

Regional Issues



Without a doubt, Berlin has the most stunning location of any community its size in New Hampshire, if not in New England and beyond. The Androscoggin River courses through it, plunging dramatically over a series of falls that were the original source of Berlin's economic pre-eminence. The Northern Presidentials soar above the community. On a clear day, the 6288' summit of Mount Washington, New England's tallest peak, is clearly visible from most parts of the city.

Since the closing of the paper mill in nearby Groveton in 2005 and the closing of the pulp mill in Berlin in 2006, a number of demographic, economic development, and marketing efforts have been undertaken focused on Coos County. There is a higher level of cooperation across the county now than many people have seen in years. It is critical for the county that this cooperation continues. As the largest community in the county, it is probably most critical for Berlin that this spirit continues, and that the observations, recommendations, and initiatives are followed through on.

As studies are completed, as implementation efforts are considered, there is occasionally a tendency to focus on the details, to lose track of the comprehensive and cohesive view that was intended. Because the success of these regional efforts is so important to Berlin, their major conclusions are summarized here, so that there is one location where all of those initiatives may be viewed collectively, so that as it views its own implementation efforts, the City can readily review the accompanying recommendations to see that those items are being worked on as well.

The State of Coos County: Local Perspectives on Community and Change

Carsey Institute, University of New Hampshire

Chris Colocousis, Spring 2008

To determine current citizens' attitudes regarding the present and the future in Coos County, the Carsey Institute completed nearly 1000 telephone interviews with local residents during the spring and summer of 2007. Geographically, the interviews were distributed as follows:

<u>Lancaster,</u> and communities south of Route 2: interviews/35%	337
<u>Colebrook,</u> and communities north of Route 2: interviews/31%	297
<u>Berlin/Gorham:</u> interviews/34%	333
<i>Total interviews</i>	967

Given that the interviews included nearly 100 questions, this was no small undertaking! Additionally, some 750 interviews were conducted in nearby Oxford County, Maine, so that, over time, comparisons made between data from that county and future attitudes in Coos County as well.



Two items are perhaps of note. First, these survey results do not delineate a course forward for Coos County. They merely document existing attitudes and concerns among the region's residents. But, these are important to understand as leaders and policy makers begin to strategize on actions that they and the area communities should be taking as they do move forward. Second, a reminder that these surveys were conducted in 2007. There is an intent to conduct additional surveys here in 2009. It will be interesting to see if the changing economic climate nationally has changed attitudes in Coos County.

Coos County is a land of native individuals.

In 1990 and again in 2000 census figures indicated that 57% of New Hampshire residents had been born outside of the state. At one point in that period, New Hampshire had the fifth highest percentage on in-migrants, behind the retirement states of Florida and Arizona, and Colorado and Wyoming, where attractive lifestyles were bringing new residents.

Not so in Coos County. This is a land of people native to this area, as shown below:

Have you always lived here?

Lancaster/South	38% Yes
Colebrook/North	48% Yes
Berlin/Gorham	69% Yes

People cited many reasons for staying here, family and recreational opportunities being regularly mentioned. The study did find some recent in-migration of retirees, primarily in the Lancaster/South region.

Coos County has an aging population.

Between 1990 and 2000 the County lost 40% of its young adults, ages 20 to 29. The lack of economic opportunities clearly has been forcing people to make difficult choices as they begin their adult lives. This has likely accelerated with the closing of the mills in Berlin and Groveton. When asked if they would advise a teenager to plan on staying in the County or leave, individuals responded as follows:

Advise a teen to stay here?

24% Yes
76% No

Coos County is not a wealthy place.

In 2000 the median family income in New Hampshire was \$57,575. The highest ranked county was Rockingham, with a median family income of \$66,345. Coos County was tenth and lowest at \$40,654. This placed Coos nearly 15% lower than Carroll County, the ninth ranked county and its neighbor immediately south of the White Mountains.

Within the county, the survey found a relatively even distribution of across the three geographic sub-sectors.

Income for 2006?

