



**Economic  
Development and  
Growing the  
Economy**



# Profiles of Best Practices

## The Florence Natural Resources and Wild Rivers Interpretive Center

### **Community, County**

Florence, Florence County

### **Area of Project Impact**

Florence County

### **Population Affected**

5,088

### **Situation**

In 1987, it was recognized that the natural resource agencies from federal, state and local governments needed additional and improved facilities or the agencies would relocate out of Florence County, taking with them a significant portion of the county's highest paid jobs. This possibility also posed a threat to the delivery of natural resource management and recreation information to the public, which potentially jeopardized tourism in the county.

### **Economic Development Strategies**

The County sought to retain state and federal level jobs, improve natural resource services, provide space for community events, and improve communications and interactions between agencies, businesses and citizens.

### **Implementation**

Delivery of natural resource and recreation services and information to the public is recognized as an essential economic development resource in Florence County, particularly for the tourism industry. However, prior to the development of the Florence County Resource Center project, it was clear that the multiple locations of the three public land managing agencies and facilities (including the USDA Forest Service, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and County Forestry and Parks) and the University of Wisconsin-Extension Office (UWEX) was problematic for the agencies as well as for the public.

One new facility, the Florence Natural Resource and Wild Rivers Interpretive Center, now provides efficient and effective information and outreach education. It acts as a clearinghouse of information on natural resources and recreation by housing the three public land managing agencies and UWEX. This new facility prevented the U.S. Forest Service and DNR from relocating out of the county, which ensured the retention of state and federal jobs. In addition, it allows participating agencies to share operational costs, which saves taxpayer dollars. In addition to offering services to tourists, the facility also serves nearby community residents. It ensures educational opportunities for residents by providing space for community forums, meetings and workshops. For instance, a wide array of educational opportunities are offered to the Florence, Iron and Dickenson County, Michigan communities, including business workshops, shoreland restoration workshops and craft workshops.

### **Partners and Leadership**

The USDA Forest Service, the State of Wisconsin and Florence County worked together on building, planning and funding. In addition, donations of labor and/or materials were provided through the Wisconsin National Guard; the Wisconsin Conservation Corps; the Blackwell (WI) Job Corps; Michigan and Wisconsin wood product producers; the Town of Florence; a local cleaning service; the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA); Florence Utility Commission; USDA RC&D; and all participating agencies provided contributions of their in-house abilities when needed.

## **Outcomes**

As a first facility in the nation of this type, the 20,000 square foot building costing \$1,520,000 was the result of cooperative efforts. The new facility has met multifaceted goals, including retaining state and federal positions, supporting industry, and improving services for both vacationers and residents of nearby counties. The cooperative effort has helped to weld natural resource agencies for the benefit of the public, and also lead to the creation of a new four-staff member non-profit organization named the "Friends of the Florence Wild Rivers Interpretive Center." The building also devotes 3,000 square feet to visitor service and exhibition. In addition, the community has benefited by having this structure provide an attractive entryway into the Town of Florence on US Highway 2.

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