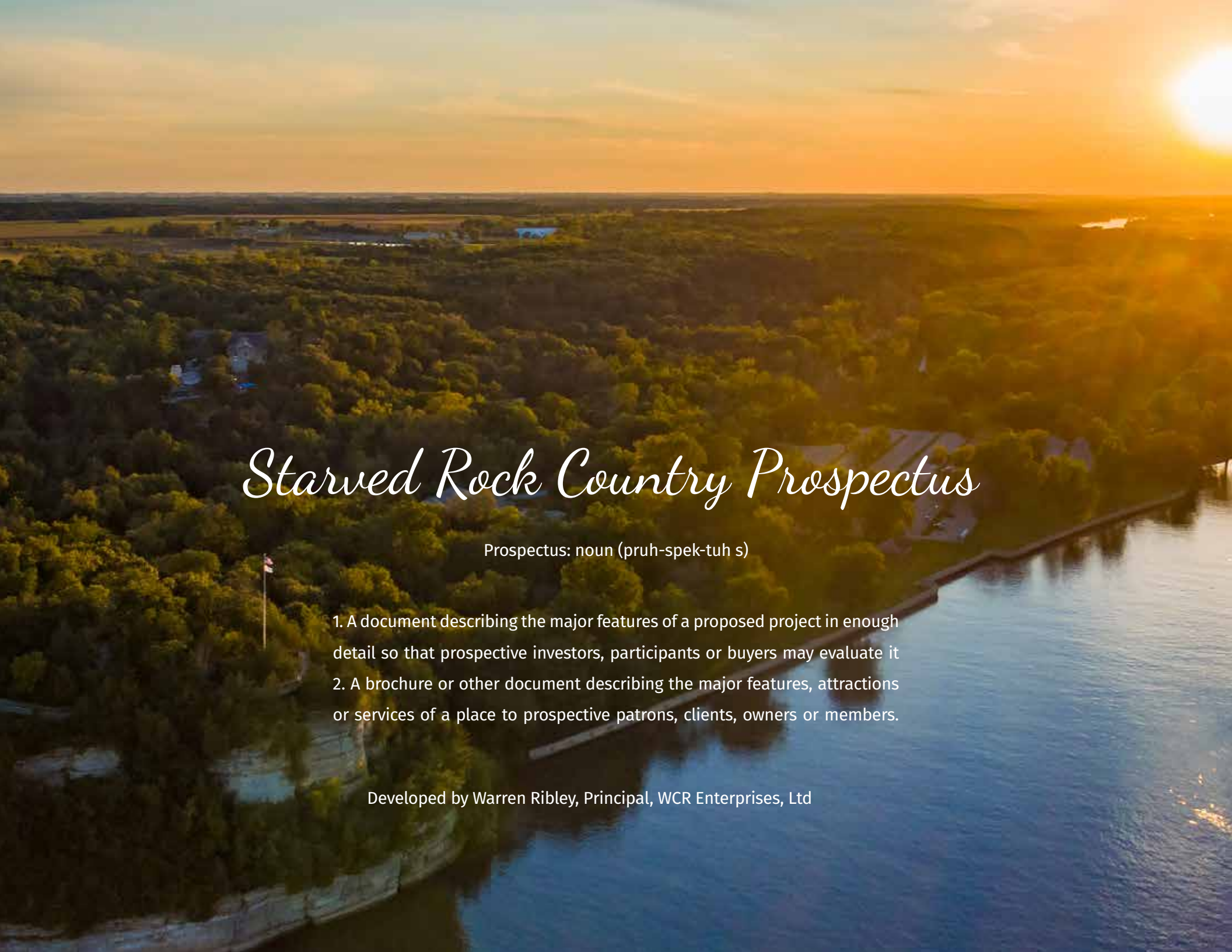
STARVED ROCK COUNTRY

Prospectus



Starved Rock Country Prospectus

Prospectus: noun (pruh-spek-tuh s)

1. A document describing the major features of a proposed project in enough detail so that prospective investors, participants or buyers may evaluate it
2. A brochure or other document describing the major features, attractions or services of a place to prospective patrons, clients, owners or members.

Developed by Warren Ribley, Principal, WCR Enterprises, Ltd

Starved Rock Country COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Foreword

The STARVED ROCK COUNTRY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION is pleased to present this community vision for STARVED ROCK COUNTRY as a way to grow and sustain our communities and provide opportunity for all the people that live, enjoy and call STARVED ROCK COUNTRY “home”.

The Starved Rock Country Community Foundation (SRCCF) is a collection of individual funds and resources given by local citizens to enhance and support the quality of life in STARVED ROCK COUNTRY. SRCCF is a tax-exempt charity that allows individuals, businesses and non-profit organizations to establish passthrough funds, temporary funds, scholarships and endowments within the confines of one large Foundation.

GOALS OF THE

Starved Rock Country Prospectus Project

- Set forth the rationale as to why STARVED ROCK COUNTRY should become the brand identity for the region.

- Capture the amenities that exist in the region and that define a lifestyle with appeal in order to transform day visitors to overnight stays, then vacation destination, and finally convert to new permanent residents including as a second-home destination and a retirement location.

- Present the case to local private and public leadership, thought leaders, opinion shapers and community stakeholders that coalescing around the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY brand is “the tide that raises all boats”.

- Outline a strategy for deployment and implementation of a plan to make STARVED ROCK COUNTRY successful in driving community and economic development as the future for the region.

BRAND IDENTITY FOR THE REGION

CONVERT NEW PERMANENT RESIDENTS

THE TIDE THAT RAISES ALL BOATS

COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

EXECUTIVE *Summary*

For most of the four-county Starved Rock County region: Bureau, Grundy, LaSalle, Putnam Counties, from Morris to Princeton and Mendota to Streator, tourism offers the best long term strategy for economic growth given its authentic local beauty and great collection of natural assets and outdoor recreactional activities. Conversely, capitalizing on these assets will lead to better quality of life that will help promote growth in the other business sectors and attract higher skilled workers to the region.

While the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY region is engaging in numerous marketing activities among many different agencies and organizations, a unified and coordinated approach is clearly lacking. Most marketing efforts are singular one-off attempts to bring visitors to a specified location or subsector of the total STARVED ROCK COUNTRY region. This leaves visitors with an underappreciation of the total experience that can be had in STARVED ROCK COUNTRY and therefore minimizes the overall return

on investment from the marketing effort. A more coordinated approach would bring more visitors and for a longer experience than a single day-trip.

Along with the disjointed marketing efforts, there is brand confusion and competition among the brands that confuses visitors and undermines the total economic return on investment. Illinois River Valley and North Central Illinois as brands fail to convey the total image of what STARVED ROCK COUNTRY has to offer. Those brands do not define the mental picture of the experience that should be conveyed. The region should coalesce around STARVED ROCK COUNTRY as the singular brand and all marketing efforts should lead with STARVED ROCK COUNTRY.

STARVED ROCK COUNTRY has the potential to become not only a more prominent tourism attraction destination for more than one-day visits, but also as a desirable second-home and retirement destination. The Baby Boom generation is seeking a relaxed quality of life experience closer to their family that is affordable but still offering the amenities to support an active lifestyle. Boomers are living longer, staying healthier and remaining more active. STARVED ROCK COUNTRY, because of its natural beauty and outdoor recreational assets, and its proximity to a huge population base within a two-hour commute, offers the best opportunity to become a second-home and retirement destination that rivals regions of Michigan and Wisconsin that have flourished by adopting this type of regional approach. This is the best way for STARVED ROCK COUNTRY to reverse the population loss it is experiencing and that is projected to continue.

To be successful, local leadership within the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY region must come together and coalesce around the brand as the best way to grow their local economy. Public officials and business community leaders and opinion shapers need to exert their natural leadership abilities and tendencies to educate and change behavior that is holding the region back from realizing its potential for economic growth.

This is not a short-term project and effort, but it is a beginning that holds the greatest economic growth opportunity for the region. Furthermore, longer-term practices and policies need to be

put in place to make this effort sustainable and successful for the long term. Local leadership must begin a serious discussion, take an open-minded approach and be willing to challenge the norms to bring about the change necessary for success. The purpose of this Prospectus is to make the case for STARVED ROCK COUNTRY to become a nexus for investment. Investment can come in many forms, but it must start with community investment where local leadership, thought leaders and opinion shapers coalesce around the brand and identity of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY and agree upon a strategy to enable STARVED ROCK COUNTRY to realize its potential.

Community investment will then lead to financial investment, both from within the community and from others that want to live within and participate in building STARVED ROCK COUNTRY for the betterment of the overall community and for their own personal satisfaction. These types of investments will attract more visitors and long-term residents that will pay dividends to the entire regional effort while making STARVED ROCK COUNTRY a better-known area for destination travel and relocation, either as a permanent or second home setting while driving economic and community growth.

The Overview

STARVED ROCK COUNTRY is generally described as the four-county region adjacent to Starved Rock State Park including the counties of Bureau, Grundy, LaSalle and Putnam. Starved Rock State Park is the tourism driver of the region, as one of the state's leading tourist attractions. It attracts nearly 3 million visitors annually thanks to its inherent get-away natural scenic beauty, blessed to be located within less than a two-hour travel from the 9.4 million Chicago metropolitan region. However, it is largely a one-day destination, attracting visitors from the Chicagoland region and central, western and northern Illinois. But STARVED ROCK COUNTRY is much more than just Starved Rock State Park. It is a region of unparalleled beauty, history, nature, quaint communities, friendly and authentic people and affordable real estate. There is "life beyond the Rock".

THE STARVED ROCK COUNTRY

"Experience"

Since the very beginning of the 1900's, the area around Starved Rock has been a vibrant resort area attracting visitors from all over the state and beyond. The area became more heavily industrialized in the mid 1900's as the country expanded & natural resources became vital to the growth of our nation. From Seneca to Princeton, Sheridan to Hennepin, Mendota to Streator, Morris to LaSalle & Peru— the entire Illinois River Valley offers a rich history that would rival any other region in the Midwest. STARVED ROCK COUNTRY boasts substantial historical significance dating back as far as 1858 when Abraham Lincoln debated Stephen Douglas in Ottawa at Washington Park seeking support for his bid to earn a seat in the United States Senate. Also, the Boy Scouts of America were incorporated in 1910 by Ottawa resident William Boyce. The historic I & M Canal Trail still thrives today as

a recreational amenity that features more than sixty miles of trails for hiking, biking, and snowmobiling.

