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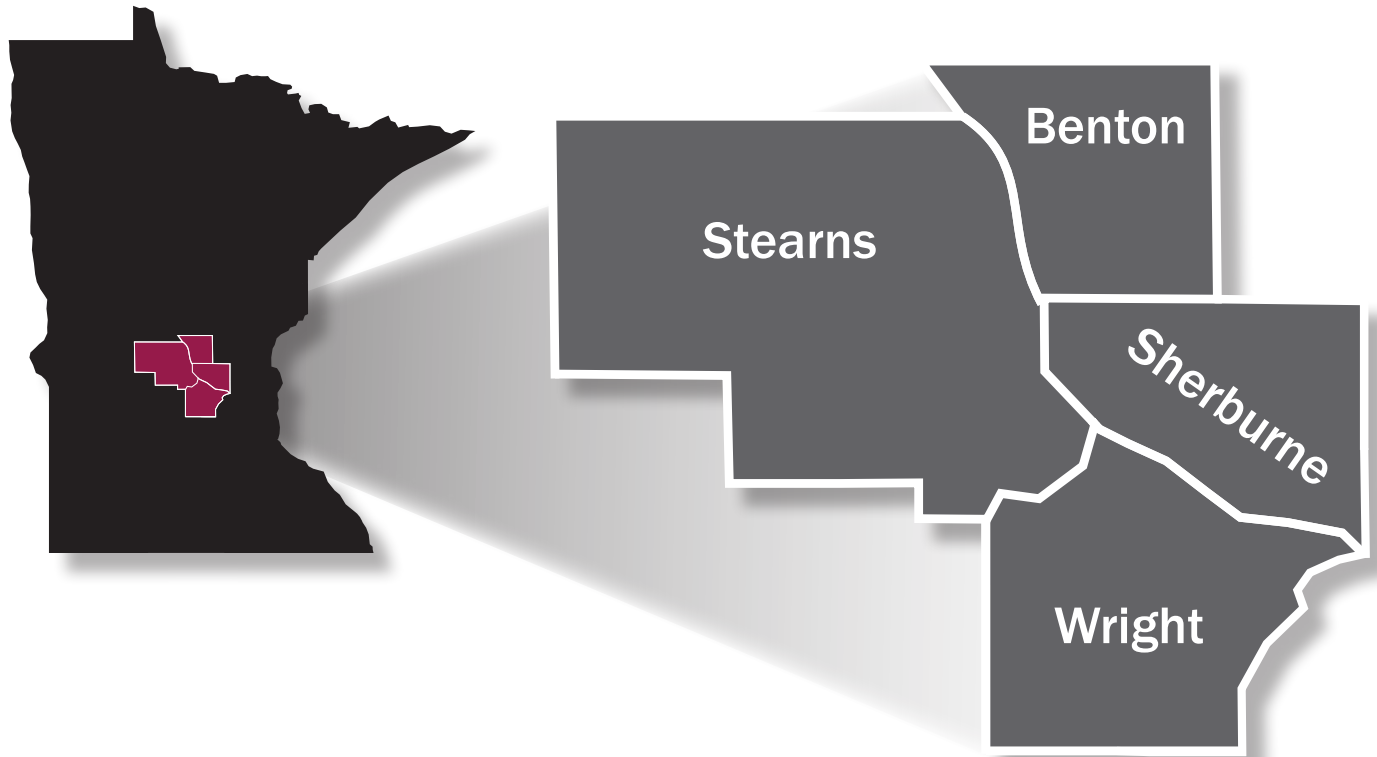
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REGION 7W
Comprehensive
Economic Development Strategy
in Central Minnesota

Benton ■ Sherburne ■ Stearns ■ Wright

2017

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Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy in Central Minnesota

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INTRODUCTION

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy in Central Minnesota

INTRODUCTION

Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services, Inc. (CMJTS) provides customer-focused employment and training services for individuals and businesses in the 11-county Central Minnesota Local Workforce Development Area 5. CMJTS matches jobseekers, including youth, adults, and seniors, with job training resources that prepare them for self-sufficient jobs and matches businesses with qualified workers and resources to grow their business. Additionally, CMJTS touts its progressive Economic Development Division of certified economic development professionals serving Region 7W. The Region 7W Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) supports and serves the counties of Benton, Sherburne, Stearns, and Wright. All economic development programs of CMJTS strive to create and retain jobs, grow the local tax base, and create wealth in our four-county region.

WHAT IS THE CEDS?

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) contributes to effective economic development in America's communities and regions through a locally-based, regionally-driven economic development planning process. Economic development planning—as implemented through the CEDS—is not only a cornerstone of the U.S. Economic Development Administration's (EDA) programs, but successfully serves as a means to engage community leaders, leverage the involvement of the private sector, and establish a strategic blueprint for regional collaboration.

The CEDS will ultimately enhance and support current and future economic development efforts in the region and engage local, regional, state, and federal partners. The CEDS follows EDA guidelines to focus on the region's unique conditions, advantages, and challenges.

The CEDS document is the result of the work of a CEDS Steering Committee comprised of community leaders, public officials, economic development professionals, workforce development leaders, educators, labor unions, and private individuals representing the diverse population of the region.

Planning and data collection for this document began in early 2016 with public input derived through community meetings and partnerships with local organizations.

VISION

Region 7W strives to foster a prosperous region that creates new business and employment opportunities essential for economic growth. Economic development strategies will drive the creation, retention, and reinvestment of resources that increase the economic opportunities and improve the quality of life for Region 7W citizens.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

CMJTS identified public and private sector economic and community development leaders throughout the region to participate in meetings focused on developing goals and strategies around the four cornerstones of community and economic health identified by DevelopMN. CMJTS promoted the CEDS planning process at economic and community development meetings in the region.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Economic resilience is a key element to bolster the long-term economic durability of the region. While it is an important enough element to be identified as its own cornerstone, the approach recommended is that economic resilience strategies be a consideration for carrying out the work identified in all four cornerstones. While not called out further in the document, it is implied that economic resilience is a component of all activities associated with economic development in Central Minnesota.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

As the world becomes more urban, and climate change picks up pace, natural disasters remain one of the greatest threats to human health and stability. Cities are becoming larger and city leaders are turning their attention toward the importance of preparedness and response to natural disasters.

Region 7W will work to build, sustain and improve the region's capability to mitigate against, prepare for, respond to, and recover from threatened or actual disasters. All levels of government, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations must work together to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from natural disasters and other emergencies that exceed the capacity or capabilities of any single entity.

Disaster preparedness by individuals, businesses, and communities can go a long way toward minimizing and surviving the effects of natural disasters or other incidents. One value of the CEDS is to elevate key infrastructure, employment sectors, and population centers for vulnerable populations, so in the event of a future disaster of significant impact we can quickly engage with the Economic Development Administration to participate in our long-term strategy and response.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CMJTS respectfully acknowledges the many individuals and organizations who have given their time and proficiency in sharing their vision for Region 7W. In addition, CMJTS explicitly recognizes the counties of Benton, Sherburne, Stearns, and Wright and their representatives for their leadership and support in driving this important initiative to fruition, ensuring its success in reestablishing their commitment to the 7W CEDS project. A special thanks and consideration to the elected county commissioners, local Initiative Foundation, and Xcel Energy for their financial support, as well as devoting their time and expertise to be sponsors, advocates, and champions of the CEDS.

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REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy in Central Minnesota

DEMOGRAPHICS

DEMOGRAPHICS POPULATION CHANGE, 2000–2016

Economic Development Region 7W–Central includes a total of four counties, located in the larger 13-county Central Minnesota planning region. Region 7W was home to 421,722 people in 2016, comprising 7.6 percent of the state’s total population. The region saw a 31 percent population increase since 2000, making it the fastest growing of the 13 economic development regions (EDRs) in the state, and now the third largest in total population after gaining almost 100,000 new residents. In comparison, the state of Minnesota saw a 12.2 percent gain from 2000 to 2016, meaning Region 7W accounted for 16.6 percent of total state growth (see Table 1).

	2000 Population	2016 Estimates	2000-2016 Change	
			Number	Percent
Region 7W	321,795	421,722	+99,927	+31.1%
Benton Co.	34,226	39,992	+5,766	+16.8%
Sherburne Co.	64,417	93,528	+29,111	+45.2%
Stearns Co.	133,166	155,652	+22,486	+16.9%
Wright Co.	89,986	132,550	+42,564	+47.3%
Minnesota	4,919,479	5,519,952	+600,473	+12.2%

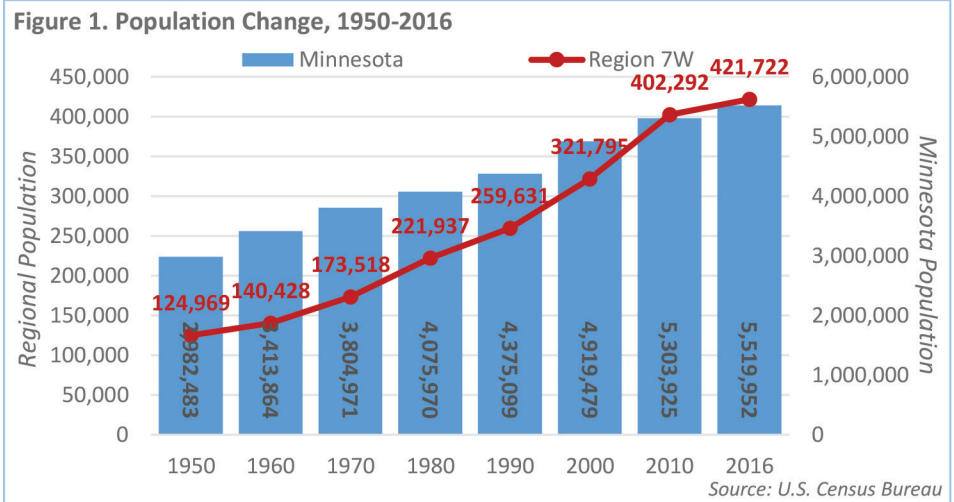
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates

All four counties in the region saw population gains since 2000, led by Wright County, which was the second fastest growing county in the state and is now the 10th largest with 132,550 people. Sherburne County was the third fastest growing and is now the 12th largest in the state, with 93,528 people. Stearns County is the seventh largest with 155,652 people, and was the 12th fastest growing after welcoming over 22,486 new residents. Benton County is the smallest in the region with 39,992 people, but is the 24th largest in the state and was the 13th fastest growing from 2000 to 2016.

POPULATION CHANGE, 1950–2016

After enjoying rapid growth over the last half century, Region 7W’s population growth has slowed so far this decade. After gaining about 197,000 new residents from 1950 to 2010, the region added just 19,000 residents from 2010 to 2016. However, it was still the fastest growing region of the state since 2010 (see Figure 1).

All four counties in Region 7W were among the fastest growing counties in the state long term as well, led by Sherburne County, which was the second fastest after growing 777 percent from 1950 to 2016, followed by Wright in 7th place after expanding 378 percent, and Benton County and Stearns County in 11th and 12th, respectively, after both growing over 120 percent. Wright County added over 104,000 new residents over the past 66 years, Stearns County welcomed almost 85,000 people, Sherburne County gained 82,000 residents, and Benton County’s population increased by just over 24,000 additional people during that timeframe. Region 7W accounted for 11.7 percent of the state’s total population gain from 1950 to 2016.



REGIONAL OVERVIEW

CEDS

POPULATION BY AGE GROUP, 2000–2016

Region 7W’s population is younger than the state’s, with 36.3 percent of the population age 25 years and under in 2016, compared to 33.2 percent statewide. Another 39 percent of people in Region 7W were between 25 and 54 years of age, which is typically considered the “prime working years,” compared to 39.1 percent statewide. In contrast, Region 7W had a smaller percentage of people from 55 to 64 years of age, and a much smaller percentage of the population age 65 years and over than the state, with just 12.8 percent of people age 65 years and over, compared to 15.2 percent of residents statewide (see Figure 2).

While the number of younger residents was rising rapidly as young, married couple families moved into the region, the number of residents age 45 years and over was also expanding quickly because of the size of the baby boom generation—people born between 1946 and 1964 (see Figure 3).

