

MONADNOCK REGION FUTURE:

A Plan for Southwest New Hampshire

2015



Southwest Region Planning Commission

The Southwest Region Planning Commission is a voluntary association of 34 municipalities in the Monadnock Region, who joined together in 1971 to establish a regional planning commission in accordance with NH RSA Chapter 36.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC) developed *Monadnock Region Future* to provide information and guidance to anyone with an interest in planning for the future of Southwest New Hampshire. The *Monadnock Region Future*, which serves as the Regional Plan, maps out a vision for the future based on an understanding of the Region's assets and opportunities as well as ongoing initiatives and current challenges. It encourages the reader to think broadly about the Region and the factors affecting its success, and presents strategies that can enhance current efforts, as well as promote new and emerging opportunities. While this Plan is advisory in nature, we are hopeful that it will stimulate discussion and action. In particular, we hope it will serve to promote regional thinking and collaboration.

This Executive Summary is a resource for communities and others to access the Plan's primary findings and recommendations. As it is a brief overview of the Plan and its content, we recommend referencing the full version of Plan, which is available at: www.swrpc.org/regionalplan.

PROCESS

In developing this Plan, SWRPC sought the opinions, ideas and perspectives of hundreds of residents, workers, and/or visitors of the Region. Early on in the process, we recognized that those who live and work here could provide valuable insight into the needs, concerns, and changes affecting our Region's communities. We also recognized that collecting this input from a diverse array of voices and perspectives would need to involve nontraditional forms of public participation and engagement.

The results of these conversations were collected and analyzed by SWRPC staff, who identified the primary themes and topics that were most frequently mentioned. We incorporated this information, as well as information collected from an analysis of conditions and trends impacting the Region and from other plans and studies into the Regional Plan. Throughout the development of the Plan, SWRPC worked with a Leadership Team composed of representatives from diverse sectors, organizations, and locales in the Region. These individuals served as advisors to the planning process.

WWW.SWRPC.ORG/REGIONALPLAN

FUTURE VISION

The Plan envisions a Southwest Region where thriving communities rich in culture, educational opportunities and natural resources, work together to support a resilient and robust regional economy, which offers residents freedom of choice and embraces our heritage and distinct sense of place.

This vision is supported by a number of interconnected factors, which are described below.

Community Vitality

Vital communities offer residents affordable and safe options for housing and transportation as well as opportunities to be socially and civically engaged.

Economic Prosperity

A prosperous economy provides opportunities for local and emerging businesses as well as for workforce development and professional growth.

Stewardship

Stewardship ensures that resources, which are necessary for public health and well-being, and that help define the Region's landscape, are protected for the use and enjoyment of current and future generations.

Preparedness

Preparedness for natural or manmade disasters and emergencies is critical for enhanced regional resilience and public safety.

