


2015 Annual Report



WMSRDC
WEST MICHIGAN SHORELINE
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

A large, stylized graphic of a dandelion seed head with many seeds blowing away, set against a light blue sky background. The graphic is positioned on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the dark blue background.

Susie Hughes, Chairperson
Muskegon County Commissioner

Erin Kuhn, Executive Director

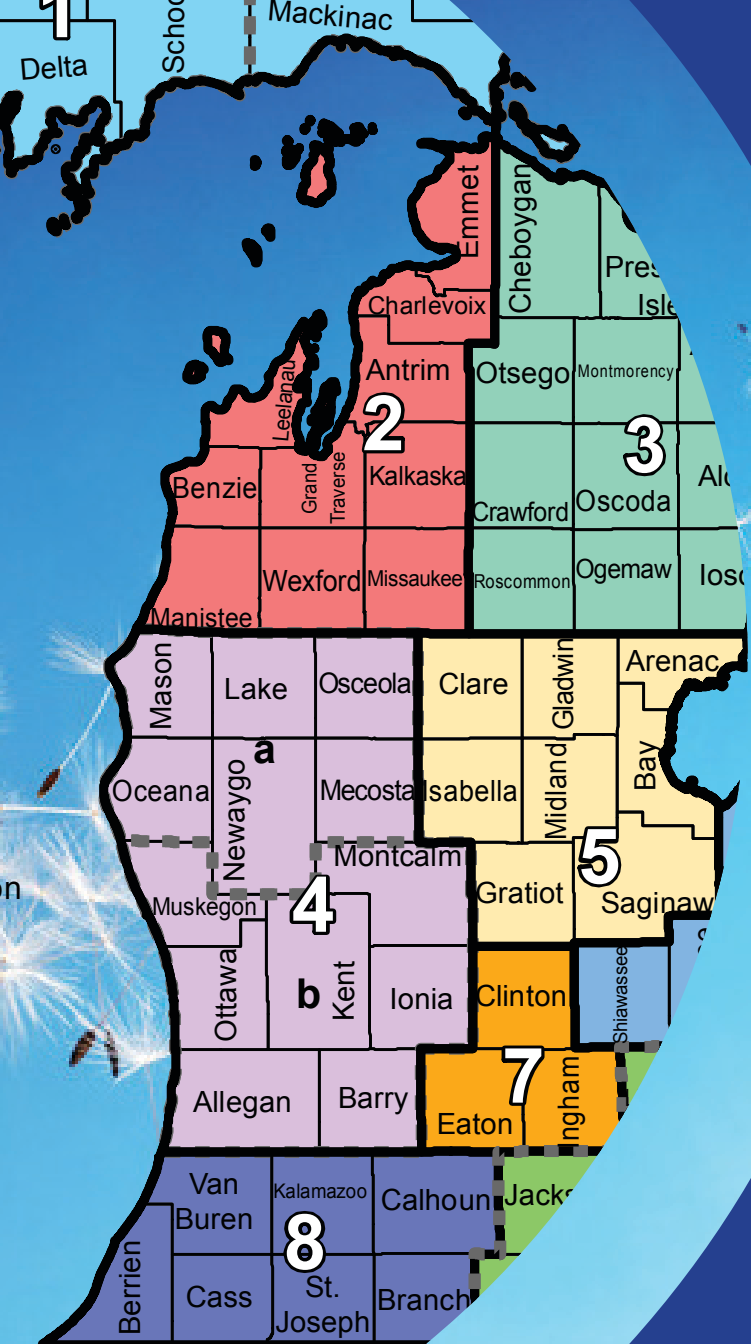
Leadership Message

As this annual report will demonstrate, 2015 was an extremely busy and successful year for WMSRDC. At the start of the fiscal year, WMSRDC staff and board adopted the theme of “doing the common uncommonly well.” In other words, the organization made a conscious decision to conduct their daily business and programs with a different perspective. This conscious effort made a positive impact on the Commission throughout the year.

Of the many successes of 2015, there are a few worth highlighting. WMSRDC and the West Michigan Regional Planning Commission, which represents seven counties in the West Michigan area, have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to increase communication and collaboration between the two regional planning agencies.

Other activities that took place during 2015 included the reconfiguration and technology upgrade of the Commission’s conference room, a complete reconstruction of the WMSRDC website, and the hiring of two new staff members. The WMSRDC region also received a total of three grants from the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA).

