

2002 Annual Report Executive Summary

Aroostook County EZ

Despite a lack of federal funding for the program, the Aroostook County Empowerment Zone (ACEZ) made significant progress during its first year. It built its infrastructure by developing the governing body (the Northern Maine Empowerment Council), creating bylaws, making revisions to its benchmarks, and signing MOAs and cooperative agreements with Rural Development and the state of Maine. Rural Development set-aside funds were awarded to the region in excess of \$1.7 million dollars in programs related to job creation and retention, natural resources, and healthcare. Significant outreach efforts were implemented to educate community members, including tax incentive workshops that have enabled a number of businesses to take advantage of federal tax breaks. In addition, a web site was developed to aid in the outreach efforts (<http://www.arostookez.org>). A Rural Empowerment Summit was organized to mobilize community members, and collaborative efforts took root in sectors including health care, education, economic development, and natural resources. New partnerships were forged in healthcare, education, and business; and existing partnerships were strengthened.