

Governor Rick Snyder Visits Muskegon

On Friday, August 25, 2017, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder attended an event at the USS Silversides Submarine Museum overlooking the Muskegon Lake channel. The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) and the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC) hosted approximately 75 people from throughout West Michigan. The purpose of the event was to hear updates regarding both the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance (WMPA) and the West Michigan 21st Century Infrastructure Pilot.

The event featured a number of brief presentations related to both the WMPA and Infrastructure Pilot projects. The presentations were the following:

- West Michigan Watershed Collaborative Update - Steve Bulthuis, Macatawa Area Coordinating Council
- Broadband Initiative with Connect Michigan - Paul Griffith, West Central Michigan Works!
- West Michigan Regional Dashboard - Erin Kuhn, WMSRDC
- Infrastructure Asset Management Pilot Project – Claire Khouri, Office of Governor Rick Snyder
- East/West Pilot Experience – Carmine Polombo, Southeast Michigan Council of Governments

Governor Rick Snyder then addressed the attendees by discussing his priorities for the State of Michigan. His priorities included the following:

- Michigan is the home for innovation, career opportunities and economic expansion
- Michigan will provide quality, lifelong education and career training
- Michigan’s infrastructure is modern and reliable

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SPOTLIGHT PROJECT:

Leaders in Economic Alliance Development

In 2016, representatives from the Region 4 Northern Collaborative (Lake, Mason, Newaygo, and Oceana counties) took part in a “Leaders in Economic Alliance Development” (LEAD) initiative facilitated by USDA Rural Development and Michigan State University Extension. LEAD focuses on developing collaborative multi-county partnerships in rural communities in order to build capacity around shared economic development goals. The planning process involved a series of meetings, a civic forum, and establishment of a leadership structure and subcommittees organized around the top three regional “opportunities” identified at the civic forum: workforce development, improve broadband access, and expand tourism and recreation.



- The Workforce Development Committee established a goal of increasing workforce participation by 10% over the next five years, and is considering strategies such as K-12 student engagement and mid-management/supervisor training.
- The Broadband Access Committee is organizing its efforts around regional broadband needs and availability through the Connect Michigan assessment process.

WMSRDC is pleased to participate in the Northern Collaborative because of its regional scope and the many correlations with the long-standing

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs).

Throughout 2017, Northern Collaborative subcommittees have continued to hold meetings and have achieved varying degrees of progress.

- The Regional Recreation Strategy Committee has secured a Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) grant which will be used to hire a consultant to provide planning services for regional trail connectivity linking Lake, Mason, Newaygo, and Oceana counties.

WMSRDC participated in the LEAD planning process and currently has staff assigned to each of the Northern Collaborative subcommittees. In addition, WMSRDC has offered to provide communications support through the WMSRDC newsletter and website. For Northern Collaborative contact information, go to www.wmsrdc.org/project/NorthernCollaborative/.

Collective Effort is Restoring “Michigan’s Most Beautiful Mile”

The Muskegon River restoration project at Veteran’s Memorial Park will improve habitat for fish and wildlife by restoring wetlands, creating natural shorelines, and re-establishing fish passage for juvenile, adult and spawning life stages. The project will re-establish the hydrological connection to the Muskegon River by creating a fish passage-friendly opening with upgrades to an aging water control structure. Restoration includes fisheries-related improvements along 2,257 linear feet of shoreline and the establishment of low growing, native rushes, flowers and sedges. More than 5 acres of open water wetland will be restored by removing 19,000 metric tons of sediment and unnatural fill material. Non-native invasive plants are being removed and native fish have been relocated to the Muskegon River.



The once, highly acclaimed, original park landscape was featured on historic postcards, promoting motorists to travel the West Michigan Pike from Chicago to the Mackinac Bridge. The removal of dead and declining, non-native trees and the re-planting of site-appropriate, native trees and shrubs will provide a variety of water quality and habitat-related benefits for fish and wildlife. Historic memorial park features will be brought back into clear view. The park was originally established in 1934 as a tribute to Muskegon area veterans

of World War I. It has since become a park in honor of veterans of all U.S. wars. Many of the park’s memorial plaques have been removed for safe-keeping, to be replaced by project partners following restoration.

