



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

6 Economic Development

Overview

The ability of a community to attract new and innovative businesses, workers, and industries is an important element for the county's prosperity and economic survival. By providing for its businesses and the residents who comprise its workforce, the county insures its future success. The chapter contains goals, objectives, background information, and programs to promote the stabilization, retention, and expansion of the economic base in Rusk County.

6.1 Labor Force

The labor force is that portion of the population 16 years or older that is unemployed but actively seeking a job or they are already employed. Employment is counted and measured in several ways according to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Office of Economic Advisors.

Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) are based on where a person lives and includes anybody working, including those who are self-employed. What that means is that it measures the employed residents of the county. The primary source is the Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted each month by the Census Bureau. CPS data employed persons at their place of residence and counts them only once even if they would hold more than one job. CPS data includes those persons "with a job but not at work" who earn no wages. Some examples could include unpaid family workers employed 15 hours or more during the survey period, workers on unpaid leaves of absence, and a significant portion of agriculture and domestic workers, but would exclude someone who is under the age of 16.

Nonfarm Wage and Salary Employment (NFWS) is an estimate of jobs based on the county an employer is located in. What that means is that it measures jobs in the county. It does not include self-employed persons. The primary source is the Current Employment Statistics program (CES) and is derived from the Quarterly Census of the Employment and Wage (QCEW), which is gathered from the quarterly reports submitted by over 8 million U.S. Employer establishments covered by unemployment insurance. The QCEW program counts



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

jobs at the place of work and counts separately each job held by more than one holder. NFWS data takes QCEW data and adds churches, private schools, RR workers, students in study, etc. For that reason the NFWS figures will always be higher than that of the QCEW figures.

Table 6.1 shows employment numbers. Each year the numbers for unemployment gradually start to increase over time.

Table 6.1: Rusk County Labor Force Data										
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Labor Force	7,167	7,199	7,941	7,973	7,927	7,829	7,825	8,021	7,913	7,728
Employed	6,748	6,861	7,532	7,504	7,403	7,320	7,324	7,511	7,387	7,190
Unemployed	419	338	409	469	524	509	501	510	526	538
Unemp. Rate	5.8%	4.7%	5.2%	5.9%	6.6%	6.5%	6.4%	6.4%	6.6%	7.0%

Source: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, LAUS

Table 6.2 shows the labor force for the year 2000.

Table 6.2: Employment Status Rusk County		
	Number	Percent
Population 16 years and over	12,039	100%
In labor force	7,473	62.1%
Civilian labor force	7,468	62%
Employed	6,997	58.1%
Unemployed	471	3.9%
Percent of Labor Force	6.3%	(X)*
Armed Forces	5	-
Not in labor force	4,566	37.0%

*Not applicable

Source: U.S. Census 2000



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

Educational Attainment

A good indicator of economic potential for an area is the educational attainment of its residents. A high level of educational attainment reflects a more skilled population with higher earnings. Table 6.3 shows the percentage of the population's of people over the age of 25 of Rusk County and Wisconsin and the highest level of schooling completed and compares the two. Rusk County is ahead in one category of high school graduate or less, otherwise Wisconsin as a whole shows a higher level of educational attainment.

Table 6.3: Educational Attainment 2000		
	Rusk County	Wisconsin
Less than 9th Grade	8.4%	5.4%
9th to 12th Grade, No Diploma	12.5%	9.6%
High School Graduate	43.4%	34.6%
Some College, No Degree	18.5%	20.6%
Associate Degree	6.1%	7.5%
Bachelor's Degree	8.2%	15.3%
Graduate or Professional Degree	2.9%	7.2%

U.S. Census, 2000

Employment

Figure 1.3 on page 1-15 shows the employment by industry for the residents of Rusk County. Manufacturing has the highest percentage with 29.2% of the residents, followed by Educational, health and social services (18.7%) and Retail Trade (10.3%).

Quarterly Workforce Indicators (QWI) are derived state administrative records and basic demographic information from the Census Bureau. Like the QCEW, the QWI counts jobs rather than employed workers and does not include self employed workers. Unlike the QCEW, the QWI counts all jobs within a quarter, not just the 12th of the month; therefore, the job counts will differ.



