UMVRDC FY23 Annual Report

July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023

50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION
Message from the Executive Director
Dawn Hegland

I am honored to write this as we celebrate the golden milestone of our organization’s 50th anniversary. I have enjoyed the opportunity to research the history of the UMVRDC and all those people and projects that have contributed to our rich history. It allowed for reflection, gratitude, and celebration of the remarkable journey we have embarked upon together.

Over the past five decades, our organization has left an indelible mark on the region. We have developed and supported a diverse list of projects that have contributed to the social, economic, and physical structure of communities thanks to the dedication, talent, and unwavering commitment of each and every individual who has been part of this incredible journey.

As we look back on the past 50 years, we cannot help but feel a deep sense of gratitude towards the Minnesota RDC Act and the local elected officials whose vision and determination in the early 1970s laid the foundation for our success. Their unwavering belief in the mission of our organization continues to inspire our work to this day.

As we commemorate this occasion, let us take a moment to honor the memories, stories, and achievements that have shaped our organization’s rich history. I hope you enjoy reading about both past and current efforts of our organization in this year’s special edition annual report.

In recognition of our 50th anniversary, we have planned a series of events and initiatives that will not only celebrate our past but also lay the foundation for an even brighter future. In the coming year, we will initiate a new strategic plan, add new employees to our team, and elect new board members as leaders for our organization. At our July 2023 Annual Meeting we will honor past board members, chairpersons, and employees, and express our gratitude to all those who have contributed to our success.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to all the past and present employees, board members, and partners who have contributed their skills, expertise, and unwavering support throughout the years providing invaluable contributions to our organization’s journey. It is through your collective efforts that we have been able to contribute time and talent to locally identified issues, projects, and needs. It is because of your contributions that we stand tall today, ready to embrace the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Together, let us carry the spirit of our organization’s 50th anniversary into the future, fueled by a shared vision and unwavering determination to create a better region. Thank you for being an integral part of our organization’s success, and here’s to the next 50 years of continued growth, innovation, and impact!

With gratitude,
Dawn Hegland

Message from the Board Chair
Ben Bothun

As I look back at my 2nd year as Chairman of the UMVRDC I am proud of what we have accomplished and am excited about the opportunities coming down the pipeline. This year we added new board members and said goodbye to a few long-standing ones. Board turnover will allow for new ideas and opinions.

The Commission will be embarking on a new strategic plan process this year and I look forward to working with staff and board members to see what we identify as important issues to try to tackle in the next five years. In our region, childcare, housing, attracting and retaining workforce continue to be the big issues that come up from our past annual surveys and I’m hopeful we can help our area with these issues.

I’d be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge the 50th Anniversary of the UMVRDC. I want to give a big thank-you to all the past staff, board members, and local government partners that have worked to help make big changes in our area the past 50 years. I’m not sure if it’s even measurable, but the direct and indirect economic impact that the Commission has had on our region is incredible.

Lastly, I’m proud to call Western Minnesota my home and I am honored to be chair of an organization that is making it an even better place to live.

In memory of...
Kay Koosman

Kay was one of the first employees hired by the UMVRDC in 1974. She served the organization as office manager until her retirement in 2008. We are thankful for her contributions to the organization for more than 34 years of service!

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Financial Report

Expenses  FY23  FY24
Salaries/Fringe  992,165  1,142,805
Commissioner's Expense  18,200  22,300
Audit  15,500  16,800
Contract for Services  28,280  63,120
Copy Charge/Xerox lease  4,000  3,600
Depreciation  7,200  5,700
Dues  5,000  7,000
Insurance  1,300  1,300
Legal Fees  700  2,000
Miscellaneous  10,000  1,000
Office Rent  12,210  21,800
Postage  3,500  3,500
Printing/Advertising  4,500  4,500
RDC Marketing  2,000  2,000
Registration  4,000  4,000
Repairs/Maintenance  2,200  2,000
Software  9,150  8,650
Sub/Publications  2,300  2,000
Supplies  3,000  3,500
Telephone/Internet  5,000  5,000
Staff Travel  15,000  20,000
Morale  500  2,000
Wellness  1,000  2,000
Web Hosting/Maintenance  3,500  3,500
Byway Guide  12,500
EDA Cares  38,420
Meander  29,000  20,000
Prairie Waters Ads  23,700  15,000

$1,254,825  $1,385,655

Revenues  FY23  FY24
Contractual Services  $271,848  $922,800
Levy  351,700  362,000
Reserves  74,580  96,000
Interest  2,000  5,000

$1,256,128  $1,385,800

FY23 Ending Account Balances

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<th>FY24</th>
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<tr>
<td>RLF Available for Lending</td>
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$16,167,611
The amount of money invested in our region as a result of the UMVRDC’s Work in FY23

$902,428
Contractual services the UMVRDC provided to the region

$15,265,183
Funds brought to the region as a result of our work

The FY22 audit was conducted by Donna F. Cole & Company out of Montevideo, Minnesota. The auditor’s report expresses an unqualified opinion on the General Purpose Financial Statements of the UMVRDC. The audit report is available online at www.umvrdc.org.
1973
The UMVRDC was established on September 10, 1973, by local governments following the RDC Act.

