

THE INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUE

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# Dakotafire

FALL 2012

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Fix Them or Not, Infrastructure Needs are Going to Cost Us

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THE MYSTERY OF HECLA'S DISAPPEARING WATER

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Left to right: Dennis Shelton, Lloyd Trautmann and Brandon Casey

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# What is Dakotafire?

Sparking rural revival is our goal,  
and we intend to do it by igniting the power within you.

**D**akotafire is a new journalism project that pools the resources of community newspapers and rural experts to report on issues of importance to rural communities in the James River watershed area of North and South Dakota.

The project is intended to give you, the people of this region, a “big picture” view of the challenges you face—from the way past generations have addressed similar problems to the insights of experts who study these issues to the way others in the region and beyond are finding solutions—so you are better informed when you make decisions about the issues that affect your lives.

Dakotafire’s alliance of reporters and editors work together to produce in-depth, regionwide coverage of issues vital to the sustainability of the area’s rural communities. This alliance, which connects these journalists online, allows them to cover topics that they could not address as successfully alone.

The results of this reporting are published online at [Dakotafire.net](http://Dakotafire.net) and in a quarterly magazine distributed in the newspapers. As the project progresses, reporting will be done in a variety of formats, including traditional story forms, photo essays, interactive infographics and video.

The “common voice” of Dakotafire is intended to help all the people of the region, which is similar in topography and population demographics but stretches over 22,000 square miles and crosses a state border, see one another as allies in facing common challenges and opportunities. The information Dakotafire provides is

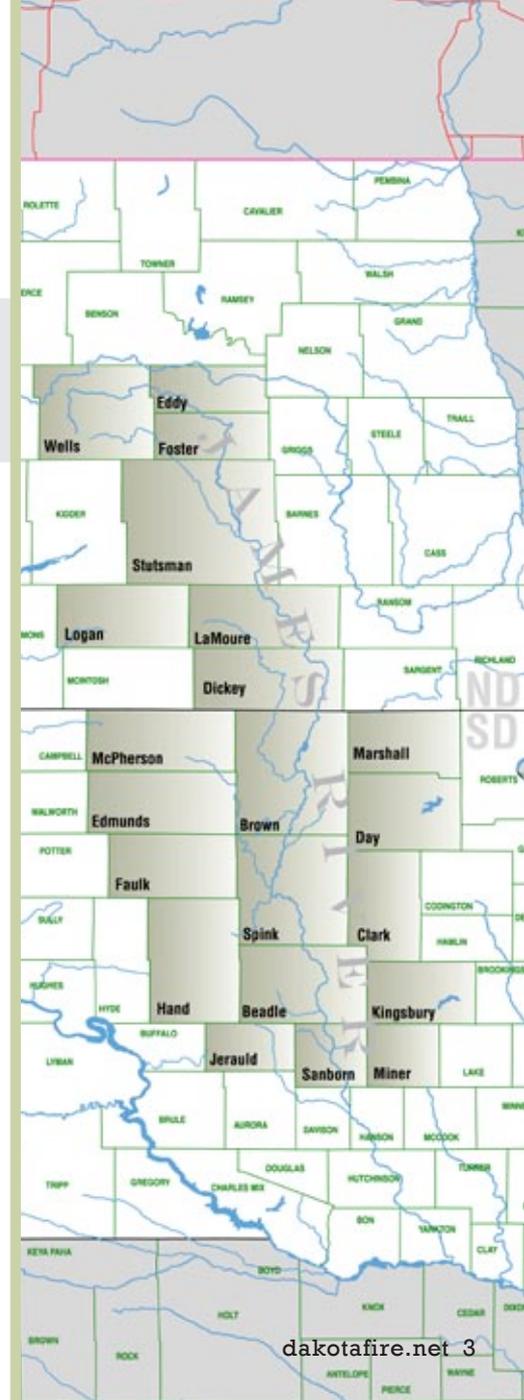
## Dakotafire coverage area by 2014.

*Counties in Phase 2 (2012-13) include Logan, LaMoore, Stutsman, Dickey, Brown, Dickey, McPherson, Edmunds, Marshall, Day, Faulk, Clark, and Spink.*

designed to spark discussion, to challenge conventional thinking and to get people to consider alternative possibilities. [Dakotafire.net](http://Dakotafire.net) as well as its presence on Facebook (search for Dakotafire Media) and Twitter (@DakotafireMedia) will serve as a conversation space for the region’s people.

As part of the Knight Community Information Challenge, the three-year project has received \$240,000 in support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and \$60,000 from the South Dakota Community Foundation, with additional support coming from Dacotah Bank, Citibank, other foundations, and corporate and individual sponsors. The project will be implemented by Dakotafire Media, LLC, a media company based in Frederick, S.D., owned by Heidi Marttila-Losure and Troy McQuillen. ✨

Next Issue:  
**WORKPLACES**  
Coming December 2012



Turn to page 27 to  
get a taste of what  
[dakotafire.net](http://dakotafire.net) has  
to offer.