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

Data from all the industry sectors of Rusk County can be seen in Table 6.4. Since manufacturing has the biggest industry in Rusk County, it will have its own sector in Table 6.5. As said before that QWI counts all jobs within a quarter, the most recent quarter available at this time for the tables is the second quarter in 2007.

Table 6.4: Employment Data, All NAICS Sectors – QWI data

2 nd Quarter of 2007	Rusk County			Wisconsin		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total Employment	5,090	2,330	2,760	2,741,758	1,355,935	1,373,204
Net Job Flows	15	67	-52	14,360	60,651	7,169
Job Creation	254	172	108	135,485	120,170	70,387
New Hires	567	264	302	368,151	214,473	183,822
Separations	766	332	434	443,509	228,953	217,845
Turnover	7.0%	5.7%	8.1%	9.0%	8.7%	9.0%
Avg. Monthly Earnings	\$2,243.00	\$2,587.00	\$1,942.00	\$3,248.75	\$3,972.00	\$2,449.00
Avg. New Hire Earnings	\$1,269.75	\$1,382.00	\$1,015.25	\$1,991.50	\$2,758.00	\$1,523.75

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Local Employment Dynamics, Quarterly Workforce Indicators

Table 6.5: Employment Data, Manufacturing – QWI data

2 nd Quarter of 2007	Rusk County			Wisconsin		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total Employment	1,792	986	806	506,476	355,105	153,936
Net Job Flows	15	3	11	8,550	5,883	-279
Job Creation	49	25	27	20,556	14,561	5,305
New Hires	94	47	47	39,279	27,672	10,214
Separations	110	60	50	40,953	28,532	13,262
Turnover	2.8%	3.0%	2.6%	6.0%	6.0%	6.1%
Avg. Monthly Earnings	\$2,471.00	\$3,080.50	\$2,214.00	\$3,825.00	\$4,201.00	\$2,975.25
Avg. New Hire Earnings	\$2,035.00	\$2,596.00	\$2,062.00	\$3,183.00	\$3,422.00	\$2,366.75

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Local Employment Dynamics, Quarterly Workforce Indicators



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

County Commuting Patterns

In Rusk County, 1,230 residents, 18 percent of the workers who live in the county, traveled out of the county for a job. Two in every five workers who left the county headed for destinations in Barron County. Many of those who left headed to employers in the City of Rice Lake, but the cities of Chetek and Barron were also popular destinations. Other popular destinations include the City of Chippewa Falls (Chippewa County) and the City of Eau Claire (Eau Claire County). The greatest number of workers that go to Rusk County employers travel from the northeast corner of Chippewa County and head to the City of Ladysmith. The City of Ladysmith is the destination for nearly half of the workers that commute to Rusk County. The second most popular destination is the Village of Hawkins which is also the first choice for the workers who travel over from Price County. Over half of the workers that commute to the county for jobs travel from either Chippewa or Price counties. Overall, about 1,220 workers travel to jobs with Rusk County employers. These workers are important to local employers and also increases the number of workers from 755 to 1,990. Overall, the county attracts nearly as many workers as it loses to other counties. Table 6.6 gives more details about the Rusk County commuting patterns.

Table 6.6: Rusk County Commuting Patterns

	Rusk Co. residents commuting to listed county	Residents of listed county commuting into Rusk County	Net gain or loss of workers
Barron County, WI	534	112	-422
Chippewa County, WI	242	387	145
Eau Claire County, WI	76	12	-64
Price County, WI	68	246	178
Sawyer County, WI	32	166	134
Taylor County, WI	31	134	103
Hennepin County, MN	26	Not available	Not available
Dunn County, WI	24	3	-21
Lincoln County, WI	19	5	-14
St. Croix County, WI	15	Not available	Not available
Elsewhere	163	154	-9