The Rivers- Illinois, Fox, Vermilion- provide some of the most stunning scenery in all of Illinois and great opportunities for recreational boating. Sky Dive Chicago is a nationally-recognized facility that is home to thousands of skydivers per year. State Parks- Starved Rock, Matthiessen, Buffalo Rock, Illini- offer more than 4,500 acres of preserved land for hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, water recreation, horseback riding and cross-country skiing. These parks draw more than 3 million visitors to the area every year, making STARVED ROCK COUNTRY among Illinois' most popular "getaway" destinations.

Each town in the area has an authentic story to tell and each community has their own rich history, unique venues, and recreational amenities. But to most people in the Chicago area and other parts of the Midwest, this area is part of Starved Rock. It is STARVED ROCK COUNTRY.

The areas surrounding Starved Rock State Park, the "Land Beyond the Rock", have a rich tradition as a cherished getaway location for people within a two-hour radius for over 100 years. STARVED ROCK COUNTRY is an understandable brand name and location identifier that can already resonate with potential visitors. It also speaks to the authentic and unpretentious appeal that the area holds for people familiar with the region. This branding concept seeks to build upon a century-old tradition that still has incredible room to grow into the future.

When you examine the inventory of natural & recreational resources available in STARVED ROCK COUNTRY, you can readily identify an impressive itinerary of activities that are uniquely available and clustered in the area surrounding Starved Rock State Park. Many new people in the Midwest will be receptive to exploring STARVED ROCK COUNTRY as a place where they can go for relaxation, recreation, adventure and authentic lifestyles.

• Parks like Starved Rock, Matthiessen, Buffalo Rock, Illini, William G. Stratton and Dixon Waterfowl Refuge are among the most visited in our state.

• Sky Dive Chicago is the number one skydiving operation in the Midwest & one of the top three operators in the entire country. Sky Dive Chicago hosts over 75,000 jumps each year.

• There are numerous kayak, canoe, paddle board, ATV, motorcycle, cross country skiing, snowmobile, & even cart racing venues in STARVED ROCK COUNTRY.

• STARVED ROCK COUNTRY offers one of the best populations of Whitetail Deer to be found in the Midwest. STARVED ROCK COUNTRY also offers turkey, pheasant, duck, goose, quail and dove hunting opportunities.

• The Illinois River is the primary waterway leading from Chicago for adventurers on "The Great Loop", a continuous recreational waterway including part of the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf Intracoastal Waterways, the Great Lakes, Canadian Heritage Canals, and the inland rivers of America's heartland. Boating here, in general, is safer & more extensive than anywhere else in Illinois.

• Fishermen flock to the rivers, streams and lakes in this region in order to take advantage of the world class fishing opportunities.

• Even Class III Whitewater rafting is available along the Vermillion River.

KAYAK, CANOE, PADDLE-
BOARD AND MUCH MORE

ILLINOIS
RIVER

WORLD CLASS
FISHING OPPORTUNITIES

A general listing of the multitude of activities supported within STARVED ROCK COUNTRY include:

Water sports, paddle sports, pleasure boating, river boating excursions, rafting, kayaking, canoeing, camping, horseback riding, off-road motorcycle, ATV, racing, trail bike riding, cycling, motorcycle excursions, sky diving, hiking, climbing, white tail hunting, turkey hunting, waterfowl hunting, fishing, fly fishing, archery, trap shooting, geo-tracking, orienteering, geo-cache adventures, scavenger hunt adventures, geological & archeological exploration, snowboarding, snowmobiling, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, bird watching, nature photography, botanical arts, wine tourism, agri-tourism, fine arts, crafts, performing arts, spa, wellness, fitness, group tourism, adult education, youth education, social gathering, community activism, eco-consciousness, habitat rehabilitation, regional history reenactments and more.

The branding initiative of the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY experience must reach out to develop a strong network of regional partners who will form the foundation for all the rich programming opportunities. A vast array of potential partners abound, speaking further to the richness of the region.

Below are some of the organizations that currently exist within STARVED ROCK COUNTRY and should be considered stakeholders:

ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Organizations

Economic Development Corporation of North Central Illinois

STARVED ROCK COUNTRY Alliance

Grundy County Economic Development Corporation

North Central Illinois (NCI) Works

Best Employment Skills Team (BEST)

Grundy Livingston Kankakee Workforce Board

North Central Illinois Council of Government (NCICG)

TOURISM

Organizations

Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau

Ottawa Visitors Center

LaSalle County Tourism Coalition

Starved Rock Connections

Canal Corridor Association

Illinois River Road National Scenic Byway

I&M Canal National Heritage Area

CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE &

Business Associations

Ottawa Area Chamber of Commerce & Industry

Illinois Valley Area Chamber of Commerce

Illinois River Area Chamber of Commerce

Streator Area Chamber of Commerce & Industry

Grundy County Chamber of Commerce

Princeton Area Chamber of Commerce & Main Street

Mendota Chamber of Commerce

Walnut Chamber of Commerce

Morris Downtown Development Partnership

LaSalle Business Association

STARVED ROCK COUNTRY Capital Fund

Hennepin Business & Betterment Association

North Central Regional Betterment Coalition

PHILANTHROPIC

Organizations

Grundy County Community Foundation

STARVED ROCK COUNTRY Community Foundation

There are so many philanthropic organizations that we can't possibly mention all of them in the Prospectus. The overall attitude toward charity and helping others is perhaps the most outstanding factor in all of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY. Grundy County Community Foundation and STARVED ROCK COUNTRY Community Foundation are examples of philanthropic organizations that are more regional in nature.

The richness of the area, the affordable value of real estate, recreational opportunities, natural beauty, steeped history, an authentic sense of community lacking in larger suburban and urban areas and a nostalgic reverence for a less complicated way of life all define the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY experience.

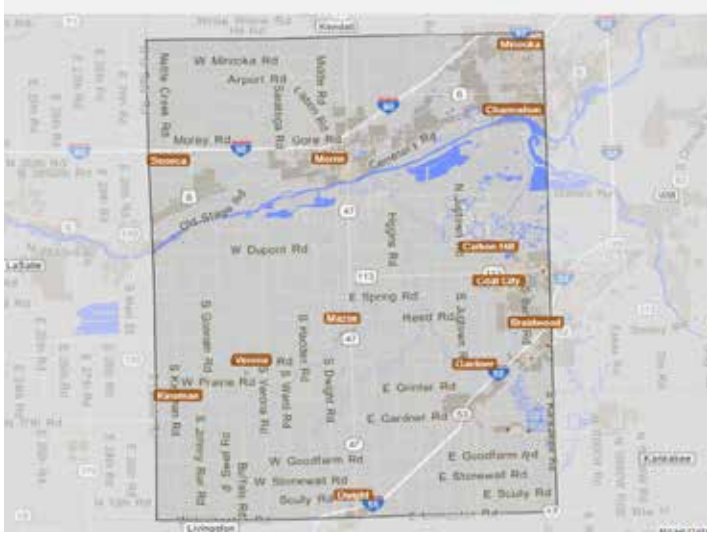
Community Profiles

STARVED ROCK COUNTRY is filled with small rural communities and larger towns that all boast a unique story and rich heritage. Many of these communities date back to the early 1800's and underwent periods of expansion as waterways were developed and rail came to the region. The area is rich in natural resources that spawned numerous mining and manufacturing industries.

These industries brought many diverse ethnic groups to the area whose influence are still seen today. While all of these communities add to the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY experience and are deserving of honorable mention, a few are highlighted below as examples of the multitude of experiences which abound in STARVED ROCK COUNTRY.

MORRIS,

Grundy County

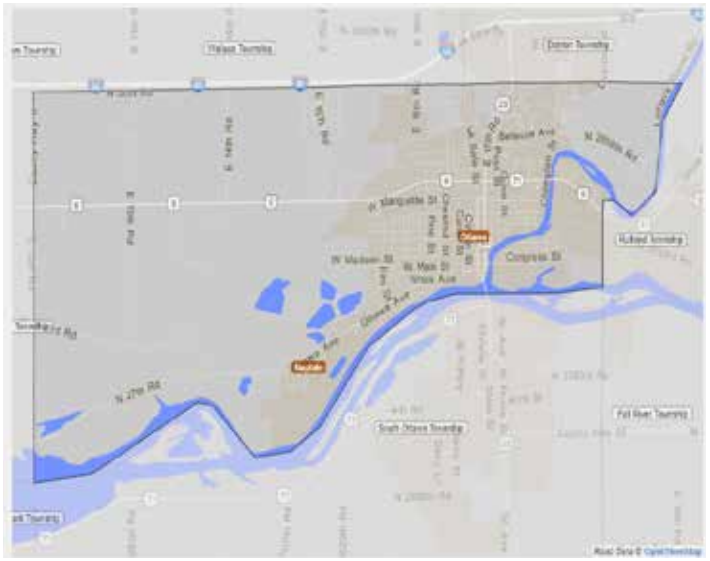


Morris is the Eastern Gateway to STARVED ROCK COUNTRY. At William Stratton State Park, Morris has a convenient public boating access point to the Illinois River boating experience, closest to the Chicago metropolitan region. Morris has an active downtown improvement organization, the Morris Downtown Development Partnership, that has had great success in keeping downtown business locations occupied, including housing opportunities in lofts above retail. A walk north from the canal on Liberty Street brings you to the heart of Morris. The eight blocks from Canalport Plaza to the Visitors Center/Chamber of Commerce at the old Rock Island Railroad Depot gives you a flavor of a century of change. Morris' Heritage Homes project serves to identify the historic homes within the City of Morris, to encourage their preservation, and to promote an awareness and appreciation of the community's history. The Grundy County Chamber of Commerce is the lead tourism organization and maintains an active schedule to attract visitors. The Grundy County Economic Development Corporation leads the business development effort for Morris and Grundy County. Morris' public leadership and the organizations noted above realize that creating and building a quality of life experience is critical to attracting families and high-skilled employees to leading employer groups such as the Morris Hospital and the chemical, manufacturing and utility sectors that are prominent. Morris sponsors weekend activities during the summer months in the downtown area and offers quaint shopping experiences and fine food and beverage establishments.

OTTAWA,

LaSalle County

Ottawa is the Heart of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY. It features the confluence of the Fox and Illinois Rivers and has an attractive and alluring riverfront that holds great potential. Ottawa is a very progressive City that has placed great emphasis on recognizing its historic roots and beautifying the City with mural artwork and restored buildings throughout downtown Ottawa. Ottawa hosts a visitor center that promotes the numerous natural beauty and recreational opportunities for all of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY. The downtown area is filled with fine dining choices and locally-owned and unique retail shops. Tangled Roots Brewing Company offers a unique farm-to-foam brewing experience where customers can view the entire brewing process while enjoying freshly brewed beers and delicious locally-sourced foods. Heritage Harbor on the east side of Ottawa offers the largest and most active harbor on the Illinois River that attracts many boating enthusiasts. Heritage Harbor also has an attractive selection of new housing opportunities, including single family permanent and second homes and vacation rentals in a beautiful setting overlooking the Illinois River. Ottawa also hosts the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY Marathon and Half Marathon in May and the 2 Rivers Wine Festival in early June, featuring Illinois wine, jazz and lobster.