1975
The Six West Regional Development Commission was organized on September 10, 1973, and is one of the 13 official state regions authorized by State legislation to receive planning grants. In accordance with the State Legislation establishing Regional Development Commissions, a Regional Development #1 Comprehensive Development Plan will be prepared. The Commission can review the comprehensive plans of local government, independent agencies, and all local government agencies for Federal and State aid programs. Other responsibilities of the Commission have been given are to collect, exchange, and disseminate regional data and information, to identify regional problems and needs and propose policies to solve them, and to help the out-state regions compete with the metro area for job opportunities.

1974
Bylaws were developed, a board was created. The first office was selected, and the staff was hired on July 15, 1974.

1975 First Accomplishments
- In May, EDA designated Region 6 an Economic Development Provisional District and the RDC began development of a Regional Overall Economic Development Plan.
- Proposed for a Region 6 Library District that included counties in ROC 6 and 6W as a much larger district.
- Proposed for MPCHA that the high emphasis on population made smaller communities less of a priority for funding for city treatment facilities.
- Proposed for the Governor to formulate a regional review process for all federal and state grants and loans made in this region.
- Worked on a regional comprehensive plan that included housing, land use, transportation, open space, and recreation.
- Proposed for criminal justice planning money for ROC 6E, 6W, and 8.
- Participated in planning for a high voltage power line sitting from Canada to the Twin cities and as a result no recommendations for suitable corridors were recommended in the region.
- Provided planning and grant writing assistance to: Big Stone County, Beardsley, Carrol, Grotaville, Dovona, Chippewa County, Milan, Watson, Waton, Clara City, Maynard, Montevideo, Bellingham, Boyd, Manistee, Louisburg, Bawdon, Madison, Appleton, Holloway, Benson, Danvers, DelGraff, Swift County, Murdock, Cotton, Kerkhoven, Porter, Granite Falls, Eaeke, St. Leo, Clandfield, Hanley Falls, Wood Lake, Carby, Upper Sioux Reservation

1976
1978
1982/1983
Began providing planning services to the Regional Manpower Advisory Committee who started regionally allocating funds for job training and employment opportunities for disadvantaged, unemployed, or underemployed individuals.

Developed a Regional Natural Resources Management Plan that used vast amounts of computerized data to detail current land use and established policies for future development.

Telecommunications Task Force was formed to examine the telecommunications infrastructure and identify new possibilities. Worked with the Governors Council on Rural Development and WCC TV to broadcast a live TV panel discussion on rural issues where home viewers could call in their questions.

The UMVRDC’s Area on Aging funds home delivered meals and 14 senior nutrition site locations. It serves 14,315 people over 65, or 4% of the region’s population.

1979
After local concern about state and federal agencies seeking new wildlife lands, the Commission’s Wildlife Task Force met to adopt plans that outlined the revenue impacts of converting land to wildlife habitat. These documents were influential in increasing state in-fee-of payment process.

1981
Due to concern about proposed railroad line abandonment in the region, ROC staff engaged in a study to look at the formation of a short line railroad extending from Madison to Hanley Falls.

1984
Developed a regional Small Business Advisory Committee of resource providers who recommended the development of a revolving loan fund to provide long, below-market interest rate loans.

1985
Working with area growers, shippers, bankers and the Pomme De Terre Sands Irrigators Association on a feasibility study to develop a direct export marketing organization for the area’s agriculture exports. The study looked into several innovative approaches to transporting high value and specialty commodities from the Upper Minnesota Valley to the Pacific Northwest for shipment to the Pacific Rim.

1986
Export trade mission to Asia included ROC staff and regional delegates to connect with potential trade partners in Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. The region started working with Agriculture to identify area growers who were interested in trial crop development including edible beans, high protein grains, and certain oil seeds. The results of these trials would be presented to buyers in East Asia.

Throughout the years...

