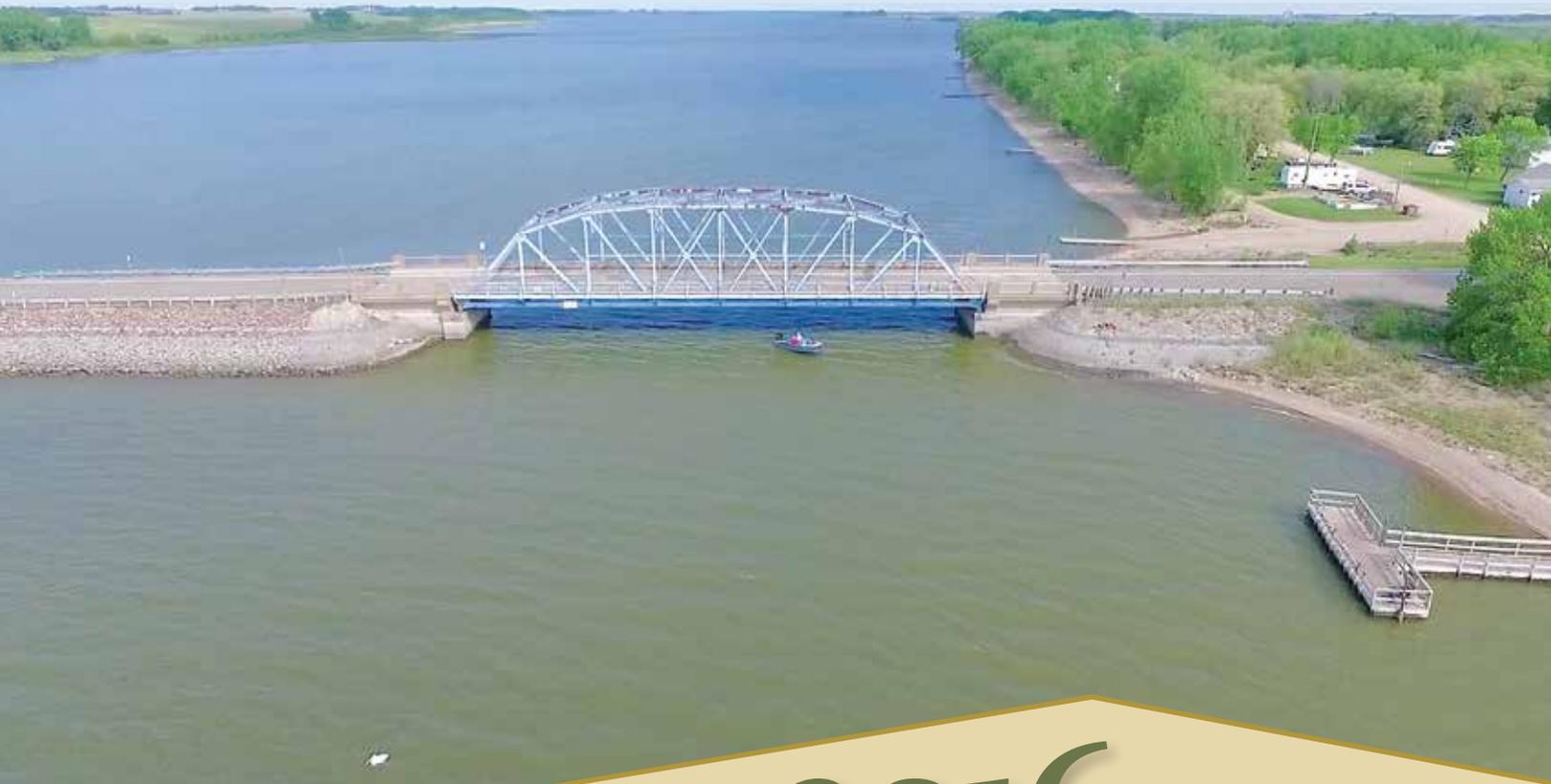




Upper Minnesota Valley
**REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
COMMISSION**



2016 Annual Report



Helping



Communities



Prosper

Message from the Executive Director

What makes living in a small rural place great? There are as many opinions as there are small town residents. No traffic, safe communities, small school class sizes and top scoring schools, personal attention in health care, low cost of housing, walkable communities, tremendous outdoor natural resources, local culture and traditions. These are some of the common things I hear when we are working in communities throughout the region. You can hear pride in the answers. There are also opportunities within them.

Our mission at the UMRDC is to help communities thrive. That means different things to different people too. Throughout this last year we have helped with numerous projects that have helped advance, solve or identify local ideas, issues or opportunities. Our staff buzz with excitement on each new project we are invited to work on and are thrilled to travel throughout the region dreaming up how we can best be of service to the local governmental units we serve. We are constantly sharing best practices, case studies, or examples of work that is being done elsewhere as a way to suggest options or ideas that might be helpful for other communities.

We can all learn from one another and part of our job is to act as a connector between the good work that is being done in our region and elsewhere. This report is full of examples of work that was done to help communities thrive. I hope that we will get a chance to share some of these stories with you in person over this next year as great examples of work that has been completed. We look forward to helping this region continue to be a great place to live, work, and play.



Message from the Board Chair

I recently looked at a report that showed the percentage of people within each county that worked out of their home. I was amazed that western Minnesota counties stood out near the top of that list. Just think about it for a second. Why would our region stand out in this type of category? I am sure that there are many reasons, but I tend to believe it comes down to two things, lifestyle and the availability of broadband connectivity. Our region has the rich diversity of people as well our geography. Our schools have had a mixture of languages over the past one hundred years which builds the culture from one generation to the next.

Coupling our culture with the availability of broadband gives us good reason to live here and work out of our homes. Thanks to many partners, by the end of 2017 our region will have broadband to the premise in the majority of our region. Community after community is pushing for the services that link us to the world. We are ahead of the curve but we must encourage each other to stay ahead.

I, for one, am glad to call Western Minnesota my home. Let's continue to encourage others that we have diversity and the services that make our region a great place to live and work.



