



The Nebraska Panhandle Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2019

Prepared by:





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THANK YOU!

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE REGION

The Panhandle region of Nebraska is composed of 11 counties in Western Nebraska: Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, Deuel, Garden, Kimball, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, Sheridan, and Sioux. Throughout this document a few other counties are included in the analyses: Goshen County in Wyoming and Grant County, NE. This is because these counties are included in other regional data reports. The inter and intra- connectedness of the region is also visible in commuting patterns, sales patterns, and health trends. This document will describe these relationships.

VISION

The Panhandle Economic Development strategy is defined by several principles of the Panhandle: Grow our Own, Perseverance, Conservation, and History. The vision of growth in our region is one of using what you have and building on the strengths and history of the place you are from. The Panhandle seeks to develop by building up our youth and giving them skills to thrive by coming home. The Panhandle seeks to develop by playing a long game and diversifying our economic sectors and by creating an environment that encourages creative problem solving to improve communities. This development seeks to be the tide to lift all boats and it will do that in a couple ways.

MAJOR THEMES

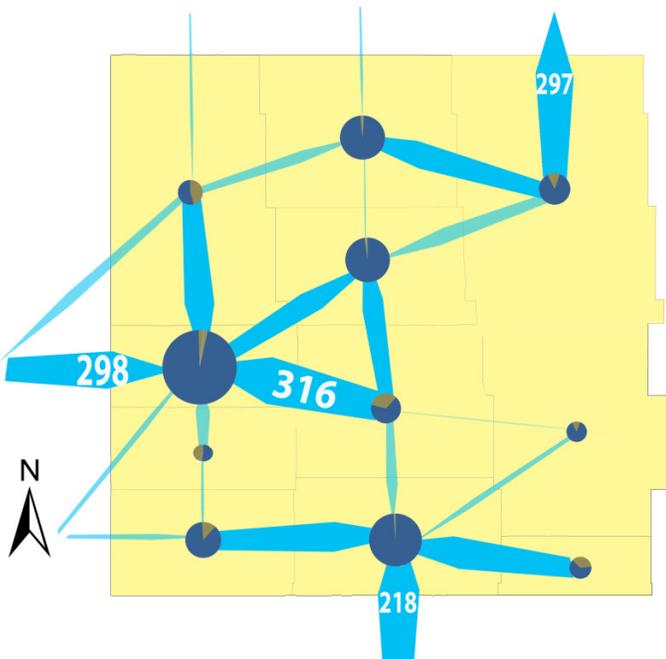
Several themes emerged throughout the process of developing this document that guided the way we wrote about the Panhandle and the way in which we planned for its future.

Shrink Smart

Though the Panhandle's overall population is declining, this theory provides the radical basis for our idea that we don't have to let population decline affect quality of life. The Shrink Smart theory was developed from European city and village models and identifies those traits that help a community maintain quality of life despite a shrinking population. Part of shrinking smart is developing good fiscal management policy and budgeting for future improvements. Other components of this theory include community interaction, community volunteerism, and efficient use of community and regional resources.

Collaboration is Key

This theme returns in many of the documents developed for this region. The Panhandle agencies in every sector are well versed in the importance of collaboration. The continued efforts of programs and organizations to work more regionally in the Panhandle results in efficient resource distribution, better services and more services for more people.



The commuter patterns of the Nebraska Panhandle Counties. Data courtesy of the 2010 Census. Map developed by Daniel Bennett.



Summary of Panhandle Commuting Patterns - 2015 census on the map data. Prepared by Nebraska Department of Labor.

Asset Based Development

Each community plays an important role in the economy of the western Nebraska panhandle. Some communities are bedroom communities, some are tourist communities, and some are regional economic trade centers. Each of these types of communities is important and developing those strengths in each of these communities helps resources go where they are most needed while making sure residents of those communities continue to be served.

Sustainability

The future of the Panhandle's economy is intrinsically linked to the environment because of its agricultural base. Thus the sustainability of our natural resources for agriculture and for our tourism industry is important to any strategy that we pursue as a region. We must consider the future of those natural resources and make plans for them as we do for our communities.

THE PROCESS

The process for developing the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a continuation of efforts over several years. This document provides a roadmap for regional economic efforts and provides investment assistance for member communities of PADD.

Every year an annual CEDS report is completed to provide an update on progress. Every 5 years the full CEDS is redeveloped to reflect the new priorities of the region for the next 5 years.

The development of the 2019 CEDS was a collaborative project between leaders in the economic development community, business community, and social services community. These leaders served on a steering committee that met quarterly throughout the development of the plan and guided its direction. They also participated in revising the document. To make sure that the document was a representation of the entire Panhandle, focus groups around various economic development topics were also held. These focus groups helped the steering committee identify large goals and small objectives for the Panhandle. Lastly, at three points throughout the document writing process, the document was sent to a large group of business owners and economic development professionals for review.

The economic development strategy for the region focuses on *business succession, small business recruitment, infrastructure investments, developing programs to recruit new residents, and providing a central location for information and programming.*

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The document is broken into five sections for easy navigation.

- Background information (Chapters 1 - 5)
- SWOT evaluation (Chapter 6)
- Action plan (Chapter 7)
- Resiliency and Recovery (Chapter 8)
- Appendices (Chapter 9)

The background informational chapters contain the current context of the region and new data. They provide statistics on the people and businesses of the Panhandle. The community's assets and challenges are all based on this data.

The SWOT evaluation is based on the data collected in the previous chapter as well as feedback from the steering committee. One steering committee meeting was devoted to analyzing the region and each focus group had a couple questions regarding the SWOTs. The SWOT analysis helped identify those areas that should be considered in the next section.

The action plan was developed based on the information gathered from the SWOT as well as based on feedback from the focus groups and steering committee. The feedback provided the basic overarching goals that informed the smaller action items.

Resiliency and recovery after major traumatic events is something that PADD does not help with directly but provides assistance for. A recent disaster that hit the region has opened up some weak spots in our ability to help businesses recover. PADD will be working closely with other regional agencies to close this gap by participating in regional forums.

The appendices contain the bibliography, focus group data, and statistical information that does not fit in the document.

CHAPTER 1:

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

FIRST NATIONS

The population of Nebraska's Panhandle has always been diverse and resilient. The region's semi-arid climate required the inhabitants of this beautiful, dry country to be creative in their settlement. The American Indian people who occupied the Panhandle were from several different tribes, most notably the Oglala Sioux, Lakota, Arapaho and Cheyenne (Figure 1-1).¹ Deemed uninhabitable for the white population, the government set Nebraska aside for the American Indians, but as missionaries and traders moved west the land was settled.²

WESTWARD EXPANSION

The Spanish and French traders established relationships with the tribes in the 16th and 17th centuries. The British and Americans followed in the late 18th century. The Platte River was a highway for trappers and traders, providing early infrastructure for the Oregon Trail. Several west bound trails ran through the region and created the blueprint for the major east-west roads that run through the region today. American settlement of the Panhandle counties took place in the late 1800s but successful agriculture and population expansion didn't occur until the development of irrigation systems.³

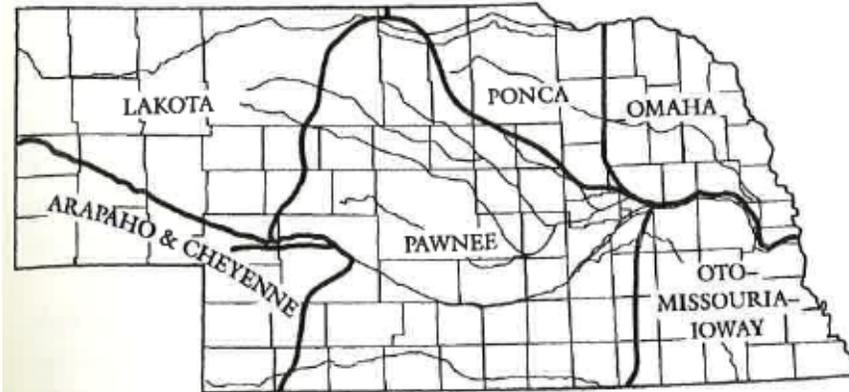


Figure 1-1. Map of American Indian Tribes of Nebraska in about 1800. Map originally adapted from Bradley H. Baltensperger, "Cultural Groups in Nebraska" in "Nebraska: A Geography", *Geographies of the United States*, ed. Ingolf Vogeler (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1985), 40.²

20TH CENTURY EXPANSION

The region's agricultural success in the 1900s brought immigrants from Mexico, Russia, and Japan to work in the Panhandle counties. These immigrants sought solace from unstable political conditions, intending to return to their home countries after the political climate had stabilized. Yet, they settled the Panhandle after the Sugar Beet production boom and the success of the Pathfinder Irrigation system brought many jobs to the area.

In the 1920s, the Panhandle experienced its largest period of population growth. The intersection of job availability and irrigation success allowed the region to maintain stability during the great depression relative to the rest of the country. A testimony to the resiliency of the people who live here.⁴ However, in the 1960's the region experienced steady population decline. This is likely due to the increase in mechanization and invention of the mono-germ sugar beet seed. Both of which, resulted in the decline in available work for farm laborers and factory workers. The spirit of hard work and resiliency still defines the region today as farmers find new ways to remain viable.

1. Naugle, Montag, and Olson, "Historic Peoples and European Contact."
2. Naugle, Montag, and Olson, "Indian Country."
3. Shumway, *History of Western Nebraska and Its People*.
4. North, "Nebraska's 150th: Settlements Become Towns in Western Nebraska."

FORCES OF CHANGE

Population decline is a common trend throughout rural America. Understanding the mechanisms of population loss, provides a context for the strategies that can be used to help the population sustain or grow. The Panhandle's population has steadily decreased since the 1960s, while the population of Nebraska has steadily increased over time (Figure 1-2). Much of Nebraska's growth has been in its metropolitan areas (Figure 1-3).

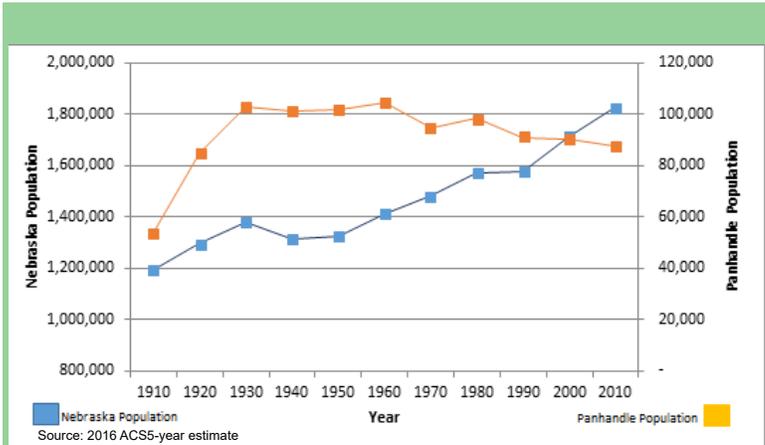


Figure 1-2. Panhandle Population change vs. Population change in all of Nebraska from 1920 -2010. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, Panhandle Area Development District (PADD).

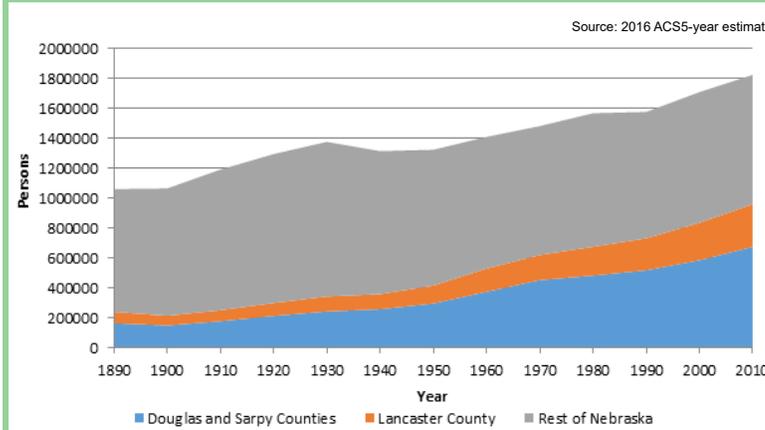


Figure 1-3. compares population growth between Douglas, Sarpy, and Lancaster Counties and greater Nebraska. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

The number of births in the region has steadily declined over-time to match the death rate resulting in a net change of zero for natural population change (Figure 1-4).

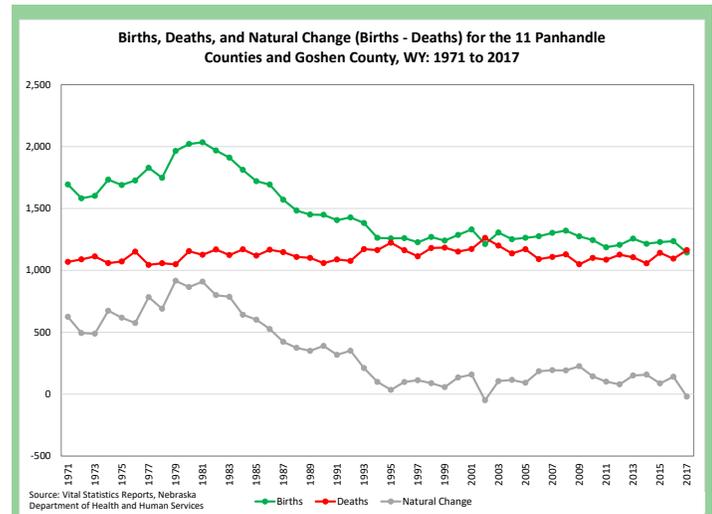


Figure 1-4. Natural change vs. birth and death numbers in the 11 Panhandle Counties and Goshen County Wyoming, from 1971 to 2017. Prepared by David Drozd, UNO Center for Public Affairs Research (UNO).

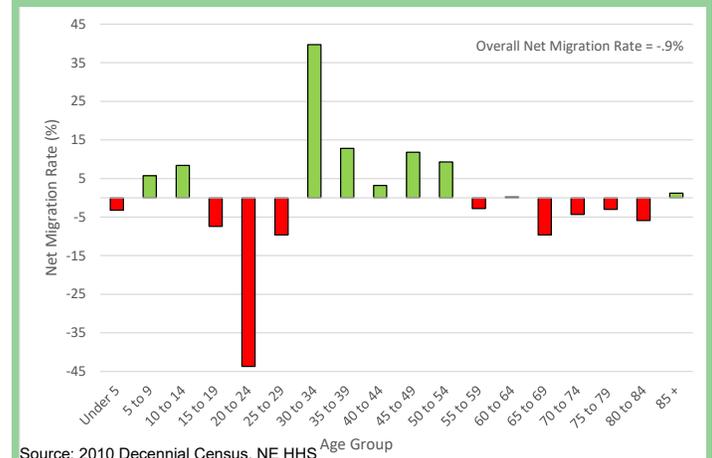


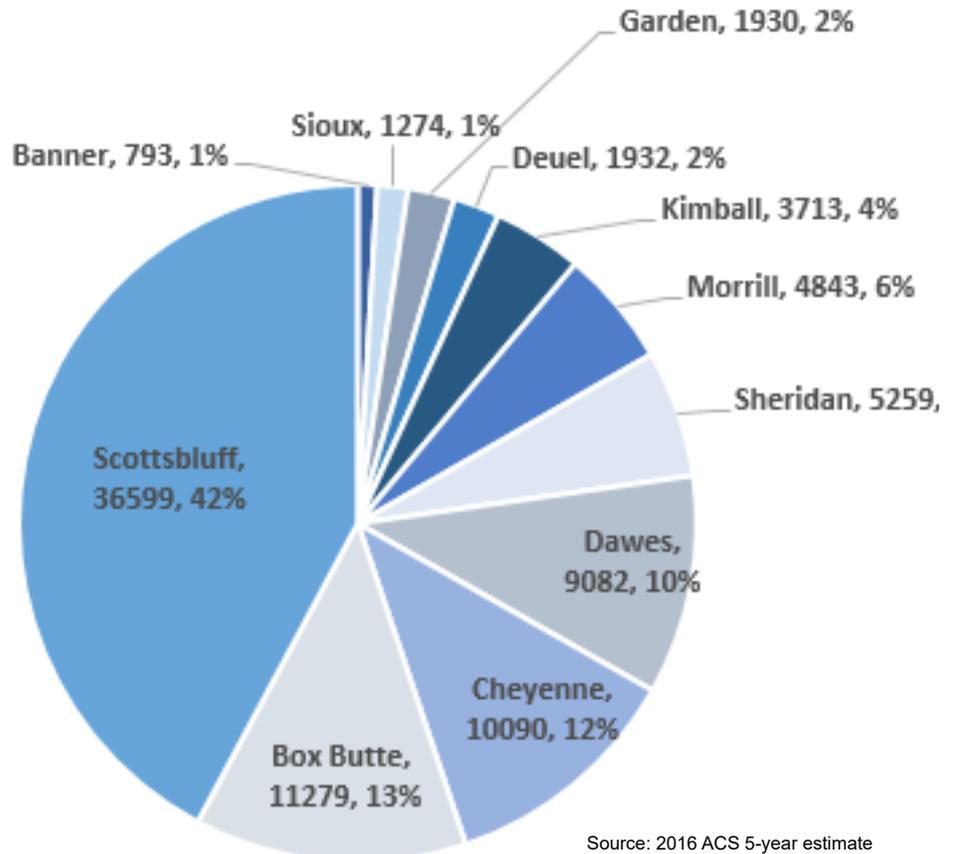
Figure 1-5. Migration rate trends in the Panhandle Counties by 5-year age groups. Prepared by David Drozd, UNO.

Births have decreased due to youth outmigration and smaller family size (Figure 1-5). Population gains will need to come from in-migration. Currently, migration patterns show the net in-migration of adults 26-45. Population centers, such as Chadron, Alliance, and Scottsbluff have higher in-migration among adults over 65, but this is not reflected regionally, because in-migration pulls from areas within the Panhandle.

The Panhandle's migration patterns parallel those of other rural Midwestern regions. Research shows that the shift from an industrial economy to a post-industrial one weakens agriculture and manufacturing - especially in rural communities. Because of the

Panhandle's strong manufacturing and agricultural identities, these market shifts have contributed to a decline in employment opportunity for Panhandle residents who are specialized to work in these sectors.

Residents moved to large population centers seeking diverse employment opportunities. Thus population consolidates in the Panhandle's main trade centers (Figures 1-6, 1-7). This phenomenon of population consolidation is not new and occurs in rural communities throughout the world.⁵



Source: 2016 ACS 5-year estimate

Figure 1-6. Panhandle 11-county region population by county. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

5. Peters, Fisher, and Zarecor, "Shrink-Smart Small Towns Communities Can Still Thrive as They Lose Population."

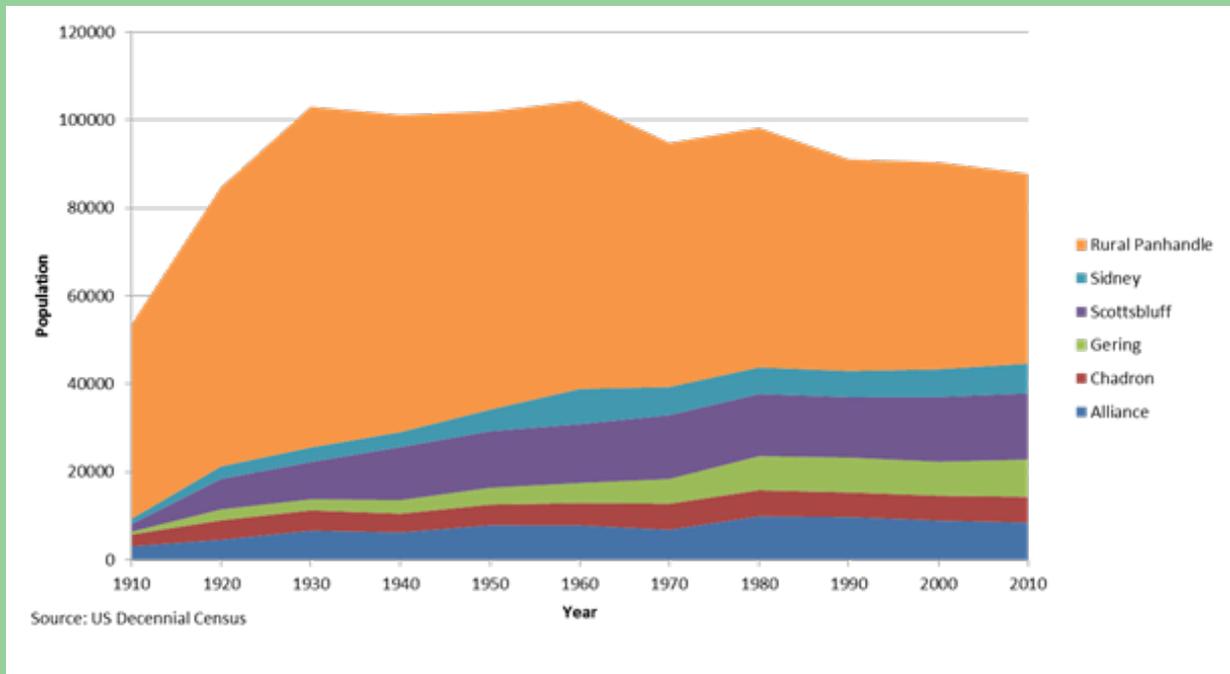


Figure 1-7. Since 1960, the rural Panhandle's population has declined while the main trade centers have grown over the last 40 years. Prepared by Daniel Bennett, PADD

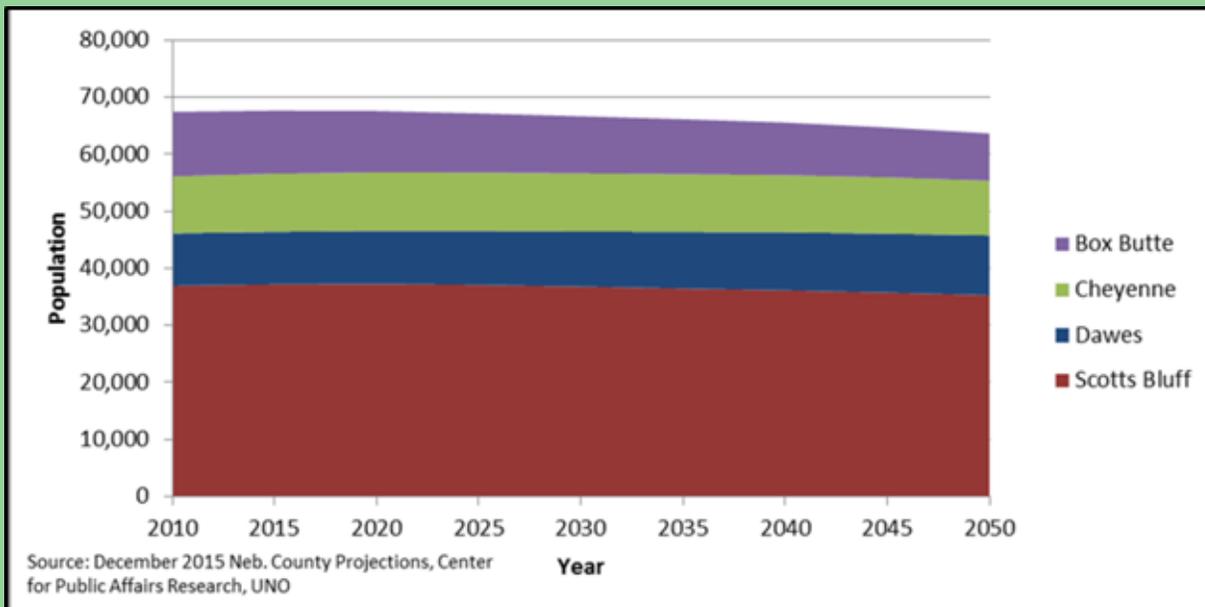


Figure 1-8. Four largest Panhandle counties population projections to 2050. Population is projected to sustain with a slight decline from 2040 to 2050. Prepared by Daniel Bennett, PADD.

