

The State of the Southwest Michigan Region

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1: Why a State of the Region Report?

This document compiles and presents a variety of current data on the people, economy, institutions, and environment of the Southwest Michigan region, comprising Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties. The State of the Region Report does not aspire to investigate the catalytic events that have led to the findings we have compiled. Rather, the Report establishes points of focus that we can return to over time to observe regional progress or the lack of it. We recognize that many actors influence the events that ultimately impact the data we monitor here. The goal of the Report is to allow interested citizens, activists, business leaders, policymakers, non-profits, and public agencies to more fully understand the current state of our region from many angles and across many aspects of life in Southwest Michigan. Detailed appendix files provided online will direct stakeholders in our region to the sources of data themselves, and provide an opportunity for customized in-depth analysis. Our hope is that the information presented in this document will empower these actors to advocate for and work towards the changes that they wish to see in their communities, to plan effectively, and to maintain or improve upon those factors that already contribute toward a sustainable, high quality of life in the region.

Chapter 2: A Brief Summary of Findings

Berrien and Van Buren Counties have experienced net population losses over the last decade. Berrien's is particularly noteworthy among its twenty comparison counties. Berrien and Cass Counties have each seen significant net loss of population within the age 25-34 cohort. This cohort is seen by many as a vital population segment to attract. Cass County has proven to be an exception to the loss in net population as it has gained

population since 2000. Van Buren County has gained population in the 25-34 cohort. The population profile for all three counties is generally older than the nation as a whole. Migration patterns show that the region tends gain and lose residents from other nearby metropolitan centers (Chicago, Detroit, South Bend). Additionally, migration within the region shows a clear dispersion of population from urban centers into more rural areas. The geographic distribution of population across racial groups shows that Berrien County has a distinctly high separation between its White and Black populations relative to its twenty comparison counties.

Unemployment in the region has been higher than the average of the twenty comparison counties and higher than the national average. The region has seen a net loss in business growth as well, and manufacturing losses are evident. Housing starts have not kept up with the national average but the trends directly follow the burst in the housing market bubble seen nationally.

Median income throughout the region is lower than the nation as a whole. But in all three counties, median income increased at a steeper pace than the national average. Similarly, income equality was greater in southwest Michigan than in the nation as a whole.

Obesity has become a barometer of overall health. In southwest Michigan, obesity rates are higher than the national average. Overall, the region has a relatively small percentage of households without vehicles. However, pockets of the region have exceptionally high levels of households without access to a vehicle. The presence of this issue points to the need for a high-functioning public transit network within the region.

The proportion of the population who hold bachelor's degrees has increased in the region. The percentage remains below the national average however. English literacy in southwest Michigan is higher than the national

average. Relative to their peers throughout Michigan, students performed better on Reading and Social Studies examinations

Local government financial conditions showed a great deal of variability in Southwest Michigan. Federal expenditures per capita have generally been lower in Southwest Michigan than the national average. In particular, non-defense federal expenditures per capita throughout the region are below the national average.

Chapter 3: Changes from 2003 Extract And Sources

The 2013 State of the Region Report updates SWMPC's 2003 Data Extract with fresh data from the 2010 Census and other sources, but it also represents an evolution in the organization's approach to presenting data. The 2003 Extract contained a rich array of data, and SWMPC has made every effort to compile a similarly high quality and quantity of data in this update. However, the 2013 Report makes changes in two key areas.

Graphics

While the 2003 Extract presented data mostly in tables, the 2013 State of the Region Report synthesizes more of this information into maps and charts. In addition, narrative text now accompanies the graphics to aid in timely interpretation of the data. In order to ensure that detailed data were not lost, many tables that were previously in the body of the text remain in the document but only as appendices. The aim of this multi-layered approach to presentation is to expand the accessibility of the data, and add multiple layers through which readers can focus on the data that they find most useful or interesting.

The 2003 Extract was completed at a time when an online version of the document, while fully functional and highly necessary, was still secondary to the hard copy

book format. With the 2013 Report, our aim has been to produce a document that still presents the data in hard copy in an effective, attractive manner. However, the 2013 Report also recognizes that much use of the document will be online, and that it will serve individuals and organizations to be able to access the data in a highly portable, digital format for their own needs and further analysis. We hope the internet-friendly format of the document will allow for more frequent improvements and updates to provide our region with the maximum number of data tools possible.

Benchmarking

The 2003 Data Extract provided plenty of numerical data on conditions in southwest Michigan, but no means of comparing how the region was performing on particular indicators relative to other regions in the state and the nation. Readers would have had no way to quickly establish whether patterns in the data were part of broader national trends, or whether they represented unique characteristics that warrant particular attention within this region. The 2013 Report attempts to show the characteristics of southwest Michigan relative to other regions by placing each of the three southwest Michigan counties within a "comparison group" of twenty other counties. Where appropriate, indicators in southwest Michigan are reported graphically along with the indicators for the comparison groups and the United States average.

To create the comparison groups for each of the southwest Michigan counties, the software program R was used to find those counties in the United States where earnings in various economic sectors were most similar to those in the southwest Michigan counties. The software allowed the SWMPC to use North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) data to search for those counties with the most similar base of economic activities to each of the southwest Michigan counties. The search also only

Benchmarking

chose counties that had total populations that were within a 50% range of the Census 2000 total populations of Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties to generate an even more applicable comparison group. After the search, the following comparison county groups were chosen for each of the southwest Michigan counties.

Southwest Michigan County	BERRIEN,MI	CASS,MI	VAN BUREN,MI
Comparison Counties	Bradley, TN	Loudon, TN	Cache, UT
	Kenosha, WI	Tipton, TN	Duplin, NC
	Gaston, NC	Hunt, TX	Grady, OK
	Rock, WI	Morrow, OH	White, AR
	Fond du Lac, WI	Hot Spring, AR	Columbia, OR
	Miami, OH	Columbia, WI	Pickens, SC
	Wayne, OH	Pettis, MO	Miller, AR
	Burke, NC	Oconto, WI	Washington, LA
	Cleveland, NC	Stanly, NC	Columbus, NC
	Lake, OH	Ionia, MI	Wilkes, NC
	Lenawee, MI	Carroll, OH	Goodhue, MN
	Newport News, VA	Jefferson, PA	Thomas, GA
	Northumberland, PA	Livingston, IL	Baldwin, GA
	Ashtabula, OH	Clinton, IA	Tioga, PA
	Madison, IN	Halifax, VA	Natchitoches, LA
	Calhoun, MI	Hardeman, TN	Branch, MI
	Niagara, NY	Sanilac, MI	Wyoming, NY
	Richland, OH	Whiteside, IL	Clarion, PA
	Macon, IL	Delta, MI	Tuscola, MI
	Saginaw, MI	McKean, PA	Accomack, VA



Data Sources

Detailed source information and citations for each individual graphic are provided in the appendix file for that graphic. The appendix files can be found at <http://www.swmpc.org/2013extract.asp>. The list below merely provides a summary of the data sources used to produce the graphics in this document:

- **US Census Bureau, Decennial Census**
- **US Census Bureau, American Community Survey**
- **US Bureau of Labor Statistics**
- **US Census Bureau, Census Statistics of Businesses**
- **US Census Bureau, County Business Patterns**
- **US Census Bureau, County Comparisons Datasets**
- **US Census Bureau, Consolidated Federal Funds Report**
- **US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) County-to-County Migration Data**
- **US Department of Agriculture**
- **Michigan Department of Education**
- **Michigan Department of Environmental Quality**
- **Munetrix Municipal Database**
- **University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**