..... UMRDC STAFF



DAWN HEGLAND
Executive Director



ARLENE TILBURY
Finance Director



MATT MOE
Finance Officer



JACKIE SIGDAHL
Administrative Assistant



JACKI ANDERSON
Community Development
Senior Planner



KRISTI FERNHOLZ
Community Development
Senior Planner



MELISSA STREICH
Communications/Tourism
Coordinator



LAURA OSTLIE
Community Development/
RLF Planner



Commission Board Members

Big Stone County

Chippewa County



Brent Olson
County Board



Scott Rixe
Graceville City
Council



Harold R. Dimberg
Ortonville Township



Jim Dahlvang
County Board



Jim Schmaedeka
Louriston Township



Debra Lee Fader
Montevideo Mayor

Lac qui Parle County

Swift County



Graylen Carlson
County Board



Jeff Olson
Dawson City
Council



Mark Bourne
Hamlin Townships



Gary Hendrickx
County Board



Mike Fugleberg
Benson City
Council



Warren Rau
Hegbert Township

Yellow Medicine County



Gary L. Johnson
County Board



Scott Peterson
Granite Falls
City Council



Gene Stengel
Granite Falls
Townships



Justin Bentaas
Granite Falls EDA

Public Interest

School Board



Juanita Lauritsen
Private Industry
Council



Vicki Oakes
Ortonville EDA



Bruce Swigerd
Prairie Five CAC, Inc.



Brett Buer
Dawson-Boyd School



Kathi Thymian
Ortonville School

\$6,893,294

RLF loans awarded to local businesses (**\$250,000**)
 Contracts for community development (**\$646,291**)
 Grants awarded to the region as a result of our work (**\$5,997,003**)

Financial Report

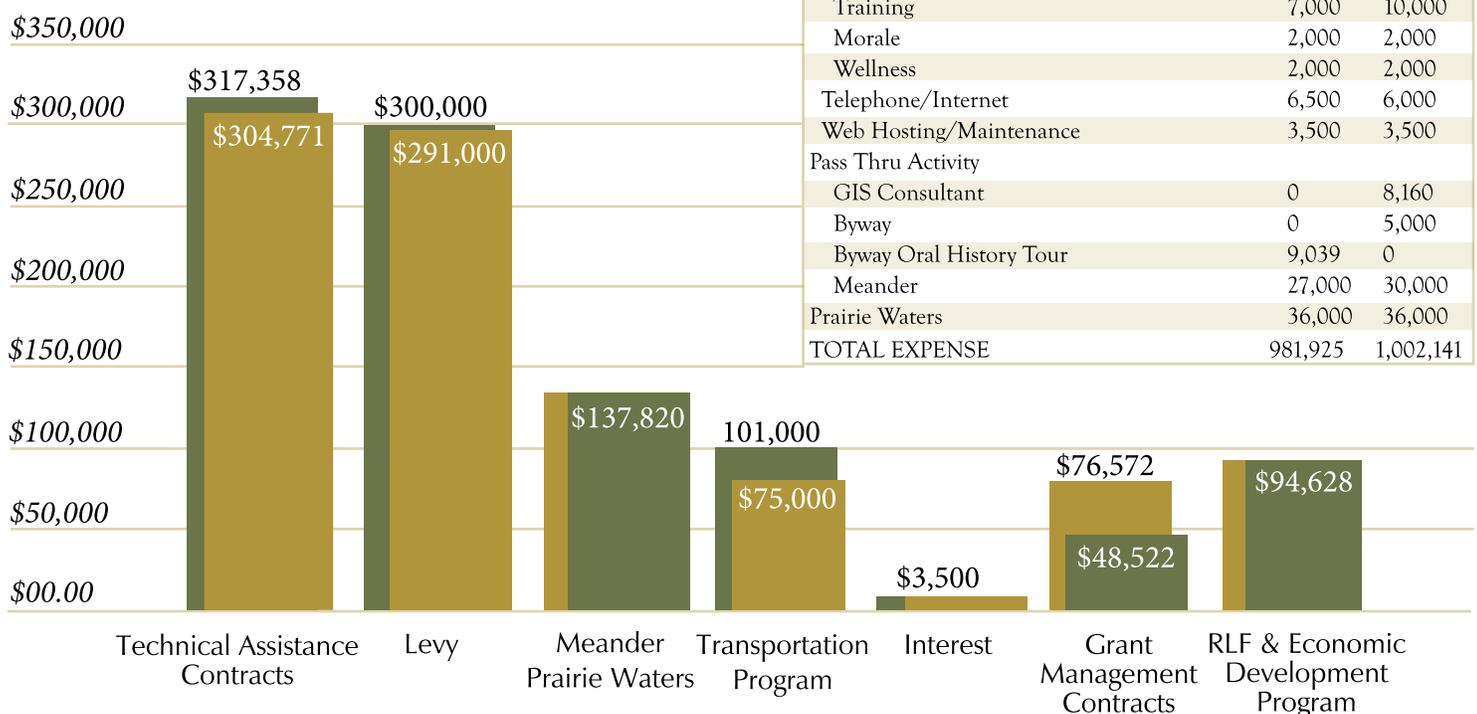
Revenue and Expenditure Comparison Current FY16 and Proposed FY17

FY16 Ending Account Balances

General Checking	\$263,166
Money Market	\$311,329
CD	\$350,000
Scenic Byway	\$7,230
Auto	\$39,043
Equipment	\$26,217
RLF Available for Lending	\$430,739

Revenue

2017 Revenue = \$1,002,828
 2016 Revenue = \$983,291



Expenses

	FY16	FY17
Salaries/Fringe	730,156	723,071
Commissioner's Expense	21,000	30,000
Audit	13,500	14,000
Contract for Services	2,500	5,000
Strategic Planning	0	10,000
Computer Technical Assistance	18,000	12,000
Email	1,560	2,400
Virtual Server	2,760	5,000
Copy Charge/xerox lease	5,000	4,500
Depreciation	9,000	9,000
Dues	4,000	5,000
Insurance - Liability	1,200	1,300
Legal Fees	2,000	2,000
Miscellaneous	1,000	1,000
Office Rent	12,210	12,210
Postage	6,000	5,000
Printing/Advertising	7,000	6,000
RDC Marketing	2,000	2,000
Registration - Conference	4,000	4,000
Repairs/Maintenance	2,000	1,500
Software GMS/GIS/General	6,000	6,000
Sub./Publications	2,000	2,000
Supplies	6,000	6,500
Staff Travel	30,000	30,000
Training	7,000	10,000
Morale	2,000	2,000
Wellness	2,000	2,000
Telephone/Internet	6,500	6,000
Web Hosting/Maintenance	3,500	3,500
Pass Thru Activity		
GIS Consultant	0	8,160
Byway	0	5,000
Byway Oral History Tour	9,039	0
Meander	27,000	30,000
Prairie Waters	36,000	36,000
TOTAL EXPENSE	981,925	1,002,141



Since 1998, the UMRVDC's RLF has partnered with financial institutions and other gap lenders to grow and retain the work force in the region. Businesses and entrepreneurs in Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Swift, and Yellow Medicine counties utilized the RLF in order to gain access to funds that are necessary to see their project come to fruition. The RLF is designed to aid in the creation and retention of jobs in the region. RLF loans can be used for equipment, fixed assets, inventory, working capital, and real estate.

