

# Western Arkansas Planning and Development District



## Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

2020-2025

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## Executive Summary

Western Arkansas Planning and Development District was established in 1966 as a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation. The mission of the Western Arkansas Planning and Development District is to foster community and economic growth in our local economy by providing community and economic development, workforce innovation, transportation and emergency planning and various other professional services in support of our Region. We are the central catalyst for community-centered economic development that links our counties, cities and businesses with state, federal and private resources to aid in a higher quality of life while promoting future growth for all citizens of Western Arkansas.

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) establishes the goals and objectives necessary to solve the economic problems and capitalize on the resources of the region.

WAPDD covers these 6 counties within rural western Arkansas: Sebastian, Crawford, Franklin, Logan, Polk, and Scott. The total population of the WAPDD area based on the 2010 Census is 206,065. WAPDD's largest county is Sebastian County with a population of 125,744. The smallest county in the WAPDD area is Scott County with a population of 11,233.

Western Arkansas is predominantly rural, made up of mostly small cities and towns. Within the Western Arkansas Planning and Development District there are 42 cities and towns. Thirty-nine or 92.8% of them have populations of less than 5,000. Additionally, of those 42, 18 or 42.8%, had a decrease in population from 2000 to 2010 according to 2010 U.S. Census data. The largest city served by WAPDD is Fort Smith in Sebastian County with 86,209 people. The smallest town served by WAPDD is Wiederkehr Village in Franklin County with just 38 people.

Within the 6 WAPDD counties are both north-south and east-west transportation networks to support industrialization, manufacturing, and tourism growth. Interstate 40, a major east-west corridor that spans across the United States, cuts through Franklin and Crawford counties. U.S. Route 71 crosses through Polk, Scott, Sebastian, and Crawford counties on its way from Louisiana to Canada. The future Interstate 49 is planned to roughly follow the U.S. Route 71 alignment. The northern part of the district boasts the Boston Mountains and the Ozark National Forest, while the southern part of the district is home to the Ouachita Mountains and the Ouachita National Forest. The Arkansas River Valley runs through the central part of the district between the two mountain ranges.

With respect to waterborne transportation, only the Arkansas River is navigable for commercial transport. The McClellan-Kerr Navigation System, as it is called, through a series of seventeen locks and dams opened in the late sixties the Arkansas River from the Mississippi River to Tulsa as a dependable, navigable waterway for commercial barges.

Fort Smith had become one, if not "the manufacturing city of the Southwest" with an outsized intensity of manufacturing activity, producing over \$7 billion of goods in 2007, an increase of \$2 billion or about forty percent over that produced in 1997, according to the federal government's

nationwide censuses of business. This amounts to \$25,000 of goods produced per resident in the Fort Smith metro area, which is almost twice the nation-wide amount per capita and considerably more than any other metro area in the state and region.

Making it an exceptional manufacturing area are the 300 or so manufacturing establishments and their just over 25,000 employees located in the Fort Smith metropolitan area of Sebastian, Crawford and Sequoyah counties, producing a wide variety of goods which are shipped all over the country and world. Accounting for 17% of the area's entire labor force nearly 120,000 manufacturing workers annually earn wages in excess of \$800 million. These earnings represent about 30 percent of all area enterprises' payrolls.

The Arkansas Economic Development Commission has identified 8 Targeted Business sectors to create strategic investments designed to transition the state's economy to one supported by higher-paying knowledge-based jobs. AEDC's Targeted Opportunities fall into one of the following categories: Aerospace & Defense, Distribution and Logistics, Food & Beverage, Metals, Paper and Timber Products, Software Development & Data Management Services, Corporate & Shared Services, and Transportation Equipment.

Of the top growth industries identified for Western Arkansas by the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services, only 3 align with the state's Targeted Business sectors: Food & Beverage, Management of Companies and Enterprises. Western Arkansas already has several successful Food & Beverage companies in Simmons Foods, OK Foods, Tyson, American Vegetable Soybean and Edamame, Inc., and Greenwave Foods. Likewise, Western Arkansas has many Regional Headquarters including C & C Market Research, Arkansas Oklahoma Gas Corporation, American Axle & Manufacturing, Cooper Clinic, and QualServ.

ArcBest Corporation, Carco Transportation Services, USA Truck, and Dancor Transit are all successful Distribution and Logistics companies with corporate headquarters in Western Arkansas.

Western Arkansas has experienced growth in several of the other statewide Targeted Business sectors and there is potential for continued growth and new opportunities. Western Arkansas has several Technical Support Centers including Experian, Sykes Call Center, Answer Fort Smith, and Health Management Associates. In regard to Firearms and Ammunition, Western Arkansas boasts Umarex and Walther Arms. Western Arkansas also includes companies producing Paper and Timber Products like Graphic Packaging International, General Pallets, Glatfelter, Rockline Industries and Travis Lumber Company.

Fort Smith is the home to the Arkansas Colleges of Health Education (ACHE) and its first college, the Arkansas College of Osteopathic Medicine (ARCOM) thanks to a more than \$58 million investment from the Fort Smith Regional Healthcare Foundation (FSRHF) and a grant of 200 acres from the Fort Chaffee Redevelopment Authority (FCRA). The medical school is estimated to have a \$100 million annual economic impact on the region. ARCOM is located on 350 acres in a 102,000 square foot, state-of-the-art facility with a 164-unit, residential complex

for students. Included in ARCOM is an active 3500 square foot Biomedical Research Lab with an equal amount of space for future research lab expansion.

The next phase for ACHE includes a 66,000 square foot College of Health Sciences building which will house future programs: Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Physician Assistant degree programs. The Village at Heritage will open in 2019. The cornerstone of Heritage is two 43,000 square foot buildings which will feature additional student housing on the second and third levels with 27,000 square feet of commercial space on the first floor. The Porches at Heritage feature 17 cottage style homes with one, two, and three-bedroom layouts. A pavilion, park, and walking trails will make Heritage a destination for the entire community.

ACHE will enroll almost 1000 students when planned degree programs are fully operational and will employ more than 150 faculty and staff with an average salary exceeding \$ 140,000. The Arkansas Colleges of Health Education mission is designed to address a great need with the Arkansas College of Osteopathic Medicine and other graduate health programs. Arkansas ranks 48th in physician accessibility in the United States with comparable shortages in other health fields. The western side of the state, including the Fort Smith region, has been identified as one of the most underserved areas in Arkansas.

The Western Arkansas Planning and Development District area has many opportunities for growth and trends that need to be taken advantage of. The goal is to turn the strengths and weaknesses of the region into opportunities. It is also important to note that this area needs to retain and strengthen the ratio of industrial employment to other economic sectors such as services, transportation, and agriculture and to further develop the tourism sector into a more dependable, year-round and stable economic sector. This region currently has the following opportunities:

1. I-49 construction and completion
2. Port Facilities in Crawford and Sebastian Counties
3. US Marshal's Museum to be constructed
4. Rail and River Infrastructure
5. Universities in Fort Smith, Ozark and Mena
6. Riverfront Development in Fort Smith, Van Buren, and Ozark
7. Osteopathic College phases to be constructed and completed in Fort Smith by 2021
8. Commercial Airport in Fort Smith, Airport and training center at Airport in Mena
9. Ability to create a regional brand to leverage one community's assets with a neighboring community to maximize competitiveness
10. Available building space in downtowns
11. Partnerships with state agencies, governmental officials, elected officials
12. Potential to further diversify economy
13. Brownfields redevelopment
14. Some communities are working to establish parks and recreation plans
15. Some communities are in the strategic planning processes and will establish economic development plans
16. Mitigation Planning and COOP Planning is occurring in our Region to ensure resiliency

## 17. Growing healthcare services to meet the needs of the population

Strategic projects, programs and activities identified in the Strategy are designed to expand these opportunities.

# Summary Background

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Within the 6 WAPDD counties, the percentage of the population that is under 18 years of age is equal to or higher than the National percentage (2010 U.S. Census data). The same is true for the percentage of the population that is over 65 years of age (2010 U.S. Census data). Across the 6 WAPDD counties, the average percentage of the population that is over 65 years of age is 16%, compared with 13% across Arkansas and 14% nationally. Polk County has a population that is 19% over the age of 65. Having such a large percentage of the population that has reached retirement age greatly impacts workforce availability.

The total WAPDD area is 20% minority, not much different from the state of Arkansas that is 23% minority. However, the percentage of minorities varies greatly across the 6 WAPDD counties with Franklin County with just 5% minority population and Sebastian County with 23.4% minority population. In addition, the state of Arkansas's largest minority is the African American population at 20%. In Western Arkansas, at 6% of the population, more minorities identified themselves as Other than any other minority race listed in the 2010 Census. In Western Arkansas, 11% of the population identifies themselves as Hispanic or Latino, while only 6% of the total population of the state of Arkansas does.

The 2013-2017 American Community Survey results show the United States poverty rate as 14.6%. Local data included in the 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates show poverty rates between 16.6% and 26.6% for WAPDD’s 6 counties.

The U.S. Median Household Income is \$57,652; but the Median Household Income for WAPDD’s 6 counties is between \$33,870 and \$43,504.

The national unemployment rate for June 2019 was 4.0%. The unemployment rate across WAPDD’s 6 counties ranged from 3.6% - 4.2%. The Fort Smith Metropolitan Statistical Area had an unemployment rate 3.7%.

