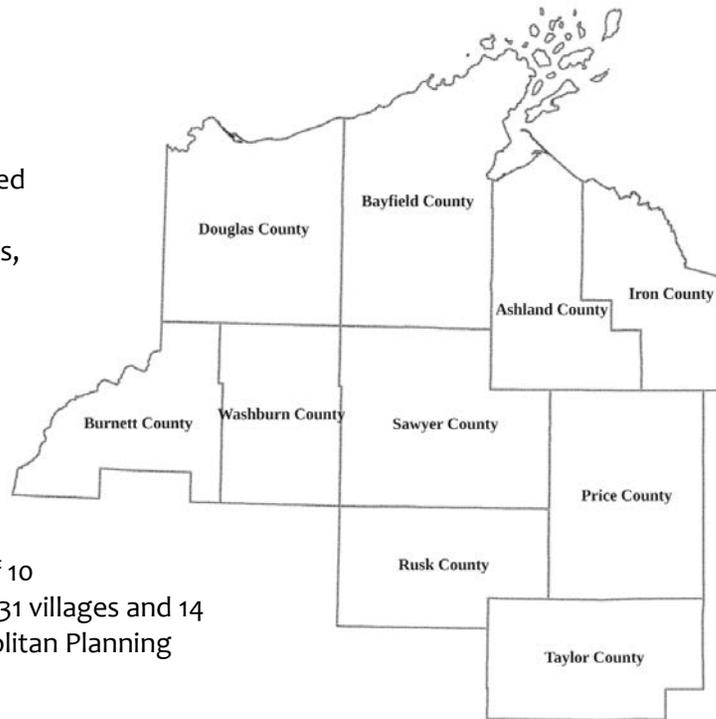


## Introduction

The Northwest Wisconsin Region has long been noted for its raw wilderness and outstanding scenic resources. Numerous lakes, impressive timber stands, spectacular waterfalls, rushing streams, rugged topography and abundant fish and game make the area highly appealing to its residents and contribute to its reputation as a premier tourism and outdoor recreation destination. The region has a combined area of 10,927 square miles and a population of 178,774. It consists of a mix of governmental units forming a complex matrix of overlapping and adjoining jurisdictional boundaries comprised of 10 counties, 230 units of local government (185 townships, 31 villages and 14 cities) 5 tribal units of government and one Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).



## Brief History of the Region

The region's recorded history is among the oldest in the state. Native Americans have lived in northern Wisconsin ever since the end of the last Ice Age, over 10,000 years ago. The Chippewa Indians migrated to northern Wisconsin from the Sault Ste. Marie area and regions even further east. In 1659, two fur traders from the newly established French settlement in what is now Canada became the first Europeans to reach the Chequamegon Bay Region. Soon after, the fur trade in northern Wisconsin was in full swing. For the most part, the Chippewa and the French developed a reasonable working relationship. The French fur traders dominated the region until about 1763 when it became part of the British colonial territory. For the Native Americans, life changed drastically after British control was passed to the United States in 1815. The Americans were not only interested in fur trading on the land; they also wanted to purchase the land and control its natural resources. The Native Americans believed that the land belonged to the Great Spirit so the concept of ownership was completely new to them. In signing treaties with the United States government, they believed they were only giving up rights to the minerals and timber; however, they were actually signing away their rights to live on their own land. After a removal order was issued by the U.S. government demanding the Native Americans depart from the region for Minnesota, a delegation of Native Americans traveled to Washington D.C. Leading the delegation was white trader, Benjamin Armstrong, with a petition signed by

white traders that supported letting the Chippewa stay in Northern Wisconsin. President Filmore agreed to meet with them resulting in a decision to rescind the removal order and establish the reservations of Red Cliff, Bad River, and Lac Courte Oreilles allowing the Chippewa to stay in the region.

