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MOBILIZE MAINE:

Asset-Based Regional Economic Development



NADO
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS
RESEARCH FOUNDATION

In Partnership with the EDA Know Your Region Project



Maine is jumpstarting its economy through an innovative initiative called *Mobilize Maine*. Led by the state's Economic Development Districts, *Mobilize Maine* is a proactive approach to revitalizing the economy by drawing on regional assets. Michael Aube, President of the Eastern Maine Development Corporation, states, "*Mobilize Maine* changes the entire culture of how we approach economic development."

Source: Eastern Maine Development Corporation



U.S. Senator Susan Collins and members of the Mobilize Eastern Maine team during a visit to Eastern Maine Development Corporation to learn about the project.





Economic Development Districts (EDDs) are self-formed, multi-county regions designated and funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). They are responsible for conducting regional strategic planning by developing the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs), which is produced every five years and updated annually by EDDs. Through the CEDs, EDDs bring together regional partners around economic development planning, and identify regional goals and objectives and prioritize projects that may be eligible for financial assistance from EDA. EDDs also provide technical and other forms of assistance to their service areas.

EDDs are often administered by a regional development organization (RDO). The term RDO is used to describe multi-jurisdictional planning and development organizations that are governed primarily by local government-elected officials who are focused on strengthening local governments, communities and economies through regional solutions, partnerships and strategies. These public entities are often known locally as: councils of governments, area development districts, economic development districts, local development districts, planning and development districts, planning and development commissions, regional development commissions, regional planning commissions or regional councils.

For decades, Maine has faced challenges as its economy evolved from a resource-dependent industrial economy centered in rural areas into a high-skilled post-industrial economy centered in urban areas.¹ As manufacturing shifted overseas to global markets and new technology reduced demand for labor-intensive jobs, economic growth in rural areas slowed. The recent national economic downturn has only exacerbated this slowdown.

Mobilize Maine, a statewide initiative launched in 2009, is an asset-based approach to economic development centered on private sector engagement. Rather than working from the top down, *Mobilize Maine* takes a bottom-up approach to identifying assets. By the end of 2011, the state's seven Economic Development Districts (EDDs) will have entered the *Mobilize Maine* framework, bringing together business leaders, along with local government and community leaders, to identify assets and develop goals for each region.

The Northern Maine Development Commission (NMDC) and Eastern Maine Development Corporation (EMDC) were the first EDDs to implement the *Mobilize Maine* framework. Both organizations are designated and funded as EDDs by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). NMDC services Aroostook and Washington Counties, and provides a range of economic development services including strategic planning, attraction of new investment, management of the Aroostook County Empowerment Zone, small business finance, and workforce development. EMDC services the greater Bangor region, including communities in Hancock, Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties, and portions of Waldo County. EMDC runs a number of programs, including a Business Resources Center, a robust workforce training development program, and a full range of community planning services. EMDC also manages a U.S. Department of Transportation TIGER II Planning Grant that will be used to develop a cohesive plan to integrate public transportation options across its four counties.

Developing MOBILIZE MAINE at the State Level

The *Mobilize Maine* initiative was prompted by a funding opportunity from FairPoint Communications, a private telecommunications company that acquired telephone and broadband lines in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont in 2008. FairPoint Communications established the “Connect Northern New England” (CNNE) program in 2009 and was prepared to provide \$125,000 per year for three years to one region in each state to implement an economic development project. The company’s motivation was simple—to be a meaningful community partner in improving the economy. FairPoint knew that economic expansion would lead to new businesses requiring additional telephone and Internet connections, which it could provide. To help build CNNE and identify one EDD in each state with the capacity to manage and implement a development project, FairPoint Communications hired the consulting firm ViTAL Economy, Inc.

ViTAL Economy found that Maine’s EDDs were well-organized at the state level and met regularly. As a result, the EDDs, along with Maine’s State Planning Office and Department of Community and Economic Development, persuaded FairPoint Communications and ViTAL Economy to design a statewide asset-based economic development program rather than focus on one region. ViTAL Economy agreed to provide each EDD with a disciplined framework that guides regions to form partnerships with business leaders, perform an asset-mapping exercise, set goals, and develop performance measures.

Mobilize Maine’s approach recognizes that the economic landscape varies greatly from one region to the next. Typically, economic development in Maine, as in many U.S. states, is top-down, and the statewide strategy does not always resonate with communities farther from the capital city. *Mobilize Maine* State Director Mark Ouellette points out that “Maine stretches 700 miles from north to south,” from small rural communities dotting the border of Canada to financial districts in more urbanized Portland. Statewide directives to foster economic activity in financial services may make sense in Portland but have little relevance to smaller rural communities with different strengths. By taking a bottom-up approach, results from each region’s *Mobilize Maine* process will feed into a more relevant and comprehensive statewide strategy.

