

# Commission Quarterly



2025 JULY-SEPTEMBER ISSUE

## West Michigan Agriculture Cluster Impact Analysis

West Michigan is rich in agricultural assets, including abundant freshwater, nutrient-rich soils, a mild climate, and a long-established legacy of farming. These factors position the region as a sleeping giant in agricultural potential, ready to be awakened. Following the closure of Muskegon's BC Cobb power plant in 2016, various regional economic studies pointed to agriculture and food processing as potential pathways to diversify and strengthen the local economy. In 2025, a significant step was taken to support the region's agricultural and food systems, from growing to processing.

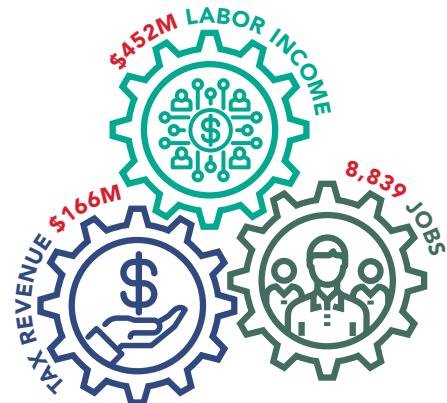
The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) teamed up with Michigan State University's Product Center and MSU RS&GIS, to conduct the West Michigan Agriculture Cluster Impact Analysis, a comprehensive initiative designed to map (literally and figuratively) the future of farming and food processing in the region. Economic analysis for the project was led by Highland Economics, a consulting firm with deep expertise in natural resources and rural economies.

Completed in September 2025, this project builds upon previous research and expands the focus beyond Muskegon County to include Lake, Mason, Newaygo, and Oceana counties. The goal? To identify key assets, opportu-

nities, and challenges in West Michigan's agricultural economy—and turn insights into action. The Analysis provides a trove of baseline information detailing the economic significance of agriculture, at both the regional and individual county levels, including economic impacts, market analysis, area profiles, and comparative analyses of Kent and Ottawa counties.

The Analysis found that agriculture processing in West Michigan currently supports \$452 million in labor income, 8,839 jobs, and, \$166 million in tax revenue. Major constraints to the industry include the cost, availability, skill of labor, transportation, and state/local regulations. Some of the identified opportunities include agritourism, value-added food processing, and greenhouse operations. In addition to the Analysis, a suite of online mapping applications was developed to help visualize agricultural assets in the region. This includes a detailed story map, a drive-time transportation network analysis, and cropland data. The Analysis and mapping applications are publicly accessible through the WMSRDC website, [wmsrdc.org/project/west-michigan-agriculture-impact-analysis/](http://wmsrdc.org/project/west-michigan-agriculture-impact-analysis/).

With the Analysis complete, efforts now turn towards implementation. WMSRDC, with assistance from agriculture and food systems specialist, Annika



Gacnik, will work to assemble a "coalition" to facilitate coordination across interests and stakeholders. In addition, voluntary work groups will be organized to tackle specific opportunities and barriers identified in the Analysis.

WMSRDC initiated the West Michigan Agriculture Impact Analysis with the support of a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration. Additional support for the project was provided by the Fremont Area Community Foundation, community foundations for Mason, Muskegon, and Oceana counties, the Make it in Michigan Competitiveness Fund, and a Rural Readiness Grant.

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## Transportation: Air Quality Activities



Michigan's Adventure's hosted the informational display from July 7 through July 15 in their staff cafeteria. During this period, over 900 employees were employed at the park and utilized this space.

With the 2025 summer season coming to an end, West Michigan Clean Air Coalition (WMCAC) wants to thank everyone for their collective initiative on keeping the air clean. This year, there were eight Clean Air Action (CAA) days. On CAA days, social media posts were made, MDOT electronic billboard messages displayed the notice along highways, radio and news stations informed their listeners and viewers, and action was seen taken by community members. Despite an increase in higher Air Quality



Hackley Public Library in downtown Muskegon graciously hosted the informational display from August 5 through August 15.

Index (AQI) days from 2024 to 2025, WMCAC has taken this as an opportunity to push the message further in the region through additional billboards and extended streaming services.

