

Annual Narrative Progress Report - 2004

Executive Summary :

Through the continued work of the Northern Maine Empowerment Council and the staff at Northern Maine Development Commission, progress continues toward achieving the Goals and Strategies outlined in the Aroostook County Empowerment Zone (ACEZ) Strategic Plan. Our Congressional delegation was successful in obtaining a \$500,000 earmark in the current year's appropriations that supported much of this progress. While we are appreciative of their efforts, we know that relying on possible annual congressional earmarks to achieve a long-term strategic process contradicts the very goal of sustainable economic development for the region. We must once again point out that a direct appropriation of at least \$2 million per year is needed for this program to maintain steady success.

NMDC, along with the Aroostook Municipal Association and Aroostook County Government, organized a summit on delivery of public services in the region. This meeting, which was promoted as "Regionalism and the County – Connecting Services", brought together a diverse group of participants from local, county, state and federal sources to local and regional service organizations. The focus was to celebrate the existing collaborations/partnerships between communities in providing services and to explore what additional alliances might be possible. The summit was an unqualified success with more than 150 participants attending and very positive responses to both the content and structure of the event. Several requests were made to have follow-up meetings to continue the discussion of specific community collaborations. Furthermore, there were at least five applications for grant funding from the Governor's "Efficient Delivery of Regional Services" program that were a direct result of dialogue begun at the summit.

Northern Maine Development Commission (NMDC) staff provided substantial community outreach to assist both the creation and retention of jobs through training for sound, fundamental business practices and product/service marketing. Twenty different training events were offered ranging from customer service to marketing to business plan development and more than 300 individual clients were assisted by our small business counselors.

The Business Finance Department administers NMDC's loan programs funded by the Economic Development Administration (EDA), the Small Business Administration (SBA), the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME), Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA-RD). These loan funds now total almost \$9,000,000.00. The Business Finance Department provides loan funds to leverage other private and public funding for new and existing businesses in our service district. The Department also provides business counseling and loan packaging for existing and new businesses, and community programs designed to assist business development in local communities as well as technical assistance for a variety of public and private loan programs as such as micro businesses. The staff will take the time to work with a business and pre-review the financial package so that a presentation to a primary lender is complete and accurate before the business makes its request for funding. Use of these loan funds has resulted in jobs created and retained of 6,475 with a dollar per job amount of \$4,175.

To further stimulate the visibility and accessibility of job opportunities in Aroostook County, NMDC has taken the initiative of creating a new "jobs" website. The Northern Maine Jobs website will provide the common connection for businesses to recruit new workers and for job seekers to look into the regional job market. There will be advanced search and notification capabilities for job seekers that will, after they register, alert them to job opportunities in the categories that they have

selected. This effort provides yet another component for allowing both residents and non-residents of the area to understand what is available in the job market and to entice individuals to come and live in our area.

Finally, NMDC continues to update and improve our website (www.nmdc.org) and the Aroostook County Empowerment Zone website (www.arostookez.org) that greatly improves the visibility and accessibility of program information. Our homepage now displays all of the programs and departments of the organization and more intuitively leads visitors to their areas of interest. Program information, related staffing and the Annual Report are all available and presented in a format that is much more easily understood. The links, both with internal context-sensitive text and through a separate page, are again, much more easily accessed for an improved flow of information to the viewer. A project to allow web-based mapping/GIS capability for Northern Maine Development Commission programs is currently in progress and we anticipate its use on the ACEZ website when completed.

Most Significant Accomplishments:

- Earmark Funds – FFY 2005 **\$500,000**
 - Funds will be expended to support the activities of the Aroostook Partnership for Progress (see Partnership and Alliances section) (#48 - support for business development, job creation and retention) and to provide reimbursement for NMDC staff time spent on governance and organization issues that will accomplish the ACEZ Strategic Plan goals and objectives (Benchmark #56 – Project administration).
- Set-Aside Funding – Grants were obtained from Rural Development (RD) set-aside funds for the following initiatives:
 - Comprehensive Regional Investment Program. Supports Benchmarks #54 (region wide programs that support diverse econ. dev.)