RLF partners in FY16:

\$200,000

Clara City Foods, Inc, Clara City

\$50,000

KEC of Granite Falls DBA Picht's Auto Body and Glass, Granite Falls

\$250,000

The amount of RLF funds loaned out this fiscal year

26 JOBS

Are expected to be created and retained within the region, as a result from the two loans



\$912,500

Was leveraged in public and private funding in addition to the RLF funds, creating a total regional investment of

\$1,162,500

FY16 RLF Fund as of 5/31/16

Total Funds	\$1,789,949
Loans Current	27
Loans Delinquent	0
Loans Deferred	2
Loans Default	2
Total Receivables	\$1,370,621
Funds Committed	\$100,000
Total Available for Lending	\$319,328

Hedgehog Grant

Helping Communities Prosper



The UMRVDC's mission statement directs us to "Enable the region to thrive by assisting units of government". We know through our recent survey that local governments have a lot of needs but are having a hard time paying for them. Those needs prompted the creation of the Hedgehog Grant to help subsidize the cost of our grant writing and planning services.

In FY16, the UMRVDC has subsidized the following work:

\$2,125

Watson Strategic Plan

\$5,000

Clinton/Graceville/Beardsley SCDP Application

\$5,000

Clarkfield SCDP Application

\$3,937.50

Appleton Comprehensive Plan

\$3,937.50

Lac qui Parle County Park Plan

This year we used \$20,000 to leverage an additional \$45,1888 in additional revenue. Applications and more program details are available on our website.

To talk about potential projects that might be eligible for the Hedgehog Grant, please contact Dawn Hegland, Executive Director at 320-289-1981 ext 101.



"The UMRVDC has made **\$6.2 million** in business loans since the loan fund started in 1990."

"The UMRVDC has leveraged almost **\$147.2 million** in other funding for beginning and expanding local businesses in the region!"



Safe Routes To School

The UMRDC Staff completed outreach throughout the year to schools in the region about the Safe Routes to School Program. Staff completed a grant application for KMS School District to complete a plan which will begin in the fall of 2016.



Transportation — — — — —

The UMRDC continues to provide local transportation planning assistance to the region through a contract with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT). Transportation issues continue to be critical for our region. We rely heavily on the existing transportation system to get to work, school, medical appointments, vacation, and to get locally produced goods and commodities into and out of the region. Our region is part of the West Central and Southwest Minnesota Area Transportation Partnerships (ATPs) in MnDOT Districts 4 and 8. The ATP ranks transportation projects including roads, bridges, trails, public transit projects. In addition to serving on the two ATPs, other transportation planning work done by staff this year includes:

- Participation in the Southwest Regional Toward Zero Deaths and Southwest Safe Communities Coalition committees, both aimed at reducing fatalities and serious injuries.
- Working with local communities to develop Transportation Alternatives projects such as trails, scenic turn outs and overlooks, Safe Routes to School (SRTS) projects and other projects that enhance the transportation system for a wider variety of users.
- Representing the RDCs throughout Greater Minnesota on the statewide Safe Routes to School Steering Committee to direct policy, programming and planning efforts for the SRTS program in Minnesota.
- Assisting MnDOT with various statewide planning such as the Bicycle System Plan, the Highway Safety Improvement Plan and the Minnesota State Highway Investment Plan.
- Communicating with local communities in Region 6W about state and federal transportation opportunities and programs to help them improve their transportation system.
- Initiating a regional trails interest group for sharing information and resources on trail planning and development.

Local Foods System Study

The UMRDC fielded questions from a variety of interested parties asking if there are things our region could do to better promote local foods and increase the amount of food being produced, distributed, and eaten right here in our five counties. In response to this, the UMRDC partnered with both the University of Minnesota Southwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership (RSDP) and Countryside Public Health - Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) for funding to coordinate discussions to answer these questions.

The study aims at exploring the capacity of our region to produce, aggregate, and distribute locally grown food. This study is focused on fruits, vegetables, meat, and small scale grain. It also strives to utilize the work that has already been done, in particular the work done recently by the Minnesota Food Charter.

This spring, UMRDC staff started the process with two meetings to engage stakeholders and get feedback from growers. Staff also started with baseline research to help determine the market availability to grow more food in our region.

Because there are additional questions that are not easily answered, the study will also identify research that needs to be done to help address local foods issues. Some examples include: identify who is growing food now in our region and at what scale; identify the most successful ways to support beginning farmers; identify different kinds/scales of growers and identify those who want to scale up and use different marketing mechanisms; research food hubs and see what is working and what is not.





What does CERTs do?

- Helps people learn about and implement energy efficiency projects.
- Helps people learn about and implement renewable energy solutions such as solar, wind and biomass.
- Connects individuals and organizations to clean energy financing tools.
- Provides limited financial assistance to projects through Seed Grants.



Clean Energy Resource Team

CERTs is a statewide partnership with a shared mission to connect individuals and their communities to the resources they need to identify and implement community - based clean energy projects.

CERTs utilizes UMRDC staff to serve as their West Central Region CERTs Coordinator. Both Erin Smith and Kristi Fernholz served as the coordinators this past year.

Highlights of the West Central Region:

Seed Grant Round (Fall, 2015); hosted a networking and priority session in Sunburg (March, 2016); hosted a “Getting into Solar” workshop in Appleton (May, 2016); worked with counties who were interested in signing up with the “Property Assessed Clean Energy, or PACE” Program.

DevelopMN & CEDS

DevelopMN - is an initiative of the Minnesota Association of Development Organizations (MADO) who at the end of 2015 released a plan outlining collaborative strategies in greater Minnesota. The UMRDC partnered with the other regional development organizations in MN in the development of this plan and will continue to actively participate in its' implementation bringing new opportunities, alliances and resources to the UMRDC region. This plan creates the frame work that all regions will use to update their local Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS). The focus in 2016 was on outreach, sharing the plan with partner and future collaborators, and are aiming to develop next steps for project implementation. The UMRDC CEDS will pull together the most important economic development challenges and opportunities for the region and will develop tangible strategies to address them by leveraging resources and connecting with a diverse set of partners.