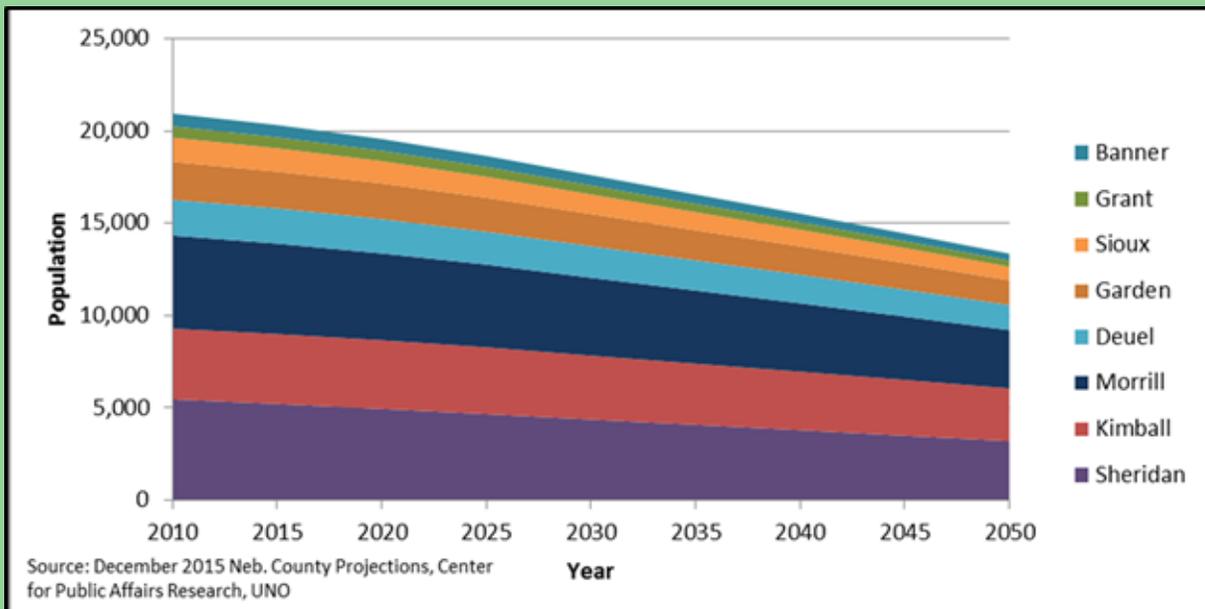


Figure 1-9. Population projections for the rest of the Panhandle Counties not shown in Figure 1-8. These counties have no cities with populations over 5000. The populations of these counties are projected to decline. Prepared by Daniel Bennett, PADD.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The above projections show continued patterns of consolidation. This will contribute to a more stable population for larger Panhandle counties and accelerating decline in population for smaller counties (Figures 1-8, 1-9). Appendix 1 has projections for each county.

AGE

The region’s age data show a strongly pronounced baby boom generation but a thinning of the pyramid where the baby boom “echo”, the children of the baby boomers, should be (Figure 1-10). This implies the loss of our young adult population and lack of available caretakers for an aging population that is continuing to grow. Decreased family sizes also contribute to the loss of youth.

A closer look shows that large Panhandle communities (populations over 5,000) have retained a considerable amount of their youth in the baby boom echo and other younger generations. In small towns (under 5,000 people) and rural areas, populations have decreased in young adult populations (Figures 1-11, 1-12).

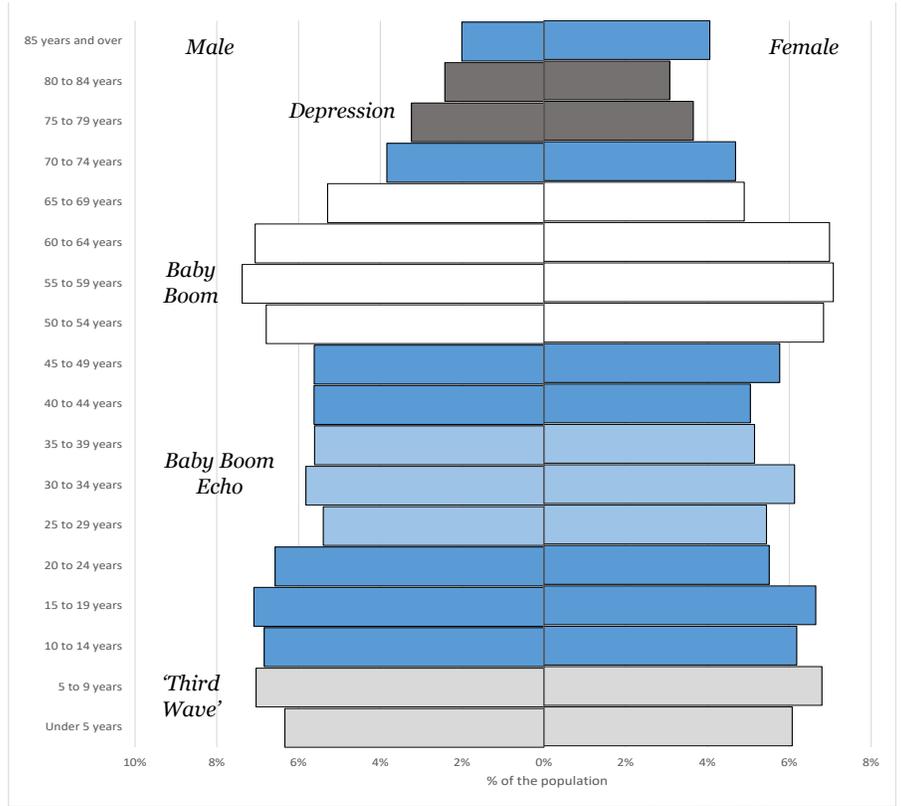


Figure 1-10. Population distribution by sex and 5-year age group in the Panhandle. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

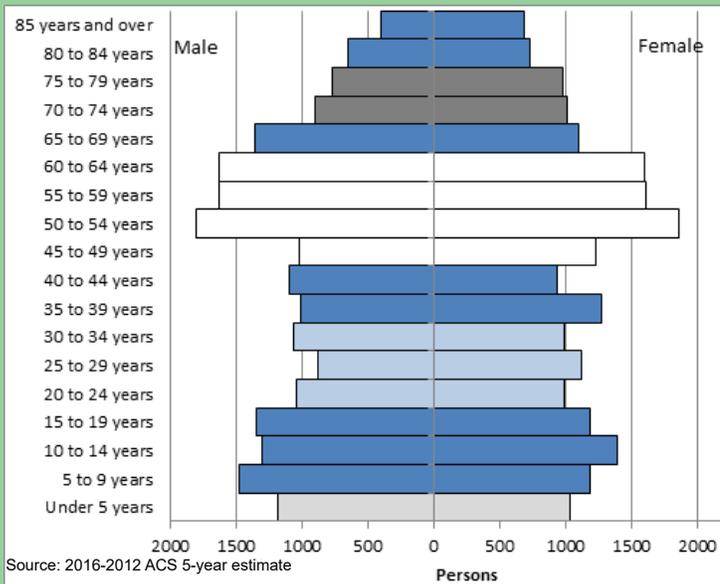


Figure 1-11. Population distribution by sex and 5-year age group in the Panhandle counties with less than 5000 people. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

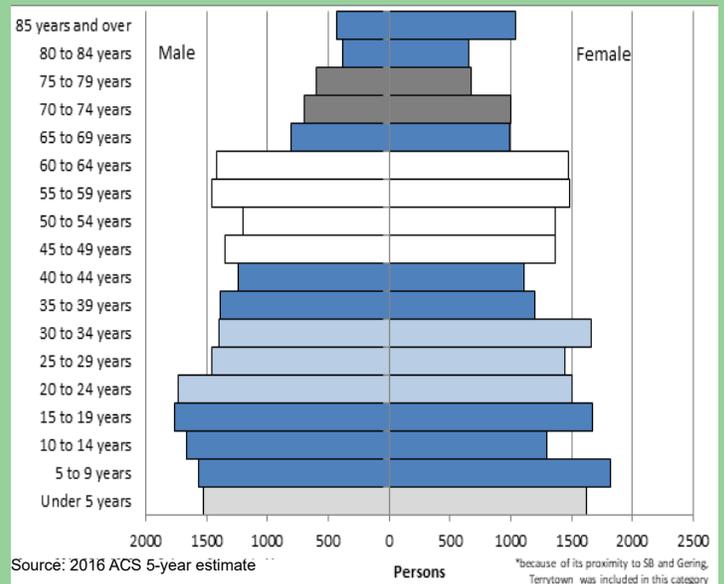


Figure 1-12. Population distribution by sex and 5-year age group in the Panhandle counties with populations over 5000* people. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

44.7%

increase in the population 65 and older by 2030

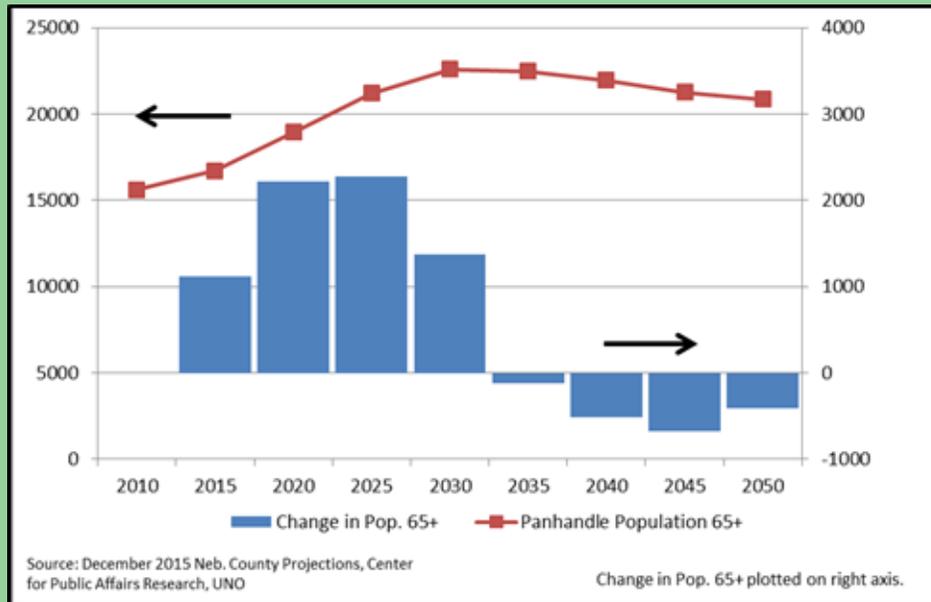


Figure 1-13. Population projections for the Panhandle's population over 65 years of age into 2050. Prepared by Daniel Bennett, PADD.

27%

of the population will be 65 and older in 2030

The Panhandle's population of adults 65 and older is projected to increase substantially as the baby boom generation ages. The cohort is projected to grow to nearly 7000 people or by 44.7%, between 2015 and 2030 (Figure 1-13). In 2030, the age group will make up 27% of all Panhandle residents. In some less populated counties, the population of residents 65 and older will account for over a third of the county's population. In 2030 the growth will have peaked and the population will decline.

An aging population has consequences, including loss of valuable workers and businesses through retirement and lack of succession. Panhandle economic development professionals and residents alike recognize the negative impact that a lack of business succession will have on the Panhandle's economy. Another possible outcome is the return of the baby boom echo generation as they move closer to aging parents to provide care, which could stabilize the region.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Racial and ethnic patterns were historically, and still are, measured in order to reveal social patterns of inequity. Examining social and economic patterns along racial and ethnic lines can reveal whether these inequities are improving or worsening and can mobilize citizens to think critically about opportunity, economic mobility, and the health of all citizens. The racial diversity of the Panhandle is representative of the racial diversity of the state as a whole. Several counties have higher populations of racial and ethnic minorities than the state average (Figure 1-14). Maintaining or growing the region's diversity depends on providing equitable opportunity, mobility and health.

In the Panhandle, and in Nebraska as a whole, the majority race is White with the next largest population being Latino of any race. Scotts Bluff and Morrill counties have the highest Latino populations while Sheridan county has the highest American Indian population. Like the rest of Nebraska, younger generations of new Nebraskans born to Latino families drive the growth of Latino populations in the region. However, in the Panhandle new generations of Nebraskans born to families with Latino heritage, are often second, third, or fourth generation Americans as compared with other communities where the population growth comes from in-migration (Figure 1-15).

Younger age groups are much more diverse than the general population. In Box Butte, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, and Sheridan Counties, over one third of all children under the age of five were of a minority race or ethnicity (not White). A slightly higher percentage of the Panhandle's population under five years old was of minority race or ethnicity than the population under 5 years old in the state of Nebraska by 2010 Census counts (Figure 1-16).

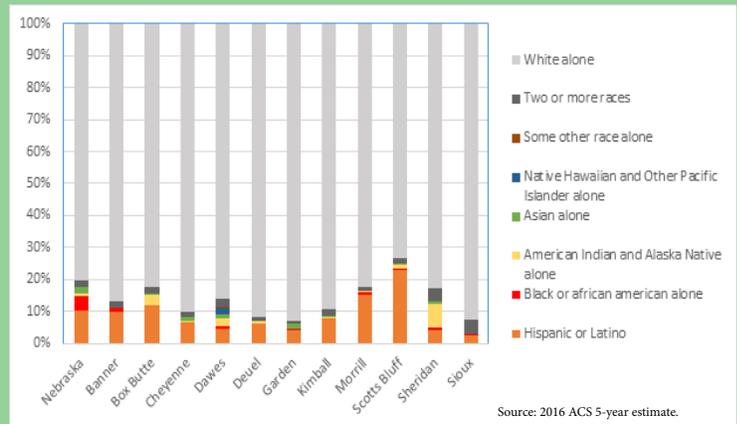


Figure 1-14. Percentage of Panhandle residents belonging to each of the major census-designated racial and ethnic groups as compared with the State's overall racial/ethnic make-up. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

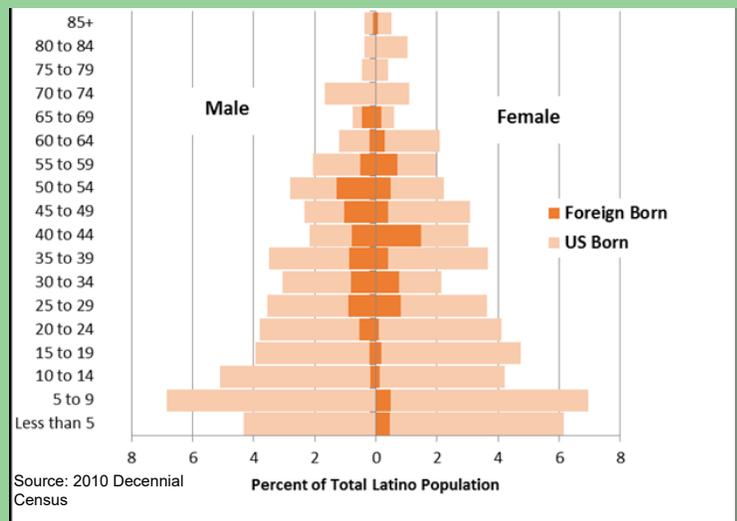


Figure 1-15. The population distribution of Latinos by 5-year age group, sex and by birth country (U.S. vs. any other country) in Western and North Central Nebraska. Prepared by David Drozd, UNO.

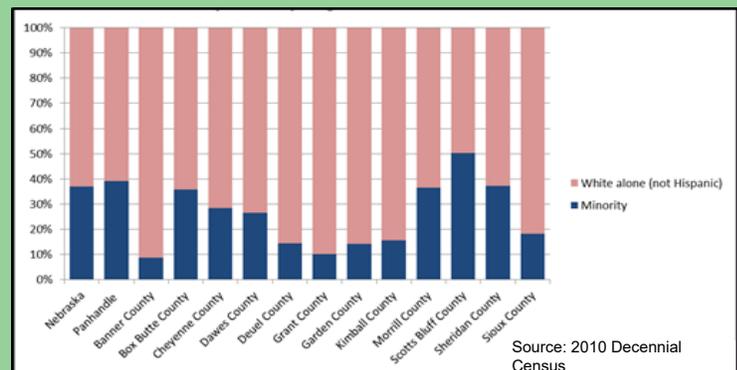
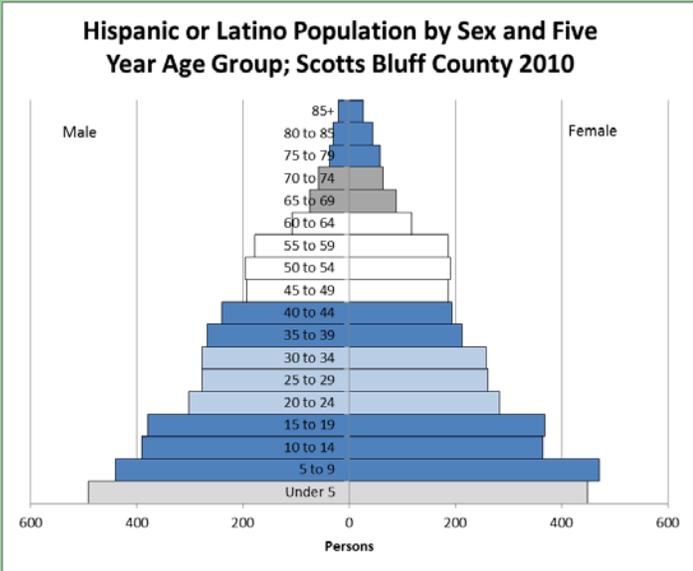
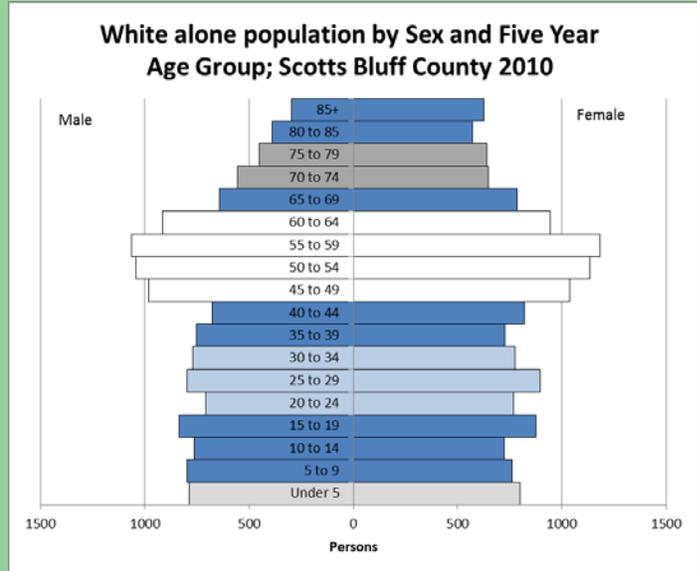


Figure 1-16. Population distribution by race for children under 5 years of age in the Panhandle. Prepared by Daniel Bennett, PADD.



Latino

Average Family Size 2010:	3.54
Median Age 2016:	24.9
Bachelor Degree or Higher 2016	5.8%
Median HH Income 2016:	\$32,135



White

Average Family Size 2010:	2.85
Median Age 2016:	45.1
Bachelor Degree or Higher 2016:	25.1%
Median HH Income 2016:	\$50,477

Figure 1-17. A comparison of family size, age, income, educational attainment and population distribution between Latino and White alone races in Scotts Bluff County. Prepared by Daniel Bennett, PADD.

Despite minority populations being present in the Panhandle for generations, a significant gap remains in the economic opportunities between minority and majority populations, as indicated by the rates of education and income for these two populations in Scotts Bluff County (Figure 1-17). Analyzing these discrepancies helps identify the root causes of the gaps in opportunity and address them through a social justice lens.

A society strengthens its capacity by supporting all sectors of the population. When everyone has equitable opportunity everyone succeeds. Aside from the humanitarian argument for supporting diversity within communities, there is an economic argument for diversity, developed by the W.K. Kellogg institute.

According to the W.K. Kellogg Business Case for Racial Equity, closing these opportunity disparities could mean an \$8 trillion gain in our national GDP by 2050.⁶ When all races of a community can participate equitably in the job market and in their communities, community vitality and quality of life improvements touch every

person in that community. In the Panhandle, the new workforce will be increasingly made up of Latino and American Indian community members. Creating an environment that makes room for people of color at the table for decision making and community visioning creates economic opportunities for growth as it did in the middle of the 20th Century according to Kellogg.

Other groups must also be included in the conversation around equity. This includes equity of opportunity on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, ability, class, veteran status, etc. The business case for racial equity is easily transferred to the case for equity for these other groups as well.

6. Turner, "THE BUSINESS CASE FOR RACIAL EQUITY A STRATEGY FOR GROWTH 2018."

MEETING THE FUTURE NEEDS

Understanding the changes that will likely occur in a region helps communities plan for future residents while continuing to meet the needs of today's residents .

Population Size

A declining population can mean an increase in blight and redevelopment challenges and a loss of political voice on the state level. While population decline is unlikely to reverse itself, small towns need not resign to a withering future. Iowa State University researchers have found it is possible to be small and maintain a thriving quality of life. This framework is called Shrink-Smart. If we assess the Panhandle from the shrink-smart framework, then we find there are opportunities to maintain or rebuild a thriving way of life. In order to be a shrink-smart community, it is necessary to:

- Connect resources across sectors
- Increase civic engagement
- Create a culture of openness and support

Equity

Meeting the needs of a diverse community requires bringing as many different voices to the table as possible. When you can build a community vision inclusive of the needs of a changing community you provide equitable opportunities for all members. This includes planning for:

- Increasing diversity on community committees in a meaningful way
- Addressing down-sizing to maintain community character and address blight
- Community gathering and meeting spaces that are age and ability friendly
- Meeting housing needs for all levels of income
- Addressing social determinants of health – access to green space, nearby business impacts, walkability, access to healthcare, etc.
- Accessible economic opportunity for everyone

SUMMARY

Population projections predict a population that will continue to shrink. Polls show 9% of Panhandle residents are planning to move and 19% are uncertain of whether they will move.⁷ Thus shrinking smart will be an important strategy for the region to maintain or improve its quality of life.

Connecting resources across sectors has long been a strength of the Panhandle. However, some remaining territorialism among service providers, municipalities, and business owners leaves room for improvement. Service providers and municipalities are consistently asked to do more with less everywhere, especially in rural regions. Combining resources and sharing information through the Panhandle Partnership helps use resources more efficiently. The region values autonomy, thus important partnerships have not yet been executed especially between municipalities and hospitals. Succession planning as the baby boomers age out of business ownership, non-profit management, and the tourism industry is a major problem in the area. People aren't thinking about retirement early enough to train new owners. Supporting this type of planning will become increasingly important for the region.

The Panhandle's communities consist of dense social networks and benefit from significant community participation. Engaging youth in these efforts in a meaningful way will serve the region by encouraging public participation at a young age. This could aid in retention by showing youth opportunities to make a difference in their local communities.

Creating a culture of openness and support will maintain and grow the region's diversity and build a thriving workforce. Creative solutions like internships, job training programs, and new higher education offerings should be strengthened. These solutions support learning new skillsets that will be useful to the local population.

Shrinking smart is a new way to look at economic development that honors where we are currently and asks, "How are we still providing for our citizens?"

7. Vogt et al., "DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska-Lincoln Individual and Community Well-Being in Nonmetropolitan Nebraska: 2017 Nebraska Rural Poll Results."

CHAPTER 2: NATURAL ASSETS

WATER

The Panhandle lies above the widest, deepest part of the Ogallala aquifer. As a result, the depleting water resources of the aquifer feel far from home. However, the map below illustrates the connectedness of our water resources with the rest of the Southwest, and points out some alarming water loss trends in the South Central and North Central Panhandle (Figure 2-1).

Over-pumping has reduced flows of Rivers fed by the aquifer ground water. Regulatory mechanisms are in place that limit groundwater usage for irrigation in the Panhandle.⁸ However, groundwater from the aquifer accounts for a much smaller proportion of irrigation water than surface water. Groundwater is highly regulated by the regional Natural Resource Districts (NRD) based on suggestions from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The DNR also gives guidance on appropriate usage of surface water for irrigation.

The 136 rivers and creeks in the Panhandle supply surface water for irrigation. The surface water irrigation rights come from approximately 30 irrigation districts and water delivery companies in the Panhandle. The main source of surface water in the region is snow melt from the Colorado and Wyoming mountains.⁹

It is equally important to pay attention to moisture accumulation in Colorado and Wyoming as it is to pay attention to rainfall recharge of groundwater here in Nebraska. Cropping acres are not projected to grow in the near future but monitoring appropriate water usage should remain a priority for the region.

