



## West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission

February/March 2017

### Regional Economic Analysis Complete

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A spectrum of social and economic realities exists within the WMSRDC Economic Development District. Still, there are many ties that bind the region, which consists of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana counties. In the fall of 2016, WMSRDC conducted a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis of the regional economy. A series of six focus groups were facilitated throughout the district in fall 2016 to

maximize the participation and effectiveness of the exercise. An interactive SWOT form was also made available online to allow other stakeholders and interested citizens to provide their perspectives.

To kick off each SWOT focus group, attendees were asked to answer the question, "What does economic development mean in your county?" All responses were tabulated to create a word cloud (Figure 1) which reflects the meaning of economic development in the WMSRDC region. The larger a word appears in the graphic, the more commonly it was used in responses to the question.



Figure 1



Figure 2

See Economic Analysis on page 8



WEST MICHIGAN SHORELINE  
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION



## SPOTLIGHT PROJECT:

### West Michigan Regional Dashboard

On Friday, February 17, the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance (WMPA), of which WMSRDC is a partner, publicly unveiled the West Michigan Regional Dashboard. More than 120 individuals, representing a multitude of sectors, packed into what ended up being a standing room only at Fredrick Meijer Gardens to learn about the dashboard.

The meeting also featured Lt. Governor Brian Calley as a special guest of the WMPA. During the meeting, Lt. Governor Calley spoke about the importance of the dashboard and the successes of the WMPA. He also announced the fiscal year 2017 Regional Prosperity Initiative grant award of \$180,897 to the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance.

Place, Inc. collaborated to launch and build the dashboard. In addition, an advisory committee assisted in reviewing nearly 100 different indicators and narrowing the list to 34 indicators.

The goal of the dashboard is to inform, educate, and focus regional efforts to increase West Michigan's overall health and prosperity. Outcomes might be achieved quicker and more efficiently by aligning efforts around common indicators and impacts. The dashboard will be updated on an annual basis.

The West Michigan Regional Dashboard is supported and funded by the WMPA. The dashboard is open to the public and can be accessed by visiting: [www.wmdashboard.org](http://www.wmdashboard.org).

Over the next several months, the Regional Dashboard team will continue to meet with organizations and groups throughout the region to share and educate them on the dashboard tool. In addition, the WMPA will work to convene sector "champions" for individual indicators that have an interest in building strategies to improve a specific indicator.

The West Michigan Regional Dashboard is an online tool that establishes a common set of shared indicators that will track the region's progress on critical economic, environmental, and social outcomes. The WMPA and The Right



## Seeking Future Environmental Grants

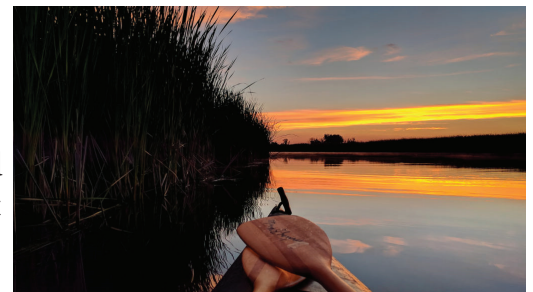
WMSRDC worked with West Michigan partners to submit grant proposals under the U.S. EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) and the Healthy Watersheds Consortium U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities (HWC). The proposed projects aim to improve water quality and green infrastructure, and reduce the presence of non-native invasive species in forest and wetland ecosystems.

- A \$600,000 GLRI proposal was submitted to monitor and control the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, a non-native invasive pest that threatens the integrity of woodland ecosystems throughout West Michigan. The project addresses priorities of the West Michigan Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. It includes outreach and education for public and private landowners and early detection, rapid response and treatment of infested sites. Partners include Ottawa County Parks and Recreation, Ottawa Conservation District and others. The project duration is from May 1, 2017 – April 30, 2019.
- A \$499,999 proposal was submitted to the GLRI Urban Waters Program. The proposed green infrastructure project will install a native plant, bio-filtration system to capture and treat urban runoff and improve Muskegon Lake water quality. The project is designed to capture 114 acres of urban runoff and treat 47.9 million gallons of stormwater, annually. The project duration is from May, 2017 – June, 2019.
- The WMSRDC partnered on a \$453,100 HWC grant proposal to address healthy watersheds in the 13-county, West Michigan Regional Prosperity Alliance region. The project goals are to (1) develop a strategy to sustainably fund implementation of existing watershed management plans, (2) develop a landowner resource guide, strategy and curriculum for the protection of healthy watersheds, and (3) refine a method to prioritize healthy watersheds for protection. Project partners include grant applicants, Macatawa Area Coordinating Council, WMSRDC, Grand Valley Metro Council, West Michigan Environmental Action Council, West Michigan Watershed Collaborative and Grand Valley State University. The project duration is from April 1, 2017 - March 31, 2020.