Using the DevelopMN format our CEDS update will focus on four cornerstones:



Visit www.mnado.org to learn more about DevelopMN



Health Care

The UMRDC authored a successful Minnesota Department of Health Rural Planning Grant for Appleton Area Health Services (AAHS). The grant award of over \$28,000 will help AAHS upgrade technology infrastructure and hire a consultant to lead the organization through a strategic planning process resulting in a long-term sustainable approach to health care services for the Appleton community.

Helping Communities with Home & Business Rehabilitation

Many communities continue to receive the benefits of the Minnesota Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) and saw residential, rental, and commercial rehabilitation projects implemented this year. Communities that have an existing SCDP grant or have recently finished one include: Benson, Ortonville, Appleton and Clara City. New communities to the program that will start projects this fall include: Clinton, Beardsley and Graceville. Together, these three communities received \$750,000 in grant funds for residential and commercial rehabilitation. The UMRDC successfully authored and managed grants for all of the communities listed above.



Granite Falls & Clarkfield Identify Housing Conditions

While determining economic development needs within their county, a Yellow Medicine County workgroup identified housing as a priority concern. Currently two cities in Yellow Medicine County, Granite Falls and Clarkfield, are working with staff from UMRDC on establishing a baseline survey of housing conditions.

The study began with a group of trained volunteers in each community completing a visual survey of all of the housing within the city. The results of those surveys was collected and entered into a Geographic Information System Format. This summer the maps produced through this survey will be available for the cities and county to analyze based on the criteria gathered such as, type, condition, status, and occupancy.

This study has equipped them with the ability to get a step up on potential funding resources and recognize clustered blight. Each city will be able to have access to all of the maps and apply them in a variety of ways to address housing in their community.



Zoning Ordinances Updated in Canby, Ortonville, & Appleton

Regardless of the size of the region's communities planning and zoning plays an important role. However, zoning laws and ordinances are constantly changing. Local and county departments change or amend their particular municipality's zoning ordinances in response to citizen, business, and community needs and in response to particular events. It is important to take a comprehensive look at the entire document periodically to ensure that it continues to serve the community effectively.

Over the last couple of years, the UMRDC worked with the cities of Canby, Ortonville, and Appleton to provide zoning updates. The UMRDC helped local committees understand state requirements and provided a variety of educational resources and examples from other communities that helped address each communities unique zoning needs.



Hazard Mitigation

After an 18-month planning process, this past year marked the completion and adoption of the All-Hazard Mitigation Plans for the counties of Chippewa, Big Stone, and Yellow Medicine, as well as the Upper Sioux Community.

The UMRDC also applied for planning funds to complete County All-Hazard Mitigation Plans for our two remaining counties, Lac qui Parle and Swift. Emergency Managers in those counties will each create a Local Hazard Mitigation Task Force to include the public, businesses, and other interested parties in the process set to start this fall.

Counties must update their All-Hazard Mitigation Plans within five years of adoption in order for counties to receive funding from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) to implement hazard mitigation strategies. Copies of the studies can be found at www.umvrdc.org/hazardmitigation.



Appleton & Madison Explore Broadband

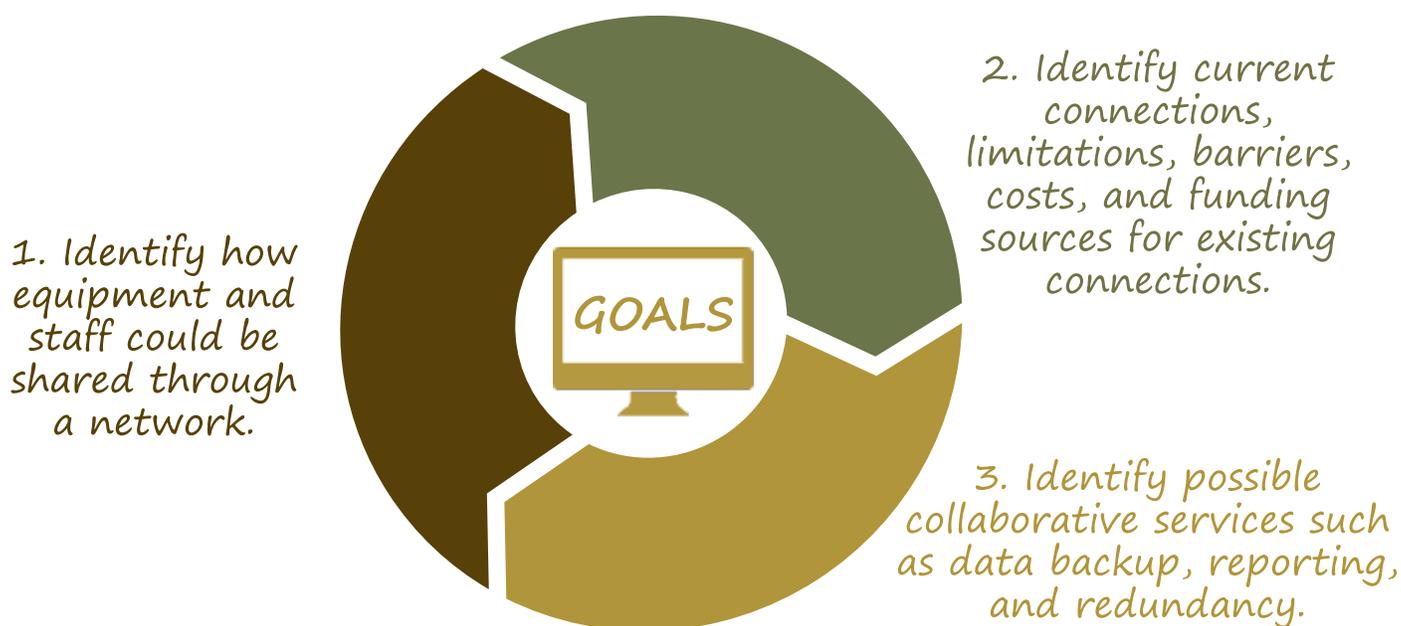
The UMRDC continues to recognize the necessity of better broadband to ensure economic development in the region. The cities of Appleton and Madison began working with UMRDC staff following concerns from community members around their current broadband services. Since the cities were not eligible for their county's broadband deployment plan, the cities wanted to determine what could be done concerning broadband services. Both communities used similar processes including; developing a broadband task force, identifying technology differences and provider needs, educating the community, and surveying city residents to determine their broadband wants and needs.