SOUTHWEST NEW HAMPSHIRE BY THE NUMBERS

976 Square Miles

100,751 Residents

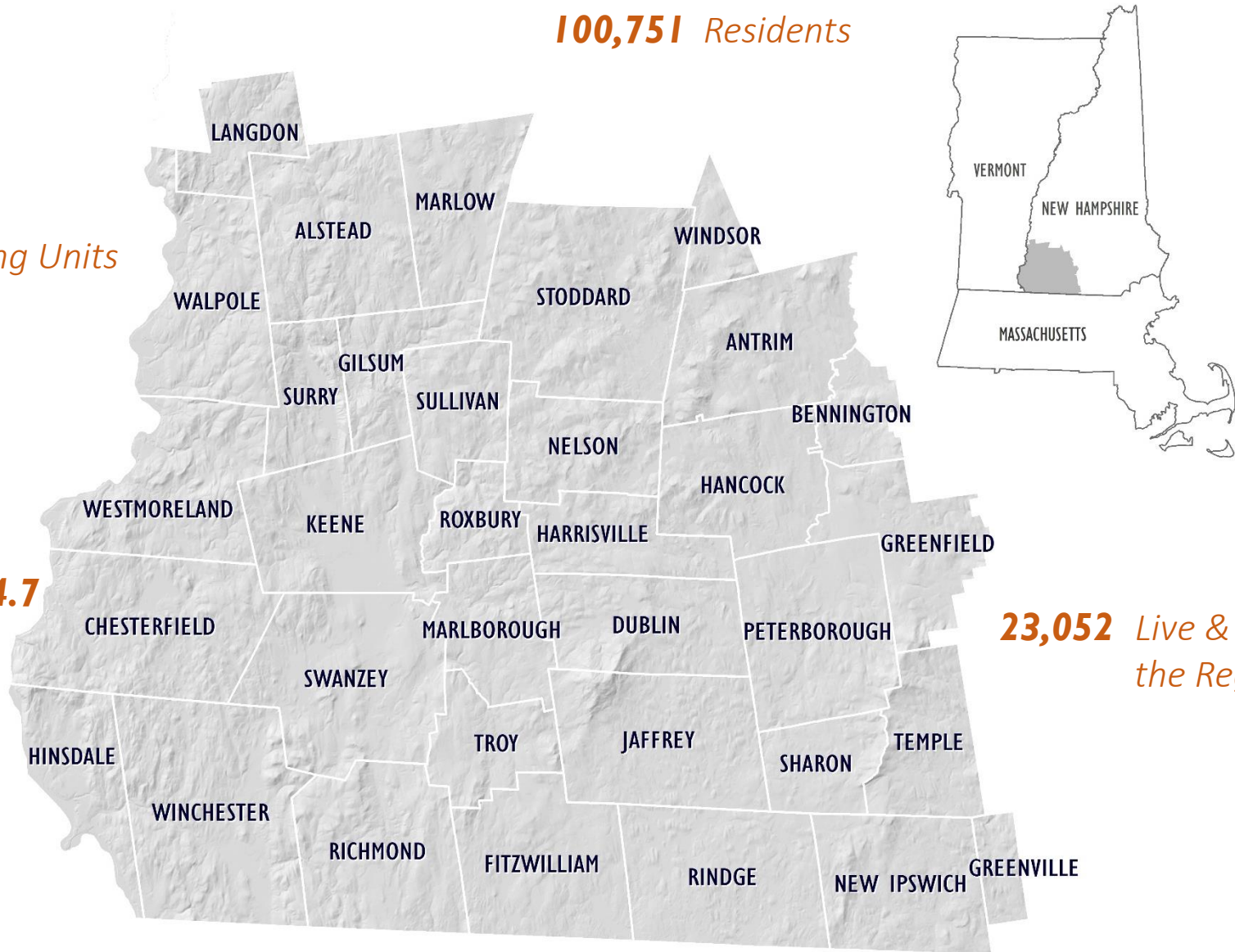
45,744 Housing Units

Median Age is **44.7**

23,052 Live & Work in the Region

35,754 People Work in the Region

\$62,118 Median Household Income





We asked you, ‘What makes the Southwest Region a great place to live?’ Here’s a sample of what we heard.

“I enjoy the scenery of all the historic buildings along the ponds. I also enjoy the hospitality at the General Store. But, more importantly I love all the friendly townsfolk that complete the community.” - Harrisville Resident

“Friendly people, healthy environment. Diverse mix of farms, technology, and manufacturing.” - Jaffrey Resident

“Rich in cultural history, natural areas, and the arts.” - Keene Resident

“The Camaraderie. People come together when they are needed.” - Antrim Resident

“The school and our gem of a library. Both are community hubs, hearts of the community, to be held onto.” - Stoddard Resident





"The relatively safe environment in which to raise a family. We have open space, forests, clean air and good communities."

- Dublin Resident

"The abundance of open space and protected land for plants, animals, and humans to thrive. Undeveloped land helps maintain a food source, and cleans our air and water."

- Hancock Resident

"Rural character and citizen volunteer ethic"

- Nelson Resident

"Maintains a rural atmosphere while offering varied amenities (art, music, food, mountains and streams)." - Peterborough Resident

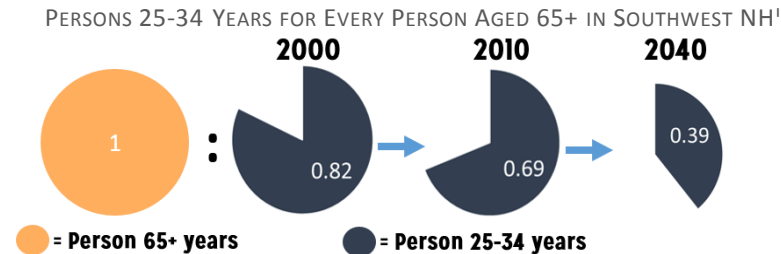
"You can take a short drive and either be in a city or in a country location. We have the best of both worlds close together."

