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana counties. Major accomplishments during the year included research and identification of natural and man-made hazards; the development of a system to prioritize those hazards; and the use of GIS/mapping resources to help identify where known hazards overlap with critical facilities and infrastructure. The next step will be to identify and prioritize actions that can be taken to mitigate or eliminate the impacts of hazards. WMSRDC will continue working closely with the Emergency Manager and the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) or Local Planning Team (LPT) of each county to complete the Plan Updates, which are expected to be complete near the end of Fiscal Year 2014.

Holton Township Master Plan

In February 2013, Holton Township (Muskegon County) officially adopted the Holton Township Master Plan. It was the culmination of a year-long partnership between WMSRDC and the Holton Township Planning Commission to bring the important document up-to-date. WMSRDC facilitated a number of meetings throughout the planning process and wrote the Plan, which is intended to guide and support land use actions and decisions within Holton Township for many years to come.



Berry Junction Trail

Over the past year, WMSRDC has been working with the Fred Meijer Berry Junction Trail Commission to develop the final 4.9 mile phase of the Fred Meijer Berry Junction Trail through north central Muskegon County. When completed, the trail will serve as the final connection between the Hart-Montague State Trail and the Musketawa State Trail. WMSRDC assisted the group by facilitating and writing grant applications to the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) Trust Fund for the \$2.6 million project.

Partners in the project include Dalton Township, Fruitland Township, Laketon Township, Muskegon Township, City of North Muskegon, County of Muskegon, Muskegon County Road Commission, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Department of Transportation, West Michigan Trails and Greenways Coalition, and the Regional Commission.

The MDNR Trust Fund grant (\$300,000) has been recommended for funding through the MDNR Trust Fund Board and is awaiting final approval from the Michigan Legislature. The MDOT grant, totalling \$2 million, is awaiting final approval. The Trail Commission has received a \$287,000 grant from the West Michigan Trails and Greenways Coalition. Pending approval from all funding sources, construction of the project is expected to occur during 2014.



Muskegon Port Involvement

WMSRDC has been working with the Muskegon County Port Advisory Committee, Economic Development Sub-Committee over the past year. The mission of the Muskegon County Port Advisory Committee includes working with private shoreline landowners, local and regional economic development partnerships, governmental units, and maritime/logistics experts to coordinate appropriate services, anticipate future needs, provide marketing assistance, and develop long-term strategies for economic growth and environmental sustainability at the Port of Muskegon.

WMSRDC's involvement with the committee is to coordinate efforts with other local and regional projects, as well as identify potential funding sources for future infrastructure and environmental improvements to and around the Muskegon Port.

Transportation Planning Conference

WMSRDC proudly planned and hosted the 2013 Michigan Transportation Planning Association's (MTPA) annual conference that took place on July 16-19 in Muskegon. The MTPA conference featured a mobile workshop touring the port facilities along Muskegon Lake. Attendees were also given the option to participate in a bicycle tour of the Muskegon Lake fish and wildlife habitat restoration project administered by WMSRDC via the Lakeshore Trail. The conference was highly educational and served as the perfect opportunity to highlight the Muskegon area.

A red and black bicycle is parked on a wooden deck. The bicycle is the central focus of the image, with its frame, wheels, handlebars, and seat clearly visible. The background shows a wooden fence and some greenery, suggesting an outdoor setting. The image is partially obscured by a large green circular graphic on the right side of the page.

Non-motorized Trail Plan

During 2013, WMSRDC and consulting firm Progressive AE completed a non-motorized transportation plan for the Muskegon County/northern Ottawa County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The study included an examination of existing non-motorized trails as well as on-road bicycle facilities within the MPO boundaries. The plan also identified potential new connections to fill in the gaps between existing and proposed, but not yet constructed, trails and on road facilities. The plan provides a guide for the MPO, Muskegon County, northern Ottawa County, and the various municipalities and townships to develop connections that will provide an interconnected system for the entire MPO area.

During the process, various master plans, transportation plans, and recreation plans were reviewed for any pertinent non-motorized transportation components. These components provided the foundation for future recommendations and were included in the MPO Non-motorized Transportation Plan.