According to the 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, the percentage of households that received food stamps/SNAP benefits is higher across the WAPDD area compared with the national percentage. Locally, between 28% - 37.3% of households receive food stamps/SNAP benefits while the national rate is just 27.2%.

| <b>Western Arkansas Planning and Development District Demographics and Socioeconomic Data</b> |                 |                  |                 |              |              |             |         |           |             |
|---|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|---------|-----------|-------------|
|   | Crawford County | Sebastian County | Franklin County | Logan County | Scott County | Polk County | WAPDD   | Arkansas  | National    |
| Population <sup>1</sup>   | 61,948          | 125,744          | 18,125          | 22,353       | 11,233       | 20,662      | 206,065 | 2,915,918 | 308,745,538 |
| Unemployment <sup>2</sup>   | 3.6%            | 3.6%             | 3.6%            | 4.0%         | 3.7%         | 4.2%        | 3.7%    | 3.7%      | 4.0%        |
| Civilian Labor <sup>2</sup> Force   | 26,861          | 57,075           | 7,406           | 8,749        | 4,380        | 8,003       | 112,474 |           |             |
| Poverty Rate <sup>3</sup>   | 16.6%           | 22.5%            | 21.9%           | 20.2%        | 20.5%        | 26.6%       |         | 18.1%     | 14.6%       |
| Percent Minority <sup>1</sup>   | 11%             | 23.4%            | 5%              | 6.8%         | 12%          | 7.3%        | 20%     | 23%       | 26.7%       |
| Percent Hispanic or Latino <sup>1</sup>   | 6%              | 12%              | 2%              | 2%           | 7%           | 6%          | 11%     | 6%        | 16.3%       |
| Median Household Income <sup>3</sup>  | \$43,504        | \$40,932         | \$39,472        | \$37,982     | \$37,396     | \$33,870    |         | \$43,813  | \$57,652    |
| Population Under 18 <sup>1</sup>  | 26.3%           | 25.3%            | 24.4%           | 25%          | 26%          | 24%         | 32%     | 24.3%     | 24%         |
| Population Over 65 <sup>1</sup>   | 13%             | 13%              | 17%             | 17%          | 17%          | 19%         | 16%     | 14%       | 13%         |
| Food Stamps/SNAP Benefits (households) <sup>3</sup>   | 28%             | 37.3%            | N/A             | N/A          | N/A          | N/A         |         | 29.8%     | 27.2%       |

<sup>1</sup> Data is from 2010 U.S. Census and is available at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

<sup>2</sup> Data is from StatsAmerica and is available at [www.statsamerica.org](http://www.statsamerica.org)

<sup>3</sup> Data is from 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates and is available at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

Within the 6 WAPDD counties are both north-south and east-west transportation networks to support industrialization, manufacturing, and tourism growth. Interstate 40, a major east-west corridor that spans across the United States, cuts through Franklin and Crawford counties. U.S. Route 71 crosses through Polk, Scott, Sebastian, and Crawford counties on its way from

Louisiana to Canada. The future Interstate 49 is planned to roughly follow the U.S. Route 71 alignment. The northern part of the district boasts the Boston Mountains and the Ozark National Forest, while the southern part of the district is home to the Ouachita Mountains and the Ouachita National Forest. The Arkansas River Valley runs through the central part of the district between the two mountain ranges.

The rivers and streams of western Arkansas are significant to the development of the region in at least three ways: the extent to which they can support transportation of resources and products; the extent to which flooding jeopardizes development; and the extent to which their classifications dictate the costs of development, especially in terms of their ability to absorb effluent discharged by developed areas.

With respect to waterborne transportation, only the Arkansas River is navigable for commercial transport. The McClellan-Kerr Navigation System, as it is called, through a series of seventeen locks and dams opened in the late sixties the Arkansas River from the Mississippi River to Tulsa as a dependable, navigable waterway for commercial barges. The dams have also helped control flooding along the River. The “Jeta Taylor” Lock & Dam 12 is located near Ozark, Franklin County’s most populated city. Lock 13 forms the jurisdictional boundary between Crawford and Sebastian Counties. Increasing the channel depth of the entire length of the Arkansas River Navigation Waterway from the Mississippi River to the Port of Muskogee to 12 feet is a goal of the Western Arkansas Intermodal Authority (WAIA). The purpose of WAIA is to plan and provide for and to develop initiatives and projects important to this region’s economic development future and particularly improvements that support the movement of the region’s goods and freight. WAIA’s role is to be a voice for the region and a catalyst and supporter for transportation improvements benefitting the Sebastian-Crawford County region. Its primary focus is developing transportation improvements that support economic development and, particularly, the movement of goods and freight into and out of the region by road, rail, water and air. WAIA’s project priorities also include developing plans and funding for new and expanded river port infrastructures. Additionally, several cities along the Arkansas River are exploring options for future riverfront development.

The Arkansas River is the boundary of northern Logan County and the northeastern portion of which forms the Lake Dardanelle pool. Scott County’s northern boundary is located approximately 20 miles south of the Arkansas River. Major rivers within Scott County include the Poteau and Fourche Rivers. The Mulberry River in Crawford and Franklin Counties is also significant to the region in regards to agriculture and tourism.

The climate of the area is influenced predominantly by the Gulf of Mexico, particularly in the spring and summer, with the autumn and winter season influenced by continental air masses from the north. Summer months are quite warm and winters, on the whole, are mild with cold temperatures generally prevailing for only short periods. For the area, typical annual rainfall is 40 to 50 inches, with the wettest month typically being May and the driest being August. The

range of mean temperatures for January, the coolest month, is 36 to 46 degrees Fahrenheit and for July, the warmest month, is 78 to 84 degrees. Slightly cooler temperatures prevail in the mountainous reaches. The average duration of the growing season is 200 to 240 days.

In recent years numerous natural disasters have resulted in significant economic disruptions. In 2008, Arkansas experienced 5 presidentially declared disasters, including FEMA Disaster #1751 for severe storms, tornadoes, and flooding in Sebastian, Crawford, Franklin, Logan, and Scott Counties. Other declared disasters have included 2009 FEMA Disaster #1819 for severe winter storms in Franklin and Crawford Counties, and 2009 FEMA Disasters #1834 and #1845 for severe storms, tornadoes, and flooding in Polk County. 2011 FEMA Disasters include #1975 for severe storms, tornadoes, and flooding in Crawford, Franklin, and Polk Counties, and #4000 for severe storms, tornadoes, and flooding in Franklin and Crawford Counties. 2013 FEMA Disasters include #4124 for severe storms, tornadoes, and flooding in Scott and Polk Counties and #4160 for severe winter storms in Sebastian, Crawford, Franklin, Logan, Scott, and Polk Counties. 2015 FEMA Disasters include #4226 for severe storms, tornadoes, straight line winds and flooding in Crawford and Sebastian Counties and #4254 for severe storms, tornadoes, straight line winds and flooding in Crawford and Sebastian Counties.

Western Arkansas has a rich history in coal mining and timber production and more recently manufacturing. Franklin County is the site of one of the first oil strikes in Arkansas. Franklin County also has many wineries, the Cherokee Prairie, and a vast array of Ozark Highland Trails. Logan County is home to some of the oldest settlements in western Arkansas as well as the Mount Magazine State Park which is located on the highest elevation in Arkansas at 2,760 feet. The Crawford County Courthouse which is listed on the National Historic Register is thought to be the oldest active county courthouse west of the Mississippi River. Crawford County also has the historic King Opera House and many sites of historic preservation in downtown Van Buren. Polk County contains 225,000 acres of the Ouachita National Forest and since the Ouachita Mountains run east and west, their south facing and north facing slopes have very different flora and fauna. Scott County also has the Ouachita National Forest as a major natural attraction as well as Lake Hinkle which is a 960 acre lake. Sebastian County is home to two National Guard Bases: Ebbing Air National Guard Base which houses the 188th Fighter Wing and Fort Chaffee, a former U.S. Army base.

In 1995, the defense Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission recommended the permanent closure of Fort Chaffee. The federal government opted to lease 65,000 acres to the Arkansas Army National Guard to be used for training. The remaining 7,000+ acres were turned over to local communities for redevelopment. The Fort Chaffee Redevelopment Authority was formed in 1997. The Authority is dedicated to ensuring that this great opportunity reaches its full potential. They are stewards of this resource and will ensure that the public receives the full market potential for the property. To accomplish this, guidelines are required to enhance and perpetuate property values, to manage the timing of land sales to coincide with supply and demands in the market, and to schedule efficient expansion of the infrastructure. In addition to

economic stewardship, the natural resources of the area must be conserved and the history of the area must be honored in the new community. Authority members believe that sustaining property values is a critical element of their stewardship. They believe that each new building sets a standard or precedent for the buildings that will follow. They believe that there is value in design and that design can be incorporated into a site or building in an affordable way. They believe that design guidelines can establish a level of quality while still leaving room for creativity and expression. They believe that design guidelines can ensure that this will become a community where parents will be proud to show their children where they work.

Fort Smith had become one, if not “the manufacturing city of the Southwest” with an outsized intensity of manufacturing activity, producing over \$7 billion of goods in 2007, an increase of \$2 billion or about forty percent over that produced in 1997, according to the federal government’s nationwide censuses of business. This amounts to \$25,000 of goods produced per resident in the Fort Smith metro area, which is almost twice the nation-wide amount per capita and considerably more than any other metro area in the state and region.

