

## Regional Development Trends:

### Geographic Location

Region VII Planning and Development Council (Region) serves seven counties located in an east to west band, generally two counties wide, from the geographic center of West Virginia to the western

edge of the Eastern Panhandle. The entire Region is in the jurisdiction of the federal Appalachian Regional Commission.

### Land Area of Counties

County	Square Miles
Barbour	341
Braxton	514
Gilmer	340
Lewis	389
Randolph	1040
Tucker	419
Upshur	355
Region Total	3,398

### Proximity to Markets

Region VII is centrally located to the major markets of Washington D.C./Baltimore MD, Pittsburgh PA, Columbus OH, Lexington/Louisville KY, and Bristol/Kingsport TN. Interstate 79 (I-79) connects Pittsburgh to Lewis and Braxton Counties. This interstate is the connecting point to the southern markets.

Rt. 19 connects to I-79 south of Sutton in Braxton County and provides excellent access to the Bristol Tennessee markets. Some access is afforded Gilmer County; however, the proposed Little Kanawha Parkway would open Gilmer and the western segment of Region VII to the Ohio Valley market. This new road would benefit central West Virginia in its entirety. Completed portions of Corridor H (Route 33) connect Upshur, Barbour and Randolph Counties to I-79 and the Pittsburgh and southern markets. Corridor H is under construction in the east and when it is finished Tucker County will have access to both the markets serviced by I-79 and I-81 in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. With the completion of Corridor H the entire region will be connected to the eastern markets dominated by Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. Furthermore, Corridor H and I-79 has the potential to become the route of choice from the Baltimore Harbor to the commercial centers of the mid-south.

## Natural Features

This area has three distinct geological provinces. The Ridge and Valley region is located in Randolph County and Tucker County. Long mountains extending from the southwest to the northeast with wide valleys characterize this geologic province. Tucker County is also home to Canaan Valley, the highest valley in elevation of its large size in the eastern United States. Barbour and Upshur Counties are transition areas from the Ridge and Valley to the Allegheny Plateau. The geologic province between the ridge and valley and plateau is often called the Allegheny Front. The watershed drains of the Front are more like gorges in contrast to the wide based valleys to the east. Barbour and Upshur Counties have mountains that graduate to rolling hills in the west. In between is somewhat rugged terrain. Gilmer, Lewis and Braxton Counties enjoy the rolling hill features of the Allegheny Plateau; however, there are islands of rugged terrain in each of the western counties.

## Development Patterns

For the most part, new development is occurring in corridors along four-lane highways in Region VII. All towns and cities adjacent to the good highways are prospering. Barbour and Gilmer Counties, which are lacking four-lane highways, have some development at the great effort of community leaders. Tucker County has had some recent development on Rt. 92 near Davis. The new "Honey" Rubenstein State Youth Center and Canaan Valley Institute facilities have been completed. New residential/2<sup>nd</sup> home construction and development is occurring and is projected to boom once Corridor H is complete, probably due to the Urban to Rural Mass Evacuation

The headwaters of at least 12 eastern rivers are located in Region VII and the Army Corps of Engineers maintain three large flood management lakes in Braxton and Lewis Counties. There is a large energy industry impoundment in Upshur. The majority of the land base is in forest; however, significant acreage is used for pasture and hay purposes. Much of Barbour, Randolph, and Tucker Counties are part of the Monongahela National Forest.

This region is rich in minerals and natural resources. Besides water and forests, much of the area has coal reserves. A major natural gas console is located in Central West Virginia and gas production is prominent in much of the Region's counties. A number of limestone deposits are also quarried.

issue in the National Capitol Region. Corridor H construction through Tucker County should boost the development and revitalization of the City of Parsons, the City of Thomas, and the Town of Davis at some point in the future. The WV Governor recently announced construction bidding for Corridor H east of Davis and the letting of engineering procurement for the Davis to Montrose portion of the highway. Residential development continues to exhibit low activity over the last year. Prefabricated and modular homes are quite popular; however, there are clusters of luxury homes throughout the region. Commercial development along the finished portions of Corridor H has seen moderate activity over the past year.