1973-2023

1975 Commission Board Members

- Big Stone County
  - Ray Buls
    County Board
  - Eugene Kashmark
    City
  - Alfred Schirm
    Townships

- Chippewa County
  - Thomas Johnson
    County Board
  - Vernon Thorstad
    City
  - Ernest Dahlen
    Townships
  - Father Henry
    Public Interest Group

- Lac qui Parle County
  - Palmer Grinager
    County Board
  - Ronald Stone
    City
  - Forrest Dessonville
    Townships

1975 UMVRDC Staff

- Dennis Dahlen
  Executive Director
- Thomas Jorgens
  Regional Planner - Land Use, Economy and Manpower
- Mervin Eischens
  City
- Patrick Miller
  Townships
- Donald Erickson
  School Board

- Nancy Carlson
  Cartographer
- Nancy Slett
een
  Secretary
- Kay Koosman
  Bookkeeper/Typist (part-time)

- Father Henry
  Public Interest Group

- Lac qui Parle County
  - Palmer Grinager
    County Board
  - Ronald Stone
    City
  - Forrest Dessonville
    Townships

- Swift County
  - John Langan
    County Board
  - Anthony Thompson - Chairman
  - Wallace Larson
    Townships
  - Harold Heinecke
    School Board
  - Kathy Cavanaugh; Joel Lee
    Public Interest Group

- Yellow Medicine County
  - Evonne Grinager
    County Board
  - Mervin Eischens
    City
  - Patrick Miller
    Townships
  - Donald Erickson
    School Board
After designation as an Economic Development District from EDA in May 1997, the RDC received their first $50,000 EDA planning grant and developed an EDA workshop focusing on national trade, recreational resources planning and development and infrastructure planning and development.

WesternMN RLF formed as a non-profit with Big Stone, Swift, Chippewa as the first eligible counties. UMVRDC conducts inventory and analysis of transit in the region with the intent of creating a transit coordination program.

The UMVRDC’s Area Agency on Aging continues to fund and promote services to older persons. Funding supports local transit, chore programs, information and referral services, leadership, and home delivered and meal site options.

UMVRDC worked with MnDOT to functionally classify all roadways in the region as part of a statewide study. This included ranking the economic centers in the region according to classifications identified by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs.

UMVRDC co-sponsored the Value Added Products conference in Montevideo. The goal was to explore ideas for value-added agricultural products and processing.

Submitted a capacity building grant on behalf of local housing and redevelopment authorities for education and training that would support housing needs of the region.

Provided significant grant writing and support to communities affected by widespread flooding in the region impacted homes, businesses, and infrastructure. Hired a regional flood coordinator to assist with recovery coordination. The MN River Valley Scenic Byway Alliance was formed and coordinated by the UMVRDC.

UMVRDC submitted an application to EDA to expand the WestMN RLF (the original name of the UMVRDC’s RLF fund) from Big Stone, Chippewa and Swift to now include Lac qui Parle and Yellow Medicine Counties making the fund cover the entire 5 county region. Prepared an application for the city of Appleton to EDA and the MN Economic Recovery Program for infrastructure improvements to support the development of a 434 bed medium security prison.

UMVRDC awarded eight industrial development grants totaling $40,000 to businesses in Big Stone, Chippewa, and Swift Counties. The money is used to redevelop and develop vacant and underutilized properties.

Did you know?

Chippewa County boasts one of the largest Cottonwoods in Minnesota.

Aging program continues into fourth season of the Senior Linkage TV series, a locally produced TV program about senior issues.

UMVRDC formed the Geographic Information Service Bureau for the region to provide maps, data, and analysis of geographic information for many local and regional projects.

Started a fully staffed regional tourism program with funding from local governments.

Began assisting counties with Hazard Mitigation Plans after the passing of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 required plan to access FEMA funding.

The Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging consolidated aging programs from four regional development commissions in SW MN.

DIAGRAM:

The WestMN RLF made loans totaling $242,000 to new and expanding businesses in the region, leveraging nearly $2 million in other public, private and owner funds for projects that created new business and job growth. These loans will result in 34 jobs being created and nine retained.

2000

Aging program continues into fourth season of the Senior Linkage TV series, a locally produced TV program about senior issues.

2001

Ran seniors with Hazard Mitigation Plans after the passing of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 required plan to access FEMA funding.

2002

After significant flood and tornado impacts, and loss of jobs due to major employer closures, applied for additional disaster recovery revolving loan funds to assist in the recovery.

2004

Coordinated regional application for Job Opportunity Building Zones (JOBZ), Businesses worked with suburbs communities in the region to expand or start new businesses with the assistance of the JOBZ program; coordinated first annual Meinander Art Crawl.

2005

The Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging consolidated aging programs from four regional development commissions in SW MN.

2006

The WestMN RLF made loans totaling $242,000 to new and expanding businesses in the region, leveraging nearly $2 million in other public, private and owner funds for projects that created new business and job growth. These loans will result in 34 jobs being created and nine retained.
UMVRDC develops outmigration study, completed in southwestern Minnesota after ongoing population loss over last 30 years.

Started working on broadband issues in the region, wrote an application to expand broadband in Appleton; completed inventory of regional providers, and established need and use by businesses.