Figure 2. Percentage of Population by Age Group, 2016

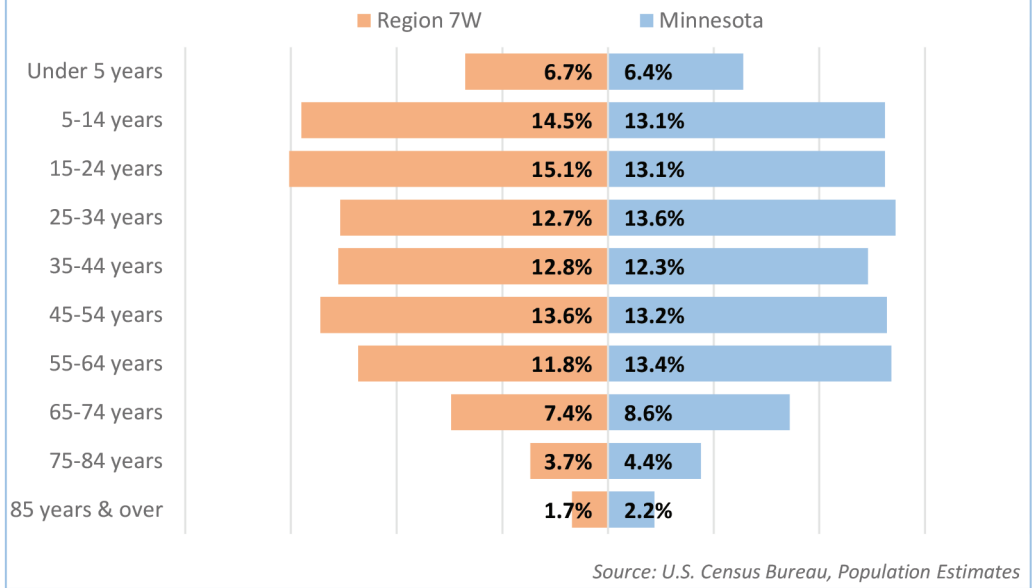
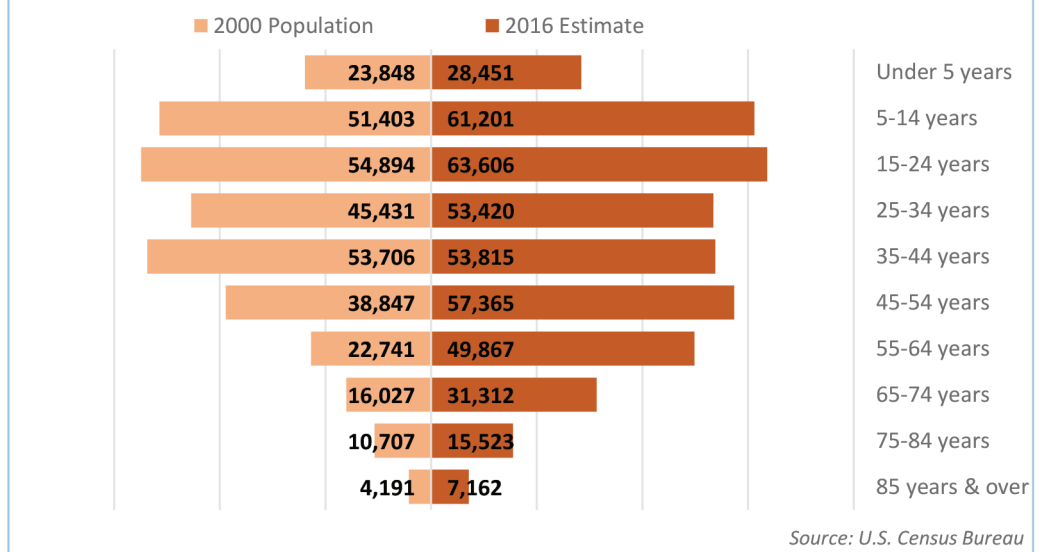


Figure 3. Region 7W Population Pyramid, 2000-2016



REGIONAL OVERVIEW



POPULATION PROJECTIONS BY AGE GROUP, 2020–2040

Region 7W is projected to enjoy continued population growth in the future as well. According to population projections from the State Demographic Center, Region 7W is expected to gain about 30,000 net new residents from 2020 to 2040, a 6.9 percent increase (see Figure 4). In comparison, the state of Minnesota is projected to grow 8.8 percent from 2020 to 2040.

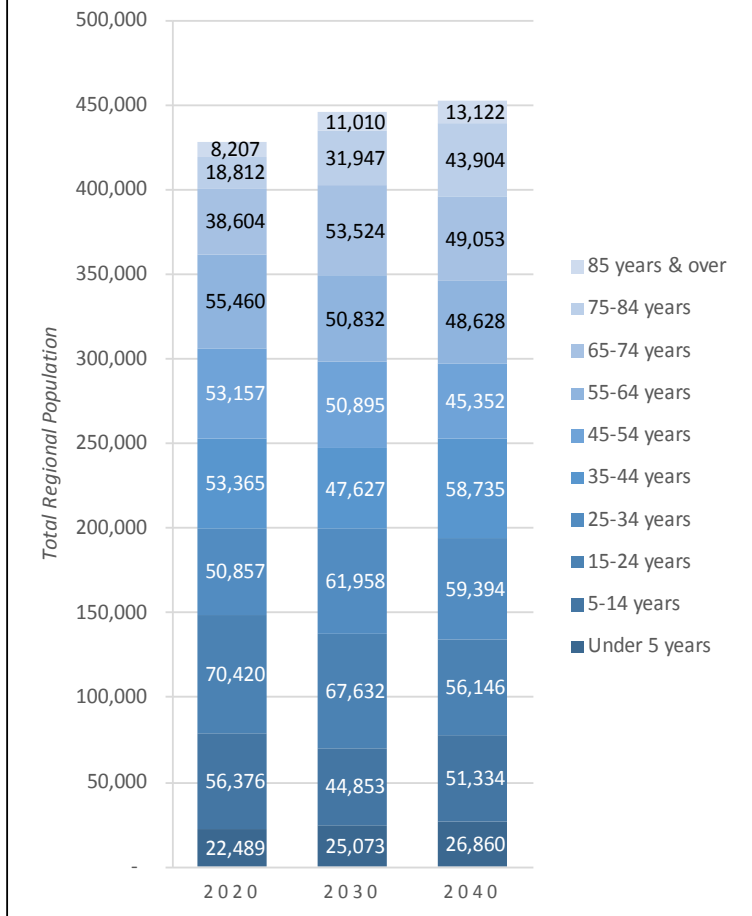
Despite the region’s younger population, much of this demographic growth is expected to be in the older age groups. Region 7W is projected to add 45,000 people age 65 years and over, a 69 percent increase. The region is also expected to gain about 14,000 people in the 25- to 44-year-old age group, as well as a corresponding increase of about 4,400 children under 5. In contrast, Region 7W is expected to lose over 14,600 people from 45 to 64 years of age and over 19,000 youth from 5 to 24 years of age.

POPULATION BY RACE, 2015

Region 7W’s population is less diverse than the state’s, but is becoming more diverse over time. In 2015, 93.1 percent of the region’s residents reported White alone as their race, compared to 84.8 percent of residents statewide. Region 7W had a smaller percentage of all other race groups than the state, with the largest minority populations being Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American (see Table 2).

The region saw a 23 percent gain in the number of White residents, but saw much faster increases in every other race group. The number of Black or African American residents rose 350 percent, while people of Some Other Race, Two or More Races, and Hispanic or Latino origin all increased more than 150 percent from 2000 to 2015 (see Table 2).

Figure 4. Region 7W Population Projections by Age Group, 2015-2035



	Region 7W			Minnesota	
	Number	Percent	Change from 2000-2015	Percent	Change from 2000-2015
Total	410,908	100.0%	+27.7%	100.0%	+10.2%
White	382,556	93.1%	+23.0%	84.8%	+4.4%
Black or African American	9,717	2.4%	+349.7%	5.5%	+74.2%
American Indian & Alaska Native	1,715	0.4%	+60.7%	1.0%	+2.9%
Asian & Other Pac. Islander	5,781	1.4%	+72.7%	4.5%	+68.6%
Some Other Race	3,408	0.8%	+152.3%	1.5%	+24.7%
Two or More Races	7,731	1.9%	+182.1%	2.7%	+74.3%
Hispanic or Latino	10,962	2.7%	+185.7%	5.0%	+89.0%

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey](#)

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

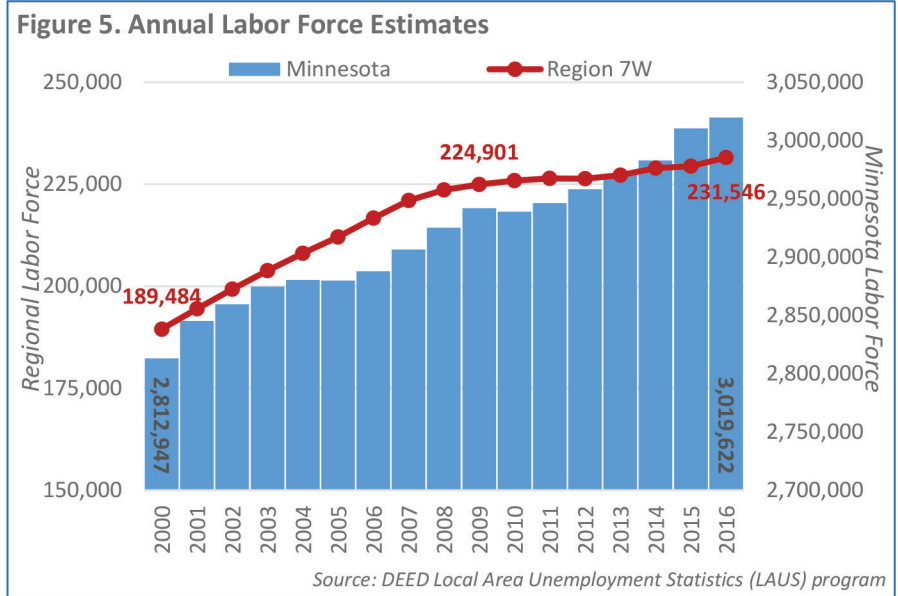


LABOR FORCE

LABOR FORCE CHANGE, 2000–2016

According to data from DEED’s Local Area Unemployment Statistics program, Region 7W has experienced rapid growth in the size of the available labor force over the last 16 years. With just over 231,500 workers in 2016, the region had over 42,000 more available workers than it had in 2000, a 22 percent increase. In comparison, Minnesota’s labor force grew 7.3 percent during that timeframe.

As the region’s population grew, so did the labor force, adding about 36,000 workers from 2000 to 2010, a 19.2 percent increase. Labor force growth has slowed since then, with the region gaining just 5,688 workers from 2010 to 2016 (see Figure 5). As the economy has recovered, the labor market in the region has been getting tighter, with about 8,400 unemployed workers in 2016.



LABOR FORCE PROJECTIONS, 2020–2040

Despite the region’s projected population growth as shown in Figure 4 above, applying current labor force participation rates to future population projections by age group would lead to much slower growth in workforce numbers in Region 7W over the next decade. Region 7W may gain just 3,400 net new workers from 2020 to 2030, a significantly slower expansion than experienced in the past two decades.

In addition to the slowing growth, the data show that the age composition of the workforce will see a significant shift over time, with a steady gain in the number of workers age 20 to 44 years and big gains in workers age 65 years and over, against a huge decline in the number of workers age 45 to 64 years. The region may lose about 5,400 workers in the 45- to 64-year-old age group as the baby boom generation moves through the population pyramid. The 25- to 54-year-old age group will still be the largest

Table 3. Region 7W Labor Force Projections

	2020 Labor Force Projection	2030 Labor Force Projection	2020-2030 Change	
			Numeric	Percent
16 to 19 years	15,954	13,932	-2,023	-12.7%
20 to 24 years	30,832	32,091	+1,259	+4.1%
25 to 44 years	93,143	97,936	+4,793	+5.1%
45 to 54 years	47,715	45,684	-2,030	-4.3%
55 to 64 years	40,554	37,170	-3,384	-8.3%
65 to 74 years	9,852	13,660	+3,808	+38.6%
75 years & over	1,670	2,654	+985	+59.0%
Total Labor Force	239,720	243,127	+3,407	+1.4%

Source: calculated from [Minnesota State Demographic Center population projections](#) and [2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates](#).

part of the labor force, accounting for 59 percent of the total (see Table 3). These changes will likely lead to a tight labor market in the future, with employers needing to respond to changing workforce availability.