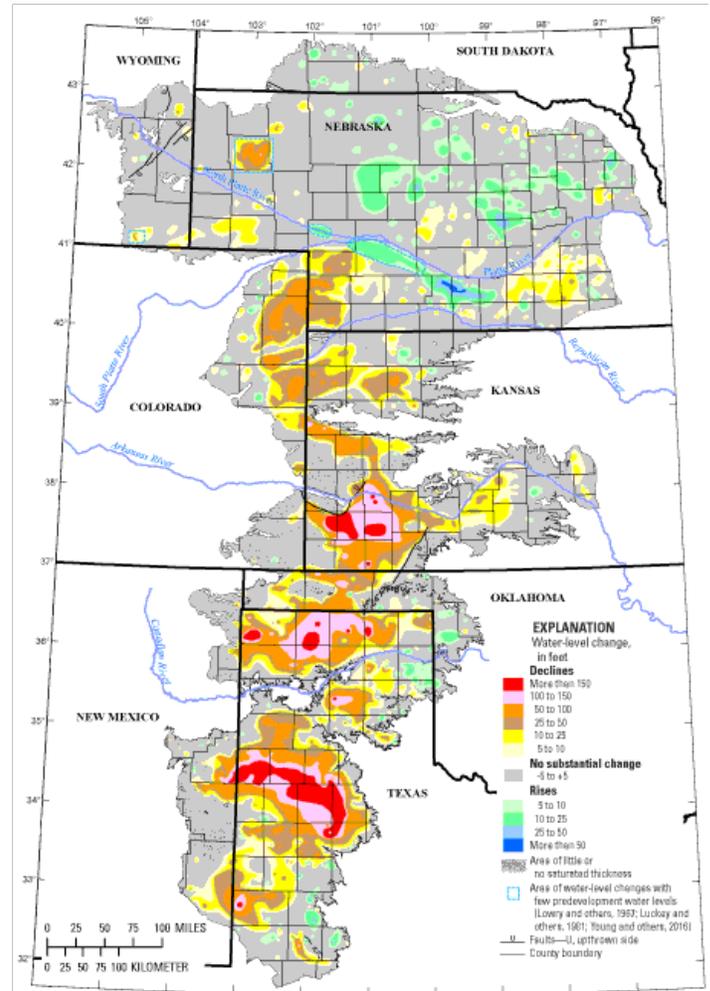


Figure 2-1. Changes in the Ogallala Aquifer from 1950 to 2015, severe loss of aquifer depth is illustrated in the Southern part of the aquifer.⁸



Figure 2-2. 30-year average annual rainfall across Nebraska. The Panhandle remains semi-arid which contributes to farming constraints.¹⁰

8. Jacobs, James, and Parker, "A Vanishing Aquifer."

9. Groskopf et al., "Agriculture in the Nebraska Panhandle."

10. High Plains Regional Climate Center, "Annual Precipitation (in.)."

SOIL AND AGRICULTURE

Western Nebraska soils are generally sandy and well-drained. The following soil map provides a generalization of soil types in the Panhandle and the rest of the state (Figure 2-3). Knowing our soils helps us understand the properties that support our unique agriculture.

The dominant soil types in the Panhandle are the chestnut soils which provide ideal conditions for winter wheat, oats, dry edible beans, and root crops like beets. The alluvial valley soils are most fertile because of constant river deposits of nutrients and fresh sediment. This soil provides the best growing environment for a diversity of crops and supports corn growth in the Platte Valley of the Panhandle.¹¹ The Panhandle gets very little rain compared to Eastern Nebraska, which also poses constraints for the type and amount of agriculture possible in the Panhandle (Figure 2-2).

According to the Nebraska Panhandle Extension and Outreach office, 75% of the agricultural land in the 16 counties they cover is rangeland and natural wildlife habitat while the remaining 25% supports crop agriculture (Figure 2-4).

Sixty percent of the cropland in the Panhandle Extension District does not receive irrigation water these lands support dryland agriculture. Predominantly, dryland crops are grown in Scotts Bluff, Morrill, Garden, Banner, Kimball, Cheyenne, and Deuel counties, with additional dryland crops grown in Box Butte and Sheridan counties. These dryland practices necessarily use soil moisture conservation practices like no till, extended rotations, and fallow periods.

While Scotts Bluff, Morrill, and Box Butte counties grow significant dryland crops, they also support over half of the irrigated crops in the Panhandle.

Most irrigation water comes from surface water. The Ogallala and High Plains aquifers support groundwater wells used for irrigation as well. The Natural Resource Districts determine whether or not to expand groundwater usage, which is important for our water sustainability.¹³

Despite our cropland's importance, the livestock industry provides a majority of the Panhandle's agricultural economy in the form of grazed cattle and feedlots to finish calves. In the 11-county Panhandle district short grass prairie forage makes up

most of the cattle land with a smaller percentage coming from Sandhills rangeland.¹⁴

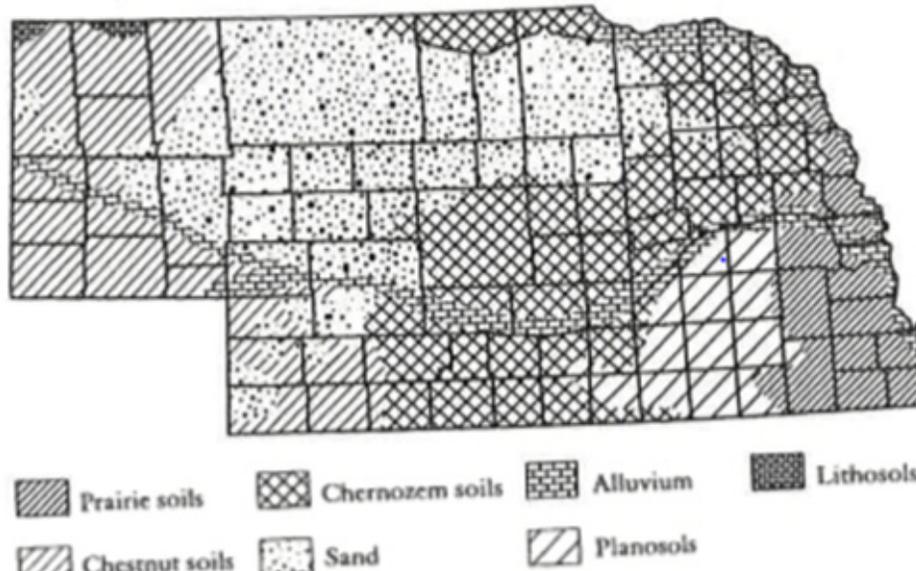


Figure 2-3. General soil categories as interpreted in *The History of Nebraska*. Based on Robert F. Turnure's map in "Soil Associations of the United States." in *Soils and Men: Yearbook of Agriculture* 1938 (Washington D.C: Government Printing Office, 1938), endpaper.¹¹

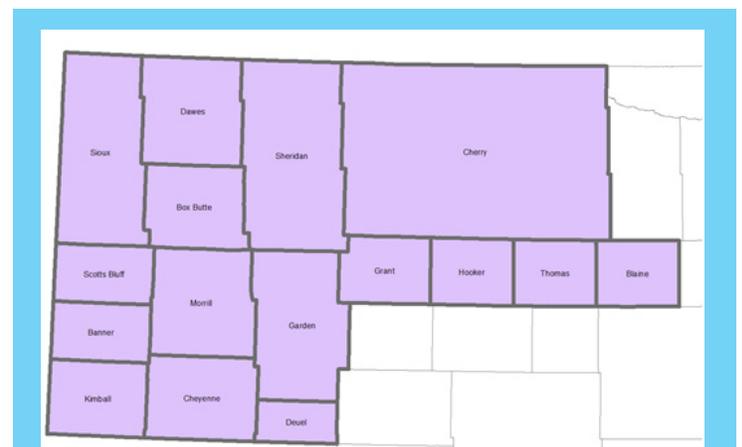
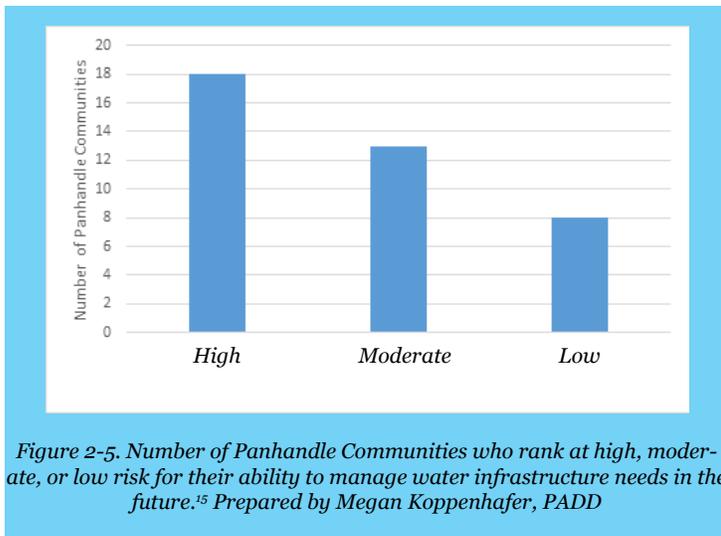


Figure 2-4. The Panhandle Extension and Outreach office covers 16 counties.¹⁴ The analyses provided by the Extension District are applicable to the Panhandle Development District.

11. Naugle, Montag, and Olson, "The Environment."
12. Naugle, Montag, and Olson.
13. Groskopf et al. "Agriculture in the Nebraska Panhandle."
14. Groskopf et al.

DRINKING WATER

The Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality maintains water quality data through the *Assessing Wastewater Infrastructure Needs* program, which provides communities with information to estimate future water needs. The program looks at a community's ability to improve their infrastructure in a sustainable manner in order to help them make important decisions, and it prioritizes communities for certain loans. According to the data more than half of Panhandle communities face a moderate or high risk for their ability to sustain water infrastructure needs in the future (Figure 2-5).



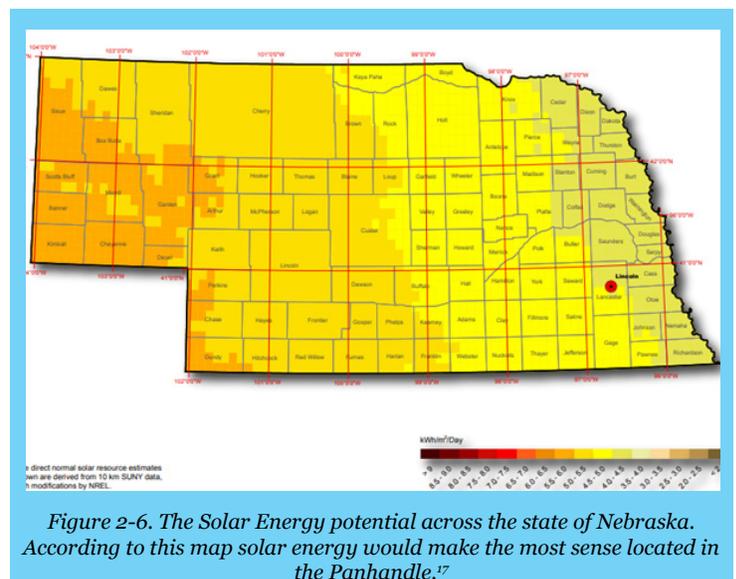
Three communities in the Panhandle, Clinton, Lisco, and Harrisburg, do not have public sewer systems. These communities rank as high risk for non-sustainable growth pressure on their wastewater systems. Fifteen other communities rank in this high risk category so, simply not having public sewer systems is not the only risk factor.

Many of the systems are old and require expensive updates.¹⁶ Estimated repairs to wastewater treatments systems across the Panhandle total \$28,296,075 and the estimated cost to repair drinking water systems across the Panhandle totals \$44,217,865. These improvements, while costly, are essential for the future of many of these small towns to continue to meet the needs and wants of current and future residents.

ENERGY RESOURCES

Overall, the mapped energy infrastructure in the Panhandle is limited compared with surrounding states. Use of oil resources in the Panhandle has tapered off over time with decreasing oil prices and consolidation of small oil companies. Over the last 80 years, oil wells in the Panhandle have produced nearly half a billion barrels. New oil resources could strengthen the tax bases of Panhandle communities. The Natural Resource Districts monitor all oil exploration and require preventative wells to protect against contamination or spills. Most oil wells were drilled in Southwestern Nebraska. The Nebraska oil and gas commission believes there is continued opportunity in the Panhandle for oil and gas resources, however the monetary risk to drill exploration wells prevents expansion.

Western Nebraska possesses strong solar and wind potential, making the Panhandle a prime location for alternative energy development (Figure 2-6). However, the regional job market relies on coal and oil industries. Railroad jobs in particular are very connected because the trains running through the region transport coal and oil. Mechanisms to train people into jobs that are entering the region through alternative energy should be developed in order to offset negative impacts from any jobs lost because of a reduction in oil and coal production.¹⁶



15. Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, "Clean Water and Drinking Water Intended Use Plan State Fiscal Year 2019."

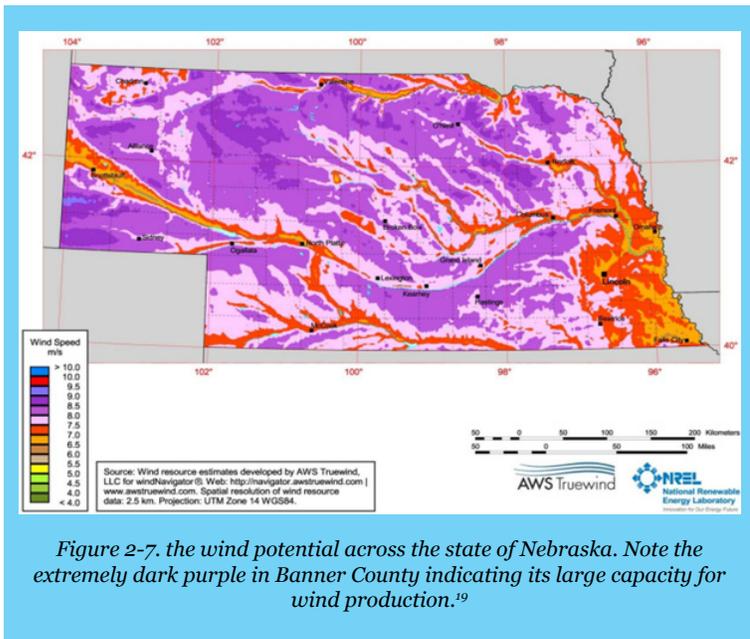
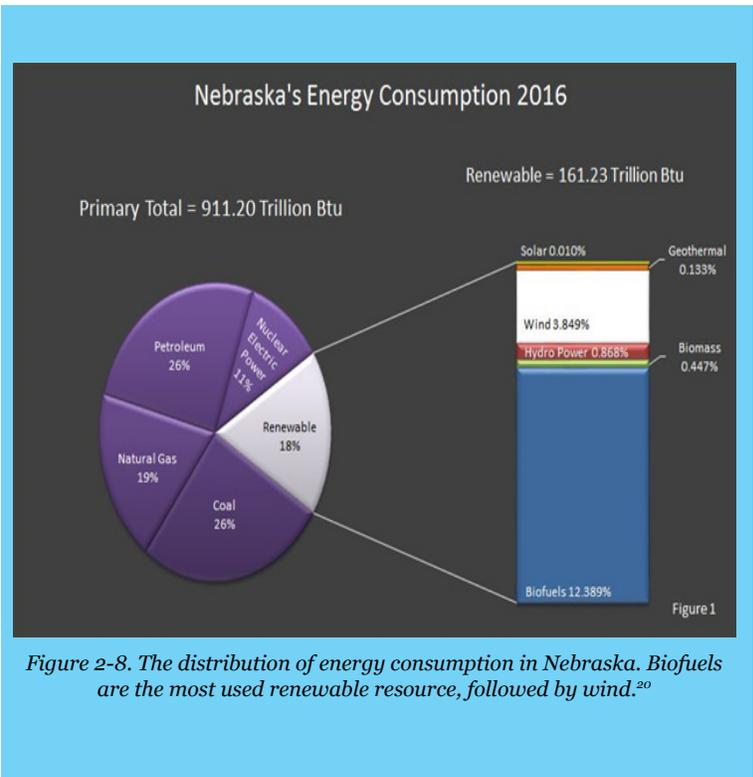
16. Koppenhafer, "Nebraska Oil and Gas Commission,"

17. National Renewable Energy Lab, "Solar Maps."

Scottsbluff, Nebraska leads the region in integrating solar power into the city's electricity grid. The city recently passed a resolution to support wider solar infrastructure. Much of the sun-soaked Southwestern Panhandle would benefit from enhanced solar infrastructure.

Wind energy in the Panhandle is most reliable in Banner County (Figure 2-7). Banner County residents have recognized their competitive advantage and formed a community initiative group to support thoughtful wind development in the region. They took initiative and hired a lawyer to investigate companies coming the region to support residents when they were approached to lease land for wind turbines. The future of wind energy in Banner County promises increased county revenue, providing money for increased services to citizens. With no incorporated communities, the county school district would benefit the most. Wind development, while in progress, has developed slowly due to poor infrastructure for carrying the energy out of the county. Adjacent economic opportunities include regional manufacturing jobs, infrastructure projects, and reduced property taxes for farmers within the county.¹⁸

resources, especially in the Northern Panhandle, could provide a significant alternative energy source (Figure 2-8).



Biomass, timber used for energy production, in the Panhandle is less of an opportunity than in the eastern side of the state, however woody biomass in Dawes County has not been fully tapped. As a whole, the state underutilizes waste wood resources. Realizing the most efficient use of these

TOURISM

The varied topography of the sandhills, bluffs, valleys, and forests provides the context for the beautiful sites and structures of the Panhandle's tourism industry. Panhandle tourism is rich in history both human and natural (Figure 2-9).

The trail system connecting the Panhandle's parks is not very extensive, but the trail systems within the parks are well developed. Several groups in the Panhandle focus on developing connecting trails to bring together the natural assets of the Panhandle.

Because of the varied topography, the region is home to many different animals which attract tourists from the Front Range looking for a quieter encounter with nature. Lack of education about the Panhandle's tourism opportunities inhibits the region's potential in this area.

18. Koppenhafer, "Banner County Wind Energy Association."

19. AWS Truepower and National Renewable Energy Lab, "Nebraska - Annual Average Wind Speed at 80 M."

20. Nebraska Energy Office, "Nebraska's Renewable Energy Consumption."

SUMMARY

The Panhandle region's identity is tied to the natural resources. Outdoor recreation opportunities and beautiful landscapes are often what people enjoy the most about the area. For the major agricultural employers the unique soil and climate combination creates ideal growing conditions for sugar beets, chicory, and dry edible beans.

A strong economic development strategy must build on these valuable natural assets. The combination of the Panhandle's natural resources and a small population makes the area attractive to folks living on the front-range who are looking for a slower pace, less traffic, and fewer people. New-comers from the front-range have already been drawn to the area for these reasons, both in permanent life and in tourism.

Year-around tourism activity will help encourage the movement of people from surrounding states to the Panhandle. These activities will provide a glimpse of life here while show-casing our areas unique natural beauty.

Additionally, preventing over-development of land will be an important planning consideration for future business endeavors. Agriculture will remain the base of the region, but value-added agricultural products and technology are the next steps to pursue as the land reaches its agricultural carrying capacity.

Finally, ensuring that drinking water and wastewater resources are upgraded to support new residents is critically important. Potential new residents will not be interested in moving to a location where the drinking water isn't deemed safe for their children. Taking care of the land in the Panhandle is not only a moral imperative but an economically smart choice as the land is and will continue to be our greatest asset.

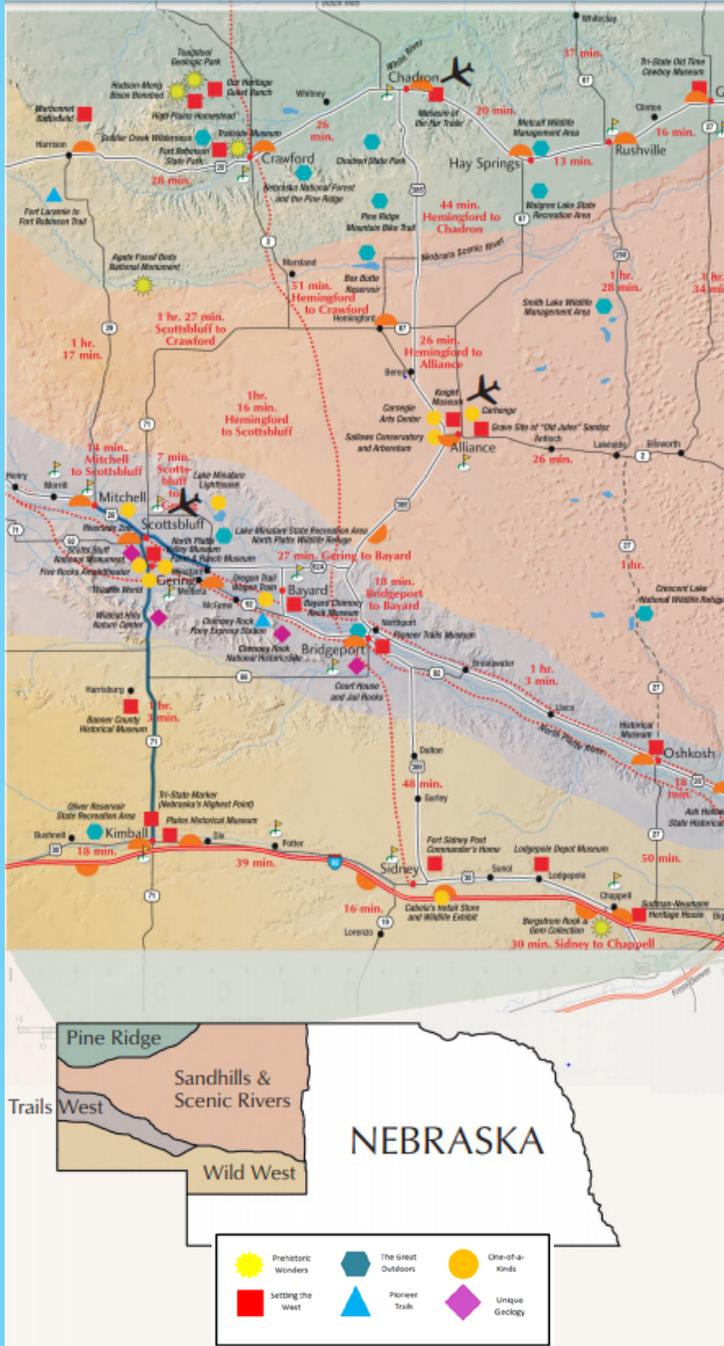


Figure 2-9. Natural attractions and trails of the 11-Panhandle Counties rely on the same geographical context as the agriculture and in many cases the two industries coexist, because the recreational lands are marginal farm land.²¹

21. Western Nebraska Tourism Coalition, "Getting Around Western Nebraska."

CHAPTER 3:

INFRASTRUCTURE

Access to transportation, availability of public infrastructure and access to distribution channels strongly influence how an area looks to potential investors and new residents. An area can lead or a follow when taking proactive steps for infrastructure improvements to meet the needs of new generation and markets.

BROADBAND

Access to fixed wireless coverage, fiber, mobile wireless coverage, and cable or wire line coverage in the Panhandle is inconsistent across the region (Figure 3-1). Generally, cities have access to these services while rural/unicorporated areas have a lack of access. Improvement to these services have been made in the communities with hospitals through the Rural Health Care Network.²²

The excess fiber from the improvements made to the hospitals then became available for other providers to lease. This fiber network has made the communities in which it is available attractive to a new class of workers looking to get away from the busy city life. Efforts are being made regionally to attract these workers to live in the Panhandle and telecommute to their job in Denver or other large metros.

The future of broadband expansion in the region will be important in order to keep rural communities competitive.

TRANSPORTATION

The Panhandle location along the historic westbound trails provided a foundation for its well placed road corridors. There are three main east-to-west corridors (Hwy 20, Hwy 30, and I-80) and two north-to-south routes (Hwy 71 and Hwy 385) that run through the region (Figure 3-2). However, improvements can always be made and there are some market factors that affect the efficiency and effectiveness of those corridors.