Developed region’s first locally developed public transit human service coordination plan to identify transit needs for older adults, those with disabilities, and people with low income.

UMVRDC created set of demographic summaries for cities, counties and the region that summarizes results of the newly available census information.

UMVRDC authored a $3.9 million grant for fiber to premise broadband development in Big Stone County to the new Minnesota Border to Border Program.

2008
Conducted a series of renewable energy forums looking at wind energy potential in the region.

2010
Worked with University of MN Extension to develop research paper and marketing strategies to attract newcomers to the region.

2012
Assisted five school district with the first Safe Routes to School Plans that outline opportunities to encourage more children to bike or walk to school.

2014
Following the Rural Arts Summit in 2013, the RDC followed up with communities interested in public art in the region and started creating a toolbox of ideas and resources.

2016
Began providing staff support to the West Central Region’s Clean Energy Resource Team to help identify and implement local clean energy ideas.

2017
Registered “Charting the Future of Local Foods” study completed with 58 action steps to expand local foods capacity.

2018
Supported multiple efforts to look at housing and redevelopment in the region; hosted a regional forum to share how communities address dilapidation, completed a system for local housing condition inventory, and authored multiple grants for rehabilitation and redevelopment.

2019
Completed first inventory of vacant and underutilized properties in the region and worked with five communities to develop conceptual redevelopment at select locations.

2020
Completed two year grant to address COVID related recovery in the region. The project included a redevelopment feasibility plan, study business retention and expansion efforts, broadband and childcare work, regional marketing, digital commerce training, developable property inventory updates.

2021
Wrote successful grants for the City of Appleton and Madison to install broadband infrastructure into fiber lines within city limits.

2022
Began following the childcare issue in our area and started developing childcare case studies to showcase how different communities are collaborating on childcare facilities and programs.
Improving our Region’s Infrastructure

Chippewa County Border to Border Broadband Grant Awarded

In December, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development announced that Farmers Mutual Telephone Company (FMT) was the recipient of $4,728,186 in grant funding for a large broadband project in northern Chippewa County through the Border-to-Border program. The UMVRDC partnered with Chippewa County and FMT to prepare the successful application for the $10.5 million project last summer. Local matching funds in the amount of $5,778,894 are being provided by the County, FMT, and Rosewood and Louriston Townships.

This last mile project will provide fiber to the premise service to 636 unique locations across 10 townships in rural portions of Chippewa County. 577 of these locations are unserved and 59 are under-served. The locations served include 15 community institutions like township halls, churches, or other public property; 10 rural businesses; 256 farms and 355 residential locations. Building this fiber-to-the-premise network that provides advanced, high-speed broadband services will position Chippewa County for the future.

Together, Farmers Mutual Telephone Company, Chippewa County, Rosewood and Louriston Townships and the State of Minnesota will share the cost to provide 300 megabits per second symmetrical or 1G symmetrical service throughout the project area, exceeding Minnesota’s 2026 state speed goal. The project area has little or no current access to consistent and reliable broadband. This lack of access prevents the locations in this grant from participating in a digital economy, tele-health, e-learning, precision agriculture, integrating smart technologies into the homes and buildings, and participating in civic, civic and recreational online activities. Broadband access will also help attract and retain residents and businesses in the county that supports the local economy and tax base. Building a fiber-to-the-premise network that provides advanced, high-speed broadband services will position Chippewa County for the future.

MnDOT Planning Grant Assists in Transportation Infrastructure

The UMVRDC provides transportation planning assistance to the region through a contract with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT). The RDC serves as a member of two different MnDOT Area Transportation Partnerships (ATPs). They review and prioritize federally funded road, bridge, public transit, and transportation alternative projects. This involvement ensures local feedback is considered when planning the projects, ensuring the best investment for our region. Over the next five years, the five-county region will see an investment of more than $4 million to area roads, bridges and other transportation infrastructure.

In 2021, Federal legislation passed the IIJA/Bill which created a significant increase of funding earmarked for transportation. For this region, success will depend on forward thinking leadership aligning the critical needs of our region with these funds. Examples of local projects that benefited from an increase in funding and new programs include three Transportation Alternative projects were awarded $1.34 million in Chippewa County including the reconstruction of the Milon to Lac qui Parle Lake trail, the reconstruction of the Highland Park Trail in Granite Falls, and the installation of a HAWK (high intensity activated crosswalk) beacon at the intersection of Minnesota Highway 31 and Big Stone County Highway Department will lease an electric vehicle through the Carbon Reduction Program.

Granite Falls Trail Improvements

The Highland Park Trail connecting downtown Granite Falls with Highland Park serves as a critical connection for recreation, safe routes to school, and connects the Highland Park neighborhood to downtown Granite Falls. The trail was built in 1999 and funded by a Transportation Enhancement grant written by the UMVRDC. After 20 plus years of useful life, the trail needed replacement.

