

North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission Comprehensive Plan



2025

North Central Wisconsin Regional Comprehensive Plan - Adopted October 29, 2025

NCWRPC Staff

Christian Boulanger, AICP
Planner

Fred Heider, AICP
Planner

Andrew Faust
Senior GIS Analyst

Dawn Johnson
Administrative Assistant

Dennis Lawrence, AICP
Executive Director

Eric Sonnleitner
Planner

Darryl Landeau, AICP
Senior Planner

Sam Wessel, AICP
Senior Planner / Assistant Director

NCWRPC Comprehensive Plan Committee

Paul Millan
Forest County

Douglas Machon
Wood County

Loretta Baughan
Lincoln County

Jason Grueneberg
Wood County

Betty Manson
Juneau County

Timothy Reed
Portage County

Jami Gebert
Marathon County

David Meurett
Wisconsin Department
of Transportation

Ted Cushing
Oneida County

For more information, contact:



North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

210 McClellan St. Suite 210

Wausau, WI 54403

715-849-5510

www.ncwrpc.org

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Introduction

About NCWRPC

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) is a voluntary association of governments created in 1973 under Wisconsin State Statute 66.945, now 66.0309. NCWRPC provides assistance for ten counties in Wisconsin: Adams, Forest, Juneau, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Oneida, Portage, Vilas, and Wood. The organization works in the areas of economic development, geographic information systems (GIS), intergovernmental cooperation, land use, and transportation. NCWRPC regularly provides professional planning services to communities, for projects of both local and Regional significance.

The North Central Region stretches 185 miles in a north-south direction, extending from Forest and Vilas Counties in the north to Adams and Juneau Counties in the south. The Region roughly follows the Upper Wisconsin River Valley and covers 9,328 square miles, or about 17 percent of the State's total land mass. The Region includes 268 local units of government: 195 towns, 41 villages, 22 cities, and ten counties.

Comprehensive Planning

Under Wisconsin State Statute 66.0309(9), "The Regional Planning Commission shall have the function and duty of making and adopting a master plan for the physical development of the Region." This plan looks ahead 20 years and is a tool that local communities can use to demonstrate that there is Regional support for addressing local issues, applying for grant programs, growing the local economy, and other activities. It replaces the 2015 Regional Livability Plan, the 2003 Regional Comprehensive Plan, and the 1981 Framework for Regional Development. In areas not addressed by this plan, previous plans are still in effect. The 2015 Regional Livability Plan (RLP) identified the following 11 goals:

- Promote a variety of safe and affordable housing options that meet the needs of all community members.
- Ensure the availability of a skilled and flexible workforce.
- Support and develop a diverse economic base ensuring economic resiliency and growth.
- Support infrastructure needed for economic development.
- Develop tourism and knowledge-based economy into leading economic sectors.
- Provide and improve access and transportation to people of all ages and abilities ensuring lifelong mobility and accessibility to the community.
- Fund the maintenance and expansion of the transportation system.
- Enhance the Regional economy by reinforcing airports and freight rail.
- Preserve and protect the Region's landscape, environmental resources, and sensitive lands while encouraging healthy communities.
- Promote the reuse of vacant and underutilized buildings and land.
- Monitor and update the Regional Livability Plan.

Wisconsin State Statute 66.1001 outlines the required contents and procedures for creating a comprehensive plan. For Regional Planning Commissions like NCWRPC, these State Statutes require a Regional Comprehensive Plan to be advisory in nature, meaning that it does not override local decision-making at the municipal or county level. Rather, it provides an overall framework for local comprehensive plans by identifying Regional issues, goals, objectives, and policies that should be considered when creating these local comprehensive plans.

Since these goals remain relevant today, they are carried forward into this updated Regional Comprehensive Plan, and this comprehensive plan's adoption fulfills the final goal in this list. The 2015 RLP's 5-year evaluation recommended that five new topics be addressed in this updated comprehensive plan:

- Public Health Needs and Pandemic Response
- Economic Recovery
- Resiliency (Weather, Natural Hazards, etc.)
- Fiscal Conditions of the Region
- Widening Equity Gap

These topics are discussed in detail throughout this Plan's ten chapters.

How to Use this Plan

NCWRPC prepared and adopted this Regional Comprehensive Plan following the process outlined in Wisconsin State Statutes 66.1001. Comprehensive Planning Law in Wisconsin enables cities, villages, towns, counties, and regional planning commissions to prepare and adopt a Comprehensive Plan that consists of nine elements: Issues and Opportunities (Demographics), Housing, Transportation, Utilities and Community Facilities, Agricultural/Natural/Cultural Resources, Economic Development, Intergovernmental Cooperation, Land Use, and Implementation. Each element includes issues, trends, maps, and data, followed by a list of grant programs, goals, objectives, and policies. The land use element is particularly important for communities with zoning ordinances as it is required to inform zoning decisions. Comprehensive Plans are required to be updated every 10 years to remain relevant and support policy decision-making. **Local units of government should use this Regional Comprehensive Plan as a guide for their own planning efforts.**

While cities, villages, towns, and counties use comprehensive plans to inform and enforce local policies and strategies, this Regional Comprehensive Plan functions differently. Because NCWRPC is not directly involved in local decision-making like zoning, budgeting, and capital improvement planning, the Regional Comprehensive Plan isn't as focused on these issues. Rather, the plan is advisory in nature by identifying issues and trends that affect the entire 10-county Region, followed by a series of programs and strategies that can be used to address these Regional issues.

The intent of this plan is to provide data, trends, and goals that local comprehensive plans should reference and/or incorporate into their own comprehensive plan, since many Regional challenges also affect local and county governments. Additionally, this plan's findings are also designed to be incorporated into other local and Regional plans such as outdoor recreation plans, farmland preservation plans, land and water resource management plans, housing studies, transit plans, bicycle & pedestrian plans, and NCWRPC's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Therefore, this comprehensive plan is implemented through a variety of local and county-level plans.



Chapter 1: Regional Demographics

Background

Planning Process

Development of this plan occurred between Spring 2024 and Summer 2025. NCWRPC formed a comprehensive plan steering committee consisting of several of its commissioners and other representatives from local governments within the Region. Meetings were held to review chapters that were drafted by NCWRPC staff, with a final draft recommendation to the full commission, which held a public hearing on July 30, 2025 and adopted the plan October 29, 2025. No comments were received at the public hearing.

Data Sources

Data sets from the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey (ACS) are used throughout this Plan in addition to other sources such as the Wisconsin Department of Administration's (DOA) population projections. The U.S. Census and the ACS are both produced by the U.S. Census Bureau; however, the Census is a count of the American population and housing units conducted every ten years while the American Community Survey is an estimate of the population and housing released on a yearly basis. Data is typically included from 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2022, and trends are generally analyzed for the twelve-year time frame from 2010 to 2022 in this report. Census and ACS data is self-reported and has some accuracy issues, but they are the most widely used and detailed data sets used in plans, grants, decision-making tools, and other programs, so they are preferred over other data sources.

1. Demographics

Population

Overall, the Region has grown steadily since 1990, but growth is uneven. Marathon, Oneida, Portage, and Vilas Counties grew since 2010 but likely for different reasons. Marathon and Portage Counties have a higher concentration of jobs and schools that may draw more families and students, while Oneida and Vilas Counties are known for their lakes and forests that draw retirees, remote workers, and seasonal residents. Previous plans indicate that the Region grew at a similar rate to the statewide growth rate in the 1990s, but this growth rate has slowed considerably since 2000. See Table 1 on the following page.



Table 1: Total Population

County	2000	2010	2020	2022	% Change 2000-2022	% Change 2010-2022
Adams	19,920	20,875	20,654	20,730	4.1%	-0.7%
Forest	10,024	9,304	9,179	9,239	-7.8%	-0.7%
Juneau	24,316	26,664	26,718	26,695	9.8%	0.1%
Langlade	20,740	19,977	19,491	19,512	-5.9%	-2.3%
Lincoln	29,641	28,743	28,415	28,402	-4.2%	-1.2%
Marathon	125,834	134,063	138,013	137,820	9.5%	2.8%
Oneida	36,776	35,998	37,845	37,799	2.8%	5.0%
Portage	67,182	70,019	70,377	70,281	4.6%	0.4%
Vilas	21,033	21,430	23,047	23,146	10.0%	8.0%
Wood	75,555	74,749	74,207	74,138	-1.9%	-0.8%
Region	431,021	441,822	447,946	447,762	3.9%	1.3%
State	5,363,675	5,686,986	5,893,718	5,882,128	9.7%	3.4%
Nation	281,421,906	308,745,538	331,449,281	331,097,593	17.7%	7.2%

Source: U.S. Census 2000, 2010, and 2020; ACS 5-Year estimates 2022

Population Projections

The Wisconsin Department of Administration's (DOA) are the State's official projections. The 2013 population projections were based off the 2010 Census, but the Region grew more slowly than the projections by the 2020 Census. DOA released updated projections in 2025 based on the 2020 Census that showed a population decline in all ten counties. Table 2 summarizes each County's projected population by year according to DOA, with an overall projected population decrease of 58,846 regionally.

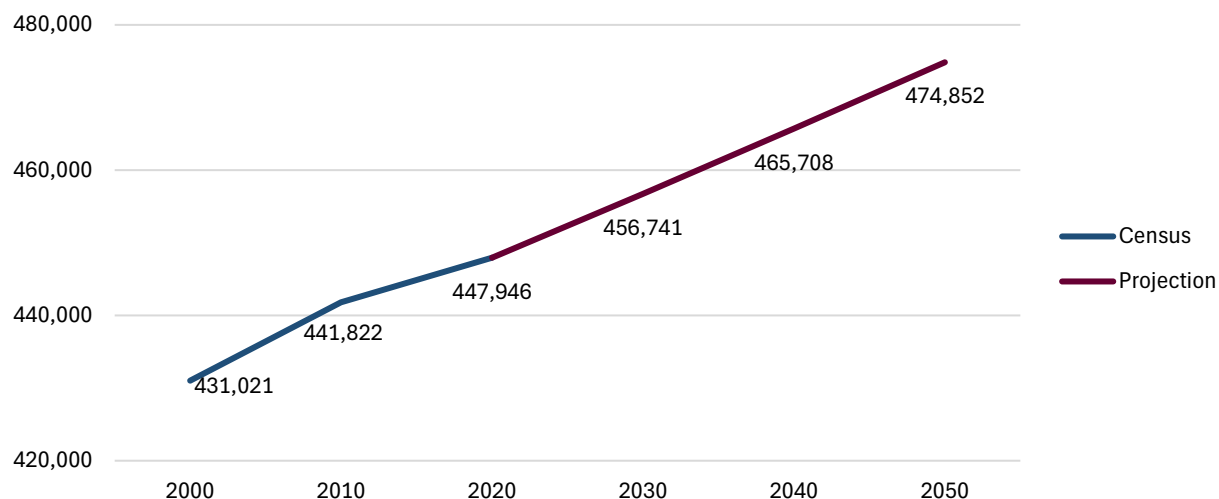
Table 2: Official Wisconsin Population Projections 2030-2050

County	2020	2030	2040	2050	Net Change 2020-2050	% Change 2020-2050
Adams	20,654	19,035	16,875	14,650	-6,004	-29.1%
Forest	9,179	8,615	7,760	6,785	-2,394	-26.1%
Juneau	26,718	25,535	23,990	22,230	-4,488	-16.8%
Langlade	19,491	18,155	16,440	14,720	-4,771	-24.5%
Lincoln	28,415	27,115	25,260	22,915	-5,500	-19.4%
Marathon	138,013	136,750	134,615	130,380	-7,633	-5.5%
Oneida	37,845	37,320	35,525	33,135	-4,710	-12.4%
Portage	70,377	68,090	63,985	58,820	-11,557	-16.4%
Vilas	23,047	23,185	22,365	20,885	-2,162	-9.4%
Wood	74,207	71,310	68,185	64,580	-9,627	-13.0%
Region	447,946	435,110	415,000	389,100	-58,846	-13.1%
State	5,893,718	5,890,915	5,841,620	5,710,120	-183,598	-3.1%

Source: U.S. Census 2020; DOA 2030-2050

Table 2 contains the State’s official projections which NCWRPC frequently incorporates in local comprehensive plans and other projects. But they are only an estimate, and the Region saw a population increase between 2020 and 2024 that reversed this trend. Therefore, NCWRPC used the rate of population growth between 2000 and 2020 to forecast population projections through 2050, which are depicted in Figure 1 and Table 3. The result is a projected 6 percent increase in population between 2020 and 2050 for a future Regional population of 474,852. By building on the success of the Region’s high quality of life and reasonable cost of living, strategies can attract new residents to offset DOA’s projections in the future.

Figure 1: Historic and NCWRPC Projected Regional Population



Source: U.S. Census 2000, 2010, & 2020; NCWRPC 2030-2050

Table 3: NCWRPC Projected Population

County	2020 Census	2030 Projection	2040 Projection	2050 Projection	Net Increase 2020-2050	% Increase 2020-2050
Adams	20,654	21,035	21,422	21,817	1,163	5.6%
Forest	9,179	8,792	8,422	8,067	-1,112	-12.1%
Juneau	26,718	28,038	29,422	30,876	4,158	15.6%
Langlade	19,491	18,904	18,335	17,783	-1,708	-8.8%
Lincoln	28,415	27,827	27,252	26,688	-1,727	-6.1%
Marathon	138,013	144,692	151,694	159,035	21,022	15.2%
Oneida	37,845	38,395	38,953	39,519	1,674	4.4%
Portage	70,377	72,050	73,764	75,518	5,141	7.3%
Vilas	23,047	24,150	25,307	26,518	3,471	15.1%
Wood	74,207	73,545	72,889	72,239	-1,968	-2.7%
Region	447,946	456,741	465,708	474,852	26,906	6.0%
State	5,893,718	6,497,304	7,162,704	7,896,249	2,002,531	34.0%

Source: U.S. Census 2020 & NCWRPC 2030-2050

Age Distribution

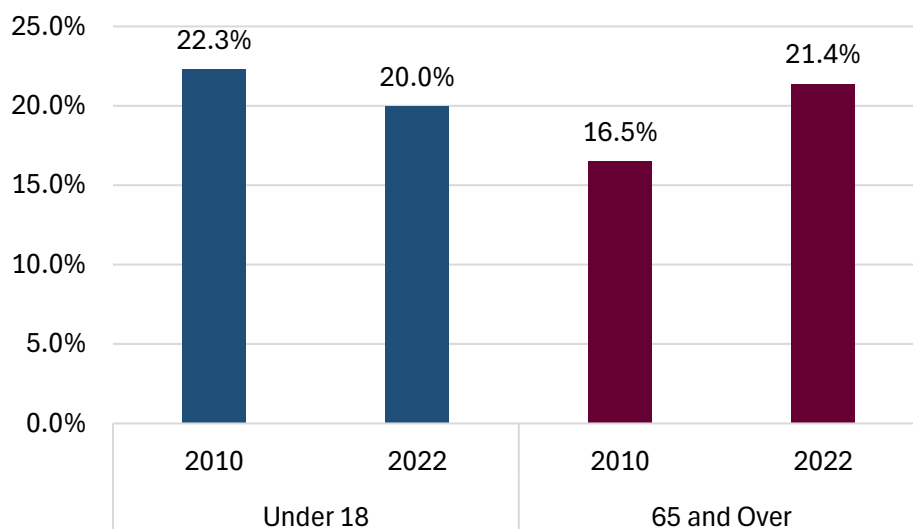
Like statewide and national trends, the Region's share of individuals aged 65 and older is increasing, while the share of those under 18 is decreasing. These groups are known as dependent populations, since most of the workforce is between the two age groups. Individuals aged 65 and older increased by 4.9 percent and those under age 18 decreased by 2.3 percent since 2010 in the Region. As this trend continues, the Region's economy will change as senior-oriented services will be in demand with fewer people of working age to fill the Region's needs. The Region's affordability and access to healthcare make it an attractive place to retire, but students, young professionals, and families may consider relocating to the area due to its good schools, job opportunities, access to nature, and affordability as the cost of living in other regions of the country increases. See Figure 2.

Table 4 provides an overall summary of the Region's age characteristics. Adams, Oneida, and Vilas had the largest share of residents aged 65 and older, while Juneau, Marathon, and Wood had the largest share of residents under age 18. While this is not always the case, urban areas tend to have a younger population due to their proximity to jobs, schools, and colleges, whereas retirees don't necessarily need to live near such services. Though an aging population will cause the economy to shift, those at or near retirement age have years of expertise they can contribute towards the future of the Region, especially when it comes to entrepreneurship.

Median Age

Similar trends appear when looking at each County's median age (note that a Regional median cannot be computed with available data). Adams, Oneida, and Vilas have the highest median age, and Marathon, Portage, and Wood Counties have the lowest median age. All Counties have a median age higher than the statewide and national median, except for Portage County, which is likely due to its high concentration of college students. See Figure 3.

Figure 2: Percentage of Population over Age 64 and Under Age 18



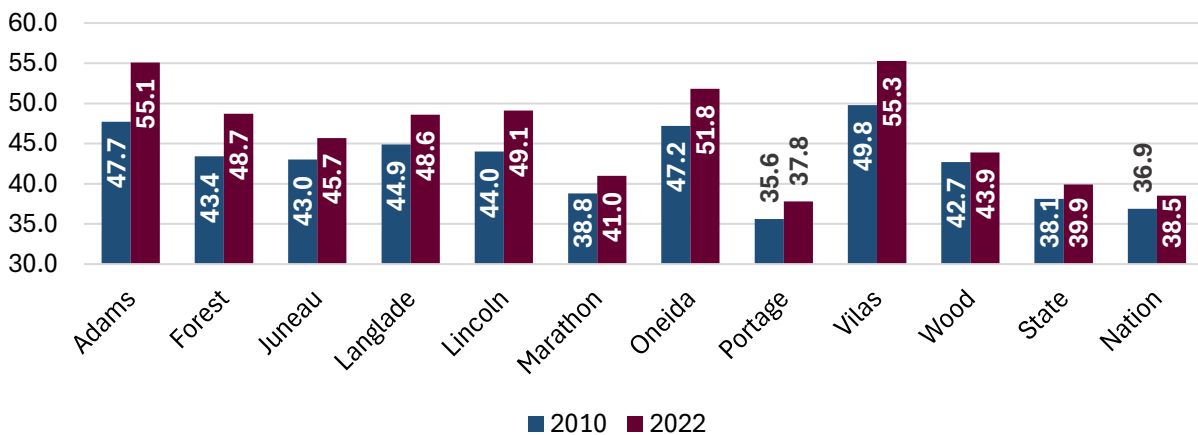
Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2022

Table 4: Age Characteristics

County	65 and Over 2010	65 and Over 2022	% Change	Under 18 2010	Under 18 2022	% Change
Adams	22.4%	30.5%	8.1%	17.2%	14.2%	-3.0%
Forest	20.1%	24.4%	4.3%	22.0%	19.4%	-2.6%
Juneau	17.3%	21.0%	3.7%	22.7%	19.8%	-2.9%
Langlade	19.6%	24.5%	4.9%	21.6%	19.4%	-2.2%
Lincoln	18.1%	22.7%	4.6%	22.3%	17.9%	-4.4%
Marathon	13.8%	18.3%	4.5%	24.9%	22.6%	-2.3%
Oneida	20.8%	26.9%	6.1%	18.9%	17.2%	-1.7%
Portage	12.3%	17.5%	5.2%	21.3%	18.9%	-2.4%
Vilas	24.9%	30.9%	6.0%	18.0%	16.7%	-1.3%
Wood	16.7%	21.1%	4.4%	23.1%	21.5%	-1.6%
Region	16.5%	21.4%	4.9%	22.3%	20.0%	-2.3%
State	13.4%	17.7%	4.3%	23.5%	21.6%	-1.9%
Nation	12.7%	16.5%	3.8%	24.4%	21.7%	-2.7%

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 & 2022

Figure 3: Median Age

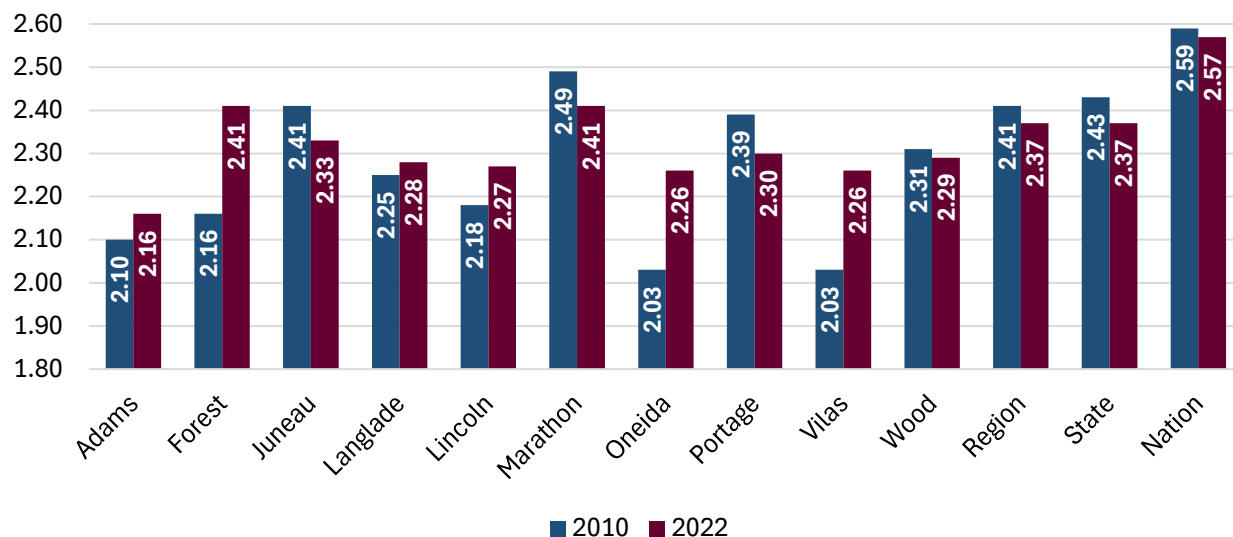


Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 & 2022

Households

There were 188,916 households in the Region in 2022, a 1.2 percent increase since 2010. The change in median household size varied between Counties. Across the State and Nation, household size is decreasing as seniors live longer and families have fewer children compared to the past. See Figure 4 and Table 5.

Figure 4: Average Household Size



Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 & 2022

Table 5: Total Households

County	2000	2010	2022	% Change 2000-2022	% Change 2010-2022
Adams	7,924	9,341	9,176	15.8%	-1.8%
Forest	4,028	4,182	3,723	-7.6%	-11.0%
Juneau	9,693	11,012	10,598	9.3%	-3.8%
Langlade	8,494	8,805	8,443	-0.6%	-4.1%
Lincoln	11,744	13,113	12,226	4.1%	-6.8%
Marathon	47,737	52,708	56,484	18.3%	7.2%
Oneida	15,332	17,475	16,417	7.1%	-6.1%
Portage	25,112	27,573	29,311	16.7%	6.3%
Vilas	9,084	10,560	10,651	17.3%	0.9%
Wood	30,131	31,979	31,887	5.8%	-0.3%
Region	169,279	186,748	188,916	11.6%	1.2%
State	2,084,544	2,274,611	2,425,488	16.4%	6.6%
Nation	105,539,122	114,235,996	125,736,353	19.1%	10.1%

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

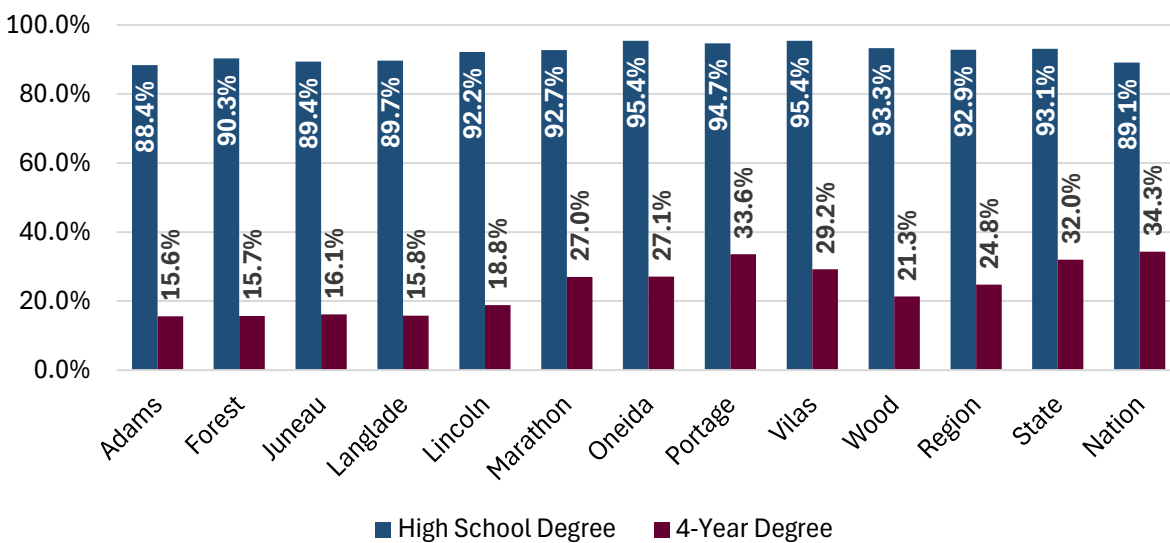
Changes in the number and size of households impacts transportation, education, housing, and healthcare needs in the future. It is possible to have a declining population in a community but still have growth in the total number of households, increasing housing demand, for example. An increase in households could also mean that there is increased enrollment at schools (although households are generally having fewer children). A decrease in household size could also suggest a higher share of seniors who may increase demand for healthcare services. Most of the Region's Counties had a decrease in the total number of households, except for Marathon, Portage, and Vilas Counties.