RD funding source: Rural Business Opportunity Grant Program (RBOG)

Features:

- Assists the development of the CREST plan **\$50,000**

- Tourism Business Plan – Benchmark #48 (support for business development, job creation and retention)

RD funding source: RBOG

Features:

- Creation of a business plan for the expansion of the tourism industry in the region. **\$50,000**

- NMDC, through its association with Aroostook County Tourism (ACT) coordinated the first ever “County Colours Tourism Show” at the Northern Maine Forum in Presque Isle. The show was held September 24-26, 2004. In total, over 45 exhibitors displayed at the weekend show. The weekend attendance for the trade show was approximately 1,000. After the conclusion of the show, it was decided to make this an annual event. The tentative show date for 2005 is September 10-11. This supports benchmark 52 (tourism development).
- NMDC staff hosted a meeting of the Aroostook Investment Exchange (AIX) at their offices in Caribou on November 2, 2004. Joe Wischerath, Executive Vice-President of Maine and Company, Maine’s national and international business attraction organization, was in attendance and gave a presentation to the attendees. AIX is an enterprise created by Northern Maine Finance Corporation and supported by Northern Maine Development Commission, Aroostook Partnership for Progress and is part of the strategic plan for Aroostook County. The Purpose of AIX is to provide opportunities for entrepreneurs who are seeking risk capital to make brief presentations to audiences of potential investors. Any connection that a forum attendee determines is of interest with a presenter is made by the attendee and the presenter at a later date. AIX recommends that each party obtain the services of professional counsel to insure that they are in compliance with federal and state securities statutes. This supports benchmark 48 (business retention and expansion), 54 (regional programs) and 55 (project collaboration).
- NMDC received notification from the Commissioner of the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) stating that they had completed their review process and the Aroostook County Pine Tree Development Zone (PTZ) has achieved “final designation status.” NMDC is now focusing its PTZ efforts on getting those qualified businesses within our

communities to better understand the potential benefits available and the process required to take advantage of those benefits. To date, five Aroostook County businesses have been successful in becoming certified as a PTZ business, with several others involved in the certification process. In the very near future, NMDC will be contacting all Aroostook County businesses that fall under the prescribed PTZ industry segments to provide the pertinent information. This supports benchmark 48 (job creation and retention) and 54 (region-wide economic development programs).

- Many volunteer hours and months of planning came together as the “Regionalism and the County – Connecting Services” summit took place. In attendance were over 150 local, regional and state officials. The meeting featured Dr. Charles Colgen from the University of Southern Maine Muskie Institute; Nancy Stark, a national speaker on rural governance; and Governor John Baldacci. The morning was designed to highlight the type of collaborations already in place in the region, present more information on the ongoing problem of out-migration and to offer some national perspectives on the changing context for regional projects. Governor Baldacci spoke during the luncheon and emphasized his view that Aroostook County represented a unique opportunity for partnerships and cooperative efforts to develop, due in great part to our willingness to discuss changing relationships with each other. The afternoon was spent in smaller groups talking about some of the issues that could promote or hinder more local/regional collaboration. Response to this event was overwhelmingly positive with many comments from the participants about when the next meeting might take place. This supports benchmark 55 (project collaboration) and 54 (region-wide economic development programs).
- Workshops/Outreach – Staff at NMDC continued to provide opportunities for education and training in customer service, funding prospects from in-state technical programs, and export regulations/requirements. Benchmark #48 (support for business development, job creation and retention)
- NMDC continues to focus on the Internet as one of the primary mechanisms for communicating both the Empowerment Zone program and other programs offered by the Commission. Our home website had a substantial redesign and we have added a new jobs website to link prospective employers and employees. Benchmark #48 (support for business development, job creation and retention)
- NMDC received a high rating from the Economic Development Administration on its final Performance Appraisal which we received in September. This is significant because funding from EDA has allowed much of the progress noted for the Empowerment Zone Strategic Plan. Benchmark #56 – Project Administration.
- Northern Maine Development Commission is continuing to work with the Northern Maine Community College in support of a Business & Industry Training Center. A pre-application had been submitted to EDA, but due to changes in the funding priorities of this agency, the project does not appear competitive. Other funding sources will be explored as this project is seen as vital to retaining and expanding the manufacturing, forestry and agriculture industries of the region. This supports Benchmark #38 (workforce training center).
- Aroostook County Tourism and Northern Maine Development Commission assisted the Maine Office of Tourism in conducting a series of regional meetings focusing on nature-based tourism. This supports Benchmark #52 (tourism development).
- The Intermediary Re-lending Programs I, II and III derives from a combination of three loans obtained from the USDA - Rural Development; originating in 1998. NMDC and the State

Department of Economic and Community Development have provided matching funds that provides the current amount of \$3,275,116 to lend in leveraged funds to most types of businesses. As of October 2004, these funds have created and retained 1,410 jobs. We have made 93 loans for a total of \$7,412,086 and helped leverage \$48,534,292 in other private and public funding within our service area. This supports Benchmark #48 – support for business development, job creation and retention.