Working with the City of Granite Falls, the UMVRDC wrote a successful Transportation Alternatives grant application for $244,600. The project will be completed in 2022.

Broadband Grants Provide New Options in Appleton and Madison

The UMVRDC wrote and is administering two federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act grants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City of Appleton</th>
<th>City of Madison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>$3,699,000</td>
<td>$2,560,000</td>
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Appleton is completing the installation of a city-wide fiber broadband network for residents and businesses within the City of Appleton. The grant also included a commercial rehabilitation component for at least 12 businesses to update new or repair heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems with good ventilation and safe air circulation. The total project cost for Appleton is $5,774,000 and includes a grant request of $3,699,000.

Madison is nearing completion of the installation of broadband infrastructure to residential and non-residential properties within the city limits. The total project cost for Madison is $4,560,000 and includes a grant request of $2,560,000.
Madison Comprehensive Plan

The City of Madison contracted with the UMVRDC to begin work on updating its 2003 Comprehensive Plan. A comprehensive plan is a tool that presents a community’s vision and policies for the long-range future by incorporating public input and goals gathered through a robust planning process. The plan will cover such topics as Land Use/Zoning, Housing, Public Infrastructure/Facilities, Services, Transportation, Economic Development, Parks/Recreation/Natural Resources, and Community Vitality. In addition, the plan serves as a legal basis for zoning and provides guidance for elected officials and other decision makers when considering future development and expenditures.

The planning process kicked off in December with a community survey which yielded over 300 responses! In February, the UMVRDC and City staff facilitated a community meeting with over 125 residents in attendance. Work continues on the plan as the UMVRDC and a local planning task force committee meet to develop goals and strategies to guide the City over the next 10-20 years.

EDA Planning Grant

Through a planning grant provided by the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA), the UMVRDC develops and maintains the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region, as well as carries out economic development activities. The CEDS was recently updated in 2022 and in January, we submitted an annual performance report which provides the EDA with a summary of accomplishments over the past year related to the goals of the CEDS. In addition to the report, UMVRDC staff convenes a group of economic development professionals from the region on a quarterly basis to share ideas, hear from speakers, and network with each other. This group is currently working together to host a workforce summit this fall for the region’s employers. The event will provide employers with information on resources, current trends, and successful examples to address workforce shortages.

Plan for our Region’s Future

Swift County Implements OHV Park Improvements

In January 2022, the UMVRDC assisted Swift County in submitting an application to the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration’s American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) competitive grant programs. Swift County applied for funding under the ARPA Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Program for improvements to the Appleton Area Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Park. The County requested funding to carry out many of the identified projects listed in their 2021 Appleton Area OHV Park Master Plan, such as the creation of a day use beach area, walking trails, improved parking areas, permanent restroom facilities, new wells, vehicle wash stations, and improved signage.

The UMVRDC notified the County in August that they were awarded $1,034,196 in federal funds to carry out the proposed improvements. The total project cost is estimated to be $1,477,423. The UMVRDC is now assisting the County with grant administration services including recently procuring an engineering firm to design the project and oversee construction activities. Construction is expected to begin in 2024.

Grant Awarded

$1,034,196

Southwest Minnesota Seeks Improvement to Electrical Network

The UMVRDC is currently assisting the City of Granite Falls with a grant application for improvements to its electrical grid system. The application is for funding through the Economic Development Administration’s (EDA) FY23 Disaster Funding which is in response to the natural disasters of 2021 and 2022. To be eligible, applicants must be located in counties that were included in the Presidentially Declared Major Natural Disaster areas across the country. All five of our counties are included as a result of the May 2022 windstorms. This funding will help communities devise and implement long-term economic recovery strategies to recover and become resilient to future disasters through a variety of construction and non-construction projects.

Grant Awarded

$1,400,000

Benson Protects Critical Infrastructure

The UMVRDC wrote a federal EDA grant for $1.1 million for the City of Benson to construct flood protection that will protect and enhance the reliability and resiliency of critical wastewater treatment services in the city. The UMVRDC is currently working as the grant administrator for the project.

Grant Awarded

$1,400,000

Granite Falls Seeks Improvement to Electrical Network

The UMVRDC is currently assisting the City of Granite Falls with a grant application for improvements to its electrical grid system. The application is for funding through the Economic Development Administration’s (EDA) FY23 Disaster Funding which is in response to the natural disasters of 2021 and 2022. To be eligible, applicants must be located in counties that were included in the Presidentially Declared Major Natural Disaster areas across the country. All five of our counties are included as a result of the May 2022 windstorms. This funding will help communities devise and implement long-term economic recovery strategies to recover and become resilient to future disasters through a variety of construction and non-construction projects.