REGIONAL OVERVIEW



EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS, 2015

With 73.4 percent of people age 16 years and over in the labor force, Region 7W had higher labor force participation rates than the state's 70 percent. The region had higher labor force participation rates than the state in almost every age group, and the overall rate was even higher because a higher percentage of Region 7W's labor force was in younger age groups (see Table 4).

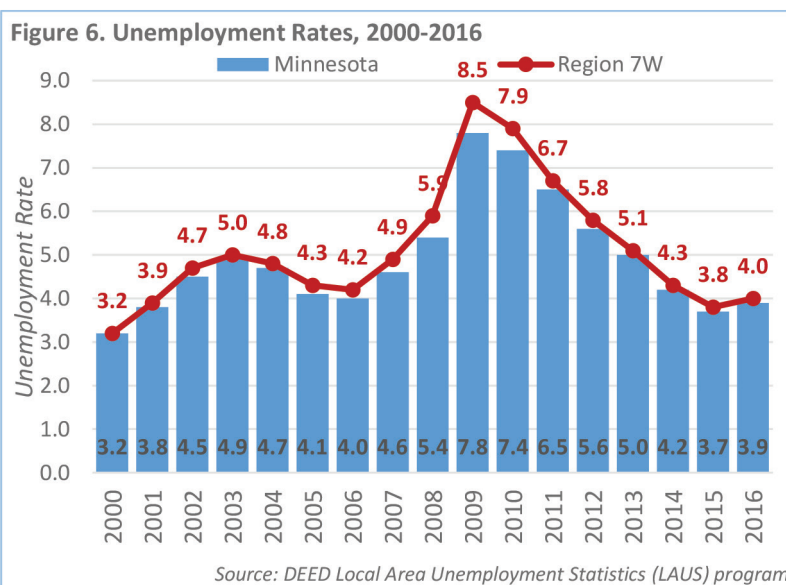
In contrast, the region had lower participation rates than the state in several race groups, and also had large unemployment rate disparities for every minority group. Region 7W also had 11,126 veterans and 10,454 workers with disabilities in the labor force, and they too had higher participation rates in the region than the state. In sum, unemployment rates in the region were highest for young people, minorities, workers with disabilities, and people with lower educational attainment.

Table 4. Employment Characteristics, 2015					
	Region 7W			Minnesota	
	In Labor Force	Labor Force Partic. Rate	Unemp. Rate	Labor Force Partic. Rate	Unemp. Rate
Total Labor Force	231,145	73.4%	5.4%	70.0%	5.6%
16 to 19 years	14,477	59.0%	13.8%	51.9%	16.1%
20 to 24 years	25,721	84.2%	7.2%	82.8%	9.2%
25 to 44 years	97,235	89.4%	5.1%	88.1%	5.0%
45 to 54 years	52,361	89.8%	3.9%	87.2%	4.3%
55 to 64 years	33,238	73.1%	3.5%	72.1%	4.2%
65 to 74 years	6,740	25.5%	3.3%	26.9%	3.6%
75 years & over	1,296	6.2%	5.1%	6.0%	3.5%
Employment Characteristics by Race & Hispanic Origin					
White alone	218,091	73.5%	4.9%	70.0%	4.8%
Black or African American	4,270	65.8%	15.4%	68.8%	14.7%
American Indian & Alaska Native	640	49.4%	21.7%	58.6%	16.3%
Asian or Other Pac. Islanders	3,452	74.5%	9.0%	70.4%	6.4%
Some Other Race	1,619	76.8%	8.8%	77.4%	9.4%
Two or More Races	2,946	78.1%	10.6%	71.0%	11.5%
Hispanic or Latino	4,833	71.9%	12.3%	75.0%	9.1%
Employment Characteristics by Veteran Status					
Veterans, 18 to 64 years	11,126	80.1%	5.5%	77.6%	5.7%
Employment Characteristics by Disability					
With Any Disability	10,454	54.8%	9.7%	51.3%	12.7%
Employment Characteristics by Educational Attainment					
Population, 25 to 64 years	182,821	86.0%	4.6%	84.0%	4.6%
Less than H.S. Diploma	7,747	71.4%	6.0%	65.4%	6.5%
H.S. Diploma or Equivalent	45,427	81.4%	4.3%	78.8%	3.9%
Some College or Assoc. Degree	76,436	87.4%	4.3%	85.2%	4.7%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	53,192	90.9%	2.9%	89.3%	2.7%

Source: [2011-2015 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates](#)

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, 2000-2016

Though slightly higher, Region 7W's unemployment rate has closely tracked the state rate over time, typically hovering within a half a percent of Minnesota's rate. According to DEED's Local Area Unemployment Statistics, the region's unemployment rate rose as high as 8.5 percent in 2009, while the state rate climbed to 7.8 percent. Since then, the state and region's economies have recovered and unemployment rates are dropping back below prerecession levels, with Region 7W reporting 4 percent in 2016, which was just 0.1 percent above the state rate (see Figure 6).



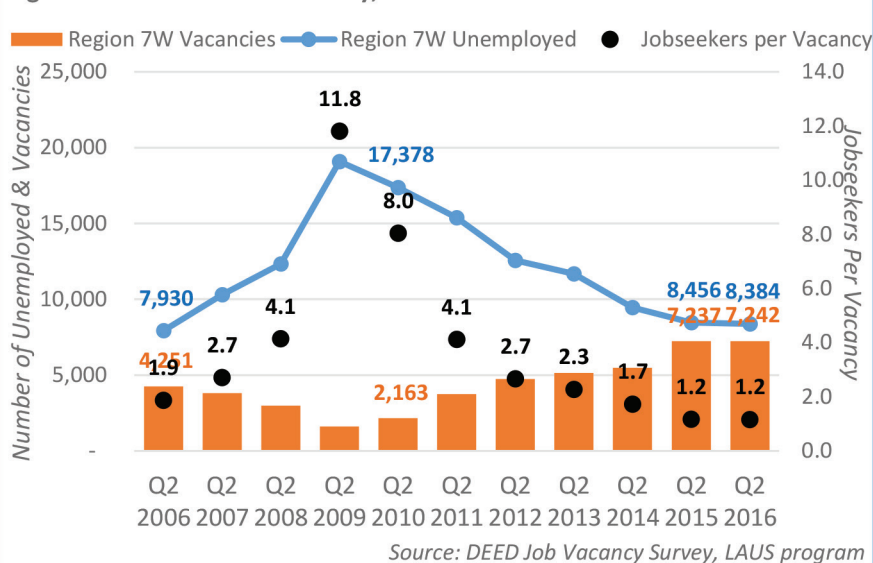
REGIONAL OVERVIEW



JOBSEEKERS PER VACANCY, 2016

As the number of available workers has declined, the region's labor market has tightened. One clear demonstration of this is the ratio of unemployed jobseekers per vacancy, which dipped to 1.2-to-1 last year, and stayed at that level in the second quarter of 2016. According to recent job vacancy survey results, there were 7,242 openings reported by employers compared to 8,384 unemployed jobseekers in the region. The ratio climbed as high as 11.8-to-1 during the recession (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Jobseekers Per Vacancy, 2006-2016



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT BY AGE GROUP, 2015

With 35.6 percent of adults age 18 years and over having a college degree, Region 7W has lower educational attainment than the state, where 41.3 percent of adults have an associate, bachelor's, or advanced degree. However, 12.2 percent of adults in Region 7W have an associate degree, which outpaces the state (10.2%). Another 28.5 percent have some college experience, but no degree, compared to 24.5 percent statewide.

Region 7W has a younger population that is focused on advancing their education, which is leading to changing educational attainment overall. In 2015, 51.1 percent of people age 18 to 24 years had attended some college, but hadn't earned a degree yet, and 15.6 percent already had a college degree. Region 7W also had a much higher percentage of people in the 25- to 44- and 45- to 64-year-old age groups who had earned associate degrees, but lower percentages of people with bachelor's degrees or higher. Region 7W has a lower percentage of the population in the oldest age groups, and those residents have much lower educational attainment than the rest of the state and those in the younger age groups (see Table 5).

Table 5. Educational Attainment by Age Group, 2015	Region 7W		Minnesota
	Number	Percent	Percent
18 to 24 years	43,853	14.4%	12.2%
Less than high school	4,778	10.9%	12.7%
High school grad. (incl. equiv.)	9,858	22.5%	26.2%
Some college, no degree	22,392	51.1%	42.7%
Associate's degree	3,369	7.7%	6.3%
Bachelor's degree	3,328	7.6%	11.6%
Advanced degree	128	0.3%	0.4%
25 to 44 years	108,801	35.8%	34.1%
Less than high school	5,769	5.3%	6.7%
High school grad. (incl. equiv.)	21,671	19.9%	19.2%
Some college, no degree	28,720	26.4%	21.6%
Associate's degree	19,065	17.5%	13.1%
Bachelor's degree	25,842	23.8%	27.6%
Advanced degree	7,734	7.1%	11.7%
45 to 64 years	103,788	34.2%	35.5%
Less than high school	5,075	4.9%	5.7%
High school grad. (incl. equiv.)	34,117	32.9%	26.9%
Some college, no degree	26,828	25.8%	23.3%
Associate's degree	12,836	12.4%	11.3%
Bachelor's degree	17,152	16.5%	21.4%
Advanced degree	7,780	7.5%	11.4%
65 years & over	47,380	15.6%	18.2%
Less than high school	7,666	16.2%	12.8%
High school grad. (incl. equiv.)	20,121	42.5%	37.3%
Some college, no degree	8,537	18.0%	19.8%
Associate's degree	1,868	3.9%	5.1%
Bachelor's degree	5,389	11.4%	15.2%
Advanced degree	3,799	8.0%	9.8%

Source: 2011-2015 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

CEDS

COMMUTE SHED AND LABOR SHED, 2014

According to commuting data from the Census Bureau, Region 7W is a net labor exporter, having more workers than available jobs. In fact, nearly as many residents commute out of the region than stay in the region for work. In sum, 120,106 workers both lived and worked in Region 7W in 2014, while 46,561 workers drove into the region from surrounding counties for work, compared to 89,054 workers who lived in the region but drove to surrounding counties for work (see Table 6 and Figure 8).

Anchored by St. Cloud, Stearns is the largest county and the largest employment center in the region and was the biggest draw for workers, actually seeing a net import of workers. In contrast, Benton, Sherburne, and Wright had significant labor outflows, primarily into the Twin Cities metro area as well as St. Cloud (see Table 7 and Figure 8).