SENECA,

LaSalle & Grundy Counties

The Village of Seneca is located approximately one hour from downtown Chicago and minutes from Interstate 80. Incorporated on February 16, 1865 as the "Village of Crotty" named after its founder, Jeremiah Crotty, an Irish immigrant, who contracted to build 11 miles of the Illinois & Michigan Canal, which bisects the Village. The historic canal is located through the center of the downtown area, and provides a great opportunity for photographers, hikers, joggers, nature lovers, bicyclists, snowmobilers and cross-country skiers. In 1854, the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad was built and designated the Village as a station stop known as "Seneca Station". Seneca was also well known for the Shipyard, which built Navy warships called LST's or Landing Ship Tanks. The Shipyard was in operation from 1942 to 1945 with a final production of 157 LST's built. The shipyards played an important role in World War II because they helped people by providing money and

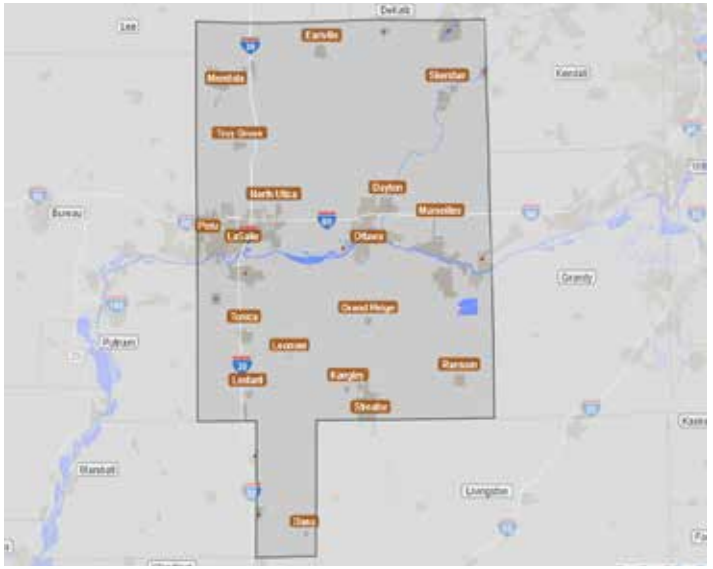
many jobs to the community. Adjacent to the canal is the Hogan Elevator which is the oldest remaining grain elevator and tours are provided through the Seneca Historical Guild. Another area of interest is the Illinois LST (landing ship tank) memorial, located in Crotty Park. The granite memorial honors those who built and utilized the LST's during WWII, Korea and Vietnam. Seneca was chosen by the Chicago Bridge & Iron Company as an operational shipyard from 1942-45. The Veterans Memorial Wall monument honors all who have served their country during the various wars. The Illinois River provides endless opportunities for family fun... the LST Memorial Boat Launch is free access to the river and includes courtesy docking, two-lane launch ramps, picnic areas and three large shelters.

LASALLE & PERU,

LaSalle County

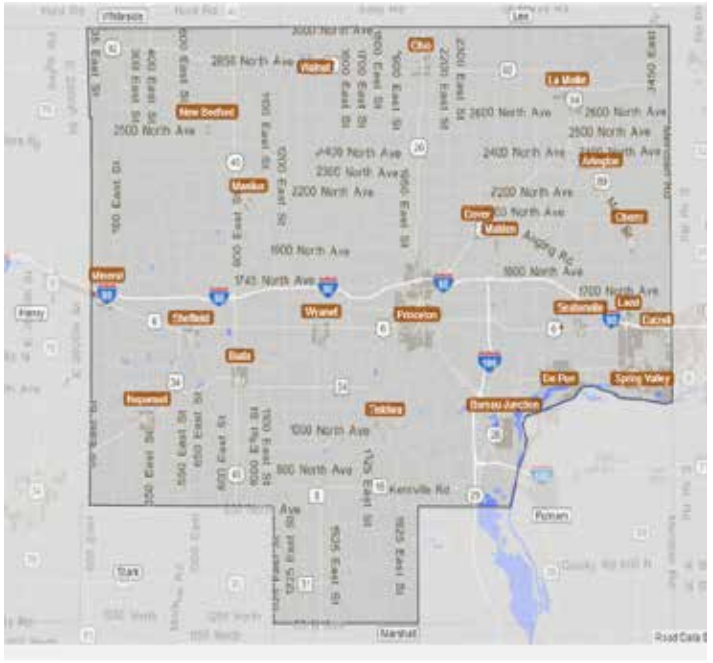
LaSalle and Peru are beautiful twin cities along the banks of the Illinois River and the I&M Canal. Two interstate highways also intersect nearby, making them a center for manufacturing and logistical commerce. Historically, LaSalle was an active mining community, including zinc and coal mining. Downtown LaSalle, particularly on First Street, bordering the I&M Canal one block away, hosts many excellent food choices and retail shopping. Redevelopment is ongoing including sought-after loft housing above the bustling commerce center that reminds visitors of time long passed in a modern, liveable setting. Lock 14 on the I&M Canal offers a visitor center and museum demonstrating life from the 1850's when the Canal connected Chicago and the Mississippi River. Other older historic structures have been renovated and redeveloped, such as the Hegeler Carus Mansion in LaSalle and the Westclox Museum and Entrepreneurship Center in Peru.

Peru is also the home of the Peru Mall, a regional shopping center. Aggressive and active plans are underway to continue these redevelopments, such as the Hotel Kaskaskia. The LaSalle-Peru area has an active performing arts community featuring the Illinois Valley Symphony Orchestra, Stage 212, and two regional arts organizations, North Central Illinois (NCI) Artworks and OmniArts.



PRINCETON,
Bureau County

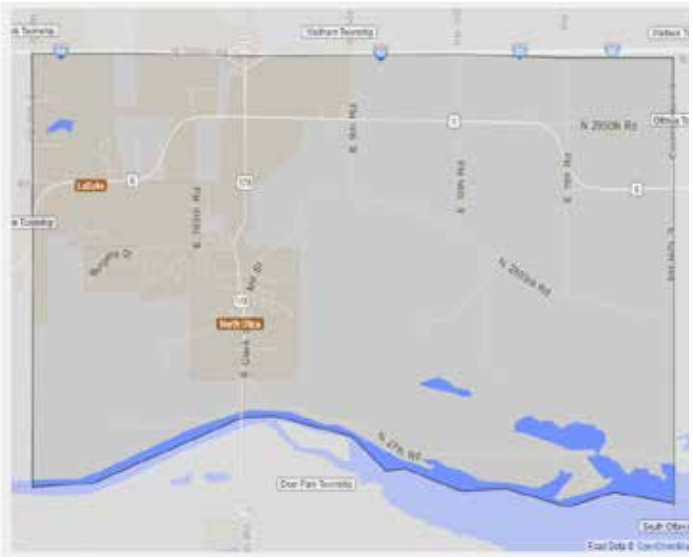
Princeton is on the west end of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY at Exit 56 off Interstate 80. It's hard to miss the giant Four Flags of Freedom which commemorate our veterans coming off Exit 56. Exit 56 leads visitors to Princeton's Main Street community which is packed with history, historic homes, attractive and unique retail shops and the Amtrak station. Princeton is served by Amtrak with 4-daily trains connecting Chicago, Western Illinois and the West Coast. Princeton's Main Street is divided into a North and South section. Princeton's Main Street has been the focus of the Downtown Revitalization Plan, the results of which are already evident. It is anticipated that the Plan's implementation will continue to yield dividends for years to come as the Main street continues to attract investment. Expansion of the arts, additional festivals, and strategies to capitalize on the historic and other attractions. Princeton hosts the Homestead Festival, the Festival 56 Film Series, the Down on Main Street summer concerts and the Z Tour Bike Ride in July. It also manages the Prairie Arts Center.



UTICA,

LaSalle County

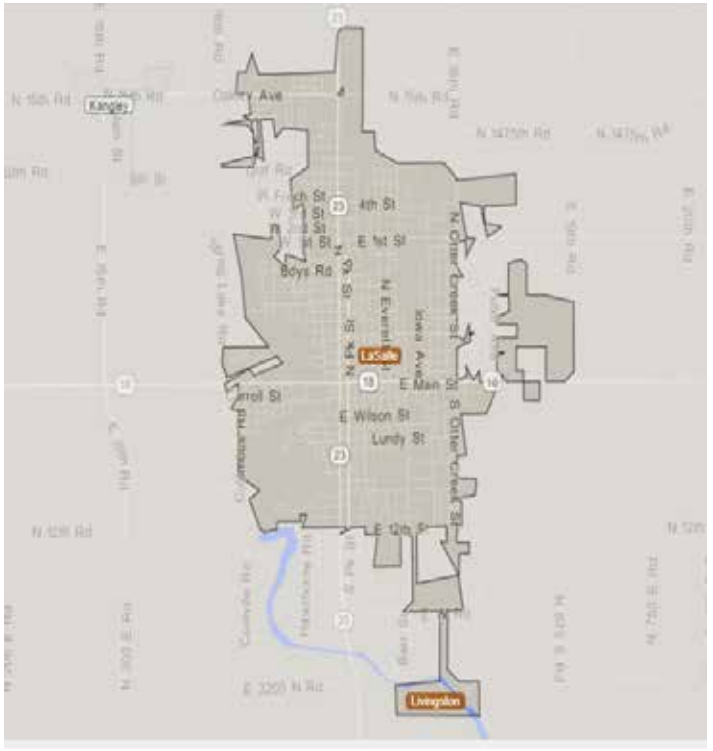
North Utica, often known as Utica, is a charming small community located on Route 178 at the front door of Starved Rock State Park and Grizzly Jack's Grand Bear Resort. Utica has rebounded from a devastating tornado in 2004, and is home to great boutique shops including the Makery on Mill, the August Hill and Illinois River wineries, live music at Clarks Run Creek, a bike trail along the I&M Canal, as well as a range of traditional diners, bakeries and local food outlets. Utica also hosts an old-fashioned Burgoo Festival on Columbus Day weekend. New lodging facilities in and around Utica serve visitors coming to the area for overnight stays. Utica has been selected as one of the Best Towns to Live for a Long Happy Life, and has been recognized in Triple AAA's Home and Away Magazine.