The project is being completed to restore the Muskegon Lake ecosystem and to remove it from the list of Great Lakes Areas of Concern. Funding for the work is provided by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and U.S. EPA via a WMSRDC grant through National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Great Lakes Commission. The WMSRDC is implementing the project and GVSU Annis Water Resources Institute is monitoring the impact of restoration on the aquatic ecosystem. The Muskegon County Veteran’s Advisory Council, Northside Lions, Muskegon County Commissioners, Muskegon Rotary and the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership and WMSRDC are working together to restore “Michigan’s Most Beautiful Mile.”



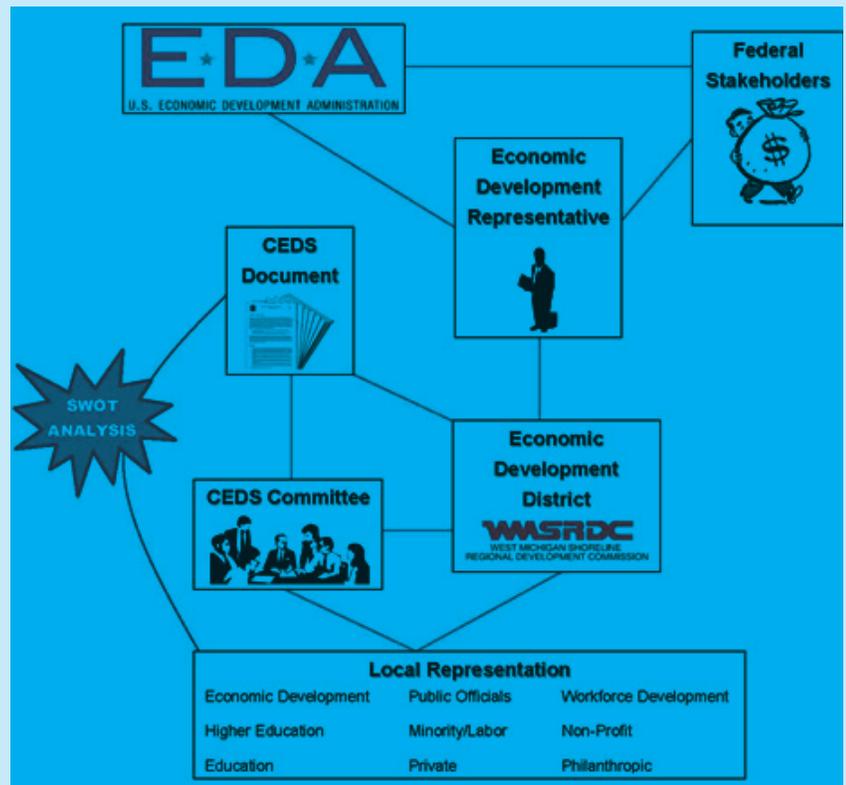
Economic Development Assistance

The Economic Development Administration (EDA) works directly with local economic development officials to make grant investments that are well-defined, timely, and linked to a long-term, sustainable economic development strategy. EDA grants are designed to leverage existing regional assets to support the implementation of economic development strategies that advance new ideas and creative approaches to achieve economic prosperity particularly in distressed communities. As a designated Economic Development District, WMSRDC can help link local governments with EDA and other federal economic development assistance.

There are no deadlines for EDA grant applications. Contact WMSRDC for more information or to discuss potential economic development opportunities and arrange a conversation with our federal economic development representative. The sooner a discussion is started, the better!

One role of the WMSRDC economic devel-

opment program is to connect local stakeholders with grants and other forms of assistance. This chart demonstrates the WMSRDC economic development ecosystem, as it relates to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration.



