

Moving Ahead

**RC&D – Now & in the Future**

## **Strategic Plan**



2012- 2014

**Northeast Nebraska Resource Conservation & Development Council Inc.**

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# Executive Summary

Since 1993, the Northeast Nebraska Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Council Inc. has worked to substantially and meaningfully improve people's lives. Over the past eighteen years this RC&D Council has grown into an organization valued by the citizens of their six-county region. The RC&D has become a "go-to" resource, a helper to those who have no other entity to turn to for assistance, and a doer of programs desired by those who live here.

The RC&D Council has been a leader in providing sustainable assistance to communities and organizations in need. As the region has evolved, so have the RC&D's efforts to improve the lives of people by seeking out and providing resources to meet their needs. Focused on the goal – connecting people to resources – is strengthening the communities where we live and work.

We do this by:

**Offering basic support** designed to improve education in communities throughout the region, including supporting farmer training programs, local food systems, enriching the understanding of natural resources protection, and supporting tourism-related efforts

**Meeting critical needs in communities** by helping with things such as access to clean water, recycling, grant writing and administration and various other local needs

With the sudden loss of the federal government's support of the program in April of 2012, the RC&D Council took a step backwards, but only temporarily. That loss in federal funding removed their full-time Coordinator, funding to pay for a part-time program assistant, office rent, supplies, equipment and a vehicle. After the shock wore off, the Council picked themselves up and decided that because their work was indeed valuable they had to move on and find ways to continue.

This plan outlines efforts to be taken to secure basic support and future funding streams in order to provide the assistance citizens are requesting. The priorities identified define the steps needed for the RC&D Council to reach sustainability to ensure a strong organization that serves the communities and Native American tribes in the counties of Antelope, Cedar, Dixon, Knox, Pierce and Wayne.

We are committed to improving the quality of life in our communities for the citizens who live and work in the region.

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## Overview of the Area

Northeast Nebraska, in general, is a well-kept secret in the state. This area is blessed with scenic vistas, rivers and streams, abundant wildlife, a wonderful variety of natural resources, and people with rich diverse cultural backgrounds. The six-county area served by the RC&D encompasses 2,701,464 acres which include 28,023 acres of water and almost 155 miles of Missouri River shoreline.

Populations of the rural communities continue to decline, but there are on-going efforts to tell people about the excellent quality of life available in small towns. Some families are moving back which is encouraging, but still more high-paying jobs are needed to lure them. Wayne, the largest town in the RC&D region, is an exception-to-the-rule because they have jobs, but few workers to fill them. Having fewer people living in the area shows up in many ways – fewer local businesses can be supported, school consolidation issues continue, and regionalization of services is happening more often.

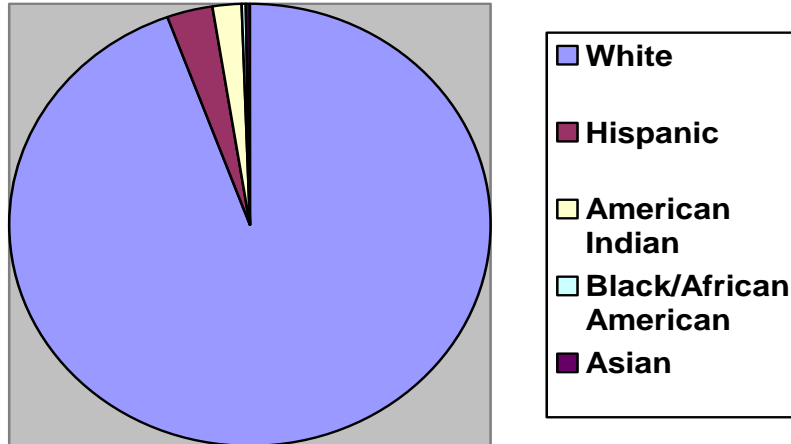
The RC&D area's economy is driven by a variety of agriculture ventures including irrigated and dryland row crop farming; livestock production includes beef cattle, dairy, hogs, turkeys, and laying chickens; ethanol and distillers grain; several organic operations; fruit for the wine industry; and some local vegetable growing operations for farmers' markets. Grain storage and marketing facilities can be found throughout the region along with chemical and seed dealer businesses and equipment sales. Many smaller spinoff businesses exist to serve farmers and ranchers.

During the current recession the agriculture sector has been the most successful of any industry. Land prices are at record highs and commodities have soared in value. With that however, input costs have gone up considerably. The total number of farms and ranches has declined while the size of existing operations continues to grow. Young farmers and ranchers whose net worth is often quite low, have a difficult time entering the business unless there are family members willing to help them. It's imperative that more of them become engaged in farming in an effort to not only continue to provide the food so desperately needed to feed the world, but to also maintain small rural communities.