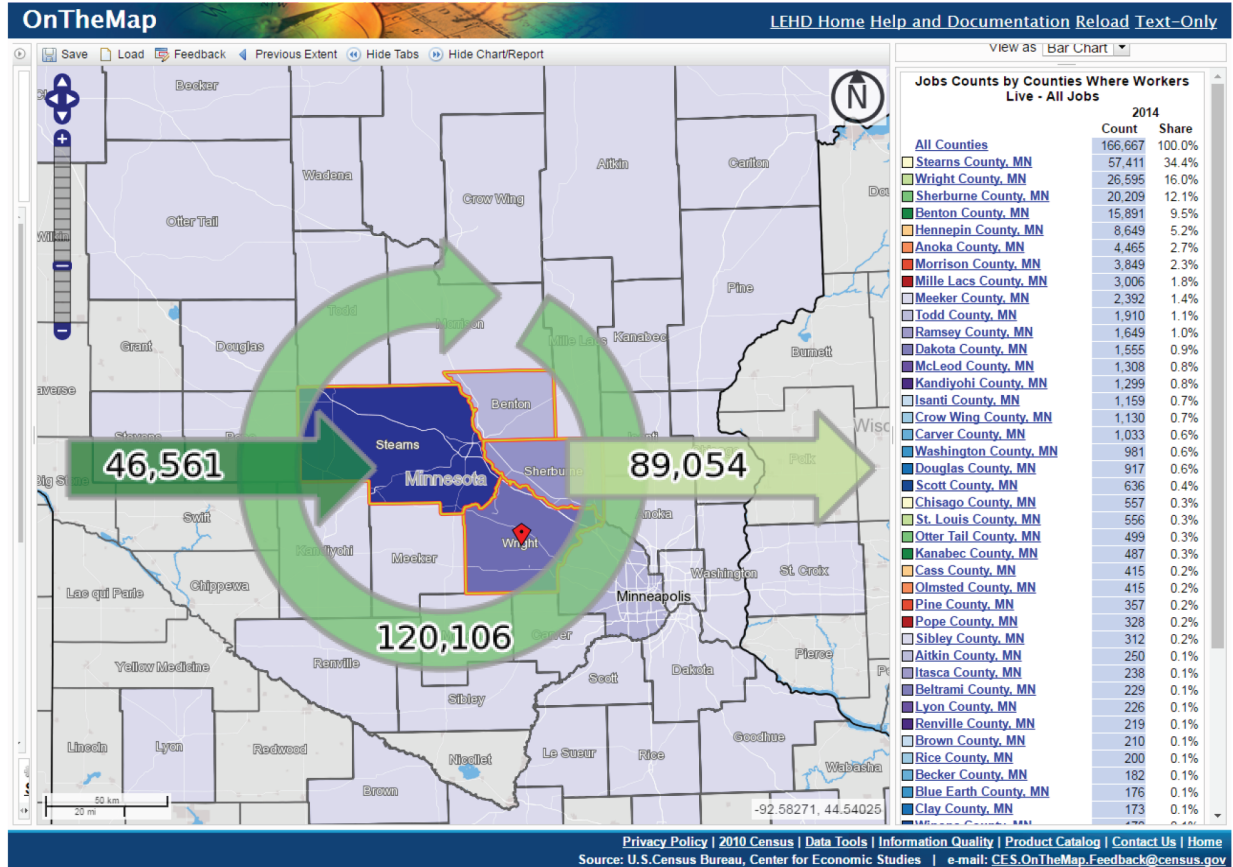
Table 6. Region 7W Inflow/Outflow Job Counts (All Jobs), 2014	2014	
	Count	Share
Employed in the Selection Area	166,667	100.0%
Employed in the Selection Area but Living Outside	46,561	27.9%
Employed and Living in the Selection Area	120,106	72.1%
Living in the Selection Area	209,160	100.0%
Living in the Selection Area but Employed Outside	89,054	42.6%
Living and Employed in the Selection Area	120,106	57.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap

Table 7. Region 7W Commuting Patterns	
Counties outside the region that send the most workers into the region	Counties outside the region that the most workers from inside the region travel to
Hennepin Co. MN	Hennepin Co. MN
Anoka Co. MN	Anoka Co. MN
Morrison Co. MN	Ramsey Co. MN
Mille Lacs Co. MN	Dakota Co. MN
Meeker Co. MN	Mille Lacs Co. MN

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap

Figure 8. Region 7W Labor and Commute Shed, 2014



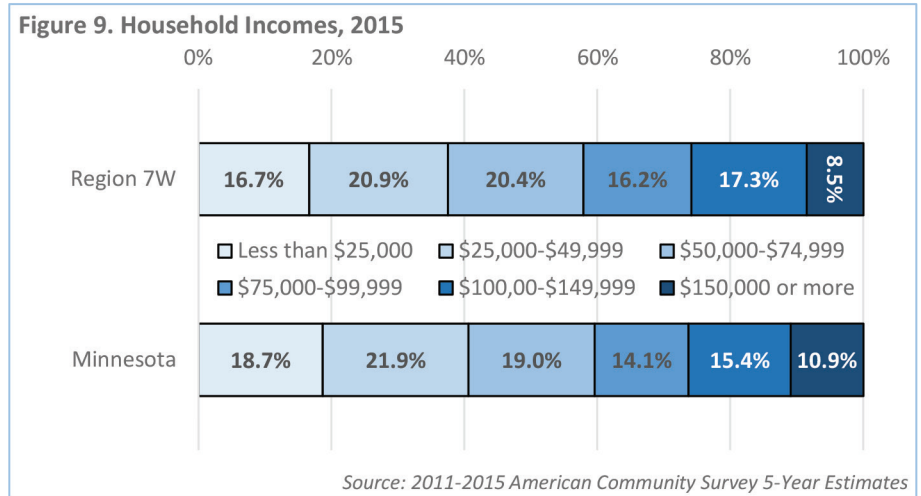
REGIONAL OVERVIEW



INCOMES, WAGES, AND OCCUPATIONS

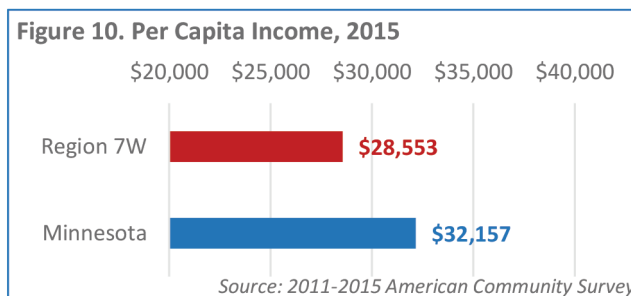
HOUSEHOLD INCOMES

At \$64,806 in 2015, household incomes were slightly higher in Region 7W than the state, where the median household income was \$61,492. Median household incomes were \$52,178 in Benton County and \$56,336 in Stearns County, which were the 30th and 23rd highest in the state, respectively. Incomes were even higher in Sherburne and Wright County, which ranked fifth and sixth highest in the state, respectively, at \$74,170 and \$73,557. Just 37.5 percent of the households in the region had incomes below \$50,000 in 2015, compared to 40.6 percent statewide. Another 36.6 percent of households earned between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in the region, compared to 33.1 percent of households statewide, and in both the state and the region, about 26 percent of households earned over \$100,000 (see Figure 9).



PER CAPITA INCOMES

The per capita incomes were slightly lower in Region 7W than the state, ranging from \$25,341 in Benton County to \$30,238 in Wright County, compared to \$32,157 in Minnesota. At \$28,553, Region 7W had the third highest per capita income of the 13 EDRs in the state, behind the Twin Cities metro and Southeast Minnesota (see Figure 10).



REGIONAL OVERVIEW



COST OF LIVING

According to DEED’s Cost of Living tool, the basic needs budget for an average Minnesota family (which consists of two adults and one child, with one full-time and one part-time worker) was \$55,200 in 2017. The cost of living for a similar family in Region 7W was \$52,656—which was also the third highest of the 13 EDRs in the state, behind only the Twin Cities metro area and Region 7E–East Central. The highest monthly costs were for transportation, food, and housing; the cost of the region’s housing, transportation, and taxes were very similar to the state, while lower childcare costs were the main difference (see Table 8).

To meet the basic cost of living for the region, the workers in the family scenario listed above would need to earn \$16.88 per hour. For a single person living alone and working full-time, the estimated yearly cost in Region 7W would be \$30,264, which would require an hourly wage of \$14.55 to meet the basic needs standard of living.

WAGES AND OCCUPATIONS

According to DEED’s Occupational Employment Statistics program, the median hourly wage for all occupations in Region 7W was \$17.48 in the first quarter of 2017, which was the fifth highest wage level of the 13 EDRs in the state. However, Region 7W’s median wage was \$2.14 below the state’s median hourly wage, equaling 89 percent of the statewide wage rate, and about \$4.07 below the median hourly wage in the seven-county Twin Cities metro area, which would amount to nearly \$8,500 per year for a full-time worker. Region 7W had higher wages than surrounding regions like Region 5 at \$15.70,

Region 6E at \$16.07, but lower wages than the Twin Cities at \$20.79, Region 7E at \$17.78, and Southeast Minnesota at \$18.53 (see Table 9).

About 12.1 percent of the jobs in Region 7W were production occupations, which was much more concentrated than in the state as a whole. Region 7W also had a higher share of workers in education, training, and library; construction and extraction; installation, maintenance, and repair; and sales and related occupations (see Table 10 on the following page).

Table 8. Family Yearly Cost, Worker Hourly Wage, and Family Monthly Costs, 2017

Region	Family Yearly Cost of Living	Hourly Wage Required	Monthly Costs						
			Child Care	Food	Health Care	Housing	Transportation	Other	Taxes
Region 7W	\$52,656	\$16.88	\$318	\$743	\$463	\$911	\$849	\$483	\$621
Minnesota	\$55,200	\$17.69	\$468	\$763	\$472	\$936	\$788	\$496	\$677

Source: [DEED Cost of Living tool](#)

Not surprisingly, the lowest-paying jobs are in food preparation and serving, personal care and service, sales and related, building and grounds cleaning, and healthcare support jobs, which tend to have lower educational and training requirements. For the most part, the gap in pay between Region 7W and the state is also lower in these jobs. In contrast, the highest paying jobs are found in management, healthcare

practitioners, legal, computer, architecture and engineering, life, physical, and social science, and business and financial operations, which tend to need higher levels of education and experience. The pay gaps between the region and state are much bigger in these occupations, with the exception of healthcare.

Table 9. Occupational Employment Statistics by Region, 1st Qtr. 2017

Region, 1 st Qtr. 2017	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Regional Employment
EDR 1 - Northwest	\$17.59	38,070
EDR 2 - Headwaters	\$16.80	30,860
EDR 3 - Arrowhead	\$17.25	141,910
EDR 4 - West Central	\$16.94	85,410
EDR 5 - North Central	\$15.70	61,170
EDR 6E - Southwest Central	\$17.07	47,410
EDR 6W - Upper MN Valley	\$15.93	16,600
EDR 7E - East Central	\$17.78	48,990
EDR 7W - Central	\$17.48	184,510
EDR 8 - Southwest	\$16.17	50,360
EDR 9 - South Central	\$16.99	114,470
EDR 10 - Southeast	\$18.53	259,060
EDR 11 - 7-County Twin Cities	\$21.55	1,751,580
State of Minnesota	\$19.62	2,810,400

Source: [DEED Occupational Employment Statistics](#)

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

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Table 10. Region 7W Occupational Employment Statistics, 1 st Qtr. 2017					State of Minnesota		
	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Regional Employment	Share of Total Employment	Location Quotient	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Regional Employment	Share of Total Employment
Total, All Occupations	\$17.48	184,510	100.0%	1.0	\$19.62	2,810,400	100.0%
Office & Administrative Support	\$17.16	27,740	15.0%	1.0	\$18.26	404,120	14.4%
Production	\$17.61	22,280	12.1%	1.5	\$17.46	220,570	7.8%
Sales & Related	\$12.39	20,720	11.2%	1.1	\$13.48	275,740	9.8%
Transportation & Material Moving	\$16.42	15,050	8.2%	1.3	\$17.06	178,270	6.3%
Education, Training & Library	\$22.30	15,000	8.1%	1.4	\$23.33	164,560	5.9%
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	\$33.51	11,030	6.0%	1.0	\$32.85	174,230	6.2%
Food Preparation & Serving Related	\$9.95	9,120	4.9%	0.6	\$10.05	236,820	8.4%
Construction & Extraction	\$24.32	8,570	4.6%	1.3	\$26.55	98,730	3.5%
Management	\$40.24	8,500	4.6%	0.8	\$49.20	168,370	6.0%
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	\$21.57	7,640	4.1%	1.2	\$22.41	95,700	3.4%
Personal Care & Service	\$11.86	7,630	4.1%	0.9	\$11.77	129,490	4.6%
Business & Financial Operations	\$28.30	6,620	3.6%	0.6	\$31.83	164,180	5.8%
Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	\$13.71	5,740	3.1%	1.1	\$13.68	83,180	3.0%
Healthcare Support	\$14.88	5,660	3.1%	1.0	\$15.11	84,730	3.0%
Computer & Mathematical	\$32.34	2,980	1.6%	0.5	\$39.75	97,680	3.5%
Community & Social Service	\$19.94	2,670	1.4%	0.8	\$21.32	53,060	1.9%
Protective Service	\$22.08	2,250	1.2%	0.8	\$19.80	42,740	1.5%
Architecture & Engineering	\$30.94	2,120	1.1%	0.6	\$35.96	54,400	1.9%
Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media	\$19.06	1,730	0.9%	0.7	\$22.39	37,290	1.3%
Life, Physical & Social Science	\$28.08	810	0.4%	0.5	\$30.59	24,230	0.9%
Legal	\$30.51	480	0.3%	0.4	\$40.36	18,640	0.7%
Farming, Fishing & Forestry	\$14.39	160	0.1%	0.7	\$15.31	3,680	0.1%

Source: [DEED Occupational Employment Statistics, Qtr. 1 2017](#)

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

CEDS

JOB VACANCY SURVEY

Employers in Region 7W reported 6,358 job vacancies in the fourth quarter of 2016, the fourth highest number ever recorded. Job vacancies in the region have increased almost 400 percent from the recession low point in 2009. Overall, half of the openings were part-time, just one-quarter required post-secondary education, and 29 percent required one or more years of experience. The median hourly wage offer for all occupations increased \$0.29 from the previous year, to \$12.33 (see Table 11).