Grant Awarded

$1,400,000

Memorial Park Continues to Make Improvements

The UMVRDC continues to assist the City of Granite Falls with improvements to Memorial Park, which was designated a regional park in 2016 by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission. The UMVRDC has helped with funding requests, environmental review, and master planning process. The UMVRDC continues to assist Granite Falls in implementing their master plan.

This past year, the UMVRDC assisted with the environmental review for Phase IV of the master plan, which will rehab the entrance gates, add amenities to the picnic area, and complete the trail around the wetland. This grant for $569,973 is expected to be completed in 2023.

Grant Awarded

$569,973
Upper Sioux Community All-Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

As a result of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requires that local units of government must first have in place a multi-hazard mitigation plan to be eligible for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funds. The UMVRDC was contracted in the spring of 2021 to complete the update for the Upper Sioux Community (USC).

From March 2021 through May 2022, ten planning meetings were held with USC staff to update all plan information. All data and historical information needed to be updated. New hazards needed to be cataloged. All changes and completed strategies were documented. New strategies were developed based on changes in climate or other new local conditions to mitigate and negative impacts of those hazards. These strategies were prioritized.

A public review process was held in July-August 2022. FEMA reviewed and approved the plan, and the plan was adopted by the USC Tribal Council in October 2022.

Chippewa County Hazard Mitigation Plan

The UMVRDC is currently working with Chippewa County Emergency Management to update the County’s Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan. Hazard mitigation planning helps identify strategies and projects to prevent or lessen the impacts of disasters on communities, infrastructure, and natural environments, making them more resilient against future disasters and thus reducing the costs of recovery. Jurisdictions with plans in place are also eligible to apply for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) hazard mitigation grant funding. Hazard Mitigation plans are required by FEMA to be updated every five years. The UMVRDC and County Emergency Management met with local committees in each of the communities, as well as a County committee to collect information and update their strategies. The plan is nearing completion and should be done in fall 2023.

Swift County Solid Waste Plan

Swift County contracted with the UMVRDC in May to assist in updating its 2013 Solid Waste Management Plan. UMVRDC staff and the Swift County Environmental Department will work to develop a policy-based road map for how the County intends to reduce waste, increase recycling, and divert waste from landfills. These plans are required by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to be updated every ten years. Work on the plan has just begun with completion anticipated by February 2024.

Big Stone County Solid Waste Plan

Big Stone County contracted with the UMVRDC to assist in updating its 2012 Solid Waste Management Plan. UMVRDC staff and the Big Stone County Environmental Department worked to develop a policy-based road map for how the County intends to reduce waste, increase recycling, and divert waste from landfills. These plans are required by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) to be updated every ten years. Big Stone County’s plan was completed in February, approved by the MPCA, and adopted by the County Commissioners in May.

Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley (CGB) School District was awarded $38,515 from MnDOT to create Safe Routes to School plans for Clinton and Graceville. Through public outreach and assessment of current infrastructure and programs, the Safe Routes to School team was able to identify a list of potential infrastructure and non-infrastructure solutions to help more children walk and bicycle safely to school.

The Safe Routes to School plan for each community can be found on the UMVRDC website.

The CGB School District also received $5000 from MnDOT to pay for bike racks and a bike fix-it station to be installed in the summer of 2023.

Local Human Services – Transit Coordination Plan

The UMVRDC worked in partnership with Prairie Five Community Action Council to update the region’s Local Human Services – Transit Coordination Plan. This plan is completed every five years to assist stakeholders as they determine ways to improve transportation for non-drivers and others with transportation challenges, especially seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income people. It serves as a blueprint for regional transportation coordination. The plan describes demographic conditions, gives an updated inventory and highlights gaps in unmet needs.

DEED Digital Inclusion Mini-Grant

In March, the UMVRDC was designated as a Digital Connection Committee by the DEED Office of Broadband Development (OBD). The UMVRDC convened key stakeholders in the region and provide information to the State as they develop the statewide digital equity plan to understand what the digital inclusion needs and goals are in Minnesota.

The UMVRDC received a mini-grant to assist in the development of the state’s digital equity plan, by collecting input and information in three ways. In May and June, staff:

- Collected information on issues such as technology access/use at home, barriers to broadband access, and using technology through a regional public survey
- Conducted a focus group discussion
- inventoried the available technology assets/services in our region and identified gaps/needs in those areas through a targeted survey

This work concluded at the end of June with the UMVRDC submitting its survey results and focus group meeting findings to the OBD to be included in the state’s digital equity plan.
Responding to Critical Issues

EDA CARES Supplemental Grant

The UMVRDC received a Supplemental Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) grant through the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) in 2020 to work on a variety of projects addressing the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. All of the work covered under this grant was completed by December 31, 2022.

