



2014 Annual Report



Leadership Message

During 2014, the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission experienced a year of both change and accomplishments. WMSRDC has undergone a change in leadership with the appointment of Erin Kuhn as the new executive director in May 2014. Among several accomplishments, the Commission has completed the Lake Michigan Water Trail Plan, part of a four state effort to develop the longest contiguous-loop water trail in the world. The commission also participated in Governor Rick Snyder's Regional Prosperity Initiative and assisted in the development of the Region 4 Regional Prosperity Plan.

WMSRDC has an outstanding and dedicated staff committed to serving the region through programs in homeland security, economic development, transportation planning, environmental planning, community development, local government services and other special projects.

Thank you to the numerous local, state, and federal partners, as well as our many supporters that have helped to make 2014 such a successful year. WMSRDC looks forward to serving the West Michigan Region well into the future.

Sincerely, *Erin Kuhn, Executive Director and Joe Lenius, Chairperson*



Who We Are

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.

In addition, WMSRDC is the planning agency for the metropolitan transportation planning (MPO) program for Muskegon and Northern Ottawa Counties.

The mission of the Commission is to promote and foster regional development in West Michigan through cooperation amongst local governments and other regional partners. WMSRDC provides services and manages and administers programs in homeland security, transportation planning, economic development, environmental planning, community development, local government services, and other special projects.



**WEST MICHIGAN SHORELINE
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

Economic Development Strategies

WMSRDC implemented the 2014 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document by working with local economic development professionals, local government officials, and higher educational institutions to identify projects that meet the CEDS goals & objectives. A sampling 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 establishment of a Lake County Economic Development Organization.

The CEDS development process includes working closely with the federally required CEDS Committee, 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 development projects, and develop a detailed work plan for implementing the document.

In 2014, WMSRDC and partners updated the CEDS for 2015 by reviewing and updating the goals & objectives and proposed projects. The year 2014 also marked the first year of a new three-year Economic Development Administration (EDA) Partnership Planning Grant. The grant was awarded to WMSRDC early in the year and will remain in effect from 2014 through 2016.



Improving Transportation Infrastructure

The Muskegon and Northern Ottawa County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) continues work on updating the Transportation Long Range Plan 2040. Throughout 2014, staff worked with the MPO Technical and Policy Committees, as well as Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to revise the existing plan. The updated plan will be completed in FY2015.

The 2040 Long Range Plan is a federally mandated document that provides for a multi-jurisdictional, multi-year look at the area's future transportation network, which includes highway, transit, non-motorized, air, rail, and port. The plan is used as a guide for investment of public funds that includes capital improvements to the transportation system within the MPO area.

Also throughout 2014, WMSRDC continued to update and amend the approved FY2014-2017 Transportation Improvement Program. The document was originally approved in 2013, and is considered a "living" document as it is continually being updated and amended as funding and programs change. All changes require approval of the MPO Technical and Policy Committees, as well as MDOT and FHWA. All meetings include opportunities for public involvement. The FY2014-2017 TIP includes over 100 projects with approximately \$90,260,348 in federal, state, and local funding programmed to be spent over the life of the document.



Region 6 Homeland Security Prepares and Protects West Michigan

In 2014, WMSRDC, the designated fiduciary for the Region 6 Homeland Security Planning Board and the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Medical Response System (GRMMRS), aided Region 6 in conducting exercises, training, and in the purchase of equipment, designed to prepare and protect the citizens of West Michigan from potential life-threatening incidents.

Michigan State Police – Emergency and Homeland Security Training Center and Region 6 Homeland Security sponsored a Joint Port Security Incident Exercise on Wednesday, September 24, 2014 aboard the Paul H Townsend ship docked at the West Michigan Dock and Market Property in the Downtown Muskegon Harbor. Two Black Hawk helicopters and a Lekota helicopter graced the skies over the Muskegon Harbor to begin the exercise, with the scenario being a foreign ship arrives at the Mart Dock and about half of the crew is sick and local multi-disciplinary response agencies must determine the cause. An incident command post was set up and the nearly 200 local first responder participants determined that a passenger aboard the ship had committed a criminal act by intentionally causing the illness using a biological agent. Muskegon County is better prepared in the event of an actual port incident with the lessons learned during the exercise and training.