	<\$20K	\$20K to \$90K	>\$90K
Lancaster/South	7%	74%	20%
Colebrook/North	12%	77%	11%
Berlin/Gorham	12%	76%	12%

The slight over representation of upper income individuals in the Lancaster/South was attributed to modest influx of retirees to that area.

In terms of trends, individuals were asked to rank their current economic situation with where they had been five years earlier, with the following results:

Personal Financial Situation, Compared to Five Years Ago

	Worse Off	Same	Better Off
Lancaster/South	26%	31%	43%
Colebrook/North	29%	32%	39%
Berlin/Gorham	35%	32%	33%

Clearly the outliers here are that Lancaster/South contains more people who have fared well in the last five years, while things have been harder for people in Berlin/Gorham.

Miscellaneous Finding: Berlin is Hopeful!

There were a variety of other findings that will not be surprising to people who have lived and worked in Coos County for a while.

Lots of people work a second job (28%).

As the only urban center, there is a perception that Berlin has more urban problems than do its rural neighbors, with the following items mentioned as issues of concern here more frequently:

- Crime
- Poverty
- Drug manufacturing and sales
- Concerns about schools

Family, natural resources/beauty, and recreational opportunities are important to all.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for this master plan, people were asked about their confidence in the future. Despite all of the economic disruption, despite all of the uncertainty about what the next phase of Berlin's future might look like, people here have hope, hope that things will be getting better.

Do you think that ten years from now your community will be a better place?

	No, Worse	About the Same	Yes, Better
Lancaster/South	21%	55%	24%
Colebrook/North	21%	52%	27%
Berlin/Gorham	28%	21%	52%

Coos Economic Action Plan

Jeff Hayes, North Country Council

Peter Riviere, Coos Economic Development Corporation

September 2008

Background

The concerns regarding the fragile economy of Coos County were not just those of the interviewees in the Carsey Report. They have been widely held by local political leaders, private

citizens, and professional development groups for years as well. Shortly after the closing of the Groveton paper mill in 2005, the North Country Council (the regional planning commission for Coos County) and the Coos Economic Development Corporation began a series of public forums with business leaders and others to craft a strategy for economic recovery.

Jointly these two entities were able to craft a plan to get to that strategy that made sense to a variety of funding agencies. With a variety of federal, state, and local partners, a planning process was developed that included ten individual projects. Chief among these was the development of a Coos Economic Action Plan.

Typical of the resilience noted in the Carsey Report, the Coos Economic Action Plan was one developed from within, relying primarily on individuals who lived and worked in the North County, and its solutions primarily called for building a future from within the area, actively promoting and developing good activities and good sites that are already here. Yes, part of the overall planning process involved increased marketing in southern Quebec and translating some of the promotional materials into French for business leaders in that province, but the core of the Economic Action Plan is locally focused.

Process

This was a plan with lots of public participation. A small planning committee organized and convened a Steering Committee of some two dozen individuals who were knowledgeable about the county and issues facing it. As envisioned by these project leaders, there were to be four key themes to be investigated in this process: Energy, Wood, Creative/Knowledge Economy, and Tourism. Later Health Care was added to this list. Under the guidance of the Steering Committee there were organized Technical Review Committees on each of these topics. A TRC chair was designated and a facilitator was provided for each. Beginning in November 2007, these groups were charged with undertaking such investigations as they needed to develop tangible, implementable actions under each topic within twelve months. There were a variety of intervening sessions with the Steering Committee where interim reports were provided. The groups met their charge, and a final plan was adopted in September 2008. The recommended priority actions are outlined below.

Energy Technical Review Committee

Priority Action 1. Support the development and growth of Local Energy Committees. Since calling for their creation by the passage of warrant articles in some 164 communities across the state in 2006, these local groups have taken on an array of activity at the community level, from monitoring energy usage in public buildings, to hosting energy fairs, to fostering the development of alternative energy in public and private buildings. These activities should be fostered and supported in Coos County.

Note: Implementation assigned to Carbon Coalition, in combination with Clean Air-Cool Planet, and the North Country Council, among others.