Education

Educational attainment is similar to statewide figures, with all Counties having a similar or higher rate of individuals with a high school diploma. Although the percentage of individuals with a 4-year degree is lower in all Counties compared to the national average, several Counties aren't far behind the statewide percentage, with Portage County having a higher rate of 4-year degree recipients than the statewide percentage. In general, the rate of high school diploma and 4-year degree recipients has increased over time.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 27 percent of jobs in the United States require a college education. However, other experts believe the percentage to be much higher. Nationally, 37.8 percent of the workforce has an associate degree or higher, which is slightly higher than in Portage County and the State of Wisconsin. Maintaining an educated workforce ensures that local employers can fill jobs that require special skill sets. See Figure 5.

Figure 5: Educational Attainment for Individuals Aged 25 and Over



Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 & 2022

Employment

In 2022, there were 227,418 workers in the Region, 218,915 of which were employed. Overall, the Region's unemployment rate was 3.7 percent, but this varied by County from 2.2 to 5.0 percent. A participation rate of 61.6 percent for those aged 16 and over reflects how many people of working age are working or seeking work. This decreased from 65.9 percent in 2010 as a result of a rising median age and an increase in retirements. Those who are retired or staying home to care for children, for example, are not considered part of the workforce. Portage and Marathon were the only Counties with a higher participation rate than State and national averages, which is partially due to many of the Region's Counties having a higher median age than the state and national median. The probability of being part of the workforce drops off significantly after age 55. See Table 6.

Table 6: Employment Characteristics

County	Population over 16 years of age	Labor Force	Number Employed	Participation rate	Unemployment Rate
Adams	18,184	8,636	8,202	47.5%	5.0%
Forest	7,608	3,937	3,779	51.7%	4.0%
Juneau	22,049	12,851	12,186	58.3%	4.2%
Langlade	16,238	9,405	8,948	57.9%	4.9%
Lincoln	24,036	14,181	13,493	59.0%	4.8%
Marathon	110,583	74,139	71,774	67.0%	3.1%
Oneida	32,148	17,187	16,809	53.5%	2.2%
Portage	58,513	38,982	37,680	66.6%	3.3%
Vilas	19,823	10,674	10,186	53.8%	4.6%
Wood	59,915	37,426	35,858	62.5%	4.2%
Region	369,097	227,418	218,915	61.6%	3.7%
State	4,764,779	3,129,606	3,020,890	65.7%	3.4%
Nation	266,411,973	169,093,585	158,913,204	63.5%	5.3%

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2022

Income

Median household income and per capita income are displayed in Table 7. Marathon County had a higher median household income than the statewide median, and Oneida and Vilas Counties had a higher per capita household income than statewide and national averages. Marathon's younger population might indicate a higher share of families in their prime working years, which results in a higher household income, whereas Oneida and Vilas' older populations may indicate more retired households, where smaller household sizes result in a higher per capita income. Across the Region, median household income rose between 34.0 percent and 53.1 percent, and per capita income rose between 35.5 percent and 52.7 percent. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, inflation rose by 35.4 percent between December 2010 and December 2022. Increases in wages vary by occupation, but the Region's lower cost of living helps make up for having lower wages than the national average.

Table 7: Income Characteristics

County	Median HH Income 2010	Median HH Income 2022	% Increase	Per Capita Income 2010	Per Capita Income 2022	% Increase
Adams	\$39,885	\$55,223	38.5%	\$21,917	\$32,223	47.0%
Forest	\$37,627	\$55,552	47.6%	\$20,578	\$30,310	47.3%
Juneau	\$45,664	\$63,455	39.0%	\$23,026	\$31,211	35.5%
Langlade	\$41,034	\$55,091	34.3%	\$22,025	\$32,989	49.8%
Lincoln	\$46,625	\$64,314	37.9%	\$23,793	\$35,558	49.4%
Marathon	\$53,471	\$73,248	37.0%	\$25,893	\$38,886	50.2%
Oneida	\$45,857	\$66,111	44.2%	\$28,085	\$40,086	42.7%
Portage	\$51,456	\$71,301	38.6%	\$24,873	\$37,990	52.7%
Vilas	\$41,631	\$63,726	53.1%	\$27,128	\$40,136	48.0%
Wood	\$47,204	\$63,273	34.0%	\$24,893	\$36,712	47.5%
State	\$51,598	\$72,458	40.4%	\$26,624	\$40,130	50.7%
Nation	\$51,914	\$75,149	44.8%	\$27,334	\$41,261	51.0%

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 & 2022

NCWRPC's 2015 Regional Livability Plan found that the Region's median household income decreased between 2000 and 2010. While this trend appeared to reverse between 2010 and 2022, inflation has persisted since 2022, and many of the same issues are expected to continue. This includes less disposable income and a desire for smaller, more affordable housing options. Rural areas are particularly vulnerable as the population ages because many seniors live on fixed income and have higher transportation costs due to living farther away from grocery stores, clinics, and other needs. Chapters later in this Plan address strategies to improve the regional economy, housing supply, transportation network, and other issues to ensure the Region remains a high-quality place to live as demographics rapidly shift.

2. Issues

A variety of issues were identified throughout the planning process. Many of these were brought up during the series of planning meetings, others were taken from existing documents, and some were taken from the public survey. The next nine chapters of this plan will list the issues that relate to those chapters:

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 2. Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Resources | 6. Economic Development |
| 3. Housing | 7. Land Use |
| 4. Utilities and Community Facilities | 8. Public Health |
| 5. Transportation | 9. Intergovernmental Cooperation |
| | 10. Implementation |

By identifying issues and examining relevant data, the chapters describe the strategies and programs available to address them, concluding with a series of Goals, Objectives, and Policies. The overall purpose of identifying these at a regional level is to inform local comprehensive plans as they are developed.

3. Regional Demographics Summary

The Region has grown since 2000 but at a slower rate than the State of Wisconsin and at a much slower rate than the Nation overall. Growth has also been slower in recent decades, even declining in many of the Region's municipalities. An aging population and smaller household sizes will affect the local economy and services, but an affordable cost of living, variety of urban and rural landscapes, and educational and career opportunities may attract those looking to relocate from higher cost areas. Evaluating this data in this chapter ensures that the planning process will accommodate changing demand for housing, schools, healthcare, and other aspects that contribute to the Region's high quality of life.

4. Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Each of the following comprehensive plan chapters will conclude with a set of goals, objectives, and policies, which will be used to guide the development of local comprehensive plans. They are defined as follows:

Goals

Broad statements that express general public priorities about how the Region should approach development issues during the next 20 years. These goals are based on key issues, opportunities and problems that affect the community.

Objectives

More specific than goals and are usually attainable through planning and implementation activities. The accomplishment of an objective contributes to the fulfillment of a goal.

Policies

Rules or courses of action used to ensure plan implementation and to accomplish the goals and objectives. Policies are intended to be used by decision-makers on a regular basis.

Chapter 2: Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Resources

Background

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.

Previous Statewide and Regional Plans and Studies

Land Legacy Report 2006 This Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) report is a comprehensive inventory of the special places are critical to meet future conservation and outdoor recreation needs for the next 50 years. It recommends protection of these places using various funding programs and incentives.

NCWRPC Regional Livability Plan 2015 This former Regional comprehensive plan supports natural resources and outdoor recreation 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 (2025) 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 2016-2025 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.

1. Issues

Land Fragmentation

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.

Resiliency

Natural hazards like flooding and severe weather, as well as unpredictable weather patterns are expected to continue to impact both rural and urban areas of the Region.

Water Quality

Land use impacts affect the quantity and quality of both ground and surface water throughout the Region. PFAS, pharmaceuticals, manganese, microplastics, nitrates, and phosphorus are a few examples of emerging contaminants for ground and surface water.

Watershed Planning

The Upper Wisconsin River Watershed covers most of the Region. Since water can become a scarce resource, NCWRPC is exploring basin-level planning that examines water quantity, quality, and future demand.

2. Natural Resources Inventory and Trends

Undeveloped land is abundant in the Region, with 92.2 percent of its land area consisting of agriculture or woodlands. These areas are developable when steep slopes, wetlands, and floodplains are not present. Surface water, wetlands, and floodplains cover 36.4 percent of the Region. Note that floodplains and wetlands are not considered land uses, and they overlap land use categories like agriculture or woodlands. See Table 20 and Maps 3 and 8 later in this plan for more information. Below is a summary of the Region's landscape and its characteristics.

Geography, Geology, and Topography

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) 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 in the southern portion of the Region.

Soils

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has soil surveys for each county. The survey contains maps of soil characteristics' limitations and hazards related to development, farming, forestry, and outdoor recreation development.

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. See Map 3: Natural Features.

Air Quality

The DNR 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 are regulations used to evaluate air quality. Therefore, the entire Region is in an attainment zone, meaning there are no additional regulations needed to remedy air pollution issues at this time. Since 2008, EPA has granted the Forest County Potawatomi Community a Class 1 Air Designation that protects air quality within a 62-mile radius of the Community's parcels in the Towns of Wabeno, Blackwell, and Lincoln.

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 DNR 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. DNR'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.

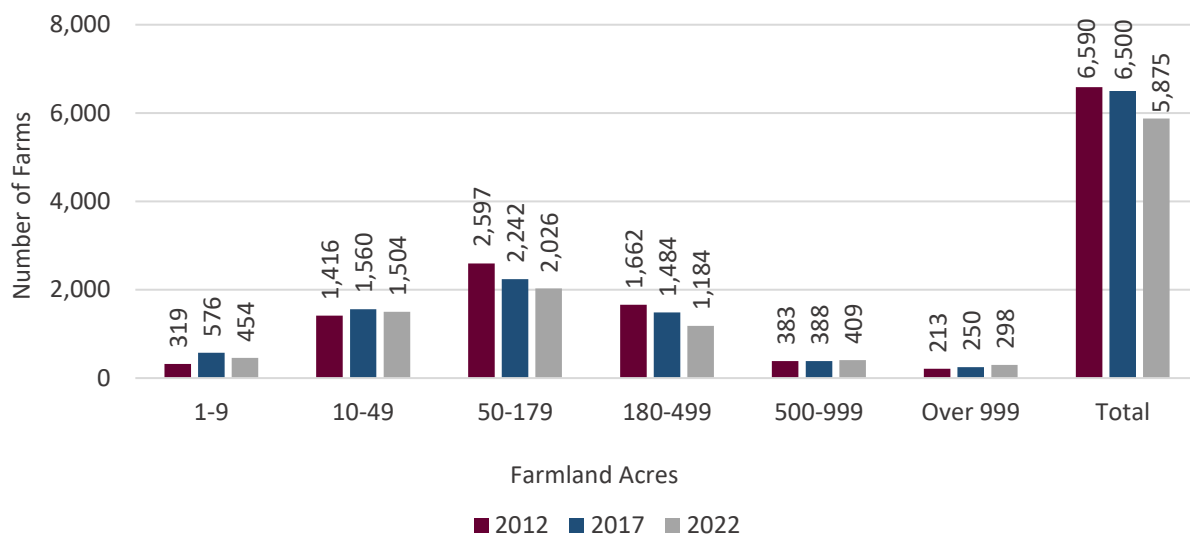
3. Agriculture Inventory and Trends

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 weather, 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 soil, groundwater is the most important agricultural resource as many crops rely on irrigation systems.

Figure 6 tracks the change in farmland size characteristics over time. Since 2012, the total number of farms in the Region has decreased, and the number of farms 500 acres and over has increased. This indicates that smaller farms, which are often owned by smaller companies or individual families, are likely being purchased by larger farm operations. But during this time, there has also been renewed interest in small-scale agricultural activities on residential properties, such as beekeeping, raising chickens, or growing food. In general, there continues to be a variety of producers in the Region with varying needs and approaches. Overall, there are over one million acres in agricultural use throughout the Region, with forty percent of the acreage being in Marathon County, a major milk producer. See Chapter 7: Land Use for more information.

Figure 6: Number of Farms by Farmland Acreage



Source: USDA Census of Agriculture

Agricultural Enterprise Areas

As part of the State of Wisconsin's Farmland Preservation Program, landowners and local governments can petition for an Agricultural Enterprise Area (AEA) designation administered by the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP). Landowners in these areas who sign a farmland preservation agreement can receive up to \$10 per acre in tax credits. Currently, the Region has three AEAs: Evergreen-Wolf River and Antigo Flats AEAs in Langlade County, and Heart of America's Dairyland AEA, which is partially in Marathon County.

4. Cultural Resources Inventory and Trends

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 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. Like 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.

5. Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Resource Summary

North Central Wisconsin's abundant natural, agricultural, and cultural resources provide aesthetic, quality of life, and economic benefits for its residents. But development pressure, extreme weather events, and other threats will require strategies to maintain, enhance, and expand them over time.

6. Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Resource Programs

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

- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
- Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
- Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)
- Water Bank and Watershed Programs
- Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) Program
- Watershed Rehabilitation Program (REHAB)
- Wetland Mitigation Banking Program (WMBP)

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

- Aquatic Habitat Protection Program
- Drinking Water and Groundwater Program
- Endangered Resources Program
- Fisheries Management Program
- Managed Forest Law
- Natural Heritage Conservation
- Nonpoint Source Program
- Parks and Recreation Management Program
- Private Forestry
- Wildlife Management Program

Extension – University of Wisconsin – Madison: Discovery Farms Program, Nutrient Reduction Programs

Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS): State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)

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

- Commercial Nitrogen Optimization
- Farmland Preservation Planning
- Nutrient Management Farmer Education
- Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants
- Soil and Water Resource Management

7. Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Goals

1. Preserve and protect the Region's landscape, environmental resources, and sensitive lands while encouraging healthy communities.
2. Monitor and mitigate health impacts from environmental contamination.
3. Expand and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities.
4. Encourage planning and development of land uses that create or preserve varied and unique urban and rural communities.
5. Monitor irregular and/or extreme weather events and local impacts.

Objectives

1. Protect natural landscapes and ecosystems in the Region by accurately mapping wetlands, forestlands, agricultural, and open space.
2. Protect sensitive lands from overdevelopment to minimize adverse effects of erosion, pollution, and soil and habitat degradation.
3. Protect prime agricultural areas for continued food production.
4. Encourage communities to explore renewable energy.

Policies

1. Maintain digital existing land use coverage.
2. Ensure that open space is accessible and appealing to people of all ages and abilities.
3. Target land conservation programs to locations with the highest priority for preserving community character.
4. Protect and restore riparian areas in high priority watersheds.
5. Encourage land donation or acquisition for conservation easements.
6. Encourage land use policies that minimize negative environmental impacts from developments.
7. Create controls to protect steep slopes from development.
8. Create policies for developments already existing on sensitive lands to lessen impacts on the environment and public safety.
9. Restore and redevelop historic properties and districts.
10. Integrate existing community character into the design of community improvements.
11. Encourage the registration of historical buildings on state and federal registers.
12. Inventory cultural assets, historical sites, and related assets and identify priority sites for preservation.
13. Explore preparing a watershed-scale approach to planning in the Upper Wisconsin River Basin.

Chapter 3: Housing

Background

This chapter evaluates opportunities for improved and expanded 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. NCWRPC-led housing studies include Adams, Oneida, Juneau, and Wood Counties, the Wausau Metropolitan Area, the Grow North Region Housing Study, and the Centergy Region Housing Study.

1. 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. Due to economics, new housing is typically for higher incomes, with lower prices being less common.

Availability: A lack of inventory also increases prices and reduces the choices of available housing units.

Housing Condition: Inflation and increased housing prices have impacted savings, causing homeowners to delay major repairs that can lead to issues like mold, radon, and other maintenance problems.

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.

2. Inventory and Trends

Housing units include single-family homes and individual units of multifamily buildings. 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 8: 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 9 and 10.

Table 9: 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 10: 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 10 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 11 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.



Table 11: Housing Demand Indicators

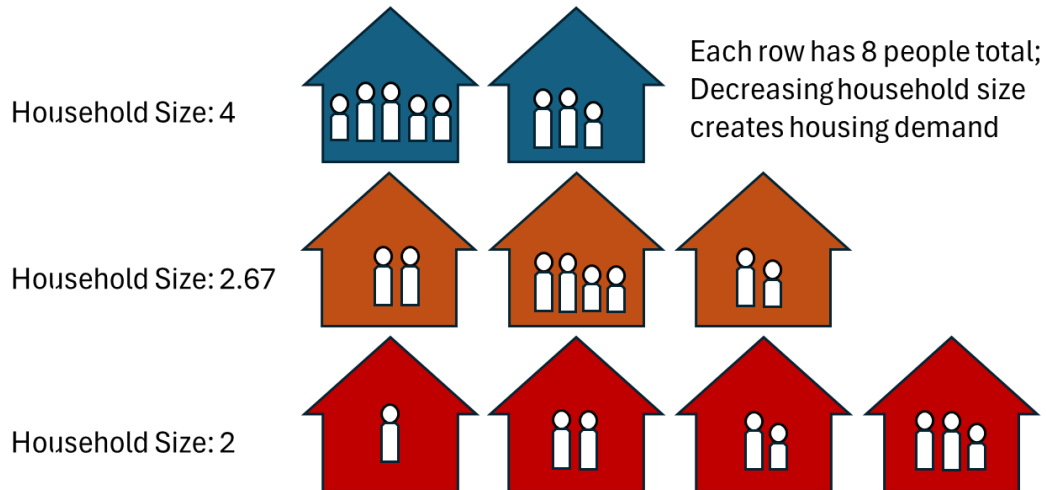
County	Median Age 2010	Median Age 2022	Average Household Size 2010	Average Household Size 2022
Adams	47.7	55.1	2.1	2.2
Forest	43.4	48.7	2.2	2.4
Juneau	43.0	45.7	2.4	2.3
Langlade	44.9	48.6	2.3	2.3
Lincoln	44.0	49.1	2.2	2.3
Marathon	38.8	41.0	2.5	2.4
Oneida	47.2	51.8	2.0	2.3
Portage	35.6	37.8	2.4	2.3
Vilas	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

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 make the approval process lengthy and expensive. Finally, even when a given location’s population is not increasing, housing demand can increase as household size decreases. See Figure 7.

The Region also 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, limiting availability and increasing prices. See Table 12.

Figure 7: How Average Household Size Affects Housing Demand



Source: NCWRPC

Table 12: 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

The Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) produced household growth forecasts in 2013. By 2022, it was clear that most counties had not grown as much as initially projected. Therefore, Table 13 uses DOA's projections, but adds or subtracts the difference between the 2020 projection and the number of estimated 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 13: Projected Demand

County	2020 Projected	2022 ACS	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: DOA, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2022, 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.

Examples of Strategies in Wisconsin

Jefferson, Sheboygan, and Washington Counties all have housing funds that utilize a mix of private and public funding sources to spur new construction. The goal is to attract more workers by adding more single-family and multifamily housing suitable for these incomes. See each County's website for more information. Additional communities that incentivize households to build new homes at a discount include the Cities of Berlin, Hillsboro, Pittsville, Shullsburg, and Waterloo, where land or financial incentives are offered on certain lots. Finally, many larger cities in Wisconsin use TIF, land banking, land trusts, educational programs, home replacement programs, and other strategies. When combined with programs listed below, these examples can inspire similar solutions that can be used at a local, county, or regional level in North Central Wisconsin. The Region should continue to work with State and federal partners, such as WEDC, WHEDA, Centergy, Inc., Grow North, USDA, and others as described in the housing programs section below.

3. Housing Summary

The Region's housing is dominated by single-family homes, and housing costs are lower than statewide and national expenses. There is also a large share of seasonal or recreational housing units. But rising costs, an aging population, and limited supply means that various strategies and programs are needed to maintain and retrofit existing housing stock while expanding housing options for all income levels and abilities.

4. Housing Programs

Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA)

- 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.
- Focus on Energy (rebates on energy efficient upgrades)



5. Housing Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Goals:

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

Objectives:

1. Ensure a wide mix of housing is available to residents of all income levels.
2. Stabilize and upgrade existing housing stock.
3. Provide support for an aging population to successfully age at home in their communities.
4. Pursue new strategies to address housing issues, such as housing studies, and existing or emerging programs.

Policies:

1. Promote increasing the number of housing units using a variety of housing styles and prices, including smaller homes to accommodate smaller household sizes.
2. Promote mixed-income housing developments and a broad range of housing choice throughout the Region, including affordable assisted living and long-term care.
3. Locate new affordable housing near jobs, transportation, services, and healthcare facilities.
4. Identify high priority sites located close to existing job and town centers and promote the development of workforce and affordable housing in these locations.
5. Encourage the public, private, and non-profit sectors to work together to increase the number of affordable homes near job centers, recreation opportunities, and community facilities.
6. Consider changing ordinances that make it more costly to develop multifamily housing.
7. Increase the number of multifamily housing units in the Region.
8. Provide incentives to homebuilders and developers for developing affordable market rate housing.
9. Invest in housing preservation, rehabilitation, and energy efficiency.
10. Support aging-in-place and ADA-accessible design, education, and advocacy for both new construction and existing building renovations.
11. Support public-private efforts, including but not limited to a Regional housing fund and/or Regional housing studies, to address the gap between construction costs and Regional incomes
12. Monitor housing programs and assist communities with maintaining updated comprehensive plans and housing studies to meet the requirements of programs and developers.
13. Consider loan funds, assistance programs, and other tools and strategies available at the local or Regional level and encourage partnerships between local, Regional, and State housing organizations.
14. Update municipal and county comprehensive plan housing chapters and zoning ordinances to maintain eligibility for programs available from WHEDA and other organizations.

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 opportunities, 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.

1. 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. Although the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) standard speed of 100 Mbps (upload) and 20 Mbps (download) may not be feasible everywhere, there is an opportunity to expand infrastructure and improve internet service.

Aging Population: Hospitals, nursing homes, social institutions, nutrition programs, EMS facilities, etc. ensure seniors can continue to live in the Region. As school enrollment declines, school districts must manage facilities and student transportation in response.

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.

Water Quality: Concerns over water quality discussed in Chapter 2 ultimately affect water utilities.

Emergency Services: Ongoing retirements and a shrinking workforce require strategies to recruit and maintain personnel for police, fire, emergency medical services, and other services. Departments that formerly relied on volunteer labor also may have to increase budgets to hire paid staff, impacting budgets.

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.

2. 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. DNR 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 DNR'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 has cemeteries, which are operated locally.

County and Municipal Facilities: Typically, each town, village, city, and county has a primary public building to house government functions and other public meetings. Many 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, 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 dispatch centers. 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 Emplify 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: In the Region, The DNR 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 the 400, Bearskin, Green Circle Mountain-Bay, Tomorrow River, and Wolf River State Trails. Federal facilities include Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Necedah National Wildlife Refuge, the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, and the Great Pinery Heritage Waterway. There are also additional State, federal, county, and local public facilities, including 128 state natural areas and several school forests. Additionally, every county in the Region (except Portage) has a county forest managed for timber production and outdoor recreation. Finally, nine accredited land trusts operate in the Region.

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, and it has additional branches in the Cities of Marshfield and Wausau.

Energy and Telecommunications

The Public Service Commission and American Transmission Company have maps of electric, natural gas, telephone, and broadband service territories online, as well as pipeline locations and transmission lines.

3. Utilities and Community Facilities 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.

4. Utilities and Community Facilities Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Goals

1. Support infrastructure that ensures the future availability of a skilled and flexible workforce.
2. Support the infrastructure, public services, and facilities needed for economic development
3. Promote or explore consolidation of services to provide high quality public services affordably.