STREATOR,

LaSalle County

Streator lies at the south end of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY along the Vermilion River. Streator promotes itself as the “Quiet Place on the Prairie”. It is known historically as a mining community which attracted many different ethnic groups, and then later for its glass manufacturing. Like many communities in STARVED ROCK COUNTRY, Streator has many historic structures included on the National Historic Register, including churches, an original Carnegie library, the train depot, National Guard Armory and many residences. It also hosts an active arts community. The Community Players of Streator offer summer performances each year at the Performing Arts Center at Engle Lane Theatre. Streator hosts many community events and festivals throughout the year and has an extensive public parks network for a community of its size, including a four-block square city park and the natural outdoor beauty of Spring Lake Park. Streator sports small town living with an entrepreneurial spirit.



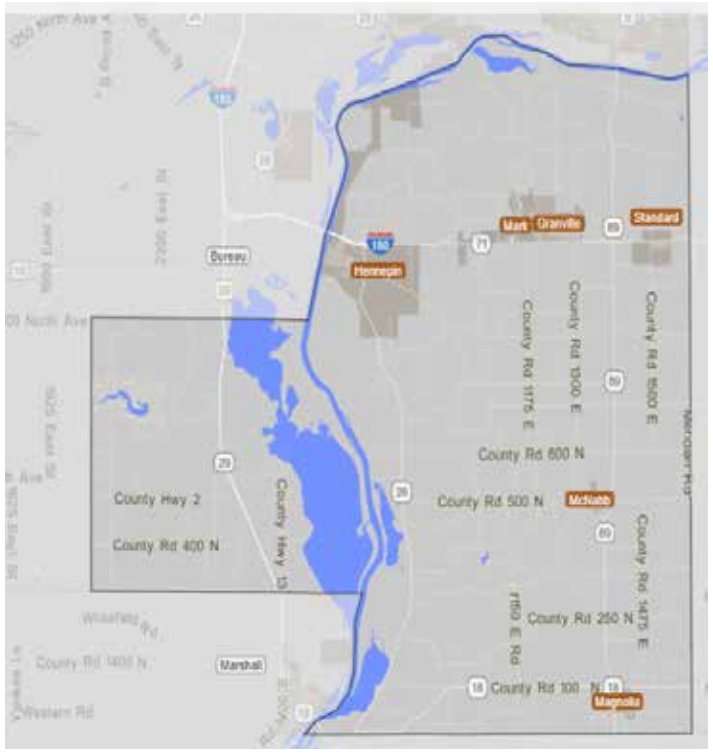
MENDOTA,

LaSalle County

The thriving city of Mendota is the result of the crossing of the Illinois Central and C.B.&Q. railroads. In 1853, upon their completion, a merchant erected the very first building for a general store on what is now the west side of the street, opposite the railroad depot. The place was named “Mendota,” meaning “junction of two trails.” Now home to approximately 7,500 residents, Mendota is located 55 miles south of Rockford. The city’s long history primarily revolves around the railroad, making it a critical stop for history buffs and railroad enthusiasts alike. The Union Depot Railroad Museum is currently home to the modern Amtrak train station and features several displays of railroad artifacts, passenger cars from the 1900s, and much more. Visitors can dive into Mendota’s history by also visiting the Hume-Carnegie Museum. Showcasing artifacts of local history, exhibits include items made in Mendota as well as a collection surrounding Wild Bill Hickok, among others. There are more than 5,000 photographs and artifacts that extend as far back as the mid-1800s. The Mendota Sweet Corn Festival attracts thousands of visitors each August; it features free sweet corn cooked in a vintage steam engine, and other special events. The Mendota Tri-County Fair is held every Labor Day weekend at the Mendota Fairgrounds. The city has two man- made lakes, Lake Mendota and Lake Kakusha, used for boating and fishing. Mendota also maintains a community swimming pool as well as several parks including Snyders Grove, a 104-acre reserve/park.

HENNEPIN,
Putnam County

Hennepin is the county seat of Putnam County located on the banks of the Illinois River. The village of Hennepin epitomizes America's rural communities in a charming and quaint manner. The town's location on the bluffs, overlooking the Illinois River, affords its citizens and visitors the opportunity to enjoy a myriad of leisure water activities supported by the Hennepin Marina which is right in their own backyard. The Putnam County Courthouse is the oldest Illinois County Courthouse still in use. Built in 1839, the Greek Revival structure is complete with a white-columned portico and is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. Early Greek Revival architecture is also featured in the restored Pulsifer House built in 1844. Hennepin is the center of nature tourism, agritourism and outdoor recreational opportunities that abound in Putnam County. Attractions include the Illinois River Road National Scenic Byway, the Dixon Wildlife Refuge on Hennepin and Hooper Lakes, the Agricultural Museum, and trails along the Hennepin Canal.



THE CASE FOR
Starved Rock Country

Approximately 90% of Illinois' total population, nearly 11.5 million people, lives within two hours of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY. No other destination in Illinois can make this claim, and that offers the richness of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY, including the relative affordability of real estate, recreational opportunities, access to natural resources, a sense of an authentic community, and a nostalgic reverence for a less complicated way of life. This quality of life is ideally situated for populations from Millennials to the "Adventurous Adult" Baby Boomer generation. STARVED ROCK COUNTRY is uniquely situated to capitalize on these assets in a way that can be transformative, which could become the leading driver for economic and community growth for years to come.

While the access to such a large population market is a significant asset, especially when coupled with the natural beauty and outdoor recreational opportunities, it also remains a significant challenge. While most visitors that come to Starved Rock State Park have a favorable impression, STARVED ROCK COUNTRY and what it has to offer remains largely unknown to many potential visitors and potential relocation residents residing within a two-hour drive. STARVED ROCK COUNTRY needs to establish itself as the leading brand for the region and be marketed heavily to this vast untapped audience. Michigan and Wisconsin figured this out long ago and defined the traveler and destination market through aggressive regional marketing efforts.

These characteristics and attributes offer STARVED ROCK COUNTRY the opportunity to become much more than a one-day destination for visitors. STARVED ROCK COUNTRY can become the next discovery region. Tourism offers great potential, but to sustain long term growth and prosperity for the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY region, the goal must be to attract visitors for a vacation destination and then convert that visitor to a second home or retirement community owner and resident.

The retention and growth of visitor numbers, and capitalizing on those one-day visits into

weekend stays and vacations, becomes the work of many organizations in the region, including various tourism agencies and local Chambers of Commerce. It is very important to go even one step further by convincing and converting these visitors of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY, either a second home owners or full-time residents. Achieving these goals holds the greatest economic and community development opportunity for most of the region's growth and long-term prosperity.

Potentially the greatest challenge facing STARVED ROCK COUNTRY in achieving its objectives, is the lack of unity among community stakeholders and public and private interests to rally around the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY brand. The marketing effort and vision to move the four-county region forward, requires that competition between interests, organizations and brands be amicably understood and resolved in an attempt to build a better economic future for all concerned.

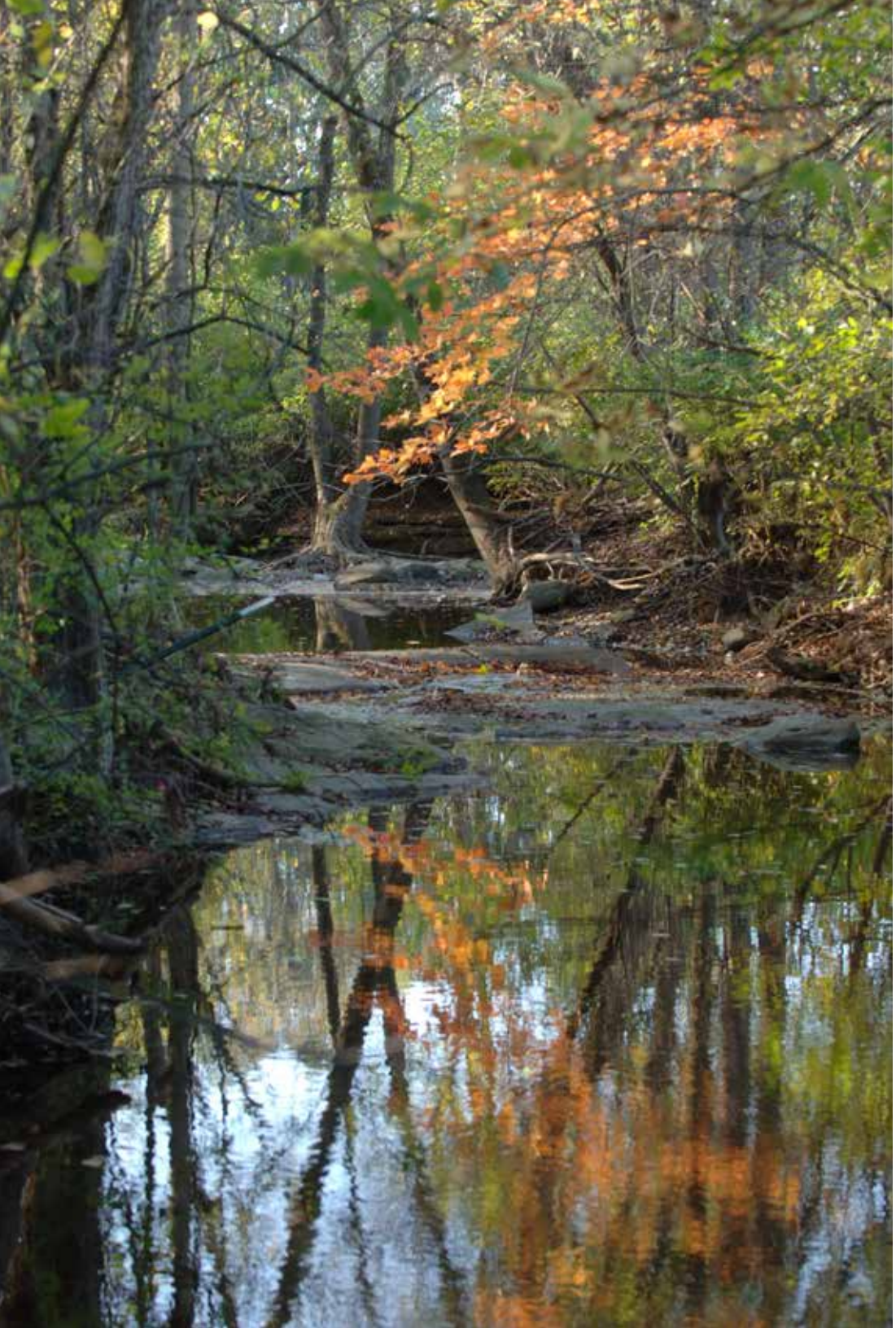
It is not the goal of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY to be an additional competitive threat to any existing entity, but to be the rally point or banner to support other efforts. To be effective, STARVED ROCK COUNTRY must be embraced and endorsed by the public and private leadership within the four-county region. Many organizations currently duplicate efforts in marketing; different organizations promote different brands; and available funding is dispersed without a comprehensive planning and approval process, which precludes maximizing the return on investment. Other regions across the country that have achieved maximum success have been able to overcome these obstacles, and it is a non-negotiable requirement certain that STARVED ROCK COUNTRY must overcome these challenges to achieve its mission.