Thank you to the many supporters including our dedicated and talented staff and our numerous state, federal, and local partners that help make WMSRDC a strong and successful organization. We are looking forward to an equally successful 2016.



Regional Collaborative Efforts

WMSRDC continues to be an active member of the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance (WMPA), which is a 13-county region (region 4) defined by the Governor's Regional Prosperity Initiative (RPI). WMSRDC received \$31,500 from the WMPA to support the Port of Muskegon Infrastructure and Organizational Analysis project. This project was identified as the WMPA's top priority project in 2014. These funds assisted in raising an additional \$31,000 of local and private dollars, and secured a \$62,500 EDA grant.

In June of 2015, WMSRDC and the West Michigan Regional Planning Commission officially formed an alliance to further enhance the communication and partnership between the regional planning agencies. The alliance was formed in early 2015 and was the leadership behind the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that followed. The MOU will formally allow for an increased level of collaboration and cooperation between the two agencies.

WMSRDC is a partner in the West Michigan Watershed Collaborative. The collaborative was also a priority project identified and funded by the WMPA in the amount of \$89,000. The Watershed Collaborative is being led by the Macatawa Area Coordinating Council in partnership with WMSRDC, Grand Valley Metro Council, and West Michigan watershed groups. The purpose of the project is to develop a sustainable funding strategy to improve water quality in the Lake Michigan Watershed.



Economic Development Strategies

WMSRDC Economic Development District, designated by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce, enjoyed an active and productive time in 2015. Staff engaged with stakeholders on a wide range of activities including the following:

- Establishment of the Lake County Economic Development Alliance
- Muskegon County Deconstruction and Recycling Initiative
- Support Towards the Port of Muskegon Regional Logistics Hub

Staff also provided technical assistance to local communities and coordinated with a range of stakeholders to develop new projects to be incorporated in the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document. WMSRDC participated in local and regional economic development meetings, and also became involved with the Michigan Economic Developers Association. The CEDS Committee, which oversees the development of the CEDS, met quarterly and began preparations for the full update and retooling of the document due in 2018.

Economic development activities reached a crescendo in September with the announcement of three EDA investments for the District totaling over \$2.6 million: Muskegon Port Infrastructure and Organizational Analysis Study; Muskegon Community College Applied Technology Center; and Muskegon County Deconstruction Cluster Feasibility Study in partnership with Michigan State University. All three projects were vetted through the District's CEDS process and identified as priorities in the CEDS.

Port of Muskegon

There has been much activity focused around the Port of Muskegon in 2015. WMSRDC continued to work with the Muskegon County Port Advisory Committee and Economic Development Subcommittee in accomplishing several tasks. WMSRDC prepared, submitted and was awarded an EDA grant to conduct a Port of Muskegon Infrastructure and Organizational Analysis. The Analysis will: review existing transportation infrastructure capacity around the port including water, roads, rail, and air; identify necessary improvements; and review and recommend a potential governance structure for marketing and/or managing the Port of Muskegon as a Regional Logistics Hub.

In 2015, WMSRDC, in partnership with the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership and the Muskegon County Port Advisory Committee, embarked on the development of the Muskegon Lake Vision 2020 document. The project kicked off in June with a series of community forums. Each forum focused on one of four lake-wide areas of interest which are natural resources/environment, outdoor recreation, commerce/port, and residential assets. A strong public input component helped to uncover a shared community vision for the future use, development, and stewardship of Muskegon Lake and its shoreline. The document will be completed in early 2016.

The Muskegon County Port Advisory Committee is a member of the American Great Lakes Port Association (AGLPA) and hosted its annual meeting in Muskegon in June. On request, WMSRDC presented at the meeting. The Port Advisory Committee worked for several months to organize the event which showcased the Port of Muskegon and surrounding community.

Long Range Transportation Plan Adopted

The Muskegon and Northern Ottawa County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) of which WMSRDC staffs, approved the 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan in June. WMSRDC staff has worked closely with the MPO Technical and Policy Committees as well as Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) staff for the past two years to update the existing plan.