Objectives

1. Enhance education and workforce readiness, ensuring residents have the education and skills needed to reach their full potential.
2. Connect workers with institutions that provide education, training, mentorship, and apprenticeship opportunities.
3. Provide quality Broadband options to all communities while improving download/upload speeds.
4. Assist communities in the development and maintenance of police, fire, emergency services, water, sewer, schools, libraries, parks, utilities and other similar services and facilities.
5. Encourage local units of government to utilize the existing capacity of services and facilities to be used before new services and facilities are provided.

Policies

1. Provide reliable broadband infrastructure in all communities allowing residents to participate in online courses and programs.
2. Support local school districts, universities, medical colleges, and technical schools to ensure a skilled workforce as younger generations comprise a smaller share of the overall population.
3. Increase cellphone coverage to 100% of area.
4. Collaborate as a Region to create co-op broadband programs.
5. Continue to negotiate with major broadband companies to provide service to rural areas.
6. Monitor emerging water contaminants and programs that help address them.
7. Assist with planning efforts and/or grant applications for enhancing public facilities and services.

Chapter 5: Transportation

Background

Previous Planning Efforts

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) 2021 is the current federal transportation program that authorizes up to \$108 billion to support federal public transportation programs, including \$91 billion in guaranteed funding. It also reauthorizes surface transportation programs for FY 2022-2026. Goals include safety, fleet and transit modernization, and equity.

Connect 2050: Let's Connect Wisconsin 2022 is the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's (WisDOT) long-range transportation plan for the State. Adopted in 2022, the plan addresses all forms of transportation over a 20-year planning horizon.

Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan 2018 assesses bicycling and walking conditions, identifies potential trails and route user groups, and describes policies and programs to assist local governments with bicycling and walking to promote connectivity throughout North Central Wisconsin. Goals include mobility, functionality, safety, and connectivity.

Regional Livability Plan 2015 addresses three issues: modes of transportation to work, driver age, and maintenance costs. The Plan's goals are providing transportation access to all ages and abilities, funding transportation maintenance and expansion, and enhancing the economy with airports and freight rail.

State Trails Network Plan 2003 identifies potential trail corridors that link existing trails, public lands, natural features, and communities. Former rail corridors are especially useful for completing these trails.

County-Level Public Transit Plans are updated by NCWRPC for each County in the Region every 5 years.

1. Issues

- A need for bicycle and pedestrian improvements
- Dispersed population in rural areas
- Weight limits on roads
- Rail and roadway conflicts
- Funding transportation maintenance and improvements
- An aging population's ability to continue depending on driving
- Transporting students as school enrollment declines and school facilities consolidate



2. Inventory and Trends

The Region's transportation system is comprised of a road network, rail lines and yards, airports, and private landing strips. See Map 5.

Road Network

Roads are classified in two ways: 1) by jurisdiction and 2) by function. The jurisdictional classification indicates who owns or is responsible for the roadway. The functional classification identifies the role or function the roadway plays in moving traffic.

Functional Classification

At the Regional level, the functional classification system is divided into four main categories as follows:

Principal Arterials (1,037 miles) serve interstate and interregional trips. The function of a principal arterial is to provide efficient mobility for through-traffic trips, with no or limited land use access.

Minor Arterials (902 miles) serve moderate-sized communities and other major traffic generators, providing intra-regional and inter-area traffic movements. Minor arterials also provide mobility for through traffic but typically have lower traffic volumes with fewer restrictions on access to the system.

Collectors (3,713 miles) collect traffic from local roads and provide links to all remaining smaller communities, locally important traffic generators and higher function roads.

Local Roads (11,311 total miles) provide access to adjacent land and provide for travel over relatively short distances. All roads not classified as arterials or collectors are local roads.

Jurisdictional Classification

The Region's roads fall into three jurisdictional classifications: interstate/U.S./State, county, and city/village/town local roads. The Region's approximately 17,000-mile road network is comprised of 1,889 miles of interstate, U.S., and State highways, 2,858 miles of county highways, and 12,173 of miles of local roads. There are also around 265 miles of other roads, such as forest roads, fire lanes, and other roads not used for general travel purposes. Where road jurisdictions overlap, the mileage is counted toward the higher class to avoid overstating the total miles of pavement within the system.

Interstate, U.S., and State Highways are three types of highways that are managed by WisDOT. Interstate Highways (ISH) 39 and 90/94 and U.S. Highways (USH) 51, 45, 10, and 8 serve as principal arterial roads along with USH 12, a minor arterial. State Trunk Highways (STHs) are primarily two-lane routes with some four-lane sections in urban areas. East-west State highways that are principal arterials include STH 29, 54, 70, 64, 21, and 82, and north-south highways include STH 13, 34, 55, 80, and 97. There are many additional State highways that are minor arterials with two- and three-digit names. Interstate, U.S., and State Highways are particularly useful for transporting freight.

County trunk highways (CTH) are primarily collector roads that link communities to each other while distributing traffic to the arterial system. They also serve agricultural and forestry areas.

Local Roads are maintained by towns, villages and cities, and they provide access to local land uses including residential, commercial/industrial and recreational areas.

Roadway Conditions and Design Standards

NCWRPC utilizes the Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating System (PASER) system, which ranks surfaces from "1" (very poor condition) to "10" (excellent condition). Roads and bridges are inspected every two years and submitted to the Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads (WISLR).

Counties prepare six-year highway improvement plans to address conditions and design standards. Recommended design standards vary based on their functional classification, and proper access management improves safety and traffic flow. WisDOT manages access to all State trunk highways, while counties and municipalities can adopt standards using subdivision and driveway ordinances.

Road Network Characteristics

Daily Traffic: Table 14 summarizes vehicle miles traveled (VMT), which is the estimated total of all mileage driven by all cars in each county. VMT has increased since 2003 (10.9 percent), but at a much slower pace since 2012 (3.0 percent). This is partially due to an increase in median age as older drivers typically drive less.

Table 14: Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), Crashes, and Fatalities by County

County	Average Crashes per Year	Average Fatalities per Year	VMT 2003	VMT 2012	VMT 2022	% Change 2003-2022	% Change 2012-2022
Adams	427	5	246,000,000	322,505,970	232,336,735	-5.6%	-28.0%
Forest	190	1	125,000,000	212,551,545	154,041,170	23.2%	-27.5%
Juneau	790	4	752,000,000	725,308,290	785,184,715	4.4%	8.3%
Langlade	464	3	228,000,000	271,739,215	224,475,365	-1.5%	-17.4%
Lincoln	755	6	462,000,000	443,427,550	592,282,945	28.2%	33.6%
Marathon	3,077	12	1,561,000,000	1,649,954,395	1,778,381,105	13.9%	7.8%
Oneida	940	5	475,000,000	585,785,945	533,436,550	12.3%	-8.9%
Portage	1,424	6	811,000,000	878,907,955	965,115,480	19.0%	9.8%
Vilas	526	2	342,000,000	388,497,970	337,203,425	-1.4%	-13.2%
Wood	1,268	9	683,000,000	638,756,935	700,893,805	2.6%	9.7%
Region	9,861	35	5,685,000,000	6,117,435,770	6,303,351,295	10.9%	3.0%

Source: WisDOT

Crashes & Safety: Table 14 also summarizes the average crashes per year (data from 2015-2020) and average fatalities per year (data from 2019-2023) using the most recent data available from WisDOT. There was a decrease in both crashes and fatalities for most counties and the Region as a whole over these periods.

Commuting Patterns: Table 15 summarizes the direction people commute to work. Typical of a rural area, many residents commute outside of their county of residence for work, with more people leaving the Region each day than entering. Marathon and Wood Counties see more inbound commuters than outbound commuters.

Commuting Modes: The share of each mode of transportation is similar among the Region's counties and similar to Regional and statewide figures. In 2022, 78.6 percent of the Region's residents drove alone, 7.6 percent carpoolled, 0.2 percent used public transportation, 2.4 percent walked, 0.5 percent cycled, 9.8

percent worked from home, and 0.9 percent used other forms of transportation. The share of workers working from home has more than doubled since 2012 (4.02 percent).

Table 15: Commute Characteristics

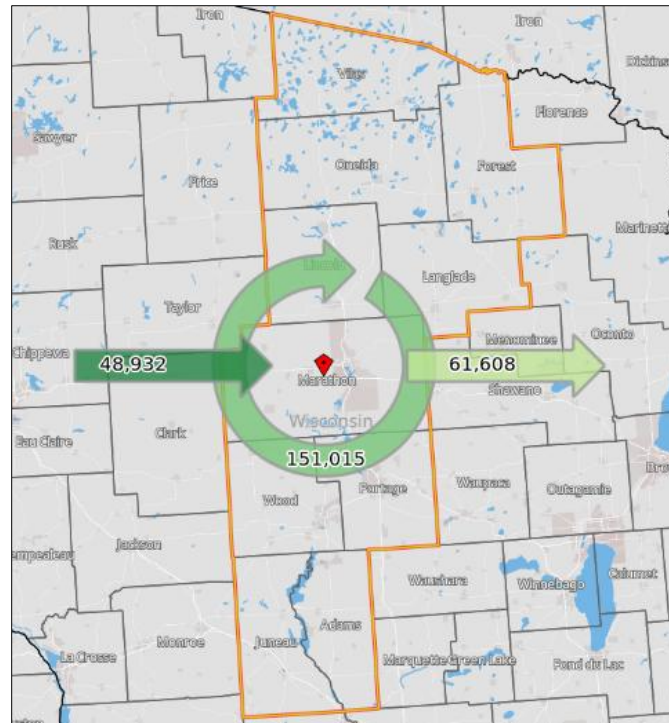
	Adams	Forest	Juneau	Langlade	Lincoln	Marathon	Oneida	Portage	Vilas	Wood	Region
Live and Work in County	2,040	1,959	4,484	4,233	5,376	43,395	8,063	17,135	4,225	18,164	149,101
Live in County, Work Outside	5,641	1,885	6,509	5,016	9,029	24,549	9,367	16,288	4,728	17,379	60,364
Work in County, Live Outside	2,393	999	4,205	2,856	4,621	27,109	6,400	15,535	3,352	19,385	46,828
Net Gain/Loss of Workers	-3,248	-886	-2,304	-2,160	-4,408	2,560	-2,967	-753	-1,376	2,006	-13,536
Workers per Car	1.05	1.06	1.05	1.03	1.04	1.06	1.06	1.05	1.04	1.05	1.05
Average commute (min.)	29.1	24.0	24.4	22.6	22.2	19.1	21.8	20.8	18.8	22.1	21.2
% of workers with no access to a car	1.5%	1.8%	1.3%	1.1%	1.6%	1.4%	1.1%	1.6%	1.8%	1.9%	1.5%

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2022

Commute Flow: 151,015 people work and reside in the Region. The Region attracts 48,932 workers who commute every day from outside the Region, and 61,608 of the Region’s residents leave the Region each day to commute for work. This could be due to the Region’s location between Wisconsin’s larger metropolitan areas, such as Madison, Eau Claire, La Crosse, and the Fox Cities. Residents may be choosing to live in the Region due to its lower cost of living while commuting to these areas that have a higher density of jobs. See Figure 8.

Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure: The Wisconsin Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (WEVI) program provides funding for EV chargers in federally designated alternative fuel corridors. This includes Interstate Highways 39 and 90-94, U.S. Highways 8 and 51, and State Highway 29 in the Region.

Figure 8: Regional Commute Flow



Source: U.S. Census-on-the-Map 2021

Network Users

Trucking: WisDOT designates truck routes based on their ability to accommodate different truck lengths and keep trucks out of quiet residential areas. Regional maps are available on WisDOT’s website.

Long Distance Intercity Bus Service: Lamers Bus Lines connects Stevens Point, Wausau, and Wisconsin Rapids to the Fox Cities, and there are WisDOT-supported routes connecting the Region to Madison, Eau Claire, and Green Bay.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities: The Wisconsin State Bicycle Map classifies State and county roads by how suitable their configuration and conditions are for cycling. Additionally, NCWRPC’s 2018 Regional Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan recommends bicycle connections that improve connectivity between communities. DNR manages the Hillsboro, Elroy-Sparta, 400, Tomorrow River, Mountain-Bay, Wolf River, Nicolet, and Bearskin State Trails, while local infrastructure is implemented by Counties and municipalities. Finally, the statewide Ice Age National Scenic Hiking Trail crosses the Region.

Transit & Transportation Systems: Municipalities, Counties, and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) administer several transportation options such as fixed bus routes, shared ride taxis, senior transportation, and ADA-accessible transportation. Table 16 displays ridership by transit system, with 2018 having peak ridership in the Region. Recently, ridership has declined significantly except for in the Village of Plover and City of Mauston. This is due to more people retiring, working from home, decreasing population in some areas, and impacts from COVID-19.

Table 16: Transit Ridership

Transit System	1980	1990	2000	2012	2018	2022	% Change 2018-2022
Forest County Potawatomi*	-	-	-	-	1,267	968	-23.6%
Lac du Flambeau*	-	-	-	-	33,520	16,678	-50.2%
Marshfield**	30,747	98,807	89,126	84,870	93,904	88,868	-5.4%
Mauston**	-	14,081	26,708	19,385	21,542	22,199	3.0%
Merrill	80,692	67,923	69,818	73,209	61,158	45,121	-26.2%
Oneida-Vilas Transit+	-	-	-	-	35,132	27,518	-21.7%
Plover**	-	1,946	10,569	21,688	24,597	58,760	138.9%
Rhineland (ended 2025)	38,907	47,012	29,768	71,338	83,028	23,051	-72.2%
Stevens Point	152,706	138,916	97,224	283,096	238,472	129,214	-45.8%
Wausau	1,093,053	731,955	749,025	633,638	507,200	341,157	-32.7%
Wisconsin Rapids**	30,323	59,494	74,856	104,072	94,452	77,259	-18.2%
Region	1,426,428	1,160,134	1,147,094	1,291,296	1,194,272	830,793	-30.4%

Source: National Transit Database. Symbols: *tribal, **shared-ride taxi, +multi-county

Other Transportation Modes

Rail: Fox Valley & Lake Superior, Canadian National, Union Pacific, and Canadian Pacific Kansas City operate rail lines in the Region. NCWRPC supports the Northwoods Rail Transit Commission, an organization dedicated to improving rail service for northern Wisconsin and Upper Michigan.

Water Transportation: No commercial water transportation is available within the Region. In 2023, the Great Pinery Heritage Waterway opened as a water-based recreational corridor on the Wisconsin, Eau Claire, and Big Rib Rivers in Oneida, Lincoln, Marathon, and Portage Counties.

Airports: General Aviation Airports in the Region are in Marshfield, Wisconsin Rapids, Adams-Friendship, Antigo, Boulder Junction, Crandon, Eagle River, Manitowish Waters, Merrill, Minocqua-Woodruff, New Lisbon, Necedah, Stevens Point, Three Lakes, Tomahawk, and Wausau. Rhineland-Oneida County Airport (RHI) and Central Wisconsin Airport (CWA) in Marathon County are the Region's two commercial airports. Data for these airports is found in Table 17. Note that COVID-19 significantly impacted figures for 2021.

Table 17: Commercial Airport Statistics

Airport	Air Carrier Enplanements			Aircraft Operations			Emplaned Freight (lbs.)		
	2012	2019	2021	2012	2019	2021	2012	2019	2021
CWA	120,637	141,123	57,163	15,236	13,574	13,592	521,788	619,262	1,763,711
RHI	11,353	27,203	13,654	736	793	925	871,615	1,420,686	861,321

Source: WisDOT

Other Modes of Travel: Other modes within the Region include snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), utility task vehicles (UTVs), horses, cross-country skis, and others. Though they are not addressed in this plan, trail locations and crossings must be considered when planning other transportation facilities.

3. Transportation Summary

North Central Wisconsin's transportation system is characterized by decreasing growth in vehicle traffic and a decrease in overall transit ridership. As the Region's population ages and concerns over transportation funding continue, strategies must ensure preservation of the existing system and expansion of transportation options that serve all ages, household budgets, and abilities.

4. Transportation Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Goals

1. Provide and improve transportation access to people of all ages and abilities to ensure lifelong mobility and accessibility.
2. Fund the maintenance and expansion of the transportation system.
3. Enhance the Regional economy by supporting airports, freight rail, and intermodal freight opportunities.

Objectives

1. Assess and improve the infrastructure, feasibility, and safety of a Regional multimodal transportation system that includes alternatives to driving such as carpooling, public transit, walking, cycling, and ride sharing (Uber, Lyft, etc.).
2. Continue maintaining, upgrading, and modernizing existing streets, bridges, rail, freight, and air infrastructure to ensure safety and reliability while exploring alternative funding sources for transportation.
3. Support infrastructure that accommodates emerging electric vehicles (EVs) as described in the Wisconsin Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (WEVI) program.

Policies

1. Create more bicycle and pedestrian routes and connections between destinations.
2. Enhance the safety and user-friendliness of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.
3. Support bike share programs, bicycle parking, and programs that improve bicycle access for low-income households.
4. Support opportunities for improved education and enforcement regarding traffic and parking laws for motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians. This includes emerging technology such as e-bikes, autonomous cars, and other new modes of transportation.
5. Assess existing demand and plan for alternative forms of transportation that serve seniors, children, and other populations who cannot drive.
6. Support innovations in transportation such as ride sharing (Uber, Lyft, etc.), park-and-ride lots, Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) fuel stations, and electric vehicle (EV) charging stations.
7. Promote multimodal streets that safely accommodate buses, bicycles, parking, pedestrians, transit, and vehicles.
8. Incorporate streetscaping, traffic calming, and safety features such as green infrastructure, ADA-accessibility, landscaping, signage, and lane reconfigurations where appropriate.
9. Explore alternative funding sources (gas tax, registration fees, etc.) and road surface materials (concrete, gravel, pavers, etc.) to ensure the long-term sustainability of maintaining, repairing, and funding the Region's roads.

10. Support the use and expansion of CWA and RHI airports for passengers and freight by encouraging additional connections and destinations.
11. Support the expansion of rail for freight in the Region while assessing the feasibility of passenger rail use.
12. Locate industrial parks near airports and rail lines and identify locations for multimodal, intermodal, and/or transloading facilities.



Chapter 6: Economic Development

Background

This chapter examines the Region’s economy and compares it to statewide and national trends, followed by a series of economic development recommendations and local, Regional, State, and federal programs.

Previous Plans and Studies

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2021 The Region is designated by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) as an Economic Development District (EDD). As part of the designation, NCWRPC prepares a CEDS every five years that summarizes past efforts, establishes goals, and identifies a work program. This is the overall economic development plan for the Region.

North Central Wisconsin Regional Entrepreneurship Assessment & Strategy 2023 This project includes a Regional business survey, an analysis of existing conditions for entrepreneurs, and a series of recommendations that led to the creation of [NCWRPC’s online Entrepreneurship Portal](#).

North Central Wisconsin Regional Recovery Plan 2022 This plan guides economic stabilization, recovery, and resiliency efforts in the Region following the COVID-19 Pandemic and future economic shocks that could occur. It identifies best-practice strategies that help economic stabilization and recovery, improving the Region’s economic resilience.

North Central Region Industrial Park Inventory, Absorption, and Needs Study 2022 This study tracks the rate of industrial park space development in the Region and provides projections for industrial land demand over the next decades. Included are maps of each industrial park.

Regional Livability Plan (RLP) 2015 The Region’s former comprehensive plan addresses three economic development issues: labor force availability, wages, and broadband.

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.

1. Issues

- An aging workforce, retirements, and the need for a skilled and flexible workforce
- Unpredictable weather impacts to agriculture, outdoor recreation, and financial resiliency
- The need for broadband expansion
- Childcare availability and affordability
- Unknown future of the forest products industry
- Limited access to active rail lines
- Artificial Intelligence (AI), automation, and their unknown future impact on the economy
- The increase in flexible, hybrid, and remote work and its impact on commercial real estate, local businesses, community facilities, and job recruitment strategies
- Inflation’s impact on businesses, County and municipal budgets, household finances, and growing wealth gaps between households of different income levels

2. Inventory and Trends

Chapter 1 discussed how the Region is growing, but at a much slower rate than the State of Wisconsin and the nation, and DOA anticipates that its population will peak in 2035. However, many of the nation's fastest growing areas are facing water shortages, natural hazards, high living costs, and other factors that reduce quality of life. North Central Wisconsin's abundance of good schools, proximity to hospitals, natural resources, and relatively affordable living could result in future population growth.

Economic Analysis

This section uses Location Quotient (LQ), estimated and projected number of jobs, and average earnings to provide detailed information on the Region's economy.

Location Quotient identifies which industries exist at a higher or lower concentration compared to State and national averages. LQ divides the economy into two sectors: The "basic" (or non-local) sector and the "non-basic" (or local) sector. The stronger the basic sector is, the more the Region is exporting, and the less it is experiencing "leakage", or dependency on importing goods and services. When the basic sector of the economy is strong, revenue is generated and circulated within the local economy. Therefore, attracting and retaining businesses and employees is essential to the Region's economic well-being.

Economic sectors with an LQ greater than 1.00 are exporting sectors which contribute to the basic sector of the economy. If LQ is below one, it is an importing sector. Exports bring money from outside the Region into the local economy and imports represent local dollars flowing outside the county. See Table 18 for a list of the Region's LQ by industry; those with bold font have an LQ greater than 1.00. Data in this table are from Lightcast (formerly EMSI), a private company that specializes in global labor market analytics. It measures all jobs within the Region, whereas the U.S. Census and American Community Survey measure the jobs that the Region's residents have, regardless of if they work in the Region or not.

Income contributes to the Region's competitiveness for workers and allows residents' consumer habits to contribute to the Regional economy. According to Lightcast, the Region has a Cost-of-Living Index of 99.3, meaning that salaries in Table 18 have 0.7 percent greater purchasing power relative to the cost-of-living compared to the nation as a whole. The Region's highest paying industries are Utilities (\$142,651), Finance and Insurance (\$102,292), and Management of Companies and Enterprises (\$85,639). See Chapter 1: Demographics for more information about household and per capita income in the Region.

Job growth is only expected to increase by 1.7 percent between 2022 and 2032, with manufacturing (973), construction (862), and professional, scientific, and technical services (823) adding the most jobs. Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (56.9 percent), Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (23.0 percent), and Management of Companies and Enterprises (21.8 percent) are expected to grow the fastest as a percent. See Table 18.

Table 18: Industry Characteristics

Industry	LQ	Avg. Earnings Per Job	Estimated 2022 Jobs	Projected 2032 Jobs	Net Change	% Change
All Industries	N/A	\$64,759	223,626	227,332	3,706	1.7%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	3.21	\$50,871	8,508	7,873	-635	-7.5%
Manufacturing	2.18	\$77,499	37,335	38,308	973	2.6%
Finance and Insurance	1.28	\$102,292	13,039	11,735	-1,304	-10.0%
Retail Trade	1.19	\$39,555	24,661	24,569	-92	-0.4%
Transportation and Warehousing	1.14	\$67,995	11,589	11,232	-357	-3.1%
Health Care and Social Assistance	0.99	\$79,297	29,368	29,668	300	1.0%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0.98	\$85,639	3,049	3,713	664	21.8%
Accommodation and Food Services	0.97	\$24,044	17,269	18,009	740	4.3%
Government	0.92	\$72,853	29,321	29,241	-80	-0.3%
Wholesale Trade	0.91	\$79,590	7,250	7,512	262	3.6%
Utilities	0.9	\$142,651	663	667	4	0.6%
Construction	0.88	\$70,498	10,943	11,805	862	7.9%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	0.87	\$36,865	9,538	9,564	26	0.3%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	0.85	\$25,837	3,147	3,871	724	23.0%
Information	0.56	\$77,802	2,380	2,315	-65	-2.7%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	0.5	\$61,708	1,939	2,243	304	15.7%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	0.49	\$45,600	6,690	7,053	363	5.4%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	0.37	\$85,496	5,496	6,319	823	15.0%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	0.24	\$83,735	130	204	74	56.9%
Educational Services	0.24	\$26,668	1,311	1,431	120	9.2%

Source: Lightcast (Formerly EMSI), 2022 & 2024

Labor Force Analysis

Labor Force is the number of those who are aged sixteen and over that are employed or looking to be employed. People over sixteen who are students, stay-at-home parents, retired, institutionalized, or unable or unwilling to seek employment are not considered part of the labor force. Between 2000 and 2022, the size of the Region's labor force increased by only 0.9 percent, compared to 9.0 percent statewide. Note this is the number of people who live in the County, not the number of jobs in the County, and some workers work in other counties. See Table 19. According to the Census' commuter data described in Chapter 5, over 2,000 more people left the Region than entered the Region daily for work, indicating a large potential source of labor.

Unemployment Rate reflects the number of people in the labor force who are not employed but would like to be. Between 2000 and 2022, the Region's unemployment rate decreased by 1.6 percent compared to a 0.2 percent increase statewide. While a falling unemployment rate means people can find jobs more easily, it also indicates that employers may have a harder time finding employees. See Table 19.