## Coastal Resiliency Plan

The Muskegon Lake Resiliency Plan is complete and ready for implementation. The sub-area plan was developed by WMSRDC and numerous local partners to guide local governments in the adoption and implementation of climate adaptation and resiliency strategies to protect assets along the Muskegon Lake shoreline. The plan outlines strategies and principles to be incorporated into future shoreline development and restoration work. While it is a stand-alone plan, it can be incorporated into future municipal master plan updates and broader plans, such as the Muskegon Lake Vision 2020 plan.

Communities wishing to implement coastal resiliency projects are also eligible for funding through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the categories of Strengthening Coastal Communities and Habitat Restoration. The program requires a 2:1 federal/non-federal match. Proposals are due on March 15, 2017. Details are available at [www.coast.noaa.gov/resilience-grant/](http://www.coast.noaa.gov/resilience-grant/).



### Acknowledgements

This project is part of the Michigan Association of Planning's Master Planning for Sustainability and Resiliency grant program. Financial assistance for this project was provided, in part, by the Michigan Coastal Zone Management Program, Office of the Great Lakes, Department of Environmental Quality, under the National Coastal Zone Management Program, through a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce.

Cover photo taken by [Nick Kroes, mostlymuskegon.com](http://NickKroes.mostlymuskegon.com)



delta institute



## MiFBI Conference

WMSRDC staff attended the Michigan Forest Bioeconomy Conference to discuss the Muskegon Deconstruction Economic Cluster Feasibility Study. The conference took place February 1-2 in Grand Rapids, and was hosted by the Michigan Forest Biomaterials Institute (MiFBI).

MiFBI is a newly established organization whose mission is to enhance quality of life in Michigan by fostering sustainable forests, communities, and economies through innovative and responsible production, use, and recycling of forest biomaterials.

One aspect of the deconstruction study that is particularly relevant to MiFBI looks at the economic potential and feasibility of recovering and repurposing materials, including wood products, from abandoned residential structures in the Great Lakes region. The study, which was made possible with a technical assistance grant from the federal Economic Development Administration, is expected to be completed in Spring 2017.



## WMSRDC Counties LEAD the Way

WMSRDC is happy to congratulate the counties of Lake, Mason, Newaygo, and Oceana for completing the LEAD program in fall 2016. LEAD, which stands for leaders in economic alliance development, is a facilitated planning process sponsored by USDA Rural Development designed to build capacity in counties or regions through a partnership development and planning process that enables local residents to accomplish specific goals. Completion of the LEAD program also positions communities and organizations for grants as they become available.

WMSRDC participated in the LEAD process and is now a partner in addressing priorities identified during the program. The top three regional priorities targeted for action in this four-county region include: workforce development; broadband access; and tourism and recreation. A subcommittee has been organized for each of the regional priorities to develop and pursue projects. In addition, WMSRDC will ensure that priorities identified through the LEAD process will be reflected in the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

## Trail Traffic Counters Now Available

WMSRDC recently purchased four TrafX infrared trail counters, along with traffic count software, for use within the region. These infrared traffic counters can be used to count general traffic on trails and could also be used to count hikers, bicyclists, and even snowmobiles.

The traffic counters were purchased through WMSRDC's Regional Transportation Program, which receives its funding through the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). The objective of this program is to provide a comprehensive, regional multi-modal transportation systems planning program in order to promote the most efficient and economical movement of people, goods, and services in cooperation with MDOT, county road commissions, local units of government, and various public and private transportation providers.

These counters will be available for regional local governments to borrow for use on their trail systems. In addition, WMSRDC will be using them to collect data on existing trails to better measure trail usage. The collected data will be useful when planning for future expansion of the regional trail system.

Please contact Joel Fitzpatrick at (231) 722-7878 extension 16 or at [jfitzpatrick@wmsrdc.org](mailto:jfitzpatrick@wmsrdc.org) for more information.

## Traffic Count Database on WMSRDC Website

WMSRDC offers a comprehensive and continually updated traffic counting database. The data is available to anyone, free of charge, through a link on the WMSRDC website. WMSRDC uses a cloud based system that is provided by Midwestern Software Solutions, LLC (MS2), to make the information available to anyone with internet access.

A Google map is used to visually identify the count locations. Viewers can select locations on the map and pull up additional data if it is available for that location. This data is also available in an exportable format that allows planners to create reports and graphs to better visualize the data.