Private leadership within the region must convene public leaders and have frank discussion about how to move the region forward. Clearly many good efforts are underway, and all activities are well intended and successful to an extent. But maximum effectiveness is not being achieved given the lack of cohesiveness on message, brand, marketing and vision. Building the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY brand is key to the entire effort of what needs to be accomplished.

STARVED ROCK COUNTRY is in some ways competing

with the terminology of Illinois Valley and North Central Illinois. While these terms somewhat compete as a brand destination, and will continue to be used in numerous conventions, it will be nesessary to more consciously use the terminology “STARVED ROCK COUNTRY” in order for the brand to become dominant and achieve its branding promise.

As noted in the NCI Works State of the Workforce Study Final Recommendations, “Starved Rock State Park is at the center of an impressive array of natural sites and other tourist attractions across the region. While research has shown good stewardship of these resources, the county and regional economic development institutions should continue to work to leverage these resources and collaborate with them to continue to support regional development. The region’s cultural, natural and other tourism assets are not as coordinated as the resources in some other regions, so it is recommended that the workforce, economic development and tourism agencies work in coordination to build on these resources in a coherent aggressive marketing effort and the expansion of some of the supportive institutions that can support these regional assets. Expanding agritourism, expanding the hospitality offerings in proximity to the parks and other tourist destinations, and conducting further research to identify opportunities to make the region a destination for longer stays should all be considered, both as economic ends unto themselves but also as key opportunities for workforce development in the region. Thus, it will be critical to strengthen linkages with the area colleges to prepare workers for some of the higher-skilled opportunities that can result from these economic investments.”



USE OF *Technology*

Utilization of cutting-edge technology and marketing will be needed for STARVED ROCK COUNTRY to become effective, and to be known as a brand and destination. A common technology platform, using shared technology, must developed in such a way that it is not intimidating to other tourism organizations. This technological approach should emphasize the development of a shared and coordinated web site, specific smart phone applications, augmented reality, and search engine optimization. The entire technology platform must create “an experience”. Creating the experience is paramount to stressing history, nature, beauty and all the assets of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY. The web site must have a broader geographic focus to initially attract or lead a potential visitor to STARVED ROCK COUNTRY. Smart phone applications can augment the experience at the local level once the visitor arrives and will guide their stay over several days. “Come, stay and enjoy the experience”

is the message to be created and delivered. The way in which visitors access information and make travel and vacation destination decisions has changed rapidly, and is undergoing significant change largely driven by the internet and social media marketing. These technology platforms are a powerful tool and their influence on travel and tourism will continue to grow. These new information communication technologies open new opportunities for destination locations to build direct links to potential visitors. Most travelers today employ some type of website and social media interaction to make their travel plans and reach their travel decisions. Not only is most of their planning done online, but they often turn to social media to ask questions. Most travelers admit that they have trust in recommendations from acquaintances, friends and family more so than advertising. Trip Advisor is only one example as a social network boasting over 390 million unique users and visitors. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are other popular social media traveler platforms. Each of these forums is driven by word of mouth which has always been a most effectiveand tructed marketing tool. By using these applications, tourists can access all kinds of information, book services, download maps and guides, leave reviews, and share pictures of their travel with a network of friends and family. Printed materials and print advertising is becoming increasingly less important in driving travel decisions, particularly with younger travelers.

To maximize effectiveness, the marketing technology platform must integrate a strong and active website with direct links, feeds and connections to social media platforms available on smartphones, tablets and personal computers. The most successful destination locations have figured out the importance of combining applications and web sites to provide visitors a full mobile experience. The major difference between social media and traditional websites is that the social media websites are user-customized and only loosely controlled by their website owners. STARVED ROCK COUNTRY's reliance on visitor traffic will require mobile-compatible sites with flexible web design frameworks, this will develop a high-quality user experience, whether it is via a desktop, tablet or smartphone. The speed

at which social media operates makes it possible for information to be obtained and shared instantly. This instantly available content makes social media popular with visitors who can access information anytime and anywhere. The information can be presented in novel ways that can be informative yet entertaining, while being informal at the same time. If deployed effectively, an integrated web and social media presence can play a significant role in tourism decision-making, marketing campaign development, and communication with customers. The goal is to create the best visitor experience by creating sites and applications that are convenient, user-friendly and personalized. Many tourism destination regions have yet to realize the full potential of the technological development that is underway and use it to their full advantage. STARVED ROCK COUNTRY has a window of opportunity if it moves quickly, while realizing that its efforts are already behind in a coordinated approach.

BEST PRACTICES- USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Examples exist of successful regional tourism efforts that have implemented good use of technology and lessons learned in developing a successful regional effort. Both are important to explore and understand if STARVED ROCK COUNTRY is going to be successful in achieving its goals.

BEND, *Oregon*

Bend Oregon is located 175 miles southeast of Portland on the Deschutes River. From its website, "...tucked neatly between the snow-covered peaks of the Cascade Mountains and the inspiring high desert plateaus of Central Oregon, Bend, Oregon has evolved from a sleepy lumber town to an international mecca for outdoor enthusiasts and people in search of active and healthy vacation experiences and tourist attractions." (https://www.visitbend.com/) Its website is beautifully designed and comprehensive, including access to social media. There also is a phone application, Bend Oregon, Locals Guide LLC, all available for a nominal $1.99 charge. The current population of Bend is 87,000, up from 52,000 in the 2000 census. Bend was initially a lumber town but now is identified as a gateway for many outdoor sports including biking, fishing, hiking, camping, climbing, rafting, skiing, paragliding and golf. Realizing that tourism was their best option for economic growth, Bend has done a wonderful job in transitioning their economy by capitalizing on their natural assets. In addition to tourism opportunities, they position their website around the idea of "MOVE HERE- MOVE MY LIFE- MOVE MY BUSINESS".

DOOR COUNTY, *Wisconsin*

Door County has achieved tremendous success since re-branding itself as a visitor destination. It is located on a narrow peninsula extending into Lake Michigan in Eastern Wisconsin. It is comprised of nearly 20 small communities and five state parks with many miles of shoreline. Door County has a population that has remained constant at around 28,000, but during peak tourist season, it will swell to 250,000. Door County markets itself as a county-wide travel destination and bills itself as a top destination experience in the USA. The website is comprehensive and provides great linkages to social media outlets, including a page of "Meet the Locals". A separate phone application is not evident. It does however have an extensive "Interactive Map" for navigation to many points of interest in many different categories. It also has a feature for purchasing "Gift Certificates". All-in-all, it is a very user-friendly website for visitors, all in a single source (https://www.doorcounty.com/login/) with separate personal account log-in features.

HARBOR COUNTRY, *Michigan*

A few years ago, Harbor Country Michigan discovered the power of a regional approach, wherein they successfully brought together eight local communities in Southwest Michigan. It is one of the best examples of regional branding and coalescing around a regional brand. A Google search of Harbor Country brings up several sites of diverse interests, all of which adopted the regional brand. Harbor Country is led and managed by the Harbor Country Chamber of Commerce. They have gone to lengths to protect their brand through trademarking. Harbor Country boasts of a life experience including beaches to interior activities such as the local foods connections abundant in the area. From the web site, "Harbor Country is close by, yet a world away". It is a trademarked destination for an eclectic collection of 8 towns: Michiana, Grand Beach, New Buffalo, Three Oaks, Union Pier, Lakeside, Harbert, and Sawyer. "Harbor Country combines the best of both worlds — endless days at the beach and countrysides brimming with farms and orchards. Add a vibrant arts and culture community, a lively local food scene, and an explosion of world-class wineries, craft breweries and distilleries and its no wonder that Harbor Country has also become a year-round home for ex-urbanites in search of a slower pace of life amid the natural beauty of the Lake Michigan shore." (https://www.harborcountry.org/) It makes an appeal to attract "ex-urbanities" from the Chicago metropolitan market which is close in proximity to STARVED ROCK COUNTRY.

PORT DOUGLAS, *Queensland, Australia*

Port Douglas, in the tropical far northern region of Queensland, Australia, was a case study subject for the use of social media to attract visitors to a small regional destination. Port Douglas competes with many markets along the Coral Sea. It is known for its beach resorts and as a base for visits to both the Great Barrier Reef and Daintree National Park which has a biodiverse rain forest. It combines an active website to connections on Facebook and Instagram as social media forums, as well as at least three different phone applications: Keys to Port Douglas, Port Douglas Cruise Ships and 101 Things to do in Daintree. An excerpt to the Journey of Vacation Travel case study is included. (https://www.tourismportdouglas.com.au/)

GALENA COUNTRY,

Illinois

Galena Illinois is another example that has adopted a single brand , known as Galena Country, to market itself. Galena County encompasses portions of JoDaviess County, which bears some similarity to STARVED ROCK COUNTRY's recreational activities and rural counties. The two areas compete for visitors and rank somewhat closely in visitor attraction, collection of hotel tax receipts and in other demographic characteristics. The Galena Country website is well developed, including a page for journals and blog postings. (http://www.visitgalena.org/) It has extensive ties to social media outlets and the site can be translated in several different languages. The site also promotes Galena Country as a business meeting destination and wedding destination. It is complimented by three good phone applications: Visit Galena, Galena Tours, Galena Guide.

Greater Galena Marketing Inc. (GGMI) is the official destination marketing organization for Galena Country. Another interesting aspect of the website is the devotion to the promotion and governing structure of Galena Country. GGMI's mission is to promote Galena Country as the Midwest's premier destination for overnight visitors. GGMI is supported by a board of eleven directors consisting of representatives from the travel and tourism industry, local government and experienced businesspersons. It is a good example of a public-private partnership that should come together in STARVED ROCK COUNTRY to lead a major regional marketing effort. It has an extensive committee structure and posts its meeting agendas and minutes on-line. STARVED ROCK COUNTRY should consider adopting a similar type of structure. Also, within the GGMI portion of the website, there is an interesting component of Going Green and supporting Green Lodging and Retail. It also includes an Awards & Honors page. Both are good touches that should be more prominently listed on the main page of the website as, particularly, the green effort could be a potential draw to a visitor segment population.