- Swanzey Resident



TRENDS & CONDITIONS IMPACTING SOUTHWEST NEW HAMPSHIRE

- It is estimated that the proportion of the Region's population that is 65 year and older will increase from 15% to 26% between 2010 and 2040, more rapidly than any other age group. This demographic shift will have significant implications on housing, transportation, and the economy.
- Nearly 1 in 3 housing units in the Region are in excess of 75 years old and typically lack the characteristics that are conducive to seniors aging in place (e.g. ground floor living, wide doorways, less maintenance, etc.).

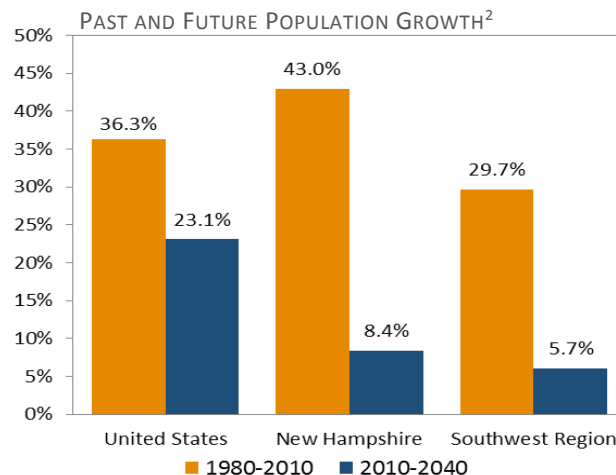


- Over half of the Region's housing is made up of detached owner-occupied structures of 3+ bedrooms, yet 64% of our households are comprised of 2 persons or less.
- It is estimated that 1 in 5 individuals over the age of 65 in the Region are non-drivers. Yet, options for public transportation are limited in the Region.
- A 2011 study showed that NH was tied for 4th among the states with the lowest state funding for transit in the nation at \$0.32 per capita.

SLOWING POPULATION GROWTH

- Although the Region's population of 100,751 grew by 54% between 1970 and 2010, the vast majority of this growth occurred before 1990. Since 2000, the population has grown by only 5%, well below the national average of 10%.
- According to the most recent projections from the NH Office of Energy and Planning (OEP), this trend of slow growth is anticipated to continue into the future with a 6% increase in the Region's population between 2010 and 2040.

RAPIDLY AGING POPULATION

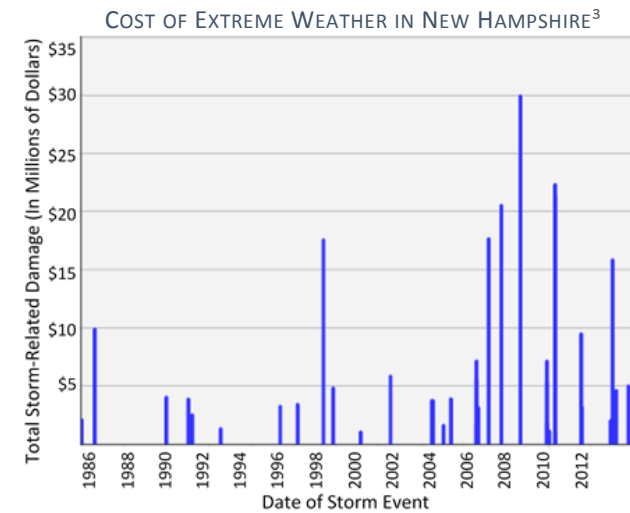


LOSS OF YOUNG ADULTS & FAMILIES

- In contrast to a growing senior population, the number of children under the age of 15 in the Region decreased by 14% between 2000 and 2010. Over this same period, the Region's young adult and family-age population (ages 24-39) decreased by 14%.
- Housing affordability might play a role in attracting younger adults. Approximately 21% of renter households in the Region pay greater than 50% of their income on rent alone. Between 2000 and 2011, the Region's median monthly rent rose by 52% and rental vacancy rates fell below 3%, meaning renters are paying significantly more with fewer options to choose from.

^{1,2}NH OEP Population Projections and US Census Bureau Decennial Census;

- Studies show that locally-owned businesses generate spending in the local economy 4x higher than externally-owned businesses.
- The Region has experienced a decline in local business ownership with many businesses being managed from outside the Region.
- In last ten years, the Region has lost approximately 20% of its manufacturing jobs.