Priority Action 2. Develop an **alternative energy technology curriculum** at White Mountains Community College. This might include an array of certificate, degree, or non-resident programs, but the goal is to train people to install and maintain the equipment needed to actually utilize alternative energy systems.

Note: Implementation assigned to White Mountains Community College, with others (high schools, industry, etc.) involved.

Priority Action 3. Create a **feasibility model for small scale community heat and power production** units. The idea is to use the co-location of energy production and consumption to create self-supporting systems in village and downtown locations.

Note: Implementation assigned to the NH Association of Economic Development Councils, and Biomass Energy Resource Center, among others.

Wood Technical Review Committee

Priority Action 1. There needs to be a thorough **Forest Fiber Inventory**, and a thorough understanding of the amount of wood that is unspoken for and would be reasonably available to support the variety of wood power and pellet operations that are being considered.

Note: This has been completed by LandVest, under contract to the NH Dept. of Resources and Economic Development, Division of Forest and Lands (November 2008).

The conclusion was that for a theoretical wood consuming facility located in Berlin, there would likely be on the order of 600,000 green tons of low grade wood reasonably available. The range of estimates associated with this figure were a low of 250,000 tons and a high of 900,000 tons. The 600,000 ton figure would support approximately 50 MW of electrical generating capacity.

Note 2: A second wood availability study was conducted by Innovative Natural Resource Solutions for Clean Power (a potential bio-fuel project developer). It concluded that the available wood supply would likely support 30 MW of generating capacity.

Priority Action 2. There needs to be established a **Market Diversity and Forest Product Development Center**. As entrepreneurs think of new ways of using wood products, there is lots of information available on research that has been completed by Research and Development labs in universities, public agencies, and other locations, but it is difficult for individuals to gain access to it. This information needs to be assembled in a convenient location in Coos County.

Note: Implementation has been assigned to DRED and NCC, among others.

Priority Action 3. **Reduce energy costs** in the wood products industry.

3A. Explore the potential to have a **bio-diesel Manufacturing Plant** sited in Coos County. This would take advantage of local machining and manufacturing skills, and if the units were installed locally, increase the demand for low grade wood products.

Note: Implementation assigned to DRED and the US DOE.

3B. Form a **fuel purchasing cooperative** to lower fuel costs. The thought was that bulk purchases would yield benefits for all participants.

Note: Implementation assigned to Timber Harvesting Council and DRED.

3C. Form a **transportation cooperative** to reduce trucking costs. A variety of options were considered: central dispatch, shared vehicles, shared maintenance facilities, etc.

Note: Implementation assigned to Timber Harvesting Council and DRED.

Creative Economy Technical Review Committee

Priority Action 1. Support existing creative economy businesses in the North Country by assuring **county-wide access to high speed Internet** and creating a **NorthSource Network**. Studies show that creative economy businesses are ones that can feed off of each other, even if they are not exactly in the same field of endeavor. To get more, there is a need to link the ones who are already here.

Note: Implementation assigned to NCIC, the LINC Project, and North Country Educational Services, among others.

Priority Action 2. Develop and **Support Creative Spaces** and creative clusters. Similar to the NorthSource Network recommendation above, creative businesses like to be located in close proximity to each other as well. Develop incubators/other facilities that would be the home for new or expanding creative businesses.

Note: Implementation assigned to the Arts Alliance of Northern New Hampshire.

Priority Action 3. Approve and fund a county-wide **marketing plan to promote Coos** as a place for creative and knowledge businesses. There is an existing plan developed by KDPaine and Partners. Modify as necessary and then fund.

Note: Implementation assigned to DRED, chambers of commerce, WMCC, and others.

Priority Action 4. **Refocus Workforce Development** and Training to include sessions on entrepreneurship, creative problem solving, use of broadband, etc.

Note: Implementation assigned to AVER Educational Committee, WMCC, and NCES, among others.

Tourism Technical Review Committee

Priority Action 1. Develop and **Fund more Promotion.** With limited resources there was a strong recognition of the need for even greater cooperation across the region.