Comprehensive Planning with a Focus on Resiliency

CARES funds were used to build staff understanding and knowledge around community resiliency/sustainability concepts - a relatively new area of expertise to the UMVRDC. New connections were made with experts and other Economic Development District staff in this field to gain knowledge and examples of work that could be implemented in the region. An internal informational document was created for all UMVRDC staff, as well as a new Resiliency Resource webpage for stakeholders and communities. With this added capacity, the UMVRDC plans to actively seek out communities ready to implement a resiliency plan or project.

Digital marketing/E-commerce webinars

Many small businesses were severely impacted by disruptions and closures during the pandemic. The UMVRDC partnered with a local marketing firm to offer 15 online webinars covering a wide range of helpful topics for small businesses such as hiring, marketing, and social media. Recordings of the webinars are now available on the UMVRDC website, below are a few examples:

- Speed Up Your Hiring Process & Fill Your Open Positions
- Facebook: Dominating the World #1 Social Media Platform
- Google Ads for Small Budgets
- Getting Found Online & On Maps
- Understanding Google My Business

Childcare Public Outreach

The UMVRDC partnered with Southwest Initiative Foundation to create a series of articles highlighting the challenges with childcare at the national and local levels. The articles include shocking data that is a concern for the current and future of our workforce. On a brighter note, there are numerous employers, cities and counties who have shown financial support to local centers. The targeted audience for this campaign is local residents, employers and elected officials – showcasing why childcare is a broken system and strategies to help overcome the issue. Below are the three topics from the outreach campaign:

- The Domino Effect
- The Financial Rollercoaster
- Regional Community Efforts

A copy of the articles can be found on the UMVRDC website.

Regional Demolition Fund Feasibility Study

UMVRDC used CARES funding to work on a new and creative approach to addressing the long-standing issue of vacant and dilapidated properties in the region. The first step in this work was working with the University of Minnesota Extension to have them investigate and prepare research on exiting regional demolition/redevelopment funds. Staff surveyed local governments and the results showed that property demolition funding should be the focus prior to further investigation into redevelopment funding. The UMVRDC sent out a Request for Proposals and ultimately selected Ehlers Public Finance Advisers to develop a feasibility report for demolition of properties. Ehlers study recommended having interested counties form a multi-county Housing and Redevelopment Authority in order to have tax capturing which would provide a continuous source of funding for the program. Upon completion of the report, UMVRDC and Ehlers presented the findings of the study to county partners to gauge interest in the recommended actions. UMVRDC staff also plan to continue discussion with Ehlers on the idea of forming a similar redevelopment fund feasibility report. A copy of the report and a recording of the presentation is found on the UMVRDC website on the Redevelopment Resources page.

UMVRDC assists Lac qui Parle County with Business Loan Program

Following the UMVRDC’s assistance in writing the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Business Development Grant application Lac qui Parle County Economic Development Authority received $300,000 in grant funds to establish a Revolving Loan Fund. These grant dollars, paired with local matching funds provides a resource for funding new or expanding businesses. The UMVRDC provides support to the County by working with applicants, managing loan payments, and working with a local loan review committee to review applications.

Currently, the County has two active loans, Hilltop Bar and Grill in Dawson and The Sticks in Madison.

Helping our Region’s Businesses

UMVRDC Revolving Loan Fund

A combination of 30 full and part time jobs were created or retained as a result of the 2 new business loans closed by the UMVRDC during this last year. In total, the Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) lent $450,000 to businesses in the five-county region. Loans for the businesses listed below were approved for equipment, inventory, fixed assets, and real estate.

A total of $450,000 of RLF funds along with additional public and private dollars were spent on these two projects. Financial partners in the projects include: local banks, Southwest Initiative Foundation, Granite Falls Economic Development Authority, and the Benson Economic Development Authority.

| $150,000 | Winter Family Enterprises, Inc. - Montevideo |
| $300,000 | Donner Manufacturing Inc. - Clara City |

UMVRDC Revolving Loan Fund Portfolio as of 6/30/23

- Total Receivables: $2,863,141
- Loans in portfolio: 41
- Total Lending Available: $1,133,094
Revitalizing our Communities

Small Cities Development Program Grant Management

UMVRDC staff continue to author grant applications and provide general administration of the MN Department of Employment and Economic Development Small Cities Development Program (SCDP), which helps cities and communities with funding for housing rehabilitation for owner occupied and single-family rental homes along with multi-family rental unit rehabilitation, public infrastructure, and commercial rehabilitation projects. A shortage of contractors, especially those bidding on projects continues to challenge the program along with material delays and high materials costs.

