

BLACKHAWK HILLS



Resource Conservation and Development
Jo Daviess ● Stephenson ● Carroll ● Ogle ● Whiteside ● Lee

January 20, 2009

Donald Kathan, Area Director
U.S. Department of Commerce
Economic Development Administration
111 North Canal Street, Suite 855
Chicago, IL 60606-7208

Mr. Kathan:

On behalf of the Blackhawk Hills Resource Conservation and Development District, I am pleased to submit the enclosed 6-Month Progress Report for the period of July 1, 2008 through December 31, 2008. The update specifically addresses the past 6 month's activities and services, meetings and workshops attended, and our current partnerships and associations. Also included are the financial reports for the same time period. This update is in regards to Award Number 06-83-05297.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact the RC&D staff at 815/625-3854.

Sincerely,

Catherine A. Brunner
Blackhawk Hills RC&D President

Enclosures

cc: C. Robert Sawyer, Regional Director, EDA
Bill Warren, EDA

**Midpoint Progress Report to the
US Department of Commerce
Economic Development Administration
From Blackhawk Hills Resource Conservation and Development District
July 1, 2008-December 31, 2008
Grant Award Number: 06-83-05297**

During the first half of Fiscal Year 2008, Blackhawk Hills RC&D District has been involved in the following activities:

Staff

Blackhawk Hills RC&D did not have any staff changes in the first half of Fiscal Year 2009, and does not anticipate any changes in the second half.

Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee

The Committee met three times over the past six months, July 31st, September 18th, and November 20th. To maintain interest at the meetings, the Council continues to arrange having speakers at the meetings. Jason Anderson, Economic Development Director with the City of Rochelle, hosted the July meeting and invited a representative from IL River Energy to speak to the group about how their ethanol plant has impacted the region and how its future growth can spur additional economic development throughout the region.

The September meeting was entitled "Creating Business Partnerships within the Learning Community". It focused on how education and business can work together to create programs that will benefit the local work force. How can schools adjust their curriculum to address the needs of business? How can business provide schools with resources needed to provide students with real life experiences in the work place? A brief review of the Welding Program established at Oregon High School was a part of the presentation. Oregon High School also developed a "Certificate of Employability" designed to help promote the needs of businesses in the area. We also learned about a new venture the SBDC is exploring which will be a Pilot Project in our region, and to begin exploring an initiative to develop an Entrepreneur Center with satellite offices in each of the six counties that our EDD currently serves.

The November meeting was used as an information-gathering session to collect input on the region to be used in our 5-Year CEDS Plan. Once it was determined we were due to complete our 5-Year Plan, we began looking at what data and information we needed to gather from our 6 counties in order to put together the information we needed. This process will stretch well into the spring of 2009.

We also had a positive movement forward with the Stephenson County CEDS Committee. In previous years, the county did not have an active CEDS group. However, the Committee has regrouped and started to push forward on a number of issues and is meeting on a regular basis. It has proved to be a great working relationship with our office and we are doing everything to help the county group maintain its momentum.

Meetings and Workshops

The District participated in the following meetings:

- Blackhawk Hills Staff attended the EDA Check Presentation to the City of Rochelle and Ogle County on September 8, 2008
- Blackhawk Hills Staff attend the Midwest CDI Training in Moline, IL from August 11-15th (part of a three-year curriculum certification)
- Blackhawk Hills Staff lead the Carroll County EDC Planning Retreat held at Lake Carroll on September 13th
- Blackhawk Hills Staff attended an EDA site visit to the Savanna LRA Army Depot on October 31st
- Bi-monthly Whiteside County CEDS Meetings
- Bi-Monthly JoDaviess County CEDS Meetings
- Bi-Monthly Stephenson County CEDS Meetings
- Three IDOT IL-40 Bridge Re-route Stakeholder's Meetings, which the Economic Development Professional currently serves on.
- Three IDOT US 30 Coalition Meetings
- Blackhawk Hills Staff attended four Local Workforce Investment Board Meetings, which the Economic Development Professional currently serves on.
- Blackhawk Hills Staff attended two Northwest IL Regional Entrepreneurship Center Board Meetings, which the Economic Development Professional currently serves on.

The District sponsored or hosted the following meetings in the past six months:

- Three County Board Chairs Meetings
- Three Regional CEDS Meetings
- Two Regional Zoning Administrators Meeting
- The Riverlands Economic Advantage Partnership Roundtable held in Elizabeth
- Carroll County EDC Strategic Planning Retreat
- Five Blackhawk Hills E&I Club Meetings
- Six Northwestern IL Renewable Energy Coalition Meetings

Riverlands Economic Advantage Partnership Project -

The Riverlands Economic Advantage Partnership is back up and moving forward. A number of meetings and conference calls have been held with partners involved in REAP. The group was not able to raise the total matching funds to equal a total project cost of \$225,000, so we have decided to do a more condensed version of the study. Therefore, the partners will conduct some portions of the process and limit the number of roundtable meetings held throughout the region to keep the cost down. Again, the study will be done to develop an economic strategy for the whole Riverlands region, which includes thirteen counties in northeastern Iowa, northwest Illinois and southwest Wisconsin. Specifically, the project will identify the Region's most promising economic development opportunities and the steps and investments necessary to capture them. The key steps in the project will be to assess the Region's cornerstone economic assets, the Region's most promising economic potential in the global economic race, and the best investments in which to compete. Recognizing that a good strategy must have champions, a critical goal of the project will be to create a sustaining forum for region-wide partnership to drive the development strategy.