- The RECD Rural Business Enterprise Grant Program (RBEG) is designed to support development of small and emerging private business enterprises in rural areas. Over the years NMDC has received a total of \$600,000 in RBEG grant funds. The repayment of these loans has become the capital that makes up the NMDC loan fund and it becomes available for a number of uses. To date, we have loaned a total of \$1,444,542 that created and retained 404 jobs. This supports Benchmark #48 – support for business development, job creation and retention.
- Rural Development has awarded NMDC a \$750,000 IRP loan to be used for loans to businesses as well as DECD providing \$200,000 of CDBG Regional Assistance Funds as required match. This supports benchmark 48 (job creation and retention).
- NMDC received funding from the US Department of Agriculture – Rural Development Solid Waste Management Grants program. The objectives of the Solid Waste Management Grant Program are to reduce or eliminate pollution of water resources in rural areas and improve planning and management of solid waste facilities and sites located in rural areas. The funding provided will be used to foster a broader understanding among community members, solid waste professionals, students and interested citizens on waste management programs, waste reduction and recycling strategies, the latest recycling technologies and state and federal regulations or laws relating to waste management. These services have been approved for the new grant – Backyard Compost Education, Burn Barrel Education and Promotion, and Multi-Media Regional Training Program. Grant total is \$96,800 with \$86,800 coming from USDA-Rural Development. This supports benchmark 51 (natural resources).
- The Small Manufacturing Development Fund (SMDF) provided matching grants to small manufacturing firms for implementation of measures developed from business counseling sessions provided by representatives of the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) and Maine Small Business Development Center (SBDC). The measures developed were blended into the companies overall business plan and submitted to the SMDF review committee in the form of a final SMDF application. Applicants could apply for grants totaling \$2,000.00 or 50 % or the total project cost, which ever was less. The \$50,000.00 in RBEG funding received for this effort was distributed to twenty two different companies, working to complete twenty four different projects. The projects completed within these efforts include such things as website development, marketing materials, production upgrades, and consultant fees. The SMDF began with a goal of capturing private matching funds of \$12,500.00. However it vastly exceeded this total in capturing more than \$68,000.00 worth of matching private funds. The SMDF was very successful in completing its goals, it received great press and even better public opinion. This supports Benchmark #48 – support for business development, job creation and retention.

Community Participation:

The Northern Maine Empowerment Council has made a consistent effort to engage and represent the interests of the region. Continuing NMDC staff involvement with municipalities, health care entities, educational institutions, business and industry leadership, and social service organizations created much of the information that came before the NMEC. Presentations were made to the Council on issues ranging from the role of the Creative Economy to how child care affects employment to current perspectives on higher education in the region. This supports benchmark 56 (administration).

Businesses and communities were very involved in discussing and supporting the expansion of the Aroostook County Empowerment Zone and this also holds true for the issue of funding this program. Please see an expanded outline of these issues in the Problems section of this report.

The governing body, the Northern Maine Empowerment Council, met four times in 2003 and members continued to dialogue with organizations across the region such as town councils, the Maine Potato Board, Loring Development Authority, area hospitals, school superintendents, businesses, and social service organizations. In addition, education sessions were held on a variety of topics ranging from the increase and impact of the aging population in Aroostook to the concerns and activities of the Native Americans in the region.

Methods used to inform the public of activities and EZ information have involved use of the media, public speaking, one-on-one conversations, and the Internet. The public has received information explaining the EZ program, the zone, and funding issues, as well as more targeted information in the workshops listed above. When the CREST plan reaches draft form, meetings will be held across the region to receive feedback on both the process and content of this planning document.

A major initiative that involved substantial participation by the business community and municipal leaders was the Pine Tree Development Zone Program and its enhancement of tax incentives for the Aroostook County Empowerment Zone. On May 7, over 50 local town and city officials were on hand at the NMDC sponsored "Pine Tree Zone Summit" where state representatives provided the audience with detailed information about the process envisioned for the program designation, company certifications, and a description of the various benefits that could be derived from participation in the PTZ program. Subsequent meetings were held with municipal officials through the early months of the year to finalize the zones that would be designated for the program. Significant staff time was spent in one-on-one discussions about the implications of zone designation and how additional flexibility could be built into the program. NMDC staff is dedicated to assisting and implementing the program as another important economic development tool for regional success.