Participation Rate measures the percentage of all people over 16 who are in the labor force. Between 2000 and 2022, the Region's participation rate decreased by 5.4 percent, compared to a statewide decrease of 3.4 percent. The decrease is mostly a result of the Region's lack of childcare along with the rising median age and large number of retirees living longer than past generations. See Table 19.

Table 19: Labor Force Indicators

Indicator	2000	2010	2022	2000-2022 % Change Region	2000-2022 % Change State
Labor Force	225,369	236,873	227,418	0.9%	9.0%
Employed	213,508	220,364	218,915	2.5%	10.5%
Unemployed	11,728	16,050	8,280	-29.4%	-21.8%
Unemployment Rate	5.2%	6.8%	3.6%	-1.6%	0.2%
Participation Rate	67.0%	66.4%	61.6%	-5.4%	-3.4%

Source: U.S. Census, 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2010 & 2021

Worker Education and Training contribute to Wisconsin's economic competitiveness and productivity. Chapter 1 discusses educational attainment and Chapter 4 lists educational facilities in the Region. In general, Wisconsin has historically had high quality schools, technical colleges, and universities. Training is another labor force indicator, which involves partnerships between businesses, governments, and educational institutions to develop the Region's economy. Included in this Chapter is a list of programs.

Economic Development Infrastructure

Redevelopment Areas are those that are underutilized or vacant and there is existing infrastructure and public services in place. These can be called blighted, deteriorated, or even condemned. Redeveloping these sites improves the tax base without requiring more infrastructure.

Brownfields are sites contaminated by former uses. DNR identifies these sites through the Wisconsin Bureau for Remediation and Redevelopment Tracking System (BRRTS) and assists with the reuse and cleanup of brownfield lands.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) involves creating a Tax Increment District (TID) where the property’s baseline taxes continue to fund all taxing jurisdictions at its current rate. As improvements are built and the property’s taxable value increases, the “increment,” or additional property tax revenue generated, goes directly towards projects within the TID. This can be used to finance infrastructure serving the site, environmental cleanup, and/or other projects needed to make a project happen. When TID-related costs are paid by the increment, the TID closes and the TID’s entire property taxes go towards all taxing jurisdictions, adding to the tax base. The State regulates TID creation and administration, requiring a “but-for” test that demonstrates the project would not be feasible without the creation of a TID.

Industrial and Business Parks enable communities to attract new businesses or to relocate existing businesses for expansion. An industrial park is designed to ensure compatibility between industrial operations and its surrounding uses through its zoning, utilities, and other characteristics that are needed to support these uses. They are further enhanced by being located near rail, airport, and highway facilities.

Qualified Opportunity Zones and Enterprise Zones are designed to spur development in distressed communities. Qualified Opportunity Zones allow investors to defer capital gains for investments made within a zone; See HUD’s online map of census tracts currently designated as opportunity zones. The Enterprise Zone program, administered through WEDC, provides tax credits for companies relocating to or expanding within Wisconsin. Credits are earned through job creation, job retention, capital investment, employee training, and supply chain purchases from Wisconsin vendors.

3. Economic Development Summary

North Central Wisconsin enjoys a strong and diverse economic base that includes tourism, manufacturing, healthcare, finance, insurance, agriculture, retail, transportation, and forestry. Continued retirements will impact the workforce while rapid changes in technology will change how business is conducted. Due to the Region’s low cost of living and strong economic development infrastructure, there is an opportunity to attract and retain workers while enhancing the existing workforce to maintain and expand the Region’s economy.

4. Economic Development Programs

Federal

- Economic Development Administration (EDA)
- Small Business Administration (SBA)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture – Rural Development (USDA – RD)

Additionally, Wisconsin was recently designated as a Biohealth Technology Hub that qualifies it for \$50 million in federal grant funding under the Federal CHIPS Act.

Regional

- North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (See NCWRPC’s [online Entrepreneurship Portal](#) for a list of programs and resources).
- Grow North
- Central Wisconsin Economic Development (CWED) Fund
- Centergy, Inc.

State

Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC)

- Brownfield Program
- Capacity Building Grants (CB)
- Certified Sites
- Historic Preservation Tax Credit
- Business Opportunity Loan Fund
- Workforce Training Grants
- Idle Sites Redevelopment Program
- Community Development Investment (CDI) Grant Program
- Fast Forward Program (see below)
- Wisconsin Investment Fund
- The Industrial Revenue Bond (IRB) Program
- Technology Development Loan Program

Additional Statewide Programs and Agencies

- Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce
- Transportation Economic Assistance (TEA)
- The Wisconsin Innovation Service Center (WISC)
- Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF)
- Wisconsin Fast Forward
- Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA)
- Wisconsin Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP)
- Wisconsin Small Business Development Center (SBDC)
- Wisconsin Small Cities Program
- Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC)

5. Economic Development Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Goals

1. Support infrastructure needed for economic development.
2. Ensure the future availability of a skilled and flexible workforce.
3. Support and develop a diverse economic base ensuring economic growth and resiliency.
4. Develop tourism and the knowledge-based economy into leading economic sectors.
5. Support economic development that ensures a living wage for the Region's residents.

Objectives

1. Ensure an educated and skilled workforce for the region.
2. Promote, attract, expand, and retain emerging and existing businesses while supporting local entrepreneurs.
3. Support development in both downtowns and industrial sites by providing an adequate supply of developable land and redeveloping existing underutilized sites.
4. Strengthen the Region's tourism and natural resources to enhance the economy and quality of life.
5. Implement and maintain a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to support new economic development projects in the Region.

Policies

1. Work with businesses, schools, and communities to ensure the future workforce is equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities and assist with workforce development grants.
2. Develop and market the Region's amenities, activities, opportunities, and wages while actively recruiting workers to fill jobs and grow the workforce population.
3. Work with angel investors, venture capital investors, businesses, and industry data to foster innovation and new business startups.
4. Develop business incubators, seed accelerators, maker spaces, coworking spaces.
5. Support start-up and small businesses with training, market research, financial assistance, strategic planning, and other assistance.
6. Assist with Counties, municipalities, and businesses navigating expansion, retention, and successional planning programs as well as grant and funding opportunities.
7. Improve connections between restaurants, stores, and farms to enhance access to local produce.
8. Assist the Region and its businesses by identifying emerging clusters, trends, markets, and export opportunities.
9. Assist communities with preparing "shovel-ready" industrial sites, retail/market analyses, and marketing materials for available sites.
10. Maintain the NCWRPC Industrial Park Inventory and Entrepreneurial Portal to ensure an adequate supply of industrially zoned land with access to transportation, utilities, workers, and programs.
11. Promote redevelopment of idle and/or vacant sites by planning and zoning for a mix of employment, residential, and recreational activities while utilizing remediation programs.
12. Review business and property tax policies and development processes to create a more development friendly environment.
13. Incentivize job attraction and retention as well as planning and redevelopment in downtown areas.
14. Conduct planning efforts, studies, and collaborative activities related to promoting outdoor recreation, tourism, festivals, hospitality, placemaking, cultural events, arts, and historic preservation throughout the Region.
15. Work with Counties to implement the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).



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Chapter 7: Land Use

Background

Land use analysis determines which areas are most suitable for development and where growth is desired based on infrastructure, topography, and other characteristics. Included are land value estimates as well as projections for demand by land use type.

Previous Plans and Studies

The NCWRPC Regional Livability Plan, adopted in 2015, has a Land Use Assessment Report, which looks in detail at the land uses throughout the ten-county Region. Trends identified in this plan include the loss of the number of farms and total farmland, and the increase in residential and vacant land over the last several decades. The two land use goals of the former plan are to 1. Manage and reduce vacant land and structures; and 2. To preserve and protect the Region's landscape, environmental resources and sensitive lands while encouraging healthy communities.

Comprehensive Planning Efforts generally include County and municipal Comprehensive Planning. All ten Counties have adopted plans, as well as many towns, cities, and villages. However, many of them are older than the 10-year update requirement per State Statute. See Map 7 for more information.

Other County Plans typically include Land & Water Resource Management Plans, All-Hazard Mitigation Plans, Outdoor Recreation Plans, Farmland Preservation Plans, and more. These plans address the quality of the natural environment, agricultural environment, outdoor recreation, and hazard management.

1. Issues

Dispersed Land Use Patterns. As the Region continues to age, a dispersed population will impact the ability of residents to access services. There are also concerns about continuing to fund infrastructure as a result.

Contamination and Blight. Older neighborhoods in the Region may have sites contaminated by former industry and structures that have fallen into disrepair. There is an opportunity to rehabilitate these properties to save infrastructure costs compared to new construction.

Environmental Features. Development pressures can fragment woodlands and other wildlife habitat, increase runoff into waterways, impact aesthetics, and contribute to erosion if not designed properly.

Land Use Demand. Work-from-home may increase the number of people living in certain areas, and decrease demand for commercial space, influencing land use patterns and infrastructure needs.

Renewable Energy. While renewable energy provides environmental and economic opportunities, large scale solar and wind power is approved at the State level, with few tools for municipal and county government to manage its location, screening, and other impacts.

Comprehensive Plans. While many communities and counties have adopted comprehensive plans, they are frequently not being updated as required by Wis. Stats. 66.1001. See Map 7 for Comprehensive Plan status.

2. Inventory and Trends

Land Use

The Region encompasses over 6.2 million acres. Only 4.5 percent of the Region's land area is developed as residential, commercial, or industrial land, but other land uses not in Table 20 are also present, such as government facilities, transportation, and outdoor recreation. Overall, the Region's varied landscape features provide abundant developable land along with wildlife habitat, economic value, recreational opportunities, and aesthetic benefits. See Map 8: Land Use.

Table 20: Acreage Totals by County 2020

County	Total Acres	Land	Water	Residential	Commercial	Industrial	Agriculture	Woodland
Adams	440,234	412,303	27,931	19,683	1,840	429	98,035	255,427
Forest	669,507	646,771	22,736	10,434	603	436	12,208	612,298
Juneau	514,280	486,758	27,522	10,907	1,743	533	106,822	282,267
Langlade	567,824	556,703	11,121	12,403	1,393	336	82,234	435,312
Lincoln	580,173	562,803	17,370	12,808	1,050	1,258	52,833	469,494
Marathon	1,008,158	979,570	28,588	49,164	6,080	6,003	409,585	400,236
Oneida	790,834	716,144	74,690	29,310	2,663	1,697	15,895	640,933
Portage	526,473	513,571	12,902	38,131	2,883	3,229	201,103	234,478
Vilas	650,886	554,173	96,713	37,518	3,974	215	4,626	495,393
Wood	517,394	502,314	15,080	21,595	2,617	2,185	132,742	246,243
Region	Percent of Total			Percent of Land Area*				
Acres	6,265,763	5,931,110	334,653	241,953	24,847	16,322	1,116,082	4,072,081
Percent	100.0%	94.7%	5.3%	3.9%	0.4%	0.3%	17.8%	65.0%

Source: NCWRPC. *These five categories account for 87.3 percent of the Region's land area. Other land use types not depicted in Table 20 include uses such as government, utilities, and transportation, etc.

Population and Housing Unit Density

Acreage totals in Table 20 are used to calculate population density and housing density in Table 21. Between 2000 and 2022, all Counties increased in housing unit density, but some decreased in population density due to smaller households and more seasonal housing.

Although countywide density estimates provide a snapshot of how dispersed each county's population is, population and housing unit densities vary widely within Counties, with urban areas having much higher densities than rural areas. Generally, the denser a community's population and housing units are, the less its residents must travel long distance to access employment, education, healthcare, and services. As aging and dispersed populations continue to grow, demand will likely increase for alternative transportation options and services for those who can no longer drive, impacting County and municipal budgets.

Table 21: Population and Housing Unit Density

County	Population Per Square Mile					Housing Units Per Square Mile				
	2000	2010	2022	% Change 2000- 2022	Net Change 2000- 2022	2000	2010	2022	% Change 2000- 2022	Net Change 2000- 2022
Adams	30.7	32.3	32.2	4.8%	1.5	21.8	27.0	26.1	19.5%	4.3
Forest	9.9	9.2	9.1	-7.7%	-0.8	8.2	8.8	8.6	4.5%	0.4
Juneau	31.7	34.8	35.1	10.7%	3.4	16.1	19.1	19.1	18.7%	3.0
Langlade	23.8	22.9	22.4	-5.8%	-1.4	12.8	14.2	14.0	9.4%	1.2
Lincoln	33.6	32.7	32.3	-3.9%	-1.3	16.6	19.1	18.4	10.6%	1.8
Marathon	81.4	86.8	90.0	10.6%	8.6	32.6	37.4	39.2	20.2%	6.6
Oneida	32.7	32.3	33.8	3.3%	1.1	23.7	27.1	27.4	15.4%	3.7
Portage	83.3	87.4	87.6	5.1%	4.3	33.0	37.5	39.0	18.1%	6.0
Vilas	24.1	25.0	26.7	10.9%	2.6	25.6	29.3	28.5	11.3%	2.9
Wood	95.3	94.2	94.5	-0.9%	-0.8	40.0	43.0	44.0	10.1%	4.0
Region	46.1	47.6	48.3	4.8%	2.2	23.4	26.6	26.9	15.0%	3.5

Source: ACS 2022 5-Year Estimates, NCWRPC

Equalized Real Estate Values and Fiscal Capacity

To assess the financial capacity each County has, Table 22 tracks the change in equalized real estate valuations over time and measures the values on a per-capita basis based on data from the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA). All Counties saw a considerable increase in equalized real estate values between 2000 and 2024, with a Regional increase of 214.8 percent, which was well above the inflation rate of 82.8 percent during this time.

Fiscal Capacity describes a County's equalized real estate value divided by its population. Counties with extensive lakefront properties, such as Adams, Oneida, and Vilas, have the highest equalized real estate valuations per capita. This is due to lakefront properties being valued more highly along with the abundance of seasonal homes relative to the number of year-round residents. Juneau County, which also has considerable lakefront real estate, had the highest increase in equalized real estate valuations since 2000, followed by Adams, Oneida, and Vilas Counties. Overall, the Region's fiscal capacity is about \$15,000 per capita higher than the statewide average, compared to a difference of \$13,000 in 2010. This suggests that the Region's fiscal capacity is growing at a rate that is slightly faster than statewide growth, despite a slightly lower overall rate of equalized real estate valuation growth between 2000 and 2024.

Table 22: Equalized Real Estate Valuations

County	2000	2010	2024	% Change 2000-2024	Net Change 2000- 2024	2024 Per Capita
Adams	\$1,235,812,700	\$2,589,942,600	\$4,904,516,000	296.9%	\$3,668,703,300	\$236,590
Forest	\$656,528,100	\$1,142,327,800	\$1,858,225,800	183.0%	\$1,201,697,700	\$201,128
Juneau	\$967,745,200	\$2,031,748,400	\$3,953,151,600	308.5%	\$2,985,406,400	\$148,086
Langlade	\$1,038,495,300	\$1,703,583,600	\$2,644,803,900	154.7%	\$1,606,308,600	\$135,548
Lincoln	\$1,457,462,700	\$2,358,251,600	\$3,965,249,400	172.1%	\$2,507,786,700	\$139,612
Marathon	\$5,545,444,100	\$9,321,354,200	\$17,264,936,400	211.3%	\$11,719,492,300	\$125,272
Oneida	\$3,604,966,400	\$7,322,297,600	\$12,049,967,300	234.3%	\$8,445,000,900	\$318,791
Portage	\$2,926,368,900	\$4,847,237,700	\$9,323,941,500	218.6%	\$6,397,572,600	\$132,667
Vilas	\$3,663,040,100	\$7,454,097,100	\$11,930,475,800	225.7%	\$8,267,435,700	\$515,444
Wood	\$3,000,148,100	\$4,596,721,050	\$7,955,395,200	165.2%	\$4,955,247,100	\$107,305
Region	\$24,096,011,600	\$43,367,561,650	\$75,850,662,900	214.8%	\$51,754,651,300	\$169,400
State	\$286,321,491,800	\$495,904,192,300	\$907,414,717,000	216.9%	\$621,093,225,200	\$154,266

Source: DOA & NCWRPC

Redevelopment and Growth Opportunities

Ideally, growth should utilize existing infrastructure and public services to minimize both up-front infrastructure costs and long-term maintenance and service costs, keeping taxes low. Communities with public water and sewer service can support a greater variety of land uses compared to areas that rely on wells and septic systems. City, town, village, and county plans should consider proximity to infrastructure when updating local comprehensive plans, particularly when creating future land use maps. Areas with natural features like steep slopes, floodplains, and wetlands should be avoided since developing them increases construction costs while causing issues with water quality, erosion, and wildlife habitat.

Revitalizing existing structures and/or redeveloping contaminated sites known as brownfields is an opportunity to increase a community's tax base while minimizing the need to expand infrastructure. This also results in new construction in walkable neighborhoods near existing amenities like waterfronts and downtowns. According to DNR's Remediation and Redevelopment Map, there are 92 open sites in the Region. Refer to DNR and other State agencies for an updated list of sites, regulations, and funding programs that assist in the revitalization of these sites, such as WEDC's Idle Sites and Brownfields Programs. These programs may also be available for non-contaminated sites that reuse an existing structure, such as schools converted into housing. Programs are listed in Chapters 2 and 6 of this Plan.

Land Use Demand

Population Projections (See Chapter 1) and Projected Job Growth (See Chapter 6) can be used to estimate demand for land for residential, commercial, and industrial development. These calculations are included in local comprehensive plans. Regionally, there is abundant developable land to meet future demand through at least 2040, with no foreseeable long-term shortage of land.

Future Land Use

Counties and municipalities adopt Future Land Use maps which guide development in locations where it is most suitable. They contain a map with text describing what the long-term intent is regarding how an area should develop. While they resemble a zoning map, they have no zoning authority and are only used as an advisory tool. Therefore, areas identified for development on these maps should not be assumed to automatically be ready for rezoning and development. Other factors like municipal boundaries and proximity to utilities determine which properties are most likely to develop in the short term. Future land use maps should also consider maps for surrounding and overlapping jurisdictions to minimize conflicts.

Additionally, the goal of the future land use map is to provide a long-term vision, even though development occurs slowly over time as proposals are brought forward. Therefore, in some cases, an immediate rezoning may be appropriate to prepare for a land use change even if it is several years away. Finally, there are likely many instances where zoning and future land use categories align appropriately, but additional barriers exist. In some cases, amendments to zoning ordinance text may be appropriate to enable the type of development that is desired for a particular site.

Land Use Tools

The principal land use program in Wisconsin is the comprehensive planning program. The primary land use tools are zoning ordinances, subdivision ordinances, and official mapping.

Zoning Ordinances use a map to identify zones such as agriculture, residential, commercial, or industrial. Zoning text includes permitted land uses, buildings, yard, or lot dimensions, and other requirements. The goal of zoning is to keep similar and related uses together and separate dissimilar, unrelated, incompatible uses, particularly in relationship to transportation facilities, utilities and public services and facilities.

Land Division or subdivision regulation relates to the way in which land is divided and accessed. A community can control the subdivision of land by requiring a developer to meet certain conditions when recording a plat. This ensures growth patterns that can accommodate necessary lot sizes, utilities, and access. Cities and villages have authority to review subdivisions proposed within a certain radius of their boundaries, known as the extraterritorial jurisdiction, as described in detail in Chapter 9: Implementation.

Shoreland Zoning is required for all counties, and they are optional for cities and villages. They regulate development in shoreland and floodplain areas to maintain aesthetic and environmental benefits.

Farmland Preservation Zoning is a voluntary zoning classification that is intended to minimize fragmentation of farmland by imposing development limitations consistent with or more restrictive than the provisions listed in Chapter 91 of WI Statutes. To adopt farmland preservation zoning, a municipality must be enrolled in the Farmland Preservation Program.

Wellhead Protection Ordinances restrict the land use activities that take place within a certain radius of public wells to protect what is known as the “recharge” area. This ensures that contaminants like chemicals will not easily travel into groundwater and contaminate sources of drinking water.

Official Maps are a map adopted by a county or municipality that specifies locations of future roads and other utilities or public facilities, along with right-of-way widths and other specifications. When a land division is approved, it must accommodate dimensions for future facilities according to the Official Map.

Other Tools include land acquisition, easements, deed restrictions, land dedication, and ordinances or programs regulating activities such as impact fees, land division, building permits, and erosion control.

3. Land Use Summary

The Region features abundant developable land and natural resources, but its rural and dispersed nature are a challenge for providing services cost effectively. Promoting comprehensive planning at the local and Regional levels maximizes existing infrastructure, protects sensitive landscapes, and minimizes sprawl.



4. Land Use Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Goals

1. Preserve and protect the Region's landscape, environmental resources, and sensitive lands while encouraging healthy communities.
2. Provide adequate supply of developable land to meet existing and future market demand for residential, commercial, and industrial uses.
3. Encourage land uses, densities, and regulations that promote efficient development patterns and relatively low municipal, State, governmental, and utility costs.
4. Encourage planning and development of land uses that create or preserve varied and unique urban and rural communities.

Objectives

1. Focus development in existing downtowns and infill sites, and reuse historic buildings.
2. Reuse vacant land and structures in innovative ways.
3. Monitor and respond to changes in land use demand and support opportunities to reposition obsolete uses and structures.
4. Work with the State of Wisconsin to mitigate land use concerns regarding renewable energy.
5. Encourage local units of government to develop and update individual comprehensive plans and create or modify implementation tools to reflect the future needs of their communities.

Policies

1. Work with Regional, State, and federal agencies to rehabilitate parcels to "shovel ready" status.
2. Collaborate with Regional economic development organizations to establish a single point of contact for developers.
3. Create incentives and policies that encourage mixed-use developments to expand potential uses of sites.
4. Promote the reuse of vacant buildings for creative, mixed-use development.
5. Explore creative ways to repurpose commercial space for housing.

6. Work with the State of Wisconsin Public Service Commission to promote and utilize tools and policies that mitigate land use concerns associated with wind, solar, and other renewable energy sources.
7. Support expansion of services and infrastructure that enables remote workers to live in the Region, particularly in communities with declining populations.
8. Give priority to property proposals that incorporate high-performance building practices.
9. Support the use of land to extend parks and recreation opportunities.
10. Utilize employment, housing, and population projections to identify future land uses.
11. Support waterfront redevelopment that enhances the economy and environment.
12. Promote infill development, especially for residential uses.



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Chapter 8: Public Health

Background

While public health is indirectly addressed in other chapters of this plan as it relates to topics such as walking and cycling infrastructure or healthcare and emergency services facilities, Comprehensive Plans in Wisconsin historically haven't dedicated public health-specific chapters. As described in this Plan's introduction, NCWRPC identified in previous planning efforts that public health should be included as a topic in future Comprehensive Plan updates, leading to the creation of this Chapter.

Previous Planning Efforts

The North Central Wisconsin Pandemic Assessment and Future Response was created following the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan's purpose is to better prepare the Region if future public health disruptions occur based on the following recommendations: 1. Meet public health mission objectives, 2. Build on intergovernmental and interagency collaboration, 3. Advance health equity, and 4. Invest in public health.

Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIPs) have been adopted in all ten of the Region's Counties (Forest, Oneida and Vilas share a single CHIP). Refer to these documents for a description of each County's unique health needs and the strategies being used to address them.

The State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) identifies the following priorities for improving health outcomes in Wisconsin: economic well-being, supportive systems of care, healthy housing, physical/mental/systemic safety, person/community-center health care, social connectedness and belonging, and mental/emotional health and well-being.

1. Issues

The Aging Population will require more healthcare services, low-maintenance and ADA-accessible housing options, and alternative forms of transportation that feature ADA accessibility. Senior citizens are at a higher risk of safety concerns related to car collisions, and reduced mobility hinders the ability to live independently and maintain a home. Many residents in the Region do not live near a clinic or hospital, so there is an opportunity to assist with the expansion of telehealth and mobile clinic services. Additional services include but are not limited to in-home healthcare and grocery and medicine delivery. There is also a need to support recruiting, training, and educating the healthcare workforce.

Aging-in-Place Practices are expected to rise in popularity as the population ages. These are retrofits to homes and communities that help extend the time seniors can live independently. Examples include physical upgrades like ADA-accessible bathrooms and wheelchair ramps as well as emerging household technology.

Broadband Access is limited in parts of the Region, impacting the ability to expand telehealth and other health-related services that require it. Additionally, expanded broadband enables more households to access medically relevant information online, such as directories of healthcare providers or information on outbreaks of diseases monitored by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS).

Emergency Services will require creative recruitment and funding strategies to address police, fire, and emergency medical service needs as an aging population increases demand and a smaller share of the

population is of working or volunteering age. Inflation and staffing will impact the ability of providers to serve the Region, especially in rural areas with dispersed populations.

