

**NORTHWEST**  
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
COMMISSION

# 50 Years

1973-2023

**NWRDC Annual Report**  
**January 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023**

**50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION**



# CONTENTS

## Introduction

A Message from our Chairperson ..... 1  
 A Message from our Executive Director .....2  
 Commission Membership ..... 3  
 In Memory ..... 3

## 50 Years

The Road We Have Traveled ..... 4-8  
 Let's Celebrate Where We Have Been ..... 9-10  
 50th Anniversary Celebration .....11

## Financials & 2022 Budget ..... 12

## Economic Development ..... 13

Supplemental Disaster Funding Available to Region One

## Northwest Regional Enterprise Loan Fund ..... 14

Higher Interest Rates Change the Lending Environment

## Northwest Regional Community Development... 15-16

Community Development Focuses on Four Key Areas

## Emergency Operations Planning ..... 17-18

HSEM Region 3 Joint Powers Board

## Dancing Sky Area Agency On Aging ..... 19-21

Senior LinkAge Line Update

Dancing Sky AAA Staff Participate in Outreach Events

2023 Aging Grantees

## Transportation Planning ..... 22

Communities Take Part in Improvement Projects

## Northwest Regional Transportation Coordination Council. .... 23

NWRTCC/Mobility Manager Has a Busy Year

## Plans & Publications ..... 24

## NWRDC Team ..... 25

# 50 YEARS



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON

---

## Welcome...

**I am feeling retrospective as I look back at the accomplishments of 2023. Characterized as a year of growth, several programs were enhanced by government funding packages and continued partnerships. New staff members were welcomed and the foundation was laid for future successes that will benefit residents, businesses and visitors alike.**

One major point of pride is that the NWRDC celebrated its 50-year anniversary in June. Working together has always been a strong suit for the region and several individuals are remembered as playing an important role in this half-a-century accomplishment. The importance of selfless public service, the cultivation of growth/development, collaboration and cooperation has never waned – but instead has led to a legacy of achievement. At the end of this anniversary year, I reflect on this journey and am reminded that we are grateful for the past and present staff, commission and community partners for their support and contributions.

I believe that Northwest Minnesota is an incredible place with many opportunities and that regional planning improves the

quality of life for all. The NWRDC is passionate about helping the region reach its full potential and is committed to doing its part to make a difference in the place that each of us calls “home”. Some highlights include:

- \$498,935 (CY 23 & 24) legislative dollars were secured for nutrition as well as upgrading technology through bar code scanner installation at nutrition sites. 10,000+ people were provided information and supportive services through the Senior LinkAge Line. At least 3,063 attendees were reached at local health fairs/events and 35 classes were held (225+ attendees).
- The culmination of a two-year regional functional exercise and planning effort regarding family assistance centers with emergency management, response, health and other agency partners.
- Advocation for workforce housing shortages and commissioning a study researching value proposition of local economic output in partnership with the NW MN Multi County HRA, Grand Forks Community Land Trust and the U of MN’s Humphrey Institute of Graduate Studies.



GARY KIESOW, COMMISSION CHAIRPERSON

- Facilitation of a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) plan with Highland Elementary School in Crookston, enhancing eligibility for future funding opportunities and securing safe and healthy student transportation. Thief River Falls also successfully received a Carbon Reduction Grant to provide solar lighting on a SRTS project by converting streetlights to LED.
- Hosting a national mobility management leader to facilitate a meeting in Hallock. The need for non-emergency medical transportation was explored along with alternative models of volunteer driver program comparisons and surveys.
- The approval of three loans totaling \$475,000.00 leveraging \$3,910,000.00 in private funding and \$300,000.00 in additional public funding.

In conclusion, thank you to our employees, community members and partners for your support over the past 50 years. We could not have done it without you! Here is to another 50 years of success.

Sincerely,  
Gary Kiesow

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

---



DARLA WALDNER  
NWRDC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Dear Friends,

In 2023, the Northwest Regional Development Commission celebrated its golden 50-year anniversary. The NWRDC was established on February 2, 1973 by the joint actions of local units of government. In celebration of our anniversary, I am reminded that with passion, perseverance and a shared vision, anything is possible. Our anniversary is a time to appreciate how far we have come, to embrace the present and the exciting future that lies ahead.

We have achieved some remarkable things in collaboration with our community partners over the last 50 years. Some of our earlier projects included identifying needs and opportunities within the region including expanding tele-communication through partnering with Telecommunications Inc. to expand television coverage in our region. Ironically, approximately 47 years

later, the NWRDC collaborated with many partners to advocate for rural broadband coverage in the remote parts of NW Minnesota.

Programs and projects supported by the NWRDC over the last 50 years will be highlighted in this commemorative issue of our Annual Report. Researching the history of our organization has been one of the highlights of this year. I am grateful for the leadership that has come before me to create the legacy of the NWRDC.

I want to take this time to honor the late Dr. Joe Bovette who was appointed to the NWRDC Commission first as the Kittson County Mayor and then transitioned to the Kittson County Commissioner's seat on our board. He served as board chair for approximately 47 years until his passing on June 28, 2020. We want to remember him for his wisdom and support of the NWRDC and the

communities that we served.

In addition, we want to thank Carol Sorensen who served the NWRDC in the role of administrative staff and transitioned into the NWRDC Finance Director. Carol was the backbone of the NWRDC for 32 years, developing and maintaining the agency budget, internal accounting systems and compliance officer with federal and state regulations. We want to thank Carol for her years of service and dedication to the organization.

Our anniversary celebrates the purpose, progress, partnership and positive impacts from the Commission, the amazing staff and the community partners who have an ongoing commitment to make NW Minnesota the best place to live, work, raise a family and retire.

All the best,  
Darla Waldner  
Executive Director



**NORTHWEST**  
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

# NWRDC COMMISSION MEMBERS



COMMISSION MEMBERS: FRONT ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT) – WARREN STRANDELL, GARY KIESOW, KEVIN REICH, KEITH SISTAD, GERALD AMIOT, DEBRA WISKOW, ELVERA CULLEN. BACK ROW - JUDY JONES, ANTHONY FLAGE, JIM DUCHAMP, KIMBERLEY JOHNSON, DARYL WICKLUND, JESSE LEE, DAN FABIAN, LOREN YOUNGGREN, DAVID ERICKSON, KATHY TWITE, BRUCE LAWRENCE, LOREN LUSIGNAN, DARIN JOHNSON, GUS BOOTH

## COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP

### Kitson County

Kimberley Johnson*	Kennedy	Townships
David Treumer	Hallock	Municipalities
Loren Younggren	Hallock	Counties

### Marshall County

Gary Kiesow**	Goodridge	Counties
Loren Lusignan	Grygla	Townships
Devin Rud	Grygla	Municipalities

### Norman County

Jesse Lee*	Ada	Counties
Lucas Spaeth	Halstad	School Boards
Darin Johnson	Halstad	Municipalities

### Pennington County

Bruce Lawrence*	Thief River Falls	Counties
Dave Erickson	Thief River Falls	Townships
Judy Jones	Goodridge	Municipalities
Elvera Cullen	Thief River Falls	At Large

### Polk County

Warren Strandell*	East Grand Forks	Counties
Keith Sistad	Fosston	Townships
Toby Strom	McIntosh	Municipalities
Gerald Amiot	Crookston	Labor
Kathleen Twite	East Grand Forks	Business
Norma Campos	East Grand Forks	Minorities

### Red Lake County

Ronald Weiss*	Red Lake Falls	Watershed District
Anthony Flage	Red Lake Falls	Counties
Kevin Reich	Red Lake Falls	Townships
Jim DuChamp	Plummer	Municipalities

### Roseau County

Daryl Wicklund*	Badger	Counties
Debra Wiskow	Greenbush	Townships
Dan Fabian	Roseau	Municipalities
Robin Wisner	Roseau	Minorities
Gus Booth	Warroad	School Board

\* Board Members    \*\* Chairperson



In memory of...