Making it an exceptional manufacturing area are the 300 or so manufacturing establishments and their just over 25,000 employees located in the Fort Smith metropolitan area of Sebastian, Crawford and Sequoyah counties, producing a wide variety of goods which are shipped all over the country and world. Accounting for 17% of the area’s entire labor force nearly 120,000 manufacturing workers annually earn wages in excess of \$800 million. These earnings represent about 30 percent of all area enterprises’ payrolls.

The impact of these payroll dollars on the local economy as they are spent and re-spent locally for goods and services, commonly referred to as the ripple effect, is an estimated \$2.2 billion annually. To put the impact in perspective, for the Fort Smith area it is estimated that each manufacturing job supports the presence of at least one other job outside of manufacturing. Indeed, Fort Smith is a manufacturing city and manufacturing is the economic engine largely driving its economy. However, circumstances have become such that this exemplary status is also now its vulnerability. While the Fort Smith-Western Arkansas area continues to be extraordinary place for manufacturing businesses, the Fort Smith area is facing more challenges in today’s economic times and many large manufacturing businesses have recently left Fort Smith. Most recently, on June 29, 2012, Whirlpool closed its Fort Smith manufacturing plant resulting in 917 jobs lost. However, Whirlpool’s Fort Smith plant employed 4600 in 2004. As a direct result of Whirlpool closing, Fortis Plastics LLC and ILPEA both also closed their Fort Smith operations resulting in 134 more jobs lost. According to a University of Arkansas at Little Rock study, the loss of the Whirlpool jobs will result in the overall loss of 1550 jobs and a labor income reduction of \$56.9 million.

| <b>Major Business Closures/Layoffs, 2011-2019</b> |                 |  |                                   |
|---|-----------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Business</b>                                   | <b>Location</b> | <b>Announcement</b>                    | <b>Number of Affected Workers</b> |
| Penske Logistics                                  | Fort Smith      | 2011 Department closure                | 16                                |
| Fortis Plastics                                   | Fort Smith      | 2011 Business closure                  | 94                                |
| Rheem Mfg. Co.                                    | Fort Smith      | Layoff                                 | 250                               |
| Stark Mfg.  | Logan Co.       | Layoff                                 | 28                                |
| Whirlpool Corp.                                   | Fort Smith      | Plant Closure                          | 934                               |
| Allen Canning                                     | Van Buren       | Consolidation to Siloam Springs plant. | 150                               |
| Trane   | Fort Smith      | Plant Closure                          | 250                               |
| Goodyear  | Fort Smith      | Outsource                              | 38                                |
| Golden Living                                     | Fort Smith      | Business Closure                       | 800                               |
| ArcBest   | Fort Smith      | Consolidation                          | 40                                |
| Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market                      | Mansfield       | Store Closed                           | 20                                |
| Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market                      | Charleston      | Store Closed                           | 22                                |
| Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market                      | Mulberry        | Store Closed                           | 20                                |
| Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market                      | Cedarville      | Store Closed                           | 20                                |
| Wal-Mart  | Waldron         | Store Closed                           | 98                                |
| Tyson   | Van Buren       | Layoff                                 | 125                               |
| Gerber  | Fort Smith      | 2019 Layoff                            | 49                                |
| Acme Brick  | Fort Smith      | Plant Closure                          | 42                                |

Source: Arkansas Department of Workforce Services

The 188<sup>th</sup> Air National Guard has adjusted their mission. Remotely piloting an MQ-9 Reaper, a major weapon deployed against the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq, is one of three primary tasks. Most of the time, the pilot's job is to provide real-time images for analysts to study, but occasionally they strike. They are doing 24/7 combat missions every day and the new mission is operations, unique and hiring.

News of the transition shocked Fort Smith, the state's second largest city, and some in the community feared the base, in operation since 1953, would be diminished or closed. But with the new mission, which also includes intelligence analysis and military-target development, that hasn't happened.

Employment has remained steady -- four recent new hires boosted employment at the base to 1,003, though the 316 full-time slots are two fewer than the former configuration. At one point they were trying to fill 148 openings, which include three dozen intelligence analysts and two dozen Reaper pilots.

The mission change stripped Ebbing Air National Guard Base of its planes, the A-10 Thunderbolt IIs nicknamed the "Warthogs." Gone is the sand berm that protected Fort Smith from bursts of debris stirred up by the fighters' powerful turbine engines. Fort Smith is one of 12 Air National Guard bases that remotely pilot aircraft, and it is the only one that also houses a center to analyze intelligence in real time. By integrating operations and having the aircraft flying the mission that our intel analysts are analyzing, they can all actually be in the same room.

Pilots operate one MQ-9 Reaper from Ebbing at a time, for now. The Air National Guard 188<sup>th</sup> Wing anticipates adding capacity for up to two more all-day, all-night Reaper operations when a new \$15.9 million operations center is built and the construction finished in 2018.

The pilot sits beside a sensor operator, the person responsible for operating the camera and firing missiles, in what is called a ground control station; right now, that station is a collection of six portable trailers pushed together. Nine monitors show a medley of information, including positioning, a high-definition picture of what the sensor is looking at and several chat boxes, which are the primary form of communication from inside the control station to supervisors, intelligence analysts and others. Some support staff and the flight supervisor are in a separate room but nearby. One of the starkest changes for the base is the continual deployment. Rather than leave the country for months at a time on a deployment, the mission is always active. This means the airmen go home after work, making it difficult to separate being in a combat environment from their domestic lives.

Between 1990 and 2000, the Fort Smith MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area) – which essentially represents the Fort Smith economic region and the area for which the city of Fort Smith is the trade center – added approximately 24,700 jobs. During the following decade, however, the region experienced a significant shift in its industrial employment. The negative side of this shift was primarily the result of the manufacturing sector's continued and already well-established worldwide trend to shed jobs and the exacerbation of that trend by the national economic recession that began in the early 2000s. Between 2000 and 2012, the metropolitan area lost just over a third of its manufacturing workforce, amounting to 12,100 lost jobs that represented 10% of the region's entire workforce. On the positive side, these losses were numerically offset by employment increases in other sectors, largely health services, business & administrative services and local government. With further investigation, including calls to area school districts, a sizable portion of the growth in local government jobs was found to be staff additions by the area's growing public schools, which in Arkansas are funded by relatively dependable funding sources and somewhat immune to the vagaries of general economic conditions. Overall, over the 2013 to 2018 period, the result for the Fort Smith region was a job increase of 1.5% region wide.

Regionally continued a decline in labor force participation rate of 2.5%. Another concern is higher potential retiring population of nearly 6% over the national average and this could have a long term impact.

Over one-half of the 14,400 jobs gained are attributable to two sectors: *Health & Education* (most of which is health services) (29%) and *Local Government* (much of which are area public school districts) (25%). The trucking, construction, leisure and hospitality, and wholesale trade industries also contributed positively to the area's employment growth. Of the 13,800 jobs lost, almost nine out of ten (88%) were in manufacturing.

The Fort Smith MSA, which is comprised of the Arkansas counties of Sebastian, Crawford and Franklin and the Oklahoma counties of LeFlore and Sequoyah, fairly well describes the Fort Smith economic region and the Fort Smith trade area. Between 2000 and 2011, the Fort Smith metro area had a decline in employed workforce of 1,865 persons, a 1.5% decrease. Crawford County, with an increase of 1,550, was the only one of the five metro counties to show an addition of employed residents. Sebastian County showed a slight decline of 50. The other three more rural counties experienced declines of six to nine percent in their numbers of residents employed.

The 2011 average mean wage for the Fort Smith metro area was 76% of the average mean wage for the United States. This is the same percentage as the metro area's 2011 per-capita income percentage of the U.S., which explains the metro area's per-person income standing relative to that of the U.S., considering that wages are the biggest component of the area's personal income.

**Major New Business Locations/ Expansions, 2012-2019**

| <b>Business</b>                             | <b>Location</b> | <b>Announcement</b>   | <b>Investment &amp; Number of New Jobs</b>          |
|---|-----------------|---|---|
| 14 Various Businesses                       | Fort Smith      | 2012  | \$52.3 mil. in capital investments                  |
| 30 Various Businesses                       | Fort Smith      | 2012  | \$57 mil. in capital investments and 1,100 new jobs |
| Sykes Call Center                           | Fort Smith      | 2013 expansion 15,000 sf  | 200 jobs, \$1 mil.                                  |
| Alma Healthcare and Rehabilitation          | Alma            | 2013 expansion 10,800 sf  | 20 jobs, \$2.4 mil.                                 |
| Health Management Associates                | Fort Smith      | 2013 regional service center 90,000 sf  | 500 jobs,   |
| Gerber Foods                                | Fort Smith      | 2013 expansion  | 90 jobs, \$150 mil.                                 |
| Answer Fort Smith                           | Fort Smith      | 2013 renovation 35,000 sf   | 90 jobs, \$1.7 mil.                                 |
| American Vegetable Soybean and Edamame Inc. | Mulberry        | 2013 new plant announced  | 100 jobs, \$5.2 mil.                                |
| Mercy Hospital                              | Fort Smith      | 2013 Orthopedic Hospital construction 69,000 sf   | 100 jobs, \$42 mil.                                 |
| SGL Carbon                                  | Ozark           | 2013 Upgrade  | \$26 mil.   |
| Tankersley Food Service                     | Van Buren       | 2013 expansion 28,000 sf  | 40 jobs, \$4 mil.                                   |
| Umarex USA                                  | Fort Smith      | 2013 expansion with Walther   | 70-120 jobs, \$7 mil.                               |
| Walther Arms                                | Fort Smith      | 2013 expansion with Umarex  | see above   |
| Phoenix Metals                              | Fort Smith      | 2013 new plant announced by existing business 65,000 sf                                       | \$12 mil., 40 jobs                                  |
| ArcBest                                     | Fort Smith      | 2016 expansion 200,000 sf   | 975 jobs  |
| Simmons                                     | Fort Smith      | 2016 expansion  | 100 jobs  |
| Mars Petcare                                | Fort Smith      | 2016 expansion  | 130 jobs, \$72 mil.                                 |
| Shared Services Center                      | Fort Smith      | 2016 expansion 34,500 sf  | 250 jobs, \$18.8 mil                                |
| Elite Comfort Solutions                     | Fort Smith      | 2016 expansion  | 100 jobs, \$3 mil.                                  |
| Arkansas Colleges of Health Education       | Fort Smith      | Health Sciences Building 60,000sf<br>The Residents Student Housing Phase 2<br>Research Center | \$15 mil.<br>\$6 mil.<br>\$1 mil.                   |
| Intelcase Co.                               | Fort Smith      | 2017 new warehouse  |   |
| Silgan Holdings Inc.                        | Fort Smith      | 2017 new plant 100,000 sf   | \$38 mil., 150 jobs                                 |
| 188 <sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing              | Fort Smith      | 2018 expansion 40,000 sf building and flight line   | \$14 mil.   |
| Bekaert                                     | Van Buren       | 2018 expansion 100,000 sf   | 40 jobs, \$16 mil.                                  |