Bob Clark, Executive Director of NMDC, says, “The traditional approach to economic development is recruiting

MOBILIZE MAINE IS:

- 1. A local leadership-driven initiative that maps regional assets and industry cluster value chains, which will complement existing Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) both statewide and regionally**
- 2. Hundreds of Mainers leading the development and implementation of focused and measurable “triple bottom line” action plans**
- 3. An asset- versus needs-based approach focused on advantages versus deficiencies, which can be preserved, enhanced and leveraged to achieve economic, social, and environmental prosperity—the “triple bottom line”**
- 4. A statewide initiative, which will uncover the unique potential of each region and connect its resources to transform Maine’s rate of economic growth**
- 5. A four-step systematic and disciplined approach that will supplement existing and enhanced regional CEDS planning and strategy development, including training and empowering hundreds of Maine leaders dedicated to growing their economy**
- 6. A statewide public/private partnership supporting a grassroots mobilization of Maine’s citizens to take responsibility for and control of their economic destiny**
- 7. Based on a proven model for success, which connects quality of place, innovation, and livable and healthy community strategies to achieve accelerated and balanced economic growth**

Source: Based on concept by ViTAL Economy, Inc.

EMDC President Michael Aube says, “Mobilize Maine breaks down the silos, forcing us to be collaborative and supportive of a whole network.”

new businesses, but we recognize that it doesn’t work in a rural area like our region.” Rural economies face challenges reaching a critical mass and bringing together resources—financial, human, or physical—to help businesses grow. An asset-based approach to economic development, like *Mobilize Maine*, helps rural communities strengthen networks across the region around common goals. EMDC President Michael Aube says, “*Mobilize Maine* breaks down the silos, forcing us to be collaborative and supportive of a whole network.”

Overall, *Mobilize Maine* is not a resource-heavy structure since it leverages existing assets and organizations to create synergies. The biggest expenditure is increasing capacity among EDD staff to coordinate meetings and events. The initiative was originally made possible with seed funding from FairPoint Communications, but it also benefited from other private sector donors at the regional level. A number of different sources—including NMDC, Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments (AVCOG), Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission, the Maine Chamber of Commerce and ViTAL Economy—provide funding for a statewide coordinator, and recently the EDDs decided to pursue additional resources from EDA to expand and enhance the statewide coordination, peer learning and implementation of the initiative.

The Process: Foundation, Discovery, Connect, and Report

Starting with NMDC and EMDC, ViTAL Economy is taking each EDD through a systematic framework to develop its personalized *Mobilize Maine* strategy. First, each EDD is responsible for reaching out to the private sector in its communities and putting together a Leadership Board comprising eight to 12 stakeholders. Some regions, like Northern Maine, were already actively engaging the private sector, whereas other regions had to start the outreach process from scratch.

The *Mobilize Maine* framework, developed by ViTAL Economy, begins with 12 months of strategy development. The next year consists of implementation and the third year is sustainment of the initiative, but short-term wins and actions throughout the process are always a priority. The yearlong strategy development stage includes four steps: *Foundation*, *Discovery*, *Connect*, and *Report*. The *Foundation* stage begins with identifying the region’s challenges and opportunities. Jim Haguewood of ViTAL Economy says the Leadership Board is charged with developing the region’s “quality of place statement,” which is meant to define the region’s sense of urgency and identify the pressing needs for the economy. Based on this information, a five-year plan is developed.

The *Foundation* phase also includes taking stock of existing research and data collection. Statewide, four measurements are assessed in each region, which incorporate per capita income, labor force participation rate, gross domestic product (GDP) growth, Internet subscriptions, and population 25 years or older with bachelor’s degrees. The Leadership Board also develops additional measurements based on its unique situation. For example, Eastern Maine established a measurement to assess the population with associate’s degrees, and Northern Maine added a measurement to consider the number of jobs with private paid health insurance. These measurements will provide benchmarks for progress toward the 2015 Regional Economic Vision.

After the *Foundation* phase, the *Discovery* stage commences the process of mapping indigenous assets, defined by Haguewood as “what makes the region unique, special, or



Figure 1, Benchmarking Progress to 2015

competitive in regards to their economy.” In this process, the project team surveys the local community to identify the region’s strengths, such as the population’s unique talents; specialization of the workforce; education institutions; or natural, cultural or historical assets. The Androscoggin Valley Region in western Maine, served by AVCOG, identified transportation, distribution and logistics as its assets, as well as destination tourism, characterized by its ski resorts. NMDC identified a business process outsourcing industry, based on good customer service skills, and an existing forest product industry cluster, linked to renewable energy. Through the *Discovery* stage, EMDC uncovered a nationally renowned health care system and the amenities of the city of Bangor’s riverfront.

The third step, *Connect*, is the phase in which assets are analyzed and prioritized. This step uses information collected in the cluster and asset-mapping to develop a strategy that connects assets to economic growth. Assets are evaluated based on their potential to create economic value and contribute to regional goals: how many jobs can an asset produce and who will it benefit? What resources are needed to help an asset achieve its full value? The final stage, *Report*, is when findings and strategies are presented to the community, by the community leaders. While *Mobilize Maine* encourages each region to establish “quick wins” throughout the process, the teams will focus next on implementation.

Northern Maine added a baseline measurement to consider the number of jobs with private paid health insurance.

Realignment: Unprecedented Progress

The state recently succeeded in realigning federal and state resources for economic development by changing the boundaries of its EDDs. The original six EDDs in Maine were:

- ***Northern Maine Development Commission (NMDC)***
- ***Eastern Maine Development Corporation (EMDC)***
- ***Kennebec Valley Council of Governments (KVCOG)***
- ***Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments (AVCOG)***
- ***Mid-Coast Economic Development District (MCEDD)***
- ***Southern Maine Economic Development District (SMEDD)***

The realignment was approved by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) in July 2011. The change moved Washington County from EMDC to NMDC, Knox County from EMDC to MCEDD and SMEDD was split into two EDDs, making York County the seventh and newest EDD.