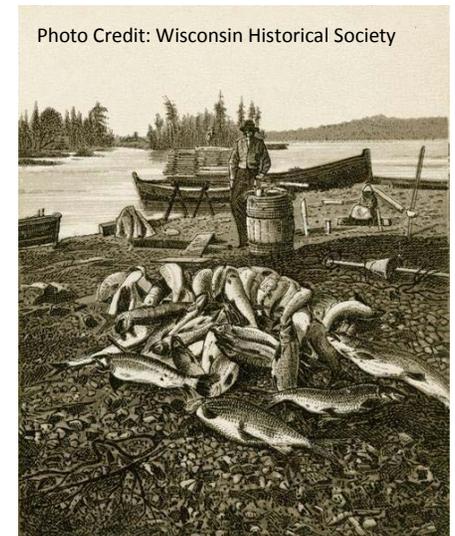
## **Industry**

### ***Fur Trading***

For hundreds of years, fur trading and trapping led the industry in the Northwest Region of Wisconsin. Furs from the north were considered among the best anywhere because the animals developed thick, lush coats that protected them from the region's long, harsh winters. Beaver pelts were in particularly high demand since their silky underhairs were ideal for making the tall top hats that had become the rage of European fashion. The North West Company, formed in about 1779, started to dominate trade in the Chequamegon region after the eastern United States became settled and the habitat for fur bearing animals was destroyed. This caused trade in the western Lake Superior region to become increasingly important. By 1830, the fur trade market had changed considerably. Beaver was no longer in high fashion demand and raccoon, muskrat, mink and fox had become more popular. By the 1840s, furs were less in demand and local fur trading companies began to cease field operations.

### ***Commercial Fishing***

Along with fur trading, commercial fishing on Lake Superior began to grow in the early 1800s. The resource was developed as immigrant fisherman from Scandinavian countries began to settle along the Lake Superior shore. A big boost for fishing came with the construction of railroads, which improved the means of getting fish to market. By 1896, there were 160 workers in the industry and 7,880,200 pounds of Lake Superior fish were sold. Herring became a species of prime economic importance in the early 1900s and remained the foundation of the industry until the late 1950s. While the commercial fishing industry has undergone many changes and experienced many economic struggles over the years, there remains a few family-owned operations working the waters along the south shore of Lake Superior.



## Mining

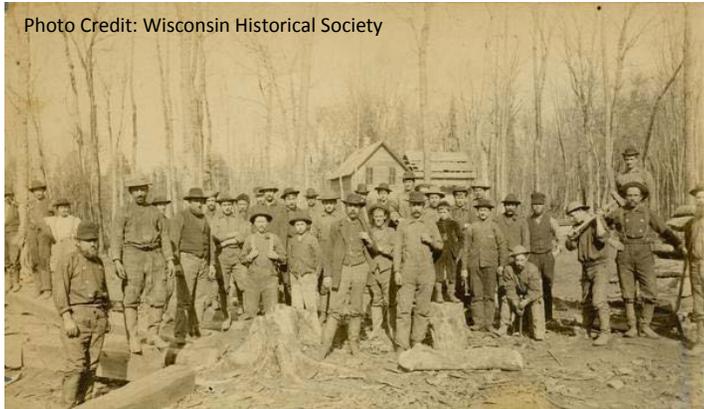


Photo Credit: Wisconsin Historical Society

When Chippewa tribal chiefs signed the treaty of 1842 at La Pointe, they gave up the mineral rights to their land and opened the region to the mining industry. It was thought by many that rich copper deposits were buried in the Lake Superior region. However, it was the discovery of iron ore that lured thousands of people to the region and opened a new era of development. By 1848, the Gogebic iron range of Michigan and Iron County, Wisconsin was discovered. Transporting the minerals went slowly at first. The construction of the canal and locks at Sault Ste. Marie joining Lake

Superior and Lake Huron in 1855, followed by railroad construction in the region allowed the industry to boom. In 1880, 353 people lived in Ashland County. By 1890, there were 9,956 people in the City of Ashland alone. The mining industry provided employment through the 1960s. Recently, there has been renewed interest in the iron resources of Gogebic Range.

Although iron ore was the main mineral extracted from the region, copper, gold and silver deposits have also been discovered. By the mid 1800's there was considerable exploration and mining at Copper Creek (Pattison State Park) and near the Amnicon River. Copper exploration and mining was also occurring near the Brule River and other parts of Douglas County. Early discoveries were promising and eventually led to widespread exploration. Following a decline in copper prices after the Civil War, mining efforts in Douglas County were abandoned. The remnants of these early mining ventures are still evident in the open pits, trenches, test holes and tunnels found scattered across the landscape today. More recently discovered in 1969, the Flambeau Deposit in Rusk County was mined between 1993 and 1997. During its four year operating life, the environmentally responsible Flambeau Mine produced 181,000 tons of copper, 334,000 ounces of gold and 3.3 million ounces of silver.