|                      |            |                          |                     |
|----------------------|------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Applied Process Inc. | Fort Smith | 2018 new plant 51,000 sf | 30 jobs             |
| Mars Petcare         | Fort Smith | 2018 expansion           | \$2.4 mil           |
| Riverbend Molding    | Ozark      | 2019 new business        | 12 jobs, \$1 mil.   |
| Sykes Enterprises    | Fort Smith | 2019 expansion           | 200 jobs            |
| Mercy Hospital       | Ozark      | 2019 expansion           | \$5.13 mil.         |
| First Star Bank      | Fort Smith | 2019 new bank            | \$3.5 mil., 20 jobs |

Source: Information provided by Chaffee Crossing, Fort Smith Regional Chamber of Commerce, The City Wire, hudexchange.info, Arkansas Economic Development Commission

Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers was the largest occupation in the Western Arkansas Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Area (WIOA), which mirrors WAPDD’s coverage area, in 2013 with an estimated employment of 4,184, earning \$35,155 in annual average wages. Western Arkansas is the home of several trucking companies and is located along Interstate 40 and the proposed Interstate 49. Registered Nurses, with an estimated employment of 1,947 had the highest annual wage of the 10 largest occupations, earning \$53,040 annually. Family and General Practitioners was the occupation paying the most in the Area, earning \$234,684 annually. Chief Executives were second on the list, earning \$151,453. Natural Science Managers finished the list, earning \$103,837.

## Largest Occupations in Western Workforce Development Area

| Occupation   | 2014 Jobs | 2024 Jobs | Change in Jobs (2014-2024) | % Change | 2015 Median Hourly Earnings |
|--|-----------|-----------|----------------------------|----------|-----------------------------|
| Office and Administrative Support Occupations      | 16,344    | 16,873    | 529                        | 3%       | \$13.11                     |
| Production Occupations                             | 14,870    | 14,081    | -789                       | -5%      | \$13.61                     |
| Transportation and Material Moving Occupations     | 11,565    | 11,436    | -130                       | -1%      | \$14.01                     |
| Sales and Related Occupations                      | 11,177    | 11,980    | 803                        | 7%       | \$12.31                     |
| Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations   | 8,536     | 9,462     | 927                        | 11%      | \$8.84                      |
| Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations | 6,394     | 6,976     | 582                        | 9%       | \$28.84                     |
| Education, Training, and Library Occupations       | 5,482     | 5,575     | 92                         | 2%       | \$18.37                     |
| Construction and Extraction Occupations            | 5,472     | 5,169     | -304                       | -6%      | \$15.83                     |
| Management Occupations                             | 5,454     | 5,748     | 293                        | 5%       | \$28.18                     |
| Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations  | 5,097     | 5,312     | 215                        | 4%       | \$16.90                     |

Source: EMSI Q1 2017 Data Set

Jobs in Western Arkansas grew by an estimate of 1,738 over the last 5 years and is expected to experience a net growth of 2,243 jobs over the next 5 years. From 2013 to 2018, jobs increased by 1.5% in 6 Arkansas Counties from 113,531 to 115,269. This change fell short of the national growth rate of 8.2% by 6.7%. As the number of jobs increased, the labor force participation rate decreased from 55.0% to 52.5% between 2013 and 2018. The potential retiring population of the region is higher than the national average by almost 6%. This along with a reducing labor force participation rate of over 2% is contributing to a continuing negative impact on available workers to industry need. Goods-Producing industries are projected to have a net gain of 1,195 jobs, while the Services-Providing industries are estimated to add 9,219. The Education and Health Services super sector is expected to add the highest number of jobs with 3,575 anticipated, while Leisure and Hospitality is estimated to see the most growth gaining 1,488 jobs during the projection period. Wood Product Manufacturing is projected to be the fastest growing industry with a 37.69% increase. Manufacturing is still anticipated to continue to be a declining industry and now larger retailers are expected to decline as well. The Western Arkansas Workforce Development Area is projected to see a 2% growth job growth in by 2023 against a population growth of only 1%. The food preparation and serving related occupations major

group is predicted to add the most jobs with 1,164 anticipated. Nurses and care technician occupations have 729 openings and as an occupation group anticipates a 7% growth. Though heavy trucking has 457 openings it is declining further illustrating the aging out of the experienced workforce.

### Highest Paying Occupations in Western Workforce Development Area

| Occupation   | 2014 Jobs | 2024 Jobs | Change in Jobs (2014-2024) | % Change | 2015 Earnings Per Worker |
|--|-----------|-----------|----------------------------|----------|--------------------------|
| Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations | 6,394     | 6,976     | 582                        | 9%       | \$28.84                  |
| Management Occupations                             | 5,454     | 5,748     | 294                        | 5%       | \$28.18                  |
| Architecture and Engineering Occupations           | 1,076     | 1,014     | -62                        | -6%      | \$28.13                  |
| Legal Occupations                                  | 459       | 492       | 33                         | 7%       | \$27.14                  |
| Computer and Mathematical Occupations              | 1,177     | 1,356     | 179                        | 15%      | \$26.38                  |
| Business and Financial Operations Occupations      | 3,178     | 3,552     | 374                        | 12%      | \$24.40                  |
| Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations     | 409       | 448       | 39                         | 10%      | \$23.94                  |
| Education, Training, and Library Occupations       | 5,482     | 5,575     | 93                         | 2%       | \$18.37                  |
| Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations  | 5,097     | 5,312     | 215                        | 4%       | \$16.90                  |
| Military occupations                               | 1,177     | 1,011     | -166                       | -14%     | \$16.83                  |

Source: EMSI Q1 2017 Data Set

## Fastest Growing Occupations in Western Workforce Development Area

| Occupation  | 2014 Jobs | 2024 Jobs | Change in Jobs (2014-2024) | % Change | 2015 Median Hourly Earnings |
|---|-----------|-----------|----------------------------|----------|-----------------------------|
| Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations          | 8,536     | 9,462     | 927                        | 11%      | \$8.84                      |
| Sales and Related Occupations                             | 11,177    | 11,980    | 803                        | 7%       | \$12.31                     |
| Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations        | 6,394     | 6,976     | 582                        | 9%       | \$28.84                     |
| Office and Administrative Support Occupations             | 16,344    | 16,873    | 529                        | 3%       | \$13.11                     |
| Healthcare Support Occupations                            | 3,254     | 3,704     | 450                        | 14%      | \$10.91                     |
| Personal Care and Service Occupations                     | 3,643     | 4,051     | 408                        | 11%      | \$9.49                      |
| Business and Financial Operations Occupations             | 3,178     | 3,552     | 374                        | 12%      | \$24.40                     |
| Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations | 3,564     | 3,878     | 314                        | 9%       | \$9.96                      |
| Management Occupations                                    | 5,454     | 5,748     | 293                        | 5%       | \$28.18                     |
| Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations         | 5,097     | 5,312     | 215                        | 4%       | \$16.90                     |

Source: EMSI Q1 2017 Data Set

The Arkansas Economic Development Commission has identified 14 Targeted Business sectors to create strategic investments designed to transition the state's economy to one supported by higher-paying knowledge-based jobs. AEDC's Targeted Opportunities fall into one of the following categories: Advanced Food Manufacturing and Packaging, Aerospace/Aviation, Biosciences, Data Centers, Distribution and Logistics Services, Firearms and Ammunition, Paper and Timber Products, Regional Headquarters, Smart Grid Technologies (Power Electronics), Software Development & Data Management Services, Sustainable Building Products and Fixtures, Technical Support Centers, Transportation Equipment Manufacturing, Walmart Suppliers.