Source: US Dept. of Commerce, Census 2000, County-to-county worker-flow files



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

6.2 Economic Base

The average annual wage for Rusk County can be seen by the next table shown. The table compares their annual wage to Wisconsin's. The highest annual wage in the county of \$41,531 is earned by fewer than 100 workers in information. The industry group includes telephone, cable and internet providers, news media, and theatres. The reason for the higher wages points to workers in two occupation groups: business and financial operations; and installation, maintenance and repair, with median wages of \$23.02 and \$17.61 per hour, respectively. The second highest average annual wage, paid to workers in over one-third of county jobs, is with manufacturing employers. Most manufacturing jobs are in production occupations, with the largest occupation group in the county with a median hourly wage of \$14.22, but many more are installers, maintainers, and repairers with a median wage of \$17.61. The manufacturing industry average annual wage of \$31,756, even though higher than most in the county, is only 69 percent of the manufacturing wage statewide.

Table 6.7: Average Annual Wage by Industry Division in 2006

	Rusk County	Wisconsin
Natural Resources	\$22,002	\$28,301
Construction	\$29,282	\$44,682
Manufacturing	\$31,756	\$45,952
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	\$22,082	\$31,935
Information	\$41,531	\$45,704
Financial Activities	\$27,474	\$48,859
Professional & Business Services	\$19,873	\$42,612
Education and Health	\$24,795	\$38,492
Leisure and Hospitality	\$8,194	\$13,058
Other Services	\$20,834	\$21,228
Public Administration	\$24,678	\$38,294

Source: WI DWD, Bureau of Workforce Training, QCEW



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

The next table shows the top 10 employers in Rusk County with the two large window factories Weather Shield and Jeld-Wen taking a huge leap ahead of any other employer in Rusk County.

Rank	Establishment	Service or Product	Number of employees
1	Weather Shield Mfg Inc	Wood window & door manufacturing	500-999
2	Jeld-Wen Windows & Doors	Wood window & door manufacturing	500-999
3	County Of Rusk	Executive & legislative offices, combined	250-499
4	Rockwell Automation Inc	Relay & industrial control manufacturing	100-249
5	Ladysmith-Hawkins School District	Elementary & secondary schools	100-249
6	County Market/ ACE Hrdw./Flambeau Pharmacy	Supermarkets & other grocery stores	100-249
7	Indianhead Community Action Agency	Other social advocacy organizations	100-249
8	Artisans Inc.	Commercial Screen Printing	100-249
9	School District of Flambeau	Elementary & secondary schools	100-249
10	Bruce Public School	Elementary & secondary school	100-249

Source: WI DWD, Bureau of Workforce Training, QCEW



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

Impact of Tourism

Rusk County's wealth of natural wonders, ecological diversity and abundant wildlife made the area a top destination for outdoor enthusiasts and nature buffs. The Blue Hills in northwestern Rusk County provide recreational opportunities year-round, including the 27-mile Blue Hills section of the Ice Age Trail. Rusk County's major rivers include the Chippewa River, Flambeau River, Thornapple River, and Jump River that offer great canoeing trips. Rusk County also provides federal, state, and county forests that bring year-round recreation, fishing, hiking, great hunting, wildlife watching, and camping.

6.3 Attracting/Retaining Businesses and Industry

It is estimated that about 85 percent of the employment in an area is generated by existing businesses; therefore, retaining these companies is a very high priority for local officials and economic development organizations. To make this happen, the obstacles that restrict the growth for existing businesses must be removed and assistance must be given to them to help them remain competitive in a global economy. This section will provide information on industrial sites, existing programs, initiatives, and organizations available to retain/attract businesses and industries in Rusk County.

Industrial Parks

Bruce Industrial Park

The Bruce Industrial Park is located on the intersection of highways 8 and 40. There is 60 acres total with 40 acres available. Roads and railroads run right through the park. The water and sewer providers are from the village of Bruce. Electricity is provided by XCEL Energy and gas is from WE Energies.

Glen Flora Industrial Park

The Glen Flora Industrial Park is located along Highway 8. There is 40 acres with 20 acres available for use. There are roads that run through the park but there is no railroad. The providers for the water and sewer systems is Glen Flora. Electricity is provided by XCEL Energy and gas is from WE Energies.