Note: Implementation was assigned to the five (5) chambers of commerce in the region. There was recognition that the marketing and branding materials being produced by Roger Brooks of Destination Development Inc. will be helpful, and that this effort needs to coordinate with that one.

Priority Action 2. **Protect the Natural and Cultural Resources** present in the Region. These are what we are showing our visitors. Work with others to strike a balance between competing needs. Inform communities about innovative planning techniques.

Note: Implementation assigned to North Country Council (Natural Resources) and Arts Alliance of Northern New Hampshire (Cultural Resources).

Priority Action 3. **Increase, improve and retain services and attractions** used by visitors and residents. This ranges from signage to cell phone service, from broadband to craft coops. It includes shop local plans, and efforts to make it easier for people from away to get around while they are here.

Note: Implementation assigned to local businesses, CEDC, North Country Council, and others.

Priority Action 4. **Increase Customer Service.** This might include expanding/re-emphasizing the Granite State Ambassadors, classes/courses/workshops at White Mountains Community College, and a host of other activities to enhance the experience of visitors to the region.

Note: Implementation assigned to downtown associations, chambers of commerce, White Mountains Community College, among others.

Health Care Technical Review Committee

Priority Action 1. Create a **Local Feeder System of Health Care Professionals.** The activities envisioned range from career counselors, health care summer camps, and curriculum development, all collaborating with Granite State and White Mountains Community Colleges, among others. The intent is to develop a “grow your own” program to enhance opportunities for locals, and to assure that the health care industry will have a steady supply of individuals who know and like the area.

Note: Implementation assigned to North Country Health Consortium, assisted by the Northern NH Area Health Education Center.

Priority Action 2. Provide capacity for the county's health care providers, community leaders, and policy makers to **learn about alternative models of care delivery** and their applicability to Coos County. Other rural areas are starting to do things differently. Some of these models might have applicability here. There is a need to get the word out.

Note: Implementation was assigned to the three area hospitals to hire a consultant to pursue this.

Summary

These eighteen Action Items outline a bold and aggressive plan. Some actions have already been accomplished, such as the Fiber Inventory. Others are being worked on, such as the Alternative Energy Technology Curriculum.

Out of this effort there have been identified seven Long Term Themes and seven Immediate Action Steps.

Themes

- Affordable access to health care
- Align with revitalization initiatives across the region
- Marketing plans for all county business sectors
- Networking across all business sectors
- Revitalized village centers
- Ubiquitous wireless broadband deployment
- Workforce/talent development

Immediate Action Steps

- Develop creative-space clusters in village centers
- Fund more Coos County promotion
- Increase customer service training
- Reduce energy costs in all business sectors: electric usage, heating, transportation
- Begin small, community-based combined heating & power production
- Launch a wood products technology & commercial transfer station

Economic Resurgence in the Northern Forest

A regional strategy of the Sustainable Economy Initiative

Northern Forest Center

North Country Council

October 2008

Background

For generations, paper and timber interests in the Northeast owned vast tracks of land to supply their various mills. Residents of neighboring communities had access to these lands as if they

were public parks. They hunted and fished there. They hiked and camped there. With permission and minimal fees, they cut firewood and built camps there. In 1988 much of that began to change.

In 1988, Diamond International sold 1 million acres in northern New England to non-mill investors. The new owners were clearly interested in a return on their investment, but that was not necessarily focused on delivering trees to a mill. Shortly thereafter, in 1989, some 40,000 acres of untamed land in the towns of Stratford, Stark, and Odell came up for sale in northern New Hampshire and were purchased by the State in one of the initial acquisitions under the then new Land Conservation Investment Program. Clearly something was changing in the economics of the forest.

During 1989-90 the US Forest Service undertook an in depth look at the forests of northern New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. This led to the creation of a Northern Forest Council, and in 1997 the creation of a Northern Forest Center. The broad charge to the Center is to keep an eye on 30 million acres of land that stretches from Eastport and Fort Kent, Maine, through northern New Hampshire and Vermont, and all the way west Lake Ontario and south to the New York Thruway so as to:

- Build a sustainable economy
- Revitalize the region's communities
- Conserve the landscape

To that end it has undertaken a variety of projects to support these goals, including fostering land protection, education about the importance of the forest to local economies, developing and supporting indigenous crafts and occupations, and community development efforts across the region.

