

Chapter 2: Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources

Introduction

Planning must consider the region's landscape and resources that residents interact with. This chapter analyzes these characteristics that contribute to the region's identity, well-being, and land use decisions.

Natural Resources

Previous State-wide and Regional Plans and Studies

Land Legacy Report, 2006 This Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) report identifies lands with significant value to the public and recommends their protection using various funding programs.

NCWRPC Regional Livability Plan, 2015 This former regional plan supports natural resources for enhancing the quality of life and attracting workers to the region, supporting economic development.

Recreation Opportunities Analysis (2018) and Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2019) The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources conducted these planning efforts to ensure high-quality recreation experiences meet the demands of the state's various regions.

The Wisconsin Historic Preservation Plan 2006-2015 This Wisconsin Historical Society administers this strategic plan, which provides goals and objectives for historic preservation in Wisconsin.

County-Level Plans like Farmland Preservation Plans qualify areas to use agricultural preservation zoning where agricultural landowners receive tax credits. Land and Water Conservation plans guide each county's conservation efforts in areas like invasive species management, water quality improvement, and more.

Issues

Climate Change

The increase of natural hazards like flooding and severe weather, as well as the unpredictability of weather patterns are expected to impact both rural and urban areas of the region.

Fragmentation of Land

Over time, development of open and wooded lands has resulted in the fragmentation of existing large, contiguous parcels. This has limited the supply of land available for agriculture and woodlands.

Water Quality

Land use impacts affect the quantity and quality of both ground and surface water throughout the region.

Inventory and Trends

Geography, Geology, and Topography

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) places the region into six ecological landscapes: The Northern Highland, Northern Central Forest, Forest Transition, Central Sand Plains, Central Sand Hills, and Western Coulees and Ridges. Extensive lakes, wetlands, and woodlands underlain by igneous and metamorphic rock are more common in the northern portion of the region, which transitions to having more agriculture as well as sedimentary bedrock or outwash farther south. Glacial landscape features are common throughout the region as well as unique sandstone buttes the southern portion of the region.

Soils

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) has online soil surveys for each county. The survey contains maps of soil characteristics' limitations and hazards related to development and farming.

Mineral Resources

Nonmetallic mining is found throughout the region where rock, sand, and other aggregates are extracted. Known metallic deposits in the region include the Crandon, Lynne, Reef Deposits and the Schoepke Site.

Climate

The region has a humid continental climate (Dfb) with four distinct seasons with varying temperatures throughout the year. Average temperatures range from approximately 41.4°F in the northernmost county (Vilas) and 47.8°F in the southernmost county (Adams), with longer growing seasons to the south. Northern counties receive more snowfall and the southern counties receive more rainfall. Most of the region is in hardiness Zone 4b (-25 to -20°F), with the northernmost areas being in Zone 4a (-30 to -25°F) and the southernmost areas being in Zone 5a (-20 to -15°F).

Surface Water, Watersheds, and Drainage Districts

The Wisconsin River is the most prominent waterway in the region, flowing through 8 of the region's 10 counties. Most of the region's precipitation flows southward through this river before joining the Mississippi River. Areas in the far northern and eastern portions of the region drain to Lake Superior and Lake Michigan, respectively. Surface inputs and impervious surfaces directly impact water quality in surface water, which is addressed by shoreland, wetland, floodplain, and stormwater ordinances.

Groundwater resources

Groundwater occupies spaces in soils and bedrock. Groundwater originates in three aquifers: the sand and gravel, sandstone and dolomite, and the crystalline bedrock aquifers. Their depth from the surface, vulnerability to contamination, and flow rates vary. Local geology impacts groundwater's chemical properties and vulnerability to contamination. Groundwater pollution that occurs today may not become evident for several years, and it is very difficult to remedy once contaminated. The DNR has developed a groundwater contamination susceptibility model as one tool to address this issue.

Floodplains, Shorelands, and Wetlands

Shorelands are lands within 1,000 feet of a lake or 300 feet of a stream. Wetlands are areas with high water tables, and floodplains are areas that can be submerged following heavy rainfall. These areas are protected by local ordinances since they filter runoff, reduce flooding, and provide wildlife habitat.

Air Quality

WDNR and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) define and monitor a series of contaminants known as criteria air pollutants. Each county meets all primary and secondary standards, which regulations used to evaluate the air quality. Therefore, the entire region is in an attainment zone, meaning there are no specific regulations needed to remedy air pollution issues at this time.