The 2040 Long Range Plan is a federally mandated document that provides for a multi-jurisdictional, multi-year look at the Muskegon and Northern Ottawa 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. Technical modeling and analysis of the current system provides a guide to plan for future deficiencies on the network. One of the goals of the plan is to address these deficiencies with projects that will allow the network to run more efficiently. The plan also includes the use of local, state, and federal transportation goals and objectives to guide transportation plans and projects. The plan must be financially constrained, and must adhere to other federal regulations such as Air Quality Conformity, Environmental Mitigation, Environmental Justice, Public Involvement, and Performance Measures.

Throughout the process, input was gathered from the residents of Muskegon and northern Ottawa County as well as from local elected officials, municipal and road agency staff, state, and federal agencies.





Homeland Security

In 2015, WMSRDC, the designated fiduciary for the Region 6 Homeland Security Planning Board, continued to aid 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.

On June 23-27, 2015 a 10-kiloton nuclear device detonation exercise called Northern Exposure 15 was conducted. The event focused on State, Regional, and Federal response to a scenario-based complex catastrophic nuclear device detonation event centered in Northeast Grand Rapids, Michigan. All 13 counties in Region 6 participated in various aspects of the exercise from radio communication checks to EOC operations.

Muskegon County Emergency Services, local dive teams, emergency first responders and other agencies conducted a full-scale Mass Fatality Operational Response Exercise in September at the Muskegon County Airport and nearby Mona Lake. The exercise featured a scenario where an inbound 50 passenger jet plane experienced engine trouble minutes before crash landing near a runway at the Muskegon County Airport.

West Michigan is better prepared in the event of an actual nuclear or mass fatality incident with the lessons learned during these exercises. Region 6 also participated in cybercrime training and exercises, and purchased 800 MHz radios, video surveillance and information sharing equipment to enhance interoperable communications among various emergency management and law enforcement agencies throughout West Michigan.

A photograph of the Muskegon Area Transit System building, featuring large glass windows and a brick base. The text "MUSKEGON AREA TRANSIT SYSTEM" is visible on the upper part of the building. A large blue circular graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text.

Transportation Improvement Program

Throughout 2015, WMSRDC continued to update and amend the approved FY2014-2017 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP.) 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 are approved by the Transportation Technical and Policy Committees, as well as the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and 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.

The TIP programmed projects that totalled to just over \$26 million federal funds for transit and highway projects during the 2015 fiscal year. Local and state match added another \$8.7 million to bring the total to approximately \$35 million in programmed transportation projects in the Muskegon and northern Ottawa County area. Transit projects accounted for \$8,033,114 of that total, the remainder of the funding was programmed for highway and bridge projects. There were several large projects that account for the expenditures including the M-231 Bypass project, the MDOT Seaway Drive project, and the new Muskegon Area Transit System facility in downtown Muskegon.



Resilience Planning

According to one definition, resilience is “the power or ability to return to the original form, position, etc., after being bent, compressed, or stretched.” When applied to planning for communities, this term means employing standards and best practices that are sustainable in the face of adversity and help communities overcome challenges that arise. WMSRDC is committed to incorporating the concept of resilience into all of its planning programs, as well as undertaking projects that enhance the resilience of the region.

One perfect example of resilience planning at WMSRDC is hazard mitigation. In 2015, WMSRDC completed a multi-year project to update the multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigations plans for the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana. 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. All five plans were approved by FEMA, thereby helping each county qualify for Hazard Mitigation Assistance funds.

WMSRDC also began working on the Mason County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) in 2015. A CWPP is similar to a hazard mitigation plan, only more detailed and tailored specifically to wildfire. The Mason County plan will include a detailed assessment of wildfire risks and a prioritized action agenda for mitigating the effects of wildfire in Mason County. WMSRDC will work closely with stakeholders such as the United States Forest Service, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, local firefighters, and landowners to complete the plan.



West Michigan Coastal Resiliency

Some of the best examples of successful Great Lakes restoration and coastal resiliency projects are happening right here in West Michigan. WMSRDC, local governments, conservation, and watershed groups implemented projects that improved natural resources by restoring wetlands, improving stream habitat, preserving natural areas and using green infrastructure to control stormwater runoff. Communities benefited from these improvements through recreational enjoyment, increased tourism, beauty and associated economic benefits.

No better example of restoration and resiliency with economic benefits can be found than in Muskegon Lake. As one of the thirteen Great Lakes Areas of Concern (AOC) in Michigan, historic, legacy problems led to severely damaged natural resources and loss of recreational uses and economic benefits. During 2015, Great Lakes restoration leaders announced that progress made to clean up Muskegon Lake put it on a trajectory for AOC de-listing as early as 2018.