Sustainable Economy Initiative

In 2006, in collaboration with the North Country Council and a variety of other organizations, it undertook the first ever unified economic plan for this broad region. It involved extensive input from government and business leaders from across the four state region. It also involved individuals from the arts, tourism, forest products, education, the environment, utilities, banking, and community and economic development sectors. It was clearly a comprehensive look at how to sustain these communities and their residents who live at the edge and in the middle of this vast forest resource.

In the end, addressing its findings to the four governors who had appointed them, as well as other policy makers and business and community leaders, it identified ten specific actions it recommended as the keys to sustaining these regions and the communities and the citizens who reside in them. (Text that follows is from the June 2008 report.)

- Keep Forests as Forests
Maintain forests to protect and enhance the essential economic and ecological services derived from the landscape and to capture value from emerging markets.

- Encourage Creativity and Business Growth
Develop programs to support creative and entrepreneurial people in building businesses that are based on and enhance the natural and cultural resources of the Northern Forest.
- Coordinate Regional Marketing
Develop coordinated marketing of Northern Forest products, businesses, tourism services, amenities and attractions, while maintaining individual state branding efforts.
- Buy Local to Keep Wealth in the Region
Support activities that encourage Northern Forest residents, visitors, institutions and government to “buy local.”
- Invest in World-Class Telecommunications
Deliver reliable, affordable and cutting-edge high-speed telecommunications to all Northern Forest communities through increased public-private investment.
- Improve Transportation Systems
Develop globally competitive, energy efficient, multi-modal public/private transportation systems to interconnect the region and its communities and support regional, national, and international trade.
- Harness Renewable Energy
Launch a four-state Renewable Energy Initiative that encourages energy efficiency, increases public and private investment in a diversity of energy systems, maximizes community wealth, and complements stewardship of the region’s natural resources.
- Prepare for Future Changes
Invest in research, tracking, and forecasting of natural, social, and economic assets in order to make informed decisions to understand, anticipate and adapt to changes in the region.
- Coordinate and Advocate for the Region
Establish a coordinating body of the Northern Forest states to support implementation of the SEI recommendations, continue regional coordination, and address future challenges and opportunities.
- Secure Federal Investment
Maintain and grow funding for new and existing federal programs that serve the long term strategies outlined in this report; Analyze and identify opportunities to more explicitly align existing federal programs with our recommended goals and actions.

The report was finalized and released in October 2008, and the Northern Forest Center continues to work on its implementations.

Coos Branding

By Destination Development, Inc.

For Northern Community Investment Corp.

December 2008

Background

To improve Coos County's attractiveness as a tourist destination, NCIC secured the services of Roger Brooks of Destination Development, a nationally recognized marketing firm based in Seattle, Washington. Mr. Brooks conducted a series of visits and workshops in 2007 and concluded his work with a final presentation in December 2008. He outlined a series of general principles, and also made some Berlin-specific suggestions based on his visit there, as follows.

General Principles

You have to be unique! Tourism is a competitive business. Every town wants some. It is a great source of revenue. Most tourism businesses are small, with fewer than 15 employees, so it is an opportunity to create a sound business with limited capital. But everyone is doing it, so find what is truly unique about your area that would entice some one to come here as opposed to staying home or going elsewhere.

Promote the experience! Not the buildings. Not the views. Promote the total experience. What can people do here that they truly cannot do elsewhere?

Make it easy! People have lots of discretion about where to spend their leisure time. Make it easy for them to pick you as an option. Don't just promote the county. Develop itineraries. Provide maps. Show people where to go. Make driving loops. Suggest interesting places to stop.

Market you anchor tenants! If the Balsams is the most unique thing in Coos County (as Brooks felt it was), tie promotional materials to that. Feature the lead attractions in the region in brochures and all people will benefit.