WMSRDC contracts with AECOM to produce the data with counters that are placed at various locations throughout the MPO planning area. In total, there are approximately 400 count locations where data is collected on a four year cycle, so every year approximately 100 of the 400 counts are updated. AECOM uses the same standards that the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) uses for their trunkline counts. This ensures constancy and accuracy throughout the database with local and state traffic counts. Counters are placed during times that avoid factors that may skew the data, such as times of peak tourism, holidays and festivals, and summer vacation for schools.

The traffic counts, classified as "Average Daily Traffic", represent the volume of traffic, in both directions, at a particular location on an average day during that particular year. The average traffic is computed by taking the raw traffic count data that is collected usually over a 24 or 48-hour period.

The information that is generated can be helpful in planning for future needs and improvements, as well as applying for competitive funding such as transportation safety or economic development funding. MDOT uses the data to create and update modeling scenarios on the transportation network within the MPO area. This information will provide planners and engineers with crucial data for determining future needs on the network. Real-estate professionals and developers also find this data useful with marketing properties. WMSRDC staff works closely with MPO local road agencies and MDOT to identify key locations to gather the data.

## CCTA Grant Submitted

WMSRDC is working with the Region 6 Homeland Security Planning Board and recently submitted a grant to the Department of Homeland Security under the Fiscal Year 2016 Program to Prepare Communities for Complex Coordinated Terrorist Attacks. The grant was submitted in early February, 2017.

If funded, the project will actively involve all thirteen counties within Region 6, as well as other members of the Region 6 Planning Board. Activities to be completed during the potential three year project include a review of core capability gaps, a tabletop exercise, training, and a full scale exercise.

Grant awards are expected to be announced by the Department of Homeland Security in April 2017.

## FY2015 Homeland Security Grant Program Update

WMSRDC, as fiduciary for the Region 6 Homeland Security Planning Board, continues to work through the FY 15 Homeland Security Planning Grant. The FY 15 grant runs through May of 2018.

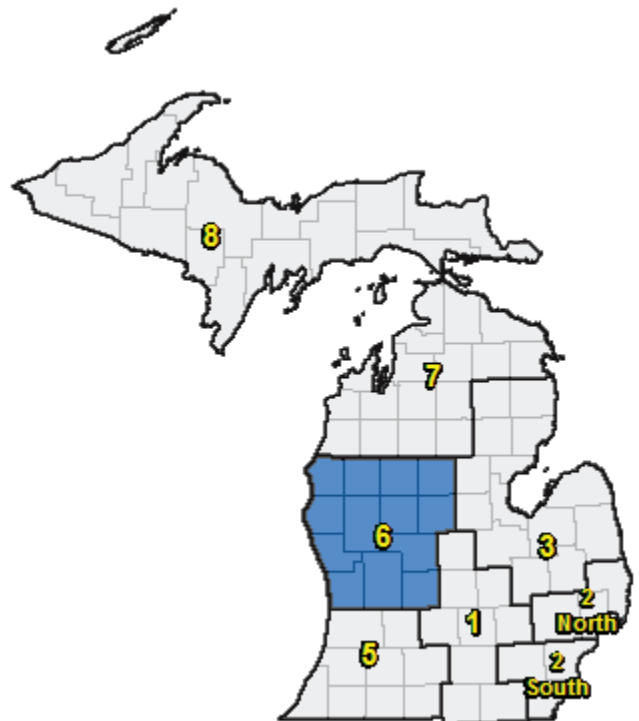
In addition, WMSRDC is initiating the FY 16 Homeland Security Planning Grant, which was signed during the fall of 2016. The FY 16 grant will run through August 2019.

## Homeland Security Regions

The State of Michigan has been divided into seven Homeland Security Regions. WMSRDC is the designated fiduciary and is responsible for management and administration of the Region 6 Homeland Security Program.

The Region 6 Homeland Security Planning Board consists of voting representation from the thirteen West-Central counties of Clare, Ionia, Isabella, Kent, Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, and Ottawa. It also consists of voting representation from the City of Ionia (small city) and the City of Grand Rapids (large city) as well as Public Health and Bio-Terrorism. Non-voting representation includes membership from Citizen Corps, the State of Michigan, and WMSRDC.

See the map below for Homeland Security district boundaries in the State of Michigan.