Also in 2015, a unique, two-year fish and wildlife habitat restoration project was implemented by WMSRDC. With support from NOAA and the Great Lakes Commission, WMSRDC began removing lumber-era saw mill waste from the lake bottom near the Lake Express car ferry terminal. Rather than disposing of the dredged material in a landfill, local artists are reclaiming the larger pieces of sawmill wood. The dredge spoils are being used to prepare a shoreline brownfield for redevelopment, where a paper mill had operated on Muskegon Lake for more than 100 years.



Local Government Services

WMSRDC was very active assisting local governments with developing local plans and providing technical mapping and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) assistance. Projects such as these are typically not a significant part of the Commission's work program. However, the Commission provides these valuable services as very few local governments in the region have their own professional planning staff, and many communities have very limited resources to hire private consultants.

Plans that were developed in 2015 include the Oceana County Master Plan, the Big Prairie Township (Newaygo County) Recreation Plan, and the Fruitport Township (Muskegon County) Recreation Plan. The two recreation plans were adopted in 2015, while the Oceana Master Plan is expected to take effect in early 2016.

Numerous communities also took advantage of WMSRDC's GIS mapping capabilities and expertise in 2015. Projects included the digitization of paper zoning maps for Benona Township (Oceana County) and Ashland Township (Newaygo County); an asset map showing the bridges of Mason County; and a geographic assessment of response capabilities of the Lake County E-911.



Regional and Rural Transportation

In 2015, WMSRDC continued to be involved in the Rural Task Force Oversight Board. The committee worked to establish the general direction and goals of the statewide Rural Task Force Program and ensure consistency in the Rural Task Force Program implementation. The board has released guidelines which will improve the rural task force project.

The five-county Rural Transportation Task Force met multiple times in 2015 to approve changes to transportation projects and to discuss additional rural transportation issues. WMSRDC assists in the administration of the Rural Transportation Task Force for the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana. In the coming year the Task Force will meet to select transportation projects for Fiscal Years 2017 through 2020.

As part of the regional transportation planning program, WMSRDC undertakes an annual Asset Management program. Each year, WMSRDC staff, along with MDOT and a county road commission employee, collect data for approximately half of all the federal aid roads within the region. This data collection process is part of an ongoing statewide program to evaluate the condition of the state's road system.

In 2015, WMSRDC began a new effort to provide traffic counters to road agencies in need of them. This program not only assists the receiving agency with equipment needs, but it also helps WMSRDC and MDOT by ensuring that needed counts are accurate and done on a timely basis. In 2015, WMSRDC purchased three traffic counters as well as associated software for Mason County.



Protecting Water Quality in West Michigan

The year 2015 saw WMSRDC enhance coastal resiliency and protect water quality in West Michigan.

The Bear Creek Nutrient Reduction Project will compliment current downstream efforts by providing additional wetland habitat in the upper watershed that traps phosphorous and increases wildlife habitat opportunities. Resiliency will come through improved Bear Lake water quality and wildlife biodiversity in the Bear Creek Watershed.

The identification and development of green infrastructure projects that slow down, reduce, and filter urban storm flows to Muskegon Lake will protect water quality in Muskegon Lake. Initial planning of six sites within the City of Muskegon and the implementation of the first of these will provide immediate water quality benefits and allow for continued resiliency into the future. This effort is funded by state and federal grants.

Muskegon and Bear Lake coastal shoreline and wetlands have seen the treatment of over seventy acres of private and public property impacted by invasive species, primarily phragmites. This effort, funded by a USEPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Grant, provided the opportunity to work with local partners and individuals to update habitat planning, provide early detection and treatment training, and develop a vehicle for sustainability. Beside local stewardship groups, four units of government and over 200 landowners have supported the project.



M-231 Open for Traffic

A large portion of the US-231 Bypass was completed and opened in 2015. The route provides an alternate option for motorists to travel around the City of Grand Haven, in Ottawa County. The route is officially open, including the new bridge that was constructed as part of the M-231 Bypass project. The entire project is approximately seven miles long and will provide an alternate route from M-45 to the M-104/I-96 Interchange.