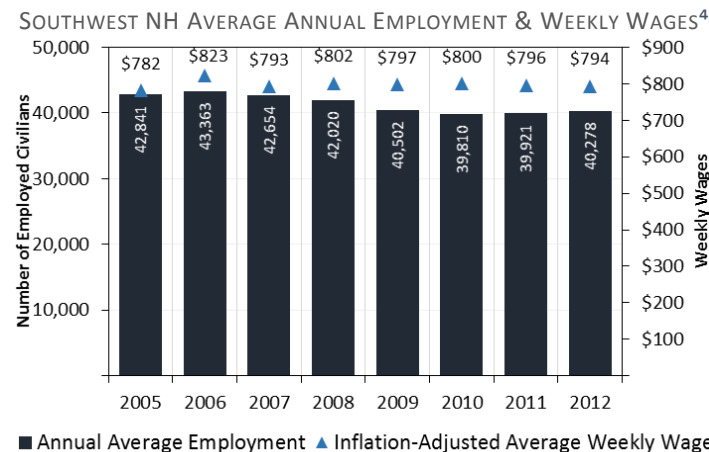
- Extreme weather events like heat waves, storms, and floods have increased over the past decade in the Region.
- According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), there were 13 severe storms and flooding events in the Region declared as Major Disasters between 2003 and 2012. Statewide, there have been 32 Major Disaster declarations since 1953, 53% of which have occurred since 2000.
- These events are examples of what climate scientists predict we can expect to happen more frequently in the Region.

LOSS OF LOCALLY OWNED BUSINESS

SLOW ECONOMIC RECOVERY

CHANGING CLIMATE & SEVERE STORMS

- After accounting for inflation, average weekly wages for all jobs in the Region increased by only 1.6% over a seven year period (2005 and 2012).
- Wages in the Region are low when compared to other parts of the state and in some instances do not amount to a livable wage. In 2012, the Region's average weekly wage of \$794 was 17% less than the statewide average of \$928.



- The availability of high-speed Internet, also known as broadband, has a significant impact on long-term economic growth. However, access to reliable broadband in the Region varies significantly.
- The speeds needed to conduct most business on the Internet have increased 100-fold over the past 15 years. The need for faster broadband will only increase over time.

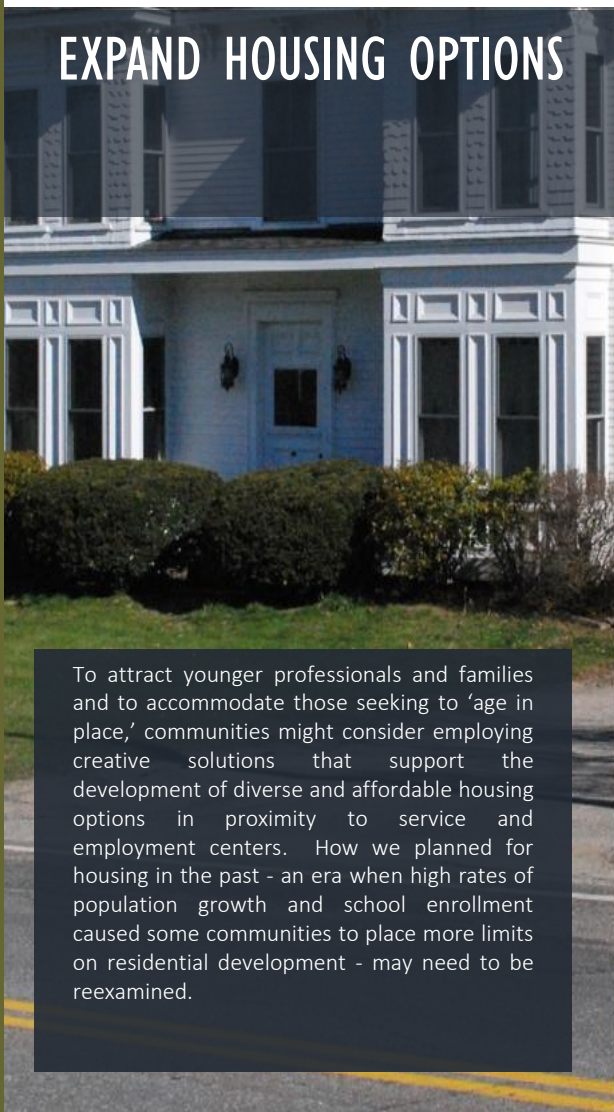
³ NH Department of Environmental Services; ⁴ NH Department of Employment Security