EDA Peer Review Results

WMSRDC maintains an Economic Development District (EDD) designation from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA). The district, which covers Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana counties, must periodically take part in a performance evaluation and peer review of its economic development program. WMSRDC recently received the results of an evaluation which took place on November 29, 2016. We are pleased to report that the WMSRDC economic development planning program meets the regulatory and programmatic requirements of EDA and received an overall rating of 3.3 out of 5. Although this is considered “fully successful” on the EDA grading scale, there is room for improvement. WMSRDC fully intends to act upon recommendations of the evaluation, including the expansion of efforts to include the private sector in the CEDS process, and annual attendance at county boards to discuss the value of the CEDS process.

Planners Attend Successful Transportation Planning Conference

WMSRDC staff attended the annual Michigan Transportation Planners Association (MTPA) conference which was held in the city of Grand Rapids during the week of July 25-28, 2017. The conference was hosted by the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC), which is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Grand Rapids area.

The conference offered many technical learning opportunities as well as several mobile workshops that took place around the city of Grand Rapids and neighboring communities. Conference sessions focused on topics from non-motorized transportation to federal issues. On Wednesday, Mark Fenton, a national public health, planning, and transportation consultant, presented the keynote message that focused on planning for healthy communities. Mobile workshops included transit and walking tours as well as a hands on look at the Grand River Rapids Restoration Project. A tour of the Columbian Distribution warehouse offered a great look at freight movement and logistics from one of the larger distributors in the region.

The annual conference is a great way for transportation planners to network, gather new information, and learn the latest on trends in the industry. The conference moves around to different cities in Michigan each year, and offers the hosting agency a chance to showcase features of their city and region. WMSRDC was the host in 2013, and held the conference in downtown Muskegon. The 2018 MTPA conference will be hosted by the Southeast Council of Governments.

Updated Traffic Counts Available

WMSRDC recently contracted with the engineering consulting firm AECOM for traffic counting services, on behalf of West Michigan Metropolitan Transportation Planning Program (WESTPLAN) which is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Muskegon/ Northern Ottawa urbanized area. AECOM completed traffic counts at approximately 100 locations within the MPO boundary.