## Population and Labor Force:

The following chart summarizes population and labor force by county.

County	2010 CENSUS	2000 Census	2009 Labor Force (July)	2010 Labor Force (July)
Barbour	16,589	15,557	6,590	6,640
Braxton	14,523	14,702	5,820	5,780
Gilmer	8,693	7,160	3,020	3,050
Lewis	16,372	16,919	7,470	7,520
Randolph	29,405	28,262	12,470	12,350
Tucker	7,141	7,321	2,990	2,780
Upshur	24,254	23,404	10,380	10,330
<b>Totals</b>	<b>116,977</b>	<b>113,325</b>	<b>48,740</b>	<b>48,450</b>

The chart indicates that the Region has decreased in workforce population by 290 persons (0.6%) from July 2009 to July 2010.

Region VII is rural in nature. The City of Elkins (population 7,094, [2010]) is the largest municipality.

## Economy

There has been some upward movement in the Region's economy until the recent recession. An abundant hardwood forest began to reach economic maturity in the mid-1990s and the value added wood industry has expanded. However, many jobs have been lost due to the economic downturn the nation has faced for the last couple of years. Adequate volumes of raw timber reserves should last the first quarter of this century. The energy sector is developing

with wind-electric farms becoming established in the ridge and valley province. Energy has always been a predominant attribute to the area's economy; however, new technology requires fewer jobs to produce market volumes of energy. In Region VII, three of every four non-farm workers are service providers. Government is the largest employment sector.

## Other Players

Plastic and specialty component manufacturing were very popular in the Region; however, there has been no significant expansion in those areas in the last several years. A cluster of correctional facilities includes two regional jails, a federal prison, a state prison, a state youth treatment center, and two private teen behavior programs. There are several other state and federal correction facilities dispersed in adjacent counties. Retail development is escalating at major intersections along I-79 and Corridor H.

## Infrastructure & Services

Due to the rural nature of the Region, infrastructure development has not progressed as in urban America. Local governments and communities continue to address the infrastructure needs in the water/sewer arena. Most incorporated towns and cities have water/sewer; however, some municipalities have system components that are antiquated and need replaced. Some smaller, un-chartered communities such as Whitmer in Randolph County and Rock Cave in Upshur County desperately need services.

The Region is progressive in communications infrastructure. Broadband projects for rural residents have been implemented in Barbour County. That technology is available to most county seats and towns along the four-lane corridors. Fiber optics has been installed in the Verizon service area, a major hub located at Rock Cave in Upshur County. Frontier and Alltel provide top end copper technology to their customers. Broadband satellite services are readily available for the more rural consumer. Glenville has an established wireless system. It should be noted that Verizon sold all their land lines to Frontier and transfer of operation took place in 2010.

Completion of Corridor H to I-81 will have significant effects on the Region's economy. Marcellus Shale is now being exploited for gas production. It is anticipated the industry cluster emerging from this activity will significantly impact the region's economy for 60 years. The Army National Guard is constructing a new 50,000sf building along Corridor H in Randolph County and a new USPFO/Armory installation in Upshur County.

Each County has an industrial park except for Braxton, which has one in the planning stages. High quality shell, specification and multi-tenant/use buildings are on most sites. There are facilities available to firms looking to locate in this region. Tucker County is now complete with its industrial park and is currently being marketed to potential businesses.

Since completing its new multi-tenant, high tech center at the I-79 Flatwoods intersection, the Braxton County Development Authority has seen many new jobs locate to the this facility. The need for a new building has been demonstrated and is being planned for adjacent to the existing facility to meet business demand. Barbour County has a very good building ready for occupancy. US EDA has invested \$1.75 million in the Upshur County Industrial Park at the 50% level to develop industrial sites and install infrastructure. This project is complete. The Lewis County Industrial Park at Jane Lew continues to grow with tenants funding almost all of the new construction.