Goal: *The Region's communities will be vibrant and affordable places for people of all ages and abilities to live, work, and recreate.*

When asked, 'What do you like about where you live?' residents of the Region most commonly respond that it is the people and the small-town feel that they value the most. Whether you live in the Region or are just visiting, the sense of vibrancy and community is unavoidable - from the familiarity of the village general store to the buzz of the local transfer station to the well cared for historic buildings and community centers. Sustaining community vitality depends on our ability to anticipate change and respond appropriately.

We should be prepared to meet the diverse needs of an aging population, and at the same time, identify opportunities to attract younger families and workers. Although cultural and generational differences exist between and among these groups, there are opportunities to make communities attractive and livable places for a range of ages, abilities, and income levels. Solutions involve examining the basic needs, services and amenities currently available in our communities to see if they meet the basic needs of residents.

EXPAND HOUSING OPTIONS



To attract younger professionals and families and to accommodate those seeking to 'age in place,' communities might consider employing creative solutions that support the development of diverse and affordable housing options in proximity to service and employment centers. How we planned for housing in the past - an era when high rates of population growth and school enrollment caused some communities to place more limits on residential development - may need to be reexamined.

ENHANCE ACCESS TO GOODS & SERVICES



Having safe and convenient options for accessing employment, goods, services, and social and recreational activities is integral to maintaining a healthy, vibrant community. While maintaining adequate roadway infrastructure is critical to enhancing safe access, it is also important to improve the travel options available for getting around the Region. These options are especially important in the Southwest Region, where low population density, hilly terrain, far distances between service centers, and limited public transportation are significant challenges to getting around.

PROMOTE SOCIAL & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



Although technological advancements have made distance less of a factor in people's daily lives, there is still a need for in-person connections and relationships. The presence of strong and diverse social networks can increase individual well-being by linking people more strongly to their community and to each other. It is through these face-to-face interactions, which may be formal (e.g. town committee) or informal (e.g. meeting a friend for lunch) that people have the opportunity to connect, interact and form social ties. These networks are especially important in rural areas, where your nearest neighbor could be far away.


Goal: A competitive and prospering regional economy will create diverse opportunities for current and future residents and workers.

Creativity, efficiency, and adaptability are hallmarks of both private and public enterprise in the Region. These attributes, which apply equally to cutting-edge technologies and traditional New England lifestyles such as agriculture, forestry and the arts, have been important factors of our regional economic success. Yet, over the last decade, we have seen our competitive advantage decline as we face greater global competition, demographic pressures, and fiscal constraints than ever before.

While the Region has a strong base of diverse industries, civic engagement, and high quality of life to build on, this alone cannot ensure future prosperity and economic resilience. We have the opportunity to identify what it takes to build a competitive regional economy in a post-recession, globalized economy and to address areas that we know need improvement. To do so, we might consider expanding a skilled workforce; growing business and industry; strengthening our existing assets; and maintaining adequate infrastructure.


ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

BUILD A SKILLED WORKFORCE

A photograph of two men, an older man with glasses and a younger man, standing in a workshop or factory setting with various equipment and machinery in the background.