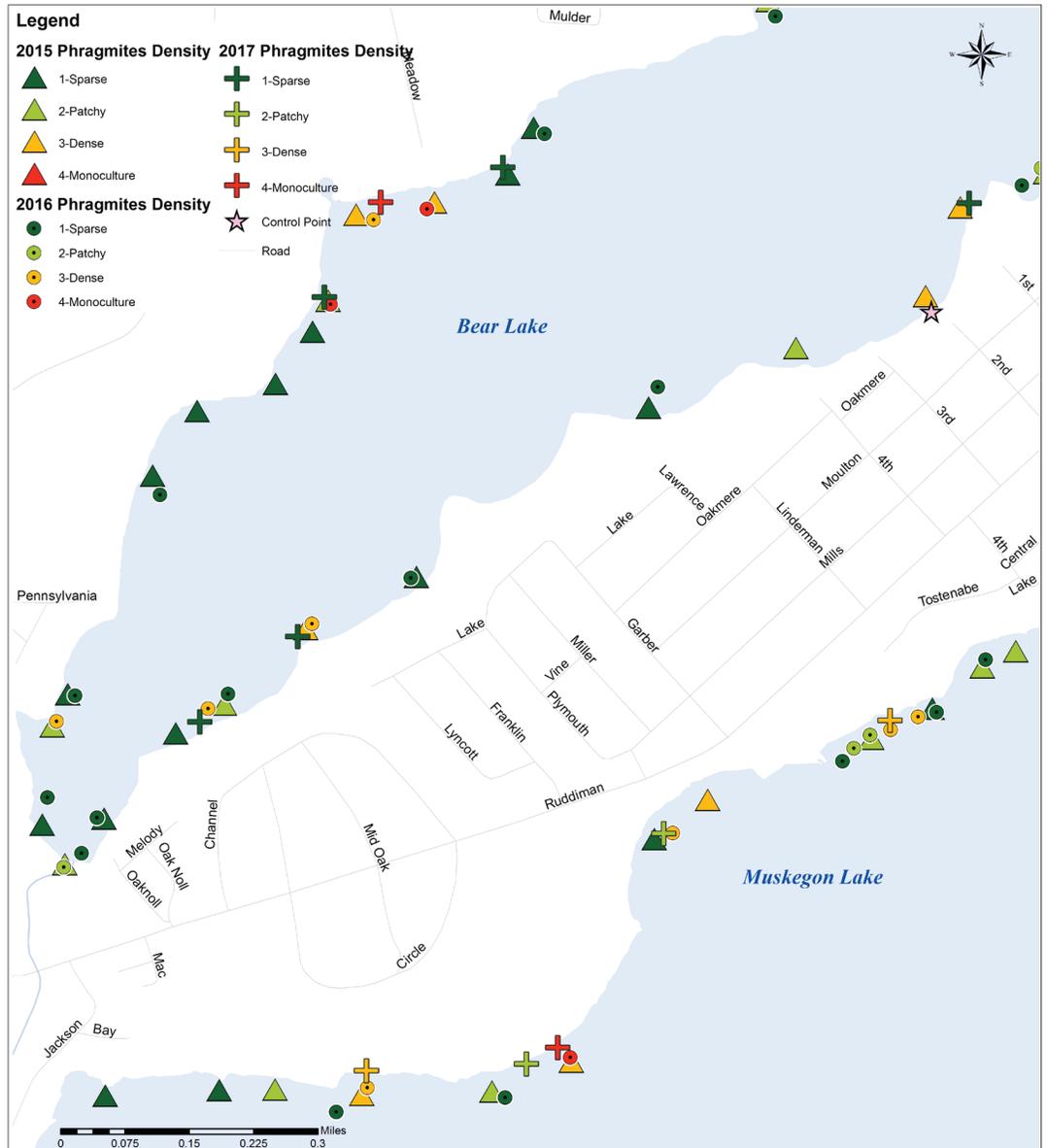
In order to ensure the most accurate traffic counts available, AECOM followed traffic counting guidelines prepared by the Michigan Department of Transportation. These include: avoiding times of increased tourism, avoiding holidays and festivals, avoiding areas affected by road closures, and counts should be done when local schools are in session to avoid changes in traffic patterns.

WMSRDC has received the count data from AECOM and has entered it into the Region's online traffic count database system. This system is integrated with Google Maps to assist users in retrieving and presenting data and information. The traffic counts are available through the WMSRDC website at www.wmsrdc.org.



With the assistance of WMSRDC, the City of Muskegon Heights hosted a successful Training Wheels educational course on July 18. The Training Wheels courses are designed to help engineers and planners develop on-road bicycle facilities.

Non-native invasive species control in the Muskegon Lake and Bear Lake watersheds is a daunting task. WMSRDC has completed its second year of a two year project designed to reduce invasive species such as phragmites (common reed), spotted knapweed, purple loosestrife, black locust, and tartarian honeysuckle in the Muskegon Lake watersheds.



Non-native Species Control Project Summary

- 115.99 coastal wetland acres treated
- 13.35 shoreline upland acres treated
- 6 Invasive Species Control training events for landowners (23) and volunteers
- 2 Early Detection and Rapid Response training events
- Sustainable Citizen Network established, 4 local units of government engaged
- 13 Experiential Learning events for 6 -12 grade students
- 4 Invasive Species Presentations to 6-12 grade student classes
- 3 Annual wetland phragmites surveys completed, including evaluation points
- GIS maps and database developed for Biodiversity Protection and Phragmites Management Plan
- Outreach and educational material established on social media sites
- 5 Public information presentations made
- 2 Midwest Invasive Species Information Network (MISIN) monitoring training sessions held
- 590 native trees and 2960 native plants planted in targeted shoreline areas
- Established a sustainability partnership with West Michigan Conservation Network (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area)

Homeland Security Update

WMSRDC staff continue to work with the Region 6 Homeland Security Planning Board to wrap up purchasing for the FY 15 planning grant. In addition, staff is also working to process Alignment and Allowability Forms (AAF's) for the FY16 planning grant. Finally, members of the Region 6 Homeland Security Planning Board are working to identify projects for the FY18 Project Workbook which is due to the Michigan State Police later this fall.