Table 11. Region 7W Job Vacancy Survey Results, 4th Qtr. 2016

	Number of Total Vacancies	Percent Part-time	Percent Temporary or Seasonal	Requiring Post-Secondary Education	Requiring 1 or More Years of Experience	Requiring Certificate or License	Median Hourly Wage Offer
Total, All Occupations	6,358	50%	5%	25%	29%	23%	\$12.33
Sales & Related	1,594	63%	8%	7%	29%	3%	\$11.45
Food Preparation & Serving Related	814	71%	11%	0%	18%	11%	\$10.58
Office & Administrative Support	558	56%	7%	12%	19%	11%	\$11.25
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	545	45%	4%	91%	51%	93%	\$20.17
Transportation & Material Moving	428	45%	2%	1%	30%	51%	\$13.12
Personal Care & Service	397	39%	3%	0%	16%	4%	\$11.86
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	374	7%	0%	69%	29%	11%	\$14.65
Production	346	12%	0%	42%	40%	4%	\$15.01
Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	302	79%	1%	0%	3%	1%	\$11.44
Healthcare Support	288	51%	0%	58%	21%	76%	\$11.98
Education, Training & Library	134	72%	8%	66%	23%	42%	\$16.04
Community & Social Service	130	18%	1%	63%	46%	58%	\$18.16
Business & Financial Operations	99	32%	2%	28%	32%	23%	\$13.68
Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media	90	57%	14%	9%	64%	14%	\$15.38
Construction & Extraction	56	0%	0%	44%	44%	0%	\$17.66
Life, Physical & Social Sciences	51	0%	2%	98%	95%	35%	\$30.84
Protective Service	47	53%	13%	7%	13%	47%	\$10.70
Computer & Mathematical	45	0%	0%	62%	58%	2%	\$22.57
Management	33	22%	0%	91%	97%	15%	\$31.29
Architecture & Engineering	23	0%	0%	76%	89%	26%	\$25.70

Source: [DEED Job Vacancy Survey, Qtr. 4 2016](#)

REGIONAL OVERVIEW



OCCUPATIONS IN DEMAND

According to DEED’s Occupations in Demand tool, there are over 200 occupations showing relatively high demand in the region, with training and education requirements ranging from short-term on-the-job training to post-secondary education to advanced degrees. Many of the occupations in demand in the region require a high school diploma or less. These occupations are spread across different sectors but are also concentrated in the region’s major industries. For example, food prep workers, personal care aides and home health aides, retail sales workers, truck drivers, information technology, welders, and healthcare practitioners are all occupations in demand based on the consistent need for these workers (see Table 12).

Table 12. Region 7W Occupations in Demand by Education Level, 2016

Less than High School	High School or Equivalent	Some College or Assoc. Degree	Bachelor’s Degree or Higher
Retail Salespersons (\$21,315)	First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers (\$39,739)	Nursing Assistants (\$28,472)	Elementary & Secondary School Teachers (\$58,658)
Food Prep & Serving Workers (\$18,729)	Automotive Service Techs. & Mechanics (\$36,511)	Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers (\$44,679)	Nurse Practitioners (\$107,243)
Personal Care Aides (\$24,131)	Maintenance & Repair Workers, General (\$42,679)	Registered Nurses (\$80,603)	Training & Development Specialists (\$58,470)
Cashiers (\$19,205)	Secretaries & Administrative Assistants (\$39,087)	Teacher Assistants (\$33,752)	Family & General Practitioners (\$142,880)
Stock Clerks & Order Fillers (\$22,504)	Customer Service Representatives (\$30,516)	Licensed Practical & Licensed Voc. Nurses (\$41,255)	Physical Therapists (\$83,512)
Janitors & Cleaners (\$27,675)	Pharmacy Technicians (\$32,564)	Hairdressers, Hairstylists, & Cosmetologists (\$19,583)	Financial Managers (\$91,755)
Slaughterers & Meat Packers (\$28,389)	Carpenters (\$43,896)	Computer User Support Specialists (\$41,725)	Construction Managers (\$80,306)
Helpers--Production Workers (\$23,763)	Bus Drivers, School or Special Client (\$21,644)	Medical Assistants (\$36,185)	Software Developers, Applications (\$70,150)
Laborers & Freight, Stock & Material Movers (\$27,745)	Office Clerks, General (\$31,817)	Manicurists & Pedicurists (\$23,227)	Medical & Health Services Managers (\$99,658)
Home Health Aides (\$23,636)	Light Truck or Delivery Services Drivers (\$27,083)	Prepress Technicians & Workers (\$40,446)	Industrial Engineers (\$76,360)

Source: [DEED Occupations in Demand](#)

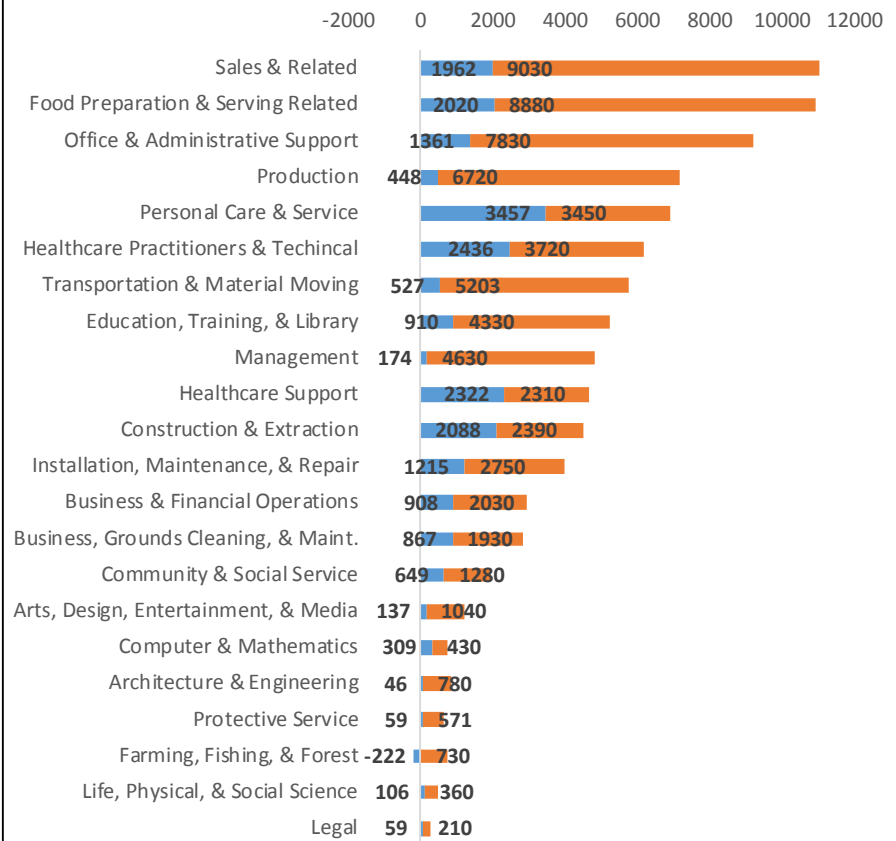
REGIONAL OVERVIEW



EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS

The Central Minnesota planning area is projected to grow 7.7 percent from 2014 to 2024, a gain of over 23,300 new jobs. In addition, the region is also expected to have the need to fill 70,740 replacement openings left vacant by retirements and other career changes. The number of replacement openings is expected to dwarf the number of new jobs in most occupational groups, though the region will see rapid growth for personal care, healthcare, construction, food prep, and sales jobs in the next decade. In contrast, seven occupational groups are expected to see a decline in jobs through 2024, but will still have replacement openings (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Central Minnesota Regional Employment Projections, 2014-2024



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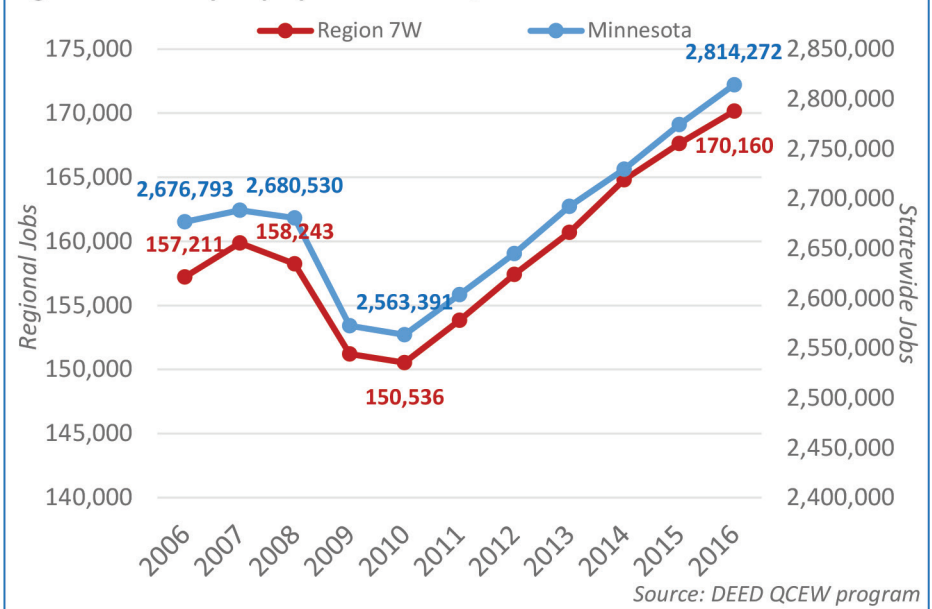


ECONOMY

INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT

Region 7W has seen job gains and losses over the past decade, but ended 2016 with about 13,000 more jobs than it had in 2006, an 8.2 percent increase. In comparison, the state grew 5.1 percent from 2006 to 2016. Like the state, the region suffered severe job declines in 2009 and 2010. Since then, Region 7W has seen a faster recovery than the rest of the state, which gained jobs at an 8.1 percent clip from 2011 to 2016, compared to a 10.6 percent increase in the region. Also like the state, Region 7W regained all of the jobs lost during the recession by 2013 (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Industry Employment Statistics, 2006-2016



According to DEED's Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages (QCEW) program, Region 7W was home to 9,891 business establishments providing 170,160 covered jobs through 2016, with a total payroll of just over \$7.2 billion. That was about 6.0 percent of total employment in the state of Minnesota, making it the third largest of the 13 EDRs in the state. Average annual wages were \$42,516 in the region, which was almost \$11,800 lower than the state's average annual wage, and the third highest of the 13 EDRs.