Why did they realign? Many leaders associated with the EDDs believed that the boundaries for their regions did not match the economic realities of 21st-century Maine. The original boundaries were established in the 1960s and, in some cases, were based around industries that no longer exist. For example, there are few economic synergies between York County and its neighbor Cumberland County, yet the two were joined under one EDD. On the other hand, the adjacent counties of Washington and Aroostook face similar economic challenges but were separated into two different EDDs.

Redrawing boundaries of EDDs statewide was not an easy task. Mark Ouellette said, “I don’t remember EDA ever doing a statewide redistricting; typically it happens one EDD at a time.” The realignment will assist the *Mobilize Maine* initiative by bringing together areas with common economic characteristics and follow natural and political lines of communication already in use by local officials.

During this process, other resources at the state and local levels were also realigned. In some cases, local Workforce Investment Boards, which administer federal programs and funds through the U.S. Department of Labor, were consolidated to serve a single region, or boundaries were redrawn to match that of the EDD. In Northern and Eastern Maine, the Workforce Investment Boards are now housed in the same offices as the EDDs serving those regions, allowing for greater synergies between economic development and workforce development programs, and better leveraging of federal, state and local resources.

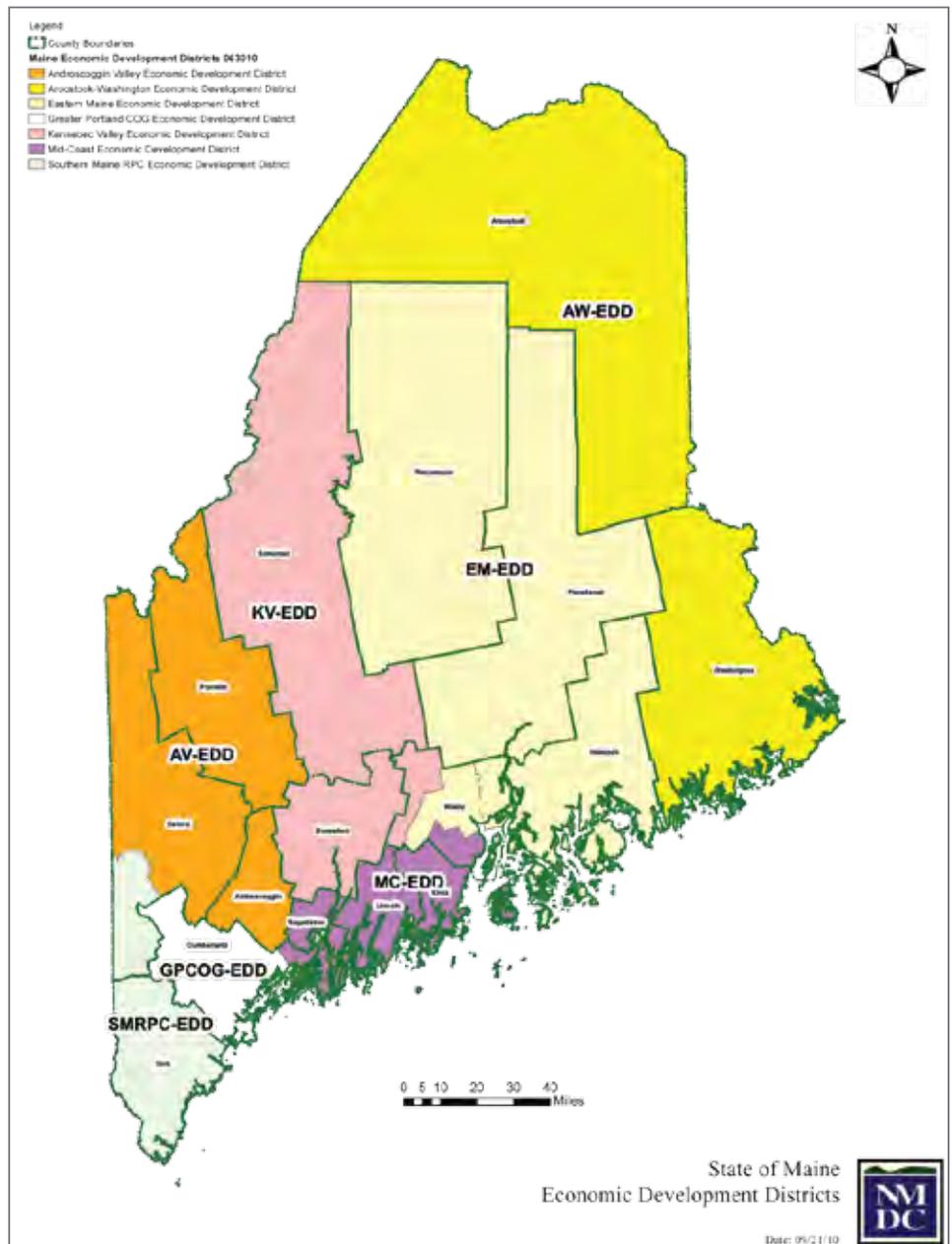
NMDC is the only region to have finished the four-step process to date. Stakeholders identified two industry clusters (information technology and renewable energy), and are implementing a strategy to mobilize resources. EMDC is in the *Discovery* stage and is now holding focus groups to finalize selection of their assets. In the meantime, they are identifying “quick wins” to move the process along. ViTAL Economy is beginning work with AVCOG in the western part of the state, the Kennebec Valley Council of Governments (KVCOG) in central Maine, and in the greater Portland region with the Southern Maine Economic Development District (SMEDD). Each region will have started the first step of the *Mobilize Maine* framework by September 2011.