Granite Falls and Clarkfield completed their grants this fall after being extended for one year. Granite Falls rehabbed 10 owner-occupied homes along with four single family rental homes and six commercial properties. Almost $900,000 in project funds will provide a significant amount of impact throughout the community.

The Clarkfield $1,104,520 grant rehabbed 11 owner-occupied homes and five commercial properties. The grant also included $600,000 for the water tower project. The water tower is part of the $23.4 million dollar infrastructure projects in Clarkfield.

Milan and Watson received a year-long extension last year and will be ending at the end of September 2023. Milan and Watson’s total improvements will be close to $1.1 million. The grant will rehab 10 owner-occupied homes along with eight multi-family rental units and four commercial properties.

Canyon also received a yearlong extension last year and will be ending at the end of September 2023. Grant funds will allow 11 owner occupied homes and eight commercial businesses to receive needed rehabilitation totaling over $1 million.

Appleton is in the last year of their grant and will close at the end of September. Appleton’s goal is to rehab 18 owner occupied homes and 5 commercial properties, totaling $1,057,530 in improvements.

Clara City is in the last year of their grant and will close at the end of September. Clara City's goal is to rehab 10 owner occupied homes, eight single-family rental homes and four commercial properties. The total funds that will impact the city is $902,203.

Benson is in the second year of their grant and plans to rehab 20 owner occupied homes and 10 commercial properties. Benson’s total project will impact the community by $1,194,700.

Dawson is in the second year of their grant and plans to rehab 18 owner occupied homes and four commercial properties. The total impact to the community is $769,300.

Ortonville is in the first year of their grant. The grant will rehab 16 owner occupied homes and seven commercial properties. The total project will be over $900,000. 23 projects will make a huge impact on the community.

Promoting our Region’s Assets

Arts Meander

2022 marked the 19th annual Meander Art Crawl which continues to be a successful event in the region. The UMVRDC continues to provide technical and financial management for the Meander since its inception and is pleased to see continued growth and support for the event.

In 2022, there was a total of $131,357 art sales throughout the weekend. Event goers came from near and far to visit the 41 artists located throughout Big Stone, Swift, Lac qui Parle, Chippewa, and Yellow Medicine counties. The Meander provides a great opportunity to showcase the area and provides a large economic boost to the small businesses.

- 83% of customers said the quality of the art was excellent
- 86% Customers spent an average of $48 on food/gas
- $3,402 Average reported art sales per artist
- Customers visited 12 studies on average
- Customers spent an average of $24 on shopping outside of the Meander art

$131,357
Meander Art Sales
Western Minnesota Prairie Waters Regional Marketing

Western Minnesota Prairie Waters is a regional marketing effort promoting the four counties of Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Yellow Medicine, Swift, and their communities. The purpose is to promote the area as a great place to visit, work, and live by highlighting the region’s natural, cultural, scenic, historic assets, and lifestyle. The program is managed by the UMVRDC and is funded by counties, cities, chambers, and economic development organizations in the region.

The 2023 Prairie Waters Members include Chippewa County, Montevideo/CVB, Milan, Swift County, Benson, Kerkhoven, Appleton, Lac qui Parle County, Dawson, Madison, Yellow Medicine County, Canby, Clarkfield, and Granite Falls/EDA.

Regional Website: www.prairiewaters.com The website is a one-stop-shop that includes information on employment opportunities, housing, education, healthcare, child care, things to do, etc.

Co-sponsored Community Events: Worked with the Madison Chamber to sponsor four Christmas movies throughout the month of December at the Grand Theater in Madison. Worked with the City of Dawson in sponsoring a Christmas event – sponsored hot dogs, smores, and hot chocolate.

Advertising: Prairie Waters received a $10,000 grant in 2022, and a $2,500 grant in 2023 through Explore Minnesota Tourism to spend locally on advertising our communities and events.

Live & Work Here: The Prairie Waters website and social media pages highlight the region’s lifestyle with information on the following: housing, healthcare, education, child care, cost of living, and things to do. The website also includes information on employment opportunities, technology/broadband services, site selector, start/expand a business, and more.

Guide Distribution: Distributed guides through the communities to businesses, chambers and encouraged employers to utilize the guides for workforce recruitment. The guides are also displayed in the visitor kiosks at the Mall of America, and available in a digital format.

Job Listings

Get Rural Workforce Recruitment

Created a toolkit that includes lifestyle information for an employer to send to a potential new employee as a welcoming package.

Created a new widget on the Prairie Waters website that pulls local employment opportunities from multiple different online job boards and local employers to one location where a user can filter by keywords, employer, and/or location. In addition, we launched a four-month Google Ads marketing campaign to drive users to the new web page.

Learn more about the region at https://prairiewaters.com/
We thank you for celebrating 50 years of service with us!