### Dr. Joe Bovette

Dr. Joe Bovette served the Northwest Regional Development Commission as board chair for 47 years until his passing on June 28, 2020. His dedication to Northwest Minnesota was remarkable. We are thankful for his contributions to the organization and to Region 1.



# NORTHWEST REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION



## The Road We Have Traveled

The NWRDC Water Quality Mgmt. Committee completed major planning efforts. This created the Framework Water and Related Resource Planning Project, coordinated by the State Water Planning Board

On January 1, 1978, the NWRDC added the Region 1 Area Agency on Aging.

The NWRDC Housing Planning Section reviewed 14 proposals for subsidized new rental housing in which 98 housing units were funded for \$3,038,000. This brought the total stock of new and existing subsidized rental housing in Region 1 to 2,064 units, of which 71% were for seniors.

1981 oversaw The Small Business Assistance Program, designed to help small businesses with problems, opportunities, and professional managerial and technical assistance. This was a two-year pilot program. Within 6 months, 16 businesses became clients of the program.

The NWRDC purchased a computer to assist with the vast volumes of information and data which supports planning, agency administration, and services to local government and agencies.

### February, 1973 - NWRDC Established

The first year included forming and electing the Commission & Board of Directors, adopting bylaws, appointing an executive director, developing a work program, and identifying needs and opportunities within the region.

'73

The NWRDC worked in cooperation with Headwaters Regional Development Commission to create and secure funding for Northwest Telecommunications, Inc. The Focus was on television coverage.

'74

Transportation TAC Committee - The NWRDC recognized the need for area-wide transportation planning and development. The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) was created.

'75

Economic Development Program - The NWRDC received funding from the U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Economic Development Administration, to begin an analysis of the economy of the Region and develop an Overall Economic Development Program.

'77

With a Manpower Planning contract with the MN Dept. of Economic Security, the NWRDC planned for the expenditure of approximately \$2.9 million dollars for manpower needs. These programs provided employment and manpower services for over 2,000 persons. The breakdown:

- \$700,000 for training & employment programs.
- \$800,000 allocated to counties for public service employment.
- \$900,000 for special projects under Special Programs by area nonprofit orgs. & gov't.
- \$390,000 for Summer Youth Employment.
- \$90,000 for the In-School Youth Employment.

'76

'79

'81

'82



# NORTHWEST REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION



A large scale Supplemental Security Income Outreach Project, which began in 1991 with seminars in each county, was completed in 1992. Thirty "Service Awareness" seminars were conducted on consumer issues, emergency call systems, mental health, AAA programs, and aging network services with 1,141 persons attending.

A School Innovation Project was a cooperative effort mainly by the NWRDC and two other area agencies. It launched in January 1991 with 12 schools participating. This program aimed to foster development of home-grown industries in the Region and encourages and teaches young people, parents, and teachers to think innovatively.

In 1990, the NWRDC created a Regional Tourism and Recreation Guide. Every year in May, the NWRDC updates and distributes this Northwest Minnesota Visitor and Recreation Guide throughout the region. This guide includes nature areas, public parks, trails, area attractions, libraries, restaurants, and much more information.

In January 1989, the NWRDC received a grant from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to design a model program for local units of government to use in locating and identifying abandoned wells.

NWRDC staff met with the Roseau County Committee on Aging to assist in the completion of a successful 16(b)(2) grant application which provided 80% of the cost to obtain an 11-passenger van for the county.

The Revolving Loan Fund Program (RLF) begins. As of end of 2022, the RLF program has provided total funding of \$134,327,484 since beginning in 1987.

1983 was the first year for a separate Community Development program. Although these activities had always existed in the past, the creation of a separate program provided a more organized and focused approach.

In 1986, the NWRDC moved the office from Crookston in Polk County to Thief River Falls in Pennington County.

Five communities in Region 1 received grants from the Small Cities Development Program Grant Funds totaling \$2,093,852. Most of the applications received some assistance and 3 were written by NWRDC staff.

The overall number of aging grants awarded increased by 30% in one year due to the addition of Hospice and Respite Care as two new funding priorities.



# NORTHWEST REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION



## The Road We Have Traveled

The Farm Recovery Program, which started as a result of the 1997 flood, low farm prices, and on-going poor weather, was completed in 2002. In this fiscal year alone, the program worked with approximately 70 farmers.

NWRDC and partners worked with the Region One Housing Development Alliance to secure \$1 million in state funds and \$85k in local funds for housing construction.

The Economic Development Program assisted in the development of a proposal to the legislator for a recreational area in an area left vacant by the 1997 flood. Staff at the NWRDC prepared the cost benefit analysis for the proposal. The city of East Grand Forks was successful in obtaining \$1 million for the project.

An NWRDC website was created. Information about our programs, services, and our region can be viewed at [www.nwrdc.org](http://www.nwrdc.org).



In May 1998, the Governor's team, "Minnesota Recovers" Task Force presented four "Awards of Excellence for Flood Recovery Efforts". NWRDC was given an award with special honors going to our Flood Recovery Coordinator staff.



GIS Mapping - NWRDC begins utilizing a Geographical Information System (GIS) to provide mapping services for both public and private entities.

The NWRDC developed a seven-county snowmobile map using computer mapping. This map was used for regional promotion efforts.



The NWRDC staff assisted the Minnesota Department of Transportation District 2 in the setup and process of the Northwest Area Transportation Partnership.



NWRDC moved from Thief River Falls to Warren.



A special Flood Recovery program related to the 1993 flood was closed out in the early part of 1996. This program provided funding for NWRDC to hire staff to assist local communities to apply for funding under a variety of special federal programs. The primary impacts of the program was the creation of a \$652,000 business loan program and assistance to various local grant applications which totaled \$3,162,500.





# NORTHWEST REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION



The NWRDC Transportation Department participated in three MnDOT Freight plans with staff serving on the Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan, the Northern MN and NW Wisconsin Freight Plan, and the Western MN Freight Plan.