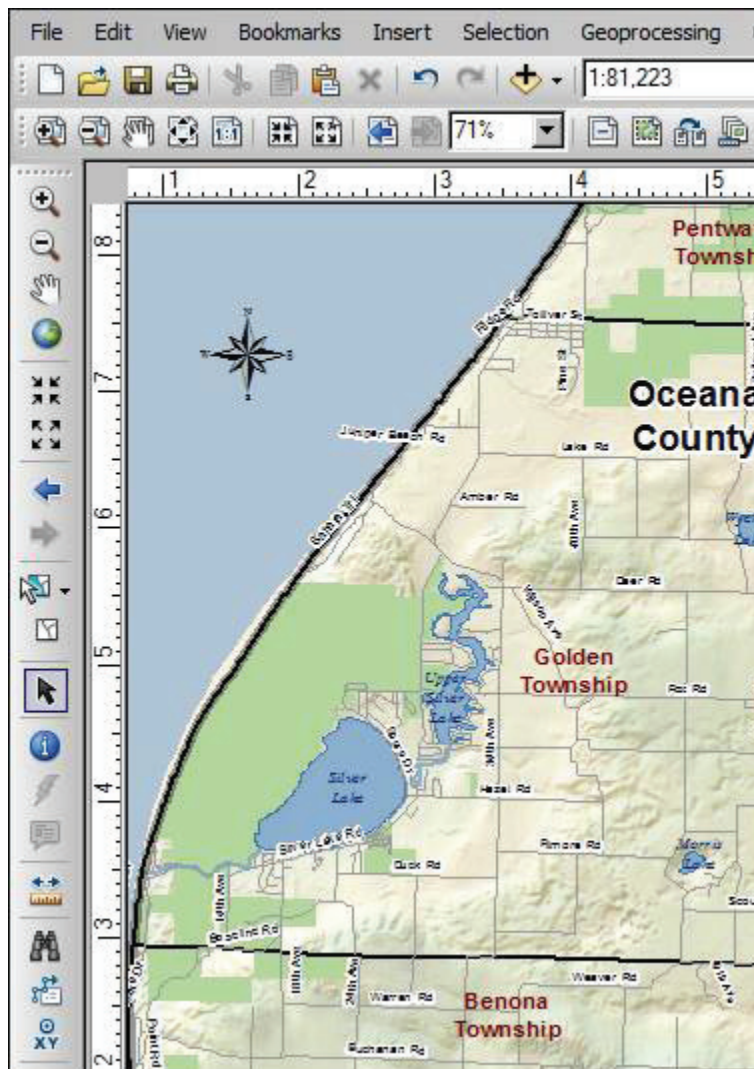
## GIS Mapping Services Available

Over the past two years, WMSRDC has completed several GIS Mapping projects for local jurisdictions within the region. WMSRDC has mapped zoning districts for Benona Township in Oceana County, as well as zoning districts and a cemetery mapping project for Ashland Township in Newaygo County.

WMSRDC also has created maps for Mason County regarding their bridge locations and structural status, and a map showing historical wildfires within the county over the past 20 years for the county's Wildfire Protection Plan.

While Muskegon and Newaygo counties have their own dedicated GIS department, other communities may not have the staff to take on either large county wide GIS projects or smaller city or township mapping needs. WMSRDC is eager to offer GIS services as needed to the communities within the region. WMSRDC can create GIS digital data such as zoning districts, road center lines, hydrology, parcel editing and recreation mapping. From the digital data created, maps can be created for planning, meetings, or display in offices or printed in publications. Please contact the WMSRDC office to find out more about using our GIS services.

Sample GIS Map Produced by WMSRDC



## Local Government Services Offered by WMSRDC

WMSRDC takes pride in supporting local governments in the region and strives to be a resource for local planning. For over 40 years, WMSRDC has helped local governments develop and implement plans for the future. WMSRDC offers technical assistance to local governments in the region, especially those with few resources for planning activities. Services range from guidance and advice, to public facilitation and plan development, to GIS mapping.

WMSRDC is currently assisting Blue Lake Township, Muskegon County, in updating its master plan and recreation plan, while also actively providing guidance to a number of other townships that are looking to update their plans for the future.

WMSRDC staff is available, upon request, to meet in person or to attend local board and planning commission meetings to discuss WMSRDC programs and services. Contact the WMSRDC offices anytime to arrange a meeting, or just to have a chat!

## Economic Analysis continued from page 1

The regional SWOT analysis yielded 485 comments, which were subsequently categorized, analyzed, and described in the Regional SWOT Analysis Report, now available on the WMSRDC website. Of all comments collected, the topic of “workforce” garnered the most attention, regardless of its perception as a strength, weakness, opportunity, or threat. However, because there was an uneven distribution of comments collected from around the region, a simple tally of comments cannot accurately identify the top regional SWOT attributes. To control for geographic discrepancies, the top three strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats from each county were identified and weighted to gain a more accurate snapshot of the regional economy. (Figure 2)

The regional SWOT analysis is a necessary component of the region’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS); a document which is required to maintain the region’s designation as an Economic Development District by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA). This designation enables communities within the WMSRDC region to remain eligible for EDA funding programs. Results of the SWOT analysis are a critical component of the CEDS document, influencing discussions about the direction of the regional economy and strategies to ensure its long-term success, viability, and durability. WMSRDC is currently crafting the latest version of the CEDS, which must be revised every five years.

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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