**DEAR DAKOTAFIRE:** First, I want to congratulate you on the launch of this new publication. It is a work that has been needed for quite some time. Thank you for the time and effort.

I am a “transplant.” My wife and I moved from the East Coast to South Dakota in 2004. We were attracted by the high quality of life and the low cost of living. I have never regretted the move.

As an outsider I found many things here that have been lost back east. This area is rich with hard-working, dedicated and friendly people standing ready to lend a hand and welcome new people into their community.

What you have in *Dakotafire* is a powerful tool to remind those who have moved away what they left behind.

**TO THE EDITOR:** Most of eastern South Dakota is familiar with the continuing expansion of Devil’s Lake in North Dakota and the devastating effect on the surrounding population. Many are aware of the similar situation near Bitter Lake in Day County, S.D. Far fewer residents of eastern South Dakota know about the recent rapid expansion and resulting devastation caused by the inappropriately named Dry Lake No. 2 in southern Clark County.

This lake was several small pockets of swampy cattail depressions until 1993 when the increase in rainfall began. It has grown to over 20,000 acres — comparable in surface size to Lake Thompson in Kingsbury County. To point out how ignored and unnoticed it is to the public, it is not even shown on the 2012 Rand McNally Road Atlas.

Local residents and those fishing Dry Lake can see several farmsteads that have been swallowed by the lake. It has engulfed thousands of acres of productive farmland and rendered many county and township roads impassable, isolating many acres of farmland and making travel extremely

I would like to bring up another subject. It is my considered opinion that the outmigration that plagued the Upper Midwest over the decades has begun to ebb and the population trend is reversing.

More and more people are getting disgusted with over-taxation, over-crowding and traffic in the larger communities. New York, New Jersey and California all lost population in the last census. North Dakota, South Dakota and other Plains states have gained residents. That trend will continue. People are moving to Bismarck, Fargo, and Sioux Falls, but they are also starting to move to the smaller towns as well.

Folks who work from home are starting to realize that “home” can be anywhere. So why not make your home in a town with a local school of

difficult. The income loss due to loss in farmland is well into the millions. Very significant is the tremendous infrastructure damage greatly affecting the economics of county towns and communities. The state of South Dakota spent over \$4 million to raise Highway 25 out of Dry Lake water in 2011. Of course, Clark County loses a great deal of tax money since most of Dry Lake is privately owned and no tax can be collected on flooded land.

Dry Lake No. 2 is between the James River and Sioux River watershed. If Dry Lake would go up about three more feet from its 2011 elevation, it would begin flowing into the Antelope Basin south of Clark. Since this basin is 15 feet lower, it would flood several thousand acres at a great depth.

The big question is, can this continuing devastation be slowed, stopped, and reversed? Although too late for those who have had to abandon their farmsteads, the answer to the question is, yes. The solution would cost far less than those proposed to fix the Bitter Lake and

fewer than 200 students? The kids moving into these towns are richer for the experience, and the parents have the peace of mind that comes with a small community.

I truly believe there is a paradigm shift in the attitudes of the population. Rural (with the benefit of high-speed Internet and satellite television) is becoming more attractive than city dwelling.

This was not reflected in the 2010 census because truly high-speed Internet (let alone G-3/4 technology) only became available in the latter part of the decade. I think many people will be surprised with the data from 2020.

Thanks for what you are doing. It is indeed timely.

— **RICK SKORUPSKI, FRANKFORT, S.D.**

Devil’s Lake problems and with great economic improvements.

An engineering study has been done on a plan to lower the lake level to allow the county roads to reappear and alleviate the destruction of other roads. The cost of this construction, to drain the top to Pearl Creek in Clark County where it would flow to the James River with a gated pipe, would be less than \$2 million. By using the gate, the flow out would be when the James was not at a flood level. It would take several years by this method to lower the lake to a manageable level under average rainfall conditions, but the river is the only practical way to stabilize the level and recover the thousands of acres of flooded cropland and restore the infrastructure of Clark County at a minimal adverse impact to others.

Those of us impacted by the “Devil’s Lake of Clark County” need to have all the state residents understand and support this situation and the only practical solution.

— **DELLAS GJERDE, VIENNA, S.D.**

**TO THE EDITOR:** Love your *Dakotafire*. Hope it keeps coming.

I have an idea that I would like to run by you. In the Clark area there are several old Norwegian Lutheran churches, all of them being well over 100 years old. What do you think of featuring a church in each of the *Dakotafire* issues? There are also some in all the surrounding counties also. One of these days they will all be gone by way of fire or storms. I love to visit these days of the past ... The people who get *Dakotafire* would love to see pictures and stories of their past.