Forests

Forests in the region include a mix of oaks, maple, aspen, pine, birch, and hemlock. The Managed Forest Law (MFL) and its predecessor, the Forest Crop Law (FCL), are used extensively in the region and offer a lower tax rate for landowners managing their forestland in a way that meets WDNR standards. Woodlands protect environmentally sensitive areas like steep slopes, shorelands, wildlife habitat, wetlands, and floodplains. Threats to woodlands include development, diseases, and invasive species.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Endangered Species

Development can easily erode steep slopes or impact fragile ecosystems. WDNR's website contains lists of threatened and endangered species in its Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) as well as maps of protected areas like State Natural Areas (SNAs). The Endangered Species Act (ESA) protects many of these species.

Agriculture

The region is home to a variety of farm products, including dairy, vegetables, cranberries, ginseng, and potatoes. Irrigation systems and farming technology have resulted in larger farms, higher crop yields, and fewer farm employees than in the past. Changes in climate, flooding, drought, insects, invasive vegetation, erosion, and soil nutrient depletion all impact agriculture. Pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, and erosion all impact the natural environment if managed poorly. Although the growing season is shorter in the region than in much of the country, a lack of excessive heat minimizes droughts. Aside from soils, groundwater is the most important agricultural resource as many crops rely on irrigation systems.

Cultural Resources

North central Wisconsin has a rich and varied history, having originally being inhabited by various Native American tribes, including the Menominee, Ojibwe (Chippewa), Ho-Chunk (Winnebago), and Potawatomi. French explorers were among the first Europeans to enter the region in the early 17th century setting up trading posts. The vast forests of north central Wisconsin also attracted loggers in the mid-1800s. Settlement in the early 19th century also brought agriculture and industry that used the Wisconsin River's power, such as logging, woodworking, and paper mills. Today, the region's economy is diverse.

Historic preservation ordinances are required in municipalities with properties property listed in the National or State Register of Historic Places. In addition to these registers, the Wisconsin Historical Society has an online database called the Architecture and History Inventory (AHI). This tool provides detailed historical and architectural information for approximately 120,000 properties in Wisconsin. Similar to the AHI, the Archaeological Site Inventory (ASI) lists archaeological sites, mounds, marked and unmarked cemeteries, and cultural sites in the state. However, it includes only those sites that have been reported to the Wisconsin Historical Society and does not include all possible sites and cemeteries of archeological significance in the state. This inventory has been developed over a period of 150 years, and each entry in the database varies widely and the information has not been verified in all cases. More information about the region’s history can be obtained in its many historical societies, museums, and other institutions.

Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Resource Programs

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) / National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
- Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) by USDA's Farm Service Agency
- Healthy Forests Reserve Program
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program
- Small, Limited, and Beginning Farmer Assistance
- Wetlands Reserve Program
- Working Lands for Wildlife

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR)

- Aquatic Habitat Protection Program
- Drinking Water and Groundwater Program
- Endangered Resources Program
- Fisheries Management Program
- Managed Forest Law
- Nonpoint Source Program
- Parks and Recreation Program
- Private Forestry
- Stewardship Grants for Nonprofit Conservation Organizations
- Wildlife Management Program

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP)

- Farmland Preservation Program
- Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants

University of Wisconsin – Extension (UWEX)

- Discovery Farms Program

Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS)

- State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)

Goals, Objectives, and Policies (2015 Numbers in Red)

Goals

1. Preserve and protect the region’s landscape, environmental resources, and sensitive lands while encouraging healthy communities. (9)

2. Develop tourism and the knowledge-based economy into leading economic sectors. (5)

Objectives

1. Protect natural landscapes and ecosystems in the region and increase the percentage of land cover labeled wetlands, forestlands, agricultural, and open space. (9.1)
2. Protect sensitive lands from overdevelopment (9.2)
3. Focus development in existing downtowns and reuse historic buildings. (5.3)