Following the city wide survey in Madison, 89% of the returned surveys reported that they had some form of internet service. Of those that had internet services, 72% of the respondents indicated that they would be willing to change providers for increased speeds and reliability. Based on that mass volume of dissatisfaction of the current internet services available, the city has determined the need to continue fiber broadband exploration activities. The City of Appleton is receiving similar responses and is working on next steps as well that are reflective of their community's feedback.

Broadband Regional Feasibility Study

The UMRDC is coordinating a regional public sector broadband feasibility study as the result of a regional brainstorming session with elected officials and staff from around the region. The UMRDC applied for funding, secured local match funds, developed an RFP, interviewed engineering firms, and secured a contract with an engineering firm to complete the feasibility study. A regional taskforce will be working with Elert and Associates to complete the study in September 2016.



Coordination of Local Information Technology Professionals

Developing a connected network of IT professionals was identified as a need and opportunity for the region at a brainstorming meeting a year ago. From that meeting, the UMRDC worked with area technology professionals to identify other professionals and topics that would benefit from the development of such a network. The UMRDC succeeded in securing a grant from the Blandin Foundation to make the coordination of the group possible. The goals of the group were clear:

- 1) Provide an opportunity to build a network of IT professionals.
- 2) Offer professional development that can benefit all IT professionals.

Coordination of IT professionals has happened on a monthly basis since February 2016. The group has helped develop their own agendas and have had opportunities to hear professional development presentations on the following topics:

- Web-based public sector solutions; sample data security policies; PDQ Inventory; disaster recovery; mobile network security; optimizing GIS for your county; remote utilities software; Office 365 migration; Imprivada; data security.

The UMRDC will help support the group but the decision to continue regular meetings will be up to the IT professionals. The group successfully expanded their network by getting to know other IT professionals in the region while learning about additional resources that can support their work.

Providing Community Development Services to Appleton

The City of Appleton contracted with the UMRDC to provide a variety of services. Over the last year, UMRDC staff worked with a local committee to update the city zoning code. After nearly a year of work, the update was adopted in June 2016. To view their update go to: www.appletonmn.com and click on Zoning Update. UMRDC staff also helped with the following:

- A website update that includes a new template which will allow for more customization, scrolling photos on the home page, updated photos, videos and content.
- Revolving loan fund support
- Broadband exploration
- Community mapping
- Strategic planning



Memorial Park Master Plan

Memorial Park in Granite Falls was officially designated as a Regional Park on October 7, 2015. The UMRDC created the Master Plan as part of the designation process that allowed them to request funding, and then wrote a grant for the park in November 2015. The \$51,200 grant was approved by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC) and enabled Granite Falls to hire an architect to address specific issues identified in the Master Plan.

Granite Falls used the grant and hired Damon Farber, Landscape Architects, to create a detailed plan to address invasive species management, technical concept drawings of the park that include recommended locations of future bathrooms and trails, and a signage and wayfinding plan that includes designs of the signs and locations within the park.

The GMRPTC, created by the Minnesota Legislature in 2013, undertakes system planning and provides recommendations to the legislature for grants funded by the parks and trails fund, to counties and cities outside of the seven-county metropolitan area for parks and trails of regional significance.

Watson Strategic Plan

The UMRDC was hired to assist the City of Watson in creating a strategic plan to guide the city council and create a work plan for the coming months.

The process started in September of 2015 with a work session with city council that gathered information about Watson. Next, a community-wide survey was conducted to get input from the residents. The last task was a community meeting where the results from the survey were presented and feedback was gathered. Participants also identified priorities for the community.

Some of the top themes for Watson to work on in the coming months include projecting an attractive image, increasing public engagement, future land use planning, and addressing housing issues.

The results of this process was captured in a strategic plan that was adopted by the city council in the spring of 2016.



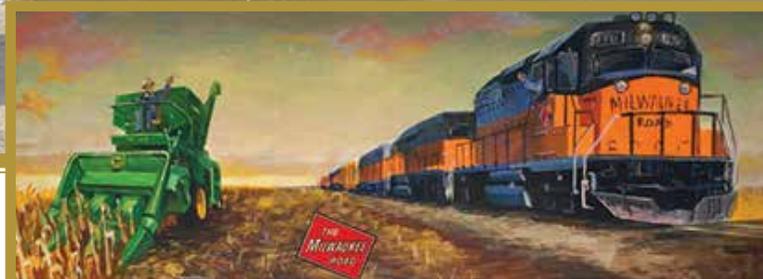
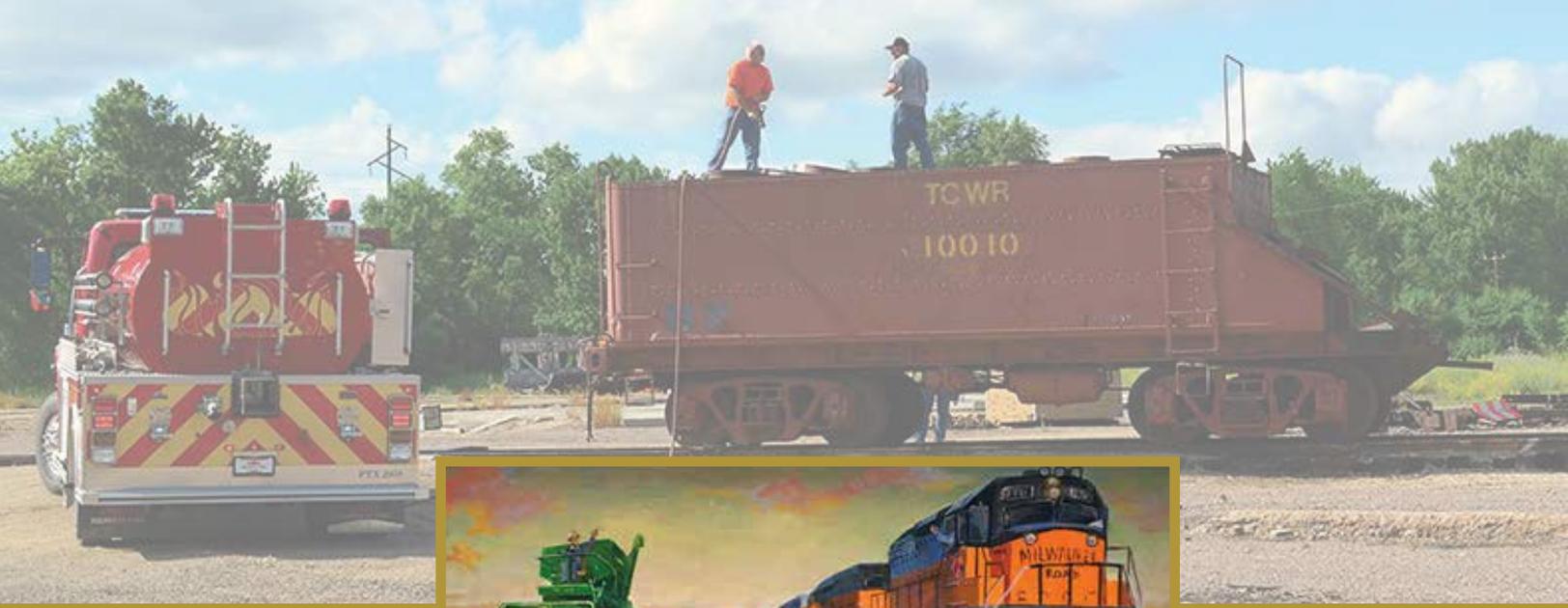