ROBSON VALLEY REGION

British Columbia, Canada

The Robson Valley Region is a collection of communities nestled on the edge of the Rocky Mountains in northern British Columbia, between Prince George, Jasper, and Kamloops. The Robson Valley Region includes: Dome Creek, Crescent Spur, McBride, Dunster, Tête Jaune Cache, and Valemount. The Robson Valley Region presents its communities and lifestyle as a great opportunity to step back and enjoy life again while enjoying the outdoors, nature, fresh air, wildlife, and close neighbors. The website (www.discoverrvr.ca) showcases "who we are, what we are about, and all the opportunities available within our area".

The Robson Valley Region holds many parallels to STARVED ROCK COUNTRY. It is largely rural, historically dependent on industries now in decline rich in natural beauty and confronted by a realization that tourism and local investment holds the key to a sustainable future.

The website is incredibly well done. Emphasizing the quality of life and openly encouraging people not just to visit, but to relocate to a better way of life. It even includes a good array of local "Success Stories" of those who have embraced the new way of life.

The site has a very welcoming feel, and does an excellent job of promoting regionalism.

Wild River Coasts, Oregon Regional Collaboration Success Story

Wild Rivers Coast was an economically depressed region along the southern coast of Oregon stretching to the California border. Fishing and timber had been the historic economic drivers but were in significant decline from peak times. Tourism was recognized as a source of employment and a driver for economic growth in the region's economy, but it had not become a true focus for a regional economic development strategy. That began to change in 2012 when a local tourism marketing organization approached the State Tourism Office, and the Governor's Office also became involved. Meetings were held with key business leaders and an approach was made to establish a new philanthropic organization that took an interest and assumed a leadership role. There was little history of regional collaboration, though there were many common areas of interest among the two participating counties. While there was initial skepticism, regional leaders knew their areas were struggling and a new approach was needed. Much of the initial focus was to build awareness of the tourism assets and lay a framework for collaboration. Seed investments came from the local philanthropic organization and the State which led to additional investment from regional and outside sources. Eventually, staff from different organizations from within the region began working together and paid staff positions were redefined to maximize collaboration and flexibility.

Lessons learned were presented in and are taken from the report from the case study.

- While the regional seed money may be unique and not immediately replicable, such seed money is invaluable in aligning interests, conferring legitimacy and attracting other resources. Other communities and regions could look to a community foundation model or crowdfunding to build this resource.

- Be open to partnerships not immediately expected. Oregon Extension (think University of Illinois Extension or WIU) was an example.

- In places where "not everyone welcomes tourism with open arms," leading with outdoor recreation development projects can build goodwill because residents will directly benefit.

- Outreach and education should include those who have the power to invest in tourism. Focus on educating political and philanthropic decision makers about tourism and the variety of jobs it generates.

- Shaking up the interpersonal and regional dynamics (by altering the "normal" boundaries of the region) brings new voices, skills and interactions that can break down fixed opinions of who should do what and how things should work.

- Leaders were intentional about the roles they played within collaborative conversations, from asking tough questions to providing calm energy to opening their own minds.

- Keep an eye on the vision to sustain your energy. It doesn't take many people, just a few committed people and a handful of believers to get the ball rolling. Don't get derailed by not having everyone on board at the beginning.

- Give it some time to unfold. Coaching helped this region to sustain momentum after the initial flush of excitement when the workshops ended, and project successes became visible.

RESONANCE, *Consultancy*

(http://resonanceco.com/)

From their website, Resonance Consultancy creates strategies and brands that shape the future of places and products around the world. Resonance is an advisor in real estate, tourism and economic development. Their services span place strategy, place branding, place marketing and placemaking. They have completed more than 100 visioning, strategy, planning and branding projects for destinations and developers in more than 70 countries. They strive to make places better by building community and generating economic benefits for everyone involved. Included in this work is an examination of what makes regional tourism efforts successful based upon direct involvement in such efforts in many different locations around the world. The lessons learned seem appropriate for STARVED ROCK COUNTRY.

Resonance Consultancy's Regional Branding Keys to Success include:

1. The best regional branding is tightly focused on a single component of the regional offer, such as a heritage product, (e.g. Starved Rock State Park), with all other components (outdoor recreational opportunities, simplified quality of life, affordable living) playing a supportive role.

2. Even good regional brands fail if the implementation is not fully and rigorously controlled for quality. Broken hyperlinks on the regional portal or limited / out- of-date content says the regional brand is a poor step-child of the individual brands.

3. Generic brands do not deliver strong results. Although regional brands should, by definition, encapsulate a broader geography, their focus should not be homogenized in the process.

4. Communicating the brand and marketing strategy to the industry stakeholders and getting their buy-in is equally, if not more important, than

communicating the brand to potential visitors. The brand is more effective if it is multiplied over-and-over by the resources of the private sector.

5. Individual destinations within a region must subjugate their own brands to the broader regional brand to be successful. By taking a back seat and reducing the noise between individual destination brands and the regional brand, the former will gain from the collective success of the latter.

6. Consumers are generally passive recipients of a brand and will not actively search it out. Visitors will actively search for destinations, but don't expect them to know your regional brand. If they hit on your destination, make sure they are introduced to your regional brand and communicate how you fit in.

7. A successful destination brand must be fully implemented with seamless connection to all mainstream social media outlets. Creating a regional website for the regional brand is a good start, but certainly not enough – make the connection between the regional brand and all other avenues for social media. Then you have a chance.

8. Successful regional brands require a leader / champion (tourism organization) plus active participation from the individual destination marketers. Passive agreements between destination marketers within a region do not deliver results.

9. A clear understanding of the destination product (supply side) does not necessarily translate into a clear and compelling destination brand. Finding the essence of the region and connecting that to tangible destination products is much more effective. Creating an engaging, strong and meaningful regional tourism brand is a difficult exercise at best, but experience has shown that if done properly, it can be effective in raising the visibility and performance of a region previously known only by its disparate parts.

Demographics

STARVED ROCK COUNTRY is comprised of Bureau, Grundy, LaSalle and Putnam Counties. Grundy County is a different demographic given its closer proximity to the Chicago metropolitan area. Portions of the county are identified as suburban, while others rural. The other three counties are considered rural. To better understand the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY region, it's helpful to examine some of its demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

Employment

The STARVED ROCK COUNTRY region still struggles to recover from the economic recession of late 2008-2009. Unemployment levels have generally returned to 2008 levels but with fewer workers in the overall labor force. Still the unemployment rate average of the four counties remains above the State average (6.3% to 6.0%). Grundy (6.8%) and LaSalle Counties (6.7%) have been the slowest to recover.

COUNTY	YEAR	LABOR FORCE	EMPLOYED	UNEMPLOYED WORKERS	RATE
2016					
BUREAU COUNTY	2016	17,353	16,303	1,050	6.10
GRUNDY COUNTY	2016	25,665	23,910	1,755	6.80
LASALLE COUNTY	2016	57,245	53,384	3,861	6.70
PUTNAM COUNTY	2016	3,115	2,941	174	5.60
STARVED ROCK COUNTRY		103,378	96,538	6,840	6.30
IL AVERAGE					6.00
2008					
BUREAU COUNTY	2008	19,294	18,126	1,168	6.10
GRUNDY COUNTY	2008	26,237	24,348	1,889	7.20
LASALLE COUNTY	2008	59,085	54,522	4,563	7.70
PUTNAM COUNTY	2008	3,206	2,982	224	7.00
STARVED ROCK COUNTRY		107,822	99,978	7,844	7.00
IL AVERAGE					6.60

Hospitality, as an employment sector, often isn't captured in regional studies. However, STARVED ROCK COUNTRY has a unique opportunity to grow this service sector through direct employment and the fostering of new business establishments, both of which have direct and indirect economic growth impacts. The region is well-suited to providing adequate training for these opportunities through the network of community colleges which would include the Illinois Valley Community College, the Small Business Development Center operated by the Starved Rock Country Alliance, and other service providers in the area. This can also be a source of lifestyle-based learning and culture desired by relocating residents.

Population

Population demographics and trends are important characteristics of a region's overall strength and health. Having a readily available workforce is critical for economic and community growth. When populations decline, added pressure is placed on employers seeking qualified workers. Communities suffer from a declining tax base that increases the urgency to grow local economies. Regions must rally around their strongest assets to bring visitors and, eventually, more full-time residents to insure growth.

Unfortunately, most of the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY region is experiencing population loss that is projected to continue. Only Grundy County has experienced population growth in the past few years and that growth is in the part of the county that identifies itself as more suburban. According to the NCI State of the Workforce report, issued in July 2017, overall population in Bureau, LaSalle and Putnam Counties is expected to continue declining over the next five-years, repeating the trend from 2011-2016. Particularly concerning is that the most severe loss in population is in the 35-54 age range, which is the highest contributor to to job retention and growth.

Population increases in those counties are only in populations under 5-years of age and over 55 years. These populations are those that require the greatest amount of support services. The STARVED ROCK COUNTRY region must reverse the population loss trends of its most economically productive income earners or devise alternate strategies to turn around the decline by attracting new residents and investment to its region. In the existing economy of the region, the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY brand and mission, which should be designed to attract new longer-stay and permanent residents to the region, will capitalize on its strategic outdoor nature and beauty assets. This approach offers the best option to reverse the economic decline discussed above.

STARVED ROCK COUNTRY Population Trends

Age Cohort	2011 Population	2016 Population	Projected Change (2011-2016)	% Change	Projected Change (2016-2021)	% Change
LaSalle County Population						
Under 5 Years	6,483	5,953	(530)	(8)	483	8
5 to 19 Years	22,042	20,547	(1,495)	(7)	(1,370)	(7)
20 to 34 Years	20,311	19,949	(362)	(2)	(750)	(4)
35 to 54 Years	31,090	27,973	(3,117)	(10)	(1,863)	(7)
Over 55 Years	33,759	36,559	2,800	8	1,780	5
TOTAL	113,684	110,981	(2,703)	(2)	(1,720)	(2)
Putnam County Population						
Under 5 Years	295	243	(52)	(18)	5	2
5 to 19 Years	1,075	961	(115)	(11)	(99)	(10)
20 to 34 Years	908	870	(38)	(4)	(73)	(8)
35 to 54 Years	1,642	1,391	(251)	(15)	(123)	(9)
Over 55 Years	2,051	2,146	95	5	61	3
TOTAL	5,973	5,611	(362)	(6)	(229)	(4)
Bureau County Population						
Under 5 Years	1,871	1,864	(7)	0	101	5
5 to 19 Years	6,793	6,135	(658)	(10)	(268)	(4)
20 to 34 Years	5,407	5,384	(23)	0	(185)	(3)
35 to 54 Years	9,264	8,145	(1,119)	(12)	(682)	(8)
Over 55 Years	11,314	11,859	545	5	200	2
TOTAL	34,651	33,389	(1,262)	(4)	(836)	(3)

Age Cohort	2011 Population	2016 Population	Projected Change (2011-2016)	% Change	Projected Change (2016-2021)	% Change
Grundy County Population						
Under 5 Years	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
5 to 19 Years	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
20 to 34 Years	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
35 to 54 Years	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Over 55 Years	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
TOTAL	50,073	50,437	364	1	N/A	N/A

Source: NCI Works State of the Workforce Report

Source: US Census (Grundy County)

Income & Poverty

Median Household Incomes and Poverty Rates are also helpful indicators of a region's prospect for continued growth and prosperity. According to most recent data from the US Census Bureau, the average poverty rate for Illinois statewide is 13%, and the average median household income is $59,590 annually. Only LaSalle County exceeds the statewide average on poverty with a 13.3% rate. Of concern though, is that the Census Bureau notes a significant increase in poverty from 2006-2017 in all populations for Grundy and LaSalle Counties. For families with children 0-17 years old, Bureau County also joins the other two mentioned. These warning signs abound for the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY region and demand immediate attention. With respect to median household income, Grundy and Putnam Counties are above the statewide average at $71,969 and $65,902 annually. Compared to all 102 counties, Grundy ranks ninth highest in median household income, Putnam tenth, LaSalle twenty-fourth and Bureau thirty-seventh.