Mobilize Northern Maine

The Northern Maine Development Commission (NMDC) services communities in Aroostook County and, more recently, Washington County. NMDC provides financing to local businesses and runs a variety of economic development programs, including an Empowerment Zone, Pine Tree Zone, Small Business Development Center, and the Aroostook County Tourism Committee. NMDC also engages in regional planning around transportation, brownfields renewal, land use planning, and emergency management. NMDC began to work closely with the private sector and engage in dialogue to improve the economy as early as 2003, allowing *Mobilize Northern Maine* (MNM) to kick off ahead of its peers.

Often referred to as the “Crown of Maine,” Northern Maine is known for its rich agricultural lands and vast dense forests. The region contains 30

In Northern and Eastern Maine, the Workforce Investment Boards are now housed in the same offices as the EDDs, allowing for greater synergies between economic development and workforce development programs and better leveraging of federal, state and local resources.



Map of Maine's EDD Boundaries

Source: Northern Maine Development Commission

percent of Maine’s land area with only eight percent of the population.² With a population of 106,794, the district’s largest cities are Caribou and Presque Isle; New Brunswick, Canada, neighbors the region to the north and east.³

The region has a diverse economy dominated by agriculture, including potato farming, and forestry, including paper mills and wood products. Northern Maine also counts tourism, manufacturing, and a budding information technology industry among its economic strengths. But with the closing of Loring Air Force Base in 1994 and the decline of manufacturing and agriculture jobs, many Aroostook County residents have been forced to look elsewhere for jobs. Average per capita income in the region is 20 percent less than the state average, and even though the region has a reputable education system, levels of educational attainment of the population 25 years and older trails the rest of the state.⁴

NMDC laid the foundations for what later became *MNM* in 2003 with the Rural Empowerment Summit, which brought together more than 180 interested citizens from across the region to address economic challenges and produce solutions. As a result, the region’s business leaders, with the support of NMDC, formed the Aroostook Partnership for Progress (APP), a public-private regional organization created to shape economic development. APP brings together CEOs and public officials to market the region to attract new investment, create new jobs, and facilitate dialogue around key development issues. APP has a close relationship with NMDC, which, in addition to sitting on the board, provides the organization with office space and public funding. APP investors provide approximately \$250,000 in private funding annually.

The 2003 Rural Empowerment Summit also led NMDC to commission Portland-based firm Planning Decisions, Inc., to conduct an industry cluster analysis for the region to identify existing assets and prepare a strategy to build on them. The analysis revealed five existing clusters in the region: forest products, agriculture, tourism, information technology, and precision manufacturing.

IDENTIFYING GOALS

When *Mobilize Maine* was announced at the state level in 2009, NMDC and APP organized an Action Team of eight to 10 public- and private-sector representatives using its existing network of businesses. The Action Team held a series of focus groups to gather existing information, identify goals for 2015, and set measures to monitor progress. The analysis and resulting goals were presented to the Leadership Team, which comprises NMDC and APP board members, for review.

The first goal is to see the region’s population increase by 3,000 people by 2015. Mike Eisensmith, NMDC’s Economic Development Director, laments that the region has “lost population every decade since 1960.” Since the year 2000, Aroostook County’s population has decreased by 4,000 people. Eisensmith says, “The region can’t continue to be viable if the trend continues.”

The region’s exodus is primarily among the younger workforce, leaving the region with an aging population. Forty-six percent of the region is age 50 or older, compared with 39 percent in Maine as a whole and 32 percent in the U.S.⁵ A survey of businesses in the region revealed that a quarter of the workforce would be eligible for retirement within five to 10 years, and only 16 percent of the population is between the ages of 20 and 34, not enough to replace the existing workforce.⁶

Another goal focuses on increasing per capita incomes. The average wage in the NMDC region is approximately 20 percent lower than the average wage in the state. While wages increased by 11 percent in the state and 21 percent in the U.S. between 1990 and 2007, they only increased by seven percent in Northern Maine over that time frame.⁷

The goal is to add 1,677 new jobs at an annual income of \$42,000 including benefits and 1,118 new jobs at an annual income of \$38,500 including benefits by 2015. In addition, Northern Maine hopes to increase 6,628 full-time salaries