Photo Shown: One of the two paintings that will be displayed on the side of the railroad car shown above.

Montevideo Arts Projects



The Montevideo Arts Project (MAP) continues to work with the UMRDC to coordinate public art projects in the City of Montevideo. MAP is a volunteer driven committee made up of local citizens, business owners, city staff, elected officials, and chamber of commerce staff. The committee has a goal of creating one public art piece per year. In 2014 - 2015, MAP created their first project: a mural by Shawn McCann in the Jose Artigas plaza.

Starting in the fall of 2015, MAP worked through ideas and brainstorming for their next project. They decided again to do a project on public property, and wanted to do something more three-dimensional. They worked with the Milwaukee Railroad Heritage Center, who then offered to donate a railroad car for the project. They decided to move the railroad car to a public location and have the artistic theme to be centered on the railroad and its impact on Montevideo.

UMRDC staff wrote a successful planning grant for \$2,000, received from the Southwest Minnesota Arts Council (SMAC), that allowed them to solicit ideas from artists and get concepts for what the project would look like. Through this process, MAP chose designs submitted by Liliana Payne, an accomplished mural artist from Minneapolis, to be painted on the outside of the railroad car.

This spring, UMRDC wrote a second successful grant to SMAC, this time an Art Legacy Project Grant for \$20,000. The MAP committee is now committed to raising the required funds to match the grant, and to prepare the site, including the costs of moving, sandblasting, preparing and priming the railroad car for the mural design. We anticipate the project to be completed by September 2016.



Maynard Area History Museum

The UMRDC has been assisting the City of Maynard with their newly acquired Historic Maynard State Bank Building. UMRDC staff implemented a grant the city had received from the Minnesota Historical Society to evaluate if the building qualified to be listed on the National Register. The UMRDC also facilitated conversations between city officials, interested residents and the Minnesota Historical Society to set up a plan to establish the building as a museum. This past spring, UMRDC also worked with the volunteer committee to find a name and purpose for the newly formed organization and will continue to work with the city in the coming months to develop the museum further and write grants for identified projects.

Appleton Sidewalk Plan

The City of Appleton worked with the UMVRDC to establish a sidewalk plan using a Healthy Communities Grant from Countryside Public Health. UMVRDC staff supported the committee led plan by providing tools to help the committee make recommendations to the city council on how to develop and maintain a sidewalk network throughout the city. Currently, the city is looking into the possibility of a franchise fee that could help fund some of the recommended sidewalk and recreation improvements identified in the plan.



Meander Arts Crawl

The 2015 Meander Art Crawl had another outstanding year and the survey results can prove it! The UMVRDC tallied the reports from 40 different artists to find that more than \$99,000 of art was purchased over the three-day Meander weekend.

Photo shown left: Handmade blanket made by Diane Trew



\$99,000

Art sales during the Meander

\$80,000

Estimated in additional local spending during the Meander

According to surveys returned by Meander visitors and the artists themselves, the average Meander customer also spends \$29 on food and gas and \$11 on shopping other than art in the region. When multiplied by the estimated 2000 Meanderers who took part in the weekend, it is projected that another \$80,000 flowed into the small towns of the 5-County region (Big Stone, Swift, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle and Yellow Medicine). The Meander Art Crawl not only highlights the artist's studios and introduces people to our region, but it is a huge economic boost for our region.

Economic Impact

11 studios is the average number of studios customers visited

81% of customers said the quality of the art was excellent

83% of customers said their overall experience was excellent

71% money raised to organize the Meander through sponsors and artists was spent on products or services (printing, paper, advertising, graphic design, staffing) in the five-county area. Meander spent over \$10,000 on advertising in 2015; 27% of the total budget.

"The Meander seems to have hit its stride now after 12 years. It has become a signature event for the region, featuring our quality of life and raising the profile of our local artists, while generating economic activity in small towns throughout the river valley," said Kristi Fernholz, UMVRDC Senior Planner.

The UMVRDC would like to thank all the sponsors, artists and participants who make the Meander great. You can visit the Meander website at Artsmeander.com or find and "like" us on Facebook at facebook.com/MeanderArtCrawl.





Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway

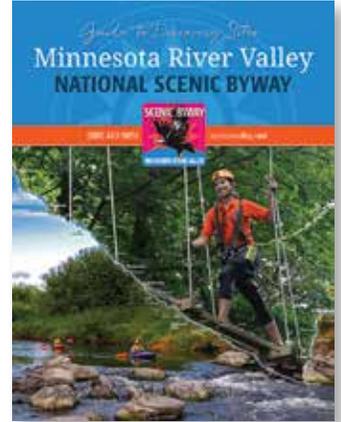
The Mission of the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway Alliance is to cooperatively enhance the Minnesota River Valley as a travel destination and raise awareness of its nationally important stories in order to provide economic benefits and preserve the intrinsic qualities of the byway.

The Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Alliance (MRVSBA) is a partnership of committed individuals from the 287-mile byway corridor representing a variety of interests including chamber of commerce, various attractions and historic sites, state parks, local and state governmental bodies, private businesses, and concerned individuals. The UMRDC has been providing staffing and fiscal services to the byway since 1996.

The Byway Alliance remains the only organization working to promote the length of the Minnesota River Valley on a regional scale. The byway plays an important role in linking and promoting historical sites and stories to better tell the history of the Minnesota River Valley through a variety of efforts, including its programs, website, roadside signs, calendar, brochures, and other marketing materials.