Partnerships and Alliances:

There is continued expansion of the contacts and partnerships that form as a result of the area's designation as an Empowerment Zone.

One of the collaborations that continues to develop is the relationship between the Maine Winter Sports Center (MWSC), a non-profit organization whose goal is to bring skiing activities back to Northern Maine, and the Northern Maine Development Commission and Aroostook County Tourism. In 2004, the World Cup Biathlon Event was held in Fort Kent at the 10th Mountain Lodge facility developed by the MWSC. This event drew top national and international athletes to the region and was broadcast live to 30 million households in Europe, where biathlon is the number one winter spectator sport. NMDC/ACT agreed to become a major event sponsor by contributing \$15,000 to host the national and international press professionals. In addition, NMDC staff coordinated the private sector rental of snowmobiles during the week-long competition.

The most significant new development is the **Aroostook Partnership for Progress (APP)**. The **Aroostook Partnership for Progress (APP)** is a grassroots, public-private partnership dedicated to aggressive and effective results-oriented actions that leverage the financial commitments and talents of the private sector in partnership with the public sector. Formed in 2004, APP will implement programs to:

- address the loss of 14,000 people from 1990 to 2001
- create 1,500 net new jobs
- attract new investment to our downtowns
- increase growth from existing businesses & entrepreneur activity

The Goals and Objectives of this organization are to:

- 1. Increase Business Activity through the following:**
 - Facilitate the Creation of 1,500 Net New Quality Jobs by 2007
 - Attract at Least \$50 Million in New Capital Investments
 - Increase the Number of New Micro-Enterprise Start-Ups by 10 Per Year
- 2. Increase Outside Investment through the following:**
 - Increase Tourism Expenditures by at Least 30% by 2007
 - Recruit One Major Film Production to Aroostook County and establish Aroostook County as a Target Region for Film Production
 - Attract a resort development by 2007
- 3. Increase Community Development Activity by working to:**
 - Establish a "Sister Cities Council" to Promote Joint Initiatives and Cooperation Among Communities in Aroostook County and New Brunswick Consisting of the Public and Private Sectors
 - Promote and Establish an Aroostook County Downtown Revitalization Program – **The Aroostook Renaissance Corporation** – Successfully Developing and Funding at Least Three Downtown Revitalization Plans
- 4. Promote Retention of the County's Youth through programs that:**
 - Succeed in Having at Least 20 Businesses Adopt "Career-Based Work Study and Mentoring" Scholarship Programs Impacting At Least 100 Young Adults Annually by 2007
 - Creating an Inter-Faith Initiative Funded by the "Partnership" to Work With The County's Youth Providing:

- i. Improved Life Skills Training
- ii. Increased Mentoring and Focus on Futures in Aroostook County
- iii. Increased and Coordinated Social Activities for the Young
- iv. Value-Based Career Counseling and Education
- v. Pooled Home Loan Guarantees for Young Adults

This ambitious program to attract new investment to Aroostook County, to reverse the trend of Out-Migration and to revitalize our Downtowns will require significant financial investment from both private and public sources. By year-end 2004, twenty private businesses have pledged \$1,087,000 to the APP initiative.

Problems/Obstacles:

Issue 1:

The most pressing problem continues to be the fact that Round III zones have been appropriated no money to help implement their strategic plans, let alone to administer the program. Northern Maine Development Commission staff continues to receive inquiries about funding for ACEZ activities. Many businesses and communities were involved with the Strategic Plan, making good faith efforts to be cooperative, collaborative and forward-thinking in the proposals that were included in this document. Leaders in both the public and private sector understood, and were delighted with, the Empowerment Zone designation in early 2002; believing that funding associated with this designation would enable accomplishment of much of the Plan. ***However, FFY 2005 earmark funds in the amount of \$500,000.00 would be the first appropriated monies that we have seen and, while appreciated, this amount falls far short of the funding levels for the Round I and Round II communities.*** The days, months and years spent in the planning process deserve reasonable funding levels to accomplish the Strategic Plan initiatives. Without these resources, the energy and momentum that has been developed will dissipate with the public perception that the designation was “much ado about nothing”.