Of the top growth industries identified for Western Arkansas by the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services, only 4 align with the state's Targeted Business sectors: Administrative and Support Services, Food Manufacturing, Management of Companies and Enterprises, Aerospace/Aviation. Western Arkansas already has several successful Advanced Food Manufacturing and Packaging companies in Gerber Foods, American Vegetable Soybean and Edamame, Inc., and Greenwave Foods. Likewise, Western Arkansas has many Regional Headquarters including C & C Market Research, Arkansas Oklahoma Gas Corporation, Cloyes Gear, Cooper Clinic, and QualServ.

ArcBest Corporation, Carco Transportation Services, USA Truck, and Dancor Transit are all successful Distribution and Logistics companies with corporate headquarters in Western Arkansas.

Western Arkansas has experienced growth in several of the other statewide Targeted Business sectors and there is potential for continued growth and new opportunities. Western Arkansas has several Technical Support Centers including Experian, Sykes Call Center, Answer Fort Smith, and Health Management Associates. In regards to Firearms and Ammunition, Western Arkansas boasts Umarex and Walther Arms. Western Arkansas also includes companies producing Paper and Timber Products like Graphic Packaging International, General Pallets, and Travis Lumber Company.

Fort Smith will soon be home to Arkansas's first college of osteopathic medicine and one of just 31 in the U.S., thanks to a more than \$58 million investment from the Fort Smith Regional Healthcare Foundation (FSRHF) and a grant of 200 acres from the Fort Chaffee Redevelopment Authority (FCRA). The medical school is estimated to have a \$100 million annual economic impact on the region. The first phase of the medical school campus includes a 60,000-square foot building, several smaller buildings, a campus green, main entry, and a proposed pond. A second phase includes a "village green" area with more buildings. Future development around the campus includes space for a medical office park and commercial and retail development.

When fully operational, the school would serve about 600 students, and employ around 65 (full-time equivalent jobs) with an average salary of \$103,000. The Arkansas Colleges of Health Education aims to address a great need with the Arkansas College of Osteopathic Medicine. Arkansas ranks 48th in physician accessibility in the United States. The western side of the state, including the Fort Smith region, has been identified as the most underserved area in Arkansas.

## Largest Industries in Western Workforce Development Area

| Industry   | 2014 Jobs | 2024 Jobs | Change in Jobs (2014-2024) | % Change | 2016 Earnings Per Worker |
|--|-----------|-----------|----------------------------|----------|--------------------------|
| Manufacturing  | 21,309    | 20,747    | -563                       | -3%      | \$52,791                 |
| Health Care and Social Assistance  | 15,261    | 16,829    | 1,568                      | 10%      | \$51,296                 |
| Government   | 14,899    | 14,782    | -117                       | -1%      | \$49,784                 |
| Retail Trade   | 12,463    | 13,523    | 1,060                      | 9%       | \$29,624                 |
| Accommodation and Food Services  | 8,398     | 9,243     | 846                        | 10%      | \$17,047                 |
| Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services | 6,546     | 6,841     | 295                        | 5%       | \$28,671                 |
| Transportation and Warehousing   | 6,191     | 6,357     | 166                        | 3%       | \$53,044                 |
| Construction   | 5,372     | 5,413     | 40                         | 1%       | \$40,719                 |
| Other Services (except Public Administration)                            | 5,178     | 5,517     | 339                        | 7%       | \$23,284                 |
| Wholesale Trade  | 3,971     | 4,336     | 365                        | 9%       | \$55,929                 |
| Finance and Insurance  | 2,617     | 2,442     | -175                       | -7%      | \$54,886                 |
| Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services                         | 2,472     | 2,733     | 261                        | 11%      | \$48,162                 |
| Management of Companies and Enterprises                                  | 2,114     | 2,638     | 524                        | 25%      | \$77,552                 |
| Real Estate and Rental and Leasing                                       | 1,543     | 1,549     | 6                          | 0%       | \$39,409                 |
| Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction                            | 1,434     | 771       | -662                       | -46%     | \$88,131                 |
| Crop and Animal Production   | 1,330     | 1,262     | -68                        | -5%      | \$35,485                 |
| Information  | 1,207     | 1,118     | -89                        | -7%      | \$71,150                 |
| Educational Services   | 767       | 980       | 213                        | 28%      | \$27,583                 |
| Utilities  | 699       | 686       | -13                        | -2%      | \$83,398                 |
| Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation                                      | 595       | 754       | 159                        | 27%      | \$18,527                 |

Source: EMSI Q1 2017 Data Set

## Highest Paying Industries in Western Workforce Development Area

| Industry   | 2014 Jobs | 2024 Jobs | Change in<br>Jobs (2014-<br>2024) | % Change | 2016 Earnings Per<br>Worker |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------|
| Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction                            | 1,434     | 771       | -663                              | -46%     | \$88,131                    |
| Utilities  | 699       | 686       | -13                               | -2%      | \$83,398                    |
| Management of Companies and Enterprises                                  | 2,114     | 2,638     | 524                               | 25%      | \$77,552                    |
| Information  | 1,207     | 1,118     | -89                               | -7%      | \$71,150                    |
| Wholesale Trade  | 3,971     | 4,336     | 365                               | 9%       | \$55,929                    |
| Finance and Insurance  | 2,617     | 2,442     | -175                              | -7%      | \$54,886                    |
| Transportation and Warehousing   | 6,191     | 6,357     | 166                               | 3%       | \$53,044                    |
| Manufacturing  | 21,309    | 20,747    | -562                              | -3%      | \$52,791                    |
| Health Care and Social Assistance  | 15,261    | 16,829    | 1,568                             | 10%      | \$51,296                    |
| Government   | 14,899    | 14,782    | -117                              | -1%      | \$49,784                    |
| Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services                         | 2,472     | 2,733     | 261                               | 11%      | \$48,162                    |
| Construction   | 5,372     | 5,413     | 41                                | 1%       | \$40,719                    |
| Real Estate and Rental and Leasing                                       | 1,543     | 1,549     | 6                                 | 0%       | \$39,409                    |
| Crop and Animal Production   | 1,330     | 1,262     | -68                               | -5%      | \$35,485                    |
| Retail Trade   | 12,463    | 13,523    | 1,060                             | 9%       | \$29,624                    |
| Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services | 6,546     | 6,841     | 295                               | 5%       | \$28,671                    |
| Educational Services   | 767       | 980       | 213                               | 28%      | \$27,583                    |
| Other Services (except Public Administration)                            | 5,178     | 5,517     | 339                               | 7%       | \$23,284                    |
| Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation                                      | 595       | 754       | 159                               | 27%      | \$18,527                    |
| Accommodation and Food Services  | 8,398     | 9,243     | 845                               | 10%      | \$17,047                    |

Source: EMSI Q1 2017 Data Set

## Fastest Growing Industries in Western Workforce Development Area

| Industry   | 2014 Jobs | 2024 Jobs | Change in Jobs (2014-2024) | % Change | 2016 Earnings Per Worker |
|--|-----------|-----------|----------------------------|----------|--------------------------|
| Health Care and Social Assistance  | 15,261    | 16,829    | 1,568                      | 10%      | \$51,296                 |
| Retail Trade   | 12,463    | 13,523    | 1,060                      | 9%       | \$29,624                 |
| Accommodation and Food Services  | 8,398     | 9,243     | 846                        | 10%      | \$17,047                 |
| Management of Companies and Enterprises                                  | 2,114     | 2,638     | 524                        | 25%      | \$77,552                 |
| Wholesale Trade  | 3,971     | 4,336     | 365                        | 9%       | \$55,929                 |
| Other Services (except Public Administration)                            | 5,178     | 5,517     | 339                        | 7%       | \$23,284                 |
| Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services | 6,546     | 6,841     | 295                        | 5%       | \$28,671                 |
| Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services                         | 2,472     | 2,733     | 261                        | 11%      | \$48,162                 |
| Educational Services   | 767       | 980       | 213                        | 28%      | \$27,583                 |
| Transportation and Warehousing   | 6,191     | 6,357     | 166                        | 3%       | \$53,044                 |
| Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation                                      | 595       | 754       | 159                        | 27%      | \$18,527                 |
| Construction   | 5,372     | 5,413     | 40                         | 1%       | \$40,719                 |
| Real Estate and Rental and Leasing                                       | 1,543     | 1,549     | 6                          | 0%       | \$39,409                 |
| Unclassified Industry  | 0         | 0         | 0                          | 0%       | \$0                      |
| Utilities  | 699       | 686       | -13                        | -2%      | \$83,398                 |
| Crop and Animal Production   | 1,330     | 1,262     | -68                        | -5%      | \$35,485                 |
| Information  | 1,207     | 1,118     | -89                        | -7%      | \$71,150                 |
| Government   | 14,899    | 14,782    | -117                       | -1%      | \$49,784                 |
| Finance and Insurance  | 2,617     | 2,442     | -175                       | -7%      | \$54,886                 |
| Manufacturing  | 21,309    | 20,747    | -563                       | -3%      | \$52,791                 |