The focus of the byway this past year was to promote the byway mobile tour through our byway awareness campaigns.

The byway also wrote a successful Partnership grant to the Minnesota Historical Society to work on our historic message. We are excited to work on this project over the next twelve months!



New Byway videos coming soon!

New Byway Guides!



 www.mnrivervalley.com

“Get Rural” Regional Recruitment

For several years a group of regional economic development professionals have researched strategies to attract new residents to the region. The UMRDC completed research that include focus groups of new residents, mail survey of new residents, an economic impact analysis, working with realtors.

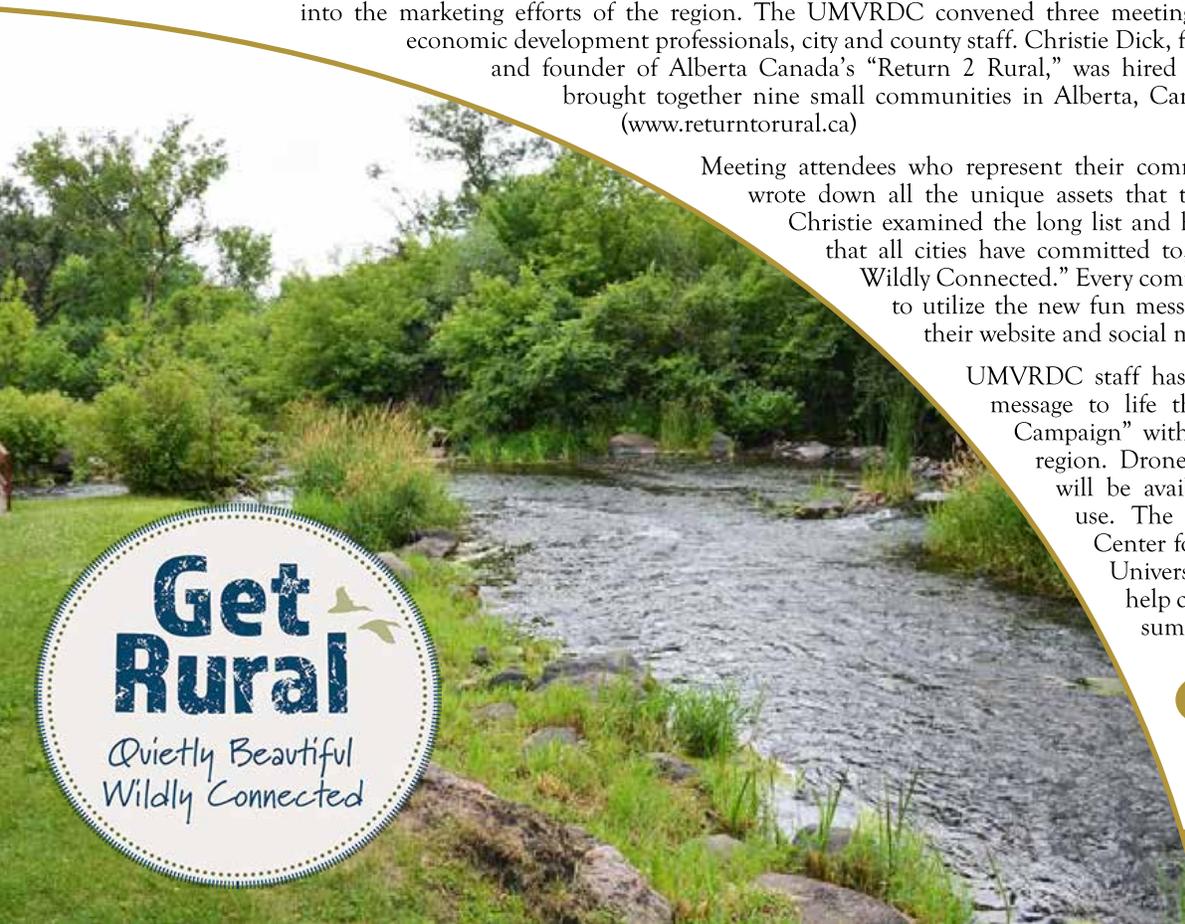
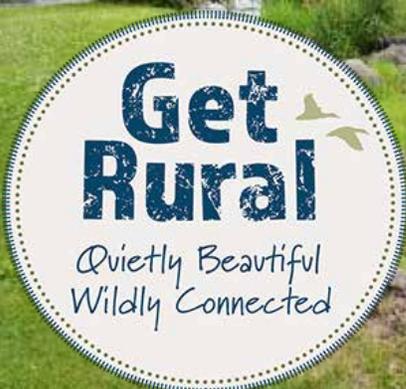
The UMRDC received funding through the Blandin Foundation to develop and implement a tag line that can be incorporated into the marketing efforts of the region. The UMRDC convened three meetings with chambers of commerce, economic development professionals, city and county staff. Christie Dick, freelance management consultant and founder of Alberta Canada’s “Return 2 Rural,” was hired to explain how she strategically brought together nine small communities in Alberta, Canada to create a regional brand. (www.returntorural.ca)

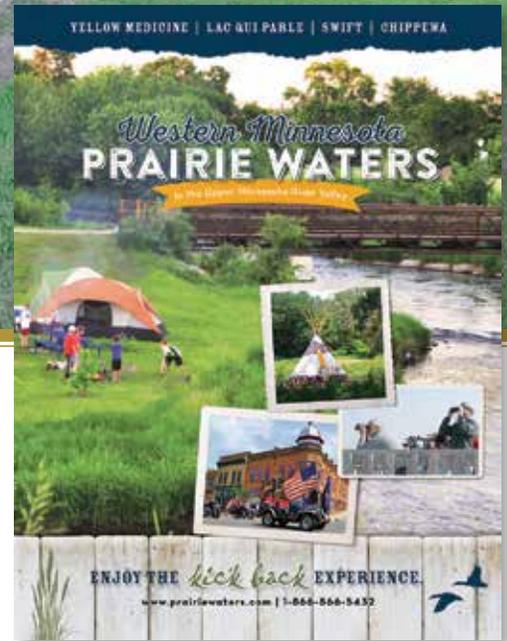
Meeting attendees who represent their communities throughout the region wrote down all the unique assets that they use to describe the region.

Christie examined the long list and helped create a regional message that all cities have committed to, “Get Rural! Quietly Beautiful, Wildly Connected.” Every community and county is encouraged to utilize the new fun message that describes the region on their website and social media platforms.