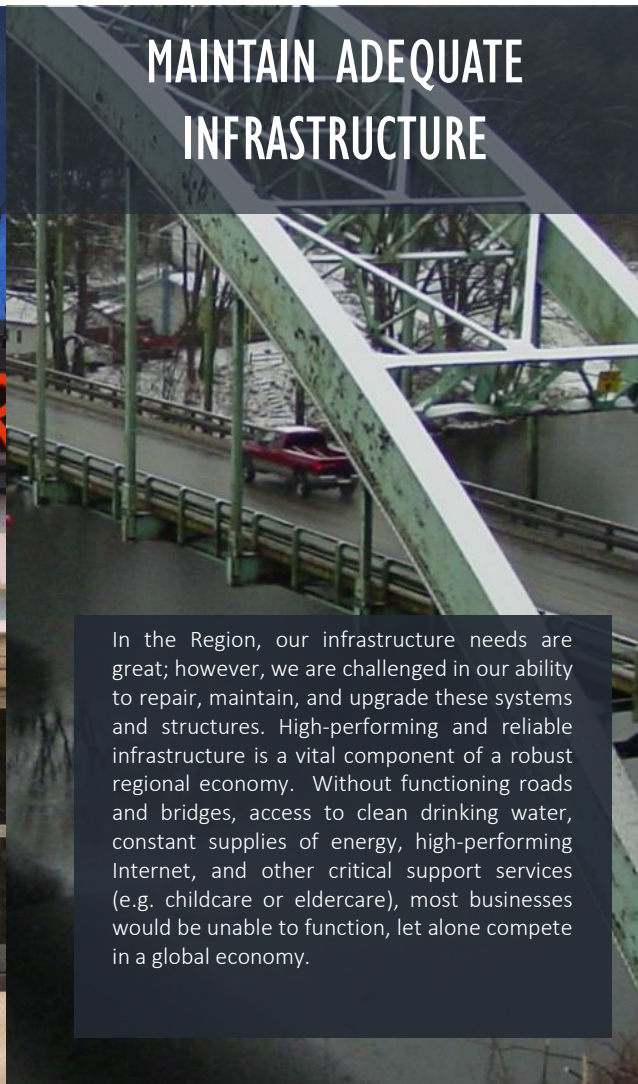
Ready access to a high-quality workforce has become one of the most important criteria for businesses in deciding where to locate. Without a diverse base of skilled and educated workers, the Region will have difficulty growing existing industries and will be less able to compete with other areas for attracting and retaining new businesses. Although the Southwest Region is fortunate to have a well-educated and skilled workforce for many of our industry sectors, there is continual need to improve these skills in order to sustain current and future economic trends.

GROW & ATTRACT BUSINESS & INDUSTRY

A photograph of the exterior of a building with a large sign that reads "monadnock FOOD CO-OP". The sign features a stylized purple root vegetable graphic. There are three black light fixtures above the sign.

Beyond developing a skilled and educated labor pool, the Southwest Region also needs abundant economic opportunities to retain and support its workforce. Expanding employment options and economic opportunity for the Region's workers, requires strategies that grow and support existing businesses as well as those that serve to attract new companies to the Region. It also requires promoting a balanced and diverse mix of business and industry that offers quality employment for a range of skills and abilities.

MAINTAIN ADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE

A photograph of a large, green-painted steel truss bridge spanning a road. A red car is visible on the road below the bridge.

In the Region, our infrastructure needs are great; however, we are challenged in our ability to repair, maintain, and upgrade these systems and structures. High-performing and reliable infrastructure is a vital component of a robust regional economy. Without functioning roads and bridges, access to clean drinking water, constant supplies of energy, high-performing Internet, and other critical support services (e.g. childcare or eldercare), most businesses would be unable to function, let alone compete in a global economy.

Goal: The Region's natural, historic, and cultural resources will be cared for and protected for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Given the diversity of interests and values related to our landscape, establishing collective priorities for resource conservation and management is a challenge. Priorities range from maximizing the commodity value of resources to ensuring the availability of clean air and water to preserving scenic views and rural character. Management strategies must balance meeting an array of needs and uses for our resources and natural systems with protecting them from current and future threats (e.g. loss of biodiversity, development pressure, and the impacts of a changing climate).

There can be no one-size-fits-all approach to managing and protecting these resources; especially, given their widespread geographic distribution. To be effective, multiple strategies should be employed from inventorying and monitoring, to implementing best management practices, to placing land in conservation.

INVENTORY & MONITOR RESOURCE AVAILABILITY & CONDITION

Having an understanding of the availability and condition of resources is an important component of stewardship. Without this information, it would be difficult to plan for or make management decisions. Routine inventorying and monitoring can help communities and others acquire knowledge of the location, abundance, and condition of resources. This data can serve as a reference point against which past and future trends, as well as the condition of resources from other areas, can be compared and measured.

PRESERVE & PROTECT IMPORTANT RESOURCES

Part of our Region's competitive advantage is its rich natural, scenic, recreational, educational cultural, and historic resources. Caring for and protecting these assets, which include our working landscapes and creative economy, is important to sustaining economic and community vitality. Strategies to maintain the integrity and/or value of these resources can include conservation, policies and regulations, the use of best management practices, and outreach and education.

COORDINATE & PLAN FOR RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Planning for natural and cultural resources within the Region and communities is important for many reasons. It is an opportunity to identify and develop goals and objectives as well as a direction for the use and management of important resources. It is also an opportunity to educate and inform residents about the history, availability, and conditions of certain resources.