The new crossing was officially opened to traffic on October 30, 2015. Prior to the construction of this bridge, the nearest crossing (other than US-31) was approximately 16 miles to the east, at 68th Avenue in Eastmanville.

Planning began over 20 years ago. In 2005 it was submitted by WMSRDC as a regional high priority project to be included in the proposed, and later adopted, federal transportation legislation at the time. WMSRDC worked with Congressman Hoekstra to get the project added to the new federal transportation bill, which was signed that year by President George W. Bush. This allowed federal appropriation to be allocated towards this project.

Due to the size of the project (estimated at \$200 million), it was separated into several phases, including bridge work, property acquisition, environmental and historical assessments, and extensive engineering. Working closely with MDOT, WMSRDC addressed the many phases and changes that occurred throughout the process, and added them to the short and long range plans.



Counting Cars

WMSRDC continued to utilize the services of engineering consulting firm AECOM for traffic counts. AECOM completed approximately 120 counts at locations throughout the MPO area.

Counts are produced in accordance with 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 generating counts when local schools are in session to avoid changes in traffic patterns.

Traffic count data is a valuable planning resource. Current count data is required for federal and state highway grant applications. MDOT also uses the current data to update traffic models and to assess statewide transportation assets. All of the traffic count data is available on the WMSRDC website.

Involving the Public in Transportation Decision Making

In 2015, WMSRDC updated its Public Involvement Plan in Transportation Decision Making. The plan lists key development periods in transportation planning and how the public will be informed and given opportunities to be involved. The plan has been recognized as a state-wide model for others to follow to garner more public involvement in transportation planning.



Information & Communications

WMSRDC launched a redesigned website in 2015. Immediately, the user will notice streamlined menus, simple navigation, interactive project related mapping, and access to the information they need, any time of day. Check out the new WMSRDC website at wmsrdc.org.

WMSRDC continued to be an active partner of the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition (WMCAC). The WMCAC celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2015, and remains a strong 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 2015 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. Individuals and groups also have the option of following WMSRDC on Facebook.



WMSRDC Board

Susie Hughes, Chairperson, Muskegon County Commissioner

Evelyn Kolbe, Vice-Chairperson, Oceana County Commissioner

James Rynberg, Mayor, City of Fremont

Kay Beecham, Councilperson, City of Norton Shores

James Brown, Oceana County Commissioner

Bill Carpenter, Mason County Commissioner

David Kieft, Jr., Supervisor, Muskegon Township

Michael Krauch, Councilperson, City of Ludington

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James Maike, Newaygo County Commissioner

Bonnie McGlothin, Mayor Pro-Tem, City of Muskegon Heights

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Dan Sloan, Lake County Commissioner

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Rillastine Wilkins, Muskegon County Commissioner



WMSRDC Staff

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Kathy Evans, Program Manager

Joel Fitzpatrick, Program Manager

Amy Haack, Program Manager

Cliff Johnson, Program Manager

Brian Mulnix, Program Manager

Gale Nobes, Environmental Planning Technician

Susan Stine-Johnson, Finance Manager

Jamie Way, GIS Specialist



Audited Statement of Revenues, Expenditures and Changes in Fund Balance for the Years Ended September 30, 2015 and 2014

2015		2014	
REVENUES		REVENUES	
Intergovernmental Revenues		Intergovernmental Revenues	
Federal	2,176,183	Federal	3,370,883
State	95,597	State	104,893
Local	311,413	Local	307,451
Total Revenues	2,583,193	Total Revenues	3,783,227
EXPENDITURES		EXPENDITURES	
Current		Current	
Land Use Planning	17,634	Land Use Planning	1,386
Regional Planning	0	Regional Planning	4,959
Economic Development	103,454	Economic Development	140,405
Transportation Planning	613,773	Transportation Planning	535,547
Local Planning	9,701	Local Planning	12,450
Homeland Security	484,176	Homeland Security	2,950,565
Environmental Clean-up	1,374,408	Environmental Clean-up	201,609
Total Expenditures	2,603,146	Total Expenditures	3,846,921
Net Change in Fund Bal.	(19,953)	Net Change in Fund Bal.	(63,694)
Fund Bal. at 10/1/14	316,806	Fund Bal. at 10/1/13 as restated	380,500
Fund Bal. at 9/30/15	296,853	Fund Bal. at 9/30/14	316,806

West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission

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