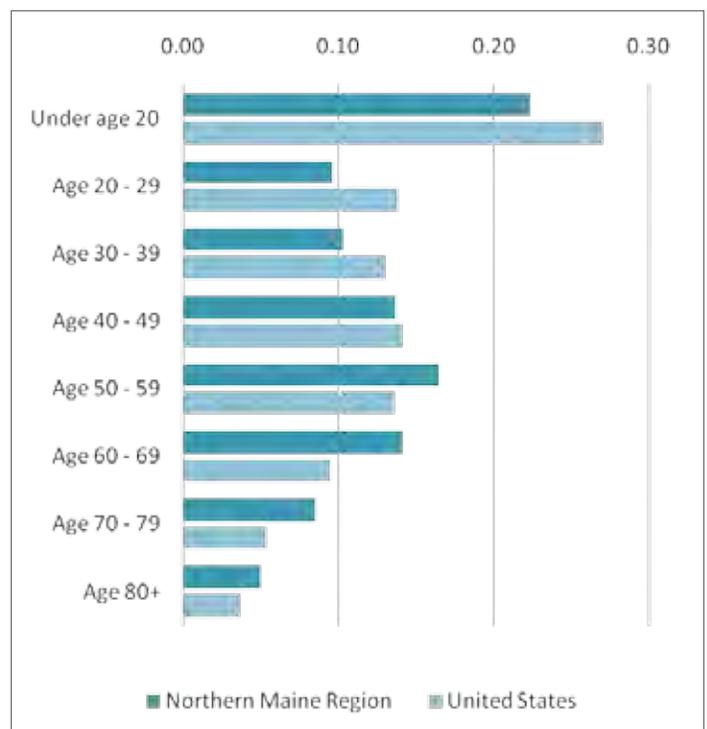


Figure 2: Northern Maine Population by Age, 2010

Source: U.S. Census, 2010



Source: Flickr user loosends, available under Creative Commons

Aroostock County

by \$5,000 per year. Attaining these goals would produce \$365 million per year in new wages. On the production side, adding to the workforce will help reach a regional GDP of \$2.8 billion, \$200 million more than the region's existing business activity produces. An additional related goal is to see 27.7 percent of private employers reimburse health care benefits for their employees.⁸

The goals set by MNM are intentionally ambitious, and are meant to motivate the region to work toward achieving them over the five-year time frame. The strategies that the MNM leadership developed around the region's existing assets are designed to make these goals a reality by 2015.

TURNING AN EXISTING ASSET INTO AN OPPORTUNITY: RENEWABLE ENERGY

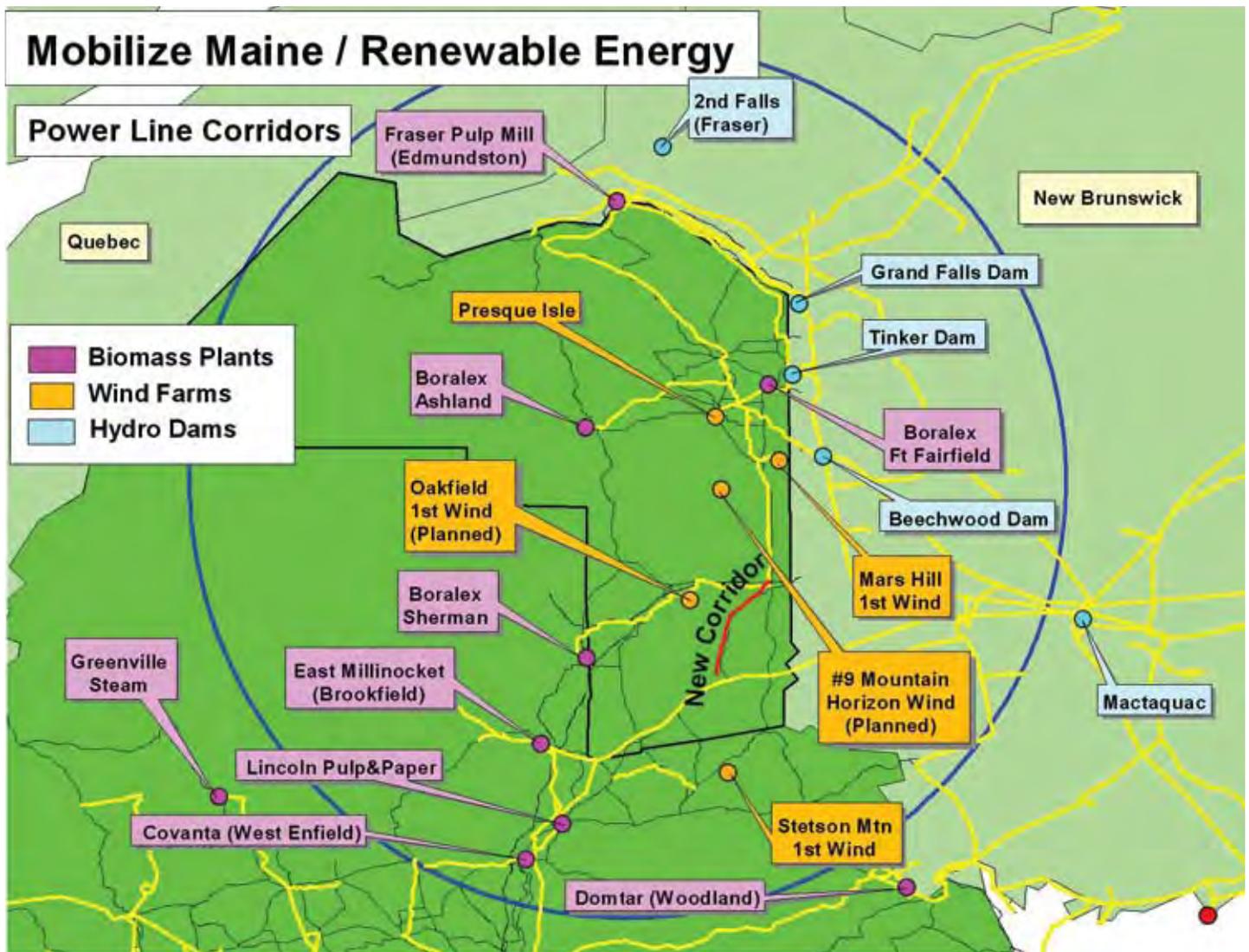
During the *Discovery* phase, MNM used Planning Decisions' cluster analysis, along with input from the business community, to identify two target clusters: information technology and renewable energy. MNM engaged ViTAL Economy to conduct a deeper analysis of the two target clusters. The MNM Leadership Board established Action Teams for each cluster. The Action Teams comprise 60 to 70 business representatives engaged in the industry cluster. Within each industry cluster, four to five smaller working groups are assigned to address specific activities.