Country	Median House-hold Income $	Poverty Rate %
Bureau County	$53,410	11.5
Grundy County	$71,969	7.9
LaSalle County	$56,543	13.3
Putnam County	$65,902	8
IL Comparative	$59,590	13

Source: US Census Bureau, 2016 SAIPE, released Nov. 2017

Housing

Affordable housing is also an important indicator for attracting new residents to a community. The STARVED ROCK COUNTRY region offers affordable housing values and could be considered undervalued, particularly in comparison to other regions in which it might compete. This is most notable in the leisure and outdoor recreation economic sectors. When compared to Illinois counties in the Chicago metropolitan region, the low housing in STARVED ROCK COUNTRY serves as a natural draw to own property in the area. The same holds true for markets across the state that could be viewed as competitors of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY. Grundy County values are skewed due to its proximity to the Chicago metropolitan region, and therefore has the tenth highest average listing price among Illinois counties. But after that, Putnam ranks 34th, LaSalle 42nd and Bureau 46th among all Illinois counties. Given the amenities available throughout STARVED ROCK COUNTRY, housing is a good value and should be a prime factor to attract new residents for a second home or as a place to retire.

Residing in STARVED ROCK COUNTRY offers a high quality of life at an affordable price, particularly for second-home or retirement ownership, and offers easy access to families and grandchildren that have taken root in Chicago and its suburbs. Parents and grandparents can create their own empty nest community by making new friends and taking up new hobbies but yet remain close enough to not miss family activities, such as dance recitals, soccer games and other life moments. What is lacking is a coordinated marketing strategy to promote the attributes of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY to potential new homeowners outside of the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY region.

COUNTY	AVE. LISTING PRICE	MEDIAN SALE PRICE
DuPage	$478,824	-
Lake	$476,426	$257,250
Cook	$360,726	$208,000
Kane	$350,540	$233,000
McHenry	$298,525	-
Will	$297,330	$222,500
Kendall	$274,962	$236,000
Jasper	$274,671	-
Jo Daviess	$224,663	-
Grundy	$220,113	$167,500
Monroe	$211,902	$194,000
Effingham	$202,582	-
Woodford	$196,242	-
Boone	$195,244	$163,000
DeKalb	$190,898	-
McLean	$184,171	-
Champaign	$181,417	$166,750
Sangamon	$174,463	$135,000
Piatt	$169,855	-
Peoria	$169,252	$125,000
Menard	$163,415	-
Tazewell	$158,734	$128,500
Ogle	$157,650	$125,000
Jersey	$155,819	$109,750
Pope	$155,427	-
Carroll	$155,423	-
Knox	$153,871	$75,000
Marshall	$152,286	-

COUNTY	AVE. LISTING PRICE	MEDIAN SALE PRICE
Adams	$149,199	-
Johnson	$146,759	$135,000
Kankakee	$145,915	$140,000
Union	$145,170	$85,750
Crawford	$144,804	-
Putnam	$144,106	-
Rock Island	$143,358	$106,000
Williamson	$139,147	-
Washington	$138,621	-
Pike	$137,989	-
Lee	$136,189	$117,000
Saint Clair	$136,046	$160,750
Clinton	$135,210	$142,500
La Salle	$133,505	$115,500
Jackson	$131,473	$36,000
Madison	$129,620	$136,000
Clark	$124,975	-
Bureau	$124,796	$85,000
Cumberland	$124,757	-
Jefferson	$124,666	$100,000
Stephenson	$124,469	-
Shelby	$121,020	-
Winnebago	$119,180	$115,000

STARVED ROCK COUNTRY Attraction Market Competing Market

Source: Trulia, Aug. 2017 Data

As noted in the NCI Works State of the Workforce Report, the region's housing stock is more than 90% occupied and, on average, consists of older dwellings than state and national averages. There is concern with the aging of the housing stock in the region. It will be critical for the area to continue building new housing to meet future needs. The housing availability needs to include a mix of different types of housing, including vacation rentals, apartments, condominiums, single and multi-family. The housing mix needs to speak to the demographic profile that STARVED ROCK COUNTRY needs to attract. Heritage Harbor in Ottawa is a great example of an entity that is working to address these needs in STARVED ROCK COUNTRY.

In 2016, there were a limited number of new housing starts within the area, with fewer than 108 housing starts in Bureau, LaSalle and Putnam Counties (Grundy not included in the NCI region). There were neither 3-4 nor 5+ unit permits issued in 2016. In 2015, there were permits issued for eight 5-unit buildings in Bureau County and one 2-unit building in LaSalle County. Particularly if the area is interested in retaining and attracting young professionals, and other younger workers, is there a need for communities and developers to consider expanding the scale of multi-unit housing options.

Several communities are doing a good job of converting downtown upper buildings into housing stock. LaSalle, Morris, Ottawa and Princeton are all examples. This type of adaptive reuse, creating walkable communities, is essential to bringing vitality into the downtown areas and attracting the type of extended stay and permanent residents to STARVED ROCK COUNTRY. Cities and villages should encourage this type of development through zoning incentives and TIF Districts. The use should also permit the use of short-term vacation stays such as Airbnb and Vacation Rental By Owner (VRBO). A spot check showed approximately 75 properties currently listed around STARVED ROCK COUNTRY on Airbnb and 30 on VRBO. Many overlap and are highly concentrated in proximity to Starved Rock State Park.

STARVED ROCK COUNTRY

Tourism Economic Impact Statistics

Hospitality, generally the tourism sector, is not measured as a major employment sector within the labor market analysis of any of the counties. It is not categorized as one of the measured subsectors. However, the data below demonstrates a significant economic impact from visitor attraction and offers a bright and ripe opportunity for STARVED ROCK COUNTRY if local leadership makes visitor attraction and retention a priority as an economic growth strategy. STARVED ROCK COUNTRY is slightly exceeding the five-year comparative State averages in increased travel expenditures, increased hospitality related payrolls, increased employment in hospitality and increased hotel tax revenues. This indicates that an extra effort around a strategic plan to increase traveler visits to STARVED ROCK COUNTRY could boost these averages even more.

The county data presented includes receipts collected within the county from the county and cities that have enacted the hotel operator tax. Non-home rule counties and cities may impose a hotel operator tax up to 5%. Most of the major communities and counties in STARVED ROCK COUNTRY have passed ordinances establishing the tax at the 5% level.

Other counties that are mostly rural and have a state park lodge or other major attractions like Starved Rock Country (Franklin County- Rend Lake (Lodge currently closed); Jackson County- Giant City; Jersey- Pere Marquette, Pike County- Outdoor Recreation, Hunting & Lodging) lag significantly behind STARVED ROCK COUNTRY.

It is noteworthy to look at Jo Daviess County, the host to Galena Country. Jo Daviess County has many more sites collecting the hotel tax (double that of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY), but their receipts are comparable to LaSalle County. That shows the dominance of the Starved Rock Lodge, but also shows the potential for more revenue if more operators could be added, including the vacation rental market.

	Travel Expenditures	Payroll	Employment	State Tax Receipts	Local Tax Receipts
2016	$	$	#	$	$
State of Illinois	35,075,000,000	10,240,000,000	302,450	1,764,000,000	869,200,000
Bureau	55,390,000	6,530,000	230	4,250,000	900,000
Grundy	73,150,000	10,070,000	420	5,260,000	1,370,000
LaSalle	188,620,000	35,600,000	1400	10,490,000	3,760,000
Putnam	5,950,000	810,000	200	350,000	460,000
SRC Totals	323,110,000	53,010,000	2,250	20,350,000	6,490,000
% Increase 2013-2016	%	%	%	%	%
State of Illinois	9.19	16.48	8.29	6.17	15.53
Bureau	6.99	14.40	4.35	6.82	13.33
Grundy	15.52	22.14	14.29	14.45	21.17
LaSalle	9.47	16.60	8.57	7.63	15.69
Putnam	7.39	14.81	0.00	5.71	13.04
SRC Totals	10.38	17.36	8.44	9.19	16.33

Source: US Travel Association

Travel Expenditures: Money spent by travelers on such things as public transportation, food service, auto transportation, lodging, retail & entertainment / recreation.

Payroll: Wages & salaries directly to employees servicing the traveler in such areas as public transportation, food service, lodging, entertainment / recreation, travel planning, retail & auto transportation.

Employment: The actual number of jobs supported by Illinois tourism. Jobs vary from executive / management to service-oriented.

Tax Receipts: Travel tax receipts are the taxes generated from revenues attributed to travel spending in Illinois. Travel-generated tax revenues are a significant economic benefit as governments use these funds to support the travel infrastructure and other public programs.

ACCESS TO *Health Care*

Health care access is available throughout STARVED ROCK COUNTRY. Seven primary hospitals serve the four-county region and are supplemented by several satellite facilities, clinics and urgent care locations offering an array of medical services. Healthcare providers include OSF Saint Elizabeth Healthcare Center (Ottawa), Illinois Valley Community Hospital (Peru), OSF Saint Paul Medical (Mendota), OSF Center for Health (Streator), Perry Memorial Hospital (Princeton), Saint Margaret's Hospital (Spring Valley) and Morris Hopsital and Healthcare Center (Morris). Having an adequate amount of access to health care and health wellness facilities in STARVED ROCK COUNTRY leads to a healthy, maintained population and provides a thriving healthcare economy for employment. It's also noteworthy that a higher average of the population in the region has health insurance to offset the costs incurred through treatment, in comparison to state and national averages. The local county health departments supplement medical care with health education, wellness, screening and other services.