Since the scheduled advertising season concluded September 1, WMSRDC has received reports from advertising partners on the reach the campaign achieved. In total, from all contracted stations and streaming services, the WMCAC campaign received over an estimated 5.7 million impressions, meaning that the CAA message was seen and heard over 5.7 million times! This messaging system helps us spread awareness

on air quality, advocate for emissions reduction activities, and get the coalition's name and purpose out to the public.

Alongside the advertising campaign, multiple events were attended, and informational displays were distributed through-

out each community from May to August. An additional thank you to our members and partners! The goal this year was to gain more members, especially transit agencies: our request for membership was accepted by multiple transit agencies in the WMCAC region. We're proud to include public transit in the conversation of clean air. Let's continue spreading awareness and educating those around us!

Continue to keep an eye on the AQI in your area to keep yourself safe and perform emission reduction activities. See everyone next year!

## Transportation: MPO Update

### Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Update

The WestPlan MPO Committees last met in August where they reviewed and approved the 27th and final amendment to the FY2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The current TIP will expire on October 1, 2025, where it is expected that the newly submitted FY2026-2029 TIP will be approved by MDOT and FHWA and become the current active TIP.



Work continues on Broadway Street in the City of Muskegon Heights.

## Transportation: WestPlan MPO Completes Shoreline Trails and Greenways (STAG) Plan



Muskegon's Lakeshore Trail

WestPlan MPO is pleased to announce the completion of the Shoreline Trails and Greenways (STAG) Plan, a comprehensive non-motorized transportation strategy for the Muskegon and northern Ottawa County region. Developed in partnership with consulting firm Progressive Companies, the STAG Plan

outlines a vision for a safe, accessible, and interconnected non-motorized network.

The plan was funded through WestPlan MPO planning funds, a generous contribution from the City of Muskegon, as well as contributions from the Muskegon County Board of Commissioners and the Muskegon County Bicycle Coalition.

The plan builds on extensive outreach

and collaboration, including stakeholder meetings, community events, and engagement with local governments and nonprofit partners. From January to July 2025, Progressive Companies and WMSRDC staff coordinated numerous public meetings in the cities of Muskegon, Muskegon Heights, Grand Haven, and Whitehall to

gather input and refine priorities. A variety of engagement methods were used to collect feedback from as many people invested in the community as possible, including an experimental, and a survey. In all, more than 700 people participated in the process of creating the STAG Plan.

The STAG Plan evaluates existing infrastructure and identifies key gaps in connectivity, with recommendations for new trail segments, safety enhancements, improved signage, and equitable access to amenities. It also aligns with local and regional master plans, ensuring the STAG Plan supports economic development, tourism, and healthier lifestyles through active transportation. With a phased implementation strategy and guidance on potential funding sources, the STAG Plan serves as a roadmap for creating a more walkable and bike-friendly region. WestPlan MPO will work with member communities to integrate the plan into future development efforts.

## Transportation: MPO Update Continued from page 2

### FY 2026 Unified Work Program

The FY2026 Unified Work Program was approved by the State of Michigan and will be active on October 1, 2025, when the new fiscal year begins. The UWP outlines the budget and activities for the MPO for the upcoming fiscal year. Budget estimates for the

UWP are provided by MDOT and are allocated to several different program areas for the MPO. The UWP is a federally required document, which is reviewed and approved by the MPO Policy Committee on an annual basis. Tasks outlined in the UWP will be completed by MPO staff with as-

sistance from the MPO Policy and Technical Committees, as well as outside consultants as needed.

Details of WestPlan MPO TIP amendments and other MPO related information can be found by visiting the website at [www.wmsrdc.org](http://www.wmsrdc.org).

## Environmental: WMSRDC Celebrates Completion of 5-Year NOAA Partnership

On September 30, WMSRDC concluded its 5-year partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA,) launched in 2020 to restore riverine habitats, drowned river mouth estuaries, and coastal wetlands across the eastern Lake Michigan watershed. The partnership focused on three major projects:

**Little Cedar Creek:** 12 acres restored, 3.5 miles of stream habitat improved, and twin culverts replaced to enhance fish passage.

**Stony Creek/Marshville Dam:** Dam remnants and footbridges removed, three culverts replaced with an open-span bridge, 500 feet of stream restored, 18 acres of wetlands enhanced, and 6.5 miles of aquatic connectivity reestablished.