UMRDC staff has been working on bringing the message to life through the “Visitor for a Day Campaign” with new photos and videos of the region. Drone footage was also gathered and will be available for cities and counties to use. The UMRDC has brought on a Center for Small Towns student from the University of MN Extension program to help continue the work throughout the summer!

 *Follow this work on Facebook at [GetRuralMN](#)*



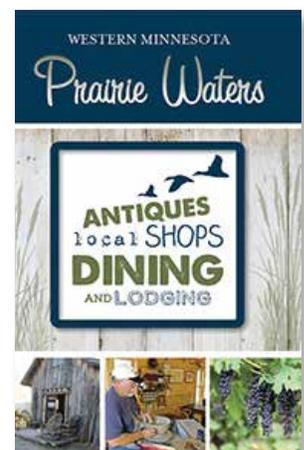


Western Minnesota PRAIRIE WATERS

The purpose of Western Minnesota Prairie Waters is to promote our area as a great place to visit, live, and work by highlighting and showcasing our natural, cultural, scenic, and historical assets. Prairie Waters serves as a tourism destination marketing organizations for the four county area of Lac qui Parle, Swift, Yellow Medicine, and Chippewa.

2015-2016 highlights:

- Hosted the Annual Gathering at the Lac qui Parle County Museum where over 75 attendees gathered to tour the museum, took old time photos, participated in a scavenger hunt and minnow racing, and learned about the efforts and importance of the Prairie Waters program.
- Updated and printed the Antiques, Local Shops, Dining and Lodging Guide. This full-color guide is a comprehensive listing of shops, restaurants and accommodations available in the Prairie Waters region. It is a collaborative effort between Prairie Waters and participating chambers of commerce. The guide is also available as an online interactive version.
- Continued to distribute the Western Minnesota Prairie Waters Visitor's Guide. These guides are distributed to chambers, cities and businesses throughout the region; travel information centers across the state and at the Mall of America; and are sent out upon requests through the toll free number or website. Look for a NEW guide in 2017!
- Wrote a successful grant to Explore Minnesota Tourism procuring \$8,000 for advertising our region.
- Promoted the area and highlighted events on the Facebook fan page. There currently are over 4,300 followers that Prairie Waters markets to with weekly updates, photos, and links to stories about the region.
- Created and placed numerous ads in our region's newspapers, statewide, and in out-of-state publications such as Midwest Living, AAA Home & Away, Pioneer Public Television, Western Peach, Bird Watcher's Digest, Pheasants Forever, Explore Southern Minnesota and Outdoor News.
- Maintained Prairie Waters website. Updated new content, photos, videos, and maintained the region's calendar of events along with the mapping system that includes places to eat, shop and stay.



*Local Shops Guide
Hot off the Press!*

 www.prairiewaters.com



Upper Minnesota Valley
**REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
COMMISSION**

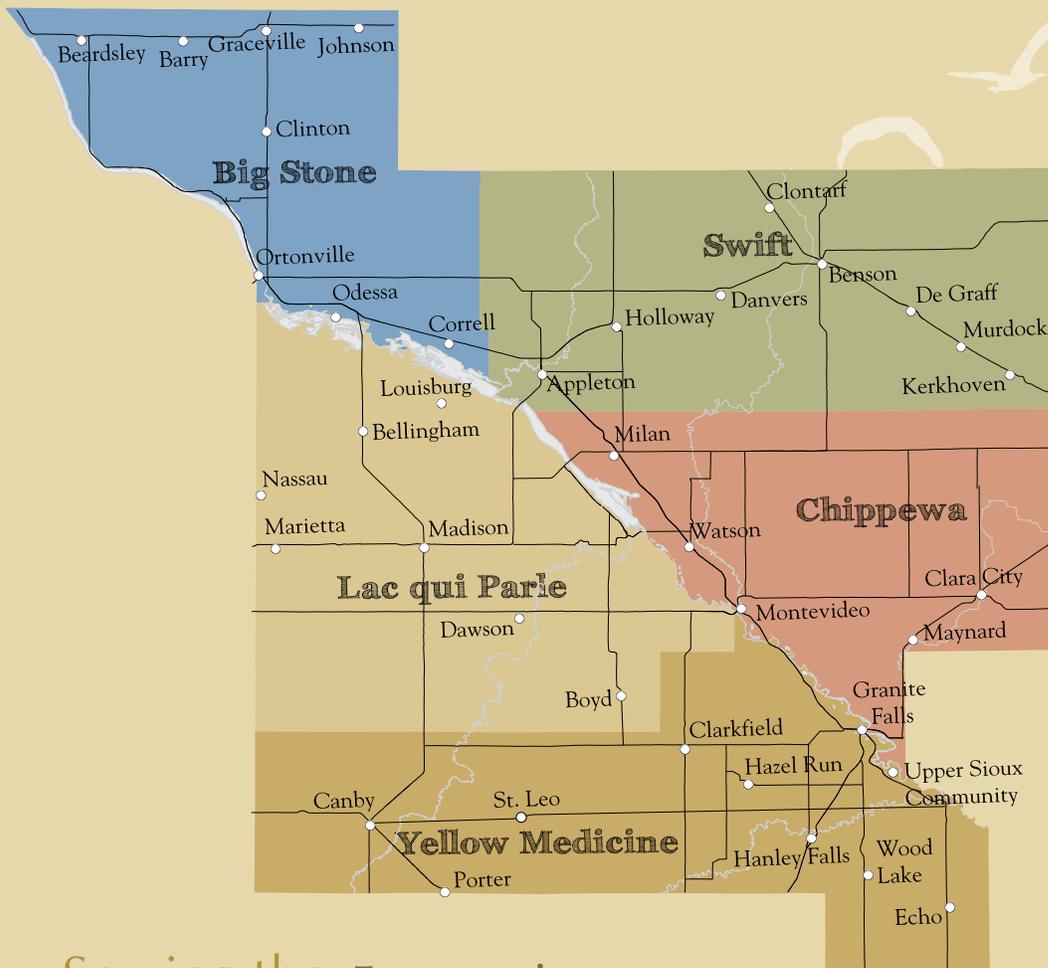
PRST STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT 63
APPLETON, MN

Helping Communities Prosper

323 W. Schlieman Ave. Appleton, MN 56208

320-289-1981

www.umvrdc.org



Serving the 5 counties
37 communities
1 tribal nation
94 townships
10 school districts
in the Upper Minnesota River Valley

Icons designed by Freepik.com



Umrvc.org

320.289.1981

323 W. Schlieman Ave Appleton, MN 56208