Policies

1. Maintain a digital existing land use coverage. (9.1.1)
2. Develop educational curriculum about natural landscapes and ecosystems. (9.1.2)
3. Ensure that open space is accessible and appealing to people of all ages and abilities. (9.1.3)
4. Develop a long range plan to protect and enhance natural landscapes. (9.1.4)
5. Target land conservation programs to locations with the highest priority for preserving community character. (9.1.5)
6. Protect and restore riparian areas in high priority watersheds. (9.1.6)
7. Encourage land donation or acquisition for conservation easements. (9.1.7)
8. Encourage land use policies that minimize negative environmental impacts from developments. (9.1.8)
9. Create controls to protect steep slopes from development. (9.1.1)
10. Create policies for developments already existing on sensitive lands to lessen impacts on the environment and public safety. (9.2.2)
11. Restore and redevelop downtown properties and main streets. (5.3.1)
12. Reuse vacant land and structures in innovative ways. (5.3.2)
13. Integrate existing community character into the design of community improvements. (5.3.3)
14. Encourage the registration of historical buildings on state and federal registers. (5.3.4)
15. Inventory cultural assets, historical sites, and related assets and identify priority sites for preservation. (5.3.5)

Chapter 3: Housing

Background

This chapter evaluates opportunities for improved housing throughout the region, which benefits the economy by attracting working families. Included are programs and strategies for enhancing the housing market so seniors, people with disabilities, and people of all incomes can find housing.

Previous Planning Efforts

ALICE: A Study of Financial Hardship in Wisconsin, 2023: “ALICE” Households (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) are above the poverty level, but struggle financially. United Way reports that 34 percent of the region’s households are either below the poverty level or are ALICE households.

Regional Livability Plan, 2015: This previous Comprehensive Plan encourages improving the availability and affordability of housing by ensuring the location, condition, and type of housing meets demand.

Welcoming Wisconsin Home: A Statewide Action Plan for Homelessness 2021-2023: This report recommends addressing damage caused by lending practices and restrictive covenants in the 20th century, investing in affordable housing, programs, and services, improving housing access through counseling, repair assistance, and other strategies, and stabilizing existing housing by growing jobs.

Wisconsin Realtors Association’s (WRA) Workforce Housing Report: Falling Behind, 2019: WRA found a shortage of workforce housing due to high construction costs and fewer new units, affecting affordability.

Wisconsin State Consolidated Housing Plan, 2020-2024: This Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) plan helps fund several state-administered housing programs.

Local Housing Studies: NCWRPC and other entities have conducted housing studies for several counties and municipalities in the region, identifying gaps in the market along with strategies for new development.

Issues

Affordability: Housing prices have risen faster than incomes because of a lack of inventory and high construction and infrastructure costs. Zoning and subdivision ordinance amendments, financial programs, and other strategies described may be used to reduce the cost of new housing and increase its availability.

Senior, Disability-friendly, and Low-Income Housing: The region’s median age reflects a need for smaller, lower-maintenance housing. Existing houses can be modified so seniors or those with disabilities can live in them longer. A variety of new housing unit styles and prices are needed for those living on fixed or limited income. Nonprofits and financial programs can be used to repair and insulate existing homes.

Seasonal Housing: Wisconsin has one of the highest concentrations of seasonal housing units for recreational use, and there has been a nationwide increase in the popularity of vacation rentals. This enhances tourism opportunities but reduces housing options for year-round residents.

Inventory and Trends

Housing unit construction was strong between 1990 and 2010 overall but slowed after the 2000s housing market crash as builders closed. This results in a lack of inventory and a higher share of older housing units in need of repairs or upgrades. See Table 8. Several counties show a negative number of housing units from 2010 to 2022; this is because the U.S. Census bases these numbers on the number of households, which have decreased in those Counties. While some structures likely have been demolished due to age, damage, or other reasons, NCWRPC does not agree that the decrease has been that dramatic. But since Census numbers are widely recognized and useful for grant applications, they are used in this chapter.

Table 6: Total Housing Units

| County | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 | 2022 | % Change 1990-2022 | % Change 2010-2022 |
|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Adams | 12,418 | 14,123 | 17,067 | 16,789 | 35.2% | -1.6% |
| Forest | 7,203 | 8,322 | 8,885 | 8,661 | 20.2% | -2.5% |
| Juneau | 11,422 | 12,370 | 14,457 | 14,540 | 27.3% | 0.6% |
| Langlade | 10,825 | 11,187 | 12,268 | 12,185 | 12.6% | -0.7% |
| Lincoln | 13,256 | 14,681 | 16,488 | 16,151 | 21.8% | -2.0% |
| Marathon | 43,774 | 50,360 | 57,017 | 59,980 | 37.0% | 5.2% |
| Oneida | 25,173 | 26,627 | 29,646 | 30,614 | 21.6% | 3.3% |
| Portage | 22,910 | 26,589 | 29,601 | 31,265 | 36.5% | 5.6% |
| Vilas | 20,225 | 22,397 | 23,922 | 24,661 | 21.9% | 3.1% |
| Wood | 28,839 | 31,691 | 33,838 | 34,558 | 19.8% | 2.1% |
| Region | 196,045 | 218,347 | 243,189 | 249,404 | 27.2% | 2.6% |
| State | 2,055,774 | 2,321,144 | 2,593,073 | 2,734,511 | 33.0% | 5.5% |
| Nation | 102,263,678 | 115,904,641 | 130,038,080 | 140,943,613 | 37.8% | 8.4% |