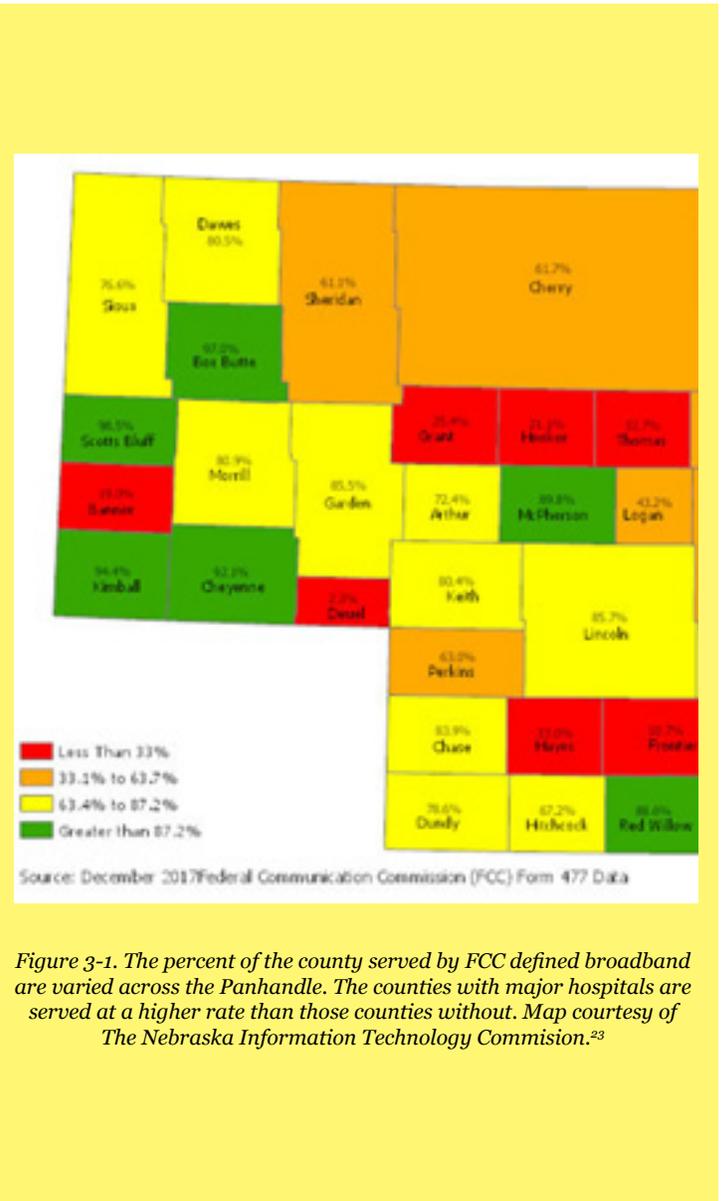


Figure 3-1. The percent of the county served by FCC defined broadband are varied across the Panhandle. The counties with major hospitals are served at a higher rate than those counties without. Map courtesy of The Nebraska Information Technology Commission.²³

22. The Nebraska Broadband Initiative, "Information Technology Assessment and Plan for the Western Region."

23. The Nebraska Broadband Initiative.

Roads

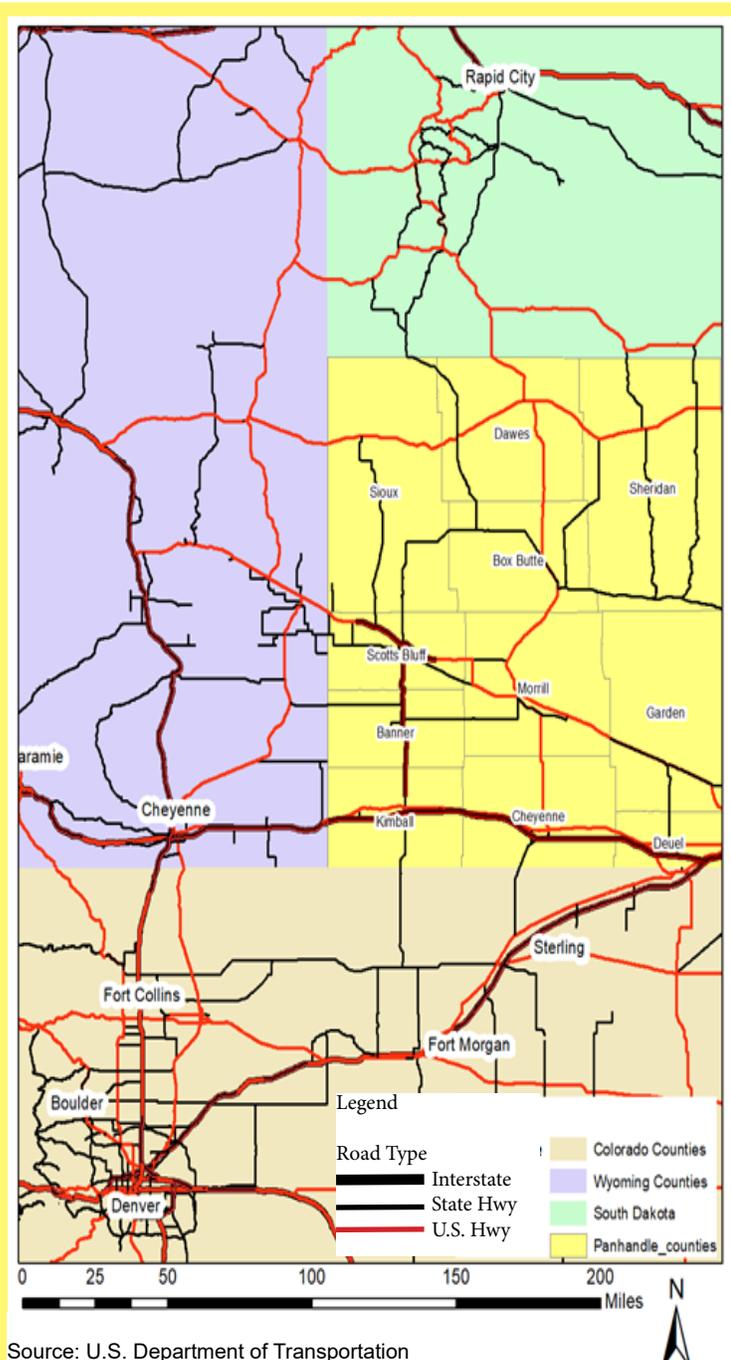
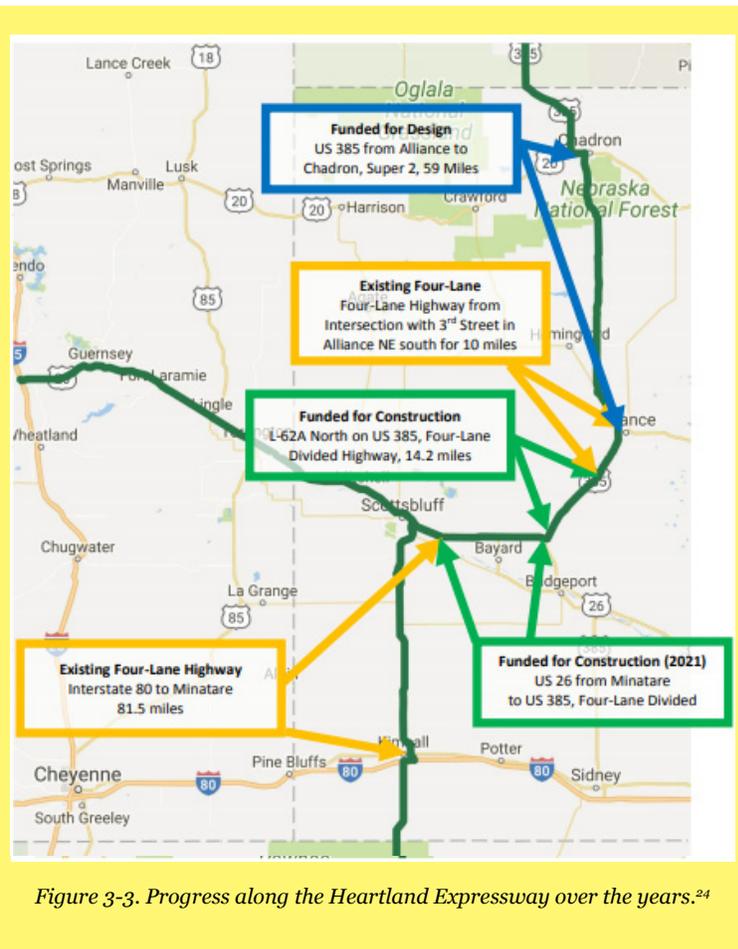


Figure 3-2. Map of the Nebraska Panhandle connectivity via roads to major surrounding trade centers. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

The Panhandle agricultural economy creates inefficiencies in its road systems because harvest necessarily requires an uneven traffic flow during the peak season. The field-to-distribution center roads are congested during harvest, but are used significantly less during the rest of the year. These uneven distributions along with a shrinking roads budget pose challenges when planning

future road improvements. One project that has support from many of the communities along the route is the Heartland Expressway (Figure 3-3). This is a four lane highway that would increase safety and economic development along the route and in the region. Additionally, the Expressway will potentially reduce shipping costs with increased traffic and more efficient trips for trucks carrying cargo.



Railroads

The Panhandle's railroad infrastructure is also deeply connected to past transportation routes. Therefore, the distribution of rail throughout the region lines up organically with population centers (Figure 3-4). Two major railroads serve the region: Burlington Northern Santa Fe and Union Pacific. These two railroad groups represent a large economic base.

²⁴ Heartland Expressway Association, "Heartland Expressway Association Annual Report."

Railroad work is turbulent by nature. For communities that rely heavily on the railroad for a bulk of their employment, large layoffs affect the workers and the larger local economy. Additionally, as talks of renewable energy continue to grow louder, questions arise about the future of railroad jobs as many are tied to coal.

FUTURE TRANSPORTATION

The Nebraska Department of Transportation and the Nebraska Public Power District are both considering the prospect of autonomous cars and electric vehicles. Gas taxes pay for road upkeep and with the loss of gas operating vehicles, officials are considering what will happen to the road infrastructure if they don't figure out how to capture the lost income. Autonomous cars could increase the number of cars on the road which will further burden the infrastructure. However, the promise of the safety that would come with this technology is exciting for an area with such heavy truck traffic. Opportunities to capitalize on these trends include strategic placement of charging stations along the Heartland Expressway and proactively addressing the road tax structure.

HOUSING

One reason for a lack of workforce frequently cited by Panhandle communities is the lack of quality, safe, affordable housing available to the potential workforce. On average, houses in the Panhandle were built in 1957 compared with Nebraska's average build year of 1971 (Figure 3-5).

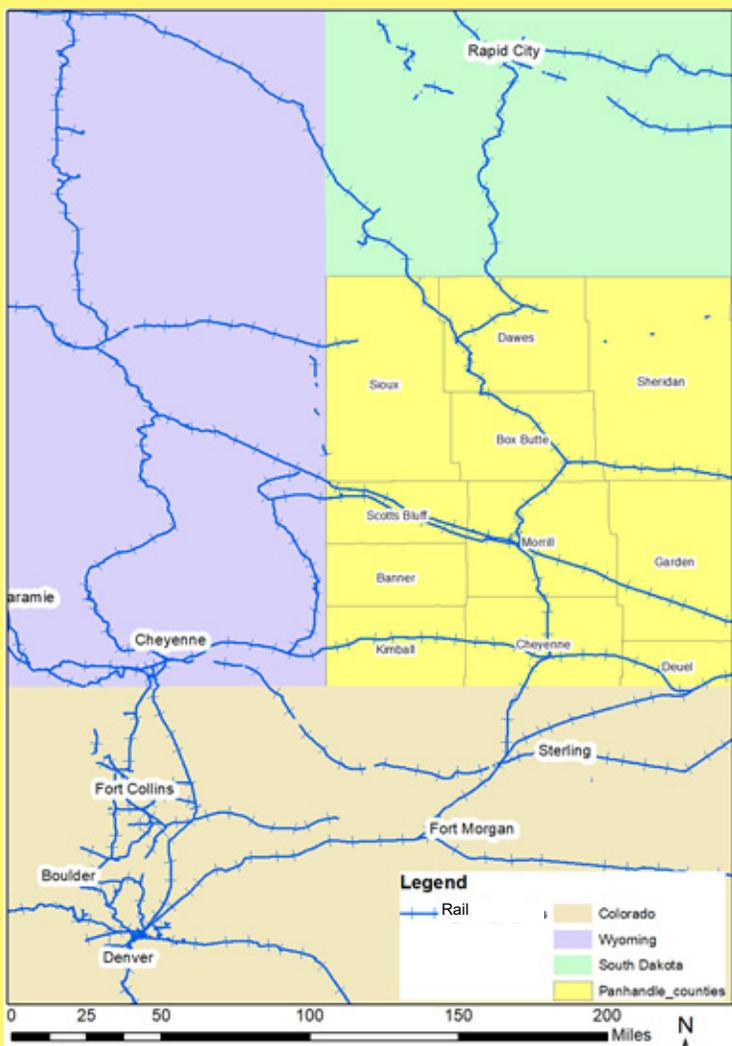


Figure 3-4. Map of the Nebraska Panhandle rail connectivity with surrounding states. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

Airports

There are 10 airports in the Panhandle ranging from small boutique airlines to the regional airport in Scottsbluff run by United airlines. The availability of air travel makes the region more accessible for tourism and political purposes. The ability to have air service in the region is supported by a federal program called the Essential Air Service.

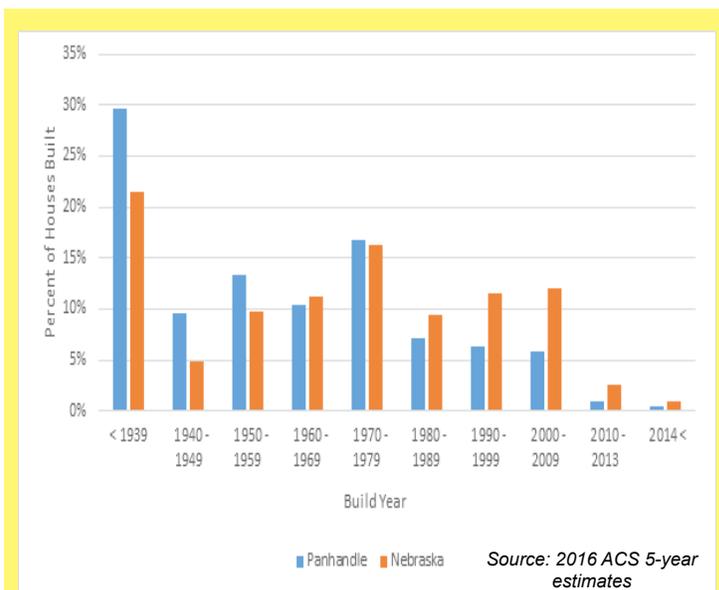


Figure 3-5. The percent of housing stock built in each decade. Of particular concern are those houses built prior to 1978 for lead paint and those built prior to 1989 for asbestos. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

Despite a shrinking population, this aging housing stock is failing to meet the needs of new and current residents.

The Panhandle has lower housing and rental costs when compared to Nebraska as a whole, but there are still

gaps between what is available and what is affordable and suitable for prospective home buyers (Figure 3-6). Despite these discrepancies, Nebraska benefits from the lower housing costs than Colorado. As retirees are looking to downsize Wyoming and Nebraska are very attractive because of the low cost of living. However, there are many Panhandle communities that don't have the quality of housing that new buyers desire. In addition to poor housing stock, the shortage of contractors and high costs prevent potential home updates.

SUMMARY

The Panhandle region struggles with aging infrastructure. Many communities have not planned for the future of their civic infrastructure including drinking water and waste water systems, broadband, and housing. In part, this is because many communities put in these systems when the population was at its peak and ample monetary resources were available.

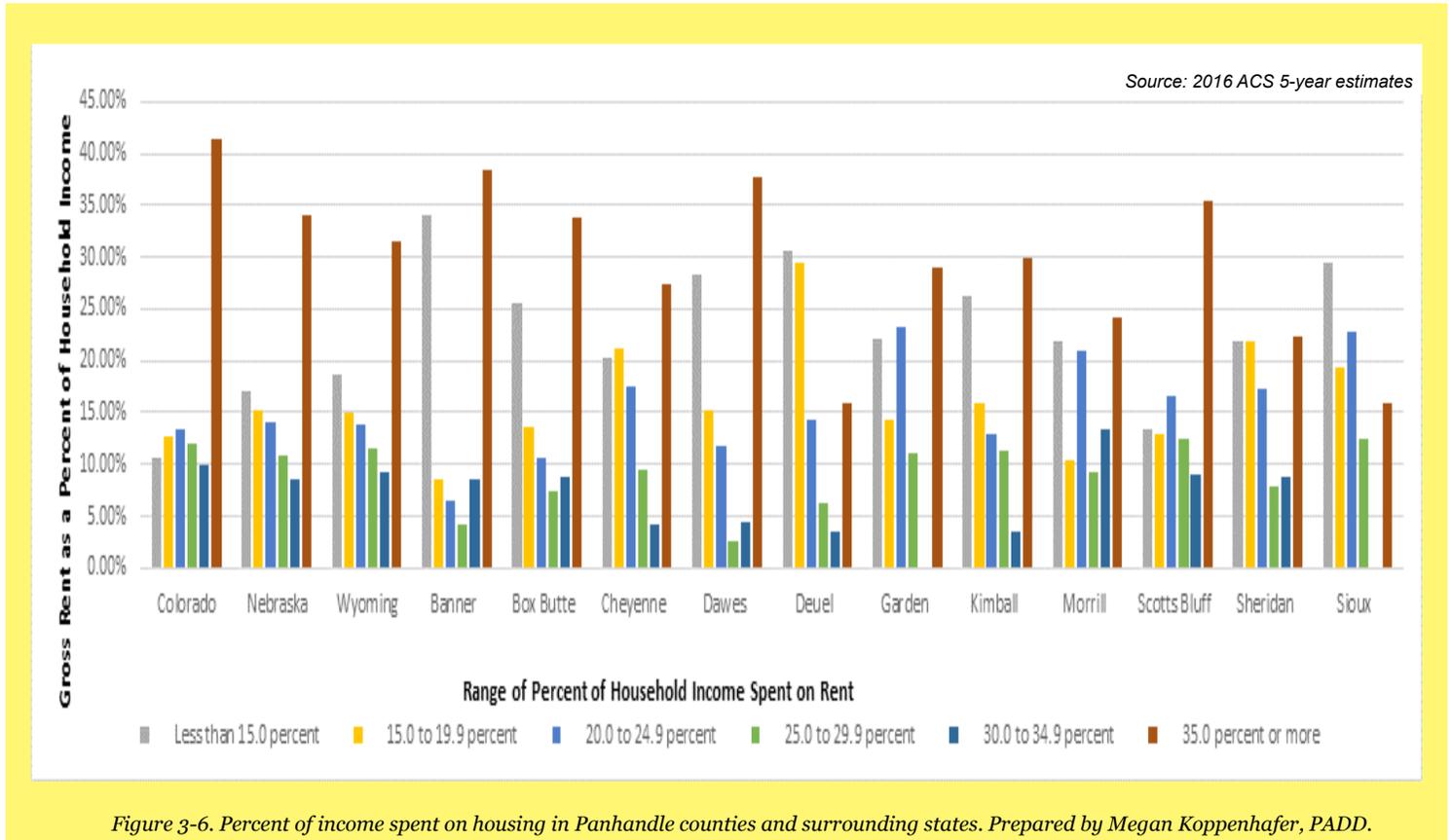


Figure 3-6. Percent of income spent on housing in Panhandle counties and surrounding states. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

This has made it very challenging for any regional groups to make a dent in housing rehabilitation in the region.

The regional economic development districts across the state agree that land banks may be the answer to the stagnating housing markets in our region. Land banking allows the accumulation of properties with unpaid taxes and forgives back taxes. The land bank would then be in charge of getting the property remediated and stabilized enough to support new development, allowing for more housing projects in the Panhandle.²⁵ In the meantime, several communities are exploring downtown housing options which support revitalization and the housing market.

Aging infrastructure will be a deterrent to those looking to move into our communities. Working with communities to plan infrastructure improvements over time, helping them to get grants and bring in businesses are all ways to support community development that will attract and retain community members.

The regional transportation systems are reasonably well-suited, but it is also aging. Improving roadways to be safer and to support economic development will add value to the region.

25. Omaha Municipal Land Bank. "What is a Land Bank?."

CHAPTER 4:

REGIONAL ECONOMICS

Economic health is the driving force for opportunities and prosperity in a region or community. While it is not the only indicator of good quality of life, robust economic opportunities contribute heavily to the level of income and the access to education and health care of the residents. Thriving local and regional economies also contribute to the vibrancy of communities and provide a base for shared investments in things like infrastructure, law enforcement, public spaces, and maintaining positive neighborhood environments.

WORKFORCE PATTERNS

The Nebraska Panhandle is rooted in a strong agricultural economy, as shown in the previous section, and has fared well in economic downturns, maintaining unemployment rates often much lower than the nation (Table 4-1).

Wages and professional opportunities, however, lag behind the state and nation as the region has struggled to compete with the metropolitan areas pool of talent and innovation (Figure 4-1). Lower wages were cited by the focus groups as being the major reason for the lack of youth returning to the area. The perception of not being able to make back one's investment is a hindrance to young people who have advanced degrees and loans to pay off (Figure 4-2).



Photo 4-1. The Heartland Expressway provides new economic opportunity for the region. Photo taken by Daniel Bennett, PADD.