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

Ladysmith Industrial Park

Ladysmith Industrial Park is located along Highway 27. There is 110 total acres with 10 acres currently available. There are railroads and roads that go through the park. The city of Ladysmith provides the water and sewer services. Electricity is provided by XCEL Energy and the gas is provided from WE Energies.

Grant Industrial Park

The Grant Industrial Park is located along Highway 27. There are 80 total acres with 60 acres available. Roads run through the park but there is no railroad service. There is currently no water or sewer providers but there is electricity provided by XCEL Energy and gas from WE Energies.

Forest Industrial Park

Forest Industrial Park is by Highway 27 south of Ladysmith. There is 100 acres with 20 acres available. There are roads and railroads that run through the park. Water and sewer systems are provided by the city of Ladysmith. Electricity is from XCEL Energy and gas from WE Energies.

Hawkins Industrial Park

The Hawkins Industrial Park is located on Highway 8. There is 100 acres with 20 acres currently available. There is road service but no railroads. The water and sewer systems are being provided by the village of Hawkins. Electricity is provided by XCEL Energy and the gas is from WE Energies.

Access to Financing and Venture Capital

Small businesses create the lion's share of new jobs, but are the least able to obtain reasonable financing for job-creating expansions and start-ups. Because of the shortage of long-term financing, small businesses are frequently unable to match the term of financing with the life of the asset. The following are some options available for start up and expanding businesses in Rusk County.



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

Local Funds

In Rusk County there is one local revolving loan funds (RLFs) available to small businesses for start up and expansion purposes. The Northwest Wisconsin Regional Economic Development Fund is administered through the Northwest Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission in Spooner. The local Rusk County Economic Development office acts as the local point of contact and loan officer for the fund. The program offers financing assistance to businesses looking at capital equipment purchases and expansion. Below or at market interest rates make the programs attractive to local businesses.

Northwest Wisconsin Business Development Corporation

The Northwest Wisconsin Business Development Corporation (NWBDC) is a non-profit corporation formed by the Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NWRPC) to address the critical need for business financing in northwestern Wisconsin. NWBDC manages three revolving loan funds and a technology seed fund. The funds partially fill the gap in private capital markets for long-term fixed rate financing. The technology seed fund can be used to complete research and development activities and validate the technology, file patents and copyright, and develop prototypes.

Northwest Regional Economic Development Fund

The State of Wisconsin, through the Department of Commerce, selected the Northwest Regional Planning Commission for the first pilot program to develop a Regional Economic Development Fund that would consolidate the 22 local revolving loan funds that exist in the 10-county Northwest Wisconsin Region (2006). Commerce's Regional Non-Profits Initiative is a state-local effort in the region, consolidating the local RLFs to make available an Economic Development Fund for local economic development efforts. The regional fund will provide money for a wider range of projects, streamline the application and administration process, and remove the current capitalization limits placed on communities.

Wisconsin Rural Enterprise Fund, LLC

In late 2000, a community-based venture capital (equity) fund called the Wisconsin Rural Enterprise Fund, LLC (WREF) was established by the Wisconsin Business Innovation Corporation (WBIC) (an organized formed by NWRPC). WREF was formed to create a capital fund that would provide self-sustaining, moderate growth through financial investments made in rural businesses that meet the criteria that WREF is looking for. Technology intensive businesses, which have the potential to create high-wage jobs in rural



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

areas and are the targeted businesses. Currently, it is the only Northwest Wisconsin community-based venture capital fund; and its members include, besides WBIC, rural electric cooperatives, a city, and local community development organizations.

Workforce Development

Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College

Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College (WITC) is a postsecondary educational institution serving northwestern Wisconsin. The four main campuses for WITC are in Superior, Ashland, New Richmond, and Rice Lake but has a branch right in the City of Ladysmith. WITC Ladysmith allows students to earn degrees in Supervisory management Associate, Accounting Associate and Accounting Assistance Technical Diploma. Students at WITC Ladysmith can also take courses towards a degree in areas like Administrative Assistance, Finance, Marketing and other areas, as well as earn certificates in several areas like Computerized Accounting, Supervisory Leadership and Supervisory Management Systems.