Source: EMSI Q1 2017 Data Set

# SWOT Analysis

## **Strengths:**

*What does our region do well?*

*What unique resources do we have?*

*What do others see as our strengths?*

1. Natural beauty, lakes, mountains
2. Close proximity to multiple major water resources
3. Strong University presence and partnerships with WIOA to establish workforce training programs
4. Universities in Fort Smith, Ozark, and Mena within Western Arkansas and also in Poteau, Fayetteville, Russellville, Clarksville outside the area
5. Arkansas College of Osteopathic Medicine in Fort Smith
6. Safe and friendly place to raise a family/retire
7. Strong tourism industry with long history in Fort Smith and Van Buren
8. Fort Smith Airport – accessibility
9. Transportation Hub- I-40, I-540, I-49, I-549
10. Location of River with city controlled river front property in Fort Smith, Van Buren, and Ozark
11. Our Region has 2 Transportation Organizations: Western Arkansas Intermodal Authority (WAIA) and the Frontier Metropolitan Organization (MPO)
12. Fort Smith Regional Chamber of Commerce
13. Arkansas Regional Coalition of the Ouachitas
14. Fort Chaffee Crossing Redevelopment
15. Available Workforce
16. Commercial Airport in Fort Smith, Airport and training center at Airport in Mena
17. Easy access to Northwest Arkansas and Eastern Oklahoma
18. Abundance of Land for residential and commercial development
19. Regional Cooperation among Mayors, County Judges, and Chambers
20. Our region has low crime rates
21. Tyson Foods Logan County Career Center in Paris, AR
22. Quality Public Schools throughout the region
23. ATV trails and many outdoor recreational opportunities

## **Weaknesses:**

*What could our region improve?*

*Where do we have fewer resources than others?*

*What are others likely to see as our weaknesses?*

1. Some areas are over reliant on tourism
2. Lack of affordable housing
3. Labor force – lack of abundant supply of quality employees, highly skilled workers
4. Lack of professional opportunities for young adults, out-migration of young adults

5. Some local governments are not business-friendly, permitting can be difficult
6. Lack of broadband in rural areas and low quality broadband region wide
7. Lack of healthcare (medical personnel and medical infrastructure)
8. Lack of Doctor Recruitment in the area
9. Some rural areas still have a lack of water supply
10. Local Leadership and their understanding of economic development and their role/ownership
11. Lack of higher wage service sector jobs
12. Funding mechanisms are needed for commercial and business development.
13. Rural areas need solid waste and recycling programs
14. Dependence on manufacturing sector
15. Lack of Business Retention Expansion programs in our communities – we do not know what our existing businesses/industry need
16. Lack of diversity in economy
17. Dysfunctional downtown merchants (shops aren't open regularly for business)
18. Local people do not support LOCAL
19. Lack of current and cultural amenities to keep people locally engaged
20. Lack of affordable daycare services
21. Lack of transportation transit routes throughout the City of Fort Smith

### **Opportunities:**

*What good opportunities are open to the region?*

*What Trends could we take advantage of?*

*How can we turn strengths/weaknesses into opportunities?*

18. I-49 construction and completion
19. Port Facilities in Crawford and Sebastian Counties
20. US Marshal's Museum to be constructed
21. Rail and River Infrastructure
22. Universities in Fort Smith, Ozark and Mena
23. Riverfront Development in Fort Smith, Van Buren, and Ozark
24. Osteopathic College phases to be constructed and completed in Fort Smith by 2021
25. Commercial Airport in Fort Smith, Airport and training center at Airport in Mena
26. Ability to create a regional brand to leverage one community's assets with a neighboring community to maximize competitiveness
27. Available building space in downtowns
28. Partnerships with state agencies, governmental officials, elected officials
29. Potential to further diversify economy
30. Brownfields redevelopment
31. Some communities are working to establish parks and recreation plans
32. Some communities are in the strategic planning processes and will establish economic development plans
33. Mitigation Planning and COOP Planning is occurring in our Region to ensure resiliency
34. Growing healthcare services to meet the needs of the population

## **Threats:**

*What trends could harm our region?*

*What is our competition doing?*

*What threats do our weaknesses expose us to?*

1. Continued decline of manufacturing sector
2. Loss of talent – workforce shrinking in areas with continued migration of younger populous
3. Lack of competitive business environment – capital and incentives
4. Lack of access to health care
5. Small rural communities that have blighted properties and empty buildings downtown (quality of place issue)
6. Our area is facing more global competition and our industries are faced with the challenge of finding ways to reduce costs
7. Difficulty competing with Northwest Arkansas and Eastern Oklahoma
8. Losing our youth – they are not coming back after college to work and live in our communities
9. Loss of “things to do” – quality of place
10. Household Income in our region is below the US Median Income
11. Poverty and Distress Rate (food stamps, etc.) for our area is higher than national percentages
12. Lack of urgency to continue to improve K-12 schools in some areas.
13. Lack of new leadership
14. Attitudes – too many with the attitude of what are “they” going to bring to us not what can “we” do to improve!

Note:

We need to retain and strengthen the ratio of industrial employment to other economic sectors

such as services, transportation, agriculture, etc. Further development of the tourism sector into a more dependable, year round and stable economic sector

# Strategic Direction/Action Plan

## GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND STRATEGIC PROJECTS, PROGRAMS, AND ACTIVITIES

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy establishes the goals and objectives necessary to solve the economic problems and capitalize on the resources of the region. Strategic projects, programs and activities identified in the Strategy are designed to fulfill these goals and objectives. The goals and objectives are organized using the Arkansas Statewide CEDS Seven Primary Initiatives for Economic Development in Arkansas.

It is our vision to constantly ascertain economic conditions within our Region; to consistently help in establishing stability; to always strive for improvement; and to foster growth and future prosperity for all of Western Arkansas. We will be at the fore front of providing “Excellence” in community and economic development, workforce innovation, transportation and emergency planning, while serving our local governments, our businesses, and our citizens with a higher quality of life.

Our Region is a distinct area having a unique character, vibrant business sector, a focus on quality of life and the beauty of the natural environment, valued historic and cultural assets, diverse infrastructure that supports business activity and has vital local, state and national partnerships. It is a community that enjoys a high sense of place, provides ample opportunity and quality living to all its citizens, and attracts and retains its youth.

### **1. Foster vibrant communities as good places in which to live, work, invest, and to do business.**

GOAL – Create quality spaces and vibrant downtowns as magnets for economic activity.

Objective – Use things such as the Main Street Arkansas Program and the Arkansas Downtown Network to create engaging and attractive downtown spaces.

- a. Encourage other cities to join Main Street Arkansas with the goal of adding 1 new community to the programs by 2020. Currently Ozark, Paris and Mena participate in Main Street Arkansas.
- b. Assist communities with limited resources to join Arkansas Downtown Network with a goal of adding 3 to the program by 2020. Fort Smith is the only city participating in this program at this time.

PROJECT: Invite AHPP to participate in new elected officials training.

GOAL – Cultivate community development.

Objective – Review and revise local codes and policies to ensure that they do not actively encourage urban sprawl and greenfield development – ensure that infill development, reuse, redevelopment, and rehabilitation of properties are equally encouraged.

- a. Continue to pursue EPA Brownfields funding to expand project area for assessments and cleanup funds to assist with redevelopment.
- b. Continue to pursue funding through the USDA Community Facilities Program for healthcare, public safety, public services, and other essential community facilities.

PROJECT: Continuing to work on the FY2016 EPA Brownfields Assessment Application targeting Fort Smith, Ozark, Mulberry, and Booneville. (FUNDED)

PROJECT: Complete task as outlined in 2016 EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant

PROJECT: Submit FY2020 EPA Brownfields Assessment Application

GOAL – Augment education and amenities that make communities more attractive.

Objective – Develop trails, linear parks, river/lake front areas and parks, and seek out street scape projects.

- a. Continue to pursue Arkansas Outdoor Recreation Grant Program funding.
- b. Pursue Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department Recreational Trails Program funding.

PROJECT: Funded FY2019 ORGP 50/50 applications were Alma and Lavaca

PROJECT: Funded FY2019 ORGP FUN Park applications were Denning, Mountainburg and Grannis.

PROJECT: Submit FY2020 ORGP 50/50 applications for Atlas, Barling, Charleston, Mena and Ozark.

PROJECT: Submit FY2020 ORGP Fun Park applications for Bonanza, Hackett, Hartford, Huntington, Logan County, Magazine, Ratcliff, Rudy and Scott County.

GOAL – Promote healthier communities.

Objective – Support local public health programs

- a. Continue to pursue Blue & You Foundation Grants
- b. Continue to assist with Local Health Units and other health programs

PROJECT: Submit a 2019 Blue & You Foundation Grant application for Central City, Denning, Mulberry and Ozark.

PROJECT: Submit FY2019 Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program grant for Sebastian County.

**2. Ensure infrastructure that supports business activity, quality communities, and development.**

GOAL – Identify and support water/wastewater project sources and supplies, make wise use of what is available, and properly deal with waste water runoff.

Objective – Engage in long range planning to identify and help secure funding for construction of facilities to provide adequate water/wastewater supply for multiple jurisdictions.

- a. Continue to pursue Arkansas Economic Development Commission and USDA funding for water/wastewater projects by submitting at least 2 applications per year.
- b. Work with community leaders to identify potential future needs based on growth patterns.

PROJECT: Submit 2020 ACEDP application for the Mountainburg and Scott County Water Project.

GOAL – Address the multiple modes of transportation used to move goods and people within and through the State.

Objective – Support the completion of the Interstate Highway System in Arkansas, specifically Interstate 49.

- a. Support WAIA and the Frontier MPO in their efforts to complete Interstate 49 and increase the channel depth of the Arkansas River Navigation Waterway to 12 feet.
- b. Encourage Arkansas Department of Transportation continue seeking funding for I-49
- c. Provide letters of support for I-49 to Frontier MPO.

GOAL - Support all Modes of Transportation throughout the region.

Objective –Support the update of the State Wide Rail Plan.

- a. Attend meetings with Arkansas Department of Transportation staff, Legislators, and appropriate facility staff to discuss project.
- b. Compile a rail database and mapping for our region.