Three regional roundtables were held throughout the Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin region. The Illinois roundtable was held on December 17th in Elizabeth. The keynote speaker was Mark Drabenstott, director of the RUPRI Center for Regional Competitiveness at the University of Missouri-Columbia. He is leading the team that will be assisting the area in

studying what this area does best. He will share plans of a regional development analysis for the tri-state area. The study will identify area strengths, business opportunities and recommended business clusters to develop a regional economic strategic action plan that reflects the realities of today's and tomorrow's economic environment.

Savanna Army Depot LRA-

Robert Sawyer, the Director out of the EDA Chicago office, visited the Depot on October 31st to review progress made at the site and what plans are in the works for the future. After an update was given by Diane Komiskey, the Director was given a tour of the existing property along with an explanation of the many constraints the LRA Board faces in dealing with the US Army and the US Fish and Wildlife. A lot of great ideas and questions were raised that may spur some new ideas in the near future, such as conducting an Eco-Tourism Feasibility Study.

Carroll County EDC Strategic Planning Retreat-

Blackhawk Hills RC&D Staff conducted an all day Planning Retreat for the CCEDC Board on Saturday, September 13th at Lake Carroll. The Board reviewed their mission and responsibilities in order to vision what they would like to focus on in the future. Due to constraints in funding the CCEDC by the Carroll County Board and private sector investors, the CCEDC Board of Directors decided to dissolve and merge with what is now being called the "Tri-County Economic Development Alliance" (TCEDA). The TCEDA will encompass JoDaviess, Carroll and a portion of Whiteside County. The goals and steps involved in structuring the board are directly in-line with modeling the very successful Greater Dubuque Development Corporation and have been pledged significant resources by Jo-Carroll Energy, as well as other entities. Our office will continue to have a very close working relationship with Jo-Carroll Energy and the new TCEDA.

Milledgeville-

Village, County and RC&D representatives met with Bill Warren from the EDA Chicago office in Milledgeville to review an industrial park development project located along IL-47 in Milledgeville. The Village has submitted a pre-application to EDA for infrastructure improvements to be made to the property to support the potential industrial development. Due to changes made in EDA's grant application submission policy, Milledgeville has been advised to submit a full application and the Village has agreed to move forward with the submission, and is currently waiting for further news from EDA.

Midwest CDI Training-

Staff attended the first year of training with the Community Development Institute at WIU the week of August 11-15th in Moline, IL. It serves as a comprehensive professional training program in community and economic development designed for development professionals, community leaders, and elected officials. CDI provides hands-on practical training that can be immediately applied to improving the economy and quality of life in communities. Each CDI session lasts five days and the complete CDI program consists of attending three sessions, referred to as Year One, Year Two, and Year Three. All three years will be offered concurrently, so participants register for only one. Moline is the permanent home of the CDI and it will be held during the third week of August each year so that participants can plan ahead. Individuals who complete all three years are eligible to become Professional Community and Economic Developers (PCED), a professional certification available through the Community Development Council (ICDC).

District Activities

Other activities and/or groups the District has been involved with this past six months include:

Entrepreneurs and Inventors Club –

The Blackhawk Hills Entrepreneur and Inventor's (E&I) Club took their mission a step further over the past few months. Our staff worked with John Huggins, the E&I Club volunteer coordinator, to apply for an AmeriCorp Vista Internship through WIU in order to provide a higher level of committed service to the E&I Club. He was awarded the one-year internship opportunity and Blackhawk Hills will provide support and leadership for his service. The goals of the work plan include the following points:

Goal 1) Increase the effective use of the internet and strengthen the web presence of the businesses, communities and organizations throughout the region.

Goal 2) Increase networking, collaboration, cooperation and pooling of resources of businesses and economic development organizations throughout the region.

Goal 3) Research and develop youth entrepreneur programs in the region.

Goal 4) Educate businesses and organizations on available resources for startup and small business, assist communities to strive to be "entrepreneur friendly" communities, and increase private investment in the region.

Goal 5) Develop 2-3 person Advisory Council to keep you connected to the needs of the low income community, which includes the unemployed and underemployed. This Council can be individuals living at poverty level themselves or agency representatives who support low income populations, or a combination of both.

Goal 6) Stay connected with other VISTA members, VISTA supervisor, IIRA VISTA Manager, and the community. Remember your mission is to develop sustainable programs that will last after your term is over.

Blackhawk Hills continues to provide technical and financial assistance to the Entrepreneurs and Inventors Club. The Club held five monthly meetings with an average of 20 people in attendance.

Broadband Task Force-

The Blackhawk Hills RC&D Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) committee met on November 20th to begin preparations for its 5-Year CEDS Document. A record number of interested parties attended the meeting and many economic development issues were discussed. However, one issue really emerged as an immediate economic development constraint for our region: Access to broadband infrastructure.