Northwest Wisconsin Concentrated Employment Program

The Northwest Wisconsin Concentrated Employment Program, Inc. (NWCEP) is a non-profit corporation whose mission is to strengthen the economy by providing effective and efficient workforce development services to workers and businesses. In existence since 1968, it administers programs to help local youth and adults gain marketable skills and find better jobs. In addition, NWCEP provides a variety of services, including conferences, newsletters for businesses and business development, and workshops. Although its main office is in Ashland, it has satellite offices located throughout Northwest Wisconsin.

Business Development Assistance

University of Wisconsin Small Business Development Center

There are several options available to small businesses for business development assistance in Rusk County. One source for technical assistance is the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Small Business Development Center (SBDC). It assists small business owners, entrepreneurs, and managers who are in the pre-venture, start-up, or existing



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

business stage. SBDC offers confidential, one-to-one counseling on business management topics through visits, telephone, and email. The center maintains a business-to-business network so a new business can ask for expertise from a reliable source.

Service Corps of Retired Executives

Technical assistance for small businesses is also available through the SCORE Association (Service Corps of Retired Executives), which is a resource partner with the U.S. Small Business Administration. The Eau Claire Chapter includes representation for the Rusk County area and can offer help with an concerns, strategy, and business questions. Small business counseling is available through workshops, telephone, activities, and email.

6.4 Redevelopment & Remediation Sites

Throughout the county, a number of redevelopment opportunities exist that include fixing up and reusing abandoned lots and buildings. Some of these vacant buildings and lots may have environmental concerns due to pollution or other environmental problems. Depending on the severity of contamination and future reuse of the property, development costs can be significant or minimal.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources maintains a list of reported contaminated sites through its Bureau of Remediation and Redevelopment. The Remediation and Redevelopment Program oversees the investigation and cleanup of environmental contamination and the redevelopment of contaminated properties. Through partnerships between the Department of Commerce; Department of Agriculture, Consumer Protection, Trade; and Department of Natural Resources, funding assistance is also provided to assist governments and private entities cleanup known contaminated sites.

At the City of Ladysmith Industrial Park, a former aluminum die castings facility and foundry has been cleaned up and turned into a recycling and resale company for consumer electronics. Before the facility had been shut down and turned into a recycling and resale company, the Safe Lite Die Casting Company operated the plant from 1970 through the 1980's. The site was in operation by U.S. Castings until in early 2000 a fire forced the facility to be shutdown. The property was vacant and abandoned until in 2001 Rusk County officials took the property through a tax deed.



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

In March of 2001, Rusk County conducted Phase I and II Environmental Site Assessments, which revealed low levels of contamination in the soil due to past oil spills. A little more than 180 yards of soil was excavated and disposed of at a licensed landfill. There were also five abandoned containers that were removed as well. The main factory building received a \$1 million dollar makeover, and the newly renovated commercial space has now been leased by 5R Processors, Ltd., a local electronics recycler.

6.5 Programs & Implementation Tools

There are many programs at the county, federal, state, and regional level that can help Rusk County in the support and development of economic development efforts. In addition, there are programs available for the individual business to assist in start-up and expansion. This sections contains a list of the major programs and agencies that are most likely to be used by Rusk County in its economic development efforts. In addition to the programs, there are economic development organizations in the county that provide help to local units of government and businesses which are also listed in this section.

Financing

Economic Development Administration

The U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration offers two programs for helping with economic development that apply to Rusk County. One is the Public Works and Economic Development Facilities Assistance Program, which supports the construction or rehabilitation of essential public infrastructure and development facilities necessary to generate private sector jobs and investment, including investments that support technology-led development, eco-industrial development, and redevelopment of brownfield sites. Secondly, the Economic Adjustment Assistance Program is available to: (1) address the immediate needs of business and communities presently undergoing transition due to a sudden and severe job loss; and (2) demonstrate new and proactive approaches for economic competitiveness and innovative capacity for threatened regions and communities.