## Natural and Cultural Resources and Environmental Issues

Due to the rugged topography most sites suitable for development are located in floodplains. This precipitates into expensive site development for any industry. Archaeology is an important concern throughout the Region due to an abundance of Native American culture and Civil War sites. Architecture issues would include local governments trying to comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)/Section 504 requirements in buildings that are 150 years old. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) is particular about how one installs an elevator in a cultural treasure. The Monongahela National Forest has finalizing a long term Forest

Management Plan Revision that will impact this region for the next 40 years (last plan approved 1970s). This plan is more restrictive and reduces total acres available for commercial wood and fiber production. In FY2010, US EDA funded an Economic Adjustment Disaster Planning Grant to help mitigate for natural disasters in the region. Weston Hospital Lewis County is home to the largest hand cut stone building from the Civil War era. This facility once housed the West Virginia Mental Hospital. The hospital campus was auctioned for \$1.5 million on August 29, 2007. Tours of the facility continue to be an attraction for Lewis County and Weston.

## Clean Water Act

Environmental issues continue to play a large part of the Region's economic dynamic. Some County development is stifled by the regulations of the Clean Water Act. Tucker County, located in the Allegheny Highlands, contains many perched valleys in which natural bogs and beaver ponds are abundant. These ecotypes produce weak acid water with a high biologic component. This creates a condition in which there are high oxygen demands on water that does not have high oxygen capacity by nature. In many cases the naturally occurring oxygen demands are not in compliance

with the Federal Statute. The water problem is further complicated by acid rain caused by Midwest industrial centers. Moisture laden air tends to condensate at higher elevations thus the warm air masses from the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley lose their capacity to hold water over Tucker County. This national clean water mandate is an onerous burden to certain communities of Region VII who would like to prosper, but cannot get past regulations. The Tier 2.5 stream classification process (Clean Water Act) is alarming to many of the Region's citizenry.

## DEP

The State Department of Environmental Protection faces several issues including the Tier 2.5, coal extraction beneath streams, and residential waste problems.

## National Forest

The Monongahela National Forest has completed a Forest Plan Revision. It is notable that the Forest Plan process for all national forests had its origins on the Monongahela. The original intent of the local citizens who raised forest management issues was to have commercial production and harvest without the gross exploitation of resources as practiced in that day. Today, local people still want the forest environment protected with wise use and harvest of the

resource. The Forest Service has accomplished significant reduction of the number of forest acres (158,000) available for commercial harvest though stipulations in the chosen management alternative. This is a significant loss to the economy in Region VII since 3 of the 7 counties have National Forest lands in their boundaries and raw timber production is such a large part of the regional gross product.

## Planning and Economic Development Activities

Region VII Planning and Development Council serves seven counties as a technical assistance provider. Also, Region VII is an Economic Development District (EDD) for the US Department of Commerce (DOC) Economic Development Administration (EDA) and the Local Development District (LDD) for the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). Each county in Region VII has an operational Economic Development Authority or Association for planning and project development purposes.

Consistently, several Small Cities Block Grant (SCBG) applications and U.S. Economic Development Administration (USEDA) grant applications are submitted on an annual basis. Qualified projects are developed and applications are submitted to ARC and USDA on a need/demand basis. Governor's Community Participation Grants, Transportation Enhancement Grants, Community Law Enforcement Block Grants, and Culture and History Preservation Grants are developed and submitted on an ongoing basis. Region VII Planning and Development Council staff provides technical assistance in project development and environmental clearance as requested and required by member governments and funding agencies.

Finish Corridor H has been rated the #1 strategy & opportunity in the CEDS evaluation surveys for 7 years. An interesting trend emerged in the FY10 evaluation instrument. The desire and demand to finish Corridor H has gotten stronger to the point that the normal bell curve of responses has been destroyed. The statistical curve looks more like a spike than a bell. This statistical anomaly occurred again in the FY11 survey. Responses charted broadband development as #2 and identified improvement of infrastructure and recruiting of new industry as distant 3rd & 4<sup>th</sup>. Funding is the #1 constraint of any development activities in this rural area.