Food Deserts are areas where grocery stores are limited, resulting in dependence on food that is often more processed and less healthy. Locally Sourced Food, along with farmers markets and agritourism, is typically discussed as an economic development tool. Promoting it improves access to high-quality, affordable groceries while allowing the Region to be less reliant on imported food in the event of a natural disaster or supply chain disruption.

Healthcare Access is a concern as workforce shortages and network consolidation can result in fewer providers and locations. There is an opportunity to support telehealth, mobile clinics, and other innovative healthcare services in areas with populations too low to support clinics or hospitals. Healthcare costs are also a growing concern, especially for those on fixed income.

Inflation impacts a household's ability to afford healthcare and healthy groceries, which affects health outcomes. Additionally, households who must take on additional jobs may have less free time to cook, exercise, and rest appropriately, which also impacts health. Overall, the wealth gap between households is growing nationally, which is expected to also result in gaps related to health outcomes.

Living Conditions can be impacted when finances, abilities, and/or age make it difficult to maintain a home. Black mold, infestations, and other health hazards can occur because of poor home maintenance. Housing insecurity can also occur as a result of economic and/or medical hardships, exacerbating health outcomes.

Low Levels of Physical Activity can result from sedentary lifestyles and/or disabilities, impacting health outcomes. Enhancing ADA-friendly bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, parks, trails, and other forms of recreation throughout the Region encourages higher levels of physical activity. Additionally, encouraging new housing units to locate near existing services and jobs increases the ability of residents to choose active transportation options that save households money while increasing levels of physical activity.

Mental Health is a growing concern statewide. According to the Wisconsin DHS, 46 percent of Wisconsinites experienced poor mental health during the month respondents were surveyed. Portage County was the Region's only county not considered to be in a mental health professional shortage area, with Adams, Forest, Marathon, Lincoln, Oneida, and Vilas Counties being considered "high needs" areas.

Pandemics and Economic Shocks like COVID-19 demonstrated how various local, State, and federal guidelines and regulations impact how the Region responds to and recovers from future similar events. While NCWRPC is not involved in public health regulations, it should be prepared to assist in minimizing economic, educational, workforce, and public health impacts should future events occur as assistance is requested.

Severe Weather can cause power outages and block the transportation of supplies, affecting medical equipment and refrigerated medicines. Power outages affect air conditioners and furnaces, putting vulnerable populations at risk during heat waves or winter storms. Storms or precipitation patterns can impact agriculture production, affecting food quality and costs. Solutions include temporary energy and transportation infrastructure, and communicating with the public about storing food, water, and supplies, along with learning first aid, emergency, and evacuation procedures.

Substance Abuse is a Regional concern, particularly with drug and alcohol use. According to DHS, "poor mental health is associated with greater use of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, higher rates of suicide and accidents,

as well as decreased school performance and lost productive workdays, which are factors in economic well-being,” indicating that mental health and substance abuse must be addressed together.

Water Quality and Pollution, as discussed in other Chapters of this Plan, are a concern since they can affect health. NCWRPC has an opportunity to support projects and strategies to remediate these issues.

In summary, Regional public health concerns overlap with various planning and economic development projects NCWRPC is engaged in. The Goals, Objectives, and Policies in this Chapter are a guide to address these complex but related issues by integrating them within NCWRPC’s various projects.

2. Inventory & Trends

County Health Departments are found in all ten of the Region’s Counties, and they are responsible for conducting community health assessments (CHA). According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), these assessments identify critical health needs through data collection and analysis, and a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) is created following the assessment to address public health concerns. Hospital Systems’ Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) plans also may be consulted when developing the CHIP. There is also a State Health Assessment (SHA) and State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP). The SHA and the SHIP provide a framework and recommendations for Counties to develop local CHAs, CHNAs, and CHIPs. See the DHS website for information regarding the guidelines surrounding these health planning activities.

County Health Rankings and Roadmaps (CHR&R) provides University of Wisconsin – Extension with county-level reports with public health statistics. According to its 2022 report, county health rankings vary greatly across the Region, with Marathon and Portage Counties being in the top quartile of all Wisconsin Counties, Forest, Adams, and Juneau Counties being in the bottom quartile of all Wisconsin Counties, and the rest of the Region’s counties falling in the middle quartiles. These rankings are based on four categories:

- **Health behaviors** (tobacco use, diet, exercise, alcohol use, drug use, and sexual activity)
- **Clinical care** (access to care and quality of care)
- **Social and economic factors** (education, employment, income, family support, social support, and community safety)
- **Physical environment** (air quality, water quality, housing, and transit)

Therefore, NCWRPC’s role in assisting communities and counties in projects that address these topics, especially in housing, childcare, economic development, transportation, and parks and recreation planning, is an opportunity to improve the Region’s public health and address disparities between counties.

Emergency Services are discussed in detail in Chapter 4: Utilities and Community Facilities.

Healthcare Providers include Marshfield Clinic and Aspirus Health Care in most of the Region. Juneau County is served by Mile Bluff Medical Center and Adams County is served by Emplify Health.

Additional Resources include Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) and various nonprofits such as United Way, Habitat for Humanity, faith-based organizations, and other resources that vary by county.

3. Public Health Summary

Though the Region has a reputation for having strong healthcare services, continuing to provide care to an aging and dispersed population is a challenge. Supporting programs and strategies related to mental health, substance abuse, natural disasters, nutrition, water quality, living conditions, broadband access, and other issues plays a role in the Region's overall health.

4. Public Health Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Goals

1. Promote healthy lifestyles in the Region.
2. Expand healthcare facilities and access throughout the Region.
3. Improve access to healthy produce and other food products.

Objectives

1. Encourage comprehensive planning that supports outdoor recreation, active transportation, cultural opportunities, and economic revitalization to expand opportunities for healthy lifestyles and social connections.
2. Facilitate conversations and projects involving public sector, private sector, and nonprofit groups related to public health.
3. Monitor and assist communities in response to changing information regarding drinking water safety and other environmental hazards.
4. Monitor, assist, and respond to significant events like natural disasters, diseases, and other threats that impact the Region's health and economy.

Policies

1. Assist communities, healthcare systems, and colleges with planning and funding efforts that improve healthcare access and infrastructure in the Region.
2. Assist communities, healthcare systems, and colleges with planning and funding efforts that expand both active and ADA-accessible transportation options.
3. Assist communities with navigating programs and policies that clean up polluted sites for reuse.
4. Assist communities with navigating programs and policies related to ensuring safe drinking water.
5. Recommend that communities support a greater variety of housing styles along transportation routes or within walking distance of amenities, businesses, and services for those with limited mobility.
6. Assist communities with navigating "aging-in-place" programs to retrofit existing structures with ADA-accessible upgrades.
7. Work with State, federal, and local officials to quickly allocate resources during large-scale events that impact health and the economy.
8. Work with State, federal, and local organizations to improve healthcare access for households of all income levels.

Chapter 9: Intergovernmental Cooperation

Background

The chapter examines the relationship of the NCWRPC with Counties and local units of government within the North Central Region.

Previous Studies

Regional Livability Plan 2015

The RLP briefly describes intergovernmental cooperation, cooperative agreements, and other methods that local governments can use to address common issues. Not all conflicts between local governments can be settled using these methods, but by looking at problems that transcend local boundaries in a Regional context, solutions are more likely to be discovered. The RLP also contains a detailed description of NCWRPC's Regional planning efforts that precede this plan and the RLP.

1. Inventory

Consistency of Plans

Since 2010, State law requires land use actions to be consistent with a municipal or county comprehensive plan. For example, each comprehensive plan has a future land use map, which should be consulted when zoning changes are reviewed. Therefore, all comprehensive plans in the Region should attempt to make policies between adjoining and overlapping jurisdictions consistent with one another to the greatest degree possible. The consistency requirement in the comprehensive planning statutes address the need for land use decisions to be consistent with the plan, but there is no legal requirement that plans be consistent one with the other, except that where a town is under county zoning, then the adopted plan of the town should be consistent with the county plan so that decisions that affect the town reflect a common policy direction.

Cities, villages, towns, and counties must review and update their Comprehensive Plans at a minimum of ten years to ensure these maps remain consistent with each other. As of 2024, about three-quarters of the Region's municipalities have adopted comprehensive plans, and one-third of the Region's municipalities have an up-to-date plan or are currently updating their plans. Additionally, all ten of the Region's Counties have adopted comprehensive plans, eight of which are up-to-date or currently being updated.

Shared Services

There are opportunities for local and county governments to share services. Whether this involves one town contracting with another for fire or EMS service, several municipalities sharing a single water utility, or a county agreeing to work with an adjacent county to solve a common problem, the goal is to maximize the benefit from the expenditure of public dollars. The economies of scale that result from a single entity providing service to several jurisdictions can benefit all by reducing costs and at the same time improving the quality of services received.

Overlapping Jurisdictions

Corporate boundaries of towns and counties often do not coincide with the boundaries of other functional services providing agencies, especially school districts. School district boundaries are set based on the location of school buildings, where the students live, and the efficiency of transporting children to a given school. Another example is the Central Wisconsin Airport in Mosinee, which is located in Marathon County, but jointly owned by Marathon and Portage Counties. In planning for intergovernmental cooperation, it is important to remember that jurisdictional boundaries can present an obstacle to efficient service delivery. All overlapping jurisdictions must be taken into consideration when considering how to implement intergovernmental agreements and deliver services to citizens.

2. Overview of Efforts

This portion of the chapter examines the various existing governmental cooperation agreements, identifies some potential efforts, and provides a summary of the surrounding county planning efforts.

Local Efforts

The following are examples of intergovernmental efforts:

- Counties often administer zoning and subdivision ordinances for unincorporated towns.
- Contracts are common that allow municipalities and counties to share responsibility for snow removal, law enforcement, fire and emergency services, waste management services, and other services to increase efficiency and maximize limited tax dollars.
- Counties disburse WisDOT's Local Road Improvement Program (LRIP) funding for local road projects in unincorporated towns.
- County and local Clerks work with the State Elections Board to manage elections.
- County and local housing authorities administer rental subsidies for low-income households in both authority-owned and participating privately-owned housing units.
- University and technical college systems, such as UW-Stevens Point, Northcentral Technical College, Mid-State Technical College, and Nicolet College frequently operate multiple campuses throughout the North Central Region.
- Cultural institutions also operate independently of jurisdictional boundaries. For example, CREATE Portage County recently expanded to add hubs in Lincoln, Marathon, Oneida, and Wood Counties utilizing a federal grant program with assistance from NCWRPC.

Regional Efforts

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) provides planning and economic development assistance to 10 counties in Central Wisconsin and their municipalities (Adams, Forest, Juneau, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Oneida, Portage, Vilas, and Wood). Members of this organization are

also eligible for Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding (see Chapter 6: Economic Development) as well as cost-effective planning projects led by NCWRPC staff.

NCWRPC's past Regional Comprehensive Plans recommended the following:

1. Encouragement of coordination and cooperation among nearby units of government, including Tribes, and special districts.
2. Cooperative service arrangements should be made among local units of government to handle basic services most feasibly.
3. Local units of governments should seek stable and adequate revenue sources for government operations and capital expenditures and prepare "capital improvement programs" that are based upon adopted development plans.
4. The most cost-effective methods should be used for carrying out government programs and projects.
5. There should be equity in the distribution of costs and benefits of public facilities and services, as determined by local government.

State Efforts

Counties and municipalities primarily work with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Department of Transportation (WisDOT), and Department of Administration (DOA) to implement goals, objectives, and policies of local comprehensive plans. Additionally, DOA provides demographic data to the County each year and is the agency responsible for monitoring comprehensive plans among all of Wisconsin's cities, counties, towns, and villages. Finally, the Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR) administers Innovation Planning Grants and Innovation Grants that assist with consolidation of government services to save costs under 2023 Wisconsin Act 12. Finally, as described in detail in Chapter 6, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) assists with local and State level economic development projects that attract, retain, and grow new and existing businesses and the workforce.

Surrounding Efforts

It is important for every local jurisdiction to look beyond its boundary to see if there are plans in adjacent jurisdictions that will impact them. There could be potential conflicts or there might be opportunities to work cooperatively, such as related to service delivery. All ten counties in the North Central Region have adopted comprehensive plans, but not every county bordering the Region has.



3. Intergovernmental Cooperation Summary

Local comprehensive plans should consider the possibility of improving the efficiency of services and minimizing conflicts by identifying opportunities for collaboration between jurisdictions.

4. Intergovernmental Cooperation Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Goals

1. Encourage the coordination and cooperation among nearby units of government, including Tribes, and special districts.
2. Encourage local units of government to provide quality public services in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

Objectives

1. Statewide and Regional agencies should work with counties and municipalities to enhance the quality of life in the Region while maximizing efficiency and financial resources needed to provide services.
2. Encourage partnerships between adjacent and overlapping jurisdictions and shared services across county or municipal borders when feasible.
3. Explore the feasibility of cooperative service and joint facility arrangements between local units of government.

Policies

1. Assist counties, municipalities, school districts, colleges, healthcare systems, businesses, and other entities with planning and funding efforts that improve conditions related to the local economy, environment, public service delivery, education, healthcare, transportation, aging-in-place, workforce development, and other systems and initiatives that enhance the Region's quality of life.
2. Monitor emerging issues, trends, policies, and programs at State and federal levels to ensure continued collaboration between the Region and its counties and municipalities.

Chapter 10: Implementation

Background

This Regional Comprehensive Plan is adopted as outlined in Wisconsin Statute 66.1001 for the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. As an advisory organization, the NCWRPC will encourage adoption of this plan at the local level. As the Region's many local units of government develop and update their comprehensive plans, they can incorporate the goals, objectives, and recommendations of this plan.

1. Procedures

Consistency Among Plan Elements

The state comprehensive planning law requires that the implementation chapter discuss how each of the plan chapters or elements is integrated and consistent with each other. Since this plan was completed as part of one overall process, there is no inconsistency, nor is there any contradiction to the previously adopted Regional Comprehensive Plan.

Responsible Organizations

The Regional Comprehensive Plan will be implemented through the efforts of many. Since the NCWRPC has no implementation authority, it is the local communities that will integrate this plan's recommendations into their local plans and policies to meet Regional goals. As county and local units of governments develop and update their own comprehensive plans, often with the assistance of the NCWRPC, it is recommended that they review and incorporate many of the goals, objectives, and recommendations developed through the Regional Comprehensive Planning process.

In addition, Federal, State, and Regional government agencies and quasi-governmental organizations may be directly involved in project coordination, funding, and execution based on the findings of this plan. Although many of the strategies and objectives outlined in the Regional Comprehensive Plan can only be fully implemented by government agencies, nonprofit and community organizations can carry out many activities that help make the vision of the Regional Comprehensive Plan a reality. Various nonprofits' missions coincide with objectives in the Regional Comprehensive Plan and many of the programs, activities, and events that these nonprofits sponsor further the goals outlined in this plan.

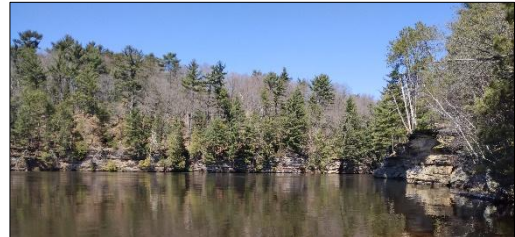
Plan Adoption

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission has followed the process for plan adoption as outlined in the State's comprehensive planning statute 66.1001(4) and the Regional planning statute 66.0309(10). The first step towards implementation is adoption. Although the NCWRPC has no formal authority, it can undertake numerous activities to aid in the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Plan. Implementation activities will be incorporated into the NCWRPC's annual work plan, including county and local planning assistance.

Plan Monitoring, Amendments, and Update

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission will regularly evaluate its progress towards achieving the goals of the Regional Comprehensive Plan, as well as the level of incorporation at the county and local level. While the plan is intended to provide a long-term framework for the community, it must also be responsive to change. As circumstances change, so should the plan. Over time it is expected that numerous things, from the economic climate to social demands, will create a need for change. As such, this comprehensive plan should be reviewed periodically.

This section recommends criteria and procedures for monitoring, amending, and updating the Regional Comprehensive Plan. The NCWRPC will also monitor State law for any changes that may clarify the amendment process.



Public Participation

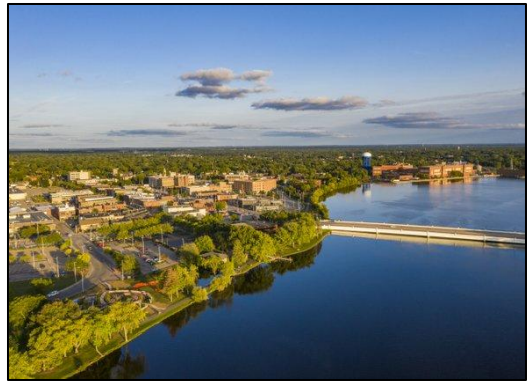
NCWRPC adopted a public participation plan (PPP) required by State Statute prior to updating this comprehensive plan. Included in the process was a public survey that was distributed Regionally that gathered input on what the regional issues, goals, objectives, and policies should be, and how to best prioritize them. A subcommittee of NCWRPC Commissioners and staff from various state agencies was created to review the plan chapters and maps throughout its creation. The plan was reviewed, posted publicly, and adopted using the process in State Statute 66.1001., which includes one Public Hearing. See Appendices A through E.

Survey results indicated that inflation, housing, and aging workforce were the top three economic issues, and the top three goals to address these issues were 1. Support infrastructure that ensures the future availability of a skilled and flexible workforce, 2. Support the infrastructure, public services, and facilities needed for economic development, and 3. Support a living wage. Water quality, protecting environmental features, and severe weather were the top three environmental issues, and the top three goals to address these issues were 1. Preserve and protect the region's landscape, environmental resources, and sensitive lands while encouraging healthy communities, 2. Encourage planning and development of land uses that create or preserve varied and unique urban and rural communities, and 3. Expand or enhance outdoor recreation opportunities. The top three quality of life issues were housing affordability/costs, mental health/substance abuse issues, and childcare affordability/availability, and the top three goals to address them were 1. Promote a variety of safe and affordable housing options that meet the needs of all community members, 2. Provide and improve transportation access to people of all ages and abilities to ensure lifelong mobility and accessibility, and 3. Promote healthy lifestyles in the Region. All responses are in Appendix E.

Survey respondents were then asked more general questions. Only 17 percent of respondents expected the Region to decline in the next 10 years, with 37 percent expecting it to stay the same and 46 percent expecting it to improve. The final, open-ended response had a variety of approaches and opinions regarding various topics covered in the plan. In general, there is support for improving housing, healthcare, education, and childcare, and a desire to protect the environment while having local control over decision making. Ultimately, the responses indicated a strong preference for economic development that revitalizes underutilized sites and responsible spending that reduces the overall tax burden.

Plan Monitoring

As part of the comprehensive planning process, several goals, objectives, and recommendations were developed. As these are promoted for incorporation in local comprehensive plans, NCWRPC staff will evaluate how relevant and useful they are to municipalities and counties. It is recommended that a periodic “Plan Status” report be prepared to summarize the progress toward implementation. The NCWRPC’s annual work program will also be evaluated and modified, if needed, to achieve implementation. It is expected that a review and possible amendments will be conducted at the Plan’s 5-year mark (2030) to ensure that it maintains its usefulness as Regional conditions change.



Plan Amendments

Amendments may be appropriate in the years following adoption, particularly in instances where the Regional Comprehensive Plan contradicts emerging policies or trends. Amendments are generally defined as minor changes to the document text or maps.

Plan Update

The State’s planning law (66.1001) requires comprehensive plans to be fully revised and updated every ten years. This differs from an amendment as the data, text, and maps for all chapters are thoroughly revised in the process. The NCWRPC will complete each full update on a ten-year cycle.

2. Implementation Summary

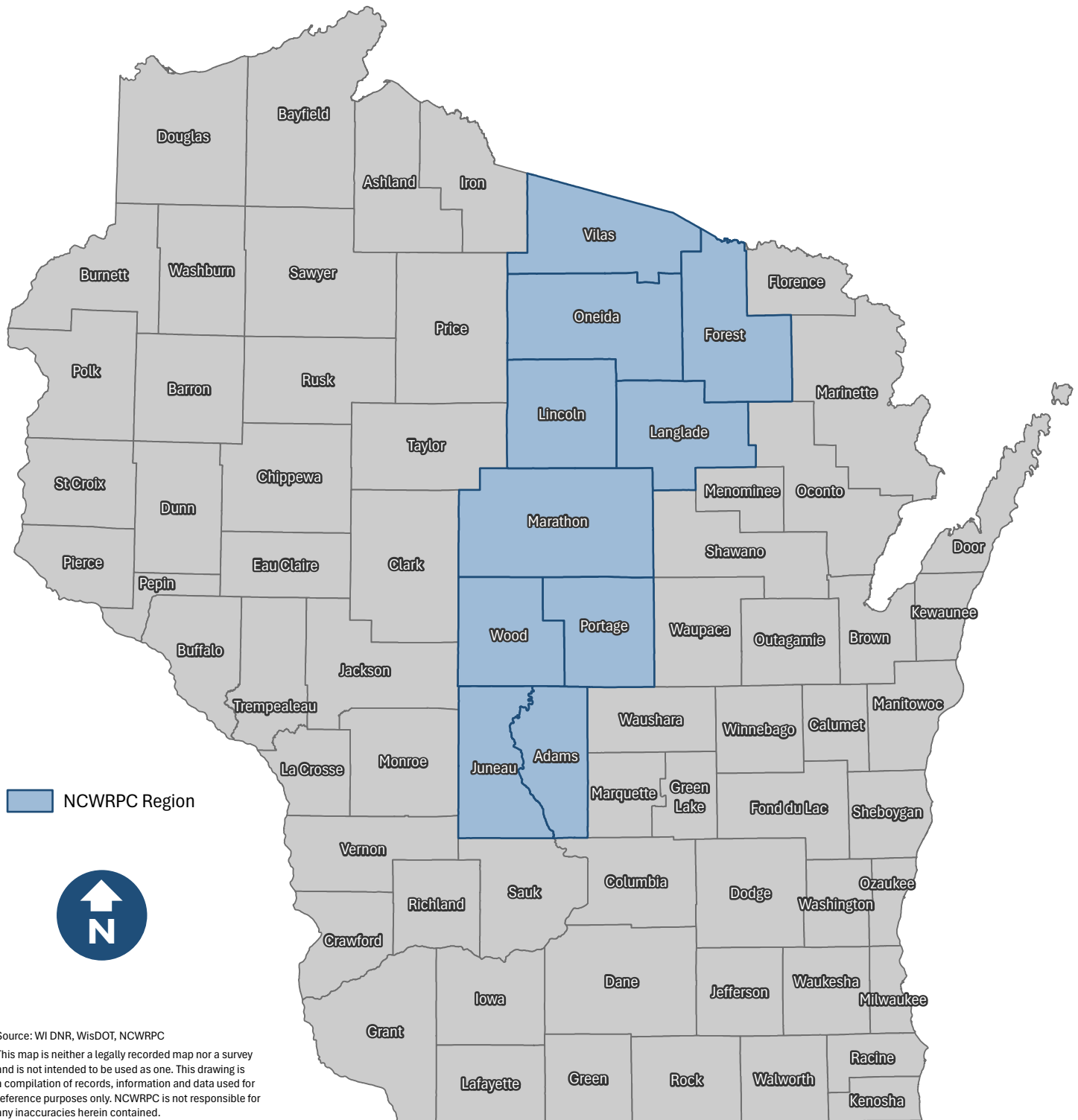
Local units of government should use the 2025 NCWRPC Regional Comprehensive Plan as a guide for their own planning efforts. The Plan’s content will be used to inform local planning efforts as they are developed, especially county and municipal comprehensive plans. It also will assist NCWRPC in developing work programs and prioritizing projects each year. Though NCWRPC is not a policy making entity that creates rules and enforces them, the organization plays a role in assisting its counties and communities in navigating ever-changing economic, social, and political conditions. Therefore, this plan reflects the latest issues and strategies that must be addressed to ensure continued success and livability for the Region.

3. Regional Comprehensive Plan Conclusion

This Plan is intended to be a “living” document, with periodic updates that ensure that it remains accurate and consistent with the needs and desires of the Region. Goals, objectives, and policies that will ultimately be implemented through local plans may be adjusted as the Region’s conditions change. Ultimately, successful implementation of this planning effort will be measured by the future quality of life experienced by both residents and visitors to the Region.