Table 4-1. Unemployment rates in the Panhandle; 2000-2017 12-month average. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD. Source: Dept. of Labor

County	2000	2008	2010	2017
Banner	3.0	2.5	4.4	3.8
Box Butte	3.9	3.7	5.0	3.3
Cheyenne	2.3	2.8	3.6	2.9
Dawes	3.0	2.9	4.0	2.8
Deuel	3.0	2.9	3.9	2.6
Garden	2.6	3.0	4.1	2.8
Grant	2.3	2.9	3.8	2.3
Kimball	2.5	3.4	4.7	2.9
Morrill	3.5	3.1	4.1	2.9
Scotts Bluff	4.0	3.7	5.5	3.4
Sheridan	2.9	2.7	3.5	2.6
Sioux	1.9	3.4	3.7	3.0
Panhandle	2.9	3.1	4.2	2.9
Nebraska	2.8	3.3	4.6	2.9
U.S.	4.0	5.8	9.6	4.4

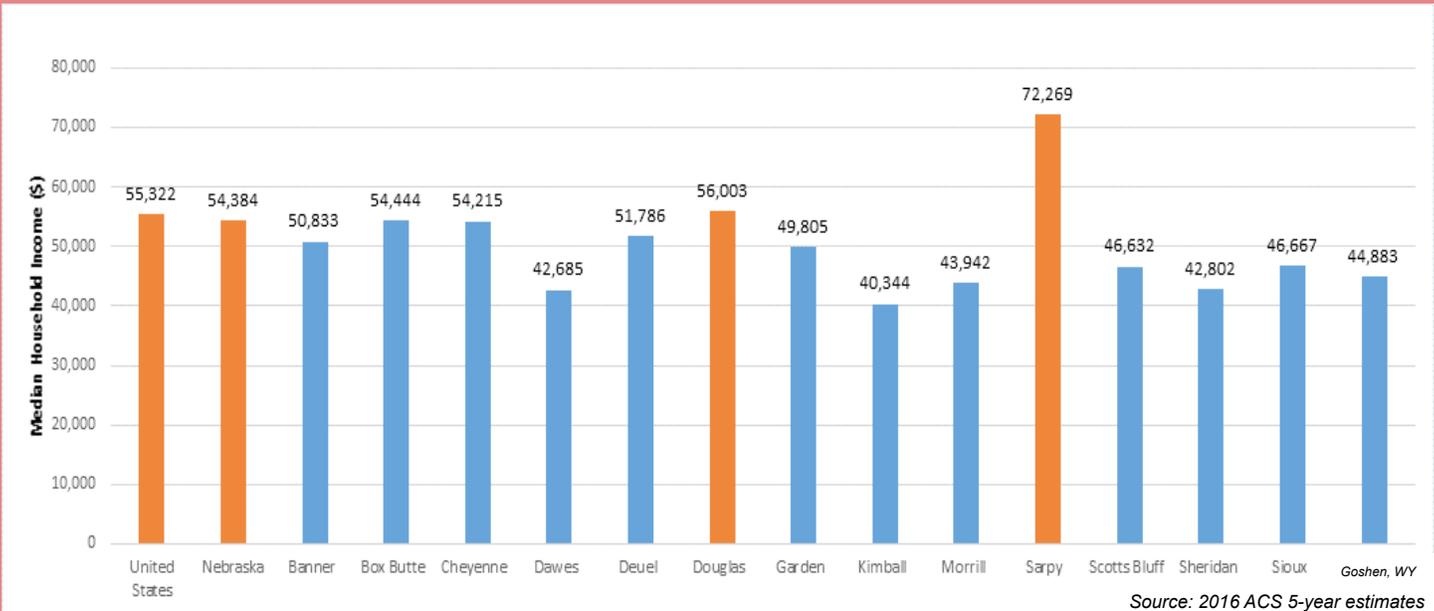


Figure 4-1 Median household incomes for each of the Panhandle counties and the metropolitan counties compared with the state and country. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

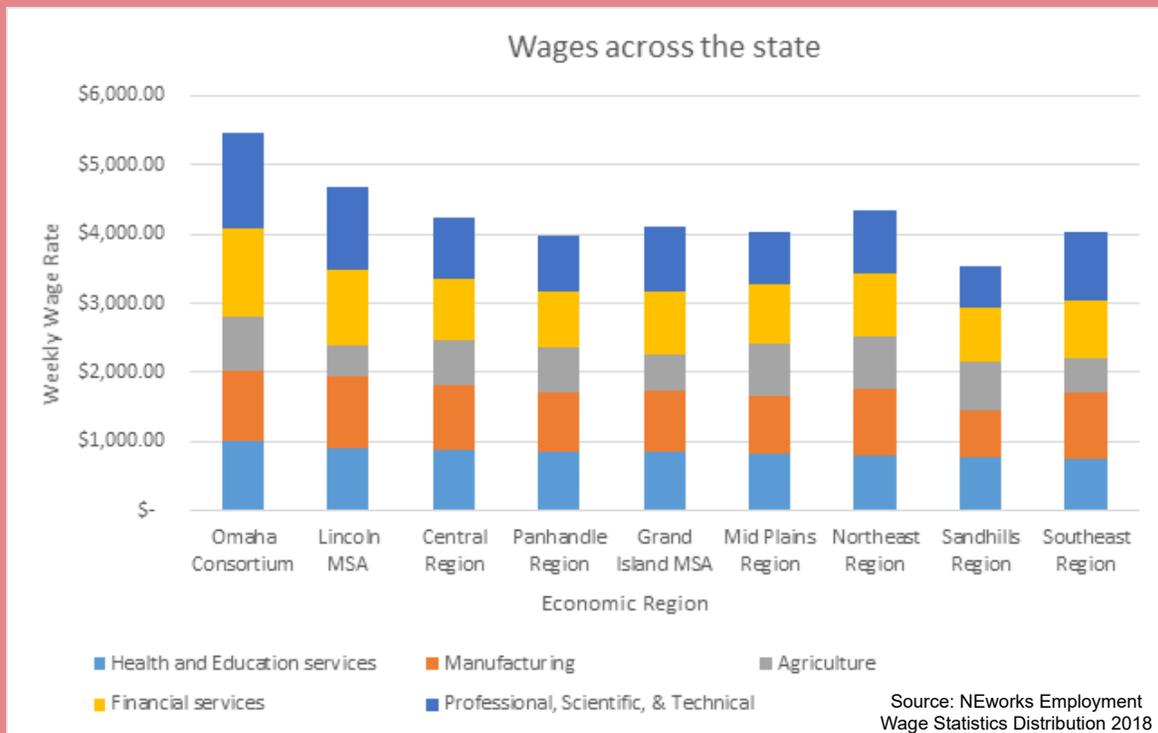
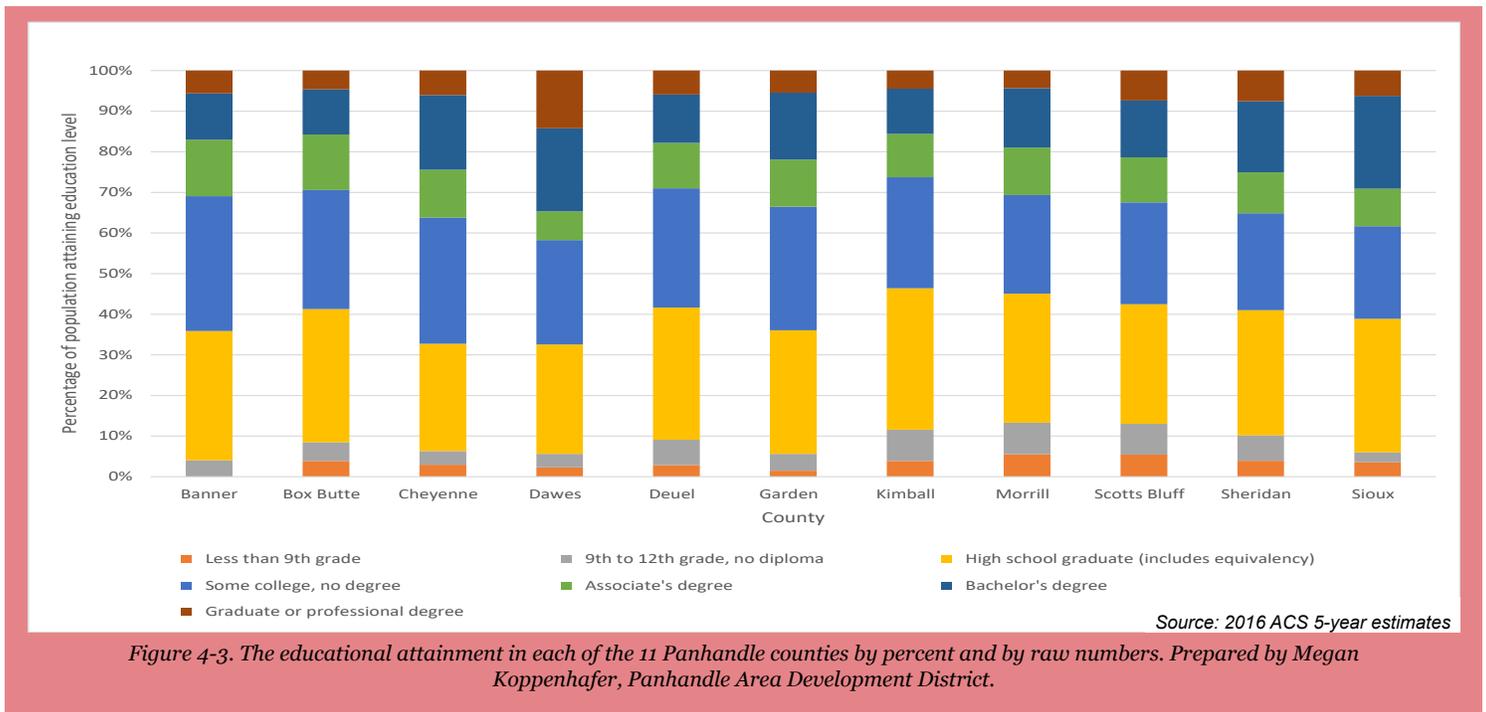


Figure 4-2. Weekly wage rates across the state by economic development region and employment industry. The wages are cumulative and should be compared by their relative color height. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Panhandle hosts a diverse range of workforce development opportunities. While an educated workforce is important it is not necessary to attend an institution of higher education in order to learn advanced skills. In the Panhandle, creative strategies for workforce development have been implemented, including technical training programs and certifications. The high schools in Scottsbluff and Gering have career development programs that allow students to get their nursing assistant certification, associates degree, or certification in a trade skill like welding.

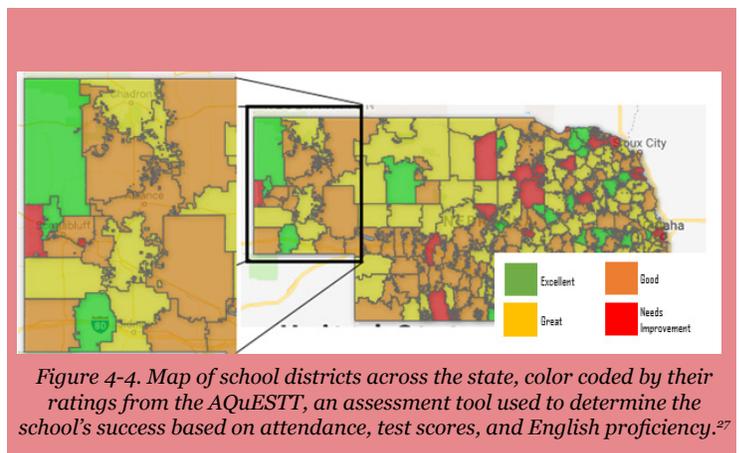
2013, compared to 62.0% of state college and university graduates. However, annual median wages were higher for University of Nebraska-Kearney (UNK) graduates. Unfortunately, disparate opportunities for minority graduates exist. The estimated average annual wage for white Western Nebraska Community College (WNCC) graduates was 19.4% higher than it was for minority graduates.²⁶ Any strategies to further opportunity and workforce development in the Panhandle must face these realities and address the inequitable opportunity for graduates from diverse backgrounds.



Lower levels of educational attainment in the Panhandle reflect the fact that many of the jobs available in agriculture, transportation, and manufacturing do not require a bachelor's degree (Figure 4-3).

High levels of high school graduation in the Panhandle reflect the trend throughout the state. Nebraska has the fourth-highest graduation rate in the nation, with 89.3% of students graduating and the rate has increased since 2010. Still, opportunity lags for students reporting their race/ethnicity as Asian, Latino, Black/African American, or Native American despite increases in graduation rates. The quality of schools in the Panhandle is mixed based on test scores but largely satisfactory based on focus group feedback (Figure 4-4).

About 74.0% percent of Nebraska community college graduates were working in-state in the first quarter of



26. Labor Market Information Center, "Graduate Outcomes - Western Nebraska Community College."

27. Brant, "Morrill among Districts Rated as 'Needs Improvement' as State Releases AQuESTT Results."

In addition to traditional educational institutions, Nebraska and the Panhandle have non-traditional work-force development strategies in place that are becoming more popular. The Nebraska Department of Economic Development has several cost share programs to support apprenticeships and internships in the state. There are also several short trainings available through the Panhandle Partnership, along with several other locally run programs, that teach particular skills such as digital marketing and child care classes.

Unemployment remains slightly higher in the Panhandle than in the state of Nebraska, but has been consistently lower than average national unemployment (table 4-1). These numbers give an incomplete account of employment trends in the region as they do not account for underemployment or those working multiple jobs. Unemployment measures also do not account for the size of the labor force which has seen a steady decline since 2000 (Table 4-2). It is worth noting that 48% of Panhandle residents are dissatisfied with available job opportunities.²⁸

Table 4-2. Average percent change in the labor force. The Panhandle as a whole is losing labor force. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

County	Labor Force 2000	Labor Force 2010	Labor Force 2016	Change 2000-2016
Banner County	428	413	418	-2.3%
Box Butte County	6,422	5,852	5,678	-11.6%
Cheyenne County	5,655	5,558	5,434	-3.9%
Dawes County	5,062	5,499	5,240	3.5%
Deuel County	1,175	1,031	1,080	-8.1%
Garden County	1,217	1,266	1,190	-2.2%
Grant County	439	421	452	3.0%
Kimball County	2,198	2,124	1,964	-10.6%
Morrill County	2,798	2,650	2,671	-4.5%
Scotts Bluff County	18,775	19,200	19,035	1.4%
Sheridan County	3,295	2,821	2,748	-16.6%
Sioux County	802	835	791	-1.4%
Panhandle	48,266	47,670	46,701	-3.2%
Nebraska	944,986	993,400	1,011,051	7.0%
United States	143,893,664	155,539,411	159,863,112	11.1%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

People leave the labor force when they stop looking for work, move away, or retire. Box Butte, Kimball, and Sheridan counties all recorded double digit percentage decreases in total labor force. This trend continued through the recession and has persisted even while the national economy has recovered. Dawes, Scotts Bluff, and Grant Counties show modest growth in the labor force since 2000.

One possible reason for loss of labor force, is the lack of jobs in high wage, high demand industries (Figure 4-5). Another reason for the loss of labor force is the aging population in the Panhandle. As the baby boomer generation retires the labor force in the Panhandle will continue to decrease. Additionally, the farm income across the state has decreased from 7 billion annually to 2 billion annually. This shift in opportunities and job markets has contributed to population consolidation within the four trade counties (Box Butte, Scotts Bluff, Sheridan, and Kimball).

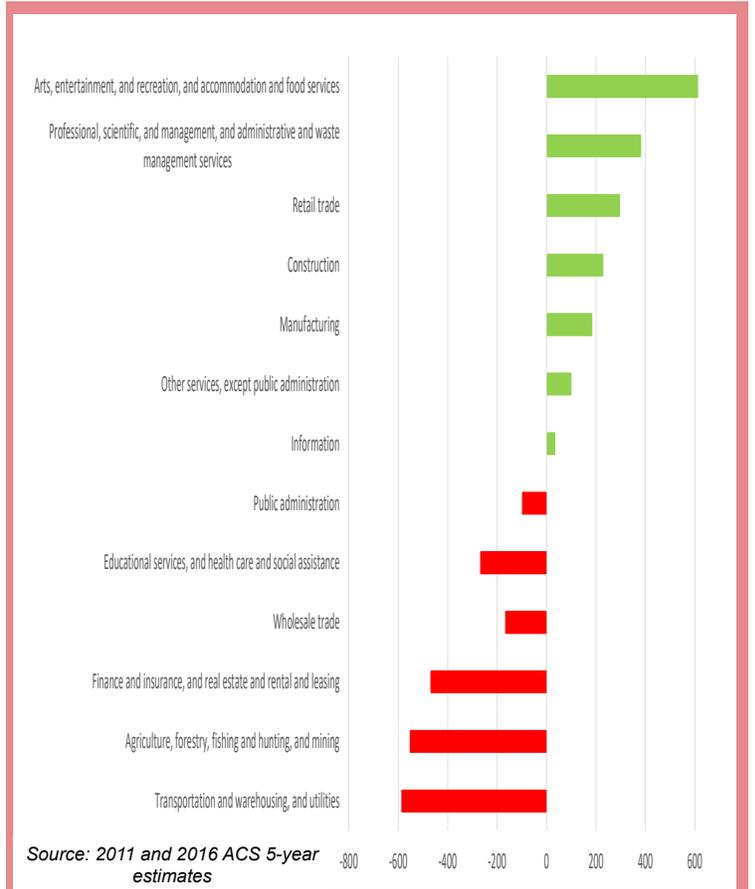


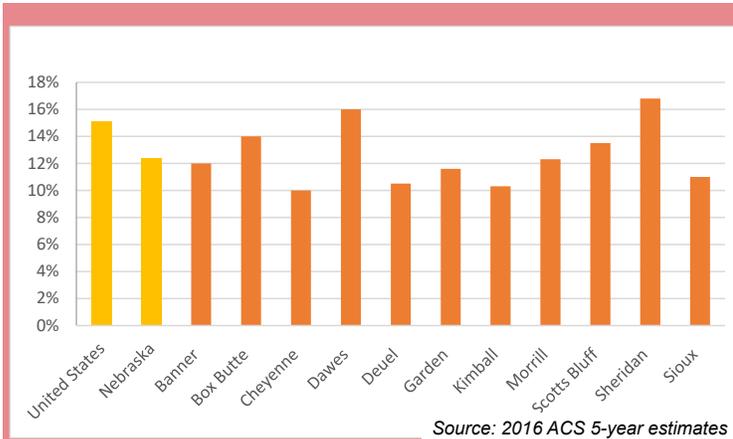
Figure 4-5. Change in number of workers by Employment Industry in the Panhandle. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

Instead of focusing on our available population there has been a lot of interest in recruitment. This effort will continue to be unsupportive of improving opportunity for young people and disenfranchised people in the Panhandle. While we should continue to recruit we should also focus efforts on expanding the capacity of underemployed Panhandle residents.

28. Vogt et al., "DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska-Lincoln Individual and Community Well-Being in Nonmetropolitan Nebraska: 2017 Nebraska Rural Poll Results."

POVERTY

Poverty is defined as \$11,880/ year for individuals and \$24,300/ year. Poverty is concentrated in the northeast corner of the Panhandle in Dawes County. This is in part because of the high population of college students. Rates of poverty in the Panhandle are generally lower than the national and state averages (Figure 4-6).



Source: 2016 ACS 5-year estimates

Figure 4-6. The percent of people in poverty in each of the Panhandle counties compared to state and national averages. Five out of 11 counties have poverty rates higher than the state only two have poverty rates higher than the national average. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

American Indian and Latino (of any race) are the largest minority groups in the Panhandle and have poverty rates higher than the area average. The White race has the lowest prevalence of poverty (Table 4-3).

County	White alone	American Indian alone	Two or more races	Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	White alone, not Hispanic or Latino
Banner County	11.5%	-	36.4%	51.6%	9.9%
Box Butte County	14.0%	68.9%	46.0%	33.3%	11.2%
Cheyenne County	11.4%	37.8%	2.7%	45.4%	9.0%
Dawes County	16.1%	73.7%	7.6%	16.3%	16.1%
Deuel County	12.5%	22.2%	0.0%	47.4%	10.1%
Garden County	10.0%	-	25.0%	0.0%	10.0%
Grant County	13.3%	-	-	29.3%	12.4%
Kimball County	14.1%	0.0%	0.0%	44.4%	11.3%
Morrill County	11.7%	0.0%	29.6%	11.9%	11.4%
Scotts Bluff County	12.7%	45.4%	23.5%	23.8%	9.7%
Sheridan County	12.2%	56.3%	17.0%	32.7%	10.9%
Sioux County	13.1%	-	3.4%	21.3%	12.7%
Panhandle	12.9%	59.3%	18.9%	26.1%	10.8%
Nebraska	10.90%	40.50%	21.70%	25.70%	9.50%

Source: 2015 ACS 5-year estimates

Table 4-3. Poverty by different racial groups in the Panhandle. The Panhandle poverty rates for the Latino population are higher than the state average. Prepared by Daniel Bennett, PADD.

Particularly high poverty rates exist for children under 18, with four of the eleven counties having childhood poverty rates over 20% (Figure 4-7). Sheridan County has the highest rate at 29.5% followed by Box Butte, Deuel and Scotts Bluff counties. More children in poverty means more children growing up with potential obstacles to career, educational, and health care opportunities, which threatens the overall prosperity of a community. One hopeful trend is a decline in poverty and childhood poverty in the region from its highest point in 2009. This recent decrease is promising, but still exposes the vulnerability of the area to changes in economy and lay-offs from major employers.

The Panhandle's low rate of poverty among people with low educational attainment, likely reflects the high-paying jobs available for those without bachelor's degrees. The region's 33% poverty rate for those with a high school degree or less is drastically lower than big cities such as Denver (50%), Rapid City (43%), or Omaha (45%). Higher education helps employees access higher paying opportunities. Just 3% of those with a bachelor's degree or higher were below the poverty level (Table 4-4).

Educational Attainment	Below Poverty		
	Panhandle	Nebraska	U.S.
Population 25 years and over	10.3%	9.3%	12.0%
Less than high school	23.8%	24.9%	27.5%
High school graduate	11.7%	10.9%	14.3%
Some college, Associate's	9.9%	8.8%	10.5%
Bachelor's degree or higher	3.0%	3.5%	4.5%

Source: 2015 ACS 5-year estimates

Table 4-4. Poverty level for individuals at different educational attainment levels. Prepared by Daniel Bennett, PADD.

Positive programs exist to help individuals who are unable to meet all of their needs in the Panhandle. These programs are brought together under one umbrella group called the Panhandle Partnership, which seeks to bring partners together to minimize duplication and increase the collective capacity of the human and health resources in the Panhandle. Despite these programs, a community survey on poverty showed recognition from the community that these services are mostly band-aids and do not address the root of the problem. Addressing poverty in the Panhandle will need to include increased services, efficient use of resources, and development of a diverse, well-paying economy.

County	Percent
Sheridan County	29.5%
Box Butte County	28.8%
Deuel County	27.2%
Scotts Bluff County	22.4%
Cheyenne County	19.0%
Banner County	17.3%
Dawes County	15.6%
Sioux County	15.5%
Kimball County	15.1%
Grant County	14.6%
Morrill County	14.5%
Garden County	8.9%
Panhandle	21.8%
Nebraska	17.1%
United States	21.7%

Source: 2015 ACS 5-year estimates

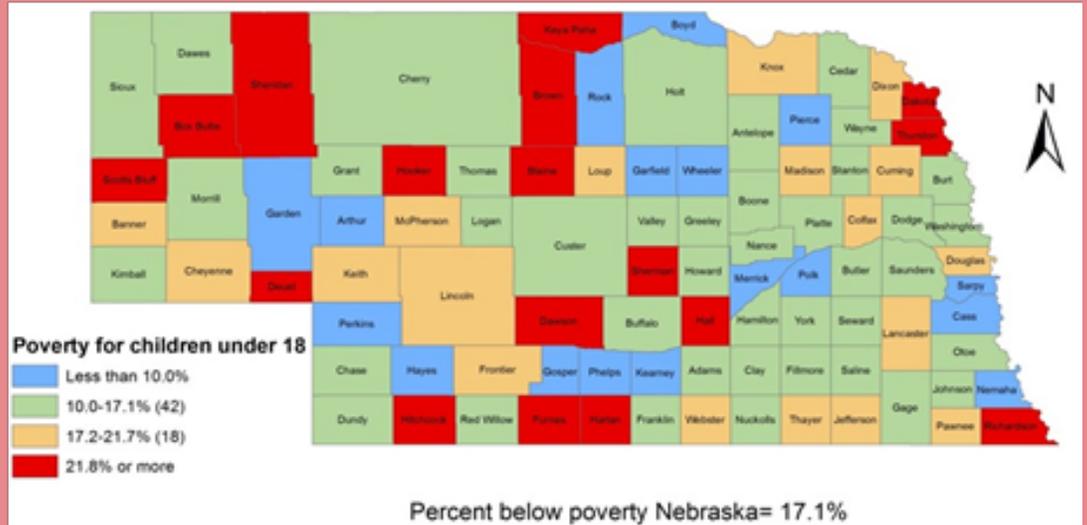


Figure 4-7. Percentage of children under 18 living below the poverty level. Four counties in the Panhandle have a high percent of youth falling into this category. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

MARKET AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

The markets of the Panhandle determine what our economies are built on. The future strength of those markets is deeply tied to the opportunity for people to come back and find or make job opportunities in the Panhandle. Opportunities include online retail markets, hospitality and tourism, and health services. Market strength can be measured in a few different ways.

Pull Factors and Trade Leakage

A region's pull factor is calculated as shown in equation 4.1.

$$\text{Eq. 4.1 Pull Factor} = \frac{\text{local per capita taxable retail sales}}{\text{(state avg. per capita taxable retail sales)}}$$

The University of Nebraska extension and outreach program published a report on retail trends and analysis from across the state in 2017. The pull factors for each county from 2015 were calculated and compiled for this report (Figure 4-8).

Pull factors greater than 1.0 indicate retail sales of the area have exceeded the assumed population base and are being sold outside of the area. Scotts Bluff County and Cheyenne County are both trade centers and their pull factors are greater than 1.0, which indicates their pull in the region. Meanwhile Banner County's very low pull factor indicates very few commercial zones. The other 9 counties, including Banner County, experience retail

leakage, meaning that people leave the communities to shop elsewhere (Table 4-5).²⁹

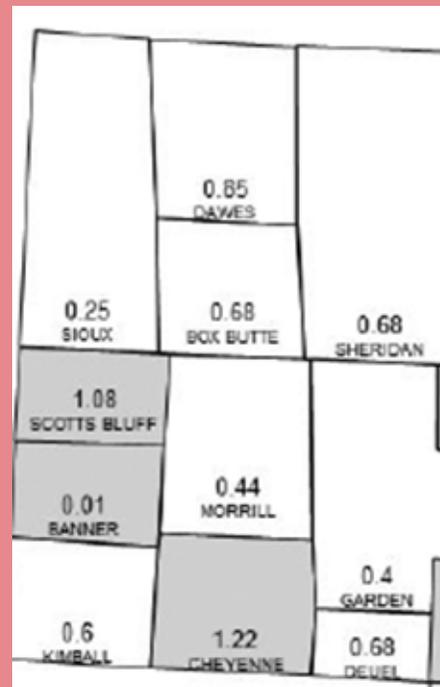


Figure 4-8. Pull factors by county across the Panhandle.³⁰ Grey counties are those counties that have a trade factor above one or are effectively 0.