Thank you, take care and God bless,

— **LES SOLBERG, CLARK, S.D.**

**FROM THE EDITOR:** Thanks for the suggestion! While we probably don't want to focus on churches to the exclusion of other interesting places in our region, this kind of feature is just what we're looking for in the Postcard section at the back of the magazine. We'd welcome a photo of one of these churches, with about 500 words of a story that really brings that place to life. You can e-mail that to [Heidi@dakotafire.net](mailto:Heidi@dakotafire.net) or mail a photo and writing to Dakotafire Media, Attn: Postcard Submission, P.O. Box 603, Frederick, SD 57441.

We'd love to have enough of these features so that we could, on a regular basis, send some along to the newspapers that publish other *Dakotafire* stories. These don't need to be the work of professional writers or photographers, though good storytellers will have an advantage. All you history buffs, take your snapshots and get writing!

#### **CORRECTIONS**

The name of Trevor Samson was misspelled in the "Ask an Ag Banker" section of the summer issue of *Dakotafire*. Also, in the "Disappearing Middle" story, the names of Diane Bell Mayerfeld and Dean MacCannell were misspelled, and Mayerfeld's title is Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator with University of Wisconsin Extension. The graphic in that story should have said "Number of farms (in thousands)" instead of "Millions of farms." We regret the errors—and coincidentally, we are looking for a freelance copy editor. Contact [heidi@dakotafire.net](mailto:heidi@dakotafire.net) if you are interested.

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**Dakotafire**  
SPARKING RURAL REVIVAL

# Vision

BY HEIDI MARTTILA-LOSURE, EDITOR

The only time infrastructure really comes up in conversation is when some critical piece of it is missing: when there are no public bathrooms in a park you are visiting, when the sewer backs up, or when the road is full of potholes. No one talks about how handy the bathroom was, the fact that the sump pump's not running, or how smooth the road is on your commute.

We don't really want to think about it. If we want to talk about investing in big projects, we'd rather think about building a big new ethanol plant or wind farm. The positive returns from such projects are much easier to measure and to comprehend, and they all have more appeal than those boring pipes that no one sees anyway.

If leaders are going to get the public to pay attention to their infrastructure problems, small-thinking discussions about short-term fixes and getting by are not going to cut it. Who wants to pay for a still-costly solution that's only "making do"?

We are going to have to make a more credible case to the public that these projects will make their lives better. What we need is a vision—a vision of the kind of communities we want to live in, which includes the infrastructure projects that

we'll need to get us there.

My favorite author and agricultural philosopher Wendell Berry has said he is suspicious of visions, as he hopes we all are; visions sound expensive and (as my grandmother would have added) a little too fancy for plain folk.

Nevertheless, for everything there is a season, and the time for bold, visionary thinking has arrived.

Or, I should say, it has arrived again. America has had several crucial periods of national planning, from the Gallatin plan that outlined how a nation could span a continent, to the New Deal-era plans that sketched out a national road system. This nation would not be what it is today if people along the way had not argued for big thinking about national infrastructure.

"The Constitution in many ways is a charter for national planning," said Robert Fishman, a historian from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, on National Public Radio in 2008. "It calls for a national vision."

A few years ago, a diverse group of national leaders got together to discuss the nation's infrastructure needs and create a comprehensive plan for the future. The resulting report, called "America 2050: An Infrastructure Vision for

21st Century America," was intended to start a national push for improved infrastructure:

America faces a host of challenges in the coming century, all of which will have profound impacts on the nation's future growth and development. ... In the face of these challenges, though, America is flying blind. No national strategy exists to build and manage the infrastructure system needed to sustain inclusive economic growth and our competitive position in the global economy.

Unfortunately, the timing of the report's release, under the cloud of forecasts of looming financial apocalypse in 2008, made it pretty much dead on arrival in the national conversation.

“What we need is a vision—a vision of the kind of communities we want to live in, which includes the infrastructure projects that we’ll need to get us there.”

Over the first half of 2012, the North Dakota USDA Rural Development office has had a more promising beginning to a conversation on a vision for North Dakota's future, including a statewide infrastructure plan. The fact that North Dakota is in the midst of an oil boom, with the benefits, headaches, and general upheaval that come with it, means that North Dakotans are in a frame



Heidi Marttila-Losure  
Editor, Dakotafire

of mind to think about change, since they are already living it.

As Jasper Schneider, director of ND USDA Rural Development, points out in the resulting "North Dakota 2.0" report, "The worst thing that could happen to us as a state is we reflect back on this time of prosperity and wish we had made better choices or wiser investments."

No upheaval has prompted similar forward thinking in South Dakota; the state doesn't have a sudden wealth of resources at its disposal. But, though that makes a statewide conversation more difficult to start, it also means it's more important. We do not have resources to waste, which is what happens when people aren't communicating and end up duplicating efforts, working in ways that aren't efficient, and not thinking about future needs or the big picture.