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Map 1 - Location



Source: WI DNR, WisDOT, NCWRPC

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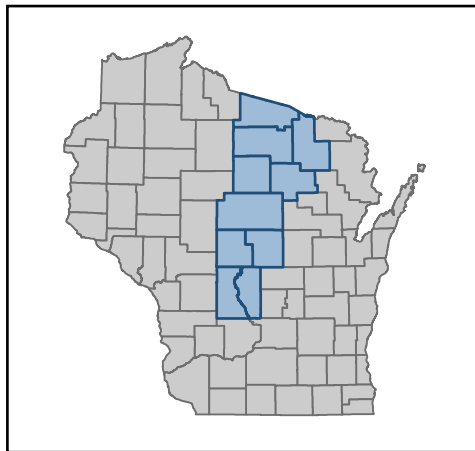
Prepared By:
**North Central
Wisconsin Regional
Planning Commission**

210 McClellan St., Suite 210, Wausau, WI 54403
715-849-5510 - staff@ncwrpc.org - www.ncwrpc.org

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Map 2 - Ecological Landscapes

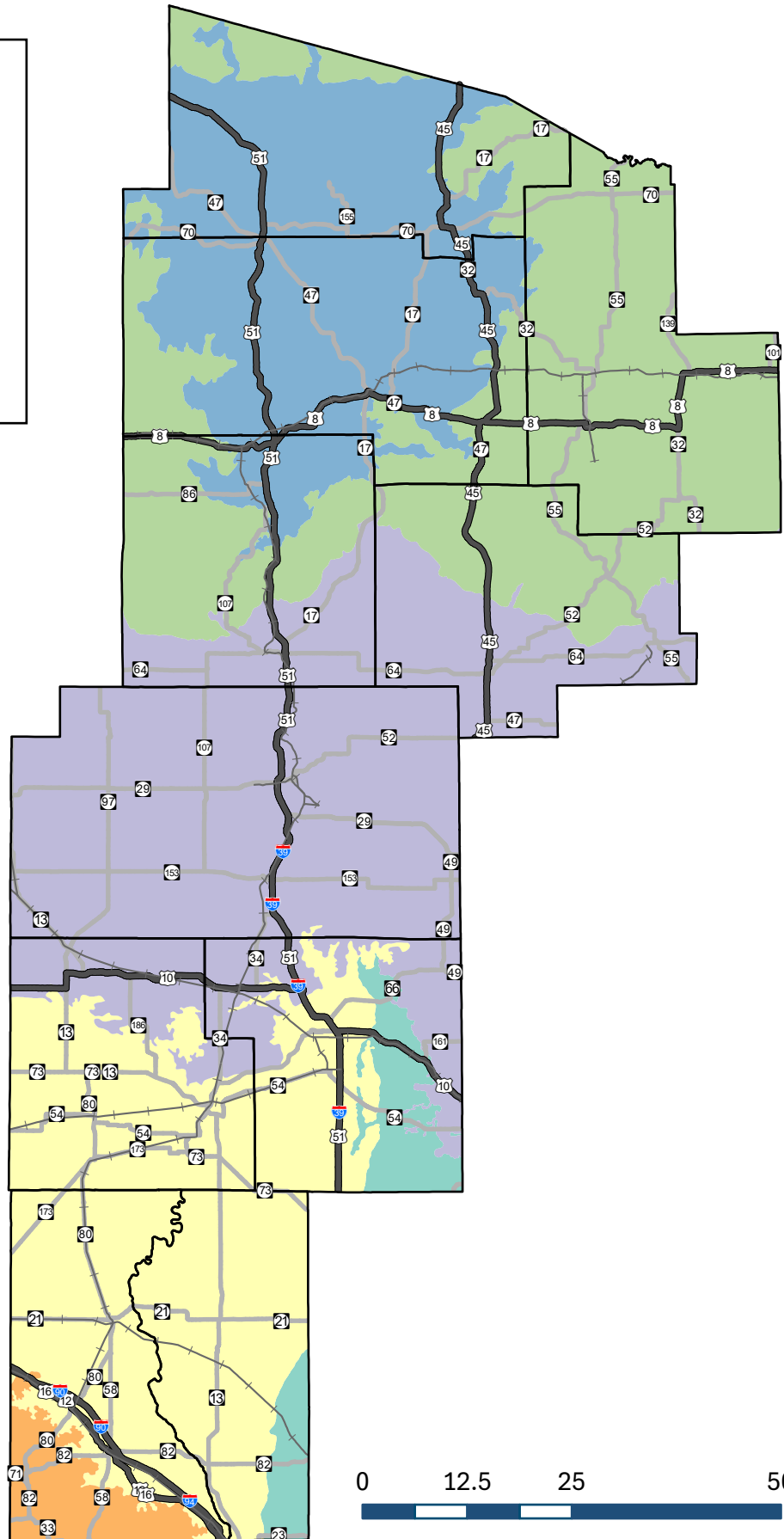


-  US Highways
-  State Highways
-  Railroad
-  Central Sand Hills
-  Central Sand Plains
-  Forest Transition
-  North Central Forest
-  Northern Highland
-  Western Coulees and Ridges



Source: WI DNR, WisDOT, NCWRPC

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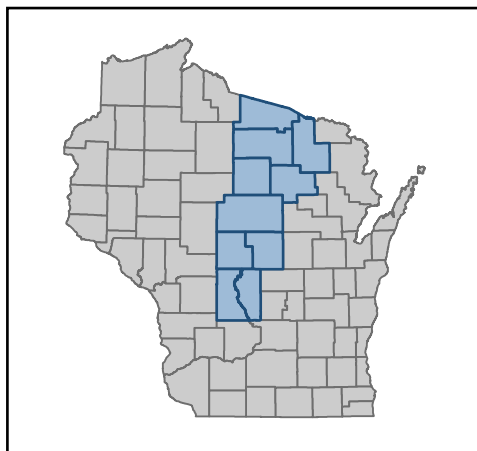


Prepared By:
**North Central
Wisconsin Regional
Planning Commission**

210 McClellan St., Suite 210, Wausau, WI 54403
715-849-5510 - staff@ncwrpc.org - www.ncwrpc.org

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Map 3 - Natural Features

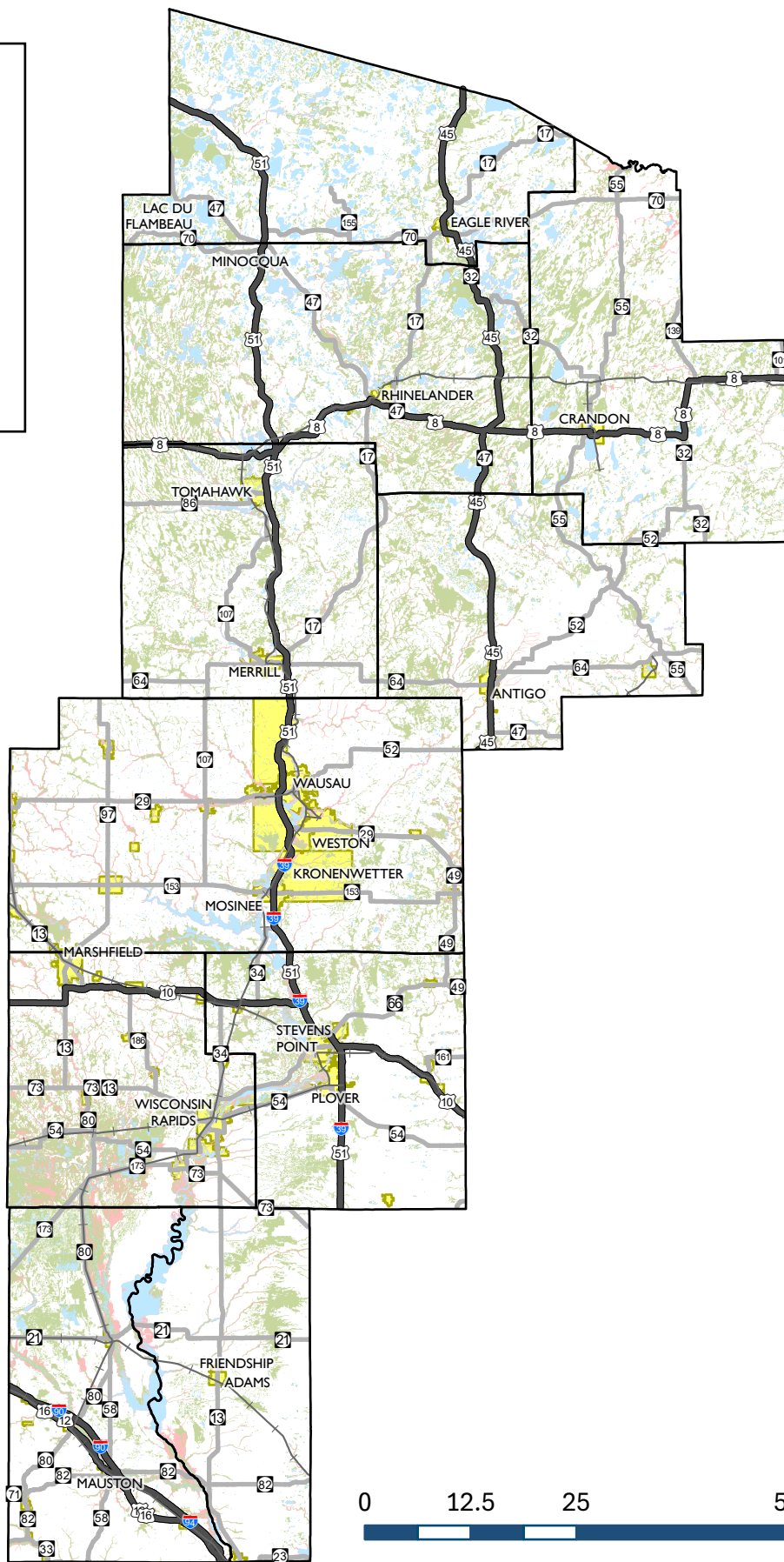


- US Highways
- State Highways
- Railroad
- Incorporated Communities
- Floodplain
- Wetlands
- Water



Source: WI DNR, WisDOT, NCWRPC

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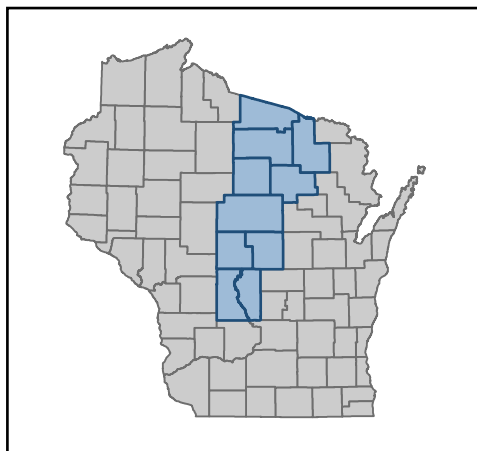


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Wisconsin Regional
Planning Commission**

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Map 4 - Outdoor Recreation

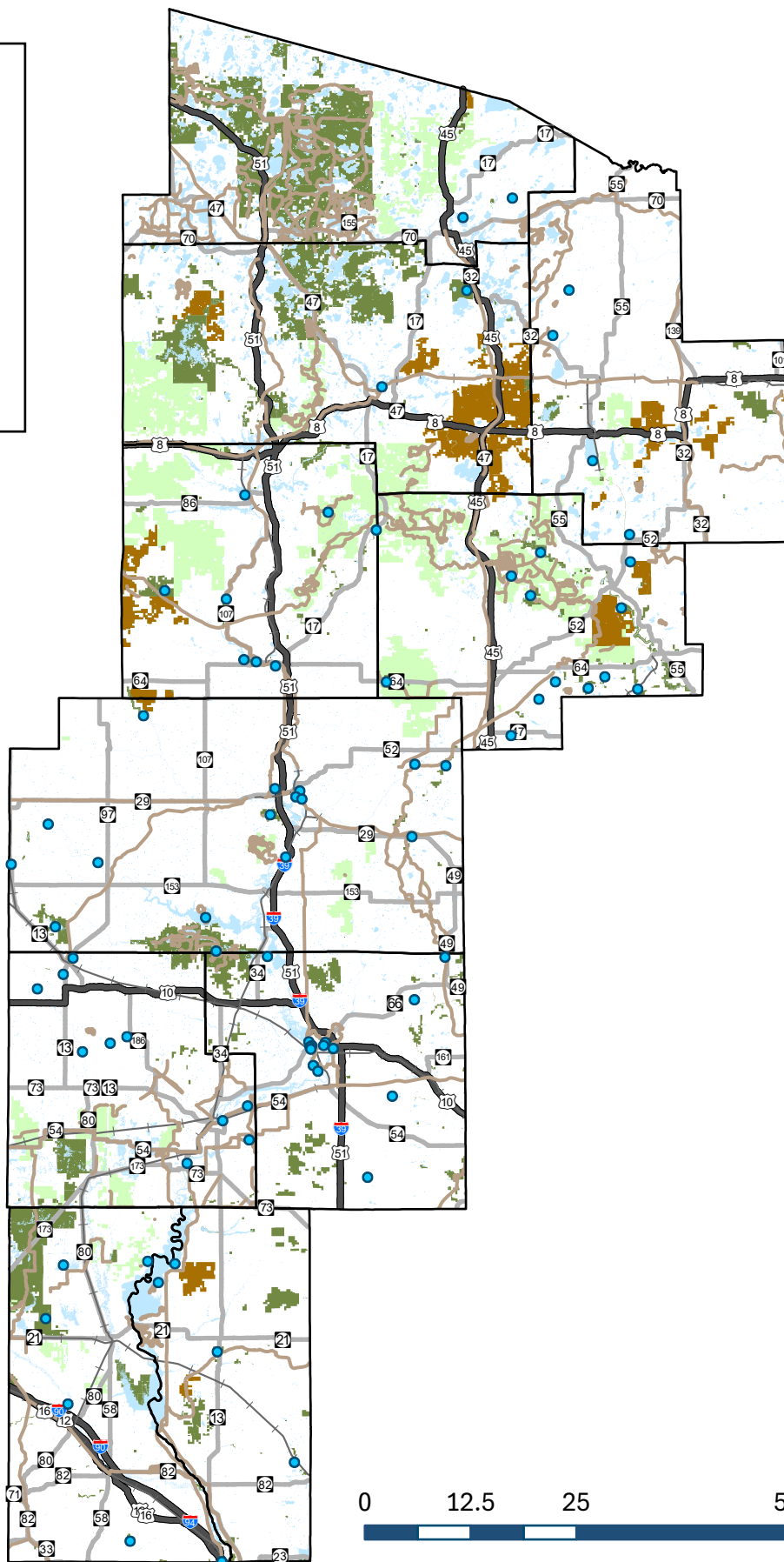


- US Highways
- State Highways
- Railroad
- Parks
- Trails
- State Land
- County Forest
- Permanent Easement
- Water



Source: WI DNR, WisDOT, NCWRPC

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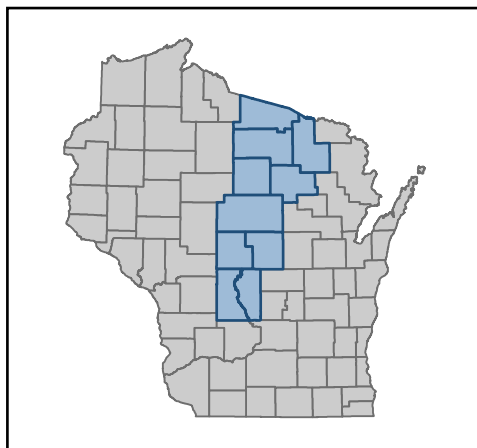
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Map 5 - Transportation

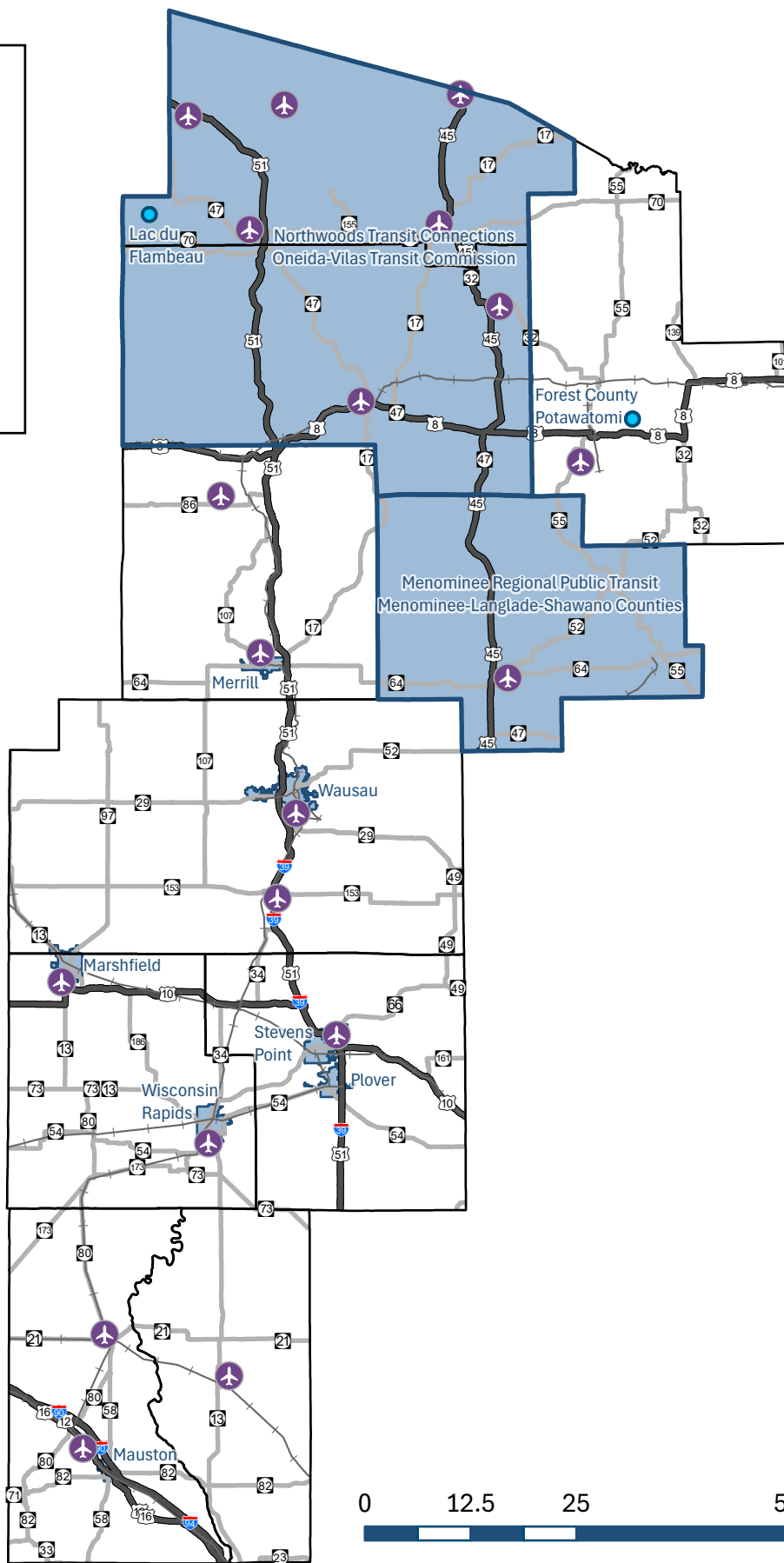


- US Highways
- State Highways
- Railroad
- Local Transit Community
- Tribal Transit
- Airports



Source: WI DNR, WisDOT, NCWRPC

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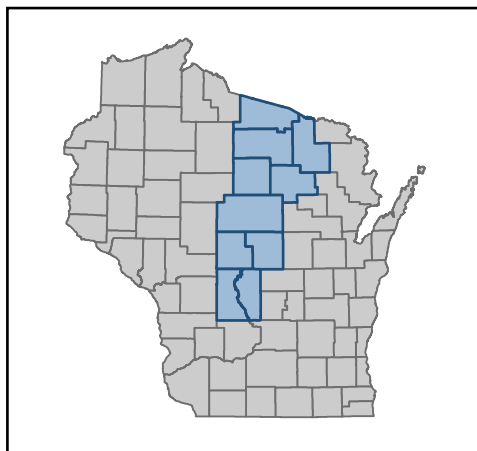
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210 McClellan St., Suite 210, Wausau, WI 54403
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Map 6 - Economic Development

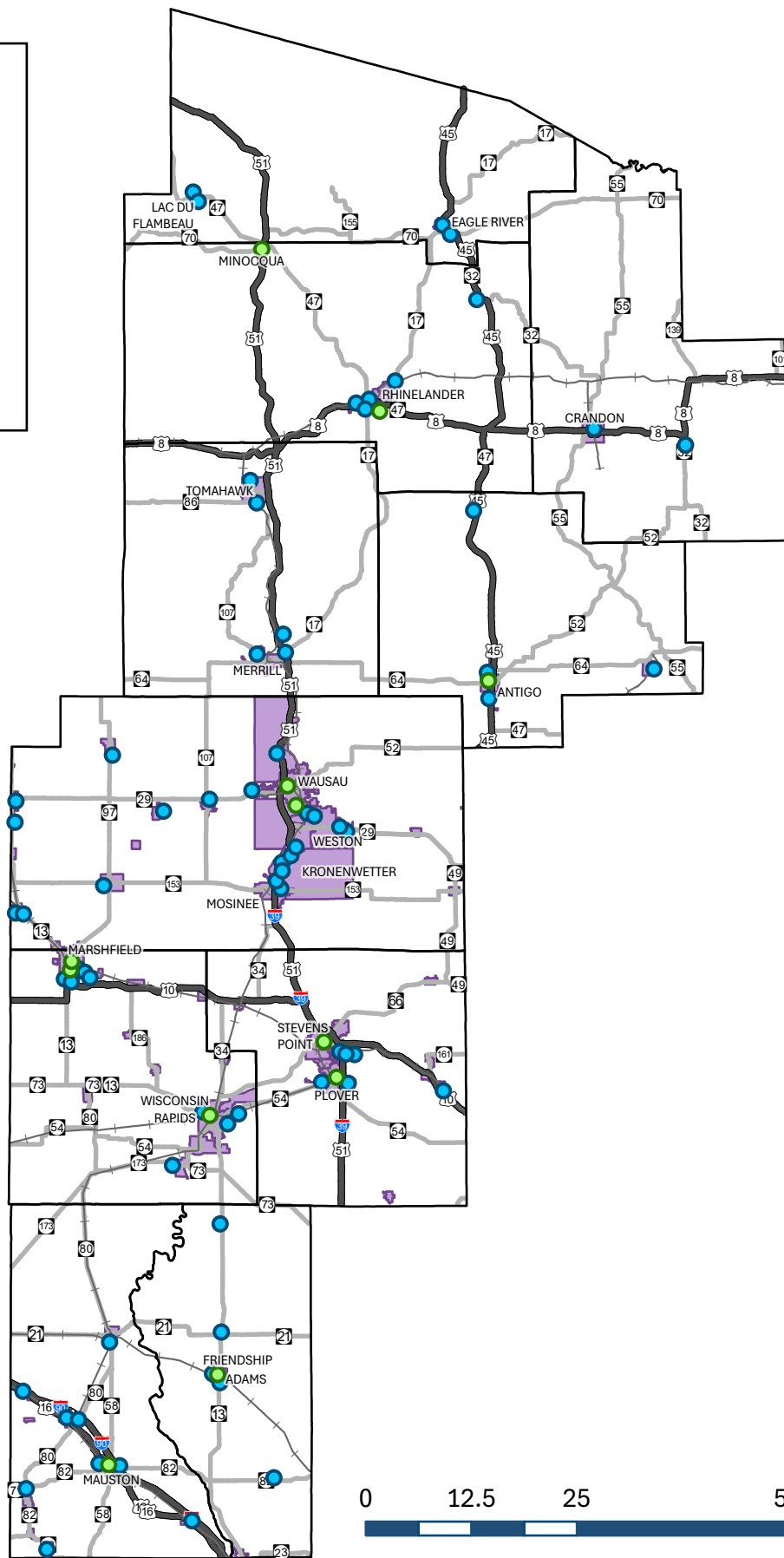


- US Highways
- State Highways
- Railroad
- Industrial Park
- Colleges
- Communities