The Grand Rapids Metropolitan Medical Response System (GRMMRS) purchased 165 evacuation med sleds designed to aid in the rapid evacuation of non-ambulatory and bedridden patients from a structure in the event of a terror attack, natural disaster, power outage or other potentially life-threatening emergency. Also 14 Recon Robotics Scout Throwbot XT Robots and 8 RoboteX Avatar II Robots were purchased for Region 6 law enforcement agencies in 2014. These robots are capable of remotely inspecting dangerous incident situations, locating armed suspects, confirming the presence of hostages, listening in on conversations, revealing the room layout, and gathering video and audio intelligence. Robots can be sent into hostile situations and help keep first responders out of harm's way.



Lake Michigan Water Trail

The WMSRDC produced the Lake Michigan Water Trail Plan in collaboration with various other regional planning organizations and partners. The Lake Michigan Water Trail extends along the Lake Michigan shoreline from Indiana to Wisconsin. The plan is available at www.wmsrdc.org. The West Michigan portion of the trail includes connecting waterways. It is part of the 1,600 mile, four-state Lake Michigan Water Trail and one of Michigan's Great Lakes Water Trails.

West Michigan communities are eligible for grant funds to implement recommendations contained in the plan. Recommendations include public access improvements, acquisition of land, implementation of conservation practices, interpretive features, way-finding signage and universal access improvements. Communities can implement the Lake Michigan Water Trail Plan in their own communities, while supporting the development of a world-class, comprehensive, non-motorized watercraft trail along the shores of Lake Michigan and its coastal waterways. The water trail helps to ensure that public access to open space, shoreline, and natural areas is abundant and provides enhanced opportunities for human interaction within the lake.

As part of the planning effort, a West Michigan Water Trails map and informational brochure was developed, and detailed information about water trail experiences and public access sites was made available on the Michigan Great Lakes Water Trails website at www.michiganwatertrails.org. The LMWT project received grant support from the Michigan Office of the Great Lakes, DEQ Coastal Zone Management Program, Land Information Access Association and local match contributions from WMSRDC and three other Regional Planning Organizations along the Lake Michigan shoreline.



Hazard Mitigation

Hazard mitigation aims to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and property from hazards. Mitigation plans form the foundation for a community's long-term strategy to reduce disaster losses and break the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage. In addition, the plans help communities qualify for certain Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) funding for pre-disaster and post-disaster mitigation. Hazard Mitigation is defined as any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate the long-term risk to life and property from hazard events. It is an on-going process that occurs before, during, and after disasters and serves to break the cycle of damage and repair in hazardous areas.

In 2014, WMSRDC continued its effort to update the Hazard Mitigation plans for Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana counties, including: research and identification of strategies and alternatives for mitigating hazards; selecting and prioritizing appropriate action items; and offering local stakeholders and the public opportunities to participate in plan development. The next step will be to work with the Michigan State Police – Emergency Management and Homeland Security Division to ensure the plans satisfy state and federal requirements. Once the plans are approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and adopted by the counties, WMSRDC will work closely with emergency managers to facilitate adoptions at the local jurisdiction of the plans. The project will be completed in Fiscal Year 2015.



Water, Woods, and Wetlands Regional Forum

WMSRDC hosted the West Michigan Regional Forum, “Water, Woods, and Wetlands,” in Muskegon on October 23, 2013. Environmental topics of significance in the West Michigan Region were presented and discussed. Presenters included Jon Allan, Director of the Michigan Office of the Great Lakes; Jennifer McKay, Policy Director for Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council; Gary Noble, Executive Director of the Muskegon River Watershed Assembly; Bob Sweet, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality; and Lisa Dutcher, RSX Consultant for Oceana County Road Commission.