Stearns County is the largest employment center in the region and the seventh largest in the state, with 85,200 jobs at 4,159 firms; accounting for about half of the region's jobs. Wright County was the next largest, with 42,229 jobs at 2,980 firms, followed by

Sherburne County with 1,841 firms and 25,561 jobs and Benton County with 17,169 jobs at 912 firms. The city of St. Cloud is located in Stearns, Benton, and Sherburne County, and is the 10th largest city in the state. As shown above, the region recovered more quickly than the state over the past five years; with Sherburne and Wright seeing the fastest rise in jobs, combining to add about 9,000 jobs; and Stearns County gaining the most new jobs. Combined, Stearns and Benton also added about 8,000 jobs from 2011 to 2016 (see Table 13).

With 28,539 jobs at 851 firms, health care and social assistance is the largest employing industry in Region 7W, accounting for 16.8 percent of total jobs in the region. Due to the region's population growth, the

Geography	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Total Payroll	Average Annual Wage	2011-2016		2015-2016	
					Change in Jobs	Percent Change	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Total, All Industries	9,891	170,160	\$7,234,448,305	\$42,516	+16,314	+10.6%	+2,528	+1.5%
Benton Co.	912	17,169	\$679,354,269	\$39,569	+1,257	+7.9%	+308	+1.8%
Sherburne Co.	1,841	25,561	\$1,082,286,148	\$42,341	+2,741	+12.0%	-23	-0.1%
Stearns Co.	4,159	85,200	\$3,771,854,092	\$44,271	+5,993	+7.6%	+1,016	+1.2%
Wright Co.	2,980	42,229	\$1,700,953,796	\$40,279	+6,321	+17.6%	+1,227	+3.0%
State of Minnesota	161,520	2,814,272	\$152,795,190,643	\$54,293	+210,746	+8.1%	+39,864	+1.4%

Source: DEED Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages (QCEW)

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largest sectors were ambulatory healthcare services and hospitals, which had just over and just under 9,000 jobs respectively, with both seeing significant growth since 2011. The region also had 6,000 jobs in nursing and residential care facilities and 4,100 jobs in social assistance.

After regaining about 3,400 jobs since 2011, manufacturing is still the second largest industry in Region 7W, with 24,992 jobs at 689 firms. Wages in manufacturing were over \$7,700 higher than in the total of all industries. In contrast, wages were relatively low in retail trade, the region's third largest industry, with 23,397 jobs at 1,296 stores. The related accommodation and food services industry had 14,265 jobs at 723 establishments, and also had low wages. Combined those two industries added almost 3,000 jobs since 2011.

With one of the largest student populations outside the Twin Cities, Region 7W also has a high concentration of jobs in educational services, with 15,611 jobs

at 197 institutions—primarily at elementary and secondary schools, but also at junior colleges, universities, and other schools and instruction.

The next largest industry was also the fastest growing in the region from 2011 to 2016: the construction industry built up payrolls by 31.1 percent, and now has 11,747 jobs at 1,550 firms. The administrative support and waste management services industry, which includes temporary staffing agencies, gained 563 jobs, an 8.6 percent increase since 2011. Other important industries in Region 7W include wholesale trade, transportation and warehousing, public administration, other services, finance and insurance, and professional and technical services. Seventeen of the 20 main industries in the region added jobs since 2011, however six of 20 industries lost jobs in the past year (see Table 14).

Table 14. Region 7W Industry Employment Statistics, 2016

NAICS Industry Title	2016 Annual Data				Avg. Annual Wage	2011-2016		2015-2016	
	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Percent of Jobs	Total Payroll (\$1000s)		Change in Jobs	Percent Change	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Total, All Industries	9,891	170,160	100.0%	\$7,234,448	\$42,516	+16,314	+10.6%	+2,528	+1.5%
Health Care & Social Assistance	851	28,539	16.8%	\$1,361,266	\$47,698	+3,371	+13.4%	+321	+1.1%
Manufacturing	689	24,992	14.7%	\$1,255,015	\$50,217	+2,919	+13.2%	+634	+2.6%
Retail Trade	1,296	23,397	13.8%	\$630,091	\$26,930	+1,679	+7.7%	+597	+2.6%
Educational Services	197	15,611	9.2%	\$693,136	\$44,401	+838	+5.7%	+204	+1.3%
Accommodation & Food Services	723	14,265	8.4%	\$209,756	\$14,704	+1,234	+9.5%	+342	+2.5%
Construction	1,550	11,747	6.9%	\$715,983	\$60,950	+2,785	+31.1%	+286	+2.5%
Admin. Support & Waste Mgmt. Svcs.	441	7,120	4.2%	\$224,145	\$31,481	+563	+8.6%	-160	-2.2%
Wholesale Trade	388	6,810	4.0%	\$365,777	\$53,712	+658	+10.7%	-162	-2.3%
Transportation & Warehousing	428	6,719	3.9%	\$291,187	\$43,338	+860	+14.7%	+57	+0.9%
Public Administration	203	6,351	3.7%	\$318,876	\$50,209	+433	+7.3%	+132	+2.1%
Other Services	1,081	5,186	3.0%	\$128,573	\$24,792	+267	+5.4%	+45	+0.9%
Finance & Insurance	507	4,833	2.8%	\$277,207	\$57,357	+607	+14.4%	+172	+3.7%
Professional & Technical Services	647	3,906	2.3%	\$222,702	\$57,015	+173	+4.6%	+229	+6.2%
Information	122	2,130	1.3%	\$112,985	\$53,045	-220	-9.4%	-157	-6.9%
Utilities	25	1,913	1.1%	\$195,629	\$102,263	-194	-9.2%	-97	-4.8%
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	196	1,889	1.1%	\$26,054	\$13,792	-55	-2.8%	+116	+6.5%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & Hunt	173	1,835	1.1%	\$61,435	\$33,480	+188	+11.4%	-22	-1.2%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	322	1,431	0.8%	\$42,356	\$29,599	+51	+3.7%	-33	-2.3%
Management of Companies	41	1,237	0.7%	\$87,352	\$70,616	+128	+11.5%	+7	+0.6%
Mining	14	244	0.1%	\$14,922	\$61,155	+44	+22.0%	+15	+6.6%

Source: DEED Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages (QCEW)

REGIONAL OVERVIEW



DISTINGUISHING INDUSTRIES

Region 7W stands out in the state for its higher share of employment in manufacturing, with specialties, including furniture and related product manufacturing and nonmetallic mineral product manufacturing,

as well as transportation equipment manufacturing, fabricated metal product manufacturing, and textile product mills. Located in the center of the state, the region also has strengths in heavy and civil engineering construction, truck transportation, and motor vehicle and parts dealers (see Table 15).

Table 15. Region 7W Distinguishing Industries, 2016

NAICS Industry Title	NAICS Code	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Total Payroll	Avg. Annual Wages	Location Quotient
Total, All Industries	0	9,891	170,160	\$7,234,448,305	\$42,516	1.0
Furniture & Related Product Manufacturing	337	65	2,113	\$95,048,975	\$44,980	3.7
Nonmetallic Mineral Product Manufacturing	327	45	1,734	\$89,800,669	\$51,688	2.8
Textile Product Mills	314	16	423	\$16,916,236	\$40,040	2.7
Transportation Equipment Manufacturing	336	20	1,753	\$91,966,834	\$52,468	2.6
Beverage & Tobacco Product Manufacturing	312	9	570	\$29,305,782	\$51,428	2.6
Heavy & Civil Engineering Construction	237	105	3,157	\$272,790,683	\$89,908	2.3
Utilities	221	25	1,913	\$195,629,472	\$102,284	2.3
Truck Transportation	484	265	3,058	\$159,093,678	\$51,948	1.9
Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing	332	177	4,492	\$260,217,374	\$57,928	1.8
Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers	441	207	3,690	\$158,236,963	\$42,848	1.8

Source: DEED Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages (QCEW)

INDUSTRY PROJECTIONS

As noted above, the Central Minnesota planning area is projected to grow 7.7 percent from 2014 to 2024, a gain of 23,338 new jobs, making it the fastest growing region of the state. The largest and fastest growing industry is expected to be healthcare and social assistance, which may account for nearly 45 percent of total projected growth in the region. Central Minnesota is also expected to see significant job growth in construction, retail trade, accommodation and food services, and administrative support, with growth spread across 17 of the 21 sectors. In contrast, the region is expected to see declines in agriculture, manufacturing, and educational services (see Table 16).

Table 16. Central Minnesota Industry Projections, 2014-2024

Industry	Estimated Employment 2014	Projected Employment 2024	Percent Change 2014-2024	Numeric Change 2014-2024
Total, All Industries	302,055	325,393	+7.7%	+23,338
Health Care & Social Assistance	44,510	54,997	+23.5%	+10,487
Public Administration	42,845	43,330	+1.1%	+485
Manufacturing	40,606	40,278	-0.8%	-328
Retail Trade	34,974	37,382	+6.8%	+2,408
Self-Employed & Family Workers	26,730	26,915	+0.6%	+185
Accommodation & Food Services	20,886	22,484	+7.6%	+1,598
Construction	15,214	18,007	+18.3%	+2,793
Other Services	12,075	12,620	+4.5%	+545
Admin. Supp. & Waste Mgmt Svcs.	10,401	11,909	+14.4%	+1,508
Wholesale Trade	10,324	11,421	+10.6%	+1,097
Transportation & Warehousing	8,368	9,211	+10.0%	+843
Finance & Insurance	6,740	7,178	+6.4%	+438
Professional & Technical Services	5,913	6,641	+12.3%	+728
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	5,676	5,936	+4.5%	+260
Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & Hunt	4,594	4,187	-8.8%	-407
Information	2,992	3,109	+3.9%	+117
Educational Services	2,915	2,866	-1.6%	-49
Utilities	2,396	2,707	+12.9%	+311
Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	2,112	2,341	+10.8%	+229
Management of Companies	1,505	1,625	+7.9%	+120
Mining	279	249	-10.7%	-30

Source: DEED 2014-2024 Employment Outlook

REGIONAL OVERVIEW



EMPLOYERS BY SIZE CLASS

The vast majority of businesses in Region 7W are small businesses, with 54.8 percent of businesses reporting one to four employees in 2015, according to County Business Patterns from the U.S. Census Bureau. Another 31 percent had between five and 19 employees, and 12 percent had between 20 and 99 employees. Only 2.3 percent had 100 to 499 employees, compared to 2.7 percent of businesses in the state. Just 25 businesses in the region had more than 500 employees, which is the Small Business Administration’s official cut off for a “small business.” Obviously, then, small businesses are vital to the region’s economy (see Table 17).

Table 17. Employers by Size Class, 2015

Number of Employees	Region 7W		Minnesota
	Number of Firms	Percent of Firms	Percent of Firms
1-4	5,754	54.8%	53.7%
5-9	1,870	17.8%	17.7%
10-19	1,382	13.2%	13.3%
20-49	957	9.1%	9.3%
50-99	303	2.9%	3.2%
100-249	171	1.6%	1.9%
250-499	45	0.4%	0.5%
500 or more	25	0.2%	0.3%
Total Firms	10,507	100.0%	100.0%

Source: [U.S. Census, County Business Patterns](#)

NONEMPLOYER ESTABLISHMENTS

Before growing, the basic building block of most small businesses is a self-employed business. Region 7E was home to 29,179 self-employed businesses or “nonemployers” in 2015, which are defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as “businesses without paid employees that are subject to federal income tax, originating from tax return information of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).” Like covered employment, Region 7W enjoyed a huge increase in nonemployers over the past decade, responding to economic changes. In sum, the region gained 1,485 new nonemployers from 2005 to 2015, a 5.4 percent increase. The largest amount of nonemployers was in Stearns County, while Wright County saw a faster increase in self-employment than the state. These nonemployers generated sales receipts of \$1.3 billion in 2015 (see Table 18).