'09

Emergency Operations Program created a project request sheet for the Northwest Emergency Manager's Joint Powers Board that aids in quicker grant spending, group information dispersal, and regional project submission.

'10

The NWRDC began a partnership with the Northwest Emergency Manager's Joint Powers Board to assist with a variety of work tasks to aid the area in the regional progression of emergency management & mitigation strategies, projects, and capabilities. Because of this partnership, the Emergency Operations program was formed.

'08

The NWRDC was designated as the Area Agency on Aging for Region 2. This extended their service area to now include Regions 1 and 2 in Northwestern Minnesota.

'03

The NWRDC served as the fiscal agent for a variety of 2003 flood housing and repair funds totaling over \$1 million. These funds were used to assist low/moderate income homeowners in making repairs.

'04

The Aging Program received a new name and a larger planning & service area. It became the Land of the Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging (now known as Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging). The service area expanded to 21 counties in Northwest and West Central Minnesota.

'05

The NWRDC Economic Development Program provided 675 hours of technical assistance to businesses which resulted in the direct creation of 100 new jobs, \$3.138 million in public investment, and \$8.797 million sector investments.

'06

The Transportation Advisory Committee received a Regional Transportation Award for Excellence from the National Association of Development Organization for completing the Grygla-Gully 10-ton shipping corridor.

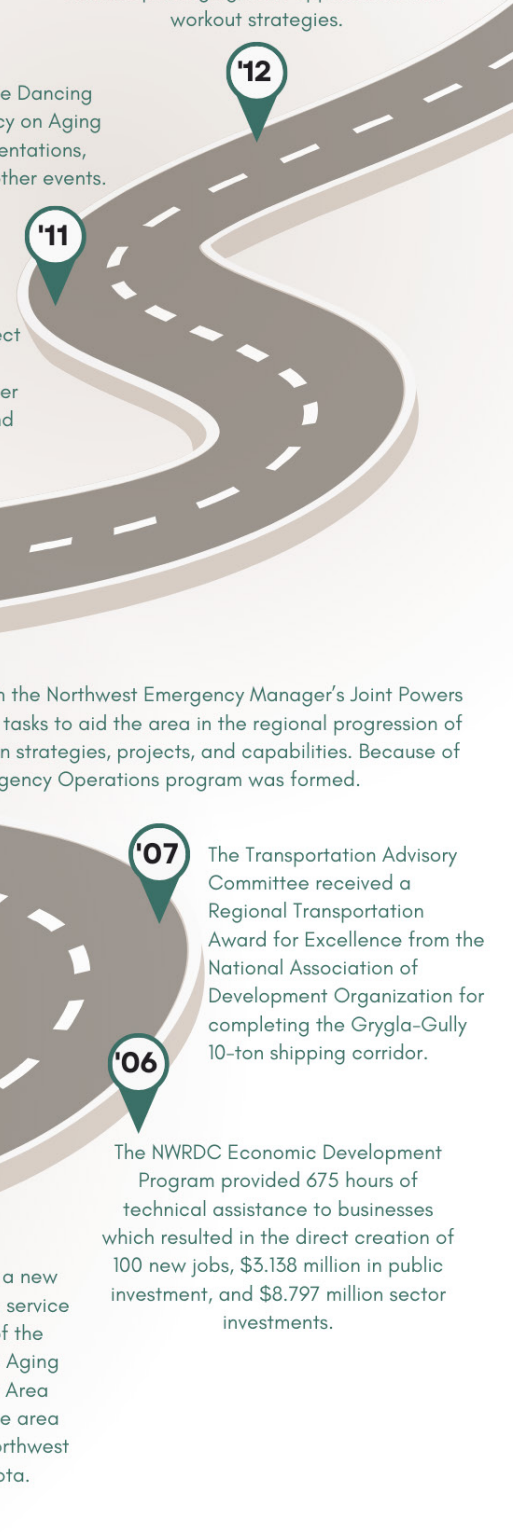
'07

The Land of the Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging held 415 presentations, outreach, and other events.

'12

The Economic Development Program provided over 1,600 hours of staff assistance on business/job creation and retention-related projects including: working with more than 80 businesses on business planning, referral, finance packaging, loan applications and workout strategies.

'11





# NORTHWEST REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION



Emergency Operations, through a grant, assisted the Moorhead Fire Department with "Operation: Coordination", a full-scale exercise involving a response to a hazardous materials spill.

In January 2021, the NWRDC assumed an additional 2-year role for regional resiliency in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic with funding from the Federal CARES Act.

'22

'21

The Northwest Regional Enterprise Loan Fund was awarded \$3.1 million in CARES Act funding through the Federal Economic Development Administration to provide loan assistance to businesses. By June 2022, 24 loans were made using these funds.

Phase Two of the Northwest Regional Transportation Coordination Council began with the hiring of a Regional Transportation Coordinator. The purpose of the NWRTRCC is to identify transportation barriers and develop solutions.

'20

'19

The NWRDC redesigned their logo. The new logo represents a compass pointing Northwest. A compass is a symbol for guidance. It is the goal of the NWRDC to be a guide to help the people of Northwest Minnesota get where they want to go and to reach their hopes and aspirations.

'18

'17

The Dancing Sky AAA Development Team were trained to facilitate Dementia Friends sessions. During 2017, they provided 26 sessions in 16 communities, resulting in 453 people becoming Dementia Friends.

The Emergency Operations Program aided in the creation of three exercises for Region 3. During the incident exercises, emergency response personnel focused on regional location, tracking, requesting, maintenance and usage. Partnerships were created with public health personnel and the role of an Emergency Operations/Command Center.

'16

'13

The NWRDC Transportation Department assisted with the ADA Safe Routes to School Plan.

'14

NWRDC office relocated to the Westbridge Center (formally the Warren Hospital).

'15

Six loans were opened for a total of \$515,000 through our Enterprise Loan Fund.

Before we navigate  
where we are going...

# 50 Years

1973-2023

Let's Celebrate  
Where We Have Been

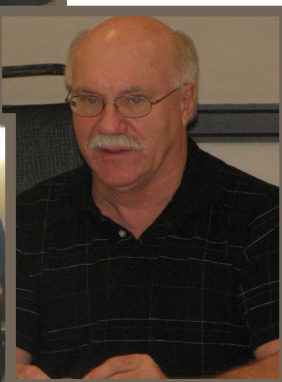
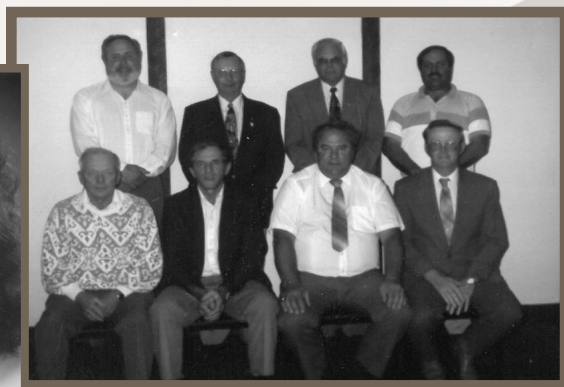


Before we navigate  
where we are going...