Information 24/7/365, please! Okay, the information booth can't be open all of those hours, but tourists are looking for information at a variety of times, not just when the booth is open. Put up kiosks. Create sign boards. Make it easy for visitors to find what they need.

Signage and wayfinding are key! These are visitors, guests in our county that we are discussing. They don't know where things are. Make it easy. Show them the way. Take a critical look at your signage. Is it easy to understand, even if you don't live here? Giving a street address to someone who doesn't know the streets is not helpful. Point the way.

Don't tell them you are closed! If you are closed, tell them when you will be open. In the spring? Tomorrow at 10 AM? And when you are open, tell people so. Put out a flag. Open the door. Make your site inviting.

Remember the rule of 10s! In order to attract visitors, try to have 10 unique, destination retail stores; 10 places to get some kind of food (ice cream counts!); and 10 venues that are open after 6 PM.

Bring people back! In order to capture greater value on your marketing investment, get people to return. Give them such a wonderful experience that they will return many times. And tell their friends about it. A one time visitor costs a lot of marketing dollars. Get them to keep coming.

Tourism has to be a community effort! This is not a public or private endeavor. Tourism has to involve everyone: chambers of commerce, private businesses, government, non-profit agencies. And in order to be truly successful, it involves not just the business and community leaders, it involves the direct service providers as well. The people selling coffee, managing the front desk at the motel, and selling newspapers on the corner need to be in on this as well. Train them. Educate them. They are your front line of contact with our guests!!

Berlin Specific Observations

This town has great bones! But some of them need some sprucing up. High marks for architecture, building scale, and walkability of the Downtown. But some cleaning up is in order. Suggestions included some simple things to start with: planters, benches, and some outdoor gathering places. Start small, maybe one section of Main Street, but start. involve government, businesses, the chamber, everyone. And remember the rule of 10s: ten interesting destination stores, ten places to eat, and ten locations open after 6 PM.

Gateways are important! The approach from the south, with the signage and park at Glen Avenue got good marks. Others were thought to need some improvement. A suggestion was to use these spots as opportunities not only to announce that a visitor has reached Berlin, but also to direct them to where you would like them to go: Downtown 2 miles, etc.

Wayfinding is critical! It was felt that much of the directional signage in Berlin was confusing to a visitor from away: multiple names for the same thing (river rides), directing people to street addresses (when they don't know where the streets are); and a lack of signs indicating when facilities were open.

Summary

Coos County is a great place to visit. It has an array of unique experiences to offer any visitor. But they have to know that you are here and it has to be easy to get around once they are here.

- Create a Coos County Branding Program;
Recommended: New Hampshire's Grand – Grand Resorts, Grand Adventures
- Market the region as a whole

- Make it easy for visitors to get around
- Identify several loops to travel around the County
- Make wayfinding distinct and uniform around the County
- Provide distinct and uniform kiosks around County

NCIC has undertaken the leadership responsibility for leading an effort (with others) to implement these recommendations.

Coos Transmission Loop

PUC Transmission Commission
December 2008

Electrical transmission lines typically have larger capacity in urban areas than in rural ones, because that is where the demand for service is higher. The move to shift more generating capacity to alternative fuels has upset that balance. Bio-fuel and wind generating facilities are typically located in more rural areas, which have access to both wood supplies and mountain top ridges and higher wind speeds.



Such is the case in Coos County. The PUC’s Transmission Commission, authorized by legislation in 2008 and required to file a report by December 1 of that year, found that there was a total of 570 MW of generating capacity being actively considered for Coos County, “actively considered” meaning that the proponents had filed appropriate documents with the regional entity that manages the electrical grid in New England. One of these projects, Granite Reliable Power, is seeking approval from the NH Site Evaluation Committee to undertake a 99 MW project in the Phillips Brook area in Dummer, Millsfield, and Dixville northwest of Berlin.