Existing non-motorized transportation facilities and currently planned connections were confirmed for creation of a comprehensive system. Maps illustrating the various existing non-motorized systems were created. In addition, these plans identified potential new non-motorized trail connections.

Finally, mapping of existing and proposed facilities was broken out by municipality to make the document more useful to involved communities.

Hartshorn Peninsula Pier - Universal Access for Deep Water Shore Fishing

Muskegon Lake will get a new fishing pier, thanks to a \$253,000 grant from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust to WMSRDC. The pier will be constructed in 2014 on the City of Muskegon's Harthorn Peninsula. It will be fully accessible to people of various needs and abilities. A paved spur from the City of Muskegon's Lakeshore Trail bike path will connect the pier to the region's recreational infrastructure. The City of Muskegon will own and maintain the pier. The pier will add to the environmental improvements started with the WMSRDC/NOAA habitat restoration project by protecting restored habitat and by providing public access to deep-water fishing.

Muskegon Lake provides a viable fishery resource to meet the needs of subsistence fishers and recreational anglers throughout the Great Lakes and its surrounding communities. The Great Lakes Fishery Trust is an innovative funding program created in 1996 as part of a settlement with Consumers Energy and the Detroit Edison Company for fish losses caused by the operation of the Ludington Pumped Storage Plant on Lake Michigan. Since inception, the trust has provided over \$55 million to educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies to improve and protect the Great Lakes fishery.

The image to the left is an example of a fishing pier with universal access and is similar to the one to be constructed on Muskegon Lake.





Information & Communications

WMSRDC continued to be an active partner of the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition (WMCAC). The WMCAC is a partnership of business, academic institutions, government agencies, industry, and non-profit organizations in Muskegon, Kent, and Ottawa counties working together to achieve cleaner air in the region through the education and promotion of voluntary emission reduction activities. Among other outreach activities, an extensive television public education campaign continued in 2013 highlighting voluntary actions people can take on Clean Air Action Days.

WMSRDC also continued to fulfill its duties as a U.S. Census Bureau Affiliate by striving to keep the WMSRDC website up to date with the latest links and most recently released data from the Census Bureau and other data products.

Through the Federal Project Review System, WMSRDC continued to review federal/state grant assistance applications to coincide with local and regional goals and policies.

WMSRDC's newsletter continues to be published bimonthly and includes updates and information on WMSRDC's projects and programs. The newsletter is available from the WMSRDC website and is also mailed to a large and diverse mailing list. WMSRDC also publishes bimonthly electronic WMSRDC Updates, which are distributed via email during the months the more detailed newsletter is not published. WMSRDC also continuously updates its website (wmsrdc.org), in addition, individuals and groups have the option of following WMSRDC on Facebook.

WMSRDC Board

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Kay Beecham, Councilperson, City of Norton Shores

James Brown, Oceana County Commissioner

Bill Carpenter, Mason County Commissioner

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Nancy Frye, WMSRDC

Susie Hughes, Muskegon County Commissioner

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Wanda Marrison, Councilperson, City of Ludington

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Lisa Stich, West Shore Community College

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William Watson, City of Muskegon Heights

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Sandeep Dey, Executive Director

WMSRDC Staff

Sandeep Dey, Executive Director

Stephen Carlson, Senior Planner

Syndi Copeland, Administrative Assistant

Joshua Croff, Planner

Nannette Emmer, Special Projects Manager

Kathy Evans, Program Manager

Joel Fitzpatrick, Program Manager

Kathleen Flannery, Homeland Security Project Coordinator

Amy Haack, Program Manager

Cliff Johnson, Program Manager

Erin Kuhn, Program Manager

Brian Mulnix, Program Manager

Greg Mund, Environmental Program Coordinator

James Saalfeld, Homeland Security Program Coordinator

Mary Seeger, Executive Assistant

Susan Stine-Johnson, Finance Manager

Jim VanBendegom, Homeland Security Project Coordinator

West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission

316 Morris Avenue, Suite 340
PO Box 387
Muskegon, MI 49443-0387
Phone: (231) 722-7878
Fax: (231) 722-9362
wmsrdc.org

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