Let's Celebrate  
Where We Have Been

# 50 Years

1973-2023



Before we navigate  
where we are going...

# 50 Years

1973-2023

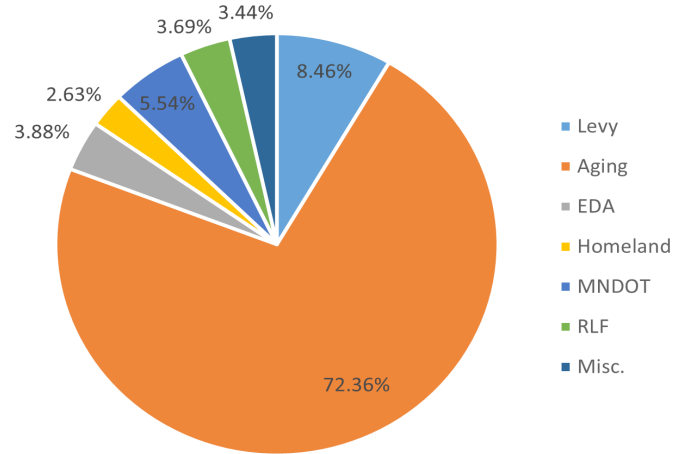
*Let's Celebrate  
Where We Have Been  
June 6, 2023*



# CALENDAR YEAR 2023 FINANCIALS & 2024 BUDGET

## CALENDAR YEAR 2023

### Actual 2023 Revenue Sources



REVENUES	CY'2023 BUDGET	CY'2023 ACTUALS	CY'2024 BUDGET
Local Tax Levy	\$ 329,546	\$319,356	\$335,312
MN Board on Aging/Department Health	\$2,704,968	\$2,732,568	\$2,433,766
Economic Development Administration	\$139,836	\$146,658	\$274,000
Homeland Security	\$105,158	\$99,391	\$100,200
MN Department of Transportation	\$208,230	\$209,248	\$250,430
NW Minnesota Enterprise Fund	\$132,655	\$139,174	\$147,456
Dancing Sky AAA County Match	\$60,830	\$60,525	\$62,800
Local Contracts/ Miscellaneous	\$79,098	\$69,323	\$45,392
Re-grant Revenue	\$3,819,620	\$4,115,199	\$3,537,389
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$7,579,941</b>	<b>\$7,891,442</b>	<b>\$7,186,745</b>

EXPENDITURES	CY'2023 BUDGET	CY'2023 ACTUALS	CY'2024 BUDGET
Salaries and Fringe	\$2,676,827	\$2,683,821	\$2,739,167
Professional Services	\$596,435	\$607,264	\$394,015
Travel	\$130,344	\$137,533	\$181,357
Printing/Postage	\$36,860	\$39,647	\$44,237
Supplies	\$45,553	\$55,938	\$51,129
Rent/Maintenance	\$77,304	\$92,499	\$65,155
Other	\$166,998	\$153,534	\$174,296
Grants/Contracts	\$3,849,620	\$4,115,199	\$3,537,389
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$7,579,941</b>	<b>\$7,885,435</b>	<b>\$7,186,745</b>

### CY'2022 AUDIT

The CY'2022 Audit was conducted by Brady Martz, Certified Public Accountants and Consultants in Crookston, Minnesota. The auditor's report expresses an unqualified opinion on the General Purpose Financial Statements of the Northwest Regional Development Commission.

### COST ALLOCATION

CY'2023 Actual  
Leave Rate:  
**17.60%**

CY'2023 Actual  
Fringe Rate:  
**38.34%**

CY'2023 Actual  
Indirect Rate:  
**14.41%**

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**PURPOSE:**

To maintain and increase the population level and job base in the seven counties of Northwest Minnesota.

**SERVICE PRIORITIES:**

Business development, labor force development, renewable energy, promotion and planning.

## Supplemental Disaster Funding Available to Region 1

Traditionally, much of the area within the NWRDC's region does not meet the eligibility distress criteria for EDA funding. But, in 2023, the criteria for Supplemental Disaster Funding through the Economic Development Administration was met.

The three primary eligibility criteria are based on per capita money income, unemployment rate or special need. The 7 counties that make up Minnesota's Economic Development Region 1, lag the U.S. average for per capita money income but do not fall below the 80% of average threshold for eligibility purposes. The unemployment rates for the 7 counties

are often lower than or close to the national average.

*2023 Was Different*

FEMA Disaster Declaration DR-4659-MN included all seven counties of the region making the entire region eligible under the special need category. NWRDC staff worked with several communities and organizations to develop eligible and competitive applications for EDA grants that cover 50% or more of project costs. Final award notifications are anticipated to arrive in early 2024.

The NWRDC and Headwater's Regional Development Commis-

sion have completed the first year partnership with the EDA University Center at University of Minnesota, Crookston to gather regional partners in efforts to further implement the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) strategies within each region. The first year was primarily introductory to each cornerstone of the CEDS and various tools we can use to measure progress as it pertains to the strategies and goals. Future meetings will shift focus to identify opportunities in the region and determine what is needed to take advantage of those opportunities.





www.nwrdc.org

## NORTHWEST REGIONAL ENTERPRISE LOAN FUND

### PURPOSE:

To strengthen and diversify the economy by providing a source of low interest financing to businesses when credit is not otherwise available from other sources and to ensure the successful completion of activities to be financed.

### SERVICE PRIORITIES:

Financing for-profit businesses which create or retain jobs, especially for the long-term underemployed or unemployed.

## Higher Interest Rates Change the Lending Environment

The Northwest Regional Enterprise Loan Fund has raised its interest rate for the first time in over 10 years.

The interest rate for new loans is set at each meeting. As the Prime Rate, as published in the Wall Street Journal, began to exceed 8%, the loan fund increased its interest rate to remain in compliance with the funding requirements.

Since commercial banking rates in 2023 were much higher than borrowers are accustomed to, the RLF program saw fewer inquiries and fewer applications than in recent years. The higher costs of real estate, products and services, in addition to the higher cost of borrowing seem to limit business opportunity until these costs normalize again.

For 2023, three loans were closed

totaling \$540,000.00 leveraging an additional \$2,505,000.00 in private funding. An additional Loan has been approved for \$300,000.00 under the Legacy RLF.

In addition to opening new loans, other loan fund activities included loan restructuring, interest rate adjustments, payoffs, loan assistance to community economic development agencies (EDAs) and technical assistance.

We continue to provide technical assistance in the form of information and referral to other organizations and agencies, including, but not limited to, a Small Business Development Center, EDA University Center, Agricultural Utilization Research Institute, Department of Employment and Economic Development, Headwaters Regional Development Com-

mission, NW Minnesota Multi-County HRA and Northwest Minnesota Foundation.