Objective - Assist Frontier MPO in updating Metropolitan Transportation Plan.

- a. Provide freight and waterways information and data to Frontier MPO.
- b. Assist in coordination of parks and trails planning.

Objective - Continue to support a Regional Intermodal Port.

- a. Promote awareness of Intermodal Port.
- b. Attend meetings with Corp of Engineers and other groups to include Arkansas World Trade Center, Arkansas Waterways, MKARNS River Port Operators and Legislators.

**3. Produce a workforce with the right education, hard and soft skills for jobs created and retained.**

GOAL – Assist in developing a workforce that can fill local and regional jobs.

Objective – Aid local governments to act as catalysts for increased business/employer-education interaction targeting specific employers and particular needs.

- a. Host meetings between industry and post-secondary leaders to determine industry needs and post-secondary capabilities with a goal of 3 meetings per year, one for each post-secondary facility in our district (UAFS, ATU-Ozark, Rich Mountain College).

PROJECT: Completed Logan County Career Center in Paris in 2018.

PROJECT: Submitted EDA grant for the Fort Smith Career Technology Center.

**4. Create a business friendly climate throughout the region.**

GOAL – Foster public-private-nonprofit partnerships where diverse efforts can be made to complement one another.

Objective – Facilitate partnerships with local governments and chambers of commerce.

- a. Continue to facilitate strategic planning in our communities with efforts in Van Buren and Paris.

- b. Seek opportunities to bolster regional impact by coordinating efforts in the ARCO counties.

PROJECT: Continuing to update and attend the Van Buren strategic planning meetings.

PROJECT: Identify new communities where strategic planning is needed and begin planning efforts.

Objective – Create or strengthen industrial and downtown development authorities.

- a. Continue to work with the Scott County Industrial Board on economic development efforts and reach out to other organizations with similar goals.
- b. Work with state agencies on industrial outreach in LMI communities.

PROJECT: Complete SWOT analysis of Scott County.

## **5. Focus efforts targeted on creating and retaining jobs with existing businesses.**

GOAL – Concentrate localized efforts into business retention and expansion

Objective – Develop business retention tools that can be employed by local governments; develop how-to guide on the available tools and how to use them.

- a. Partnering with Van Buren to do a BRE Program
- b. Work with Greenwood to incorporate use of BRE program received from CDI.

PROJECT: Host BRE training with more communities in district and in Arkansas.

GOAL – Determine locally appropriate development and guide efforts in those areas.

Objective – Focus efforts on further development of existing industry clusters and of those businesses that serve these clusters.

- a. Coordinate efforts of similar production types throughout the region.
- b. Identify support industries in these areas and determine assistance needed in getting them established.

PROJECT: Work on opportunities to diversify economic development throughout the district.

Objective – In rural areas, recognize that retail development may be the first step in viable growth.

- a. Track private investment and jobs created / retained.
- b. Build a knowledge of available retail space in these communities and insure they are being listed on a state level at a minimum.

PROJECT: Continue reporting project outcomes to GPRA on annual basis.

GOAL – Find the right balance of inducements and incentives to recruit industry and site development

Objective – Advise local governments on possibilities of contributing utility infrastructure as inducements to complement and improve new business recruitment efforts.

- a. Continue to pursue EDA funding for infrastructure projects that assist in recruiting and retaining industry with a goal of 1 application per year.
- b. Seek state and private sources for infrastructure projects that promote multijurisdictional projects.

PROJECT: Awarded in December 2017 EDA grant for improvements at Chaffee Crossing.

PROJECT: Submit an EDA grant for the Fort Smith Career Technology Center.

## **6. Promote and aid in the delivery of locally driven planning and economic development.**

GOAL – Invest in efforts to produce knowledgeable leaders who can drive local efforts.

Objective – Educate local public leaders as to how their local governments are the owners of the Western Arkansas Planning and Development District

- a. Host training for public officials on a regular basis that incorporates the role and purpose of WAPDD.
- b. Seek out opportunities in regional communities to deliver the same message to the public through the chamber of commerce and industrial boards.

PROJECT: Continue to hold quarterly WAPDD Board meetings.

GOAL – Find the next generation of leaders and nurture their development.

Objective – Establish or support local and regional leadership programs that target those less than 50 years of age.

- a. Support and participate in local leadership programs in Fort Smith, Crawford County, Franklin County.
- b. Continue to support education efforts of WAPDD staff in economic and community development techniques to train out to the region.

PROJECT: Encourage other counties to establish similar programs. Assist existing programs in recruiting participation by younger citizens. Allow WAPDD employees to participate in local leadership programs.

Objective – Use the graduates of the leadership program

Objective – Create internship opportunities and foster the development of mentors

- a. When hiring additional WAPDD staff, consider those who have completed a local leadership program.
- b. Encourage cities, counties, and local employers to do the same.

PROJECT: In 2016 added a WAPDD staff member to perform community liaison role.

## **7. Enhance collaboration and regional approaches that engage a wide range of partners.**

GOAL – Assist cities and counties in discovering win-win solutions.

Objective – Advance the understanding that cities and residents in those cities are also part of their counties.

Objective – Foster the mindset that counties and cities must both succeed if they are to prosper.

- a. Facilitate meetings between city and county leaders, especially in those counties where there has been strife between the mayors and county judge.
- b. Endorse the idea of regionalized cooperation and branding as a growth strategy.

PROJECT: Arrange a meeting of elected officials.

PROJECT: Attend quarterly Crawford County Intergovernmental Meetings.

# Evaluation Framework

The Western Arkansas Planning and Development District's performance and evaluation measurement process is tied directly to the long-term goals and objectives that were developed. The CEDS goals and objectives outline criteria from which progress can be measured in the areas of:

Amount of public land that remains available for development and wise multiple usage.

Amount of green spaces that are available for parks and recreation.

Increase in local public health programs and facilities.

Increases in average household wages and income.

Number of new customers added to public water systems through CDBG funding.

Number of meetings with local elected officials.

Number of public meetings to prioritize community needs.

Number of CEDS goals and objectives advanced or accomplished.

Number of jobs retained.

Number of jobs created.

Number of new businesses and companies.

Number and types of public sector investments undertaken.

Amount of Federal, state, and local investment in the district.

Amount of private sector investments in the district.

Changes in the economic environment of the district such as adjustments to taxes, fees, and new incentives.

Trends in key economic development indicators and any significant changes in the district's economy will be monitored by WAPDD staff and CEDS strategy committee. The effectiveness in meeting the CEDS goals will be evaluated regularly and adjustments to the CEDS document and WAPDD annual plans of action will be made as needed to meet the economic development needs of the district.

# Economic Resilience

Regional economic prosperity is linked to an area's ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major disruptions to its economic base. In an economic development context, economic resilience becomes inclusive of three primary attributes: the ability to recover quickly from a shock, the ability to withstand a shock, and the ability to avoid a shock. According to the US Economic Development Administration, the shocks or disruptions to the economic base of an area or region are manifested in three ways:

1. Downturns or other significant events in the national or international economy which impact demand for locally produced goods and consumer spending;
2. Downturns in particular industries that constitute a critical component of the region's economic activity; and/or
3. Other external shocks such as natural or manmade disasters, closures of military bases, exit of a major employer, and climate change.

The Western Arkansas Planning and Development District has focused on economic resilience in the following ways in our Region:

1. The District is engaged in comprehensive planning efforts with all six counties (Crawford, Franklin, Logan, Polk, Scott and Sebastian) and municipalities within these counties, also including the School Districts, Colleges, and other groups such as the Salvation Army and local chambers. WAPDD currently assists all the above mentioned counties and participating jurisdictions in FEMA approved Hazard Mitigation Plans. Crawford County, Logan County, Scott County, Sebastian County and Franklin County have current Hazard Mitigation Plans. WAPDD is also working with Polk County in updating their Mitigation Plan to keep them in compliance with FEMA and engaged in the planning efforts to establish economic resilience. WAPDD also conducts pre-disaster recovery planning to define the stakeholders, roles, responsibilities and key actions needed.
2. The District Participates in the Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP) or Comprehensive Planning for many of our area cities and offer this service to all participating jurisdictions. WAPDD is currently keeping the Crawford County COOP updated quarterly and participates in testing of the plan with ACOOP and the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management (ADEM). The COOP elements consists of the essential processes of daily positions, the orders of succession, delegation of authority, interoperable communications (emergency contact information and alternate contact information), vital records, human capital, alternate locations such as backup sites and

offsite storage, devolution planning and reconstitution. A leadership succession plan for short, intermediate, and long term recovery needs is a key component of COOP.

3. WAPDD has listed in their goals and objectives to begin initiating and establishing Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) programs in our Region. This goal and objectives will include assisting areas with economic recovery post-disruption. WAPDD also promotes business continuity and preparedness so that businesses and communities understand their vulnerabilities and can be prepared to take action to resume operations after an event. Another element that is incorporated into the BRE programs is to establish a process for regular communication, monitoring, and updating of business community needs and issues. WAPDD recently signed a contract with the City of Van Buren to start a BRE Program.
4. WAPDD has listed in their goals and objectives the proposed project of assisting the Logan County Career Center in Paris. This training facility is being established to meet the areas need for skilled labor and to build a resilient workforce that can transition between jobs and industries when changes occur in jobs or required skills. The Career Center was completed in Spring of 2018. WAPDD is currently working with Fort Smith Public Schools on a grant for the Fort Smith Career Technology Center.
5. WAPDD has a GIS department that maintains geographic information systems and mapping that link with business establishment's data, taxing information, zoning, fire department district boundaries/locations, transportation data and flood plain areas. Our GIS department can provide available development site data as well as property ownership information to our district.
6. WAPDD's community development department and GIS department assists communities, local chambers, industrial boards and businesses in employing safe development practices. Such strategies include assisting in city and regional planning in locating structures outside of floodplains, preserving natural lands and creating green spaces, and protecting downtowns and other existing development from the impacts of extreme weather.