Topics included Dam Removal and River Restoration, Harbor Dredging, Michigan’s Sustainable Water Use Strategy, Restoration of Road Stream Crossings and Funding Programs for Non Point Source Water Quality Projects.

WMSRDC presented on the Lake Michigan Water Trail, West Michigan Hazard Mitigation, and the Restoration of Water Resources in Great Lakes Areas of Concern. Participants gave input on the environmental and natural resource priorities for the region. The input will be used by WMSRDC and others to guide planning and project development for the restoration and management of Michigan’s natural resources.

This forum was one in a series held by WMSRDC to educate local government officials and others about pertinent planning topics.

Training Wheels

In July of 2014, WMSRDC, in coordination with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), the City of Fremont, and the Village of Spring Lake, facilitated two “Training Wheels” courses. These sessions were designed to educate planners and local leaders interested in providing on-road bicycle facilities in their communities.

The Training Wheels sessions were designed to provide communities with information on the planning and design of on-road bicycle facilities into existing infrastructure to make bicycling safe and convenient therefore providing alternate transportation that make roads more complete for everyone. Classroom instruction was based on a guide produced by the American Association for State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). An outdoor on-bike segment provided participants a firsthand look at the benefits of providing an alternative mode of transportation that does not require expensive facilities for communities to build or maintain. MDOT is planning to work with more local communities in Fiscal Year 2015 to provide additional Training Wheels courses.

Environmental Restoration

2014 was truly a watershed year for Great Lakes restoration in West Michigan. The WMSRDC partnered with local, state and federal agencies, businesses, universities and non-governmental organizations to complete engineering and design plans for more than thirteen million dollars of Great Lakes restoration in the lower Muskegon River, Muskegon Lake, and Bear Lake watersheds.

A five million dollar grant was awarded to restore fish and wildlife habitat and water quality along the Muskegon River at Veterans Memorial Park and to also restore aquatic resources that were degraded by historic deposits of sawmill debris in Muskegon Lake. Engineering and design was completed for the Bear Creek hydrologic reconnection and wetland restoration project and the eight million dollar project is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2015. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Great Lakes Commission provided support for the projects.

WMSRDC worked with NOAA to complete the Muskegon Lake Habitat Blueprint to guide research and restoration efforts into the future and participated in the process to develop Michigan's Water Strategy with the Michigan Office of the Great Lakes. WMSRDC also participated in the Michigan Blue Economy Initiative, led by Grand Valley State University Annis Water Resources Institute and the Michigan Economic Center.

In recognition of the restoration completed in the White Lake area, Michigan celebrated the de-listing of White Lake's Area of Concern status and a perceptions research study was completed to assess public perceptions of the White Lake and the Muskegon Lake communities. The work done to cleanup and restore West Michigan water bodies has resulted in well documented social, environmental and economic benefits.