Source: U.S. Census 1990 & 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 & 2022

The North Central Region features high levels of homeownership, a predominance of single-family homes, and an abundance of seasonal homes. This allows owner-occupied households to build wealth but may limit housing choices for those who prefer to rent or need to rent to be able to save a down payment for a future house. Most housing was built between 1970 and 2009, with few being built since 2010. Older homes are more affordable to purchase or rent, but often require expensive repairs. See Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7: Age and Structure Characteristics

| County | Percent Single Family | Built Before 1950 | Built 1950-1969 | Built 1970-1989 | Built 1990-2009 | Built 2010-2022 |
|---------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Adams | 74.2% | 1,537 | 2,409 | 6,486 | 5,658 | 699 |
| Forest | 86.1% | 1,540 | 1,260 | 2,853 | 2,492 | 516 |
| Juneau | 70.3% | 2,872 | 2,140 | 3,978 | 4,597 | 953 |
| Langlade | 79.4% | 3,220 | 2,063 | 3,210 | 3,015 | 677 |
| Lincoln | 80.4% | 4,175 | 2,931 | 3,822 | 4,409 | 814 |
| Marathon | 75.3% | 13,173 | 10,792 | 15,549 | 16,777 | 3,689 |
| Oneida | 84.2% | 4,451 | 5,603 | 9,448 | 9,420 | 1,692 |
| Portage | 69.2% | 6,203 | 4,319 | 9,288 | 9,276 | 2,179 |
| Vilas | 87.6% | 3,292 | 4,634 | 7,772 | 7,607 | 1,356 |
| Wood | 75.1% | 8,220 | 7,213 | 9,815 | 7,490 | 1,820 |
| Region | 77.4% | 48,683 | 43,364 | 72,221 | 70,741 | 14,395 |
| State | 66.5% | 652,352 | 550,190 | 658,030 | 698,139 | 175,800 |
| Nation | 61.4% | 23,451,116 | 28,250,485 | 39,157,524 | 37,679,468 | 12,375,020 |

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2022

Table 8: Value Characteristics

| County | Median Home Value | Median Monthly Housing Costs - Owner Occupied | | Median Rent | % Households spending over 30% of Income on Housing | |
|---------------|-------------------|---|---------------|---------------|---|-----------------|
| | | Mortgage | No Mortgage | | Owner-Occupied | Renter-Occupied |
| Adams | \$168,400 | \$1,269 | \$512 | \$719 | 32.1% | 40.3% |
| Forest | \$160,100 | \$1,182 | \$462 | \$593 | 30.5% | 33.1% |
| Juneau | \$153,700 | \$1,340 | \$542 | \$820 | 25.8% | 36.4% |
| Langlade | \$138,000 | \$1,114 | \$441 | \$715 | 20.2% | 33.5% |
| Lincoln | \$163,700 | \$1,279 | \$493 | \$706 | 19.7% | 53.0% |
| Marathon | \$194,500 | \$1,404 | \$557 | \$898 | 17.0% | 42.8% |
| Oneida | \$214,700 | \$1,379 | \$481 | \$876 | 25.1% | 46.2% |
| Portage | \$214,700 | \$1,450 | \$566 | \$876 | 17.6% | 41.4% |
| Vilas | \$255,700 | \$1,382 | \$463 | \$766 | 31.8% | 26.0% |
| Wood | \$156,600 | \$1,215 | \$499 | \$830 | 20.1% | 39.3% |
| Region | \$182,010* | \$1,301* | \$502* | \$780* | 21.2% | 41.1% |
| State | \$231,400 | \$1,602 | \$624 | \$992 | 23.5% | 45.5% |
| Nation | \$281,900 | \$1,828 | \$584 | \$1,268 | 27.9% | 51.9% |

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2022. *Note: A regional median cannot be calculated from Census Data, so the average of the 10 County medians is used instead.