Source: WI DNR, WisDOT, NCWRPC

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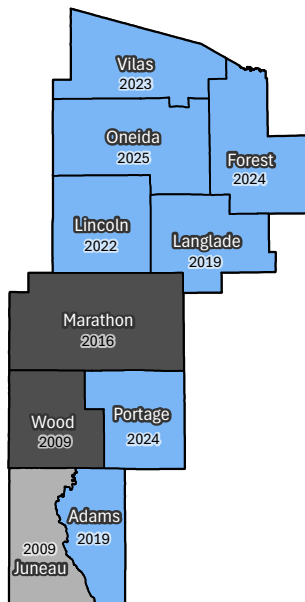
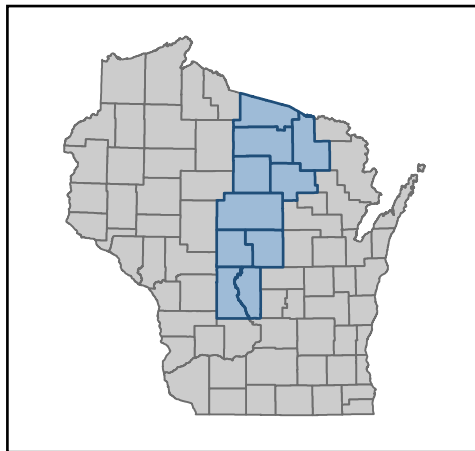
Prepared By:
**North Central
Wisconsin Regional
Planning Commission**

210 McClellan St., Suite 210, Wausau, WI 54403
715-849-5510 - staff@ncwrpc.org - www.ncwrpc.org

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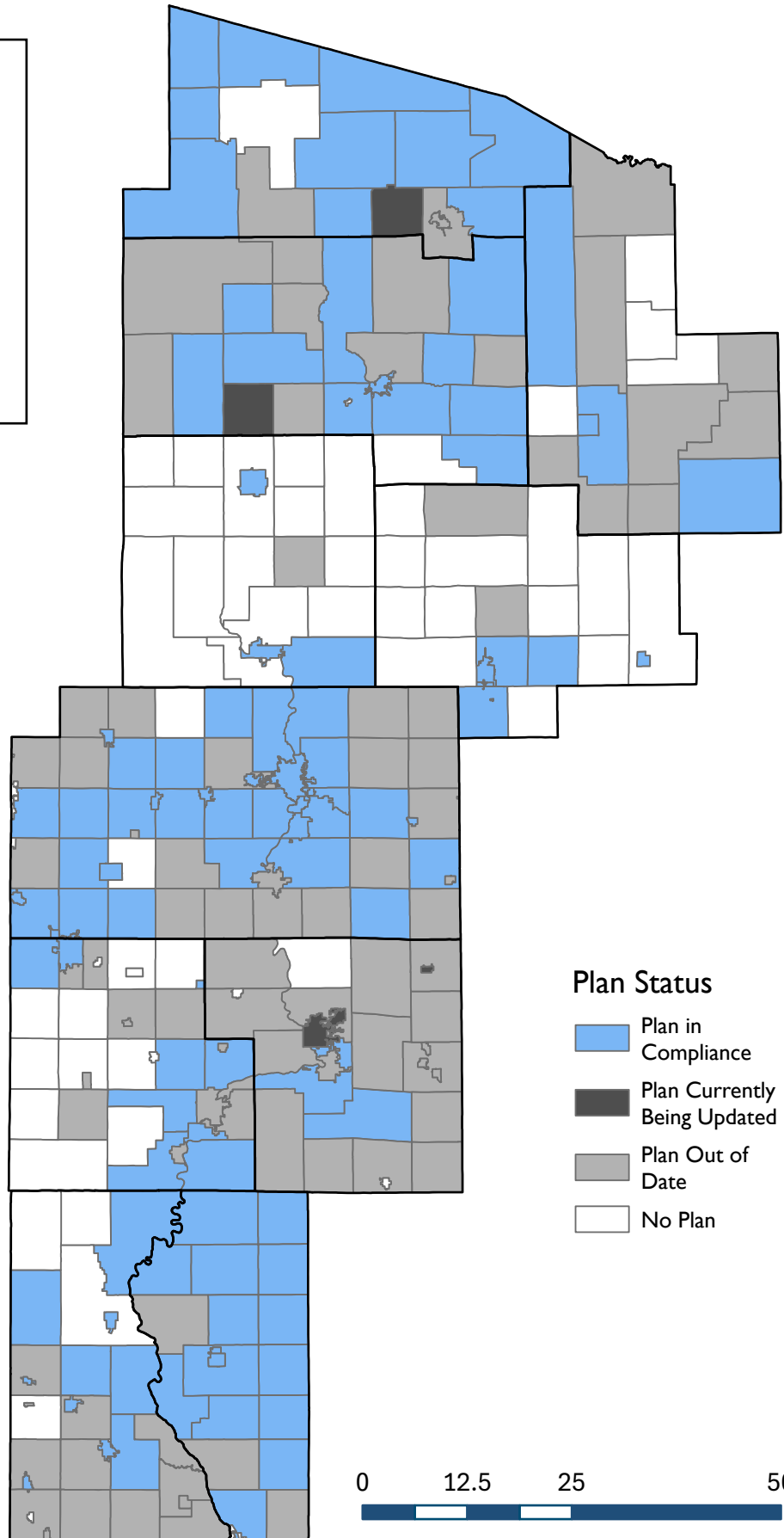
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Map 7 - Comp Plan Status



Source: WI DNR, WisDOT, NCWRPC

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Plan Status

- Plan in Compliance
- Plan Currently Being Updated
- Plan Out of Date
- No Plan



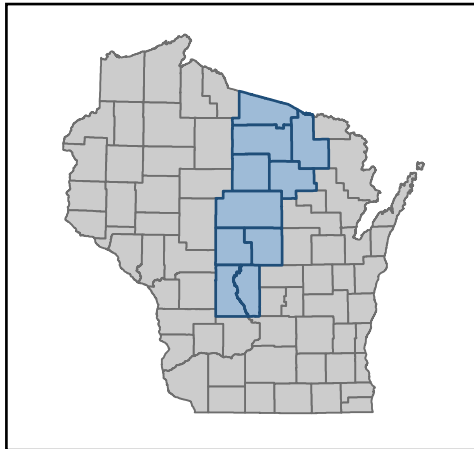
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210 McClellan St., Suite 210, Wausau, WI 54403
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Map 8 - Existing Land Use

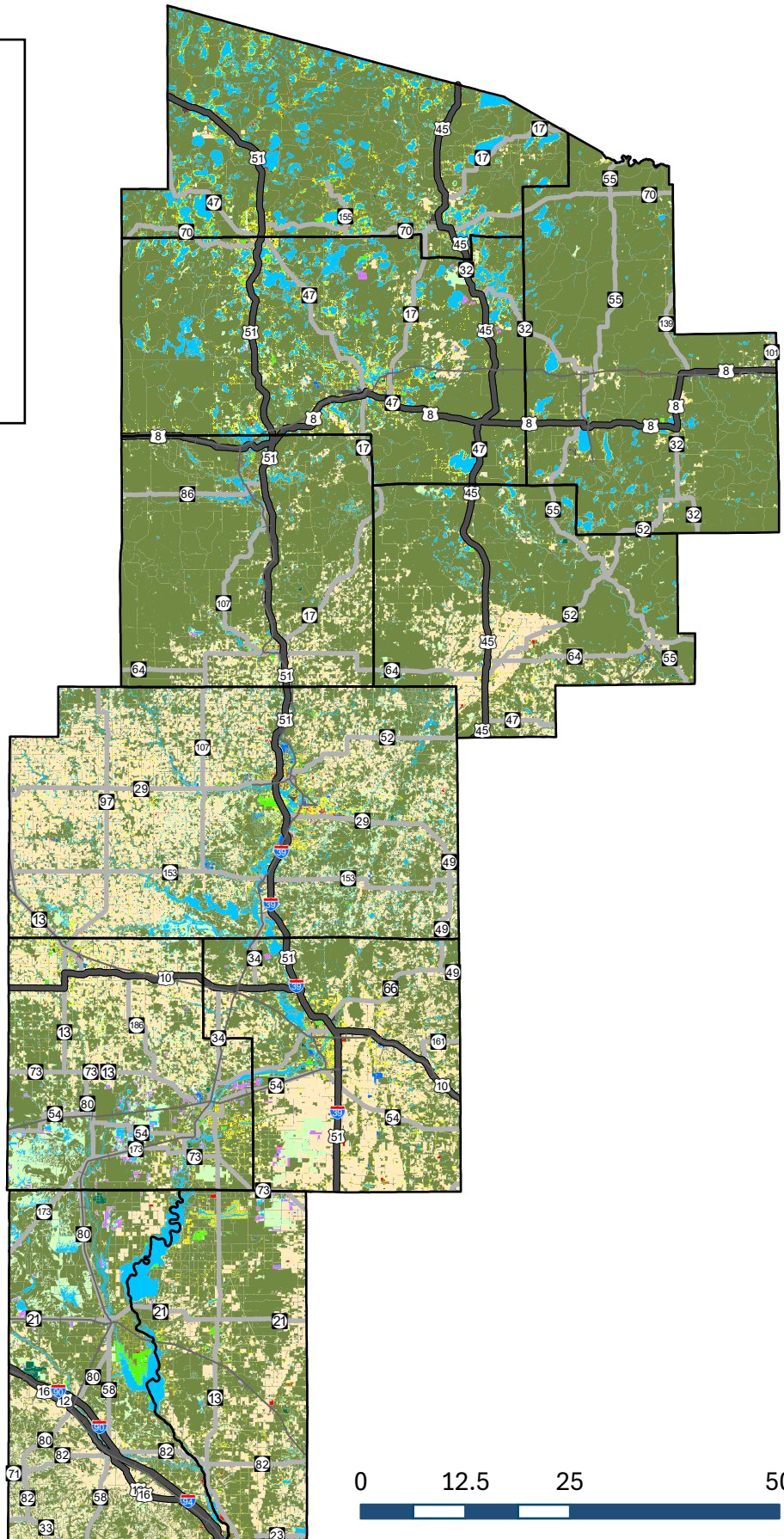


- US Highways
 - State Highways
 - Railroad
- Existing Land Use 2020**
- Agriculture
 - Commercial
 - Cranberry Bog
 - Governmental / Institutional
 - Industrial
 - Open Lands
 - Outdoor Recreation
 - Quarry
 - Residential
 - Transportation
 - Utility
 - Woodlands
 - Water



Source: WI DNR, WisDOT, NCWRPC

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Appendix A: Public Participation Plan

North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) Regional Comprehensive Plan Public Participation Plan (PPP) adopted June 3, 2024

Background: NCWRPC recognizes the need to engage local governments and the general public in the planning process. This public participation plan (PPP) sets forth the techniques to meet the goal of public participation. Therefore, this PPP forms the basic framework for achieving an interactive dialogue between citizens, local decision makers, staff, and the NCWRPC.

The creation of the Public Participation Plan is a task required in meeting the requirements of Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law (ss. 66.1001). Under the Regional Planning Commission statute (ss.66.0309) regional planning commissions are required to adopt a master plan for the region they serve. NCWRPC last prepared a Regional Comprehensive Plan in 2015.

Goals:

- Inform the public, including county, city, village, and town governments, as well as tribal nations that the planning process is underway.
- Provide opportunities for involvement and incorporate that input.
- Formalize the relationship between the Comprehensive Plan and the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.
- The completed plan becomes a foundation for other regional and local planning efforts.

Objectives:

- That the public have opportunities to provide their input - both formally and informally.
- That the public has access to all information developed throughout the planning process.
- That input is elicited through a variety of means (electronic, printed, and oral) in such a way that it may be carefully considered.
- That this process of public involvement strengthens the sense of community present in the Region.

Actions:

- An advisory committee will be established to provide oversight during the planning process.
- This document, a PPP, is adopted and implemented by the Commission.
- All meetings date, time, and location for the planning process will be posted on NCWRPC's website and are open to the public.
- An online survey will be conducted to seek input.
- Periodic updates will be provided in our newsletter updating everyone on the status of the plan.
- Periodic updates will be made at our Quarterly Commission Meetings
- Draft documents will be shared with Peer Reviewers representing various stakeholders.
- Planning meeting summaries and materials will be maintained in the NCWRPC office and on our website at www.ncwrpc.org.
- A Public Hearing will be held prior to the adoption of the plan, likely July 2025



Wisconsin
GANNETT

PO Box 630848 Cincinnati, OH 45263-0848

AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

REGIONAL PLANNING NORTH CENTRAL WI REG
North Central Wi Regional Planning
210 McClellan St Ste 210
Wausau WI 54403-4820

STATE OF WISCONSIN, COUNTY OF BROWN

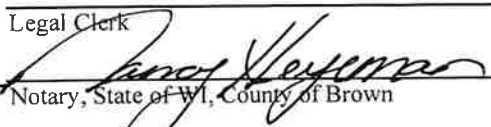
I being duly sworn, doth depose and say that I am an authorized representative of The Wausau Daily Herald, a newspaper at Wausau Wisconsin and that an advertisement of which the annexed is a true copy, taken from said paper, has been published in said newspaper in the issues dated:

06/30/2025

That said newspaper was regularly issued and circulated on those dates and that the fees charged are legal.

Sworn to and subscribed before on 06/30/2025

Legal Clerk


Notary, State of WI, County of Brown

My commission expires

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PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE:

North Central Wisconsin Regional
Planning Commission
Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP)

The Draft 2025 Regional Comprehensive Plan presentation and public hearing will occur on July 30th, 2025. The meeting will take place at the Wausau Business Incubator at 11:00 AM. A link to the plan is below and it is also on our website at ncwrpc.org. The RCP will be considered for adoption later this year at our October Meeting.

Reach out to Sam Wessel with any questions or comments related to the plan.

Regional Comprehensive Plan Public Hearing

Date: July 30, 2025

Time: 11:00 AM

Location: Wausau Business Incubator,
Large Meeting Room

100 N. 72nd Avenue, Wausau, WI

Contact: Sam Wessel, Senior Planner

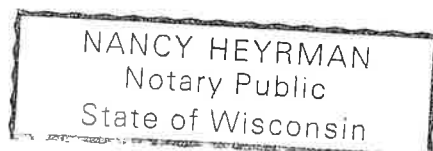
715-849-5510, Ext. 303

swessel@ncwrpc.org

RCP Link:

<https://www.ncwrpc.org/regional-comprehensive-plan-2025-2045/>

Run: June 30, 2025 WNAXLP



**NORTH CENTRAL WISCONSIN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
RESOLUTION 2025 - 8**

ADOPTING REGIONAL MASTER PLAN...REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

WHEREAS, the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) has the responsibility of preparing a Master Plan for the Region under ss. 66.0309 (9); and

WHEREAS, the NCWRPC is required to incorporate the nine planning elements as outlined in the comprehensive planning law ss. 66.1001; and previously

WHEREAS, the NCWRPC adopted the 1981 "Framework for the Region"; and

WHEREAS, the NCWRPC adopted the 2003 "Regional Comprehensive Plan"; and

WHEREAS, the NCWRPC adopted the 2015 "Regional Livability Plan"; and

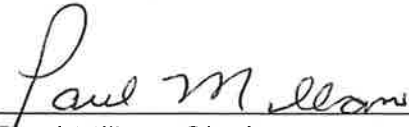
WHEREAS, the NCWRPC has prepared the 2025 Regional Comprehensive Plan that builds upon those previous efforts; and

WHEREAS, the previous planning effort, the Regional Livability Plan, provides guidance if any deficiencies are identified in the Regional Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS, adoption of said Regional Master Plan...now 2025 Regional Comprehensive Plan complies with the above state laws; and

THEREFORE, NOW BE IT RESOLVED: that the NCWRPC supports and adopts a Regional Master Plan, the 2025 Regional Comprehensive Plan, and confirms its commitment to the goals and objectives contained therein.

Adopted this 29th day of October, 2025.


Paul Millan, Chairperson


Ron Nye, Secretary/Treasurer

Appendix D: Comprehensive Plan Committee Meeting Summaries

Regional Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee Meeting 1 Summary

Date: June 3, 2024

Time: 2:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Place: Virtual via Microsoft Teams

Committee Attendees: Loretta Baughan, Jason Grueneberg, Doug Machon, Betty Manson, David Meurett, Paul Millan, and Tim Reed

Staff Attendees: Christian Boulanger, Dennis Lawrence, and Sam Wessel

Meeting Overview:

- NCWPRC staff provided a brief overview of the Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) planning process. The four past regional planning efforts were outlined, including the most recent plan named the “Regional Livability Plan.” This plan, adopted in 2015, addresses four specific areas: Housing, Economic Development, Transportation, and Land Use. NCWPRC has begun updating its Regional Comprehensive Plan, formally known as the “Regional Livability Plan.” This plan will provide data, trends, and goals that local comprehensive plans should reference and/or incorporate into their own comprehensive plan since many regional challenges also affect local and county governments.
- Staff provided a tentative timeline for the project. This project will likely involve 4-6 meetings with the Steering Committee to discuss/review a few chapters at each meeting. Before each meeting, a Doodle Poll will be sent out via email to pick a date and time that works for most committee members. Staff also explained the goal is to complete the rough draft around June 2025, with the full Commission adopting the plan in October 2025.
- Staff reviewed the Public Participation Plan and highlighted the actions that will be taken to meet Wisconsin’s Comprehensive Planning law (ss. 66.1001).
- Staff reviewed the Introduction and Chapter 1 sections of the Regional Comprehensive Plan. Committee members supported the demographics/data findings in Chapter 1.
- The Committee held an open discussion on regional issues that should be integrated into the Regional Comprehensive Plan. As demand has decreased, several members voiced their concern about the future of the region’s forestry/paper products industry. Additionally, the topic of resiliency came up; with economic and environmental factors impacting a community's ability to adapt to changing conditions. Further, the lack of effort to increase resilience in a community can impact bond ratings, one member said. Several members also brought up changing demographics in their area, brought on by a declining school-age population and an increased elderly population, impacting local schools and the workforce. Related to this issue is the lack of ability to attract new or returning people to the region. A couple of members are concerned about the lack of services for elderly people in rural areas. Other issues brought up included: aging infrastructure, groundwater quality, and the future of automation and work from home. Staff said they would incorporate/explore these issues in the Regional Comprehensive Plan.
- Staff concluded the meeting by mentioning that they will send a Doodle Poll to identify dates/times for the next meeting, likely in August.

Regional Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee Meeting 2 Summary

Date: August 14, 2024

Time: 2:00-3:00 p.m.

Place: Virtual via Microsoft Teams

Committee Attendees: Loretta Baughan, Ted Cushing, Jami Gebert, Doug Machon, Betty Manson, and Tim Reed

Staff Attendees: Christian Boulanger, Dennis Lawrence, and Sam Wessel

Meeting Overview:

- NCWRPC staff provided a brief recap of the first meeting, mentioning that the introduction and Chapter 1 sections of the Regional Comprehensive Plan had been reviewed at the last meeting. The project timeline was also covered.
- Staff reviewed Chapter 2 (Natural Resources). The Committee did not have any specific concerns with the chapter's content. The issues section will remain general, but the water quality issue will list common water quality concerns (nitrates, PFAS, etc.) relevant to the region.
- Staff reviewed Chapter 3 (Housing). The Committee did not state any specific concerns with the chapter's content. After discussing the chapter's issues, staff will add that housing availability and poor housing conditions (health and safety) are issues.
- Staff reviewed Chapter 4 (Utilities & Community Facilities). There were no concerns with the content. Under the issues section, staff will add that Emergency Services like Fire and Emergency Medical Services are moving away from a volunteer workforce to a paid workforce. The objective on broadband speed will be changed to reflect the FCC's definition of broadband (100 mpbs upload/20 mpbs download).
- Staff concluded the meeting by mentioning that the Committee would receive an email to identify dates/times for the next meeting.

Regional Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee Meeting 3 Summary

Date: October 14, 2024

Time: 2:00-3:00 p.m.

Place: Virtual via Microsoft Teams

Committee Attendees: Loretta Baughan, Ted Cushing, Jami Gebert, Jason Grueneberg, Doug Machon, Betty Manson, Paul Millan, Dave Meurett, and Tim Reed

Staff Attendees: Christian Boulanger and Sam Wessel

Meeting Overview:

- NCWRPC staff provided a brief recap of the second meeting, mentioning that Chapter 2 (Natural Resources), Chapter 3 (Housing), and Chapter 4 (Utilities & Community Facilities) of the Regional Comprehensive Plan have been reviewed at the last meeting. Current updates of the draft plan will continue to be posted on the NCWRPC website.

- Staff reviewed Chapter 5 (Transportation). The Committee had no specific concerns with the chapter's content but would like to see intermodal transportation covered. Also, the topic of electric bikes/scooters will be incorporated into the chapter.
- Staff reviewed Chapter 6 (Economic Development). The Committee did not state any specific concerns with the chapter's content. Industry Characteristics will be reordered in Table 18.
- Staff reviewed Chapter 7 (Land Use). There were generally no concerns with the content, but several considerations were mentioned. Both the effects of remote work and the installation of solar/wind energy have land use impacts that should be highlighted in the chapter.
- Staff concluded the meeting by mentioning that the Committee would receive an email to identify dates/times for the next meeting.

Regional Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee Meeting 4 Summary

Date: January 7, 2025

Time: 12:00-1:00 p.m.

Place: Virtual via Microsoft Teams

Committee Attendees: Loretta Baughan, Ted Cushing, Jason Grueneberg, Doug Machon, Betty Manson, Paul Millan, Dave Meurett, and Tim Reed

Staff Attendees: Christian Boulanger, Dennis Lawrence, and Sam Wessel

Meeting Overview:

- NCWRPC staff provided a brief recap of the third meeting, mentioning that Chapter 5 (Transportation), Chapter 6 (Economic Development), and Chapter 7 (Land Use) of the Regional Comprehensive Plan were reviewed at the last meeting. Current updates of the draft plan will continue to be posted on the NCWRPC website.
- Staff reviewed Chapter 8 (Public Health). The Committee had no specific concerns with the chapter's content but would like to mention home health care and delivery services as options for seniors aging in place. Also, an emphasis on education on preparation for severe weather events would be useful. ADRC's role in assisting the aging population will be added.
- Staff reviewed Chapter 9 (Intergovernmental Cooperation). The Committee did not state any specific concerns with the chapter's content. Both public utilities and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation will be added to the shared services paragraph.
- Staff reviewed Chapter 10 (Implementation). There were no concerns with the content.
- Staff explained the upcoming survey which will likely be included in the spring NCWRPC newsletter.
- DOA's recent population projections were discussed, with the committee agreeing that projections based on both the 2010 and 2020 could be included in the RCP. Factors like increased homeschooling and better broadband could continue to make the region an attractive place to live.
- Staff concluded the meeting by mentioning that the Committee would receive an email with the draft survey as well as potential dates/times for the next meeting.

Regional Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee Meeting 5 Summary

Date: June 24, 2025

Time: 1:00-2:00 p.m.

Place: Virtual via Microsoft Teams

Committee Attendees: Loretta Baughan, Ted Cushing, Doug Machon, Betty Manson, Paul Millan, Dave Meurett, and Jami Gebert

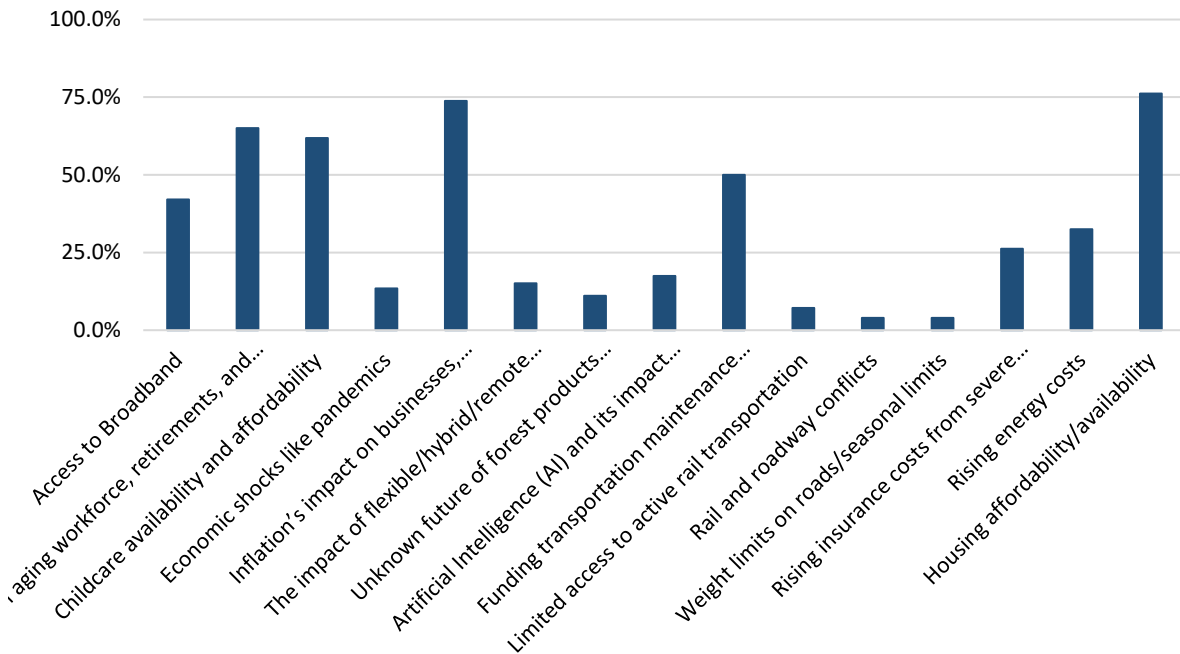
Staff Attendees: Christian Boulanger, Dennis Lawrence, and Sam Wessel

Meeting Overview:

- NCWRPC staff provided a brief recap of the plan progress and a review of each chapter.
- Staff reviewed the survey results. Certain identifiable information from the survey will be filtered out of the plan in the next draft.
- During the review of each chapter, several edits were identified. The following revisions will be implemented:
 - Throughout the plan: Climate change language will be changed to an alternative phrase such as severe or resiliency to comply with EDA requirements.
 - Chapter 3: The Centergy Housing Plan will be added under the existing plans section.
 - Chapter 5: Dave Meurett (WisDOT) recommended a number of minor transportation-related edits and the closing of Rhinelander Public Transit will be noted in the plan.
 - Suggestions as to how to lay out the survey results in the plan will be incorporated for readability.
- Motion by Jami Gebert/seconded by Paul Millan to recommend the draft plan for public hearing at the July 30th Commission meeting, contingent on the edits being made to the plan. Motion passed 7-0.

