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

50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION
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**50 YEARS**

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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.
- 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

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
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.
1981 - 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.

The NWRDC Housing Planning Section reviewed 14 proposals for subsidized new rental housing in which 98 housing units were funded for $3,058,000. 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.

1978 - The NWRDC added the Region 1 Area Agency on Aging.

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.

1973 - 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.

1974 - Transportation TAC Committee - The NWRDC recognized the need for area-wide transportation planning and development. The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) was created.

1975 - 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.

1976 - 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. & govt.
- $390,000 for Summer Youth Employment.
- $190,000 for In-School Youth Employment.

1977 - On January 1, 1978, the NWRDC added the Region 1 Area Agency on Aging.

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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.

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.

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.

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 1996, the NWRDC moved the office from Crookston in Polk County to Thief River Falls in Pennington County.

The overall number of aging grants awarded increased by 50% in one year due to the addition of Hospice and Respite Care as two new funding priorities.

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.
The Road We Have Traveled

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.

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.

The Farm Recovery Program, which started as a result of the 1997 flood, low farm prices, and ongoing 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 $65k in local funds for housing construction.

In the year 2001, NWRDC received an award for excellence in the area of Data Management.

An NWRDC website was created. Information about our programs, services, and our region can be viewed at www.nwrdc.org.

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

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

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

A special Flood Recovery program related to the 1995 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 $5,162,500.

The NWRDC moved from Thief River Falls to Warren.

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.

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.

The NWRDC served as the fiscal agent for a variety of 2005 flood housing and repair funds totaling over $1 million. These funds were used to assist low/moderate income homeowners in making repairs.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

The NWRDC Economic Development Program provided 675 hours of technical assistance to businesses which resulted in the direct creation of 100 new jobs, $5.138 million in public investment, and $8.797 million sector investments.

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

The Emergency Operations Program aided in the creation of three exercises for Region 5. 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.

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

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.

The Dancing Sky AAA Development Team were trained to facilitate Dementia Friends sessions. During 2017, they provided 26 sessions in 16 communities, resulting in 455 people becoming Dementia Friends.

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

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

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.

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.

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.
Before we navigate where we are going...

Let’s Celebrate Where We Have Been

50 Years
1973-2023
Let’s Celebrate Where We Have Been
Before we navigate
where we are going...

50

Years

1973-2023

Let’s Celebrate
Where We Have Been
June 6, 2023

50th Anniversary Celebration | 11
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.

**Actual 2023 Revenue Sources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue Source</th>
<th>CY’2023 Budget</th>
<th>CY’2023 Actuals</th>
<th>CY’2024 Budget</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Tax Levy</td>
<td>$329,546</td>
<td>$319,356</td>
<td>$335,312</td>
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<tr>
<td>MN Board on Aging/Department Health</td>
<td>$2,704,968</td>
<td>$2,732,568</td>
<td>$2,433,766</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic Development Administration</td>
<td>$139,836</td>
<td>$146,688</td>
<td>$274,000</td>
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<td>Homeland Security</td>
<td>$105,158</td>
<td>$99,391</td>
<td>$100,200</td>
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<td>MN Department of Transportation</td>
<td>$208,230</td>
<td>$209,248</td>
<td>$250,430</td>
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<td>NW Minnesota Enterprise Fund</td>
<td>$132,655</td>
<td>$139,174</td>
<td>$147,456</td>
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<td>Dancing Sky AAA County Match</td>
<td>$60,830</td>
<td>$60,525</td>
<td>$62,800</td>
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<td>Local Contracts/ Miscellaneous</td>
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<td>Re-grant Revenue</td>
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<td>$4,115,199</td>
<td>$3,537,389</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$7,579,941</strong></td>
<td><strong>$7,891,442</strong></td>
<td><strong>$7,186,745</strong></td>
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**CY’2022 Audit**

**Expenses**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expense Type</th>
<th>CY’2023 Budget</th>
<th>CY’2023 Actuals</th>
<th>CY’2024 Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries and Fringe</td>
<td>$2,676,827</td>
<td>$2,683,821</td>
<td>$2,739,167</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Services</td>
<td>$596,435</td>
<td>$607,264</td>
<td>$394,015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>$130,344</td>
<td>$137,533</td>
<td>$181,357</td>
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<td>Printing/Postage</td>
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<td>$39,647</td>
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<td>Supplies</td>
<td>$45,553</td>
<td>$55,938</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rent/Maintenance</td>
<td>$77,304</td>
<td>$92,499</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>$166,998</td>
<td>$153,534</td>
<td>$174,296</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grants/Contracts</td>
<td>$3,849,620</td>
<td>$4,115,199</td>
<td>$3,537,389</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$7,579,941</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Cost Allocation**

- CY’2023 Actual Leave Rate: 17.60%
- CY’2023 Actual Fringe Rate: 38.34%
- CY’2023 Actual Indirect Rate: 14.41%
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 Commission 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.
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 Commission, NW Minnesota Multi-County HRA and Northwest Minnesota Foundation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Loan Activity (period ending 12/31/2023):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Loans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Loans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Loan Amount</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Financing Leveraged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs Created/Retained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Project Costs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 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 community 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/Okke/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.
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 successes 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

Additional projects (not part of the above-mentioned grant) were also undertaken including:
- Northwest Minnesota Tourism Directory
- 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
- NW Health Services Coalition Projects: Website Upgrades & Exercise Development
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 person’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.

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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THOSE WE SERVE</th>
<th>9,919</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number Served by Senior LinkAge Line Staff</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:1 Open Enrollment Visits in Warren and Bemidji</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Senior LinkAge Line - Outreach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SENIOR LINKAGE LINE OUTREACH</th>
<th>190</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior LinkAge Line Presentation Attendees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

Learning Experiences

Monthly webinars were presented. Previously recorded webinars can be found by going to www.youtube.com and search for “Northwest Regional Development Commission.”

Social Media Campaigns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNING EXPERIENCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>464 Webinar Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>528 In-Person Attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>181 YouTube Views</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACEBOOK CONNECTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13,576 Users Reached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>580 Followers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>489 Published Posts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

**Health and Wellness**
The Dancing Sky AAA provides funding for organizations to provide health and wellness classes. The newest class is “Bingocize”.

**Development Team Puts On The Miles**

**2023 AGING GRANTEES**

- 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
- 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
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.
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
www.dancingskyaaa.org
www.visitnwminnesota.com
www.nwrtcc.org
50 Years
1973-2023

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

50th Anniversary Edition