Crime

Crime in STARVED ROCK COUNTRY is comparably low. The region has dramatically less violent crime incidents when compared to the state and national figures.

LONG TERM
Sustainability

The key to long term success of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY, if it is to become a reality, is a plan to insure its long-term viability and sustainability. This essentially becomes a funding issue that is predicated on a reliable revenue stream. The other issue central to sustainability is implementation and management.

Below are some initial concepts on how STARVED ROCK COUNTRY could achieve long term financial sustainability.

STATE / FEDERAL
Public Grants

While it currently is a difficult climate to access public funding, the effort should continue to be pursued. The Illinois Office of Tourism is one option. Federal sources are also difficult, but an effort should be explored with the Economic Development Administration and possibly the US Department of Agriculture Rural Development programs. Another option should be to explore with the Heritage Corridor Convention & Tourism Bureau to see if any reprioritization could be achieved to provide funding to the effort.

PRIVATE GRANTS /
Philanthropic Funds

Visitor attraction and retention and conversion to second home or permanent residency has clear economic and community development goals that improve quality of life within the region and help alleviate societal problems concerning lack of employment opportunities and increasing poverty rates. Efforts to provide economic growth and improvement of community quality of life are goals that are supported by private giving and philanthropic efforts. The leadership of the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY initiative should be prepared to make the case for this type of investment. The effort cannot be successful without this type of local private support. The case studies presented above also support this point.

REAL ESTATE
Transfer Tax

Illinois law allows local counties to establish a county real estate tax of 25 cents per $500 of value on real estate transactions. Only Grundy County has adopted this type of revenue source. The Cities of LaSalle and Peru, as home rule cities, also can levy real estate transfer taxes. A real estate transfer tax that promoted a strategy of attracting new permanent residents to the area through home ownership would have a positive return on investment.

LOCAL HOTEL
Tax Receipts

Counties and cities in the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY region collect nearly $6.5 million annually in local “pillow taxes”. A strong case should be made to access some small portion of theses revenues to support the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY initiative. The local communities and counties must be partners in this effort if it has any chance of success. Using this revenue source is directly consistent with the intent of the excise tax.

REALTOR
Give Back Program

Given the opportunity for increased economic growth through implementation of the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY initiative, realtors located within STARVED ROCK COUNTRY will be able to achieve financial gains from population growth as newer second-home buyers and permanent relocation buyers enter the market. The campaign promotes retirement living, healthy living, vacation living and opportunity to improve blighted properties. This activity drives real estate transactions. Under a voluntary program, participating real estate companies and real estate brokers could be asked to give a small percentage of commission earned per transaction back to STARVED ROCK COUNTRY. In return, these realtors will be highlighted in the marketing program and will also receive leads obtained through the program.

ADVERTISING *Revenue*

Businesses and tourism destinations wishing to be highlighted in the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY marketing effort (video, print, web, phone application) will have the opportunity to purchase ads that are linked to their websites. An advertising sales person will sell advertising based on commission. To minimize work load and streamline efficiency of campaigns, annual membership levels will be offered for advertising sponsors. Financial commitments from members will be collected at the time of contract signing, with participation at various levels.

SOLICITATION OF *In-Kind Support*

In-kind support includes resources required to promote the brand. For example, regional printers could donate printing necessary for the marketing campaign. Another form of in-kind support is in the form of volunteers that provide services, supplies, or pro bono assistance, such as legal counsel. Universities and Community Colleges could be solicited to provide internship opportunities or other indirect support. For example, the WIU Institute of Rural Affairs should be approached to determine how they could support the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY initiative through its programs including technical assistance, planning and grant writing.

MANAGEMENT & *Implementation*

Selecting the appropriate organizational structure to manage and implement the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY brand and initiative is critical to its success. Accomplishing the goals and vision of STARVED ROCK COUNTRY is a difficult and long-term task. It will require education, changing norms, aligning stakeholders, achieving support from public and private leadership and significant patience while charging ahead at the same time with a constant eye on the vision and mission. There are many moving parts that will have to be coordinated. Fundraising, technology development and `collaborative alignment among stakeholders will need to be pursued simultaneously. There will need to be a strong governance structure representing public, private and community interests from all parts of the region. One model that could work is a division of labor between two different entities. One would focus on fundraising development and acting as a fiscal agent and another tasked with operational and management functions including technology development, stakeholder collaboration and leading the marketing and outreach effort. This is a suggested model that seems to fit within the STARVED ROCK COUNTRY regional approach. Dividing the tasks into clear identifiable paths seems appropriate given the enormity of the undertaking. The Starved Rock Country Community Foundation might be appropriate for the development and fiscal agent role and a different established entity may take on the management and operational role. There must be clearly defined responsibilities and, if embraced, with a dual organizational approach, memorialized by a Memorandum of Understanding, all overseen by a governing Executive Leadership Council. The relationship between the Governing Council and the individual Boards of the two lead entities would need to be identified in the Memorandum of Understanding.

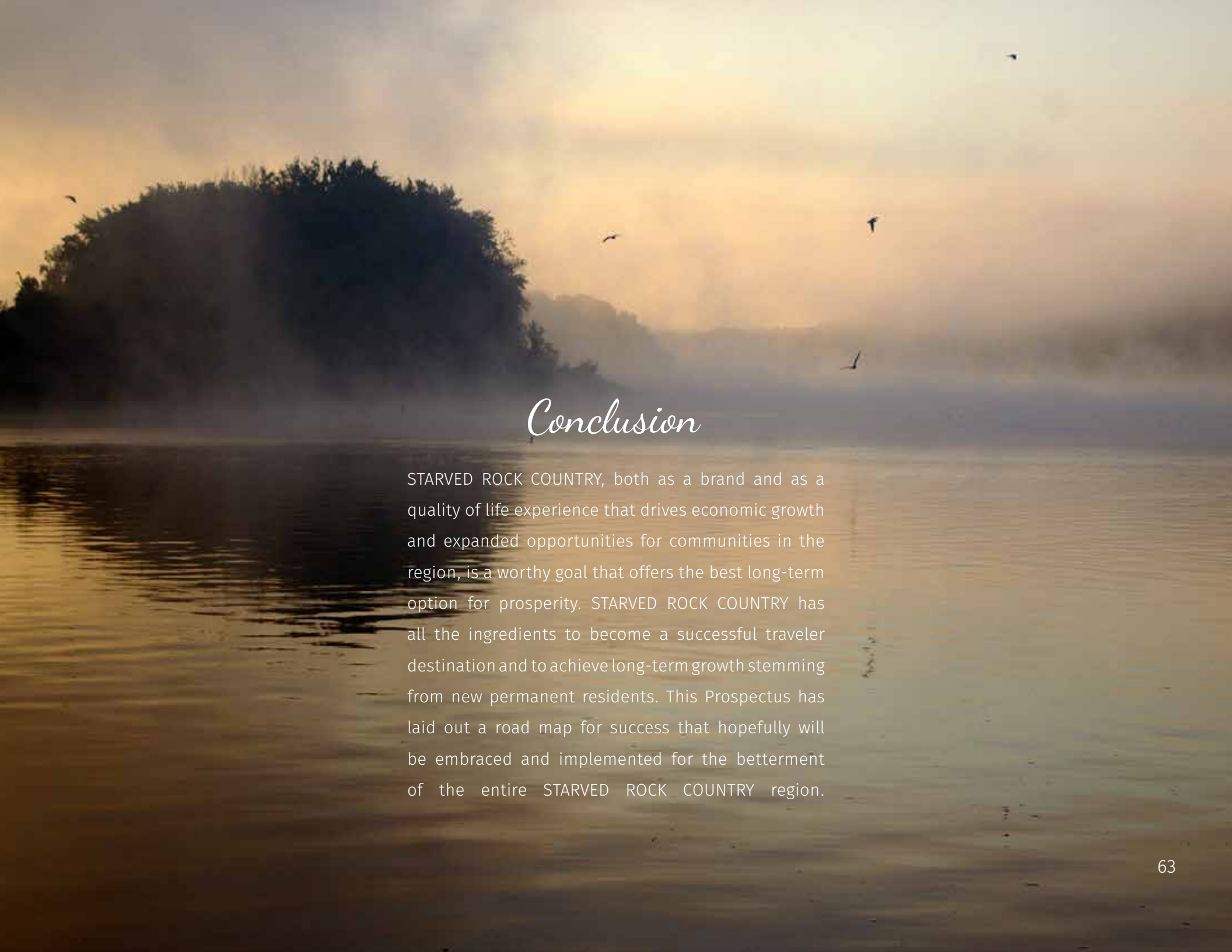
STARVED ROCK
Country

INTERSTATE INTERSECTION

39 & 80

TWO HOUR RADIUS OF

Starved Rock Country



Conclusion

STARVED ROCK COUNTRY, both as a brand and as a quality of life experience that drives economic growth and expanded opportunities for communities in the region, is a worthy goal that offers the best long-term option for prosperity. STARVED ROCK COUNTRY has all the ingredients to become a successful traveler destination and to achieve long-term growth stemming from new permanent residents. This Prospectus has laid out a road map for success that hopefully will be embraced and implemented for the betterment of the entire STARVED ROCK COUNTRY region.

WARREN RIBLEY, PRINCIPAL

WCR Enterprises Ltd.

Mr. Ribley has over 35 years of professional experience in state government and the private sector, focusing on economic development, public policy and financial services.

Prior to forming his own company focused on economic development and governmental relations consulting, Ribley was as President and CEO of the Illinois Biotechnology Innovation Organization (iBIO) and the iBIO Institute, a trade association representing the diverse biotechnology industry in the biomedical, bio industrial and bioprocessing sectors.

Before joining iBIO, Mr. Ribley led the revitalization of the Chicago-based Illinois Medical District Commission (IMDC), home to four hospitals, two academic medical research universities and the Chicago Technology Park by implementing initiatives involving real estate, infrastructure development, community health, translational research and clinical data.

From 2009-2012, Mr. Ribley was Director of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and Director of Operations from 2003-2009. At DCEO Mr. Ribley led initiatives to increase investments in business relocation and expansion, entrepreneurship and innovation, restore disadvantaged communities and develop workforce training to meet the challenges of the 21st century economy.

Mr. Ribley began his career as a Legislative Analyst in the Illinois Senate, worked in the Office of the Illinois Treasurer and in the mortgage banking industry.

WCR
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONSULTING

STARVED ROCK COUNTRY

Tourism Brand

Stay in touch with the latest developments and progress of the regional Starved Rock Country tourism brand, by emailing: pamela@srccf.org and requesting to be added to the SRC partner database.