29. Giri, Anil; Johnson, "Retail Sales Patterns and Trends Across Nebraska Counties and Localities."

30. Giri, Anil; Johnson.

Town/City	Average Pull Factors of Taxable Retail Sales Activity for Selected Years					Percentage Changes in Pull Factors				
	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	1990 to 2000	2000 to 2005	2005 to 2010	2010 to 2015	
Population Class										
	Pull Factors									
Less than 500	0.55	0.51	0.50	0.60	0.57	-8.35%	-0.99%	20.00%	-5.00%	
500-999	0.73	0.59	0.67	0.68	0.63	-18.41%	12.96%	1.34%	-7.35%	
1,000-2,499	0.96	0.75	0.79	0.91	0.84	-21.56%	5.31%	14.75%	-7.69%	
2,500-4,999	1.18	1.12	1.10	1.00	1.15	-5.01%	-1.52%	-9.17%	15.00%	
5,000-9,999	1.10	1.08	1.03	1.11	1.24	-1.45%	-5.07%	7.87%	11.71%	
10,000-19,999	1.29	1.19	1.21	1.41	1.60	-7.61%	2.02%	16.24%	13.48%	
20,000-99,999	1.26	1.35	1.19	1.39	1.38	6.97%	-11.93%	16.90%	-0.72%	
100,000 and over	1.40	1.58	1.47	1.48	1.41	12.33%	-7.04%	1.02%	-4.73%	

Based on taxable retail sales as reported to the Nebraska Department of Revenue

Table 4-5. Pull factors over time for Nebraskan cities of varying sizes.³¹ Over time small cities have had weakening growth factors and large cities have had growing growth factors.

The growth of pull factors has been negative in many small communities across Nebraska and has been positive in larger communities (Table 4-6). This trend puts pressure on the budgets of the smallest communities. In the Panhandle, the trend of lower pull factors in smaller communities holds. There are a few small communities that break the trend like Big Springs, Harrison, and Hay Springs. In Big Springs the proximity to I-80 and the annexation of two truck stops have been a benefit to the community's economic prospects. Harrison is the only economic center in Sioux County and thus pulls from a large surrounding area.³²

Career Clusters

Career clusters are those economic activities which are uniquely strong in the region. In the Panhandle these clusters are measured in districts known as economic areas. The Scotts Bluff economic area includes 10 out of 11 of the Panhandle counties and Goshen County. Dawes County is included in the Rapid City economic area. The career clusters that succeed in the Panhandle over the state are health services and hospitality and tourism. The lack of high paying jobs in comparison to those same jobs found in other parts of the state deter high skilled workers.

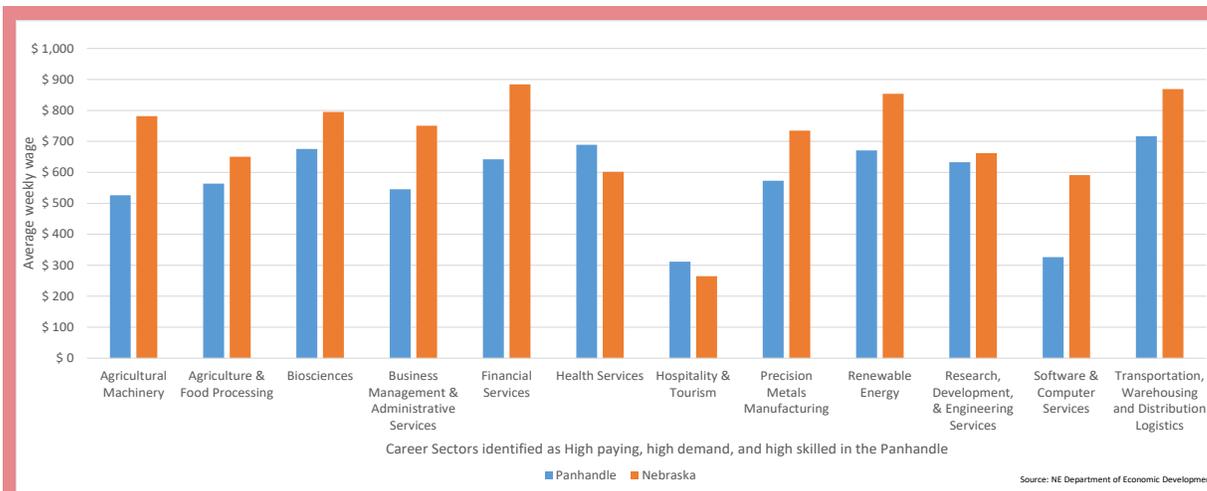


Figure 4-9. The "H3" career sectors in the Panhandle – High Skilled, High Wage, and High Demand. The weekly wages are shown for each sector in comparison with the state average wages for the sector. Most sectors lag behind the state in their wage offerings with the exception of the Hospitality and Health Services industries. Prepared by Megan Koppenhafer, PADD.

Table 4-6 Average pull factors of taxable retail sales activity by population³³

Population Class	Panhandle Average pull factor 2015	Panhandle Median pull factor 2015	Nebraska Average pull factor 2015	Nebraska Average pull factor 2015
<500	0.42	0.17	.57	.37
500 - 999	0.68	0.62	.63	.56
1000 - 2499	0.79	0.87	.84	.77
5000 - 9999	1.14	1.025	1.25	1.04
>10000	2.12	2.12	1.6	1.2

In spite of the low cost of living, the wage problem contributes to the loss of young people from the region. Careers in the health sector and in hospitality/tourism show the most promise to provide new opportunity in the region (Figure 4-9).

31. Giri, Anil; Johnson.
32. Giri, Anil; Johnson.
33. Giri, Anil; Johnson.

POLITICS AND POLICIES

Local, state, and federal policies can significantly impact economic development. Sometimes that impact is positive like appropriating funds and programs to support efforts in small communities. Sometimes that impact is negative and affects the transportation of goods or the ease of doing business outside of the community.

According to business owners and economic development professionals across the Panhandle, the largest concern is lack of connection to the state capital, 400 miles away in Lincoln. This distance is further exacerbated by a lack of air service connecting the Panhandle to the eastern side of the state. However, Nebraska benefits from several large foundations that invest heavily in local communities and help improve quality of life for residents.

Because the Panhandle relies heavily on the agricultural economy, the Farm Bill affects many local farmers and connected large manufacturing employers. The interconnected nature of the Panhandle economy increases the collective impact of laws that affect agriculture. For example, when the dry edible beans sell at a low market rate farmers are less able to purchase new equipment, which negatively impacts local agricultural manufacturers.

Many small communities in the Panhandle have the opportunity to utilize Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds and local option sales taxes for economic redevelopment. TIF allows small communities with scarce resources to accomplish projects like building redevelopment, community infrastructure improvements, and can help draw investment into neglected communities. Local option sales tax or LB 840 provides a mechanism by which communities can raise funds for similar economic development and community improvement activities through a community vote.

Another state legislative bill that could greatly benefit the Panhandle is LB 854. This bill would expand the power of creating Land Banks to the entire state of Nebraska. It is currently only allowed in Omaha.³⁴ Land Banks would provide the region with an opportunity to clean up old properties and spur redevelopment.

SUMMARY

Overall, the market in the Panhandle has been stable overtime with relatively few major downturns. However, there has also been very little growth in its economy. People value the region's stability, but population decline requires innovative efforts to create new and diverse economic opportunity. Regional economic development professionals are working to increase small manufacturers, hospitality jobs, and to develop entrepreneurs in the region.

Hospitality recruitment aids the effort to take better advantage of tourism opportunities and builds on the opportunity in one of the H3 career sectors where the Panhandle is competitive against the state. Recruitment in health services also builds on our regional strength. Rethinking health care and providing for an aging population could bring a new niche to the Panhandle and help to bring young people back to the region.

Poverty in the Panhandle is disparate among races, county lines, and education levels. Wages remain lower than the state and national averages. Investing in social programs to help forgive student loans for those who come to work in the region could be a significant bonus despite the low wages available. Additionally, the region should pursue programs to support employees teetering on the edge of poverty, and provide the training or aid needed to keep them from falling in.

Finally, continuing to support small businesses is the surest way to grow the economy in the region. According to focus groups, small businesses are the most likely to have sticking power in the region. Small businesses are more often committed to the community and to growing their business there and they aren't subject to national forces like large publicly traded companies. In addition to the recruitment of hospitality jobs, manufacturing jobs, and nursing jobs, economic developers support programs that make it easier to succeed as a small business. Some new ideas for supporting these businesses include succession planning workshops, social enterprise funding, small business loans, business development roundtables, and regional job fairs for high schoolers.³⁵

Economic development is collaborative and should continue to be collaborative like most successful programs in the region.

34. Omaha Municipal Land Bank, "What is a Land Bank?"

35. Appendix B.

CHAPTER 5:

QUALITY OF LIFE

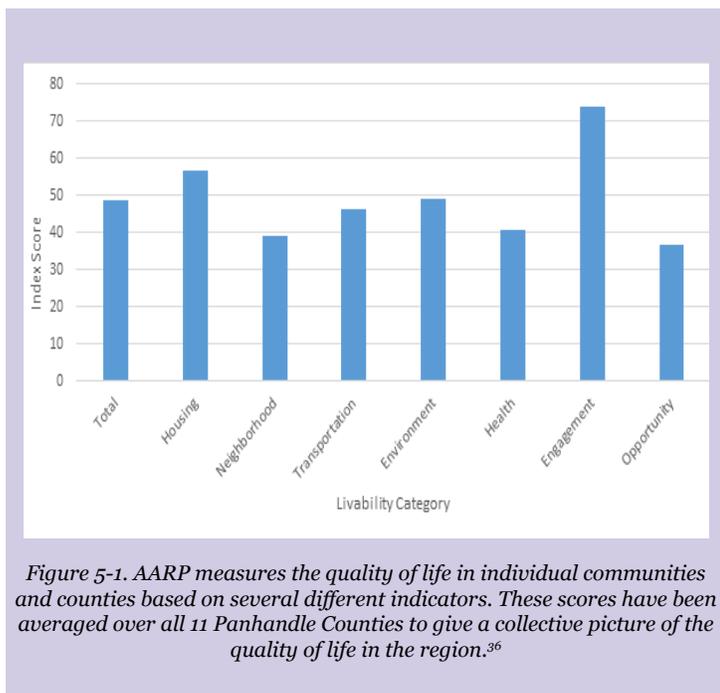
In the context of this plan, quality of life refers to several facets of life in the Panhandle including transportation, opportunity, and housing. It also accounts for those activities that support businesses by providing a place where people want to live and where people can connect with one another. Access to the surrounding natural environment and the economic activities that go on there is another component.

It's all about how a place makes you feel. The Panhandle's greatest strength as an economic region is the way it makes you feel when you are here. Employers and recruiters from the region say the single best indicator for whether someone will choose to put their business here or move here is whether they visit the area. AARP developed an index to quantify quality of life in communities across the United States (Figure 5-1).

The AARP livability index measures community livability based on seven categories: housing, neighborhood, transportation, environment, health, engagement, and opportunity. The total livability score is an evenly weighted combination of the categories. The benefit to of particular index is its applicability to older adults, an aging population needs access to different types of resources. So while these communities are beneficial to all who live there, there is a particular focus on the ability of these communities to be accessible to an aging population, a reality in the Panhandle.

HOUSING

The factors influencing the housing score include housing accessibility (how easy is it to enter homes), housing options (availability of multi-family housing) and housing affordability (cost per month and availability of subsidized housing). The Panhandle housing score is in the middle third percentile of neighborhoods across the country. The main concern in the region is the lack of housing options. This has come up many times in conversations across the Panhandle. For our aging population the lack of choices for transitional housing (post-family, pre-retirement homes) leaves a gap in the whole housing market. People stay in large homes much longer than they would like, which makes those homes unavailable for new families. According to a housing study done in the Valley region of the Panhandle, two- and three-bedroom homes in the \$50,000 - \$120,000 price range are most needed. The median home value in the Panhandle is \$111,000 compared to \$142,000 statewide. While homes are cheaper, lower wages in the Panhandle make this cost burdensome.



36. AARP Public Policy Institute, "AARP Livability Index."

NEIGHBORHOOD

The neighborhood index score measures community accessibility to services within neighborhoods. The Panhandle neighborhoods rank close to the bottom third, nationwide, in this category. In small communities, where economies of scale are dealing with a small scale, maintaining access to resources like grocery stores, banks, jobs and libraries that are within walking distance is very challenging. The small communities of the Panhandle serve their residents well if they have each of these services in town. Creative business owners often make their places of work multi-purpose to serve small community needs. Another neighborhood consideration for people moving to the Panhandle is the quality of the school districts. Several of the larger communities have new high school buildings and are experimenting with dual credit options for those students who are interested in going into the workforce.



Photo 5-1. Chadron, NE, taken by Deb Cottier, NNDC

TRANSPORTATION

The transportation index score is influenced by the number of options people have for public transportation, the cost of transportation, the safety of pedestrian and vehicle transportation, and accessibility of public transportation. In the Panhandle, transportation scores in the lower, middle third percentile of communities nationwide. The low score is influenced heavily by the lack of public transportation and the higher cost of transportation in the Panhandle. When talking with communities, the lack of public transportation is often something that gets brought up. Especially as the population continues to age, hospitals and the Public Health Department are looking at ways to increase access to critical resources.

ENVIRONMENT

While the rurality and beautiful landscapes are natural assets for the region the environment index score is lower than expected. In the Panhandle, water quality causes the most concern. The naturally occurring arsenic and nitrogen contamination from farm field runoff can contaminate wells. To address this contamination, communities must dig new well. Communities seeking to expand must consider water quality concerns.



Photo 5-2. Buffalo grazing, taken by Daniel Bennett, PADD



Photo 5-3. The bluffs at sunrise, taken by Daniel Bennett, PADD



Photo 5-4. Scotts Bluff national monument, taken by Daniel Bennett, PADD

HEALTH

The Panhandle ranks in the lower-middle third of the health index. This metric takes into account smoking prevalence, obesity prevalence, access to exercise opportunities, healthcare professional shortages, preventable hospitalizations, and patient satisfaction with health care quality. Panhandle residents suffer from high rates of obesity, high rates of smoking, shortages of health care professionals and lack of access to exercise opportunities. The health challenges most often cited by residents and professionals in the Panhandle are obesity, lack of medical providers, and poor access to hospitals. Most communities have regional hospitals and clinics but these have limited business hours, and some of the smaller clinics are disappearing. Increasing access to health care is an important goal for many working toward improving the quality of life in the region.

ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is the Panhandle's strongest quality of life factor. This index measures internet access, opportunities for civic involvement, voting rate, social interaction, and access to cultural/entertainment institutions. Panhandle residents have a high voter turnout rate and high interaction with neighbors, despite low access to cultural and entertainment activities. Local participation and ability to accomplish projects is high because of the collaborative nature of the Panhandle. The Panhandle has a very oral tradition, people through the grapevine. When encouraging people to come to events, a phone conversation is often the surest way to get participation. The Panhandle also hosts some of the oldest festivals in Nebraska. Oregon Trail Days is the oldest, continuously running community festival. For the Panhandle the community gathering opportunities are still very important to the social fabric.

OPPORTUNITY

Opportunity is measured by income equality, jobs per worker, high school graduation rate, and age diversity. Opportunity is the Panhandle's lowest quality of life index score. The aging population and an inability to bring young people back due to low wages and a weak housing stock bring this score down. However, the spirit of the Panhandle is one of perseverance and grit. Businesses, economic development professionals, schools, and recruiters are all working on new ways to help young people succeed here. A lot of these initiatives include exposing young people to potential jobs and training them early.

Opportunity for people of color in the Panhandle, particularly for Latinos and Native Americans, lags behind the opportunities for white residents (Figures 5-2, 5-3, 5-4, 5-5). According to focus group participants talking about equity of opportunity in the Panhandle, white people perceive a stigma associated with businesses owned by people of color because they are located in a different part of town. Another problem is the lack of support given to students of color by schools. Recently, Sciencebound, an important extra-curricular program meant to help students of color succeed, lost funding. Loss of programs like this removes an important element of support for minority students. There are some programs in the area that are seeking to redevelop that support. For example a LaCrosse team in Scottsbluff, Alliance, and Chadron seeks to help Native youth find a community and support network.³⁸



Photo 5-5, USDA Business Program Specialist, Marla Marx works with a group of entrepreneurs. Photo courtesy of Melissa Norgard.

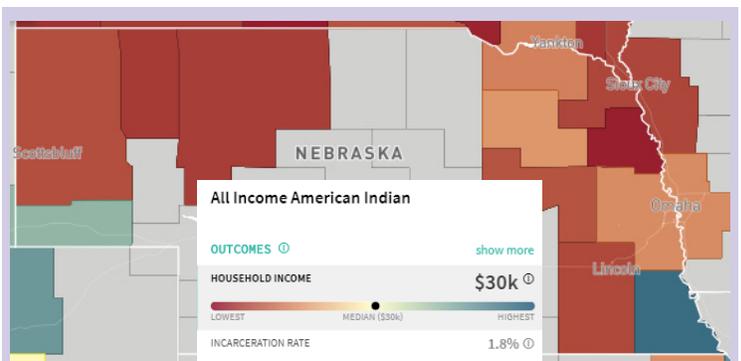


Figure 5-2. Map of the opportunity for all income levels of American Indian youth to move out of poverty as a measure of income today compared to parent income. The grey represents no data.³⁷

37. United States Census Bureau and Opportunity Insights, "The Opportunity Atlas."

38. Appendix B.

SUMMARY

Many tout the Panhandle's Quality of Life as the region's greatest resource. The steering committee and focus groups all mentioned this as a strength of the region. The Panhandle provides a safe, small town, free-of-crowds environment. The region provides incredible access to amazing outdoor resources. The school systems provide unique opportunities for students to get hands-on experience in careers they may be interested in. The collaborative, neighborly, warm people that live in the region are inspiring and make you feel at home.

However, work must be done to improve the climate of acceptance, especially because the region is losing its young people. Increasing access to economic and educational opportunity for people in minority groups in the region is most important. In Scottsbluff, the next generation of young people will be made up of 50% minority race or ethnicity. Failing to provide opportunity for 50% of our next generation ensures a continued pattern of out-migration for our youth. Providing opportunities means supporting our schools to support our students better. Providing opportunities for students of color to work with businesses they may not otherwise have connections will encourage youth retention. It's not only students of color who need opportunity though. Supporting all of our youth to be involved in our business succession planning and entrepreneurship training should be a priority.

Ensuring that we recruit jobs and employers to the region who will provide much-needed aging services will improve the quality of life for those that want to stay in their communities as they age. Helping with succession planning is another way to support the quality of life of our aging population. Finally, ensuring focus on updating aging infrastructure to accommodate new growth will help to support an improved quality of life in the region.



Figure 5-3. Map of the opportunity for all income levels of Latino youth to move out of poverty.³⁹

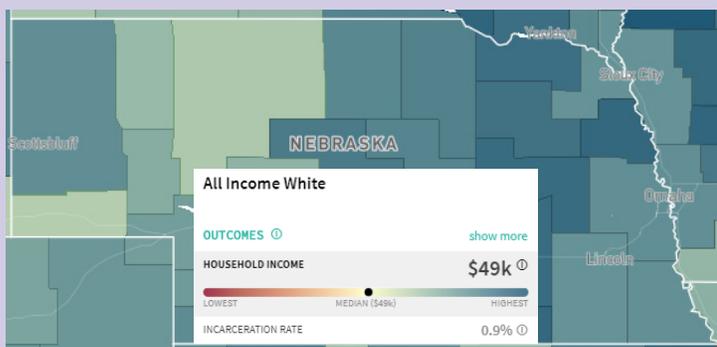


Figure 5-4. Map of the opportunity for all income levels of White youth to move out of poverty.⁴⁰

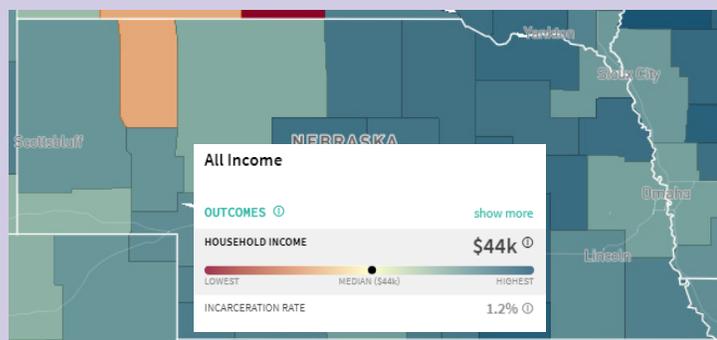


Figure 5-5. Map of the opportunity for all income levels of any race of youth to move out of poverty.⁴¹

Despite disparities there are many successful businesses and entrepreneurs within the communities of color in the Panhandle. The East Overland community in Scottsbluff is particularly well-known for its strong community and entrepreneurial spirit. More services to support entrepreneurs and business owners of color are needed to continue to support more successful businesses like those in East Overland.

39. United States Census Bureau and Opportunity Insights, "The Opportunity Atlas."

40. United States Census Bureau and Opportunity Insights.

41. United States Census Bureau and Opportunity Insights.

CHAPTER 6: SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- Panhandle Health resources
- Flexible options for higher education in the region (both community college and state college)
- Strong partnership between high schools and community college
- Strong telecommunications industry
- Strong nursing program leading to good jobs
- Close to amenities and population bases in three states (Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota)
- Our infrastructure supports significant through traffic on I-80 and on our North/South roadways
- Strong regional work ethic, hospitality, and community contribution in time and money
- Robust governance
- Businesses are invested financially and socially in the community
- Low cost of living
- Wide, open spaces
- Small community which attracts young families
- Good place to start a new small business with relatively low overhead
- Regional literacy in collaborative technology
- Good fiber infrastructure
- Strong K-12 programs
- Collaborative spirit- willingness to partner in order to make the most of services
- High ethnic and racial diversity for a rural community
- Diverse natural resources throughout the region
- Strong regional identity

WEAKNESSES

- High poverty and homelessness rates
- Poor utilization of space and lack of infill in vacant buildings
- Affordable housing that is safe and appropriate for family needs or aging needs
- Education is only supported by property tax which places a high burden on our small population
- Lack of inclusivity for minority groups
- Lack of higher income industries
- Lower graduation rates for minority students
- Lack of inclusive representation in leadership positions
- Despite a strong collaborative nature, territorialism still affects efforts to efficiently work together
- People leave our community for larger metro areas
- Lack of mental health resources
- We address our low number of jobs by recruiting large employers who don't have connections to the area
- No mechanism to easily support people during periods of unemployment
- Not attracting or retaining young workforce
- Lack of competitive benefits packages for employees and farmers
- Low comparative wages overall
- Undermarketing ourselves and our assets
- If you grew up in a small town there is a stigma against returning home - it is seen as failing to make something of yourself
- Higher shipping costs
- Loss of skilled laborers to larger cities

OPPORTUNITIES

- Infrastructure and space to support data storage
- Population shift away from the front range as families look for smaller and quieter communities
- A University of Nebraska satellite campus in the region to fill gaps in high demand programs, as well as overall expansion of higher education programs in the region
- Small communities allow for a larger impact and a more immediate change than in large cities
- Unique natural assets with less crowds
- Expanding tourism marketing to Eastern Nebraska and international markets
- Consolidating resources
- Career ladders starting with the high school vocational programs
- Creative and effective uses for LB840 and TIF funds in the region
- Helping farmers develop value-added agricultural products
- Support for local businesses
- Providing and promoting workforce development opportunities: including apprenticeships, certificates, and quick classes in addition to the traditional degree programs
- Getting young people engaged in community through business and volunteerism early and often, especially in the conversations around succession
- Helping young people find value and opportunity in returning to their communities and giving them tools to succeed in their goals
- Expanding tourism opportunities year-around
- Partnering with redevelopment authorities – Downtown revitalization and Main Street improvements to attract and recruit telecommuters

THREATS

- Lower tax rates in surrounding states
- Aging populations with a lack of resources/professionals to adequately support this growing portion of our community
- High poverty rates - continuation of intergenerational poverty
- The waning importance of the farm voice and rural voice in political discourse
- Increasing regulation with little support to afford making updates for companies with a smaller resources base
- Lack of incentive funding for businesses compared with the incentives in surrounding states
- Housing available at prices higher than is affordable to the local population
- Changing foreign markets
- Tariffs affecting agricultural and manufacturing commodities
- The continued decline of farm wages and small farms
- Transition of the agriculture economy and how quickly we, as a region, can shift to change with these transitions
- Lincoln and Omaha decision-making removed from the Panhandle
- Decreasing population can be very threatening if approached with a defeatist attitude
- Territorialism and refusing to work together to make resources last longer and be distributed more effectively
- High community turn-over, leading to vacant property and brownfields
- Risk to school funding during property tax reduction conversations

CHAPTER 7: REGIONAL ACTION PLAN

COMMUNITY VISION

The regional vision for the Panhandle's economic development future is a complex one. The steering committee and focus groups involved in the development of this plan all noted that the more important aspects of economic development potential had to do with human capital in the region. Certainly - having business friendly laws was an important access but I heard about the importance of a reliable workforce more than anything else.