## Demographics

The area is quite homogeneous with 94.4 % of the population being of White descent, 3.03% are of Hispanic background, 1.98% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.31% Black or African American, and 0.29% Asian. (Census Date 2000)



## Socioeconomic Information

A large portion of the local population is being served with aid programs such as free-and-reduced school lunches, Medicaid, Women Infants & Children (WIC), commodity programs, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). According to an article in the New York Times from June 2009, five of the six counties in the RC&D area saw an increase in the use of SNAP with Cedar County having a 122% rise. Medicare recipients in the region are growing as well.

Due to the current recession many in their late 50's and early-mid 60's are retiring - some voluntarily, but with encouragement from their employer who are facing ever tightening budgets. Will they want to go back to work, where will they find work, will it take away jobs of younger workers, will they become new entrepreneurs, etc.? These young retirees possess many desirable skills and an energy level still needed in the

## Strengths of the Organization

- Dedicated volunteers on the board of directors
- An excellent paid part-time program assistant
- A network of community leaders in the region
- Passion for the work of the organization
- Strong partnerships
- 501(c)(3) status
- A history of "getting things done"
- Grassroots local control



## Where we're Headed

The RC&D Council is, at this point, in a compromised position financially. Future development is uncertain. Current funds are adequate to maintain the organization for approximately two years. In-kind donations of rent, utilities and furniture have been excellent, however, the need exists to develop a basic level of support to sustain current staffing and facility operation. Additional dollars will be needed from grant funds and partner contributions to continue projects and fortify operating dollars. With this plan the Council has outlined how they will get to a fully-funded and sustainable level by 2014.

## Goals, Objectives & Strategies

<b>Goal 1:</b>	<b>Improve the economic condition and participation in RC&amp;D Council programs to attain a level of sustainability</b>	
<i>Objective A</i>	<i>Promote Council programs and expand name recognition throughout six counties</i>	
Strategies	♦Create a presentation outlining successes and strengths of the RC&D Council to inform and educate the public	3/1/2012
	♦Secure commitment from at least six RC&D Board Members willing to do local presentations for the purpose of gaining awareness and soliciting financial contributions	3/1/2012
	♦Provide training to Council members on how to generate support and share accomplishments of the RC&D program	4/1/2012
<i>Objective B</i>	<i>Strengthen the Council's ability to serve their citizens by securing annual basic support funds by July 2013</i>	
	♦Develop a document outlining various support levels for use with prospective donors	3/1/2012
	♦Identify needed office furniture, equipment, and programming needs, determine their costs, and develop a program of giving for those items	4/1/2012
	♦Secure cash, pledges, and grants in the amount of \$32,000 to meet the annual operating budget	7/1/2012
	♦Verify with the landlord the opportunity to purchase or pay rent on the office facility	9/1/2012
<b>Goal 2:</b>	<b>Provide support to recycling programs that help protect the environment and conserve natural resources</b>	
<i>Objective A</i>	<i>Partner with existing recyclers to strengthen area recycling programs</i>	
Strategies	♦Host weekly electronics recycling services at the RC&D office during one month in 2012	8/1/2012
	♦Work with at least 2 local recyclers to develop outreach materials on the convenient and affordable services currently available to citizens	7/1/2013
	♦Partner with the Lower Elkhorn NRD and the City of Norfolk to offer household hazardous waste disposal to citizens of the region	9/1/2014

<b>Goal 3:</b>	<b>Provide hands-on opportunities for students and others to experience and explore natural resource and rural development issues</b>	
<i>Objective A</i>	<i>Work closely with local youth leadership groups including FFA, FBLA and others to assist with youth development projects</i>	
Strategies	♦Partner with Plainview FFA on one electronics recycling event	9/1/2012
	♦Co-host with the Osmond FBLA one disposal event	5/1/2014
<i>Objective B</i>	<i>Offer, in conjunction with Nebraska Game &amp; Parks Commission and other entities, activities designed to learn about the environment</i>	
Strategies	♦Host a nature walk or tour annually	September annually
	♦Partner with the Northeast Nebraska Weed Management Area on at least one educational day on noxious and invasive weeds annually	September annually
	♦Share information about the Grassland Evaluation project	12/1/2012
<i>Objective C</i>	<i>Partner with existing efforts supporting the growth and consumption of local foods</i>	
Strategies	♦Co-host a Grassfed Exchange seminar	October annually
	♦Assist the Farm-to-School program, Santee Sioux Nation, Ponca Tribe of Nebraska and other initiatives in supporting the healthful benefits and increased economic stimulation from using locally grown foods	9/1/2013
	♦Continue the Organic Farming Statewide project by hosting at least 2 workshops and providing grant administration	12/1/2012
<i>Objective D</i>	<i>Provide technical assistance to at least 2 organizations' efforts to increase tourism and recreational development</i>	
Strategies	♦Assist the Outlaw Trail Scenic Byway in seeking grant funds for the interpretive development of the Outlaw Trail Center	12/1/2012
	♦Partner with the Northeast Nebraska Travel Council to share information about local attractions through brochure distribution	March annually

Approved by the Northeast Nebraska RC&D Council Dennis G. Wacker Date February 27, 2012

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