Table 8 shows how the Region’s housing costs are lower than the state and national averages. But, as discussed in Chapter 1, household incomes are also lower, so there is still a need for housing that is affordable for a variety of incomes and household configurations. Table 9 shows how the median age has risen in every county, while household size remains smaller than state and national averages. This could indicate demand for not only smaller housing units, but also more housing units for seniors as the region’s low cost of living and high-quality healthcare, amenities, and recreation may continue to attract more “empty nest” households.

Additionally, young families often also must compete against this demographic for similar affordable, low-maintenance, entry-level housing. Unfortunately, the more affordable a housing unit is, the harder it is to construct without subsidies and/or other financial strategies from a municipality or county. Often, builders choose to construct higher-end, custom homes as a result. Multifamily housing can also be difficult to construct where high infrastructure costs and/or restrictive zoning makes the approval process lengthy and expensive.

Table 9: Existing Demand

| County | Median Age 2010 | Median Age 2022 | Household Size 2010 | Household Size 2022 |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Adams | 47.7 | 55.1 | 2.1 | 2.2 |
| Forest | 43.4 | 48.7 | 2.2 | 2.4 |
| Juneau | 43.0 | 45.7 | 2.4 | 2.3 |
| Langlade | 44.9 | 48.6 | 2.3 | 2.3 |
| Lincoln | 44.0 | 49.1 | 2.2 | 2.3 |
| Marathon | 38.8 | 41.0 | 2.5 | 2.4 |
| Oneida | 47.2 | 51.8 | 2.0 | 2.3 |
| Portage | 35.6 | 37.8 | 2.4 | 2.3 |
| Vilas | 49.8 | 55.3 | 2.0 | 2.2 |
| Wood | 42.0 | 43.9 | 2.3 | 2.3 |
| Region* | 43.6 | 47.7 | 2.2 | 2.3 |
| State | 38.1 | 39.9 | 2.4 | 2.4 |
| Nation | 36.9 | 38.5 | 2.6 | 2.6 |

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2022

The Region has a high rate of seasonal homes, except for Marathon, Portage, and Wood Counties. This enhances tourism opportunities, but results in year-round residents having to compete for housing with those who are not year-round residents. See Table 10.

The Wisconsin Department of Administration (WDOA) produced household growth forecasts in 2013. By 2022, it was clear that most counties had not grown as much as initially projected. Therefore, Table 11 uses WDOA’s projections, but adds or subtracts the difference from them between the 2020 projection and the number of households in 2022. Despite the reduced projections, household growth is still expected for every county through at least 2035, indicating an ongoing need for future housing units.

Table 10: Occupancy Characteristics

| County | % Owner Occupied in 2010 | % Owner Occupied in 2022 | % Vacant in 2010 | % Vacant in 2022 | % Vacant that is seasonal in 2010 | % Vacant that is seasonal in 2022 |
|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Adams | 82.2% | 84.8% | 45.3% | 45.3% | 86.3% | 86.1% |
| Forest | 75.4% | 81.3% | 52.9% | 57.0% | 89.7% | 90.2% |
| Juneau | 79.1% | 79.3% | 23.8% | 27.1% | 70.8% | 76.3% |
| Langlade | 80.5% | 77.0% | 28.2% | 30.7% | 74.7% | 71.6% |
| Lincoln | 74.7% | 78.5% | 20.5% | 24.3% | 75.1% | 82.2% |
| Marathon | 75.5% | 72.9% | 7.6% | 5.8% | 26.3% | 25.7% |
| Oneida | 77.8% | 82.6% | 41.1% | 46.4% | 86.2% | 89.9% |
| Portage | 70.1% | 69.7% | 6.9% | 6.2% | 32.4% | 30.7% |
| Vilas | 79.4% | 83.5% | 55.9% | 56.8% | 87.6% | 90.5% |
| Wood | 76.4% | 73.0% | 5.5% | 7.7% | 16.6% | 21.4% |
| Region | 76.5% | 76.8% | 23.2% | 24.2% | 75.7% | 78.5% |
| State | 69.5% | 67.7% | 12.3% | 11.3% | 50.7% | 57.8% |
| Nation | 66.6% | 64.8% | 12.2% | 10.8% | 29.7% | 32.6% |