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

USDA Wisconsin Rural Development

Several loan and grant programs of benefit to the county and local business development are available from the USDA Rural Development. One of those programs is the Community Facility Guaranteed Loans Program, which provides funding to local units of government to construct, extend, enlarge, or otherwise improve community facilities providing essential services in rural areas and towns.

The Rural Economic Development Loans and Grants Program helps develop projects that will result in a sustainable increase in economic productivity, incomes in rural areas, and job creation. Projects may include business start-ups and expansion, community development, incubator projects, medical and training projects, and feasibility studies.

The purpose of the Business and Industry Direct Loan Program is to improve, develop, or finance business, employment, and industry, and improve the economic and environmental climate in rural communities. Loan purposes include purchase and expansion of land, equipment, working capital, and buildings. Loans to the public can be used to finance community facilities and build and equip industrial plants for lease to private businesses.

The Community Facilities Direct Loans and Grants Programs provides funding for essential community facilities (CF) such as municipal buildings, safety and health facilities, and day care centers. There are some examples that include clinics, hospitals, fire trucks, fire halls, and nursing homes. CF loans and grants may also be used for such things as activity centers for the handicapped, libraries, schools, and other community buildings.

State

Wisconsin Department of Commerce

There are at least three programs available to local units of government through the Wisconsin Department of Commerce (DOC). The first program is the Community Development Block Grant for Economic Development (CDBG-ED). Its purpose is to provide resources to local governments that will enable them to assist economic development projects in their community. The local unit of government is the applicant and recipient of the funds. A specific business, which must be located in a municipality of 50,000 or less, is loaned the funds for eligible business development uses. When the funds are repaid to the local government, they may stay in the community to be used as a revolving loan fund to help



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

other businesses in that community.

The second program is the Community Development Block Grant Public Facilities for Economic Development (CDBG-PFED). Its main purpose is to provide grant funds to local governments that will enable them to provide needed public facilities (i.e., sewer mains, water mains, streets, etc.) to private business enterprises that are going to create full-time jobs by starting or expanding their business because of the availability of the funded public facilities.

The third program available from the Wisconsin Department of Commerce is the Community-Based Economic Development Program (CBED). Its purpose is to provide financing assistance to local governments and community-based organizations that undertake planning or development projects or that provide technical assistance in support of business (including technology-based businesses) and community development.

Wisconsin Departments of Tourism

The Tourism Development Initiative is a multi-faceted program designed to assist tourism businesses. With its purpose to market all of Wisconsin, the Department offers several opportunities providing local tourism groups and other organizations funding assistance to promote local events and activities. The department's newly launched website also boosts links and other information that could be there for Rusk County.

Wisconsin Department of Transportation

Available from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation is a program called the Transportation Facilities Assistance and Development Program (TEA). The intent of the TEA program is to help support new business development in Wisconsin by funding transportation improvements that are needed to secure jobs in the state. A consortium group, governing body, business, or any combination thereof can apply for TEA program funding.

Regional

Northwest Regional Planning Commission

The Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NWRPC) is a cooperative venture of the local units of governments in the ten counties of Rusk, Burnett, Iron, Price, Sawyer, Taylor, Bayfield, Washburn, Douglas, and Ashland. This also includes the five tribal nations of Lac



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

Courte Oreilles, Bad River, St. Croix, Lac du Flambeau, and Red Cliff. The purpose of the NWRPC is to assist the communities of the membership to promote sustainable economic development, develop public Facilities, provide planning and technical services, protect the environment, and efficiently manage and conserve natural resources. Every five years, NWRPC, with the cooperation of the local units of the government in the region, prepares a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the entire Northwest Region. In an effort to build focused development strategy for the Northwest Region, NWRPC developed three non-profit development corporations, each focusing on a specific area need and opportunity including financing for business start up and expansions (Northwest Wisconsin Business Development Corporation), affordable housing (Northwest Affordable Housing, Inc.), and technology-based business development (Wisconsin Business Innovation Corporation).