### Historical Loan Activity (period ending 12/31/2023):

Total Loans	249
Active Loans	63
Total Loan Amount	\$19,787,229
Other Financing Leveraged	\$99,529,592
Jobs Created/Retained	2,250
Total Project Costs	\$137,367,484

### Historical Loan Activity by County (period ending 12/31/2023):

County	# of Loans	Amount
Kittson	25	\$1,389,120
Marshall	46	\$3,187,045
Norman	21	\$1,239,248
Pennington	33	\$3,291,850
Polk	76	\$6,583,475
Red Lake	16	\$1,190,615
Roseau	32	\$2,905,875







# NORTHWEST REGIONAL Community Development

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of the Community Development program is to assist communities in discussing and developing solutions to rural issues and problems which are common in Northwest Minnesota.

**SERVICE PRIORITIES:**

Assist local units of government with comprehensive planning, infrastructure needs, area promotion, housing and other issues that contribute to strong quality of place.

## Community Development Focuses on 4 Key Areas

NWRDC’s Community Development experienced significant growth in 2023. Outreach efforts across the region supported a variety of community-centered initiatives. Four key areas of focus directed by our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy continue to be: Regional housing availability; Labor force; Broadband access; and Economic resiliency/childcare availability.

### 2023 Project Highlights

#### US EDA/FEMA Supplemental Funding

NWRDC Staff provided technical assistance to several regional projects seeking funding for improvement of com-

munity resiliency. In April, US EDA announced regional eligibility under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, a highly competitive grant with \$9 million in funding available. Technical assistance included:

- City of Crookston industrial park
- City of East Grand Forks industrial park
- Red River Valley Co-op Power – electrical grid resiliency
- City of Roseau – storm water infrastructure replacement
- Northland Community and Technical College – mechatronics training in Roseau/Warroad



# Community Development Focuses on 4 Key Areas, cont.

## Increase the Region's Childcare Capacity

Childcare capacity is constrained in Northwest Minnesota which is impacting job growth. A 2022 study completed by First Children's Finance (FCF) indicated the need for up to 593 additional birth-to-age 5 slots in School District #564 (Thief River Falls) alone. Through collaborative efforts with FCF, funding was made available to 10 new childcare providers/centers creating an additional 100 childcare slots. A new site for a second childcare center location in Thief River Falls was secured with an expected opening date in early fall 2024. In partnership with the Thief River Falls Area Community Fund, the childcare collaborative is working to establish a childcare sub-fund which will be managed by the NW Minnesota Foundation. NWRDC is actively engaged in a second Strategic Supply Plan effort guided by FCF in Red Lake County (Plummer/Oklee/Red Lake Falls)

## Incentivize the Need for Affordable Market Rate Housing

NWRDC in partnership with Northwest Minnesota Multi-County HRA received additional funding in July from the Northwest Minnesota Foundation for phase II of the Market Rate Housing project in Region 1. In November, this group applied for a grant from the Otto Bremer Trust for program funding to support additional efforts in 2024. Project technical review occurred in late December and awards will be announced in January 2024.

## Workforce Development

NWRDC supported a workforce training grant application to the US EDA on behalf of Northland Community and Technical College (Thief River Falls/East Grand Forks). This project will fund additional training equipment to expand programming at the Advanced Resource Center (ARC) in downtown Warroad. In a unique partnership with the Marvin Foundation, programs within the ARC are offered by NCTC on site and are designed to support the growing needs of the region's employers in advanced manufacturing. All programs are open to the general public and are self-paced. Due to the popularity of the programs, additional equipment is needed to serve the increased student demand.

## Regional Food Business Center (RFBC)

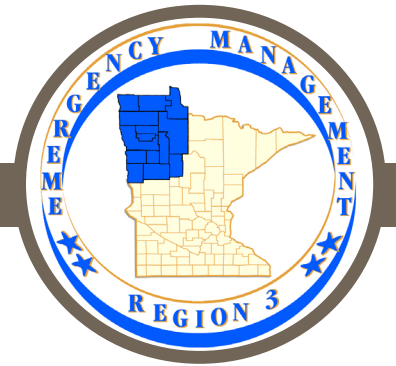
In July, NWRDC was awarded a technical assistance grant as part of the tri-state USDA-funded North Central Regional Food Business Center (North Dakota, Minnesota, South Dakota). This project will establish a robust local foods program focused on small to mid-size producers and build resiliency into local food supply chains. NWRDC has established a Food Systems Planner position within its community development to lead outreach efforts in Regions 1 and 4 (West Central Initiative). This project has received funding through July 2028.



# Emergency Management



www.nwrdc.org



## EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLANNING

**PURPOSE:** To aid Homeland Security & Emergency Management (HSEM) Region Three in the preparation, planning and implementation of activities related to regional preparedness, response and recovery.

**SERVICE PRIORITIES:** Utilize a specifically geared, annually evolving work program to support existing emergency management capabilities throughout Northwest Minnesota, as approved by the Emergency Management Joint Powers Board and HSEM staff.

## HSEM Region 3 Joint Powers Board

The Northwest Regional Development Commission continued its planning partnership with the HSEM Region 3 Joint Powers Board by providing planning services for the fourteen counties and two tribal nations located in Northwestern Minnesota. This year's focus was on homeland security and terrorism.

With an ever-evolving work program combined with an active array of hazards present in Minnesota; it takes many individuals active in emergency preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery in order save lives, reduce property damage and decrease/eliminate future effects. Government, local agencies, volunteers, businesses and emergency response personnel all work together and lend efforts/resources to keep our communities safe. Following are highlights of the suc-

cesses that the Northwest Emergency Manager's Joint Powers Board's regional planning program has accomplished in 2023, thanks to a grant funding opportunity through Minnesota Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM):

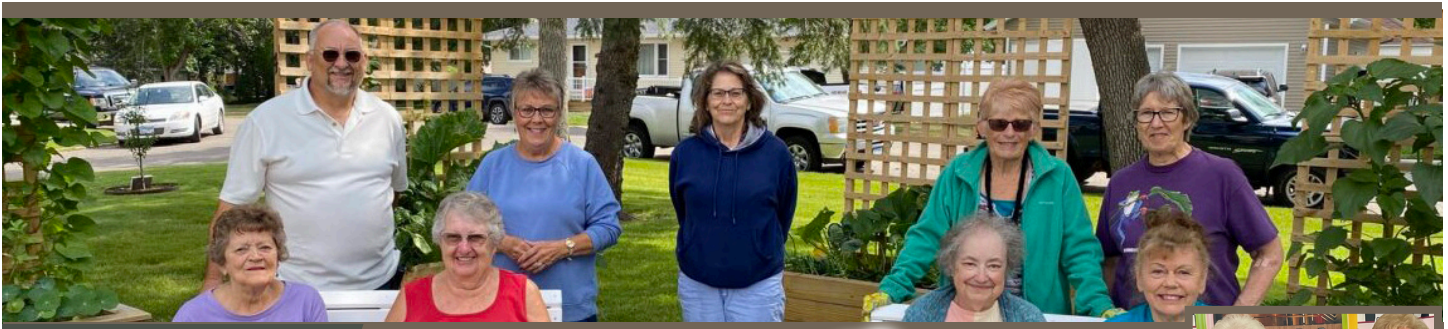
- Partner Information Coordination Planning
- Regional Resource Planning
- Training, including: Public Information, Tornado Awareness, Security Assessment & EOC Planning/Operation
- Critical Infrastructure Planning
- Regional/Local Emergency Operations Center Planning
- Family Assistance Center Regional Functional Exercise
- Cybersecurity