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2022

Table 11: Projected Demand

| County | 2020 Projected | 2022 Census | Difference | Projected Households | | | |
|----------|----------------|-------------|------------|----------------------|---------|----------------|---------------|
| | | | | 2025 | 2030 | 2035 | 2040 |
| Adams | 9,887 | 9,176 | -711 | 9,888 | 10,379 | 10,533 | 10,508 |
| Forest | 4,180 | 3,723 | -457 | 3,976 | 4,187 | 4,258 | 4,217 |
| Juneau | 11,774 | 10,598 | -1,176 | 10,613 | 11,095 | 11,283 | 11,306 |
| Langlade | 8,913 | 8,443 | -470 | 8,707 | 8,867 | 8,867 | 8,656 |
| Lincoln | 12,922 | 12,226 | -696 | 12,861 | 13,350 | 13,430 | 12,997 |
| Marathon | 57,394 | 56,484 | -910 | 58,701 | 60,614 | 62,048 | 62,820 |
| Oneida | 16,986 | 16,417 | -569 | 17,227 | 17,775 | 17,777 | 17,323 |
| Portage | 29,817 | 29,311 | -506 | 30,049 | 30,633 | 31,011 | 31,131 |
| Vilas | 10,469 | 10,651 | 182 | 11,251 | 11,694 | 11,757 | 11,699 |
| Wood | 32,486 | 31,887 | -599 | 32,262 | 32,444 | 32,576 | 31,962 |
| Region | 194,828 | 188,916 | -5,912 | 195,535 | 201,038 | 203,540 | 202,619 |

Source: WDOA, NCWRPC; Bold text indicates projected peak number of households.

Housing Strategies

Zoning and subdivision code amendments that improve affordability include reducing minimum lot sizes, reducing parking requirements, allowing mixed use buildings, allowing multifamily housing in more areas, and allowing accessory dwelling units. Strategies to improve housing stock include using land trusts, land banks, development bonuses, employer-sponsored housing, tax incremental financing, and others.

Housing Programs

Wisconsin Department of Administration (WDOA)

- Community Development Block Grant-Housing Revolving Loan Fund Program
- Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG)
- Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP)
- Housing Assistance Program (HAP)
- HOME Homebuyer and Rehabilitation Program
- Neighborhood Stabilization Program

Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA)

- Housing Tax Credit (HTC, formerly LIHTC)
- Home Improvement Advantage Loan
- Home Rehab and Repair Loan
- Vacancy-to-Vitality Loan
- Restore Main Street Loan
- Infrastructure Access Loan

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

- Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers

U.S. Department of Agriculture – Rural Development (USDA-RD)

- Section 502 Homeownership Direct Loan
- Section 502 Mutual Self-Help Housing Loan
- Section 504 Very-Low-Income Housing Repair Program
- Section 515 Multi-Family Housing Loan Program
- Section 521 Rural Rental Assistance
- Section 523 Rural Housing Site Loans
- Section 533 Rural Housing Preservation Grants
- Single Family Home Loan Guarantees

Other Programs

- The Federal Housing Supply Action Plan.
- Emerging CDBG, LIHTC, HOME, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and other Department of Transportation (DOT) and Economic Development Authority (EDA) programs.
- Emerging WEDC and WHEDA housing programs.

Goals and Objectives (2015 numbers in red)

Goals:

1. Promote a variety of safe and affordable housing options that meet the needs of all community members. (1)

Objectives:

1. Ensure a wide mix of housing is available to residents of all income levels. (1.1)
2. Stabilize and upgrade existing housing stock. (1.2)
3. Provide support for an aging population to successfully age at home in their communities. (1.3)

Recommendations:

1. Promote smaller homes to accommodate smaller household sizes. (1.1.1)
2. Promote mixed-income housing developments and a broad range of housing choice throughout the region. (1.1.2)
3. Locate new affordable housing near commercial corridors and transit routes. (1.1.3)
4. Identify high priority sites located close to existing town and job centers and promote the development of workforce and affordable housing in these locations. (1.1.4)
5. Encourage the public, private, and non-profit sectors to work together to increase the number of homes in closer proximity to job centers and recreation opportunities. (1.1.5)
6. Consider changing ordinances that make it more costly to develop multifamily housing, e.g. sprinkler requirements for 3 or more-unit complexes. (1.1.6)
7. Increase the number of multifamily housing units in the region. (1.1.7)
8. Provide incentives to homebuilders and developers for developing affordable market rate housing. (1.1.8)
9. Use public investments towards housing reuse and rehabilitation. (1.2.1)
10. Expand housing preservation and rehabilitation incentive programs. (1.2.2)
11. Retrofit housing to improve energy efficiency and to accommodate an older population. (1.2.3)
12. Provide incentives for repair and renovation of existing housing as well as retrofits that promote energy efficiency. (1.2.4)