Issue 2:

Current regulation that constrains the geographic footprint of an Empowerment Zone was promulgated to address concentrated pockets of poverty, which tends to occur most visibly in urban settings. The policy is not well-conceived to address the condition of out-migration, which does not occur in specific census tracts; but rather, in broad, rural areas that need comprehensive improvements such as job creation and retention, education, and social services. ***The current EZ geographic divide that exists between communities, and even parts of the same community, has created a great deal of frustration and confusion. It has become a divisive issue that, as time goes on, could prove to be very significant***

To qualify to apply to the Empowerment Zone program under out-migration, eligible applicants were determined by county (i.e., an entire county must have suffered a 15 percent or greater population loss between 1990 and 2000). Under the out-migration criteria, Aroostook County qualified as a whole to apply, yet only portions could be included because it was guided by geographic constraints created to address poverty. This is especially relevant when you consider the fact that Aroostook County is the largest county east of the Mississippi and is larger than the states of Rhode Island and Connecticut. At present, major areas of Aroostook County that qualified and are suffering out-migration (some at an even higher rate than the 15 percent average of the county) cannot participate in the program. This includes businesses that cannot utilize tax incentives to create new jobs, municipalities that cannot utilize set-aside funding to improve infrastructure to serve their businesses or residents, social service agencies that cannot access funding to increase services to rural residents, and more.

Issue 3:

Out-migration, especially youth out-migration, continues to be a problem for the region. This issue is directly related to the lack of attractive job opportunities and the lack of diverse social activities.

Solutions :

In facing the problems listed above, the Northern Maine Empowerment Council (NMEC) and NMDC continue to work closely with the State Rural Development staff and the Congressional delegation. Both parties have been very supportive and have been available to offer as much assistance as possible.

Issue 1 – Solution:

Engagement by our constituents and advocacy for their concerns on funding levels will continue to be a priority for the Empowerment Council and NMDC. We will be working with our Congressional delegation, and the other EZ communities to establish consistent and appropriate funding levels to accomplish the activities outlined in our Strategic Plan.

Issue 2 – Solution:

The NMEC and NMDC strongly believe that the problem of rural out-migration is pervasive in our region and cannot be legitimately addressed by having certain areas of Aroostook County designated as being included in the Empowerment Zone, while other adjacent areas – with the same circumstances – are excluded from the benefits of the EZ program. Although not successful in expanding the Zone in these past two congressional sessions, we will continue to work with our representative communities and our congressional delegation on this vital matter.

Issue 3 – Solution:

Targeted economic development activities and robust business retention programs will be undertaken by the Aroostook Partnership for Progress; with NMDC staff playing key roles in both of these efforts.

Best Practices:

The NMEC functions as the coordinating committee for both EDA planning and the Empowerment Zone Strategic Plan. Given that the primary objective of both these planning efforts is to bring about community/economic growth and stability in our region, our goal is to combine the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) document with the EZ Strategic Plan.

The Northern Maine Empowerment Council will engage its partners in Aroostook County to create a single vision and single investment strategy for development for the area; and in turn will take that vision and strategy to its state and federal partners for their support. This program will be called the **Comprehensive Regional Economic Strategies and Tactics (CREST)** plan and will address all of the major components of the regional economic and social structure.

The strategy will guide key investments for the region in the following sectors:

- 1. Economic Development**
 - 1.1. Tourism
 - 1.2. Creative Economy
- 2. Education**
- 3. Emergency Services**
 - 3.1. Law Enforcement
 - 3.2. Homeland Security/EMS
 - 3.3. Fire and Emergency Transport
- 4. Healthcare**
- 5. Housing**
- 6. Natural Resources**
 - 6.1. Agriculture
 - 6.2. Organic Farming
 - 6.3. Forestry
- 7. Public Infrastructure**
 - 7.1. Utilities
 - 7.2. Transportation
 - 7.3. Energy
 - 7.4. Communications
- 8. Social Services**

The **CREST** will be developed through the involvement and decisions of the Northern Maine Empowerment Council (NMEC) which has representatives of all of the sectors indicated above. NMEC members will assist Northern Maine Development Commission (NMDC) staff in obtaining current and relevant information from each sector. Criteria will be established to identify and prioritize projects/initiatives from each sector that have regional impact. The review process will also identify lead organizations that will be responsible for guiding each project. These regional impact projects will be the result of local input and discussion; and will have measurable performance indicators that will be monitored and updated annually.