“Workforce development is part of everything we do at the Northern Maine Development Commission and the Mobilize Northern Maine work around industry clusters is better informing our programs.” – Bob Clark, Executive Director

The renewable energy industry cluster illustrates how the region is using MNM to turn an existing asset into an opportunity. With rising energy costs and concerns about the impacts of climate change, renewable energy has received a lot of attention in Maine, as well as across the country. Because of Northern Maine's cold climate, residents carry twice the national average burden for residential energy costs compared with their household income.⁹ Residents of Northern Maine primarily use imported oil to heat their homes, which is costly and subject to price fluctuation.

The Action Team identified biomass as a renewable energy source that could be both produced and consumed within the region. Biomass energy production uses wood or plant products to generate electricity or create heat. Wood waste products, such as sawmill residue, supplemented with pulpwood, can be turned into wood pellets. Automated furnaces burn wood pellets in a system that can heat an entire building.

Adjacent to the largest wood basket east of the Mississippi River, Northern Maine's existing wood products industry is well-poised to foster a niche market for biomass to energy production. The forest products industry is the largest industry cluster in Northern Maine, employing 3,500 people in timber harvesting, lumber and paper mills,



Northern Maine Renewable Energy Map

Source: Northern Maine Development Commission

wood production plants, trucking and railroad transport, and equipment and chemical supplies.¹⁰ There are three existing biomass energy generation plants and a number of wood production plants in Aroostook County that already produce more than 21,000 tons of sawmill residue that can be converted to wood pellets.

Replacing oil heat with locally produced biomass in residential and commercial buildings will allow the region to capture and retain economic value. Using oil as a source of heat retains 22 percent of each dollar in the economy, while using locally produced biomass would retain 100 percent of each dollar in the economy.¹¹ Biomass is a cheaper energy source than oil or electricity, reducing the financial burden on residents and allowing them to spend in other areas. In addition to decreasing U.S. dependence on foreign oil, the energy produced from biomass burns cleaner than the energy produced from oil.

ViTAL Economy's analysis indicates that producing and burning an additional 300,000 tons of wood pellets a year in Northern Maine would generate \$150 million in benefits, including more than 1,000 new jobs.¹² Based on existing capacity, the MNM Action Team set a near-term goal to produce 45,000 tons of wood biomass pellets for residential and commercial heating per year, which would create an estimated \$9 million per year within five years.¹³ Furthermore, the Action Team set a goal to convert 4,500 residential units and 10 commercial facilities to biomass heat over the next five years. To date, nine of the 10 commercial applications have been achieved, with an economic impact value of \$585,000/year. But, in order to fully achieve these goals, MNM needs to improve demand.

On the demand side, the Team designed a marketing education campaign on the benefits of biomass heating. The Team is promoting energy audits as a tool to help

consumers understand the advantages of using alternative energy sources. Energy audits are a professional evaluation of a building's energy usage aimed at identifying areas to improve energy efficiency. NMDC partnered with the Northern Maine Community College (NMCC) to train eight professionals to become energy auditors.

To increase demand through exports, Northern Maine needs a reliable and efficient connection to markets. In February 2010, the Montreal, Maine & Atlantic Railway (MMA) announced its intent to abandon the rail line connecting Aroostook County to the seaport. NMDC and APP, through MNM, worked closely with state officials to understand the importance of the railway to their economy. In October 2010, the state agreed to purchase the railway and recently announced it will be operated by Maine Northern Railway. As a result, MNM is fostering relationships with shipping companies to forge the link between the region's renewable energy cluster and markets in Europe.

On the supply side, the Team identified a need to increase capacity among the workforce in the field of renewable energy. In response, NMCC opened the Northern Maine Center for Excellence in Alternative Energy Training and Education. The President of NMCC, an active participant of MNM and advocate of economic development, secured a \$1.2 million private donation to establish the Center, which is expected to have a significant impact in training a competent workforce in renewable energy.

