

## 2001 Annual Report Executive Summary

### Aroostook County EZ

*(Note: Aroostook County was formerly a Round II Champion Community. They were designated as a Round III EZ on December 31, 2001.)*

In 2001, the people of northern Maine have once again found new and innovative ways to implement the principles of the Empowerment Zone Program and use its progressive planning strategies. This year, while the Aroostook Champion Community benchmarks were being monitored and updated, a new process was being developed in other planning directly related to our Strategic Plan and vital to our region. Last year, it was agreed by USDA-Rural Development and the U.S. Economic Development Administration that the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for Northern Maine (CEDS) be combined with the Aroostook Champion Community Strategic Plan. This decision was based on the effectiveness of the benchmarking system that allows for interactive planning and performance measurements.

The Economic Development District Council that oversees the coordination of the CEDS and is the EZ Advisory Committee to the Board, also underwent major changes. These changes were an effort this year to become even more effective and efficient in strategic planning efforts. The EDDC was redeveloped into the Northern Maine Economic Development Council (NMEDC) with seventeen members instead of the previous council that had 35 representatives. The new council, the NMEDC includes representatives from all sectors of the northern Maine area including: forestry, agriculture, public leadership, economic and business development, employment and training, community/development organizations, minorities, aged and disabled, education, other, and one ex-officio member. The NMEDC membership was approved by the Board in June 2001. This council continues to meet monthly. The NMEDC monitors plan quality and will determine project selection equitably in an organized scoring process. Any individual or group may submit projects to the NMEDC for consideration or inclusion in the Strategic Plan. Projects are scored and submitted for various years of the plan according to the total score received. However, reviews are conducted annually to update the placement of current and new projects. No project is ever discarded. This new process has eliminated the "wish list" mindset that pervaded past plans. One half of the current CEDS projects have been preliminarily reviewed and are ready for scoring, and then placement in the Aroostook Champion Community Strategic Plan.

Another step was taken by the NMEDC to revise the original Vision Statement. NMEDC held a meeting on September 14th, 2001 and revised the original three-page vision to one page that really targets what our Champion Community wants to look like in 2011. Original catalyst participants from 1998 were invited and some were present. They were acknowledged for their long-standing service to the Aroostook Champion Community. The Empowerment Zone Map was also reviewed and approved.

In addition, the goals of the Aroostook Champion Community were put in a more concise format from 8 goals and strategies to 4 goals and strategies. They are as follows:

GOAL I Support business success by creating an environment that supports the success of existing businesses as well as new businesses. Strategy 1 – Upgrade the condition and capacity of the region's public infrastructure to support business success, such as transportation systems, telecommunication systems, and public facilities and services. Strategy 2 – Minimize barriers and support employers and employees through educational programs, financial assistance, and legislative efforts. Strategy 3 – Continue to build on and integrate existing regional marketing programs for business and tourism

development through efforts such as targeting industries best suited for Aroostook's natural and human resources, developing tourism-related infrastructure, and capitalizing on the proximity with Canada. Strategy 4 – Expand natural resource-based businesses through the continued development of forest products industries, agriculture, and aquaculture.

GOAL II Develop a well-educated and well-trained work force through educational and training opportunities. Strategy 1 – Expand and improve pre-K through high school education. Strategy 2 – Expand and improve post-secondary, training, and retraining opportunities. Strategy 3 – Make more efficient use of educational resources. Strategy 4 – Create and build on partnerships between business and education.

GOAL III Improve health and social services by providing comprehensive programs for the enrichment of all residents. Strategy 1 – Create a healthier community. Strategy 2 – Provide quality health care and social services through all stages of life. Strategy 3 – Enhance family support. Strategy 4 – Provide affordable, quality housing for residents. Strategy 5 – Upgrade community services.

GOAL IV Steward Aroostook's natural resources and way of life by balancing development with the need to protect valuable natural resources and the rural character of its communities. Strategy 1 – Steward Aroostook's pristine natural resources. Strategy 2 – Maintain and improve Aroostook's quality of lifestyle.

Lastly, a revised Strategic Plan was submitted to USDA-Rural Development on October 1, 2001, for designation as an Empowerment Zone. This year the 1998 implementation of the Strategic Plan netted over \$27 million dollars for the thirty-nine projects included in the plan.