### **Logging**

In the late 1800s, towns began to form all across the Northwest Region. They were filled with adventurers, fortune-seekers, and ordinary working people who arrived to harvest the majestic white pines that towered over the land. Timber from the north was in high demand because of increasing development across the country. Building materials were needed for emerging metropolises such as Milwaukee and Chicago, and for the Great Plains region, which had virtually no timber supply of its own. Lumberjacks used little more than muscles and cross cut saws to harvest the wood. In 1899, Wisconsin led timber production for the nation with 3.5 billion board feet cut. Lumbering reached a peak in the 1880s and 1890s and by 1910, huge stumps and logging rubble littered most of the vast stretches of the north causing the loud roar of the logging era to become barely audible.

### **Immigration**

For the most part, immigrants arrived in northern Wisconsin from countries where their lives had been made harsh by poverty or political oppression. Primarily, the region was favored by Bohemians, Cornish, Croatians, Finnish, Hungarians, Italians, Norwegians, Polish, Russians, Slovaks, Swedish, and Swiss. Some communities were settled almost entirely by immigrants of a particular nationality. At times, particular characteristics of an area – the lay of the land or an abundance of lakes- attracted immigrants who were seeking natural features that were similar to their native lands. Because religion and ethnic identity were frequently entwined, it wasn't unusual for men of the cloth to get involved with attracting immigrants to an area as a means of developing a religious community.



## **Creation of the Northwest Regional Planning Commission**

Created in 1959 by local units of government in northwest Wisconsin, the Northwest Regional Planning Commission is the oldest planning commission in Wisconsin and one of the first multicounty planning commissions in the nation. The commission is a cooperative venture of Ashland, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Iron, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Taylor, and Washburn Counties and the tribal nations of Bad River, Red Cliff, Lac du Flambeau, Lac Courte Oreilles, and St. Croix. The region that NWRPC serves has a combined area of 10,927 square miles and a population of approximately 179,000. It consists of a mix of governmental units forming a complex matrix of overlapping and adjoining jurisdictional boundaries comprising 10 counties, 230 units of local government (185 towns, 31 villages, and 14 cities), five tribal units of government, and one metropolitan planning organization (MPO).

NWRPC is a nonprofit organization that is exclusively owned and operated by member communities through their elected representatives. Organizational guidance is provided by a 31-member commission and an 11-member executive board that represent member counties, communities, and tribal units of government. Membership in the commission is voluntary and has been continuous by all partnering jurisdictions. While we were created by member counties, our organizational structure allows us to operate outside the influence of the often-changing political landscape and to be as responsive as possible to the needs of citizens, businesses, and interest groups.

As authorized by state statute, the commission was formed through collective effort and investment on behalf of local units of government and tribal entities in northwest Wisconsin. Originally created for the purposes of research, studies, and the preparation of regional master plans, NWRPC's role has evolved to include a wide range of community and regional services focusing on economic, community, and business development, transportation, land use, and coastal and environmental resources.

## **Early Regional Planning Efforts**

The inaugural effort to develop a regional comprehensive plan began on April 20, 1962 when the commission entered into an agreement with the Wisconsin Department of Resource Development to prepare a general development plan for Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas, Iron and Price Counties. This early project was conducted under the auspices of Section 701 of the Housing Act of 1954, which provided funding for the development of plans in order to coordinate housing, transportation, infrastructure placement and capacity, along with early efforts at natural resource conservation. The 1962 regional plan, titled "Northwestern Wisconsin Regional Comprehensive Planning Program", was completed in the fall of 1964, and represented the first multi-county development plan created in Wisconsin. The technical report was completed in two parts, the first being an

analysis of the region's physical characteristics and the latter, a general development plan, regional strategy and implementation program.