Goal: The Region will be prepared for and have the capacity to withstand and recover from the impacts of natural and manmade hazards and other emergency situations.

The Southwest Region, like much of New Hampshire, celebrates its Yankee heritage and related qualities of independence and self-sufficiency. Residents are used to New England's variable weather and the hardships of long winters – shoveling, plowing, heating, potential power outages, etc. However, events such as severe flooding and ice storms have tested the preparedness of our residents and communities and have compelled us to consider our capacity for responding to and enduring natural and manmade disasters and potential emergencies.

There are many factors that influence a community's resilience - the ability to prevent or withstand and recover from natural or manmade disasters, public health emergencies and other crises. Resilience involves developing the capacity to account for and mitigate vulnerabilities, establishing strong social networks, considering preparedness and mitigation in local planning efforts, reducing negative health consequences, and rapidly restoring community functions. While many communities in the Southwest Region have in place plans and trained volunteers to respond to a disaster or emergency, building resilience is an ongoing task.

ASSESS EXISTING CAPACITY

Part of preparedness is knowing the type of risks and hazards we might face as a Region and assessing our degree of vulnerability or exposure to them. It also involves understanding our capacity for responding to and dealing with these events, including our ability to meet basic needs such as supplying food and water, shelter, health care, heat, electricity, communications, etc.


PLAN FOR DISASTER MITIGATION & RESPONSE

In order to protect critical infrastructure and strengthen the Region's response to disasters and emergencies, planning for hazard mitigation and emergency response is a critical and oftentimes necessary task. These plans offer a framework to reduce impacts to lives, property and the economy from future disasters and can provide a strategy for response efforts in a town. In addition, communities can plan for events by ensuring that emergency management professionals and volunteers receive adequate training and access to resources.

ENHANCE CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE RESILIENCE

Critical infrastructure are the assets and systems vital to the public health and safety of the Region. We rely on these systems - which include transportation, water and wastewater, energy, emergency management, health care, agriculture, and telecommunications - to access essential resources such as electricity, food and clean drinking water. The resilience of critical infrastructure is intricately linked with the overall resilience of a community. Therefore, protecting these systems against disruptions and adverse impacts is an important component of preparedness and hazard mitigation.

BENEFITS OF A REGIONAL PLAN



Tool for communities in developing their own local plan and in coordinating with one another.

Provides a picture of what residents and communities value, what they want for the future and ideas for getting there.

Addresses issues that transcend municipal boundaries.

Resource for communities and others to identify ways to address issues of common concern.

IMPLEMENTATION

In addition to outlining a vision for the Region along with supporting goals and objectives, the Plan identifies a number of potential action items. These strategies are projects and programs that could be implemented at either the community or regional scale by a range of stakeholders including municipal boards and committees, businesses, institutions, nonprofit organizations, human service agencies, and others. Examples of strategies include:

- ▶ *Support and expand programs that offer services for healthy aging and aging in place (e.g. ServiceLink, Monadnock at Home, Moandnock RSVP, etc.).*
- ▶ *Improve access to air and rail transportation hubs (e.g. intercity buses, taxi services, car rental services, etc.).*
- ▶ *Expand and support apprenticeship and internship programs for youth and other age groups.*
- ▶ *Promote and expand programs and facilities that support small and emerging businesses (e.g. incubators, maker spaces, shared commercial kitchens, etc.).*
- ▶ *Support programs that reduce the impacts of invasive species and diseases.*
- ▶ *Continue to support and develop activities that promote agricultural practices to younger generation (e.g. farm-to-school initiatives, school gardening programs, adult farm schools and apprenticeships).*
- ▶ *Expand the availability and quality of broadband infrastructure, especially in unserved and underserved areas.*
- ▶ *Assess the capacity of communities to assist and respond to the needs of vulnerable populations in the event of an emergency.*
- ▶ *Establish and support programs that involve youth in volunteer firefighting and emergency response services.*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Looking for more information on a particular topic? The Plan's Appendix contains a number of technical components. These Region-specific materials contain more detail and information regarding subject areas, such as housing, transportation, economic development, natural resources, and broadband in the Region, and serve as reference documents to this Regional Plan. These documents and the Plan itself can be accessed by visiting the weblink below.



FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: WWW.SWRPC.ORG/REGIONALPLAN

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