Northwest Wisconsin Business Development Corporation

A strategic partner of the Northwest Regional Planning Commission, the Northwest Wisconsin Business Development Corporation, has available revolving loan funds to address a gap in private capital markets for long-term, fixed rate, lowdown-payment, and low interest financing to assist businesses in job creation/retention and growth.

Local

There are several economic development organizations dedicated to the businesses and the community in Rusk County. The following is a list of these organizations that provide assistance to local units of the government, businesses, and industries within the county or promote economic development.

Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce

The City of Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce helps with business networking, marketing and education. The chamber can also help in other business needs like getting help with employee benefits, human resources, payroll, tax services, etc.



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

Ladysmith Industrial Development Corporation

Through independent projects and partnerships with local governments, the Ladysmith Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) works to attract and retain businesses in Ladysmith. IDC was organized in 1958. The corporation sold stock to local businesspeople and interested citizens and, in the almost 40 years since, has had a big impact on economic development in Ladysmith and throughout Rusk County. Today, the IDC partners with local governments to carry out projects, or undertake projects of its own.

Rusk County Economic Development

Rusk County Economic Development is a County Department that handles a number of functions relating to economic development. They work to attract and retain businesses through providing small business counseling, access to loan funds, and building and leasing industrial space. A number of the County's efforts are in conjunction with the City of Ladysmith. Together the partners have remodeled, built, a number of industrial facilities in the City of Ladysmith. In addition the County has built industrial buildings in Weyerhaeuser, Bruce, and Glen Flora. These buildings are then sold or leased to businesses. The Economic Development office is also responsible for the County's tourism promotion efforts.

University of Wisconsin-Extension

The Rusk County UW-Extension Agriculture/Natural Resources Development Agent works with local business and industry groups and can provide business and marketing counseling, feasibility study assistance, and business plan development.

6.6 Survey Data Summary

According to the Rusk County Comprehensive Planning Survey, the top 5 job opportunities chosen by the Rusk County population that are most suitable for development in this county are light manufacturing/industrial, health care related, forestry related, recreation related, and agricultural related. 82.4% of the population also said Rusk County should offer economic incentives to businesses to relocate or open facilities in Rusk County so more jobs are available. They also said these incentives should include low interest loans and discounts on industrial land.



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

A brief SWOT analysis determines that Rusk County is a resource rich area (timber, water), with available and affordable labor ready to serve a variety of manufacturers. These would be the predominate strengths of the area. Additional positives are a high quality of life attributable again to excellent nature resources, safe communities, and affordability. Additionally the area does have the possibility of excellent rail connectivity.

Weaknesses of the area include logistics – distance to markets and the Interstate transportation system. The low educational attainment of the workforce, and current lower skill labor force are some of the other low points.

Opportunities exist for the County to focus on its resource based economy, as well as its existing base of manufacturing companies. Tourism and Agriculture are also growing industries and new opportunities are emerging in the area of ag and bio-energy, on farm production, and value-added agriculture.

Overseas competition for manufacturing is an ever growing threat, as is the continued “brain drain” of young people from rural communities. In addition the area has a high concentration of jobs related to the building industry (windows, doors, furniture/fixtures), and is highly susceptible to downturns in this industry.



RUSK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED -

6.7 Summary – Goals & Objectives

Goal: Promote, attract, and maintain the expansion and development of the economic base in Rusk County.

Objectives:

1. Encourage the growth of new job opportunities and higher paying job opportunities in Rusk County.
2. Promote the development of manufacturing and industry where infrastructure is readily available.
3. Promote the education and skilled training of the work force.
4. Encourage the start-up of new business and the retention of existing businesses.

Actions:

- A. Work with job training and education providers to provide opportunities for local workers to prepare for current and future job opportunities.
- B. Maintain a business retention/expansion program.
- C. Seek new opportunities for business growth and encourage the pursuit of emerging technology companies.
- D. Monitor the availability of suitable sites for industry and the skill base of the workforce to attract companies.