The region's first comprehensive plan was developed on the basic premises of strengthening the region's economy, improving facilities and municipal services, making effective use of public and private investments in the region, community revitalization and protecting the region's natural and scenic resources. The early planning effort was surprisingly accurate in anticipating future trends, issues and concerns in the region. While the region has undeniably changed since the initial plan was developed, many of the philosophies, values and ideals regarding growth, development, recreation and economic development have remained constant.

### **Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Legislation**

In 1999, then Governor Tommy Thompson signed into law sweeping changes to Wisconsin's planning statutes which expanded the scope and significance of comprehensive planning in Wisconsin. The law created a framework for the preparation, adoption and implementation of municipal, county and regional comprehensive plans. The new legislation did not mandate planning, however consistency provisions in the law require that certain local ordinances and official mapping enacted or amended on or before January 1, 2010 must be consistent with the unit of government's comprehensive plan. Wisconsin's planning law requires a plan to address *at least* the following nine elements:

- Issues and Opportunities
- Housing
- Transportation
- Utilities and Community Facilities
- Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources
- Economic Development
- Intergovernmental Cooperation
- Land Use
- Implementation

The planning legislation also established fourteen planning goals that provide a vision for state and local land use and planning programs, policies, infrastructure, and investments. Wisconsin's planning law requires that all communities receiving planning grant (Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning Grant Program) funds to address each of these goals in their comprehensive plan.

1. Promotion of the redevelopment of lands with existing infrastructure and public services and the maintenance and rehabilitation of existing residential, commercial and industrial structures.

2. Encouragement of neighborhood designs that support a range of transportation choices.
3. Protection of natural areas, including wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, woodland, open spaces and groundwater resources.
4. Protection of economically productive areas, including farmland and forests.
5. Encouragement of land uses, densities and regulations that promote efficient development patterns and relatively low municipal, state government and utility costs.
6. Preservation of cultural, historical and archeological sites.
7. Encouragement of coordination and cooperation among nearby units of government.
8. Building of community identity by revitalizing main streets and enforcing design standards.
9. Providing an adequate supply of affordable housing for individuals of all income levels throughout each community.
10. Providing adequate infrastructure and public services and an adequate supply of developable land to meet existing and future market demand for residential, commercial and industrial uses.
11. Promoting the expansion or stabilization of the current economic base and the creation of a range of employment opportunities at the state, regional and local levels.
12. Balancing individual property rights with community interests and goals.
13. Planning and development of land uses that create or preserve varied and unique urban and rural communities.
14. Providing an integrated, efficient and economical transportation system that affords mobility, convenience and safety and that meets the needs of all citizens, including transit-dependent and disabled citizens.

At the time the law was created, the Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning Grant Program was established to provide cost-share funding for the development of county, municipal, tribal and regional comprehensive plans. The program was in effect from 2000 through 2010 and it provided financial assistance to 1,171 units of government across the state, including many counties and local units of government in northwest Wisconsin. This regional comprehensive plan was funded, in part, by a grant through the Wisconsin Planning Grant Program.

### **Regional Planning Framework**

Per state statutes, regional comprehensive plans are advisory in nature. County, municipal and local comprehensive plans facilitate the land use decision-making process across the region, whereas the Regional Plan serves as a guide and framework for local plan development or amendment. The Northwest Regional Comprehensive Plan is an important document as it attempts to align the common goals and themes of county and local comprehensive plans across the region. This document will serve as a source for regional information to aid local planning and project development efforts and provide a basis for future grant funding.

*Northwest Regional Comprehensive Plan – Introduction*

requests for projects across the region. This plan is also intended to a general policy framework to aid state and federal agencies in the exercise of their duties across the region.

### **Plan Development**

While funding for the Northwest Region Comprehensive Plan was secured in 2010, plan development didn't begin in earnest until 2011. During the plan development period, NWRPC staff met regularly with the Executive Board of the Planning Commission to discuss regional issues, concerns and planning activities. A formal public participation adopted by the Commission, identified the strategic public outreach and engagement protocols during plan development and adoption. Visioning aspects of plan development were conducted in conjunction with the "Visions Northwest" economic development group, which represents government, community and economic development interests in northwestern Wisconsin. The plan was completed in draft in late March of 2015 and released for public review in April of 2015. A public hearing on the draft plan was held on May XX, 2015 at the Northwest Regional Planning Commission office in Spooner.