The renewable energy industry cluster illustrates the synergies that can be facilitated through MNM. NMDC Executive Director Bob Clark says, "Workforce development is part of everything we do at NMDC and the MNM work around industry clusters is better informing our programs." MNM meetings succeeded in fostering connections among the private sector, universities, and public sector to work together towards nurturing this industry. Similarly, MNM is now creating synergies around the information technology industry cluster, using these techniques.

NEXT STEPS

MNM's success toward completing the first phase of *Mobilize Maine* has allowed it to become a model for its peers. Recently, MNM hosted other EDDs in a workshop to share experiences. MNM has had an advantage and a head start in this process because of its ties to the private sector through APP, which has helped attract private donations.

Initially, MNM utilized funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Empowerment Zone program to fund staff time and meeting facilitation. Private sector donations through APP have helped MNM to leverage

SINGLE ECONOMIC STRATEGY



Mobilize Maine holds the potential for regions and local governments to integrate multiple service areas and planning processes into a single regional strategic economic development plan. The process aims to generate a strategic plan that is supported by the private sector and not only satisfies federal and/or state agency requirements, but also provides direction for the region to achieve economic growth and sustainability. For example, such a plan could serve as the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, Long-Range Transportation Plan, regional and local land use and housing plans, environmental protection strategies, workforce development strategies, and others. By relying on an asset-based planning process that focuses on a region's unique attributes, such a plan can be a viable, credible tool that leverages federal, state and local resources to shape sustainable development.

Mobilize Maine holds the potential for regions to integrate multiple service areas and planning processes into a single regional strategic economic development plan.

existing funds and be more attractive when applying to public sector funding sources. While *MNM* does not require funding for the actual implementation, it does require a great amount of staff time and capacity. In its next stage, *MNM* will progress toward its goals by formulating and implementing strategies for the renewable energy and information technology clusters.

Mobilize Eastern Maine

Mobilize Eastern Maine (MEM) is coordinated by EMDC, also an EDA-designated EDD. EMDC services Hancock, Penobscot, and Piscataquis Counties and portions of Waldo County—almost 11,000 square miles and 257,334 people.¹⁴ With twice the population density of Northern Maine, EMDC’s region and MEM are centered in its largest city, Bangor.

Like NMDC, EMDC embraced the *Mobilize Maine* approach early on and is driving it forward to produce measurable results. ViTAL Economy worked with EMDC leaders in the initial stages of *MEM* to set up the approach and establish their goals. Facing many of the same challenges as Northern Maine, Eastern Maine seeks to retain more young professionals and increase median household incomes above the national average by 2020. Now, *MEM* has turned over the process to their business leaders to complete the *Discovery* phase.

When *MEM* was first announced, EMDC sought assistance from Doug Hall, CEO of consulting firm Eureka Ranch, to lead a three-day seminar on innovation for business leaders. The seminar succeeded in helping EMDC forge connections with business leaders in the region. Participants of the seminar, including the *MEM*’s Leadership Team alongside 175 local business leaders, were introduced to *MEM* and are now involved in moving the process forward by mapping assets.

MEM’s asset-mapping process is entirely driven by the community’s engagement. EMDC created sub-groups to focus on seven sectors: education; transportation and logistics; tourism and business conferencing; forestry; technology, research and development; data transmission; and the biomedical field. Each sub-group meets on a regular



Mobilize Eastern Maine Asset-Based Approach

basis to conduct a “listening session,” where local business leaders in the sector identify important issues and needs of the industry. During these sessions, local business leaders also network with one another and identify areas where they can collaborate. *MEM* intends to divide the seven sub-groups into three categories: emerging sectors, existing sectors, and support sectors.

MEM led to the alignment of the Workforce Investment Board with EMDC. In June 2009, the Tri-County Workforce Investment Board, which serviced Hancock, Piscataquis, and Penobscot Counties, was moved to EMDC. Workforce Investment Act services, through the U.S. Department of Labor, for the three counties will now be administered by EMDC, which is aligning many of its existing workforce development programs with those of the federal Workforce Investment Act.

DISCOVERING EMERGING SECTORS: BIOMEDICAL AND TOURISM

The biomedical field provides a good example of how asset mapping through *Mobilize Maine* can uncover an emerging industry sector. During a biomedical sub-group meeting, the team learned that Eastern Maine Medical Center in Bangor received a prestigious award for its use of health care information technology. The hospital is now recognized nationally as a center of excellence. Haguewood says that learning about the hospital is an example of how *Mobilize Maine* can lead to the “discovery of something unique and special.” Haguewood said, “It was an ‘ah-ha’ moment—there were 25 people in the room and only one or two people even knew about the award.”

Along with the hospital, the team discovered that the region has two biomedical research facilities (Jackson Labs in Bar Harbor and the Maine Institute of Human Genetics and Health), two educational institutions (the University of Maine Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences in Orono and Husson University's Pharmacy School in Bangor), and a handful of smaller companies that together form the backbone of the biomedical sector. Once all of the assets are identified and mapped, the next step is to create a strategy that delineates how to leverage existing assets and how to shape the greater Bangor region into a leader in bioscience. Because it includes both educational institutions and private sector facilities, this sector can connect a trained workforce to jobs, which will help retain young professionals in the community.