Table 18. Nonemployer Statistics, 2015

	2015		2005-2015	
	Number of Firms	Receipts (\$1,000s)	Change in Firms	Percent Change
Region 7W	29,179	\$1,316,701	+1,485	+5.4%
Benton Co.	2,554	\$114,661	-49	-1.9%
Sherburne Co.	6,526	\$279,708	+363	+5.9%
Stearns Co.	10,356	\$513,109	+562	+5.7%
Wright Co.	9,743	\$409,223	+609	+6.7%
State of Minnesota	397,378	\$18,435,244	+23,959	+6.4%

Source: [U.S. Census, Nonemployer Statistics program](#)

CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

Finally, one other important industry in Region 7W is agriculture, with 6,377 farms producing nearly \$1.3 billion in the market value of products sold in 2012, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Region 7W had 8.6 percent of the state's farms, and 6.1 percent of the state's total market value, led by Stearns County, which ranked first out of 87 counties in the state for the market value of products sold. On a much smaller scale, Wright, Benton, and Sherburne ranked 49th, 54th, and 62nd, respectively. Despite seeing a decline in the number of farms, the region saw a 54.3 percent increase in the market value of products sold from 2007 to 2012 as many farms got bigger and commodity prices went up (see Table 19).

Table 19. Census of Agriculture, 2012			<i>State Rank</i>	<i>Change in Market Value, 2007-2012</i>
	<i>Number of Farms</i>	<i>Market Value of Products Sold</i>		
Region 7W	6,377	\$1,292,036,000		+54.3%
Benton Co.	958	\$167,502,000	54	+47.1%
Sherburne Co.	455	\$88,512,000	62	+28.4%
Stearns Co.	3,501	\$808,498,000	1	+55.7%
Wright Co.	1,463	\$227,524,000	49	+62.4%
State of Minnesota	74,542	\$21,280,184,000		+61.5%

Source: [2012 Census of Agriculture](#)

SIGNIFICANT INDUSTRY TRANSITIONS

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy in Central Minnesota

SHERBURNE COUNTY GENERATING STATION (SHERCO)

For the current CEDS planning period (2017-2021), one of the most significant economic transitions or impacts for the 7W region will occur in the coming decade. The Sherburne County Generating Station, also known as Sherco, is a significant coal-fired power plant in Becker, Minnesota (Sherburne County). Its three units have a combined capacity of 2,400 megawatts, making it the largest power plant in the Midwest, and 16th largest in the nation.

On October 2, 2015, Xcel Energy filed plans with the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission to shut down the plant's Unit 2 in 2023 and Unit 1 in 2026. Generating capacity will be partly replaced with a new natural gas-fired power plant and partly through renewable energy investments. Regulators approved the plan in October 2016.

The Sherco facility employs over 300 workers in “high pay, high demand” jobs, but the reconfiguration to convert to natural gas will result in a reduction of nearly 200 positions. Additionally, a recent analysis by the University of Minnesota Extension Office indicates that for every 100 electric power generation jobs, an additional 227 indirect and induced jobs are created. Of equal significance, the coal plant represents 75 percent of the tax base in Becker, and 15 percent for the entire county. Local leaders are eager to use the transition period to diversify the tax base and create or retain jobs in new or related sectors.

Substantial investments by local government and philanthropic partners have already been made to assess feasibility of transportation and related infrastructure investments to support the attraction or expansion of businesses in the Becker Industrial Park (located adjacent to Sherco) as a mitigation for the job and tax losses associated with the transitions at the power plant. Leaders of these projects are eager to partner with the Economic Development Administration to quickly mature these efforts to the implementation stage.

VERSO PAPER MILL

The Verso Paper Mill site was a fixture in Sartell for more than a century, dating back to the Watab Pulp and Paper Company in 1905. This longstanding operation came to an end when an explosion and fire on Memorial Day in 2012 damaged the facilities beyond repair, an event that is well-remembered across the state of Minnesota due to the regional and statewide economic impact—it was more than just job loss and tax base removal—the forestry and timber industry took a hit as well.

The subsequent decision by Verso to forgo rebuilding the plant and to discontinue operations in Sartell resulted in a loss of 260 jobs—on top of 175 lost in layoffs six months before the explosion. The closure of the 750,000-square-foot paper facility also led to a loss of over \$1 million in property taxes for Sartell and Benton County and a loss of over \$150,000 a year in water, sewer, and utility revenues.

The site was sold to AIM Development LLC, which acquired it to salvage materials in 2013. All structures were demolished, except for two buildings. A preliminary environmental analysis revealed the possibility of contaminants, such as arsenic, cadmium. Removal and remediation may be required upon redevelopment and when a known project and development is identified.

A market analysis and redevelopment planning process was also required, which AIM postponed. The property contains 38 acres and is zoned Heavy Industrial along with 20 acres zoned Commercial/Light Industrial. The property also boasts approximately 1,500 feet of Mississippi River shoreline. There is an active BNSF rail line running through the middle of the property with a private spur. Within the 2016 Comprehensive Plan update, the City had designated the property as general industrial and commercial and was identified as a candidate for redevelopment based on the current environmental state, along with the present amount of concrete debris left on the site.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy in Central Minnesota

SWOT ANALYSIS

The CEDS process requires a SWOT Analysis to be conducted as part of the development of the five-year plan. Community meetings started with a SWOT Analysis to provide a baseline for local governments to work from when addressing these regional concerns. The purpose of the SWOT Analysis is not just to recognize areas of strength and where opportunities may lie, but also to rigorously examine and increase awareness of weaknesses and potential threats so proper preparation can take place.

SWOT stands for

Strengths: Internal factors that give our region, communities, and businesses an advantage over others.

Weaknesses: Internal factors that place our region, communities, and businesses at a disadvantage relative to others.

Opportunities: External factors that our region, communities, and businesses could capitalize on to our advantage.

Threats: External factors that could create challenges for our region, communities, and businesses.

Region 7W SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

- Transportation infrastructure/strong highway system
- Agriculture
- Natural resources
- Great recreational opportunities
- Educational (higher ed) facilities
- Strong school system
- Access to quality, local medical facilities
- Location between St. Cloud and metro
- Safe place to live

WEAKNESSES

- Broadband – underserved in rural areas
- Housing – lack of affordable housing
- Wage competition with the metro (higher near metro)
- Location – a lot of people commute for work out of region
- Lack of entertainment/amenities
- Retention of post-secondary students
- Aging population for workforce

OPPORTUNITIES

- Retaining population of youth
- Post-secondary education
- Work-based learning opportunities
- Increase collaboration between public-private partnerships (education)
- On-the-job training
- Develop partnership with local business and education
- Rapidly growing immigrant communities
- Matching up of labor force and business
- Growth in small business development

THREATS

- Small businesses getting run out by larger corporations
- Higher wages near metro
- Aging population/workforce
- Labor shortage
- Labor exportation
- Perception of the region
- Federal government uncertainty
- Aging infrastructure
- Brain drain

STRATEGIC DIRECTION / ACTION PLAN

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy in Central Minnesota

MADO and DevelopMN

The DevelopMN Plan is the result of a collaborative effort of the ten Economic Development Districts that make up the Minnesota Association of Development Organizations (MADO). DevelopMN was completed in 2016. It was developed to align strategic economic development efforts throughout Greater Minnesota, and leverage resources at all levels for a greater overall development impact. DevelopMN identified four cornerstones for strong regions and communities that are a template for the organization of the Minnesota CEDS: human capital, economic competitiveness, community resources, and foundational assets.

Human Capital

Developing, retaining, and attracting talent are critical for Central Minnesota to sustain and grow rural businesses and communities. Tracking the characteristics of the labor force and the needs of employers, and creating strategies for alignment between the two, are the foundation for this cornerstone.

Economic Competitiveness

Making Central Minnesota an attractive environment for growth is critical to creating jobs, improving living standards, and financing necessary public services. Economic competitiveness requires communities to develop and link all available assets to support innovation and encourage business growth.

Community Resources

Central Minnesota communities seek to maintain rural values, their heritage, and the assets that support them. Community resources include topics that balance the preservation and improvement of local social, cultural, and natural assets that are critical for the future.

Fundational Assets

Central Minnesota communities require proactive and collaborative approaches/strategies to address infrastructure needs in a cost-effective manner. Managing the access to and maintenance, replacement, and growth of these assets are key to preserving and maintaining communities and provide for growth opportunities. Foundational assets include above-ground and below-ground infrastructure such as transportation, utilities, and water.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION / ACTION PLAN

CEDS

HUMAN CAPITAL

Developing, retaining, and attracting talent is critical for Region 7W to sustain and grow businesses and communities. Tracking the characteristics of the labor force and the needs of employers and creating strategies for alignment between the two, are the foundation for this cornerstone.

Labor Force Context

As Region 7W looks to grow its economy, it is confronted with the challenge of meeting the hiring and skill needs of employers. Region 7W has a higher labor force participation rate in almost every age group at 73.5 percent compared to the state's 70.1 percent labor participation rate. Region 7W's labor force will see a significant shift over time, with a steady gain in the number of workers aged 20 to 44 years and big gains in workers aged 55 years and over, against a huge decline in the number of workers aged 45 to 54 years. The Central Minnesota planning area is projected to grow 7.7 percent from 2014 to 2024, a gain of over 23,300 new jobs. The region may lose about 6,000 workers in the 45- to 54-year-old age group as baby boomers retire and leave the workforce.

Labor Force Goal

Uphold a high labor force participation rate and maintain a low unemployment rate.

Labor Force Objectives

- Embrace diverse populations (e.g., aging, youth, people of color, previously incarcerated, people with disabilities, etc.) through targeted workforce programs.
- Increase employment access and retention by connecting potential employees to the existing employment and workforce support networks.
- Design industry-led certification training programs, credit-based apprenticeships, internships, and on-the-job training to train existing and future workers for a more competitive economic environment.
- Conduct collaborative planning activities with regional partners to promote alignment of economic and workforce development goals, including encouraging post-secondary education and skills training to support high-growth and high-wage jobs.

- Pursue funding opportunities with workforce partners to expand the availability of training programs for targeted industries and occupations.
- Make labor market information more accessible to school districts and higher education institutions so students can make informed career choices.
- Develop a program for experienced workers to mentor the emerging workforce.
- Encourage seasoned workers to remain in the workforce.

Educational Attainment Context

With 35 percent of adults aged 18 years and over having a college degree, Region 7W has lower educational attainment than the state, where 40.5 percent of adults have an associate, bachelor's, or advanced degree. In Region 7W, 11.8 percent of adults have an associate degree, which out-paces the state (10.0 percent); 29.1 percent have some college experience but no degree, compared to 24.8 percent statewide.

Educational Attainment Goal

Increase the number of residents (ages 18-64) who have completed post-secondary education or training with a particular focus on certificates, technical degrees, and apprenticeships relevant to employment in skilled, living-wage occupations.

Educational Attainment Objectives

- Develop K-12 and post-secondary apprenticeships, internships, entrepreneurship opportunities, and mentorship programs.
- Support "brain gain" programs to recruit and retain workers ages 25-54.
- Increase the awareness among students, parents, and educators about the requirements for future employment opportunities specific to the region.
- Market career opportunities in the region and share information about in-demand careers with students, parents, and educators.
- Align education and workforce systems to meet current and future skill needs of employers.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION / ACTION PLAN

CEDS

- Educate employers on the potential of the untapped workforce (e.g., underserved and diverse populations).
- Work to eliminate disparities in educational attainment.
- Expand access to post-secondary education opportunities in the region by establishing secondary education satellite facilities available for use by area universities and community colleges.

ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

Making Region 7W an attractive environment for growth is critical to creating jobs, improving living standards, and financing necessary public services. Economic competitiveness requires communities to develop and link all available assets to support innovation and encourage business growth.

Business Growth Context

The vast majority of businesses in Region 7W are small businesses, with 54.2 percent of businesses reporting one to four employees in 2014, according to County Business Patterns from the U.S. Census Bureau. Just 24 businesses in the region had more than 500 employees, which is the Small Business Administration's official cut off for a "small business." This is an indication that small businesses are vital to the region's economy.

Business Growth Goal

Foster job creation and support the growth of new and existing businesses by providing capacity-building information, tools, and resources.

Business Growth Objectives

- Assist business startups and existing businesses in finding the services and support they require to create and maintain jobs.
- Coordinate public-private partnerships to facilitate small- and medium-sized business lending.
- Educate businesses on grant and funding opportunities available.
- Advocate to fully fund regional Small Business Development Centers at the state level.
- Develop and promote a regional marketing strategy with a clear and concise message to attract new businesses.
- Support startup and small businesses with training, market research, financial assistance, strategic planning, and other assistance.
- Implement business succession planning processes and seminars throughout the region.
- Campaign for competitively-priced, high-speed broadband infrastructure throughout the region to attract and retain businesses.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION / ACTION PLAN

CEDS

- Encourage communities to complete a business retention and expansion (BRE) program.
- Create networks of incubator, coworking, proof-of-concept, and maker spaces.
- Encourage and support immigrant businesses, startups, and expansions.
- Improve the region's competitiveness by assessing and leveraging industry clusters.