Another layer to a successful regional development strategy is the development and improvement of the attractiveness and infrastructure in our communities. It is increasingly important to have communities that take pride in themselves because the new workforce chooses the place they will live before they choose their job in many cases.

Successful transition of the current economic opportunities from one generation to the next is another highly mentioned piece of a successful economy. Encouraging entrepreneurship in the next generation and helping them figure out how they fit into the current economy with those goals will sustain the economic momentum from one generation to the next.

Lastly the Panhandle is highly successful due to its collaborative nature. Building on this strength will help the community to succeed as a region and will help build a diverse economy and a healthy workforce. The vision for the future has to include all of these pieces in order to be sustainable and that is really the main task moving forward. Building and supporting a sustainable economy.

The vision for the future of the Panhandle is this: to provide an environment that cultivates economic responsibility and creativity, to support growth through youth retention and new resident jobs, to benefit employees and employers by making it easy to get support for economic

and health instability, and to support local businesses that increase the diverse fabric of the economic landscape. In this chapter you will find our regional action plan to meet this vision, the partners who will help us achieve it, and some best practices to inspire our efforts.



NexGen is a new group of entrepreneurs selling outdoor equipment that came out of the Cabela's closing in Sidney, NE. Photo Courtesy of Melissa Norgard.

REGIONAL ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The time frame to begin is also a way to measure priority, the earlier a strategy is started the higher priority the action item. Each of these actions were devised after talking through the regional strengths and weaknesses.

 Highest Priority

 Ongoing Work Continued by PADD

Overall Goal: Support Recruitment Efforts to Bring New Residents to the Panhandle					
Objectives	Strategies	Lead Org.: Partners	Resources	Time Frame to Begin	Job Potential
Work as a region to increase rural youth retention and return	Host a job fair at the Panhandle High Schools and Middle Schools	PADD, WNDN: Local schools, local businesses	Staff time, local school time and space	2020	0
	Business and industry tours for middle school students	WNDN: PADD, local businesses	Staff time, local school support	2021	5
	Develop a regional recruitment website	PADD, WNDN: local businesses, local schools	Staff time, regional funds, state economic development grant	2023	10
	Continue to include youth in any community and regional planning efforts and then incorporate their ideas	PADD: Local economic development districts	Staff time, Local school district time	2019	10
	Connect high school business classes to the local entrepreneurship groups	PADD: local entrepreneurship groups	Staff time, local school/teacher time	2020	0
	Host focus groups in high schools in conjunction with student business groups	PADD: local economic development districts, local schools	Staff time, local school time, economic dev. employee time	2020	0
	Strengthen Panhandle health resources and networks to make mental health resources more accessible	Panhandle Partnership: CAPWN, PPHD, PADD		2020	0
Develop marketing materials on why one should live in the Panhandle to be distributed with tourism materials	Develop marketing materials to sell our community as a home during tourism conventions	WNTC: PADD, Chambers of Commerce	staff time, tourism grants	2022	0
	Panhandle job and residency recruitment materials at our large tourism events - host a hospitality table or have materials at check-in	WNTC: PADD, Chambers of Commerce	staff time, money for printing costs - pooled funding from local sources	2024	0
	Market in hotels for folks passing through and staying the night	WNTC: local tourism offices, hotels	staff time, printing costs	2024	0
	Place job marketing materials in the chamber of commerce office in each community	PADD: Chambers of Commerce	staff time, printing costs	2023	5
Work to secure funding for internships and apprenticeships for businesses in the Panhandle	Work with businesses in the PADD loan fund to develop a relationship with the Department of Labor	PADD: Department of Labor	Staff time	2020	10
	Explore PADD private memberships and provide grant-writing for apprenticeship programs	PADD	Staff time	2020	5
	Test-pilot local government apprenticeships	Local Governments: UNL, WNCC	UNL time, apprenticeship program information - DOL	2022	4

Overall Goal: Support Succession Planning

Objectives	Strategies	Lead Org.: Partners	Resources	Time Frame to Begin	Job Potential
Provide trainings for local governments to support transitions from one generation to the next	Work as region to host succession planning training for local government officials	PADD: Panhandle Partnership	Staff time, annual partnership membership dues	2020	0
	Work as a region to host long-term fiscal policy training for local government officials	PADD: Panhandle Partnership	Staff time, annual partnership membership dues	2021	0
Develop collaborative resources to support business owners in transition with succession planning	Long term loans specifically for business succession	PADD	Staff time, funding from foundations	2021	5
	Work with REAP and NBDC to house region-wide succession planning forums	PADD: REAP, NBDC, Panhandle Partnership	Staff time, Panhandle Partnership resources	2020	5
	Host student business classes that connect students to the financial institutions and other business enterprise resources.	NBDC: PADD, Panhandle Partnership	Staff time, Panhandle Partnership training resources	2022	5
Encourage youth early and often to consider taking on a business in town	Business classes at colleges and high schools attend the succession planning training and network with businesses they are interested in learning more about	WNCC, CSC: PADD, Panhandle Partnership, REAP, NBDC	Class time, Panhandle Partnership training resources, staff time	2022	5
	Business classes at colleges and high schools do a luncheon with banks in town	REAP: local high schools, WNCC, CSC, local banks, PADD	Staff time, meeting space, local school staff time, bank employee time	2021	5

Overall Goal: Support Small Business Development and Expansion

Objectives	Strategies	Lead Org.: Partners	Resources	Time Frame to Begin	Job Potential
Increase networking among the business community to promote entrepreneurship and creative partnerships	Develop a mentor match program for current business owners and potential business owners	PADD, WNDN: current business owners volunteer time	Staff time, local business owners, entrepreneurship classes at WNCC	2020	10
	Host a regional business networking training where local businesses can meet other local businesses and talk about ideas	Local business associations, Panhandle Partnership: PADD	Staff time, local business volunteered time	2021	5
	Increase advertising for groups like Masterminds and for spaces like the ones TCD has available in Scottsbluff	Local chambers of commerce, NBDC: PADD	Staff time, chamber funding, WNDN resources	2024	0
Support and grow economic opportunity for communities for underrepresented groups	Host business resource groups and entrepreneurship workshops in partnership with underrepresented groups to have specific events supporting those business efforts	PADD: NBDC, REAP, local banks, entrepreneurship groups, local non-profits	Staff time, Panhandle Partnership resources	2020	10
	Develop a fund to support minority owned businesses on the local level	PADD: Nebraska Hispanic Chamber of Commerce	Staff time, foundation resources	2023	10
	Develop networking opportunities between the local chambers of commerce and minority owned businesses similar to Caminos Crusados	PADD, WNDN: local chambers of commerce	Staff time, chamber of commerce time and resources	2020	10

Overall Goal: Support small business development and expansion

Objectives	Strategies	Lead Org.: Partners	Resources	Time Frame to Begin	Job Potential
Increase resources for small communities to support small businesses	Create online repository of sample tax incentive programs, finance packages, and facade programs for cities	PADD: local economic development offices	Staff time	2021	10
	Increase business class offerings in small communities and look into sponsoring individuals to take these classes	PADD: Panhandle Partnership	Staff time, Panhandle Partnership resources	2022	0
	Partner with Worksite Wellness to provide employee networking opportunities with service providers to improve employee retention	PADD, PPHD: local businesses	Staff time, Panhandle Public Health District time and resources	2021	0

Overall Goal: Serve as regional hub for community and economic development information

Objectives	Strategies	Lead Org.: Partners	Resources	Time Frame to Begin	Job Potential
Maintain regional website with resources and information to support community development across the Panhandle	House webinars and other online resources educating communities about community development potential in the Panhandle especially on e-commerce and forums for success sharing	PADD	Staff time	2021	0
	Continue to provide updated data on the data dashboard for communities to engage with, promote this service so communities know how to make the most of it	PADD	Staff time	2019	0
	Maintain calendar of community trainings related to economic development, grant deadlines	PADD	Staff time	2019	0
Provide technical assistance to communities for funding opportunities	Write CDBG applications and continue to serve as administrator for communities	PADD	Staff time	2019	0
	Continue to house business loans funding	PADD	Staff time, foundation funds	2019	30
	Continue to serve as support for local businesses	PADD: NBDC, Department of Labor, REAP	Staff time	2019	5
	Continue to support funding opportunities for social entrepreneurship funding	PADD: Panhandle Partnership	Staff time, foundation funds	2019	10
Increase economic development literacy throughout the region	Send out annual survey to city council, city employees, and city committees asking for feedback on what type of training they would like to receive regarding economic development tools	PADD: Panhandle Partnership	Staff time, Panhandle Partnership training academy	2020	0
	Host an economic development conference for communities without and economic development staff person	PADD: local business associations, local banks, Panhandle Partnership	Staff time, Panhandle Partnership training academy	2021	20
	Provide trainings to downtown business associations and chambers of commerce to strengthen marketing campaigns and materials that can go out with tourism marketing	PADD, Panhandle Partnership	Staff time, Panhandle Partnership training academy	2022	0

Overall Goal: Support infrastructure improvements that enhance the assets of the Panhandle region

Objectives	Strategies	Lead Org.: Partners	Resources	Time Frame to Begin	Job Potential
Continue to address brownfields in a multi-jurisdictional effort	Connect investors/developers with business owners looking to expand to promote brownfield building succession	PADD: local economic development professionals	Staff time, city buy in, foundation funds	2020	10
	Work with communities to identify properties and property owners who could benefit from an assessment	PADD: city councils, city staff	Staff time	2019	0
	Help communities with redevelopment planning and pursue funding and aid for execution of said redevelopment plan	PADD	Staff time, EPA grant funds	2020	3
	Aid communities in completing blight studies and nuisance abatement	PADD	Staff time, community funding	2019	0
Support community development of transportation plans that address transportation needs of the whole community	Meet with communities to build a coalition of communities to participate in a regional transportation plan	PADD	Staff time, state CDBG resources	2020	0
	Help 5 communities apply for transportation grants	PADD: Department of Transportation	Staff time, state transportation funds	2020	10
	Continue supporting development of the Heartland Expressway corridor and larger Ports to Plains alliance	PADD: Heartland Expressway Association	Staff time	2019	50
	Implement non-grant funded purchase rehab resale program with partner community	PADD: community councils	Staff time, foundation resources, regional housing fund	2020	0
Help communities plan for the future of their municipal resources	Host a regional training on fiscal planning for community managers	PADD: league of municipalities	Staff time, Panhandle Partnership training resources	2022	0
	Host a planning workshop to address drinking water/waste water updates and plan for future of water resources	PADD: NRD, Panhandle Partnerships	Staff time, Panhandle Partnerships training resources	2021	0
	Partner with PPHD to help support environmental health efforts in communities by leveraging funds	PADD: PPHD, local councils	Staff time, local communities, PPHD resources	2019	0
	Become certified as a floodplain manager to advise communities in planning for the future of their floodplains	PADD	Staff time, PADD travel allocations	2020	0
	Host a regional training on communicating resource provision to residents in the community	PADD: University of Nebraska Extension and Outreach, Panhandle Partnership	Staff time, Panhandle Partnership training resources	2022	0
	Support community planning efforts by housing plan writing in PADD	PADD	Staff time, local funding	2019	0
	Work with government officials to effectively map central navigation systems in place	PADD	Staff time	2021	0

MEASUREMENTS OF SUCCESS

The unemployment in the Panhandle is relatively low similar to the rest of Nebraska (3.94% unemployment). With these low unemployment rates the measurements of success for the economics of the region are going to be more dependent upon measures other than job creation. These measurements include:

- Number and kind of investments undertaken in the region
- Number of jobs retained or businesses retained through business succession planning
- Number of new entrepreneurial endeavors
- Number of new infill development projects
- Increase in economic diversity break down of region
- Increase in private sector investment in the region
- Development of regional transportation plans
- Number of transportation grants and investments made
- Number of homes abated and tested for lead
- Number of apprenticeship programs started
- Participation in educational and workshop programs
- Improvements in community health factors
- Number of new minority owned businesses
- Number of students showing interest in the economic opportunities in the region - via poll



*The explosion of entrepreneurial enterprises coming out of Sidney are a great example of the way business succession can support economic sustainability.
Photo Courtesy of Melissa Norgard.*

PLAN EXECUTION PARTNERS

Every plan requires a network of partners to lean on in order to accomplish the goals outlined. The partners listed here are not necessarily working on projects at this moment but will be good resources as these projects are developed throughout the region.

Community Action Partnership of Western Nebraska

Community Action Partnership of Western Nebraska (CAPWN) Community Action Partnership of Western Nebraska (CAPWN) provides services to people in Western Nebraska in four main program areas: Community Bridges, Child Development, Health Services, and Youth Services.

Panhandle Trails Intercity Public Transit

Panhandle Trails Intercity Public Transit is an intercity bus service in the Nebraska Panhandle. They are operated by a non-profit organization based in Alliance, NE. They are funded through allocations via the Nebraska Department of Transportation.

Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

The Nebraska Hispanic Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to work for the leadership and the economic development of the Latino businesses, and the professionals who belong to the Latino entrepreneurial community.

Western Nebraska Development Network

The Western Nebraska Development Network (WNDN) is a group of service providers that meets every other month to share economic development happenings and ideas that other communities can draw upon to strengthen policies, programs and services for their communities.

Western Nebraska Tourism Coalition

Western Nebraska Tourism Coalition (WNTC) shares marketing ideas and develops innovative approaches to promote Western Nebraska, its attractions and businesses by attending bimonthly meetings, held in various communities throughout the region.

Continuum of Care

Continuum of Care is a group that seeks to bring together regional resources to address homelessness and housing for people in poverty or other challenging situations. The group meets regularly and shares housing resources.

School Districts

Many of the strategies are related to getting the schools and students more involved in economic development early on. Strong relationships between the economic development groups and the schools will help the students see the connections to entrepreneurship and jobs in their communities before they get ready to leave.

City/County Economic Development Agencies

City and County economic development agencies are already strong partners. PADD works with these organizations to fill in financing gaps for new businesses, to brainstorm new programs, and to share information so that resources are distributed efficiently.

City/County Employees and Elected Officials

City and County employees and elected officials are also strong partners already. PADD works closely with these entities when doing nuisance abatement, grant writing, community development and more. PADD relies on these relationships to be sure that we are doing what makes sense for the community we are working with.

Higher Education Institutions

Relationships with higher education institutions helps the economic development professionals in the region to connect new job skill education to the people. Higher education institutions allow the region to grow its own professionals in every field. Developing programs that train people to do the jobs that are in high demand in the region helps us to remain a viable region.

Nebraska Business Development Center

The Nebraska Business Development Center is a resource available through the University of Nebraska - Omaha. They provide consultation assistance for developing a business plan, financial projections, and funding plans. PADD often works with NBDC when small businesses reach out to us with interest in our small business loan program.

University of Nebraska Extension and Outreach

The University of Nebraska Extension and Outreach department has several programs related to community development. They also put on trainings and host classes that aid in job skill training. They also send out a rural living survey annually that focuses on collecting

economic impact data from rural communities. They are able to collect this data by subregions allowing for the Panhandle to reflect on data relevant to our region. Areas for partnership that could be enhanced include identifying successful trainings done in other parts of the state and having the field staff bring them here, developing youth connections with the 4-H program, and co-facilitating community input sessions.

Local Entrepreneurship Groups

Several communities have local entrepreneurship groups that provide support and room for new entrepreneurs to share ideas and receive feedback. In Scottsbluff there is a group called Masterminds, in Sidney there is a resource fair and a new entrepreneurship center on the WNCC campus. Across the Panhandle, efforts are being made to develop more of these types of programs so that new entrepreneurs can learn from their peers.

Panhandle Partnership

Panhandle Partnership is a community coalition that brings together area non-profits working to improve economic development from the health and human services side. This organization works to improve housing and alleviate poverty. Both topics are very important for healthy economic development in the region. PADD is a member of this coalition and works with the housing team.

Panhandle Public Health District

Panhandle Public Health District works collaboratively with area hospitals, health systems, and human services agencies to improve the health, safety and quality of life for all who live, learn, work and play in the Panhandle. Their vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle Community. The core areas of the most recent regional Community Health Improvement Plan include: Access to Care, Aging Population, Behavioral Health, Chronic Disease Prevention, Early Childhood Care & Education, & Social Determinants of Health.

Heartland Expressway Association

The Heartland Expressway Association is a group that advocates for a 4-lane highway through the Panhandle. The purpose of this roadway is to bring economic development to the region. PADD serves on the board.

Rural Enterprise Assistance Project

REAP provides services for financing, business training,

technical assistance, and networking for rural enterprises. There are local offices throughout the state including one in Nebraska.

Nebraska Department of Labor

The Nebraska Department of Labor (NDOL) offers a large array of services to employers and individuals seeking employment. The State of Nebraska labor exchange website, NEworks.nebraska.gov, provides job listings, recruitment tools and labor market information.

Department of Economic Development

The Nebraska Department of Economic Development provides resources for housing, business growth and development, and community development. The department has funding for new internships in the state, which partners well with the goals of bringing youth into economic development early and often.

Department of Environmental Quality

One of the projects that defined the last 5 years in the Panhandle is the revitalization of downtown buildings with the brownfields assessment process. PADD has been working with communities to get buildings assessed through the regional EPA grant and through DEQ's assessment program several buildings have made their way to successful redevelopment.

BEST PRACTICES

Case studies from across the United States can be helpful when developing action plans to accomplish the goals outlined in this chapter. A few will be highlighted here to support momentum in developing these types of plans.

Brevard, NC - Retiree Resource Network

This small town in North Carolina leaned on the expertise of their retiree community to help new entrepreneurs get there businesses off the ground. The new entrepreneurs worked with the city economic development office to identify their needs and were paired with a consultant who best fit those needs. They had nearly 67 retirees volunteer to be a part of this program and it lasted for 10 years. The program should be adapted to blend with the resources already available in many of our communities. It would be a good way to maintain generational knowledge and to continue building networks of people that include those who are retired.⁴²



An example of a multigenerational community meeting in Scottsbluff. Courtesy of Daniel Bennett.

Hollandale, MS - Regional Transportation

In Hollandale and the surrounding communities, a survey made it clear that regional transportation would be an important solution to many regional challenges. The region formed a coalition which sought planning grants and followed up with an implementation grant. They started small with two vans and two drivers and it grew from there. They work directly with the potential high school students the year prior to college to determine need for student transportation.

42. Lambe, "Case Studies in Small Town Community Economic Development."

They can then use this data to leverage future funding and to keep the community engaged in the process. Regional transportation, especially in the northern Panhandle is an opportunity that is already being discussed. This model could provide a framework for forward momentum.⁴³

Cape Charles, VA - Ecotourism Certification

In Cape Charles, VA, officials had to decide the next steps following food processing plant closures. They partnered with The Nature Conservancy and the area community college to develop an ecotourism certificate. This certificate gave locals the skills to host tourists and show them the landscape in a sustainable way. The course was extremely successful and the partnership with TNC allowed them access to protected lands that people could only see by using their services. The Panhandle has lots of opportunities for ecotourism and could succeed in partnering with the community college and chambers of commerce to do something like this.⁴⁴



An example of the Panhandle's Natural Assets that could be visited during an ecotourism trip.

Tryon, NC - Public Fiber Optic Networks

Tryon, NC community leaders proactively developed a fiber optic network to support economic development in their region. They sought a feasibility grant followed by an implementation grant. This may be an opportunity for some of the small communities in the Panhandle who need the infrastructure, but don't have the private investment to put in the infrastructure. The community leaders in Tryon formed a non-profit to manage the network. Rural America has struggled with access to large scale resources like electricity in the early 1900s and public investment was the solution. The same efforts can be applied to internet infrastructure.⁴⁵

Oakland, MD - Mainstreet AND Box Stores

Oakland sought an opportunity to proactively work with its main street to prepare the business owners with a new business plan that would set them apart from Walmart. They also partnered with Walmart from the start to develop a summer concert series sponsored in part by, and promote by Walmart, that takes place on their Mainstreet. An opportunity to partner with the large box stores in the Panhandle could exist in a similar capacity. Especially if the box stores can support events already happening in the Panhandle.⁴⁶

Hemingford, NE - Social Enterprise

Hemingford developed a non-profit gym that supports community health, revitalized a brownfield site, and brings the community together. This social enterprise provides fitness services to the Village of Hemingford for a fair price which supports the upkeep of the building and sponsors support free wellness classes. This social enterprise is prime example of Panhandle communities who are leveraging local funds to meet the needs of the local community.



The Body Shop doubles as a rentable community space when classes aren't in session. Photo Courtesy of Google Maps.

43. Lambe.
44. Lambe.
45. Lambe.
46. Lambe.

Potter, NE - Social Enterprise

Potter is a community of less than 500 people who saw value in maintaining community services no matter how many people were in town. Potter Duckpin bowling is a community staple that provides entertainment opportunities 24/7 in the form of a rentable duckpin bowling alley/arcade room. This community service provides local activity space as well as tourist interest. The alley is run by a non-profit and the proceeds return to the building for upkeep and improvements as needed.



The Duckpin Bowling lanes are all manual so you need a good sport to reset all the pins! Photo courtesy of Megan Koppenhafer.

Pelican Rapids, MN - Inclusive Economics

In Pelican Rapids, 18 languages are spoken in the elementary school. In an effort to build up the entire community economically they specifically sought out entrepreneurs in the immigrant communities and helped them to get started. They also developed an intentional, cross-cultural soccer league to bring families together and library programs to educate the community. Inclusion, especially in small communities that have been previously homogenous, should be a proactive approach that seeks to educate and build bridges. This could be easily replicated in the Panhandle by working with teams in each community to take action.⁴⁷

SUMMARY

Not all of these goals will be accomplished by PADD explicitly but it will be the role of PADD to seek out these efforts and support them through grant writing, strategic planning, business loans, or other appropriate resource connections. Those table items highlighted in light blue are the goals that will take priority for the next five years.

PADD's current operations are beneficial to the member communities and thus will continue to be offered. Those "business as usual" activities are still listed in the table as they are part of the regional strategy. These activities will be highlighted in orange.

PADD evaluates a strategic plan on a yearly basis so no timelines have been given for the goals laid out in the tables. The strategies that are a priority will be assessed on a yearly basis. The lower-priority strategies will be assessed in the context of building partnerships and pursuing the goals as a region.

The partners listed will be critical in pursuing these goals on a regional scale. The best practices outlined in this section will serve as the guide book to help these teams develop strategies to begin chipping away at the bigger goals. Every year we will start with at least two of the priority areas in addition to our "business as usual" tasks. Many of the priority areas are trainings or workshops that can be accomplished in the course of the year and some may be multi-year projects as we work to build capacity in the region.

The next section will address resiliency as a region. While PADD is not directly responsible for the actions related to natural disasters, the strategies outlined in this section are part of our efforts to develop economic resiliency with regard to the market changes. Succession planning in particular is one way that the region can be planning for economic resiliency.