13. Support home modifications to assist aging-in-place creating “universal design”. (1.3.1)
14. Expand and coordinate support services to assist aging in place, including education and advocating. (1.3.2)
15. Encourage and incentivize builders and architects to design universal homes that include friendly design features in renovations and new construction. (1.3.3)
16. Support the development of affordable assisted living and long-term care close to community services and amenities. (1.3.4)
17. Provide a wider variety of housing options for an aging population such as aging-in-place programs and accessory housing options. (1.3.5)
18. Provide incentives for repair and renovation of existing housing as well as retrofits that promote living-in-place and “universal design”. (1.3.6)
19. Encourage housing development in close proximity to healthcare facilities. (1.3.7)
20. Provide reliable broadband infrastructure. (1.3.8)

Chapter 4: Utilities and Community Facilities

Background

This chapter reviews utilities and community facilities in the Region, which include solid waste disposal, on-site wastewater recycling facilities, parks, telecommunications facilities, transmission lines, cemeteries, health care facilities, childcare facilities, and other public facilities, such as police, fire and rescue facilities, libraries, schools, and other government facilities.

Previous Planning Efforts

American Transmission Company: 10 Year Transmission System Assessment, 2022: This assessment is routinely updated, and it contains a list of future projects for the region's transmission system.

Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) Planning: Counties within the region have developed their own broadband plans under this program to expand economic opportunity, especially in rural areas.

Existing County and Municipal Plans: These include comprehensive plans, all-hazard mitigation plans, outdoor recreation plans, transportation plans, bicycle and pedestrian plans, sewer service area plans, and more, which guide the development of infrastructure in the region.

Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan: This plan includes trends and recommendations for outdoor recreation facilities in the Northwoods and Western Sands areas, which the Region is a part of.

Issues

Access to Broadband: Broadband expansion is promoted as an economic development tool, and there is a desire to use it to attract younger families back into smaller, more rural communities.

Aging Population: Hospitals, nursing homes, social institutions, nutrition programs, EMS facilities, etc. ensure seniors can continue to live in the Region. Disabled people of all ages also can benefit from senior-oriented infrastructure, such as public transportation or ADA-accessible sidewalks and trails.

Childcare: A lack of affordable and available childcare in the Region means employers may be unable to fill open jobs. The State of Wisconsin regulates childcare and NCWRPC's website has a dashboard that tracks childcare demand and availability.

Emergency Services: Ongoing retirements and a shrinking workforce requires strategies to recruit and maintain personnel for police, fire, emergency medical services, and other services.

Renewable Energy: Solar arrays and wind turbines have emerged in the Region, and although many support these projects, there are concerns over the size and location of them and how they impact the landscape. Electric Vehicles (EVs) may also increase demand for charging stations.

Inventory and Trends

Below is a summary of existing utilities and community facilities in the Region, along with related facts and descriptions.

County Government

Many of the Region's services are provided by its ten county governments: Adams, Forest, Juneau, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Oneida, Portage, Wood, and Vilas.

Water-related Facilities

Dams and Drainage Districts: The Wisconsin River, which flows through the Region, is known for its many hydroelectric dams and reservoirs. Dams are also used to control flooding, assist with irrigation, create lake-based recreation areas, and provide wildlife habitat. WDNR has an up-to-date inventory of these structures. County all-hazard mitigation plans identify dams that are hazardous and in need of repair or replacement. County-level drainage boards administer drainage districts in Adams, Juneau, and Portage Counties, which may use dams and other structures to control flooding and irrigation.

Drinking Water, Wastewater, and Well Water: It is common for incorporated areas to provide drinking water, sanitary sewer, and water treatment facilities. Wellhead protection ordinances can be used to protect drinking water quality. Sometimes, these utilities are provided in unincorporated Towns or are extended from a Village or City into a neighboring Town. Water and sewer facilities support a greater variety of uses and densities. Where public water and sewer do not exist, a private well and private onsite wastewater treatment system (POWTS) is typically used, though they often cannot handle the higher volumes that industrial, commercial, and multifamily uses require. Well and septic systems are regulated by the State and administered by counties. High-capacity wells and surface withdrawals are those that draw more than 100,000 gallons per day, and they are also regulated by the state.