# HSEM Region 3 Joint Powers Board, cont.

- Regional Badging & Credentialing
  - Hostile Actions Planning
  - Involvement with the Upper Red River Valley COAD (Community Organizations Active in Disaster), Regional Radio Board/Radio Advisory Committee and the Northwest Health Services Coalition
  - Conference, Quarterly and Joint Powers Board Meeting Attendance
  - Local and Regional Exercise Planning, Assistance & Involvement
  - IT Support
  - Strengthsfinder Peer Training
  - Safe Routes To School Assistance
  - Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) – Tabletop Exercise
  - Dancing Sky – Winter Weather Preparedness Presentations (In Person & Virtual)
  - Age Friendly Conference Presentation
  - Assistance to the NW Regional Transportation Coordination Council, Including A Tabletop Exercise
  - Northwest Health Services Coalition Projects: Website Upgrades & Exercise Development
- Additional projects (not part of the above-mentioned grant) were also undertaken including:
- Northwest Minnesota Tourism Directory





[www.dancingskyaaa.org](http://www.dancingskyaaa.org)

## DANCING SKY AREA AGENCY ON AGING



**Dancing Sky**  
Area Agency on Aging



### PURPOSE:

The Dancing Sky is 1 of 7 Minnesota Area Agencies on Aging. Our goal for the people of Minnesota is simple: to work with rural communities to help older adults stay in control of their choices. We envision vibrant communities invested in their elders as well as older adults and caregivers planning for the future. Together, older adults and communities thrive.

### SERVICE PRIORITIES:

Nutrition - congregate and home delivered meals, legal services, homemaker and chore services, home modification, assisted transportation services, health promotion and prevention programs, medication management, dementia friendly and age friendly communities.

## Senior LinkAge Line Updates

### SLL Resource Coordinator

Formerly known as Community Living Specialist. Resource Coordinators help older adults remain in their homes by connecting them with housing options, assistance programs, providers of community-based services, healthy aging workshops, caregiving support and more. In addition, they provide follow-up visits and phone calls to aid in the success of the older adult living safely out in the community.

### Pre-Admission Screening Specialist

Our Specialists receive and process assessments to ensure that it is appropriate for a person to be placed into a skilled nursing facility. These assessments are required in the state of Minnesota to measure a per-

son's need for nursing home level of care and to connect people with supportive services. With a new charting and phone system that allows for automation of the PAS from the provider who fills it out, Dancing Sky will no longer be housing Pre-Admission Screeners in our office, beginning January 1, 2024. These will solely be completed at Minnesota River AAA (MNRAA) and Central Minnesota Council on Aging (CMCOA).

### SLL Resource Specialist

Formerly known as Information & Assistance or Phone Specialists. Resource Specialists receive calls from older adults and/or their caregivers who are seeking information and resources on things such as: housing, transportation, Medicare, financial services, community supports, assistance with complex issues and deci-



# Senior LinkAge Line Updates, cont.

sions, reducing prescription drug costs, resolve billing errors, compare health and/or drug plans, fighting fraud and abuse and many more miscellaneous topics.

## Medicare Open Enrollment

Through free, unbiased, comprehensive assistance, our trained Senior LinkAge Line staff can assist older adults in saving money by doing plan comparisons to see what plan is right for them based on their health and medication needs for the coming year.

## Outreach Events

Staff partnered with Arrowhead Agency on Aging to present a virtual Medicare 101 class. These classes are for people who are new to Medicare, agency providers and/or County Social Workers. Senior LinkAge Line staff have also teamed up with Development Team staff and manned booths at Health Fairs throughout our region. Staff have also been out in the communities doing presentations at various types of settings, but mainly Senior Centers. The topics included: Healthcare Fraud, Waste, and Abuse and Senior LinkAge Line – who we are/what we do/how we can help.

# Dancing Sky AAA Staff Participate in Outreach Events

The Senior LinkAge Line and the Dancing Sky Development Staff were busy in 2023, reaching out and taking part in events throughout the 21 counties they serve. Below is a recap of a very busy year.

### Numbers Served by SLL

**THOSE WE SERVE**

**9,919**  
Total Number Served by Senior LinkAge Line Staff

**40**  
1:1 Open Enrollment Visits in Warren and Bemidji

### Senior LinkAge Line - Outreach

**SENIOR LINKAGE LINE OUTREACH**

**190**  
Senior LinkAge Line Presentation Attendees

Topics: SLL: Who We Are and How We Can Help, Medicare 101 (online and in person), Healthcare Fraud, Waste, and Abuse

### Community Health Fairs

Senior LinkAge Line and Development Team staff took part in health fairs, county fairs and other events.

**COMMUNITY HEALTH FAIRS**  
Includes Health Fairs, County Fairs and other events

**3,063+**  
Attendees

Dev. Team & SLL Total Attendees

### Learning Experiences

Monthly webinars were presented. Previously recorded webinars can be found by going to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and search for "Northwest Regional Development Commission."

**LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

**464**  
Webinar Participants

**528**  
In-Person Attendees

**181**  
YouTube Views

### Social Media Campaigns

**FACEBOOK CONNECTIONS**

**13,576**  
Users Reached

**580**  
Followers

**489**  
Published Posts



# Dancing Sky AAA Staff Participate in Outreach Events

## Dementia Friendly Initiatives

Dementia Friends is an informational session to help people understand dementia and how it affects a person. The Virtual Dementia Tour gives participants a glimpse into the world of dementia.

**DEMENTIA FRIENDLY INITIATIVES**

**338**  
Dementia Friends

**252**  
Virtual Dementia Tour

## Health and Wellness

The Dancing Sky AAA provides funding for organizations to provide health and wellness classes. The newest class is "Bingocize".

**HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

**35**  
Classes

**225\***  
Attendees

**3** Bingocize start-ups

## Development Team Puts On The Miles

**WHERE WE HAVE BEEN**

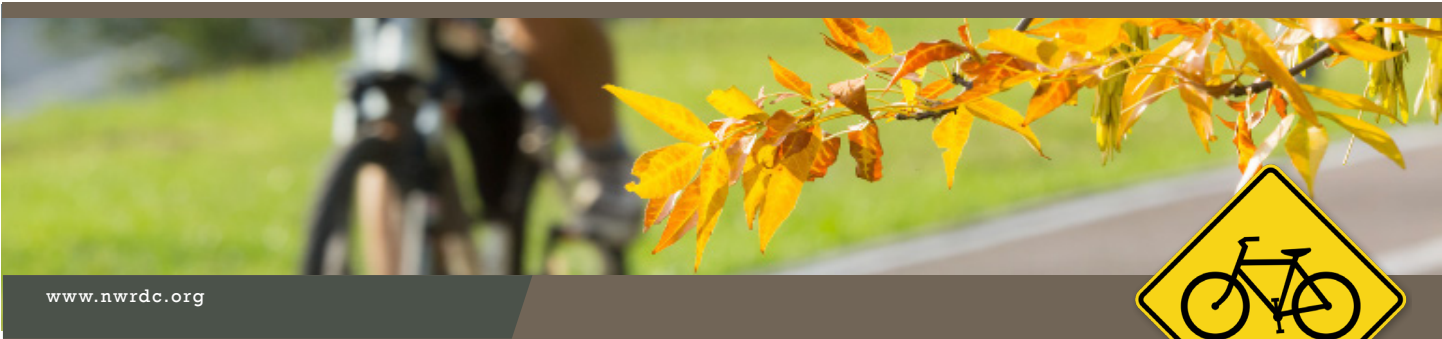
**20,000+\***  
Miles Driven  
by the  
Development  
Team

\*Estimate

## 2023 AGING GRANTEEES

- Alexandria Housing Authority - Evidence Based Program
- Alexandria YMCA - Evidence Based Program
- Barnesville Helpers - Evidence Based Program
- Bemidji Senior Center - Evidence Based Program
- Central MN Elder Network - Respite Care & Caregiver Support
- Clear Waters Life Center - Assisted Transportation & Homemaker
- Community Resource Connections - Telephone Reassurance/Information & Assistance
- Douglas County - Information & Assistance
- First Lutheran Church - Evidence Based Program
- Groceries Plus, LLC - Grocery Delivery
- Kittson Public Health - Evidence Based Program
- Knute Nelson - Evidence Based Program
- Knute Nelson, Crystal Brook - Evidence Based Program
- Lake Region Healthcare - Medication Management
- Lakes & Prairie Community Action - Information & Assistance
- Legal Services of NW Minnesota - Senior Legal Services
- Life Care Medical Center - Evidence Based Program
- Living at Home of the Park Rapids Area - Homemaker & Assisted Transportation; Evidence Based Program; Respite Care & Caregiver Support
- Lutheran Social Services - Nutrition Services Program; Respite Care & Caregiver Support
- Mahube-Otwa - Homemaker/Chore/Home Modification/Information & Assistance; Evidence Based Program
- Memory Cafe of the Red River Valley - Evidence Based Program
- Northwoods Caregivers - Homemaker & Home Modification; Evidence Based Program; Respite Care & Caregiver Support
- Northwest Sentence to Serve - Chore Services
- Nutrition Services, Inc. - Nutrition Services Program
- Ottertail County - Information & Assistance
- Perham Area Community Center - Evidence Based Program
- Perham Health - Evidence Based Program
- Productive Alternatives, Inc. - Assisted Transportation
- REACH of Hawley - Evidence Based Program
- Regents of UMN - RSVP of RRV - Evidence Based Program
- RiverView Health - Evidence Based Program
- Rothsay PARTNERS - Evidence Based Program
- Stevens County - County Coordinator
- Tri-County Community Corrections - Chore Services
- Warren SOS - Evidence Based Program
- Wellness in the Woods - Evidence Based Program
- West Central MN Communities Action - Modification/Homemaker/Chore/Assisted Transportation; Evidence Based Program
- Western Prairie Human Services - Information & Assistance; Evidence Based Program; Respite Care & Caregiver Support
- Wilkin County Public Health - Homemaker Services/Information & Assistance; Evidence Based Program





www.nwrdc.org

# TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

### PURPOSE:

To ensure safe and efficient movement of people and commodities and provide an on-going forum for important transportation issues in the region. To assist MnDOT and provide input with planning and programs.

### SERVICE PRIORITIES:

Direction setting, comprehensive regional planning, legislative advocacy and MnDOT project coordination.

## Communities Take Part in Improvement Projects

The NWRDC region was very active with transportation projects this year. New grant programs were available for local communities to consider applying for to fund projects. Carbon Reduction Program (CRP) became available early this year and the cities of Fosston, Roseau and Marshall County received engineering funding to assist with existing pedestrian trails. The city of Thief River Falls received \$135,000 in funding to provide solar lighting along walking and biking trails near a school and also received funding to convert street lights to LED which will reduce electricity use in the city.

Protect is another new program available for local communities. The city of Roseau received \$237,000 and Thief River Falls received \$263,000 to fund Street Storm water improvements. These projects will help prevent erosion from occurring on streets.

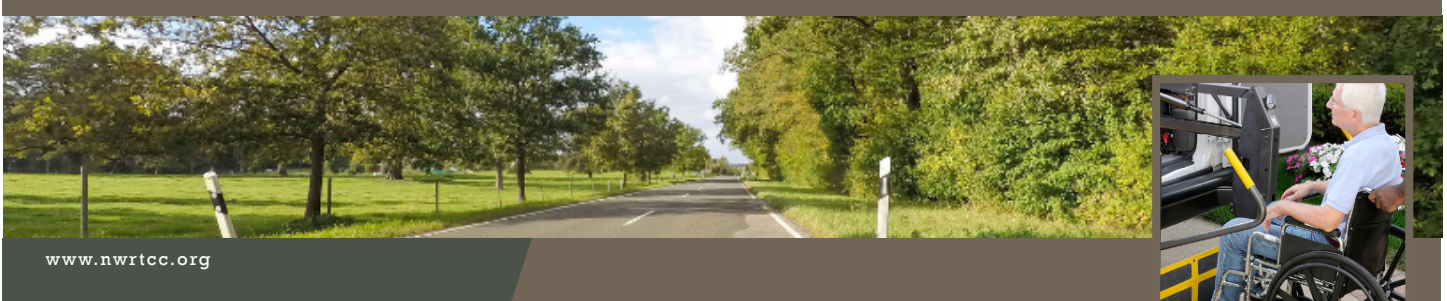
The Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) and the Alternative Transportation (AT) programs were once again very active. Staff visited several communities to

work on plans for walking and biking. Currently the cities of Crookston, Fosston, Thief River Falls and Warroad have good applications that will be considered for funding early in 2024. Other proposals were deferred for possible applications in 2024 to provide more time to develop better plans.

The NWRDC has been very active in working with Highland Elementary School in Crookston to develop a Safe Routes to School plan. This process is bringing local community members together to develop a plan that will provide safe transportation of students to and from school. The plan will look at streets, crosswalks, lighting, sidewalks, parking and pickup and drop off areas. It will incorporate ways to encourage students to walk, bike or roll to and from school in a safe and fun environment. Completing this plan will assist the community in scoring and eligibility for future grant funding. The NWRDC is in contact with other area schools to promote applications for future Safe Routes to School grants.







www.nwrtcc.org

# Northwest Regional Transportation Coordination Council

**PURPOSE:**

To support improved access and options for transportation in Northwest Minnesota through communication and creative partnerships.