Regional Transportation & Rural Task Force

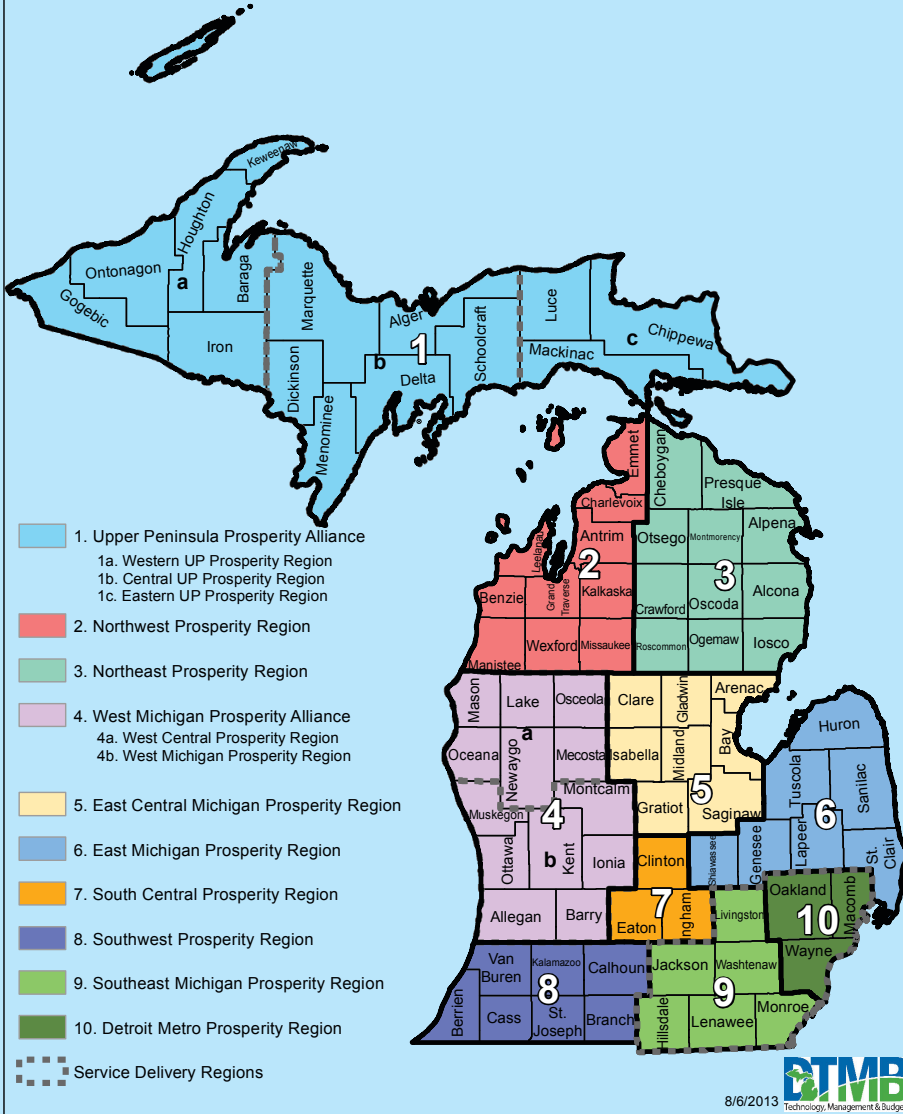
In 2014, the five-county Rural Transportation Task Force met multiple times to approve changes to transportation projects and to discuss other rural transportation issues. WMSRDC assists in the administration of the Rural Transportation Task Force for the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana.

A Rural Transportation Oversight Board has recently been created by the Michigan Department of Transportation. The committee will establish the general direction and goals of the Rural Task Force Program and ensure consistency in the Rural Task Force Program implementation. Staff will be informing task force members of any changes as soon as the MDOT releases information to region staff. WMSRDC staff is also responsible for Regional transportation planning within Mason, Lake, Muskegon, Oceana, and Newaygo Counties. As part of this program WMSRDC staff undertakes an annual Asset Management program. Each year, WMSRDC staff, 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.

In addition to federal aid data collection, WMSRDC staff also collects local road data for communities upon request. In 2014, staff collected data for the Village of Shelby, Oceana County, as well as data for all paved roads under the jurisdiction of the Muskegon County Road Commission.



State of Michigan Prosperity Regions



Regional Prosperity Initiative

During 2014, WMSRDC participated as a partner in the Governor's Regional Prosperity Initiative (RPI). The RPI is a voluntary process to encourage local private, public and non-profit partners to create vibrant regional economies. These partners include representatives from sectors including adult education, workforce development, economic development, transportation, and higher education organizations.

The Governor has identified ten Prosperity Regions across the state. The West Michigan Prosperity Alliance (Region 4) is comprised of thirteen counties. WMSRDC and other Region 4 partners agreed to voluntarily participate in the RPI by establishing a 25 member steering committee and successfully acquiring a \$250,000 grant from the State. As a result of the grant, the Region 4 Alliance held monthly meetings, coordinated three large scale community conversations, developed a Regional Prosperity Plan, as well as identified and prioritized six regionally significant economic development projects. Stay tuned for more to come during the upcoming year regarding the Region 4 Prosperity Alliance.