The transmission line in that area has at most, with reasonable upgrades, the ability to carry that amount of electricity, and little else. Additional upgrades range in costs from \$160 to \$210 million. Traditionally, once the capacity has been awarded to a particular generator, the next proposal in line has paid for the additional capacity needed to accommodate their project. There are some circumstances that would yield a different outcome, such as when the upgrade is seen as something that would enhance the reliability of the system for the entire New England region. Failing that, however, improvements to the Coos Transmission Loop would have to be paid for by the Coos project developers, with the expenses passed on the New Hampshire ratepayers.

The Transmission Commission met for several months in 2008, entering into discussions with potential project developers to discuss arrangements for cost sharing among several project developers. This has been done, and has been approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission under a system known as the California Model. While the project proponents indicated a willingness to discuss cost sharing, there was no agreement as to how that might actually be done.

The Commission also reviewed work recently completed by Dr. Susan Tierney, now an under-secretary in the US Dept. of Energy in the Obama administration. Dr. Tierney suggested that there is a need for national investment in the country's electrical grid, following in many ways the nation's investment in the federal highway system.

The Commission's conclusion was that the issue was likely to be on-going, and was unlikely to be solved without legislative action or federal involvement. New Hampshire legislation was filed in the 2009 Legislative Session by Senator John Gallus of Berlin and three Coos County representatives to the General Court. SB 164-FN-A sought a \$155,000,000 capital appropriation over a ten year period to fund the necessary upgrades to the Coos Transmission Loop. That bill was laid on the table before the Senate Energy, Environment, and Economic Development Committee in February 2009 and has seen no further action.

Suffice it to say that this is likely to be an ongoing conversation. The Granite Reliable Power project has had its final hearing before the Site Evaluation Committee, which is due to render a decision on the project in May 2009. If that is approved by all parties, including federal licensing agencies, it will effectively use up the remaining capacity in the Coos Transmission Loop, putting all other energy projects on hold until an arrangement for upgrading it can be agreed to by all parties.

Summary

Clearly 2008 was an exciting year for regional issues for Coos County and the Berlin region. The Carsey Report alone would have provided significant information about the current thinking of Berlin and Coos residents. But here we have the Coos Economic Action Plan recommendations, the Northern Forest Center's Sustainable Economy Initiative, the Coos Branding Project, and the Transmission Commission's discussions about upgrades to the Coos Transmission Loop all rendering opinions and recommendations.

Lots of meetings have been held. Lots of data has been collected and analyzed, but there are some common themes here.

- Internet access is critical.
- Training individuals in new (alternative energy) and traditional (health care) is critical.
- Cooperating and creating a common identity for Coos County is critical.



- Taking advantage of research that has already been done and making it available to entrepreneurs is critical.
- Sprucing up village and town centers to make them attractive to visitors, creative economy entrepreneurs, and average citizens is critical.
- Looking for ways to reduce energy costs is critical in all sorts of areas.

Themes of sustainability permeate all of these efforts. What steps are taken in the coming months and the next few years will lay the foundation for a new economy in Coos County. They must be taken in a way that is sustainable for the next generation, and the generations that follow that one.

There are always other topics that could be included in a chapter on regional issues. Inter-municipal cooperation is an ongoing topic, from schools, to dispatching, to sharing equipment. Interest in roadway upgrades that have the potential to link the Canadian Maritime Provinces with Northern New England and the Midwest rise and fall periodically.

But for right now, the recommendation is that Berlin focus on the reports that have most recently been completed. Assignments have been made, particularly in the Coos Economic Action Plan. Work with the assigned leaders for implementation. Help find them the resources that they need to complete their task. But, most of all, hold them accountable. See that the goals are met and the tasks are completed.

As the largest community in Coos County, as the city that is at the very heart of the Northern Forest, Berlin cannot help but benefit from the successful implementation of the recommendations contained in these various studies. And the timing seems right for that. Although there has been discussion about how the county needs to act as one, to pull together, much of that has been committed to only verbally and not in actions until the closing of the mills in Groveton and Berlin. If it is ever going to happen, it needs to be now. Berlin needs to take the lead to assure that these various projects and recommendations to come to fruition. It can only benefit the community.