**White River:** Four road crossings upgraded, 7.6 acres of wetlands enhanced, 7.24 miles of aquatic connectivity restored, and 1,000 feet of stream habitat improved.

These long-term restoration projects were made possible by \$3.75 million in federal investment. WMSRDC extends thanks to NOAA, Oceana County Road Commission, GEI Consultants, Catskill Remedial Contracting Services, and all local partners for making these restorations possible.

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New culvert at Little Cedar Creek



Open span timber bridge at Roosevelt Road and Cushman Creek



Stony Creek post dam removal with a new open span timber bridge

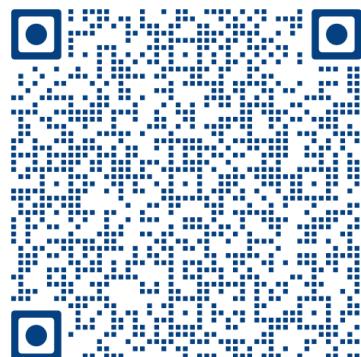
## Environmental: Community Input Shapes Regional Resilience Projects

This summer, WMSRDC hosted five community meetings across the region, engaging leaders and stakeholders to identify priority nature-based projects. Combined with survey feedback, the process generated a list of 50 projects highlighting areas in need of protection and opportunities for restoration. WMSRDC's consultant, Environmental Consulting & Technology (ECT), is now using multi-criteria decision analysis to evaluate and prioritize these projects for potential design and implementation through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) National Coastal Resilience Fund (NCRF), who is also providing funding for this initiative.

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## GIS: Introducing Near-MISS: The Missed Incident Safety Survey

To support its goal of zero roadway fatalities, WMSRDC is working to identify areas with ongoing traffic safety concerns. Crash reports often miss unreported incidents and near-misses involving vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians. To help fill this gap, WMSRDC created a tool to anonymously collect data on near-miss events at locations like unmarked crossings, school zones, transit stops, and high-speed roads. This data will supplement crash reports to better understand where safety issues occur most often and help guide future solutions. You can access this survey through the WMSRDC GIS project page or by scanning the QR code. This tool is for data collection only and is not intended for emergency response. Local agencies or MPO staff will not respond to individual reports. For maintenance or non-safety concerns, contact your local public works department. In an emergency, call 911 immediately.



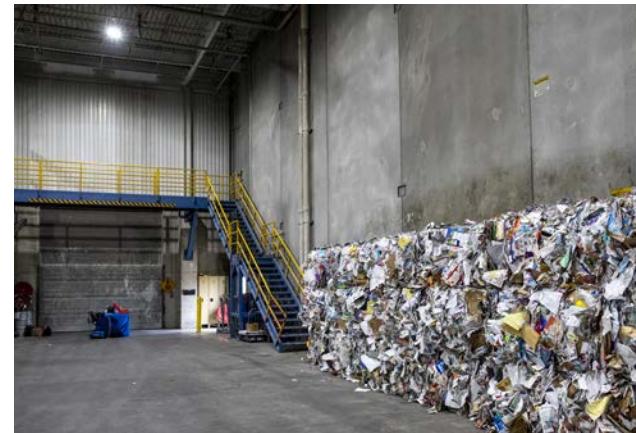
Scan to Access the Near-MISS survey

## Local Government Services: Materials Management Planning Update

WMSRDC is the Designated Planning Agency (DPA) for the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana. In this role, we are working to develop a Materials Management Plan (MMP) and maintain a Materials Management Planning Committee (MMPC) to meet requirements set forth by the State of Michigan. The MMPC is responsible for overseeing development and implementation of the Plan. Each of the five counties has four appointed representatives from a range of backgrounds, such as elected officials, waste haulers, business owners, etc.

Did you know... each city, village, and township within the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana will have an opportunity to review and either approve or reject the Materials Management Plan? A proposed draft is expected to be available for review in mid-2026. WMSRDC is constantly working to educate

its local jurisdictions about the materials management planning process and seeking information about local materials (i.e. waste, recycling, and organics) infrastructure and services. WMSRDC staff have been attending regularly scheduled township association meetings to spread the word. Let us know if you have a collaborative meeting coming up! In addition, keep on the lookout for communications sent via email through Constant Contact. For example, over the summer, we sent and re-sent a local government survey. (The survey is still open, by the way!) Please let us know if your community has not received any MMP messages and we'll work with you to make sure we have the correct and appropriate contact information for your community.



