

## Potentials for Economic Development

### Analysis of Potentials

Previous discussion in the District description section touched upon many potentials that the District has for economic development. These potentials include, but are not limited to: natural resources, transportation, agricultural land, tourism, logistics and products, and financial incentives for industrial development to locate in District community centers.

Sand and gravel production continues to be a profitable industry in the district. These resources are extremely beneficial to the production of concrete and aggregate building materials, and road and surface coverings. Mining also continues to be a profitable and beneficial industry today and will into the future. Coal deposits and reserves are plentiful in the southern two-thirds of the district. Expansion of this industry depends on the future demand for high-sulfur coal and mining economics. Many of the potential coal deposits lie along the Illinois River.

Another important resource to the district is the Illinois River. It provides a well-developed transportation route for barge and other cargo traffic. In addition, the Illinois River, along with its tributaries, provides an excellent attraction for recreation and tourism. The river and accompanying wetlands support many diverse forms of wildlife that have produced several conservation districts and wildlife preserve areas throughout the District, see figure 4 Conservation Area Map

Highway transportation is one of the best qualities that the District possesses for economic development. Lying at the crossroads of two major interstate highways (I-80 and I-39), and its close proximity to major Midwest trading markets, the District is well-suited for highway transportation needs. The proposed four-lane highway, if built, will provide the district with another connection to Chicago, the largest city in the Midwest. Its extensive U.S. and state highway system provides suitable access to virtually all parts of the District.

Agriculture and land are other important resources for the district. Approximately 84 percent of the District is currently used for agriculture. This high percentage of usage produces large amounts of quality agricultural products, including hogs, beef cattle, and grain, and makes up a large amount of employment within the District as well. The presence of a strong agricultural base provides the potential for new industries that process raw agricultural products. An abundance of land for industrial expansion is also available in the District. The larger communities have large amounts set aside in industrial parks for industrial development in the area.

Each county in the District has significant potential for development of its recreation and tourism industries. As previously stated, the Illinois River provides a high amount of water recreation for the District, but could be further developed to attract more tourism. Additional access points for boating and fishing in communities could be constructed in more communities, and would be a great starting point for more river tourism. In addition, the Rock Island State Trail and Peoria/Toulon State Trails provide recreation locations for walking and biking enthusiasts. The Illinois-Michigan Canal and Hennepin Canal also provide recreational opportunities including public parks and camping.

Historic communities and Main Street areas are found throughout the District . These communities have potential for increased tourism that can be produced through community image

and appeal. The Illinois Main Street Program has provided that service for the City of Ottawa in LaSalle County and is currently providing its program services to the City of Princeton in Bureau County and Mendota in LaSalle County.

Business and tourism centers could be established to harness this tourism potential. Local interest groups and movements can greatly increase the potential of tourism development within communities. Community and area Chambers of Commerce provide much of this information to residents and visitors. This service could be expanded to cover each county and unify the district as a whole. Two convention and visitors bureaus, the Peoria Area Convention and Visitor Bureau and the Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitor Bureau service Counties in the district.

Land use planning throughout the district places controls and requirements that benefit the district through careful planning and long-term use by development. Updating of other planning documents such as subdivision regulations and comprehensive plans is becoming more evident throughout the district. These documents provide a basic course of action for communities and counties to implement planning.

Natural beauty in each county also possesses potential for economic development. State parks located along the Illinois River currently attract a high percentage of Illinois tourism annually. There are a number of lakes, conservation districts, wildlife preserves, and parks that could be further developed to attract tourism. This tourism could be established in the form of camping, fishing, hiking, boating and canoeing, and other outdoor recreation. With the numerous natural, recreation and tourism attractions in the District a regional tourism plan should be developed for the District. This would assist in making tourism play a larger role in the Districts economy.

### **Problems and Constraints**

Many of the limits to economic development in the District fall beyond the control of the local and county initiative and action. The national farm crisis in the 1980s, the trade deficit, and the fluctuation in farm products are all examples of economic conditions beyond regional control.

Population decline is one of the most hindering factors to economic development within the district. Outmigration trends have sent young people and working adults out of the district. This loss severely hurts the districts labor force and of skilled workers. Lack of job opportunities offered for highly trained workers and educated job seekers force those persons to look out of the District for jobs.

Communities wish to retain businesses and industries that have already been established in the area. Many losses of industries are due to the lack of a skilled labor force. The Committee believes that more incentives for local job training is needed throughout the district. Education of the workforce also plays a part in enlarging the skilled workforce. An increased and prepared labor force can be extremely beneficial in retain existing business and industry, along with attracting new.

Another limitation to economic development in the District is infrastructure. This includes community sewer, water, and communications. Many communities are in need of improvements to current sewer and water systems. This improvement can only be found in funding because of limited budgets of smaller communities. The Committee also felt that communications could be improved throughout the district. This includes the telephone and high-speed internet network, service and locations provided by companies, and new technologies to support the new telecommunications market. Greater coverage of fiber optic lines within the district, for example,

could greatly enhance the District's potential for newer communications technology and future economic development.

Infrastructure can also include housing and community protection services in communities. Improved housing units and elimination of substandard housing can greatly improve a community and increase population. Protection services such as ambulance, police, and fire could be improved throughout parts of the district. Establishment of countywide 911 systems could greatly enhance the response time of medical teams to rural areas. Maintained health care facilities can better provide for the needs of future populations. These issues must also be addressed to maintain and improve quality of life issues both locally and throughout the District.

Although the District's transportation system is adequate for current needs, there is still room for improvement. Many two-lane highways could be improved to support heavier and increased traffic counts. Sections of the interstate highways could be improved and better maintained. Locations of rail throughout the District could be promoted or expanded to enhance possible industrial development looking at the district. Passenger service in the form of buses, rail, and air could essentially be developed. Better promotion of the Amtrak passenger rail service throughout Bureau and LaSalle Counties would enhance the District's passenger transportation system.

The Peru and Marshall County airports could be better promoted. Many companies utilize corporate plain for their executives. Passenger service is another option that could be looked at for these facilities. In order to accommodate aircraft used by existing and potential industries as well as commercial service, major runway extensions would be necessary. Establishment of a Bureau County airport could greatly enhance the transportation potential in Bureau County. Bus systems could be established, along with other airport transportation (such as taxi service) to better improve the overall transportation service and network throughout the district. NCICG is currently working with IDOT and local officials in creating regional Human Services Transportation Plans. These plans will be looking at improving public transportation the elderly, handicapped and low income.

Without improvements to the above-mentioned constraints, chances for future economic development in the district are severely diminished. Although the separate counties and localities have their own lists of problems within their own areas, these constraints represent the issues that are hindering economic development in the District in general. Specific program goals and objectives have been formed by the Committee and are addressed in the next section. Steps must be taken to ensure that the above issues and other local issues are addressed, along with the goals and objectives mentioned in the next section, so that the District has better opportunities for economic development in the future.