

RangeReadiness

INITIATIVE
Responsible regional growth.



Growing Needs

Northeastern Minnesota, and the Iron Range in particular, are on the verge of an economic expansion and job growth, the likes of which has not been seen in at least three decades. Major new projects in various stages of planning, study and execution are slated to infuse an investment of more than \$3.5 billion dollars into the region's economy. The projects, which represent a cross section of mining (iron and nonferrous), timber/paper and power generation sectors, are also projected to directly create 3,500 construction and 4,000 permanent jobs.

As good as that expansion news is, add in the anticipated job openings from looming retirements and the numbers are staggering. According to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, northeastern Minnesota will need to fill approximately 75,000 existing positions in the next decade due to retiring baby boomers. To put this into perspective, the entire region is expected to graduate a total of 7,500 students per year for the next 10 years. Therefore, even if every graduating student chose to remain and work in the region, the available workforce would still fall short of the expected demand.

Many important questions are raised by the convergence of the region's economic expansion and looming retirements. How can we help the area's young people prepare to take advantage of these unprecedented opportunities? Where will the surplus workers come from? Where will we house the influx of new workers and their families? What should our communities do to prepare for growing populations of young, likely culturally diverse new families?

A Coordinated Regional Response

In an effort to answer these types of questions, communities from across the region along with local and regional experts have joined forces to respond to the surge of activity and implement policies and tactics to accommodate growth in a logical and responsible manner. With the leadership of Iron Range Resources, the Range Readiness Initiative was conceived in the summer of 2007 as an ad hoc forum of regional experts from the public and private sectors that would identify potential challenges, issues and opportunities, develop shared strategies and solutions, and focus the appropriate technical and financial resources in an efficient and effective response.

The Range Readiness Initiative is comprised of an amalgam of elected officials, economic development organizations, educational institutions, representatives of industry and labor, communities and government agencies. The first meeting of the Range Readiness Initiative was held in August 2007, during which the group set the Initiative's mission and organizational framework. The Initiative was built with a team-oriented approach with the various entities pooling resources and working collectively and cooperatively to achieve the desired big-picture results.

The Northspan Group, Inc., headquartered in Duluth, was hired to facilitate the Range Readiness Initiative and funding was provided by several regional funders including the Blandin Foundation, Northland Foundation, Minnesota Power, Itasca Economic Development Corporation and Area Partnership for Economic Development (APEX).