Partners with the Northern Maine Empowerment Council in planning and implementing this strategy will include:

- Northern Maine Development Commission
- Aroostook Partnership for Progress
- Aroostook County Action Program
- Aroostook County Tourism
- Rural Planning Organization (formerly the Regional Transportation Advisory Committee)
- Loring Development Authority
- University of Maine System and Aroostook County Campuses
- Northern Maine Community College
- Husson College
- MicMac and Maliseet Native American communities
- Area chambers of commerce and development corporations
- Municipalities
- Non-profit social, education and health organizations

At the state level, the partners will include:

- Maine Department of Economic and Community Development
- Maine Department of Transportation
- Maine State Planning Office
- Maine State Housing Authority
- Finance Authority of Maine
- Maine Economic Development District Association
- University of Southern Maine – Center for Economic and Business Research
- FAME
- Maine Small Business Development Centers
- Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership
- Maine International Trade Center

Finally, federal investment partners will also be included in the planning and implementation process. These federal partners include:

- Rural Development /USDA
- Economic Development Administration (EDA)
- Small Business Administration (SBA)

Plans/Prospects for the Future :

Expanding the geographic boundary of the ACEZ will continue to be a priority of the NMEC and NMDC. It is our view that obtaining designation for all of Aroostook County is a crucial step in maintaining public support for regional strategies which can better enable meaningful positive change leading to future economic success.

CREST Plan

The CREST plan process was a work in progress in calendar 2004. Primary accomplishments were the reconfiguration of board membership to represent as many sectors as possible and the identification of primary and subsidiary sectors that will be addressed in the plan. Early work in 2005 will be the establishment of how projects will be evaluated and prioritized. Combining the CEDS and EZ Strategic Plan will lead to a much more comprehensible planning process for Aroostook County. The process by which this is accomplished will also develop more robust involvement by government and businesses in the region. Further, it will help to create a system of prioritized initiatives that these entities acknowledge as appropriate and effective.

Aroostook Partnership for Progress

The Aroostook Partnership for Progress will provide the primary focus of business attraction activities outside of the region. Our approach will be to design specific financing and incentive packages for the individual businesses wishing to locate in our region. The emphasis for our outreach will be to continue to enlist the expertise of significant regional businesses, like Maine Public Service, in leading the recruiting effort.

The Aroostook Partnership for Progress came of age in 2004 and embarked on a program that could have a significant positive impact on Aroostook County. The creation of the Partnership was significant in that it changed the course of economic development activities in the County with a new level of cooperation among agencies, brought the private sector into the economic development arena, and set the future economic development program focusing resources from a number of programs on specific goals and objectives.

The Partnership will continue to advance its agenda by implementing an aggressive marketing and communications program. With the assistance of Corporate Communications Limited (CCL), our marketing and communications firm, APP will focus on five key areas in 2005. These key areas are federal and state government, targeted businesses, destination development, image development, and communications.

With the assistance of our Congressional offices, APP is planning a governmental relations trip to Washington, D.C. in late February or March. Continued contact will be made throughout the year with the agencies and the region's Congressional staff. As this activity is underway, APP will implement a web casting program to key businesses and targeted markets. The web casts should begin by the end of February and will continue to be utilized monthly throughout the year.

The Destination Development initiative is being pursued and a consultant should be on board by the end of February to assist in developing the resort conceptual plan while also attracting a resort developer to the County. To support this initiative, state and federal grants are currently being pursued that if approved, will greatly enhance northern Maine's tourism development initiative and ultimately our efforts in attracting a world-class destination development to the County. These two initiatives indicate the importance of developing a cooperative working relationship among organizations focused on similar goals and objectives.

With the signing of the MOA with LEAD in the fall of 2004, well-defined responsibilities have been established for each organization. The activities will compliment each organization's initiatives. To that end, LEAD will focus on implementing image development, (one of APP's five key activities for the year) business recognition events and government relations. Improving the County's image internally has been discussed by the LEAD Board in recent years and will become a key component of its objectives for the year. The cooperative relationship between these two organizations, LEAD and APP, sets the example for other organizations in the County to come together and focus resources on a core mission.

Resort Development

The World Cup Biathlon Event (see Partnerships/Alliances section) held in March of 2004 in Fort Kent revealed the need for a significant increase in lodging if more such national/international events are to be brought to the region. Staff from the Maine Winter Sports Center discussed this need with Northern Maine Development staff to see what could be done to create more lodging options. As a result, the Aroostook Partnership for Progress will be performing a feasibility study for possible resort development in Northern Maine. Special emphasis will be placed on lodging development in the St. John Valley area where the biathlon events take place. This analysis will look at existing resources and provide guidance for the development of additional accommodations; possibly in the form of several small resort-style facilities.