47. Lambe.

CHAPTER 8:

RESILIENCY

PHASE I: PRE-DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Pre-disaster recovery and mitigation planning

The Local Emergency Operations Plan (LEOP), adopted by and for each county, outlines ways to be prepared before a disaster strikes for response and recovery. Hazards are identified in the State Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) ahead of time to recognize where greatest threats lie to reduce loss of life, injuries, economic costs, and destruction of natural and cultural resources. More locally, the Natural Resource Districts (NRD) complete HMPs for their areas. In the Panhandle there are three NRDs: North Platte, South Platte, and Upper Niobrara White. ‘Be Ready Nebraska’ is a guide and mobile App for emergency planning. Specific guidance is available for citizens, including senior citizens, businesses, schools, and healthcare facilities to be ready for disasters and emergencies.⁴⁸

Risks and Vulnerabilities

The LEOP hazards assessment and the state and Regional HMPs outline some of the key risks and vulnerabilities in the Panhandle. Some key vulnerabilities, which are pervasive in the Panhandle, include weather related events such as severe thunderstorms, tornadoes, high winds, drought, and severe winter storms. The threat of wildfire is also a risk but is more pronounced in the Pine Ridge in the Northern Panhandle, and a wildfire plan has been developed for that area and is being emulated in the Wildcat Hills in the Southern Panhandle. Locally, flooding is an issue in the banks and valleys of the South and North Platte Rivers, as well as north near the Niobrara and White Rivers. Other risks considered by the state include landslides, terrorist attacks, and hazardous spills.⁴⁹

Business Continuity Planning

Preparation for unforeseen emergencies or events is critical for recovery for businesses. There are several

resources for business continuity planning. Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has resources available for free planning assistance.⁵⁰ The University of Nebraska Omaha has training available for businesses to develop a business continuity plan. This training is available through the Nebraska Business Development Center and has an associated cost for participation.⁵¹

Resources for limited mobility, special needs, and elderly

All steps of response, shelter, evacuation, and recovery include plans to take care of those with limited mobility and special needs. These guidelines can be found in Annex E of the LEOP for evacuation, Annex G for health and medical care, and Annex I with mass care. Resident volunteer organizations like medical reserves and CERT teams would know where limited mobility, special needs, and elderly neighbors are located to provide help and assistance to those individuals. Elderly and disabled people also have specific resources made available through Be Ready Nebraska to prepare for emergencies.⁵²

Shelters

Shelters are addressed in the LEOPs in Annex J and cover events that range from tornadoes to hazardous material spills to radioactive fallout. Emergency management coordinators are responsible for identifying appropriate shelters and establishing protective shelter procedures. All schools, health care facilities, and major industries have tornado plans. Air circulation system directions and instructions will be given to private homes and institutional facilities for indoor protection in the event of a hazardous material incident. Mass Care plans are also outlined in Annex I of the LEOPs.⁵³

48. Bennett, “Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, 2014.”

49. Bennett.

50. Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, “Preparedness Planning for your Business.”

51. Nebraska Business Development Center and University of Nebraska Omaha, “Emergency Preparedness and Business Continuity”

52. Bennett, “Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, 2014.”

53. Bennett.

Recovery Partners, type of assistance and resources they can provide. Develop an interagency action plan.

Responsibilities of agencies like law enforcement and the Red Cross are outlined in the LEOPs. Vital services, basic needs of the public, damage assessment, and emergency response are all coordinated across multiple agencies. Housing, food, and restoration of non-vital services and reconstruction are also addressed in the plans adopted by the local Emergency Management organizations and are addressed in the LEOPs in respective Annexes. These plans are multi-agency in nature and include:

Debris Removal, Habitability Inspections, Repair and Restoration of Essential Utilities, Repair and Restoration of Public Facilities, Decontamination of HazMat Spill Site, and Assistance to Individuals and Businesses.⁵⁴

Identify what recovery activities will take place immediately, short-term, intermediate, and long-term

Recovery activities are outlined several places, including the county LEOP, Regional Emergency Management Plans, and in the greater NEMA procedures. Activities from Debris Removal to Habitability Inspections, to Restoration of facilities to Assistance to Individuals and Businesses and the parties responsible for carrying those activities out are all outlined in the LEOP.⁵⁵

Develop and disseminate a community evacuation plan

Evacuation plans are outlined by each county's LEOP. Evacuation plans are developed on a county level as well as for each community and are created in response to hazards such as flood plains identified through the LEOP Hazard Analysis. Transportation is coordinated by the Regional Emergency Management Coordinator and mass care of evacuees will be managed by the American Red Cross.⁵⁶

Establish a communication plan

Warning and alert systems are in place through such entities as the National Weather Service, local media stations, and law enforcement. Annex B in county LEOPs includes Emergency Management Warning Procedures and includes a notification chain to media, government, emergency services, and non-governmental organizations (such as schools, hospitals, and senior centers). The Panhandle counties have an emergency notification system

known as "Panhandle Alert" to disseminate information and alerts to residents. These mobile app warning systems are advertised in many locations around local communities. Annex D in the LEOP also outlines the chain and methods for information dissemination in the event of a disaster.⁵⁷

Engage the community to communicate the process and protocols to follow in the event of a disaster and what recovery efforts will be undertaken

Local CERTs and medical reserve corps are organizations through which ordinary citizens are engaged and informed on the recovery and response processes. Trainings and seminars are on-going through NEMA and other outlets to inform and train citizens on what will occur in the event of an emergency. BeReadyNebraska.gov is another resource that's goal is to help members of the public prepare and plan for emergencies.⁵⁸

PHASE II: POST-DISASTER PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Disaster Assessment

Disaster assessments are addressed in Annex C of the county LEOP and are broken down into Public, Private and Agriculture under the direction of the Emergency Management Coordinator. Included in the Public activities are transportation, public utilities, and public works. The LEOP outlines the procedure for incident assessment and the need for good record keeping.

The Damage Assistance Taskforce of Nebraska (DATNE) is a service established by the state of Nebraska which consists of building inspectors, architects, and structural engineers that can be deployed to estimate damages. The assessments recorded and provided to the emergency manager ensure appropriate support from the state and federal government is requested.⁵⁹

54. Bennett.

55. Bennett.

56. Bennett.

57. Panhandle Public Health District et al., "Panhandle Alert."

58. Bennett, "Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, 2014."

59. Bennett.

Develop and/or Implement Recovery Timeline

The timeline and responsibilities for recovery actions are outlined in the LEOP Annexes C and K. These activities include immediate debris removal (Annexes C and K), taking days weeks and months, and Habitability Inspections (Annex K) in the following weeks and months. Longer term actions of Restoration of Utilities (Annex K) are outlined for the following weeks and months, and assistance to individuals and businesses (Annex G) is included which can last for months and years after an event.

It is assumed through the Emergency Management Agencies and LEOP that the local government and response personnel will be responsible for immediate needs of a community or area following a disaster or emergency. Depending on the type and extent of the emergency, additional resources and parties will be activated as described in the LEOP and agreed upon by the Emergency Management Area boards. Incident Status Reports are completed with NEMA to determine the extent of the emergency and the extent of services and assistance needed.

Resources (federal, state, local, and private sector) needed for each activity are identified in the LEOP and in other plans in the area and outline when and who would be contacted for assistance. City and village resources, county resources, Emergency Management Resources, the Red Cross, state resources through NEMA and federal resources are all accounted for and deployed accordingly as the situation is understood and assessed.

Once the scope of a disaster and emergency is understood and the area experiencing an emergency has been stabilized, local organizations, including the broad inclusion of the community, in partnership with state and federal emergency planning agencies (NEMA and FEMA) will set goals for recovery to plan for where the community wants to be post-disaster at certain points in time.⁶⁰

Implement Recovery Plan (long-term recovery)

Business, economic, and entrepreneurial rebuild initiatives and workforce initiatives, as have been addressed above, include SCEDD's NE Biz Recovery, Be Ready Nebraska, and resources from state (NEMA) and federal (Department of Homeland Security and FEMA) agencies.

Other resources available to the community for busi-

nesses to rebuild and entrepreneurial resources to reignite include the same resources that are currently available in planning and financing through the economic development districts and local economic development organizations.

Federal funding programs, as outlined in the NRDs' HMP, are available for Hazard Mitigation grants, flood mitigation assistance, pre-disaster mitigation, repetitive flood claim programs, severe repetitive loss programs, and others. Event recovery funds are available federally through FEMA for individual assistance (housing, loans, counseling, unemployment, property, etc.) and public assistance, which typically pays for 75 percent of approved project costs. Public assistance programs may include debris removal, protective measures, repair of damaged public property, loans for government functions, and grants for public schools.

It is outlined that local governments and organizations will have funds for immediate response and recovery actions.⁶¹

ROLE OF PADD IN DISASTER RECOVERY/EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

While PADD does not play a role at the forefront of Disaster Recovery and Emergency Preparedness, there are ways in which the organization helps the entire system run smoothly.

Disaster Recovery and Emergency Preparedness

During community development efforts, PADD should include emergency preparedness as part of the community conversation. Including survey questions to gauge resident understanding of available safety and preparedness resources is a good starting place. From the business perspective, any businesses participating in the loan program should be made aware of business emergency preparedness resources. PADD should also assist communities in securing EDA funding to bounce back.

Business Continuity and Succession

As outlined in the goals in the previous chapter, PADD will need to start playing a larger role in pulling together resources and people in order to support businesses in periods of transition.

60. Bennett.

61. Bennett.

Business continuity and succession are at risk in the Panhandle due to an aging population and decreased interest in trade work. The ideas outlined in the business succession portion of the plan of action are ways PADD will aim to support this work.

Business continuity in the face of building malfunction or workers absence is another important aspect to the success of businesses. Many businesses in the Panhandle have one employee and it can be difficult to maintain consistent business hours under those circumstances. PADD will also work to get those businesses set up with a continuity plan by connecting them to resources.

One of the strategies from the best practices that could be useful in the Panhandle is a coalition of retired consultants. This allows generational knowledge to be passed down and intergenerational relationships to form. A retiring population doesn't have to be viewed as a threat when there are strategies in place to preserve the generational knowledge they have.

CURRENT RESOURCES

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT): CERT is a program promoting community preparedness by training citizens and government employees for an emergency. Kimball County, Region 21, and Scottsbluff are the Panhandle communities which maintain a CERT program.⁶²

Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA): Safety and security of agriculture is a high priority to NDA and is important to the economic and physical well-being of the state. Some activities include Livestock Emergency Disease Response System - emergency response planning in agriculture, planning response to contagious animal disease emergencies, and working to mitigate human implications of food and dairy product emergencies and their effect on humans.⁶³

Nebraska Medical Reserve Corps: The NMRC program provides structure to deploy medical and public health personnel in response to an emergency, as it identifies specific, trained, credentialed personnel available and ready to respond to emergencies. The Panhandle Medical Reserve Corps program is located in Bridgeport and is led by Melody Leisy. mleisy@pphd.org⁶⁴

Hazard Mitigation Plans (HMP): These plans are completed in the Panhandle by the Natural Resource

Districts and thus are multi-jurisdictional in scope. These plans outline steps and actions to take to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to life and property from a hazardous event. The plans are developed with extensive cooperation of local officials in government, roads, and public works. These plans qualify the regions for Hazard Mitigation assistance from FEMA in the form of grants and programs.⁶⁵

Regional Emergency Management Agencies: Three Emergency Management agencies are maintained in the Panhandle of Nebraska, Regions 21, 22, and 23. Each emergency management organization is directed by a council comprising of representatives from member communities. The Regions have a coordinator who is employed by the joint council, maintains an Emergency Operating Center, and supports in emergency preparedness, recovery, and resiliency. The council and coordinators advise and support the local and county emergency management coordinators.⁶⁶

Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA): The NEMA is charged by state statute to reduce the vulnerabilities of the people and communities of Nebraska from the damage, injury and loss of life and property resulting from natural, technological, or man-made disasters and emergencies. The agency focuses on preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation. Assistance and services for planning, grants, trainings, organization of volunteers and hazard mitigation are provided by the agency.⁶⁷

Nebraska Continuity of Government Plan (COG): The COG plan establishes the policies, plans, guidelines, and procedures that will allow for the preservation, maintenance, or reconstitution of the state government's ability to carry out its responsibilities under all circumstances that may disrupt normal governmental operation.⁶⁸

State Emergency Operations Plan: The SEOP establishes policies, plans, guidelines, and procedures that allow all emergency resources to function effectively in the state.⁶⁹

Local Emergency Operations Plans (LEOP): Each county is required to form and adopt a LEOP. The plans outline 12 primary functional areas of responsibility that ensure public safety and welfare in the event of an emergency. Each LEOP addresses the local authority while adhering to state agency responsibilities and local capacity.⁷⁰

62. Bennett. 66. Bennett. 70. Bennett.
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CHAPTER 9: APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

County	Total Population (Projected)			% Change	% Change
	2010	2020	2030	2010-2020	2020-2030
Banner	690	636	558	-19.1%	-12.3%
Box Butte	11,308	10,768	10,014	-11.4%	-7.0%
Cheyenne	9,998	10,251	10,178	1.8%	-0.7%
Dawes	9,182	9,301	9,679	5.4%	4.1%
Deuel	1,941	1,862	1,711	-11.8%	-8.1%
Garden	2,057	1,932	1,743	-15.3%	-9.8%
Grant	614	567	488	-20.5%	-13.9%
Kimball	3,821	3,715	3,456	-9.6%	-7.0%
Morrill	5,042	4,703	4,220	-16.3%	-10.3%
Scotts Bluff	36,970	37,296	36,816	-0.4%	-1.3%
Sheridan	5,469	4,948	4,373	-20.0%	-11.6%
Sioux	1,311	1,205	1,058	-19.3%	-12.2%
Panhandle	88,403	87,184	84,294	-4.6%	-3.3%
Rural Counties	20,945	19,568	17,607	-15.9%	-10.0%
Counties with City over Pop. 5,000	67,458	67,616	66,687	-1.1%	-1.4%

Table 1. Population projections for each Panhandle County based on 2010 numbers. In rural counties we see severe rates of declining population but the rates of decline are decreasing over time. In counties with cities that have a population greater than 5000 people the population loss is much smaller but the rate of decline is slightly increasing over time.

APPENDIX B

Appendix B is the data collected from the focus groups held during the process of writing this document.

Common threads among all focus groups

People who are committed to the Panhandle were from here originally or were married into a situation where their partner's family was from the region. In a couple instances jobs brought families here.

Common opportunities in the Panhandle:

- Natural environment
- Internships
- School career programs and other career ladders

Common challenges in the Panhandle:

- Housing shortages
- Succession planning
- Wages
- Benefits

Commonly mentioned beneficial strategies:

- Housing
- Central Navigation
- Succession Planning

Summary Report from the Economic Development Focus Group

Diverse economic bases are developed through internship programs and business incubators/recruitment efforts

Efforts in the Panhandle focused on by the Economic Development community include:

- Increasing digital literacy
- Connecting people to resources and helpful relationships
- Community development
- Recruitment of specific businesses

Regional resources utilized:

- Local economic developers
- Small Business Administration
- REAP
- USDA
- LB840
- Banks

Challenges in the Panhandle:

- Duplication of information networks
- Lack of appropriate housing for different job levels
- Lack of skilled workforce
- Disparities among who communities are connected to and what resources they are connected to
- Lack of financial resources for small projects
- Perception of the region

Business succession resources/gaps/opportunities:

- Resources: Small business administration, business resource meetings at college, UNL extension and outreach, UNK used to offer aid to transitioning businesses, NBDC
- Gaps: lack of knowledge in business community, lack of marketing, not getting to businesses soon enough, "not small enough"
- Opportunities: More outreach by going TO business owners, get feedback from our business communities to better understand their needs, provide webinars

Entrepreneurship resources/gaps/opportunities:

- Resources: Grow Nebraska, LB840, Business incubators at WNCC and TCD, entrepreneurship camps through extension and outreach and WNCC, high school and middle school programs, entrepreneurship roundtables
- Gaps: Missing our target market, how to connect to entrepreneurs early and often

- Opportunities: attend local events where entrepreneurs congregate like farmer's markets and craft shows, hang up banners in these places, advertise at the colleges to bring entrepreneurs into a networking event with other entrepreneurs or shark tank type event

Communication Gaps:

- Not diverse enough in our efforts
- Banks not having information to share
- No central navigation
- Too many duplicative meetings

Economic Success to Economic Developers:

- Helping local businesses succeed and focusing efforts there
- Playing to individual community strengths
- If someone has a business idea: everyone knows where to go to get the information
- Many diverse small businesses

Regional economic development strategy:

- Evaluate the feedback you get and implement it when working with business owners
- Market using the data you have
- Identify how business has changed, what's on the horizon, and how to get ahead of it
- Focus on housing
- Longer term planning
- Workforce training to meet our skills gap
- PADD should house regional marketing for workforce development opportunities and business recruitment
- Community building

Summary Report from the Education and Workforce Development Focus Group

Challenges in the Panhandle:

- Ability to adapt to changes in businesses to meet new skills needs
- Business programs aren't necessarily meeting needs of future RURAL business owners

- High turnover in leadership
- Lack of quality applicants

Opportunities for workforce development in the Panhandle:

- Health care is the number one industry so targeting specialty skills training to attract and retain
- Career ladders like UNMC to the hospitals
- Targeted coursework that focuses on how to be a professional in rural areas
- Agricultural technology training and implementation

Key programs providing workforce for the businesses in our communities:

- WNCC
- Advisory Panels from businesses letting schools know what they need – though it is underutilized
- Panhandle Partnership Trainings

External pressures:

- Property taxes fund schools

Economic Success to Educators:

- Economic activities that match the community's unique identity
- Opportunities for businesses and individuals to grow and develop
- Being resourceful and taking pride in what you do

Regional economic development strategy:

- Mentorship
- Mega – high risk lending group
- Central navigation
- Microloans
- Programs to aid farmers starting out

Summary Report from the Equity of Opportunity Focus Group

What do you like about working/owning a business in the Panhandle:

- Familiar with the community
- Opportunity to make a difference in home community and tap new talent

- Businesses in the community are supportive of the community

Challenges in the Panhandle:

- Stereotypes
- Internally changing your own dialogue about what is needed to become an entrepreneur
- Figuring out who the right people are to help you get started
- Not well connected with the mainstream business community
- Gaining skills to use quick books, and other technology
- The 8-5 mindset of educators
- Stigma around where a business is located --> not supported by larger community --> not successful
- Business succession resources

Youth success opportunities:

- TEAMS and Upward bound are amazing mentorship programs – need continued funding
- Guidance counselors that support communities of color by supporting those children
- Extension and Outreach programs
- Better initiative on the part of schools to meet needs of students of color
- Business partnerships with these student programs to provide funding support
- Improvement of mental health services

Economic Success:

- Evenly developed communities, no stigma to a certain “side of town”
- Opportunities for young people to come back and be successful in their dreams
- Can purchase everything we need in this community
- Open-minded to change of business and new people
- How to support all visions of economic success

Regional economic development strategy

- Mentorship
- College and business partnerships
- Central navigation – community resource center
- Succession planning for volunteer programs
- Teaching people how to accumulate wealth
- Changing the mindset of “graduation is enough”
- Community foundation

Summary Report from Human and Health Services Focus Group

Challenges in the Panhandle:

- Benefits packages do not compete with what is offered in larger communities
- Flexibility that jobs may offer

How can employers and service providers partner:

- Collaborations between the hospitals and the schools to provide scholarships and incentives to stay
- Employer policies that better support workers to use services provided
- Providing after-hours day care for employees who do shift work
- Better communication to avoid service duplication

What regional resources are helpful to support better collaboration between hospitals:

- United community visions for healthcare, not every community can have every specialty
- Potential for hospitals to share staff
- Panhandle Partnership

What is the region missing to recruit people:

- Better insurance benefits packages, economies of scale
- Hard to bring people out to the region so they can see it
- Lack of ability to train enough people here

Regional economic development strategy:

- Less political trouble and more family friendly activities
- Improving pay rates
- Develop a regional goal that we are all working toward

Summary Report from Panhandle Non-profit Focus Group

Successful Economic Development:

- Social entrepreneurship
- City governments connected to service providers to fill gaps
- Focus on recruiting and retaining small family businesses
- Partnerships between non-profits and businesses
- Opportunities to build student skills and focus energy early on to support student success

Challenges in the Panhandle:

- Fundraising is a struggle, especially for operating costs
- Closed community when trying to address social issues and the stigma surrounding them
- Rural areas are not taken seriously by contractors and funders
- Building consistent volunteer support
- High poverty

Regional economic development strategy:

- Central distribution center to accumulate resources and provide on central call number
- How to match non-profits to for-profits – some sort of non-profit/business fair
- Have businesses support volunteerism
- Work with businesses to support staff members so they don't lose people due to sickness, lack of childcare, etc.

Summary Report from Large Employer Focus Group

What brought your business to the Panhandle:

- Right environmental conditions
- Started as a small family-owned business and has grown and added over time
- Started to fill a need many years ago

Challenges in the Panhandle:

- Attraction and retention of workers at all skill levels – internships have helped
- Being far away from resources
- Consistency of workforce – lots of turnover
- Knowledge of qualified applicants about what is available
- Low wages compared to other areas when students are thinking about paying off student loans

Economic Success to Large Employers:

- Profitability
- Maintaining workforce
- Expansion and innovation
- Fostering and growing small family businesses that will give us a foundation here so we can be self-sufficient
- Profitability
- Providing community needs for rural NE

Opportunities for workforce development:

- Career academies – high school programs intended to help students test out career paths
- Apprenticeships – opportunity to look for qualified individuals with less risk because of state monetary aid
- Recruit employers with attractive high paying jobs to encourage our trained workforce to come back

Regional resources for large employers:

- Vocational rehabilitation in Scottsbluff
- Housing programs to bring in quality housing would be helpful

- Large amount of open space available for new businesses

External forces having an impact on regional businesses:

- Affordable care act --> pressure on employers
- Increase regulation --> more time spent just on compliance
- Tariffs
- Lack of mental health resources --> looks bad when recruiting
- Other cities can offer bigger and better recruitment packages
- Agricultural commodity prices

Regional economic development strategy:

- Innovation and entrepreneurship training
- Targeting entrepreneurs early on/ connecting students/individuals with compatible skills to each other
- One stop shop for economic development resources
- Community recruitment

Summary Report from Tourism Focus Group

Successful tourism industry in the Panhandle:

- Strong marketing plan focused strategically on aspects of tourism in the area
- Collaborate with other tourism groups to provide attractions and family friendly activities
- Infrastructure to support tourism: healthy businesses that provide food, lodging, and evening activities to the visitor

Challenges in the Panhandle:

- Selling the Panhandle and the Oregon Trail
- Targeting the historical tourists
- Takes some time to find the best way to reach your customers
- Navigating politics and territorialism in a new community

Key tourism programs:

- Nebraska tourism
- Succession planning for tourism – needed
- Dawes County travel board
- Chambers of commerce
- Keith County Visitor's Bureau
- State tourism grants

External forces having an impact on tourism:

- Seasonal nature of the tourist attractions here – not mild year around
- Small communities think in terms of survival

Regional economic development strategy:

- Tourism chamber
- Work with communities to build entrepreneurs who can think about seasonal businesses that complement the tourism
- Capitalize on our wildlife tourism
- Thinking about how to develop year-around tourism activities

Summary Report from Small Business Focus Group

Describe what brought your business to the Panhandle:

- Businesses were in the community and were transferred to current owners

Describe why you choose to stay in the Panhandle with your business:

- Legacy business
- Provide services to local community

Challenges in the Panhandle:

- Small communities have lack of daytime population
- Marketing to folks traveling through
- Cyclical population patterns due to tourism peak times
- Educating community about niche products
- Providing opportunities for convenience with products

Economic success for small businesses:

- Have the name of the company become a household name
- Being connected with what's happening in the community
- Hiring more staff, creating more jobs
- Innovation
- More online orders to fill gaps in sale season

Training programs that would be helpful:

- Management courses
- Computer proficiency
- Quick classes that support continuing education for small business employees
- Continue digital marketing classes

Most helpful format and timing for trainings:

- In person
- Online
- Central navigation location with lists

Helpful resources when starting up:

- Masterminds
- Networking with local entrepreneurs/business owners
- WNCC business classes

Regional economic development strategy:

- Central navigation for new business owners
- Incubator where new business ideas can be vetted
- Checklist for starting a business

APPENDIX C

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