The Region 6 Homeland Security Planning Board voted to retain WMSRDC as their fiduciary for the upcoming grant cycle at their regularly scheduled July 2017 meeting in Big Rapids. As the designated fiduciary, WMSRDC is responsible for the management and administration of the Homeland Security Grant Program for the counties of Clare, Ionia, Isabella, Kent, Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, and Ottawa.

Blue Lake Township Update

WMSRDC is simultaneously updating the Blue Lake Township master plan and the Blue Lake Township recreation plan. These documents will communicate the community's vision for the future of Blue Lake Township over the next 5 to 20 years. The master plan is intended to guide and support decision making by township leaders. Successful completion of the recreation plan will qualify the township for recreation grants offered by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Both plans must be reviewed and updated as needed every five years.

Proposed drafts of the Blue Lake Township master plan and the Blue Lake Township recreation plan are expected to be made available for public review this coming October through December. Until then, WMSRDC will continue to work closely with the Blue Lake Township Planning Commission to bring the plans up-to-date. Please contact Stephen Carlson at scarlson@wmsrdc.org with inquiries regarding this or any other local government project.

West Michigan Watershed Collaborative

The West Michigan Watershed Collaborative (WMWC) met on August 28, 2017 and identified a proposed framework to generate sustainable funding for water quality improvement projects throughout the region. The framework is based on nearly two years of planning and research and the results of six round-table discussions held throughout West Michigan during the summer of 2017. The WMWC is a voluntary network of watershed stakeholders, located within the West Michigan Prosperity Region 4. Participants shared the results of the round-table discussions. Public Sector Consultants facilitated the meeting in partnership with WMSRDC, Grand Valley Metro Council, and the Macatawa Area Coordinating Council. More than 50 people participated in the regional meeting.

During the six round-table discussions, 45 participants discussed views and perceptions of current funding models and four approaches, including: Voluntary Watershed Contribution, Watershed Management Districts, Pay for Success and Millages. Discussions were held in Grand Rapids, Grant, Hamilton, Lowell, Muskegon, and Walker. WMWC participants agreed that new funding approaches are needed and that current funding is positive but not enough. Partners from throughout the region want to work together to develop more strategic funding decisions and to reach more economies of scale through partnerships. Partners are also willing to pursue new legislation if needed. Participants agreed that a successful funding framework will draw from strengths of multiple approaches and develop short and long term funding strategies. WMWC partners will continue to engage stakeholders and refine the strategy. The strategy will be completed by Public Sector Consultants in November 2017 and the WMWC will convene to discuss next steps.



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- Michigan’s communities are strong and thriving
- Michigan’s government is efficient, effective, and affordable

Governor Snyder also talked about the importance of the Regional Prosperity Initiative and Michigan 21st Century Infrastructure Pilot projects. He noted the relationships formed, as well and the increased collaboration and cooperation that has developed throughout the process of the two projects. The Governor’s presentation ended with a brief question and answer period.

The event was extremely successful. Work on both the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance and the Michigan 21st Century Infrastructure Pilot projects will continue into the future. The Governor’s visit has given a new energy to the projects as the Region continues to build relationships and increase collaboration to have a more prosperous West Michigan and State.

The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission is a federal and state designated regional planning and development agency serving 120 local governments in Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana Counties. WMSRDC is also responsible for the management and administration of the homeland security program for the counties of Clare, Ionia, Isabella, Kent, Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, and Ottawa. WMSRDC is also the planning agency for the metropolitan transportation planning (MPO) program for Muskegon and Northern Ottawa Counties.

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