**SERVICE PRIORITIES:**

The work-plan consists of seven tasks identified by the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access. Find the link at [www.nwrtcc.org](http://www.nwrtcc.org).

## NWRTCC/Mobility Manager Has A Busy Year

### Transportation Guidance

The NWRTCC website provides access to a list of transportation providers in our region, by county or by service. Our providers are regular participants in our bi-monthly RTCC meetings and provide updates to the group at that time. The website provides a video introduction to our coordination efforts and a video to recruit volunteer drivers.

### Vehicle Sharing

- Committee work with MCOTA and the Shared Mobility Collaborative
- Local efforts include volunteers using an accessible agency vehicle to transport family members staying at that facility to outside events
- A day training and habilitation program is sharing their vehicle with two other providers when they are not using it
- Significant effort to create a Neighborhood Electric Vehicle (NEV) lending library for older adults in Warren

### Mobility Management

- Working with Tim Finseth, NWRDC Transportation Planning Director, to implement the Safe Routes to

- School program and the Complete Streets program
- Working with the Regional Development Organizations to integrate climate and environmental concerns into the strategic planning process
- Working with Jennifer Olson, Emergency Manager, to integrate emergency management concepts into transportation planning process.
- Created a "Who Ya Gonna Call?" worksheet to track important contact information

### Volunteer Driver

- Member of the Volunteer Driver Coalition
- Member of the MCOTA Volunteer Driver Work Team
- Member of the Volunteer Driver Forum Development Team
- Primary advocacy effort at the federal level to tie the volunteer driver rate to the business rate

### Training / Education

- National Center for Mobility Management training to become Certified as a Mobility Manager. This is a two-year program.

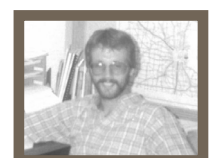
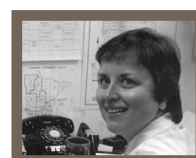
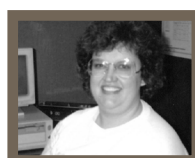
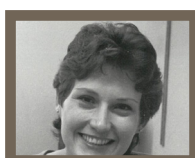
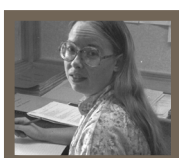
- Community Transportation Association of American annual meeting
- Shared Mobility Summit
- Moving Greater Minnesota Forward grant/class on entrepreneurship

### MCOTA Work Team

- Volunteer Driver Work Team
- Removing Barriers Work Team
- Shared Mobility Climate Action Group

### Stakeholder Engagement

- Bi-monthly NWRTCC meetings
- Meetings with the Adults Mental Health Initiative to listen to social service directors
- Meetings with transportation providers, Area Agency on Aging staff, and other agencies that serve transportation disadvantaged residents.
- Community Needs Assessment conducted in Kittson County to develop support for volunteer driver program. A national grant was sought and received in support of this effort.



# PLANS & PUBLICATIONS

## PREPARED BY THE NWRDC

---

### PLANS:

**2023 Aging Area Plan** – Includes senior and provider input as well as demographic data to establish priorities for the use of Title-III Older Americans Act funds. Includes information on the unique characteristics of our region, demographics, accomplishments, program outcomes and budget information.

### **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) –**

The 2022–2026 CEDS has taken a little different shape to more closely resemble that of each of the other Economic Development Regions of Greater Minnesota. The Economic Development Regions have agreed upon four key cornerstones to economic development: Human Capital, Economic Competitiveness, Community Resources and Foundational Assets. Each region has based their CEDS on these cornerstones and developed their own unique goals and strategies. The 2022-2026 CEDS does maintain previous priorities of Planning, Promotion, Business Development, Labor Force Development and Renewable Energies with added emphasis on workforce related issues such as housing, childcare, training and business succession planning.

**Revolving Loan Fund Plan** – Consists of program elements and guidelines.

### PUBLICATIONS:

**Senior News** – A newsletter for senior citizens and service providers of Northwest Minnesota.

**Government Units of Service Directory** – A listing of service agencies and government offices from the township and legislative levels.

**2023 Annual Report** – A report sent to local officials and legislators on funding and work activities of the NWRDC.

**NW MN Visitor & Recreation Guide** – A guide of attractions highlighting services and recreational opportunities in Northwest Minnesota communities.

### WEBSITES:

[www.nwrdc.org](http://www.nwrdc.org)

[www.dancingskyaaa.org](http://www.dancingskyaaa.org)

[www.visitnwminnesota.com](http://www.visitnwminnesota.com)

[www.nwrtcc.org](http://www.nwrtcc.org)



# 2023 NWRDC TEAM



**Darla Waldner**  
NWRDC Executive  
Director



**Kalen Wiseth**  
Financial Director



**Anne Joppru**  
Financial Director



**Carol Kilen**  
Financial Assistant



**Amanda Russell**  
Office Manager



**Judy Flaten**  
Administrative Support



**Sean Ranum**  
Loan Fund Manager/  
Economic Development



**James Retka**  
Community Develop-  
ment Director



**Tim Finseth**  
Transportation  
Planning Director



**Lynnell Simonson  
Popowski**  
Regional Transportation  
Coordinator



**Jennifer Olson**  
Emergency Operations  
Planning Director



**Thaddeus  
McCamant**  
Food Systems Planner



**Heather Pender**  
Dancing Sky AAA  
Director



**Amy Dallmann**  
Development  
Supervisor



**Melissa Hoeft**  
Contact Center  
Manager



**Judi Weiss**  
Grant & Contract  
Manager/Program  
Developer



**Connie Troska**  
Program Developer/  
Marketing Manager



**Stephanie Aassness**  
Program Developer



**Valerie Mattison**  
Program Developer



**Marlene Dahlquist**  
Senior LinkAge Line®  
Supervisor



**Nancy Finstrom**  
Resource Coordinator



**Jane Stumbo**  
Resource Coordinator



**Mary Krueger**  
Resource Coordinator



**Tanya Hagen**  
Resource Coordinator



**Dana Kloepfner**  
Pre-Admission  
Screening Specialist



**Deb Rapp**  
Resource Coordinator



**Cindy Engelstad**  
Pre-Admission  
Screening Specialist



**Kristen Anderson**  
Resource Coordinator



**Lyn Pankratz**  
Resource Specialist



**Helen Phalen**  
Resource Specialist



**Jennifer Hedrick**  
Resource Specialist



**Kathy Dahl**  
Resource Specialist



**Kim Anderson**  
Resource Specialist



**Tami Miller**  
Resource Specialist



**Renee Lerfald**  
Resource Specialist



**Kathy Hanson**  
Resource Specialist



**NORTHWEST**  
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
COMMISSION

# 50 *Years* 1973-2023

**NWRDC FY 23 Annual Report**  
**January 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023**

**50th Anniversary Edition**