Stormwater: Stormwater management systems mitigate heavy rainfall and prevent flooding and erosion, especially in urban areas with impervious surfaces like roofs and pavement. In low-density areas, ponds, ditches, and culverts are common to keep water off roads and other infrastructure. Municipal and county ordinances regulate stormwater management, and additional local, state, and federal regulations may apply related to erosion control and discharge of water into waterways. See the WDNR's website.

Solid Waste and Recycling Facilities

Counties often administer landfills, recycling facilities, and transfer sites across the region. Many of them contract with individual municipalities, privately owned disposal companies, and/or other Counties to maximize efficiency.

Public Works

Cemeteries: Nearly every Town, Village, and City have cemeteries, which are operated locally.

Town Halls and Garages: Typically, each Town, Village, and City has a primary public building to house government functions and other public meetings. Many communities also have other buildings to store equipment for road maintenance, firefighting, etc. Road maintenance is discussed in Chapter 5.

Public Safety

Emergency Medical Service (EMS): EMS is typically provided by municipalities, hospitals, or through a contract between a municipality and a provider. EMS can utilize paid staff and/or volunteers.

Fire: The Region is served by a variety of municipal fire departments, some of which have volunteer staff. Most, if not all of them have mutual aid agreements that allow them to assist each other if needed.

Law Enforcement, Jails, and Prisons: The Wisconsin State Patrol serves the entire region’s public roads, operating mainly on State and U.S. highways. A typical county has a Sheriff’s Department, which usually operates local jails and 911 programs. Many municipalities have police departments as well, and the County Sheriff usually patrols municipalities without a police department. Law enforcement agencies in a given area often contract to assist one another when needed. The Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) also operates state correctional facilities in Juneau, Lincoln, Marathon, and Oneida Counties. The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) operates one facility in the region, FCI Oxford in Adams County.

Healthcare

The Region is home to several medical facilities, including Marshfield Clinic based in Marshfield and Aspirus Health Care based in Wausau. These two providers serve eight of the Region’s Counties, while Juneau County is served by Mile Bluff Medical Center and Adams County is served by Gundersen Health.

Education, Recreation, and Culture

Childcare: The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families maintains an up-to-date list of licensed daycare providers along with a search tool.

Libraries: Four library systems serve the region: South Central, Winding Rivers, Wisconsin Valley, and Northern Waters. Other libraries can be found at schools and colleges.

Museums and Cultural Institutions: These facilities are described in Chapter 2.

Parks, Trails, & Natural Areas: The State of Wisconsin operates Council Grounds, Mill Bluff, Roche-a-Cri, Rocky Arbor, and Rib Mountain State Parks, Northern Highland - American Legion State Forest, Willow Flowage Scenic Waters Area, and Bearskin, Green Circle, Mountain-Bay, Tomorrow River, and Wolf River State Trails. Federal properties include Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Necedah National Wildlife Refuge, and the Ice Age Trail. There are also many additional state, federal, county, and local public lands.

Schools, Colleges, and Universities: The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) updates its inventory of school districts, their boundaries, enrollment totals, and other data each year. The region is

served by the Madison Area, Fox Valley, Mid-State, Nicolet Area, Northcentral, and Western Technical College Systems. The University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point is the only four-year university in the Region.

Energy and Telecommunications

The Public Service Commission has maps of electric, natural gas, telephone, and broadband service territories online, and the American Transmission Company (ATC) has a map of its high-voltage lines.

Summary

Utilities and Community Facilities enhance the region’s quality of life, provide economic development opportunities, educate and train workers, and more. NCWRPC can support counties and municipalities as they pursue programs and strategies to maintain, enhance, and expand these facilities.

Goals, Objectives, and Policies (2015 numbers in red)

Goals

1. Ensure the future availability of a skilled and flexible workforce. (2)
2. Support infrastructure needed for economic development. (4)

Objectives

1. Enhance education and workforce readiness, ensuring residents have the education and skills needed to reach their full potential. (2.1)
2. Provide quality (3+ MPBS or better) Broadband connection to all communities. (4.1)

Policies

1. Provide reliable broadband infrastructure in all communities allowing residents to participate in online courses and programs. (2.1.4)
2. Support local universities, medical colleges and technical schools increasing enrollment and graduation. (2.1.5)
3. Study WiMAX efficiency and effectiveness for the region. (4.1.1)
4. Increase cellphone coverage to 100% of area. (4.1.2)
5. Collaborate as a region to create co-op broadband programs. (4.1.3)
6. Continue to negotiate with major broadband companies to provide service to rural areas. (4.1.4)