Most recycled materials collected in West Michigan are processed at the Kent County Recycling & Education Center.

In the coming months, WMSRDC will guide the MMPC through development of regional goals and objectives and begin drafting the Plan. Upcoming MMPC meetings will take place at 10:00 AM at the following: October 6, Muskegon County (WMSRDC office); November 3, Oceana County (location TBD); December 1, Mason County (location TBD). To contact WMSRDC, or find additional information regarding materials management and the MMPC, go to the WMSRDC website, [wmsrdc.org/program/materials-management-planning/](http://wmsrdc.org/program/materials-management-planning/).

## Special Projects: Restoration Complete at Stony Creek/Marshville Dam!

On August 28, 2025, under clear blue skies, community members gathered to celebrate the official completion of the Stony Creek/Marshville Dam restoration. Hosted in partnership with Oceana County Parks and Conservation Resource Alliance, the ribbon-cutting ceremony welcomed nearly 100 attendees. Speakers included Garry McKeen (Oceana Parks), local historian John Wyns (Oceana County Parks), Erin Kuhn (WMSRDC), DJ Shook (CRA), and Mark Tonello (DNR Fisheries).

This project was made possible through WMSRDC's partnership with NOAA, which supports habitat restoration throughout the eastern Lake Michigan watershed. The focus: restoring connectivity of river corridors

and wetlands to improve fish passage and habitats for native wildlife. Stony Creek was identified as a priority site because of its spring-fed cold waters, direct connection to Lake Michigan, and its value as a brook trout fishery.

### Project Highlights:

- **Removal of Marshville Dam** remnants and two footbridges
- **Replacement of three perched culverts** with an open-span bridge
- 500 feet of **stream habitat restored**
- 18 acres of **wetlands enhanced**
- 6.5 miles of **aquatic connectivity** reestablished

In total, \$1.6 million of direct federal funding was invested in the restoration. Together, these efforts support native fish and wildlife populations, benefit state and tribal resources, and strengthen the health of the Great Lakes ecosystem.

WMSRDC would like to express its gratitude to GEI Consultants, Oceana County Parks, the Oceana County Road Commission, Catskills Remedial Contracting Services, and the Conservation Resource Alliance. This project is a true reflection of what can be achieved through collaboration and a shared commitment to our region's natural resources.



Project leaders cut the ribbon to "officially" open the improved Marshville Dam Park



New signage at Marshville Dam Park

## Economic Development Update

WMSRDC maintains a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region. This ensures the counties and communities in Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana remain eligible for federal economic development grants and assistance through the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA). Did you know... the EDA has invested over \$33 million in the region to expand capacity, spur investment, and support well-paying jobs?

The CEDS Strategy Committee meets quarterly to oversee maintenance and implementation of the CEDS. During the summer meeting in July, attendees reviewed and discussed the "Natural Resources" and "Quality of Life" goals and objectives outlined in the document. The fall quarterly meeting, to be held in October, will feature review of the CEDS "Economic Variety" and "Regional Integration" goals and objectives.



*In 1975, the EDA awarded a grant to establish Ludington Industrial Park, which is one of the many industrial parks in the region established with federal assistance.*

## Commission Operations: Meet the Staff

Stephen oversees the economic development and local government services program areas. He has a degree in Geography from Grand Valley State University and has been with WMSRDC since 2003.

Stephen has written or collaborated on projects spanning economic development, community master plans and recreation plans, hazard mitigation, and materials management. He is trained in infrastructure asset management and leadership, and has experience with grant writing, public engagement, and facilitation.

Stephen enjoys the outdoors, playing sports, gardening, and traveling. His personal achievements include playing collegiate golf; GVSU Men's Club Volleyball team founder; adjunct professor at Muskegon Community College; and former member of the Midwest Professional Volleyball Association tour. Stephen lives in Norton Shores with his wife and two children.



*Stephen Carlson,  
Program Manager*



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