Entrepreneurship Context

Region 7W must embrace and encourage innovation and calculated risk-taking to foster entrepreneurship to compete effectively in the global economy. Self-starters, creative thinkers, and service-oriented entrepreneurs are a necessary part of the region's workforce.

Entrepreneurship Goal

Increase cross-sector initiatives to support entrepreneurship and innovation.

Entrepreneurship Objectives

- Create and promote programs, activities, and policies to foster innovation and community-wide support for entrepreneurship.
- Identify and grow angel and venture capital investments.
- Experiment with the concept of a startup package for new businesses.
- Develop local business mentorship programs.
- Work with immigrant entrepreneurs to connect them to existing resources.
- Educate entrepreneurs on grant and funding opportunities available.
- Expand K-12 business startup courses to support entrepreneurship (e.g., DECA, Junior Achievement, Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities (CEO) program).
- Create and enhance university/college and business cooperation in the areas of research and practical product and service application throughout the region.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Region 7W seeks to maintain rural values, heritage, and the assets that support them. Community resources include topics that balance the preservation and improvement of social, cultural, and natural assets that are critical for the future.

Arts and Culture Context

Minnesota's artists and creative workers have a large and growing impact on our state's economy. Through direct spending and their operations, creative businesses are a core part of the economic vitality of our state. The 2015 Creative Minnesota report illustrates that artistic spending by Minnesota's 104,148 full- and part-time artists and creative workers have a far reaching impact. Artists buy supplies, contract for services, and more. These actions support jobs, create income, and generate government revenue.

Arts and Culture Goal

Promote cultural amenities for the purpose of attracting economic investment and skilled workers to the region. Lead and serve individuals and organizations to help build environments in which the arts and arts-education thrive and contribute to more vibrant and creative communities.

Arts and Culture Objectives

- Communicate economic development impacts of arts with local leaders.
- Connect artists to mentoring and financing opportunities.
- Connect artists with resources they need to make a living and improve the quality of life.
- Integrate the arts in public infrastructure and space.
- Improve art education in school systems, including career opportunities in the arts.
- Engage artists in community planning and get them involved at the ground level.
- Create economic or job clusters based on creative businesses.
- Link creative businesses with non-artistic businesses.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION / ACTION PLAN

CEDS

- Use celebrations or festivals to highlight communities' cultural amenities.
- Implement arts-based placemaking to improve public spaces and enhance the vibrancy of our communities.

Tourism Context

Tourism is a source of economic vitality to the state of Minnesota and can provide an economic development alternative for communities. Increasing the economic benefits of tourism can play an important role in a community's economic development strategy.

Tourism Goal

Strengthen the local economy by attracting people from outside the region to increase visitor spending and increase consumer awareness of Region 7W.

Tourism Objectives

- Promote and market local community events, amenities, and assets to people outside of the geographic region.
- Develop and ensure consistent regional branding efforts that promote local businesses and locally made products.
- Strategically invest in tourism infrastructure and projects which also support economic competitiveness and quality of life in the region's communities, such as parks and trails.
- Collaborate with municipal, regional, and economic development partners to grow tourism.
- Develop career pathways in the tourism industry to attract and retain employees.
- Increase the number of overnight and same-day visitors.

Natural Resources Context

Region 7W has an abundance of natural resources, which provide critical habitat for wildlife, protect water quality, offer recreational opportunities, and serve as the foundation for the region's environmental well-being, economic prosperity, and quality of life. Protecting these important resources is a priority for the region. However, the region's natural resources

are under increasing pressure from population growth, development, and climate change.

Natural Resources Goal

To protect and preserve the environment, enhance the quality of life for current and future generations, and practice responsible management of natural resources.

Natural Resources Objectives

- Encourage community and regional planning that address all aspects of natural resource protection, preservation, and restoration.
- Develop and manage funding programs that provide financial and technical assistance to implement best management practices.
- Protect the region's natural resources through public outreach and education.
- Preserve and protect natural areas and open spaces to maintain and attract desired wildlife species and provide "non-developed green space" for community residents.
- Conserve natural amenities by incorporating these features into the local and regional development plan as open spaces, buffer areas, or other common areas.
- Support policies and procedures to mitigate invasive species threats and focus efforts on their reduction or elimination.
- Maintain existing park facilities while seeking opportunities to expand and enhance future facilities.
- Protect lakes, rivers, and wetlands from direct and indirect impacts of new and existing development and infrastructure.
- Seek sources of public and private funding for brownfield site assessment, cleanup, and redevelopment.
- Support educational programs on energy conservation and use of renewable energy resources through cooperation with other agencies and energy suppliers.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION / ACTION PLAN

CEDS

- Support the development of diverse, reliable, and cost-effective energy sources and systems to meet the region's economic and environmental goals.
- Increase the use of solar energy and other renewable energy resources in existing and new developments in the region.
- Work with stakeholders to protect and improve air quality.
- Continue to encourage composting, recycling, reduction, and reuse of solid waste as an alternative to landfilling.
- Support initiatives to retrofit or correct substandard stormwater management systems.
- Conserve water and promote bio-diversity and support pollinators through installation of native landscapes on public lands.

FOUNDATIONAL ASSETS

Region 7W communities require proactive and collaborative approaches/strategies to address infrastructure needs in a cost-effective manner. Managing the access to, maintenance, replacement, and growth of these assets are key to preserving and maintaining communities and providing for growth opportunities.

Broadband Context

Affordable high-speed internet is necessary to remain competitive in today's global economy. Many businesses and residents experience lack of access to reliable broadband at acceptable speeds and costs.

Broadband Goal

Connect local units of government, communities, and interested parties with technical assistance and resource providers to expand broadband internet within the region.

Broadband Objectives

- Advocate for broadband funding at both state and federal levels.
- Leverage state resources to increase broadband access.
- Promote an understanding of the importance of broadband to a community's infrastructure.
- Develop "Dig Once" programs and policies in communities.
- Expand broadband to unserved and underserved parts of the region.
- Partner with broadband providers to explore ways to assist with broadband infrastructure.
- Identify industries in need of high-speed internet connectivity in the next five years to plan infrastructure development.
- Ensure equitable broadband access for all students outside of school.
- Work with the private sector to promote the availability of high-speed broadband.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION / ACTION PLAN

CEDS

Transportation Context

Transit services in rural areas, small towns, and regional centers will be increasingly important for access to medical care, community services, and employment.

Transportation Goal

Develop and maintain a regional transportation system that supports economic productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness throughout the region.

Transportation Objectives

- Support regional transportation infrastructure to promote multi-model systems, improvements to outdated components, and enhanced connectivity among the growth centers in the region.
- Encourage state and local units of government to support and pursue options that increase the availability of transportation funding.
- Work to ensure that long-range public transit policy decisions in Central Minnesota address future demographic shifts and needs.
- Prioritize transportation projects that connect regional economic hubs.
- Design streets and highways that are safe and efficient to move vehicular traffic, accommodate transit, pedestrians, and bicyclists with minimal environmental impacts.
- Promote a public transit system where all providers work together to maximize resources.
- Maintain and reconstruct existing roadways and bridges in a manner that promotes safety, increases efficiency, minimizes life-time costs, and preserves transportation corridors.
- Develop and expand transportation facilities to accommodate freight movement and meet the changing needs of the regional economy.
- Improve and expand facilities for air travel and transport.
- Preserve rail corridors and provide safe and convenient rail facilities and service to meet rail passenger and freight transportation needs for the region.
- Extend the Northstar Commuter Rail Corridor operations by identifying the region's needs.
- Work with state and local partners to coordinate efforts to develop and enhance regional bicycle and pedestrian systems.
- Address traffic congestion between and on I-94 and U.S. Highway 10 through state and regional efforts.
- Work with local highway coalitions on transportation initiatives.
- Collaborate with partners to secure funding for an additional Mississippi River crossing connecting Interstate 94 to the Highway 10 Corridor.

Housing Context

Housing issues in Region 7W vary significantly by community. Identifying where and how to prioritize limited resources to address housing is important to meet the needs of all residents.

Housing Goal

Create housing options that give people in all life stages and of all economic means viable choices for safe, stable, and affordable homes.

Housing Objectives

- Advocate for funding the demolition of vacant, unsafe, and dilapidated housing units.
- Rehabilitate and preserve the existing housing stock while prioritizing poverty-stricken neighborhoods and disinvested areas.
- Establish partnerships with private sector, nonprofit, government, and neighborhood entities to access public funding and attract private capital for affordable housing development.
- Work with local organizations to provide financial planning for home ownership.
- Advocate for dollars to fund local housing studies.
- Encourage development of housing for seniors and persons with disabilities.
- Integrate economic development and job creation with workforce housing development, including housing within walking distance of job growth locations.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION / ACTION PLAN

CEDS

Water Quality/Wastewater Infrastructure Context

The financial burdens of maintaining aging infrastructure is overwhelming cities and residents. Local units of government will need to be innovative in paying for and addressing on-going infrastructure maintenance.

Water Quality/Wastewater Infrastructure Goal

Improve water quality by ensuring the region's groundwater and surface water supplies are protected from depletion and degradation by reducing the number of impaired waters and endangered ecosystems.

Water Quality/Wastewater Infrastructure Objectives

- Work with partners to implement water quality restoration and protection projects to improve impaired water resources.
 - Provide communities with a sufficient supply of safe drinking water, meeting all regulatory requirements, in a cost-efficient manner.
 - Provide technical assistance and education to residents, municipalities, watershed management groups, and other entities to protect and restore water resources.
 - Encourage cities to obtain technical assistance in the early stages of infrastructure development.
 - Encourage regionalization to reduce operation and maintenance costs.
 - Work with communities to apply for grants that support water quality.
 - Assist communities to review rate structures for water and sewer services.
 - Encourage cities to develop capital improvement plans that are aligned with comprehensive plans and land-use ordinances.
 - Support designing and building sustainable infrastructure to collect and manage stormwater runoff from streets, sidewalks, parking lots, and rooftops to prevent runoff from entering the communities' sanitary sewer systems.
- Promote stormwater management techniques that minimize surface water runoff in public and private developments.
 - Advocate for the cleanup of contaminated sites with the potential to significantly impact groundwater resources.
 - Support efforts to obtain federal, state, and regional funding to upgrade and maintain aging infrastructure (e.g., water, sewer, drainage facilities) while supporting the expansion of infrastructure to underserved areas.
 - Support inter-governmental studies and/or demonstration projects to identify areas for improved water and sewer system efficiency and performance.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy in Central Minnesota

To evaluate the progress of the CEDS, CMJTS staff will meet frequently with stakeholders in the region to assess the goals and objectives that have been developed. As the Economic Development Administration CEDS guidelines indicate, performance measures are an important tool that will allow the region to measure progress in implementing the CEDS and the impact on the regional economy over time. The primary purpose of our CEDS is to align public and private entities around a common vision for Region 7W.

CMJTS' performance measures are intended to evaluate the organization's independent and collaborative contributions on the regional economy through the implementation of the CEDS. The two questions that should be asked regularly include: How are we doing? What could we be doing better? As annual performance reports are prepared, each cornerstone will be evaluated. The analysis and review will take into account traditional EDA performance measures, such as jobs and tax base, as well as additional investment for specific projects and other assets leveraged.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON 7W CEDS PLAN

CEDS

The required public comment period occurred from September 1, 2017, to September 30, 2017. Documentation of public comments and verification of adoption is located in the Appendix.

CMJTS provided a link to the Region 7W Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) plan on its website at: www.cmjts.org, for the 30-day comment period and a press release

announcing the public comment period to regional newspapers. Paper copies and electronic copies of the EDR 7W CEDS plan were also available at the CMJTS office and by mail, when requested.

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