Aube says that “quick wins” are an important part of Mobilize Maine because they keep participants positive and push the process forward. With this in mind, the MEM biomedical sector is pursuing investment opportunities based on the region's proximity to Europe. Many vaccinations and antidotes are manufactured in Europe, but U.S. security regulations require vaccinations to be assembled on U.S. soil. The recent H1N1 global pandemic led to a series of congressional hearings that identified a need to bolster national capability to respond to a threat of bioterrorism and increase capacity to assemble vaccines. Home to the closest U.S. airport to Europe, EMDC hopes to capitalize on this asset and attract this investment in the near term.

The international airport is also an asset for another emerging sector identified by MEM, tourism and business conferencing. The tourism and business conferencing sub-group coined Bangor as the “gateway to the north.” Northern Maine, along with some parts of Eastern Maine, are popular destinations for tourism, including hiking, bird watching, canoeing, fishing, and hunting, as well as winter sports such as skiing and snowboarding. The sector seeks to capture a greater share of overnight stays from tourists heading to attractions in other parts of the state.

The Bangor waterfront along the Penobscot River stretches from Belfast to Millinocket and is dotted with a number of existing and proposed amenities. The city of Bangor has long promoted its waterfront as a recreation space through a concerted effort to clean up abandoned properties and attract new investment. A 27-hole golf course, a racetrack, civic center, outdoor auditorium, and the state's only casino are just a few of the assets along the Penobscot River. The outdoor auditorium attracts a continuous line-up of



Bangor Waterfront

popular musicians for well-attended waterfront concerts. The concerts along with the other riverfront features are a destination for tourists but also enhance quality of life for existing residents.

The MEM tourism and business conferencing sub-group found that building a new arena along the waterfront would enhance this sector. Designed as a modern event and convention center, the \$65 million project will allow Bangor to attract business conferences, trade shows, conventions, large live performances, and large athletic events. MEM rallied significant support for the arena among the business community and residents, leading to its eventual approval for funding through public bonds. Haguewood says MEM sparked this effort: “The region garnered this huge leadership base around MEM; they could describe what the arena meant to them and how it would help them reach their goals.”



Members of the Mobilize Eastern Maine team.

Source: Eastern Maine Development Corporation



Staff at Sutherland Weston Marketing Communications, a local business heavily involved with Mobilize Eastern Maine.

The tourism and business conferencing sub-group brings together institutions involved in tourism across the region such as the Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Bangor Convention and Visitors Bureau, Bangor Region Development Alliance, and a number of private sector firms—organizations that previously did not communicate with one another. As a result of the collaboration, tourism organizations are now marketing their assets together, developing a collective calendar of events and sample itineraries.

NEXT STEPS

The biggest challenges to moving MEM forward are limited staff and financial resources. EMDC uses internal resources, including EDA funding, to move the Mobilize Maine process along. In addition, the Maine Technology Institute provided

funding for asset mapping. The MEM process has succeeded in increasing awareness and generating conversations, and, as a result, is beginning to attract funds from private sector donors. EMDC is looking to organizations such as the Maine Technology Institute and others for future support to continue asset mapping and to develop and implement the MEM strategy. EMDC hired a full-time staff member to pursue funding opportunities for MEM.

MEM has had remarkable success in increasing communication and collaboration among business leaders, public sector organizations, and the community. The next step for Eastern Maine is to finish asset mapping and develop strategies around their emerging sectors. Aube says, “We will no longer think, think, think; we will think and act, and get results.”

The Mobilize Maine process represents a unique approach that Maine’s EDDs have embraced as a way to invigorate state and regional economies using bottom-up, asset-based thinking. This framework incorporates participation from the public and private sectors, as well as the education and philanthropic communities, to uncover a region’s unique strengths, set measurable goals, develop strategies, and chart progress. The process relies on interdisciplinary collaboration, open channels of communication, and robust data collection and analysis. By applying these principles of bottom-up, asset-based economic development to a range of settings, EDDs across the country can seek to leverage and align their resources to shape regional economic development in a way that builds upon a region’s inherent strengths and quality of place.



Flickr user Justin Russell, available under Creative Commons

Fort Kent railroad in Northern Maine

Endnotes

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¹¹ ViTAL Economy Alliance. 2010. *Aroostook County, Maine Industry Cluster Opportunity Analysis: Renewable Energy*. Presentation prepared for NMDC and APP. (Online: http://www.nmdc.org/Development/Energy_Report.pdf)

¹² Ibid.

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¹⁴ U.S. Census, 2010.

This report was made possible by conversations with the following people:

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- **Mark Ouelette, Executive Director, Mobilize Maine**

For more information on the programs highlighted in this report, visit:

- **Mobilize Northern Maine: http://www.nmdc.org/Development/mobilize_maine.html**
 - **Mobilize Eastern Maine: <http://www.mobilizeeasternmaine.com/>**
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ABOUT THE NADO RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Founded in 1988, the NADO Research Foundation is the nonprofit research affiliate of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO). The NADO Research Foundation identifies, studies and promotes regional solutions and approaches to improving local prosperity and services through the nationwide network of regional development organizations. The Research Foundation shares best practices and offers professional development training, analyzes the impact of federal policies and programs on regional development organizations, and examines the latest developments and trends in small metropolitan and rural America. Most importantly, the Research Foundation is helping bridge the communications gap among practitioners, researchers and policy makers.

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