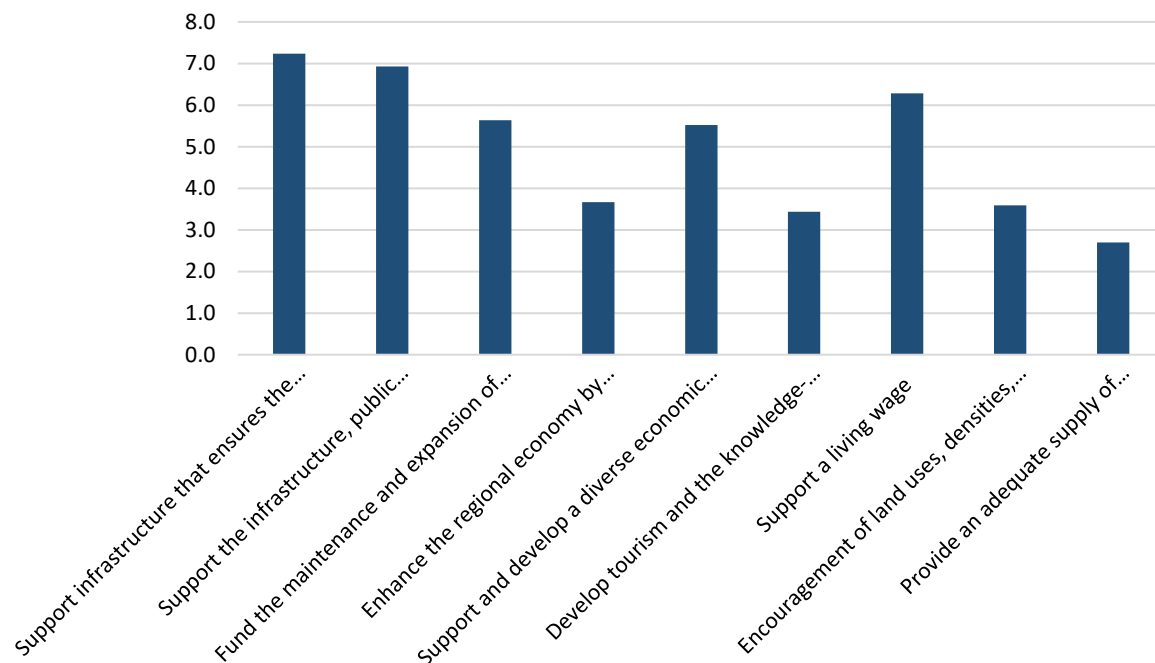
Appendix E: Public Survey Results

Q1. What are the top 5 economic issues in North Central Wisconsin?



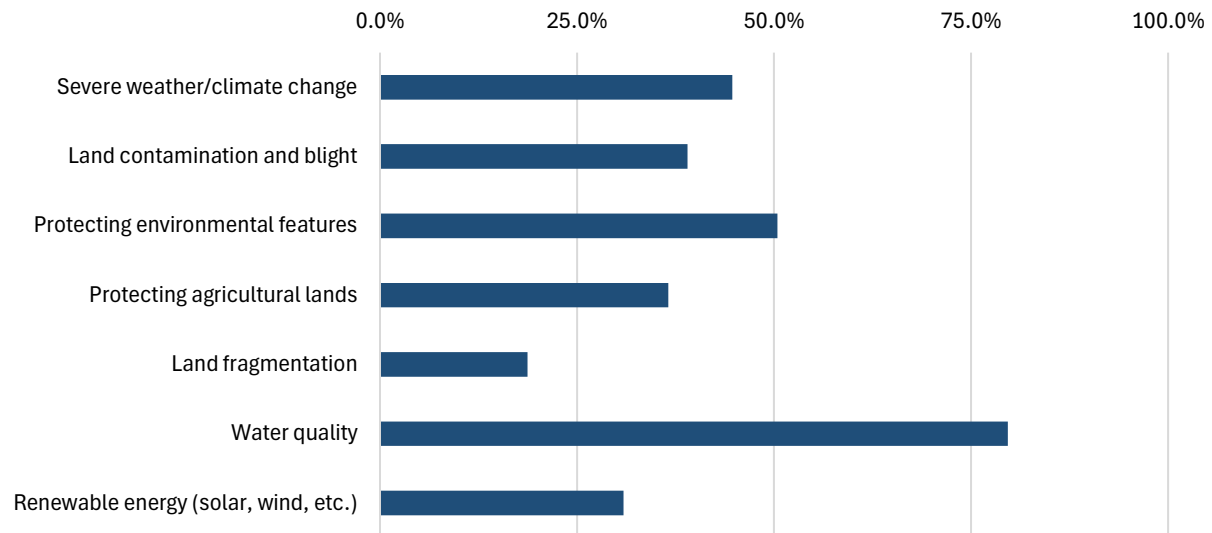
Answer Choices	Responses	
Access to Broadband	42.1%	53
An aging workforce, retirements, and training and recruiting to fill jobs	65.1%	82
Childcare availability and affordability	61.9%	78
Economic shocks like pandemics	13.5%	17
Inflation's impact on businesses, county/municipal budgets, household finances, and growing gaps between income levels	73.8%	93
The impact of flexible/hybrid/remote work and its impact on real estate, land use, and the workforce	15.1%	19
Unknown future of forest products industry	11.1%	14
Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its impact on the economy	17.5%	22
Funding transportation maintenance and improvements	50.0%	63
Limited access to active rail transportation	7.1%	9
Rail and roadway conflicts	4.0%	5
Weight limits on roads/seasonal limits	4.0%	5
Rising insurance costs from severe weather events	26.2%	33
Rising energy costs	32.5%	41
Housing affordability/availability	76.2%	96
	Answered	126
	Skipped	0

Q2. Please rank the following goals designed to address economic issues from highest priority (1) to lowest priority (9):



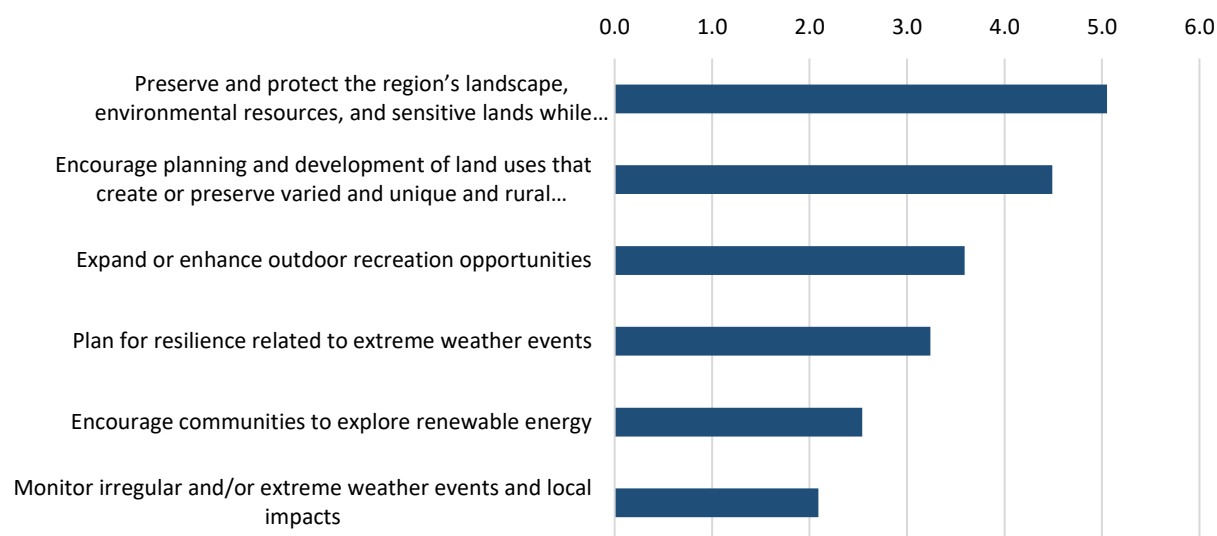
Answer Choices		Score
Support infrastructure that ensures the future availability of a skilled and flexible workforce		7.2
Support the infrastructure, public services, and facilities needed for economic development		6.9
Fund the maintenance and expansion of the transportation system		5.6
Enhance the regional economy by supporting airports, freight rail, and intermodal freight opportunities		3.7
Support and develop a diverse economic base ensuring economic growth and resiliency		5.5
Develop tourism and the knowledge-based economy into leading economic sectors		3.4
Support a living wage		6.3
Encouragement of land uses, densities, and regulations that promote efficient development patterns and relatively low municipal, state, governmental, and utility costs		3.6
Provide an adequate supply of developable land to meet existing and future market demand for residential, commercial, and industrial uses		2.7
Answered		123
Skipped		3

Q3. What are the top 3 environmental issues facing North Central Wisconsin?



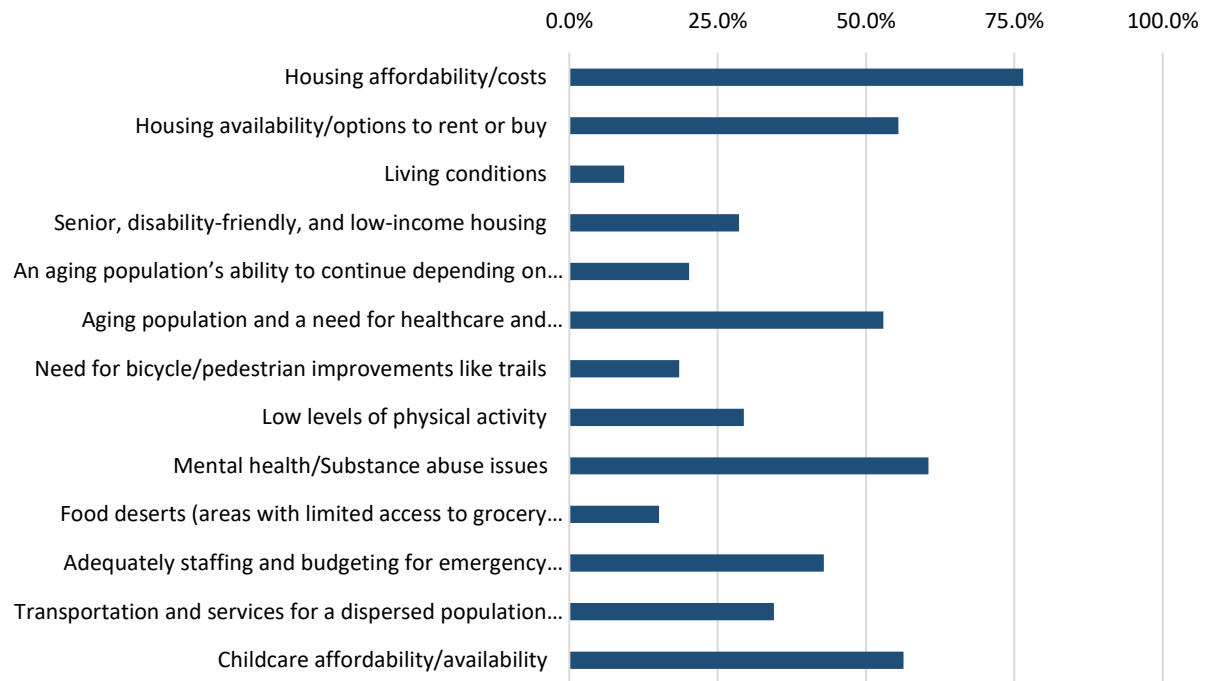
Answer Choices	Responses	
Severe weather	44.7%	55
Land contamination and blight	39.0%	48
Protecting environmental features	50.4%	62
Protecting agricultural lands	36.6%	45
Land fragmentation	18.7%	23
Water quality	79.7%	98
Renewable energy (solar, wind, etc.)	30.9%	38
Answered		123
Skipped		3

Q4. Please rank the following goals designed to address environmental issues from highest priority (1) to lowest priority (6):



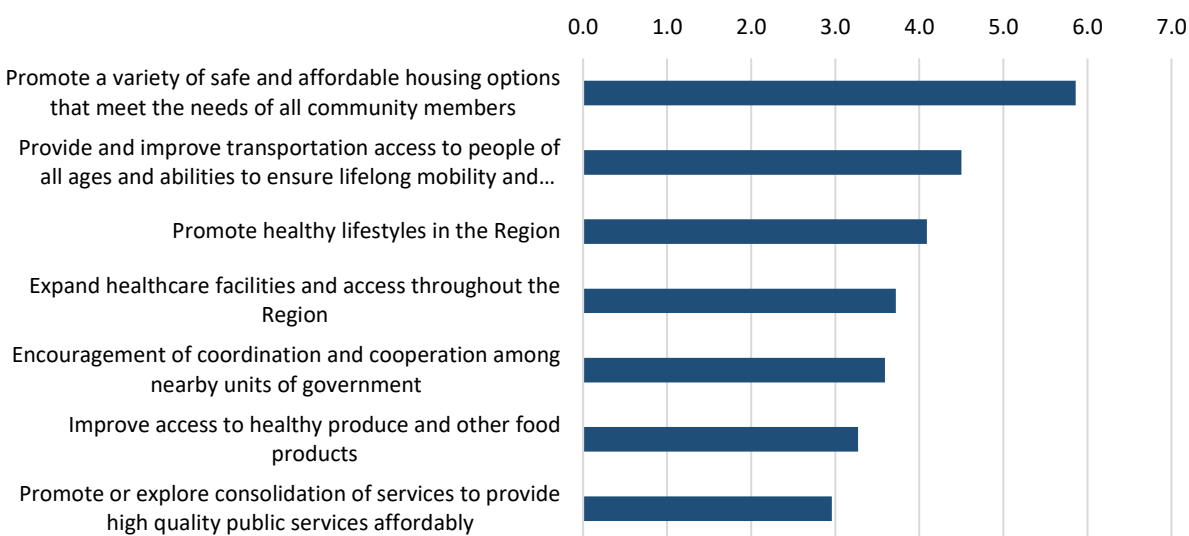
Answer Choices	Score
Preserve and protect the region's landscape, environmental resources, and sensitive lands while encouraging healthy communities	5.1
Encourage planning and development of land uses that create or preserve varied and unique and rural communities	4.5
Expand or enhance outdoor recreation opportunities	3.6
Plan for resilience related to extreme weather events	3.2
Encourage communities to explore renewable energy	2.5
Monitor irregular and/or extreme weather events and local impacts	2.1
Answered	113
Skipped	13

Q5. What are the top 5 issues affecting Quality of Life in North Central Wisconsin?



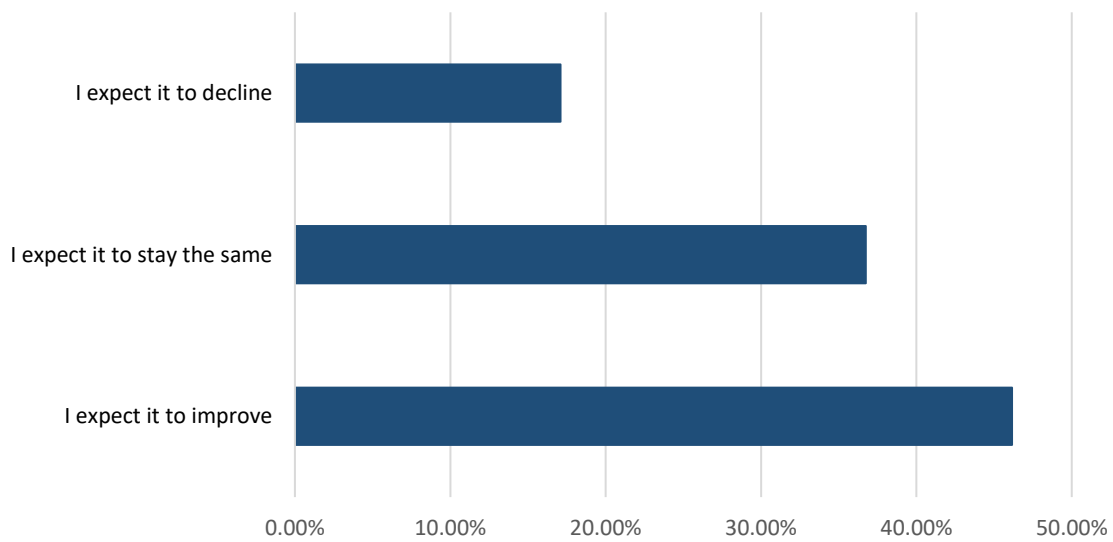
Answer Choices	Responses	
Housing affordability/costs	76.5%	91
Housing availability/options to rent or buy	55.5%	66
Living conditions	9.2%	11
Senior, disability-friendly, and low-income housing	28.6%	34
An aging population's ability to continue depending on driving	20.2%	24
Aging population and a need for healthcare and nursing care	52.9%	63
Need for bicycle/pedestrian improvements like trails	18.5%	22
Low levels of physical activity	29.4%	35
Mental health/Substance abuse issues	60.5%	72
Food deserts (areas with limited access to grocery stores)	15.1%	18
Adequately staffing and budgeting for emergency services	42.9%	51
Transportation and services for a dispersed population in rural areas	34.5%	41
Childcare affordability/availability	56.3%	67
	Answered	119
	Skipped	7

Q6. Please rank the following goals designed to address quality of life issues from highest priority (1) to lowest priority (7):



Answer Choices	Score
Promote a variety of safe and affordable housing options that meet the needs of all community members	5.9
Provide and improve transportation access to people of all ages and abilities to ensure lifelong mobility and accessibility	4.5
Promote healthy lifestyles in the Region	4.1
Expand healthcare facilities and access throughout the Region	3.7
Encouragement of coordination and cooperation among nearby units of government	3.6
Improve access to healthy produce and other food products	3.3
Promote or explore consolidation of services to provide high quality public services affordably	3.0
Answered	111
Skipped	15

Q7. In general, how do you feel about the 10-county Region's future over the next 10 years?



Answer Choices	Responses	
I expect it to improve	46.15%	54
I expect it to stay the same	36.75%	43
I expect it to decline	17.09%	20
Answered:		117
Skipped:		9

Q8. Are there any other issues or goals that should be considered, or comments you have?

Answered: 38

Skipped: 88

- We need better quality health system that's more affordable.
- I feel there is too much concern for personal issues impacting us now and not enough focus on our future and what we are leaving for future generations.
- Water quality and protection of marshlands that provide natural water cleaning. A public safe law enforcement service that befriends and protects local citizens. High quality public education, universities and technical training.
- Overall road conditions are terrible
- Townships should receive at least \$5 per acre for county, state, and park land in township aid.
- Regarding renewable energy sources - some of these have more of a negative impact than people may think. Solar energy and wind powered energy systems are not always recyclable when they are damaged or at the end of their life. Also - the many solar energy farms are popping up in the Rome - Adams County area and towns are not getting a say in whether or not they should be there. In Portage County, a threatened species, Prairie Chickens, are at stake due to a large solar field coming to that area and destroying their habitat.
- The nature and open spaces bring more people to the area and add congestion and diminish its rural beauty.
- None
- Loss of local control of major solar projects
- Housing affordability, childcare and workforce are all important issues that need to be focused on
- Childcare challenges should be our number one priority
- Tourism monies should be used for the betterment of locals living in the communities year-round.
- Elected officials need to be educated in preparing for disasters and ev
- State funding of our rural School district is less than in larger communities. The local school is one of the most important resources in our community.
- Develop job opportunities, wages, affordable housing & childcare that will encourage local youth to remain in the area as well as attract others from outside the area.
- No, stop focusing on climate change. Worry about what is in front of you, not what might happen.
- Lack of dentists including Badgercare accepting dentists, free/low-cost indoor physical activity options, water quality/contamination, Poor environmental outcomes r/t solar energy implementation
- We're not ready for the Baby Boomers retirements and healthcare costs and services we're gonna have to sell our homes. Will it be affordable to buy it???
- Municipalities should be more engaged in how to reduce expenses and lower taxes for its residents.
- No
- There needs to be a bigger influence to promote economic opportunities in the region, which will in turn help bring growth and diversity to the area. We are too reliant on historic industries which limits innovation and resiliency of the region.
- More housing for over 55 age population, more options for assisted living housing. The population is aging and more services are needed to support it.
- I'm hoping things will improve soon with the housing issues and daycare in the area. This is very much needed.

- Stop allowing solar panels on agricultural and wildlife land. Oppose all wind turbines. Make roads friendlier to cars, no one uses bike lanes.
- As long as the policy makers in Madison and Washington care more about the special interest groups with money than they do about the local governments we are going to have a tough row to hoe.
- I live in Plover and work and shop in Stevens Point often. The biggest need I see in this is economic growth. An example of this would be the Hwy 10 corridor in Stevens Point. There are at least a half dozen main parcels for sale, vacant buildings or vacant lots that need to be filled with business. There are openings and parcels for sale in Point on business 51 also. There are also many open lots and buildings on Post road in Plover. What can be done to bring in more businesses, restaurants, and fun attractions for families? How is the city planning on growing and making sure the right business go in. Another major issue in our area is how effective local government is at getting things done which sometimes seems like slow or not at all. The Business 51 project through Stevens Point was supposed to be half way done by now and it is now pushed to start in 2026 due to poor leadership from city and government officials. The leadership in Stevens Point in particular does not seem to care about what the citizen think. Economic development, better leadership in city government, property taxes are way, way, way too high and the roads need better attention.
- Plover is a great place to live, work, and raise a family. The community is welcoming, services are well-maintained, and the Village continues to grow in ways that support both residents and businesses. It's exciting to see the positive momentum and thoughtful planning that make Plover a vibrant and attractive community.
- Not at this time
- We have too many younger people leaving the area and not returning.
- No
- Need to protect and expand our public land. Look at taxing and not allow such a large portion not be paying their fair share.
- Supporting new and current businesses is something that could be incorporated into the economic development goals, especially considering all the work the NCWRPC did creating the Entrepreneurship Portal a couple of years ago. This is a great resource that could still be utilized as part of the bigger efforts.
- We need to engage the new talent/employees who move to the area in the community. So they feel a part of the community, otherwise it's easy to leave when other opportunities come available. We aren't great at welcoming new talent and encouraging their involvement in the community.
- Improve "Education" at all levels. Sad to say that over time education has become a very sad issue. As an example people cannot even do basic math as a general rule, or even grammar/spelling. Way too much reliance upon electronic devices!
- No
- Community involvement through volunteering.
- Creating authentically welcoming communities is one of the best ways we can grow. Innovation is best achieved with diversity of thought. Being exclusive and rigidly rooted in "this is how it has always been done" will be detrimental to our future.
- State should update and improve regulations to improve efficiencies and eliminate conflicts.

NCWRPC Commissioners October 2025

Adams

Rocky Gilner
Rick Pease

Forest

Paul Millan
Tom Tallier

Juneau

Betty Manson
Dennis Krejci
Terry Taft

Langlade

Reinhardt Balcerzak
Angela Close
Ronald Nye

Lincoln

Hans Breitenmoser
Loretta Baughan
Alan Bishop

Marathon

Joshua Klingbeil
Randy Fifrick
Jami Gebert

Oneida

Michael Tautges
Robb Jensen
Ted Cushing

Portage

Ray Reser
John Pavelski
Larry Raikowski

Vilas

Holly Tomlanovich

Wood

Dave LaFontaine
Douglas Machon
Jason Grueneberg