# APPENDIX

CEDS Committee Members

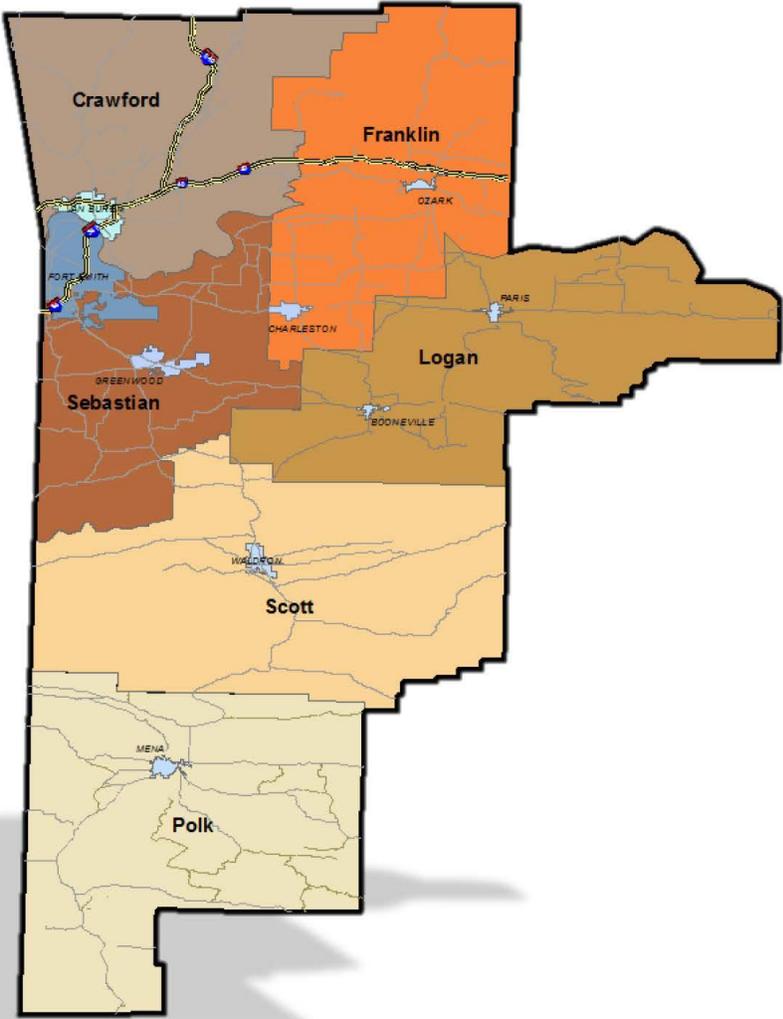
WAPDD Maps

**WESTERN ARKANSAS PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT, INC.**  
**CEDS STRATEGY COMMITTEE**

| <b>Name</b>                         | <b>Race</b> | <b>Sex</b> | <b>Date</b> | <b>Co. Res.</b> | <b>Position</b>      | <b>Locality</b> | <b>L.E.O.</b> | <b>Econ. &amp; Bus. Dev.</b> | <b>Emp. Training</b> | <b>Comm. Org.</b> | <b>Private Bus.</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Daniel Rogers,<br>President         | W           | M          | 01/17       | Logan           | Mayor                | Paris           | X             |                              |                      |                   |                     |
| Brandon Ellison,<br>President-Elect | W           | M          | 01/17       | Polk            | Judge                | Mena            | X             |                              |                      |                   |                     |
| James Forbes<br>Vice-President      | W           | M          | 01/17       | Scott           | Judge                | Waldron         | X             |                              |                      |                   |                     |
| Gary Baxter                         | W           | M          | 01/17       | Crawford        | Mayor                | Mulberry        | X             |                              |                      |                   |                     |
| Julie Murray                        | W           | F          | 06/19       | Crawford        | Chamber              | Van Buren       | X             | X                            |                      |                   |                     |
| Dennis Gilstrap                     | W           | M          | 01/17       | Crawford        | Judge                | Van Buren       | X             |                              |                      |                   |                     |
| Rickey Bowman                       | W           | M          | 01/15       | Franklin        | Judge                | Ozark           | X             |                              |                      |                   |                     |
| Seth Smith                          | W           | M          | 01/19       | Polk            | Mayor                | Mena            | X             |                              |                      |                   |                     |
| David Hudson                        | W           | M          | 10/97       | Sebastian       | Judge                | Fort Smith      | X             |                              |                      |                   |                     |
| Jerry Martin                        | W           | M          | 01/19       | Crawford        | Mayor                | Alma            | X             |                              |                      |                   |                     |
| Joe Hurst                           | W           | M          | 01/19       | Crawford        | Mayor                | Van Buren       | X             |                              |                      |                   |                     |
| Jerry Wilkins                       | W           | M          | 01/03       | Logan           | Mayor                | Booneville      | X             |                              |                      |                   | X                   |
| Roxie Hall                          | W           | F          | 01/19       | Franklin        | Mayor                | Ozark           | X             |                              |                      |                   | X                   |
| Doug Kinslow                        | W           | M          | 06/14       | Sebastian       | Mayor                | Greenwood       | X             |                              |                      |                   |                     |
| Buddy Black                         | W           | M          | 01/19       | Sebastian       | Mayor                | Mansfield       | X             |                              |                      |                   |                     |
| David Millard                       | W           | M          | 01/19       | Scott           | Mayor                | Waldron         | X             |                              |                      |                   |                     |
| Rusty Myers                         | W           | M          | 08/17       | Crawford        | Businessman          | Van Buren       |               | X                            |                      | X                 |                     |
| Lyn Miller                          | W           | F          | 11/07       | Crawford        | Businesswoman        | Van Buren       |               |                              |                      |                   | X                   |
| Rob Ratley                          | W           | M          | 02/16       | Sebastian       | Utility organization | Fort Smith      |               | X                            |                      |                   | X                   |
| Mitch Minnick                       | W           | M          | 08/13       | Sebastian       | Housing Authority    | Fort Smith      | X             |                              |                      | X                 |                     |

|                   |   |   |       |           |                        |             |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-------------------|---|---|-------|-----------|------------------------|-------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kevin Settle      | W | M | 01/09 | Sebastian | Businessman            | Fort Smith  |   |   |   |   |   | X |
| Veronica Post     | W | F | 01/15 | Franklin  | Mayor and ATU          | Altus/Ozark | X |   | X | X |   |   |
| Ken Warden        | W | M | 02/16 | Sebastian | UAFS                   | Fort Smith  |   | X | X |   |   |   |
| Bob Purvis        | W | F | 06/18 | Sebastian | Greenwood Chamber      | Greenwood   | X | X |   |   |   |   |
| Jay White         | W | M | 01/15 | Crawford  | Pepper Source          | Van Buren   |   |   |   |   |   | X |
| Bruce Sykes       | W | M | 02/16 | Franklin  | ATU                    | Ozark       |   | X | X |   |   |   |
| Lorie Robertson   | W | F | 01/15 | Sebastian | Chaffee Crossing       | Barling     | X |   |   |   |   |   |
| Susan Featherston | W | F | 08/17 | Logan     | Booneville Chamber     | Booneville  | X | X |   |   |   |   |
| Tonya Baumgartner | W | F | 04/14 | Logan     | Paris Chamber          | Paris       | X | X |   |   |   |   |
| Elaine Roser      | W | F | 06/18 | Franklin  | Ozark Chamber          | Ozark       | X | X |   |   |   |   |
| Steve Rook        | W | M | 02/16 | Polk      | Rich Mtn College       | Mena        |   |   | X | X |   |   |
| Jamie Scott       | W | M | 02/16 | Sebastian | USDA                   | Fort Smith  | X | X |   |   |   |   |
| Matt Twyford      | W | M | 2/16  | Pulaski   | AEDC                   | Little Rock | X | X |   |   |   |   |
| Robert Null       | W | M |       | Crawford  | Arkansas Lamp          | Van Buren   |   |   |   |   |   | X |
| Kevin Wright      | W | M | 2/16  | Sebastian | Businessman            | Fort Smith  |   |   |   |   |   | X |
| Lorlla Wallace    | W | F | 2/16  | Scott     | Boys/Girls Club        | Waldron     |   |   |   |   | X |   |
| Mat Pitsch        | W | M | 1/15  | Sebastian | Transportation/Senator | Fort Smith  |   | X |   |   | X | X |
| Reese Brewer      | W | F | 12/17 | Sebastian | Transportation         | Fort Smith  |   | X |   |   |   |   |
| Terry Rice        | W | M | 1/15  | Scott     | Businessman/Senator    | Waldron     |   |   |   |   |   | X |
| Tom Webb          | W | M | 1/15  | Sebastian | Medical College        | Fort Smith  |   |   | X |   |   |   |

# WAPDD Service Area



# Western Arkansas Planning and Development District