Access to broadband fiber in northwestern Illinois emerged as a primary and serious goal of the group. A number of very knowledgeable and enthusiastic participants at the meeting came forward to volunteer their time and participation in serving on a task force and investigating this issue. The group felt there was an immense need to explore, educate and

bring grassroots pressure for governmental spending to access and expand existing broadband infrastructure in our 6-county region. Recent economic and political changes lead us to believe that there is immediate job growth opportunity, especially for businesses competitively positioned to use broadband communication. A meeting was set for December 19th to begin gathering information and knowledge surrounding the issue, but due to inclement weather it was postponed to January 9, 2009. The response to the taskforce invite has been positive and immense.

SBDC Pilot Project-

The Blackhawk Hills RC&D office has begun an initiative to develop an Entrepreneur Center with satellite offices in each of the six counties that our EDD currently serves. To facilitate the effort, a partnership has been formed between our office, the County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committees, the Small Business Development Center, the Workforce Investment Board and the private sector. The goal is to create a working environment where large and small entrepreneur's can succeed by developing a business plan and operating a successful business. Due to the high demand, currently limited technical resources are available to assist them in developing a functional business plan that includes subsequent follow up to keep the business viable over the long term.

Northwest IL Renewable Energy Coalition (NIREC)-

The Northwest Illinois Renewable Energy Coalition (NIREC) is focused on promoting renewable energy in Northwest Illinois and the development of businesses that rely on renewable energy in their operations. They are committed to environmental responsibility, business diversity and public awareness. Their current mission is to market, promote, and grow the renewable energy industry in our region. The group is currently beginning work on a marketing plan to promote and educate others on the need. Future goals include the following: identification of appropriate development sites, identification of the types of businesses to attract, coordination of uniform information, increasing market shares, establishing a regional impact, promoting economic development incentives of the region, building and maintaining relationships, and emphasizing the importance of conserving energy.

Northwest Regional Entrepreneurship Center-

The NWREC met with its full board 2 times over the last six months and reviewed approximately 10 Challenge Grant applications for the last fiscal year period. To date, 2 Challenge Grants have been awarded for individuals located within the Blackhawk Hills RC&D District. Since the program began, the District has received a total of 29 grants with two more currently being reviewed. Staff continues to actively serve on the Board and provide assistance in the review process.

Northwest IL Workforce investment Board-

The Northwest IL Workforce investment Board met four times over the past 6 months. Currently, Blackhawk Hills RC&D staff serves on the board and actively participates in the operations of the board. We view our involvement as a vital tie between workforce development and economic development, and continue that role.

US Census Bureau PSAP Training and Participation-

Blackhawk Hills RC&D has been invited to serve as the primary participant in the US Census Bureau's 2010 Participant Statistical Areas Program (PSAP). The 2010 PSAP allows our office to review and update the boundaries for census tracts, census block groups, census designated places and census county divisions. These statistical areas are used by the

Census Bureau to report data from the 2010 Decennial Census, American Community Survey and other census related surveys.

Staff has recently been trained by US Census representatives on program guidelines and MAF/TIGER Partnership Software. We have begun the review process and have 2 counties completed by the time of this report. All 6 counties must be completed by February 2009 and be submitted to the US Census Bureau's Chicago offices for review and approval.

2009 Stimulus Package Project Gathering-

Staff has spent a considerable amount of time requesting, gathering, and compiling input from the communities and counties located in the Blackhawk Hills RC&D Region in regards to the new administration's proposed stimulus plan. This process has stretched into January of 2009, but has compiled a fairly comprehensible list of "shovel ready" projects to share with various US agencies. Though EDA had requested a list of economic development related projects, other entities had requested a much broader list of projects. Therefore, we have been able to compile a very thorough list of projects to be started by June/July of 2009, if funding were to be available. The list really emphasizes the vast need for infrastructure funding to the northwestern IL region.

Meetings with Community Leaders Concerning Potential Projects

Blackhawk Hills Staff meet with the following communities to discuss potential projects:

- City of Rochelle, in regards to Steward Road Overpass.
- Village of Ashton and Village of Franklin Grove, to begin exploring possible future development options that could benefit both communities.
- City of Savanna on potential infrastructure projects.
- City of Milledgeville to discuss a potential, large Industrial Park project for that community which may require water/sewer projects that EDA may be able to assist with. Council and community representatives also met with EDA representatives on-site to discuss the city's EDA funding application.
- Jo-Carroll Development (LRA) on potential infrastructure projects, clean-up areas and their development needs. Further meetings were held to investigate the potential interest for Eco-Tourism and explore funding availability to conduct the study.
- City of East Dubuque to discuss a potential, large Industrial Park project for that community which may require water/sewer projects that EDA may be able to assist with.

Letters of Support

Blackhawk Hills Council provided letters of support for the following developments:

- City of Freeport, in support of Freeport's application to the US EPA for 2009
- Ogle County, in support of Ogle County's application to the US EPA for 2009
- Carroll County, in support of the Carroll County Economic Development Corporation's request for continued funding in 2009