Prioritized RPI Projects

1. Port of Muskegon Regional Logistics Hub
2. Protecting Lake Michigan Water Quality through Establishment of a Dedicated Revenue Stream for Watershed Management
3. Connected Community Engagement Program, Technology Action Planning
4. Emerge Regional Website Portal/E-Merge West Michigan
5. Michigan Work Ready Communities
6. Michigan Works Strategic Redesign

Local Government Services

WMSRDC completed the Oceana County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). This plan represents the efforts and cooperation of a large number of organizations and agencies working together to improve the preparedness for wildfire events in Oceana County while reducing factors of risk. The plan was funded with a grant from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and developed under the guidance of the Federal Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003. It evaluates wildfire risk in Oceana County; contains information for landowners and local officials to reduce those risks; and proposes a prioritized collection of actions that can be taken over the next five years.

WMSRDC was also very active assisting local governments, signing three contracts to develop local plans. These projects include the Oceana County Master Plan, the Big Prairie Township (Newaygo County) Recreation Plan, and the Fruitport Township (Muskegon County) Recreation Plan. All three projects kicked off in October 2014 and are expected to be completed in late 2015. In addition, WMSRDC provided support to the Oceana County Parks and Recreation Commission in their efforts to update the Oceana County Recreation Plan.





Port of Muskegon Regional Logistics Hub

WMSRDC continued to work closely with the Muskegon County Port Advisory Committee and the Economic Development Sub-Committee during 2014. The vision of the Muskegon County Port Advisory Committee is to serve Port of Muskegon partners in further development of West Michigan's international and domestic logistics services through a coordinated strategy of planning, governmental assistance, and infrastructure improvements. Throughout the year, WMSRDC staff have attended regular meetings of the committee and its members, provided technical assistance, and attended the Great Lakes Port Association Annual Meeting held in Monroe, Michigan.

The Regional Commission, on behalf of the Port Advisory Committee, also submitted the Port of Muskegon Regional Logistics Hub project to the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance. The Alliance named this project as their number one priority for the 13 county region. The Regional Commission offers assistance to the committee through programs in transportation, economic development, and environmental planning.

Connect Michigan

Throughout 2014, WMSRDC staff partnered with Connect Michigan to engage local communities in a comprehensive broadband planning and technology initiative as part of a national effort to map and expand broadband access. Connect Michigan is a non-profit subsidiary of Connected Nation in the State of Michigan and works closely with the Michigan Public Service Commission to comprehensively plan for broadband access expansion.

To date, Connect Michigan has gathered broadband provider data to form a statewide broadband map and performed statewide business and residential technology assessments. After completing statewide data collection and technology assessments, Connect Michigan began engaging local and regional partners in planning processes to bring solutions to challenges identified in the statewide assessment phase through completion of technology action plans.

Three WMSRDC communities are currently engaged in this process: Lake County, Oceana County, and Newaygo County. Through this planning and engagement process, local champions work to gauge local broadband adoption, access, needs, and barriers to adoption through resident surveys and workshops. Working in close partnership with local champions and Connect Michigan, WMSRDC is in the process of mapping survey results along with other data provided by Connect Michigan to help support completion of local action plans. WMSRDC presented the mapped survey results to Lake County champions in December of 2014 and plans to continue attending community meetings and providing mapping and general planning assistance throughout 2015. Mason County is holding a kickoff meeting in January 2015 and WMSRDC and our Connect MI partners have had preliminary conversations with potential local broadband champions in Muskegon County.

The ultimate goal of this work is to increase technological transformation through innovation, job creation, and entrepreneurship through the expansion of broadband technology and increased usage by Michigan residents.

Information & Communications

WMSRDC continued to be an active partner of the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition (WMCAC). The WMCAC is a partnership of businesses, 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 2014 using theater students from Muskegon Community College 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 made available on the WMSRDC website, as well as 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.



WEST MICHIGAN
CLEAN AIR
ACTION!

WMSRDC Board

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Evelyn Kolbe, Secretary, Oceana County Commissioner
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