Schneider said his office has played its role in starting the North Dakota conversation, but that they've carried the ball this far down the field and now must hand it off to other players. Leaders are going to have to step up to make the plan happen. In South Dakota, a statewide conversation about a bold "2.0" vision for the future is needed, as is the leadership needed for follow-through.

This is not a process that will be comfortable or easy, but it will be meaningful. As the "North Dakota 2.0" report points out, "Making North Dakota a leader, known for its educational system, its industries, and its people, will require boldness and passion for the future. Nothing of import comes from timidity."

A conversation about boring pipes it's not. ✨

## We Want to Hear From You!

Please address any letters submitted for publication to **Dakotafire Media, Letters to the Editor, PO Box 603, Frederick, SD 57441** or e-mail submissions to **heidi@dakotafire.net**. With email, as with regular mail, please specify if the correspondence is intended as a letter to the editor. *Dakotafire* reserves the right to edit letters for length or clarity.

# Big Plans in America's History

Americans have had significant infrastructure needs in the past, and they have created national plans to address them. According to Robert Fishman, a historian at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, the nation's past infrastructure projects really "created the country."

"Think about the incredible task of spanning a continent, of uniting this vast area into one country, into one economy," Fishman said in an interview on National Public Radio in 2008. "This was inconceivable without conscious national planning at the larger scale."

Here are some of the biggest national infrastructure plans and how they affected the nation, as described in the "America 2050" report.

**1808:** Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin put together a national plan of roads, ports, and inland waterways that would connect the nation's new settlers. The plan supported the "homestead vision" of Thomas Jefferson. The Erie Canal in New York State was one result of this plan; the Homestead Act, the transcontinental railroad and the Morrill Land Grant Colleges Act, which all shaped the future of the Dakotas, were later developments based on this plan.

**1908:** Theodore Roosevelt brought together governors to put together a national plan for inland waterways. The Roosevelt Dam near Phoenix, the Colorado Compact and the Hoover Dam were all projects that resulted from the Inland Waterways Commission.

**1930s and '40s:** Franklin Roosevelt established the National

Resources Board, which guided the infrastructure projects that were part of his New Deal. The board was directed to account for "the distribution and trends of population, land uses, industry, housing, and natural resources" across regions to assure that federal spending would deliver "comprehensive and coordinated" results. The board created a plan for a National Toll Road and Free Road System, which later was worked into the interstate highway system by Dwight Eisenhower.

Fishman also pointed out that Albert Gallatin, the 1808 planner, understood that maintenance was at least as important as the initial investment. "Today there's just a sense we can get by in the minimum," he said, "[which is] undermining the massive investment that we have made over 200 years through these national plans."

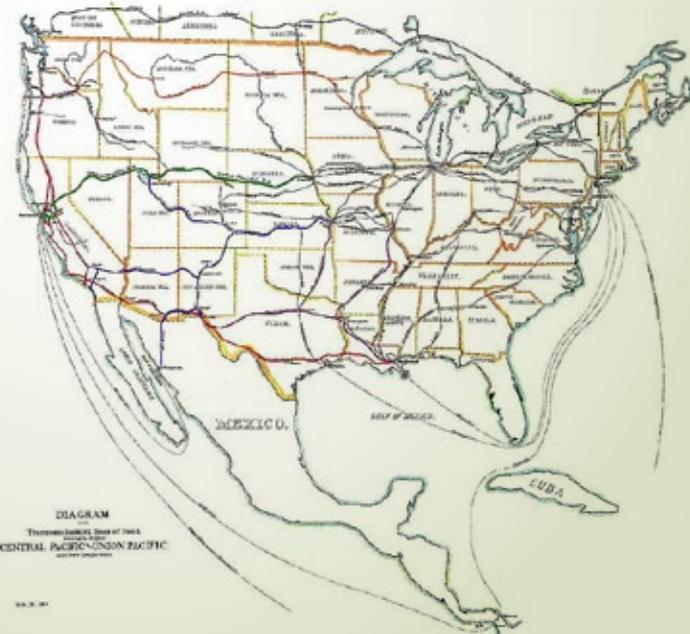


Image Source: Wikipedia

# THE BIG BILL

Fix them or not, infrastructure needs are going to cost us

BY HEIDI MARTILA-LOSURE



## \$1.7 Trillion.

That's the amount the American Society of Civil Engineers says America needs to invest in infrastructure needs by 2020. The Council on Foreign Relations, which has a research focus on Renewing America, puts the number even higher, at \$2.3 trillion over the next decade.

It doesn't really matter which one is more accurate: "All of the numbers are so gargantuan large that they're useless when you're trying to communicate with the public," said Roy Kienitz, undersecretary for policy at the Department of Transportation.

The ASCE gave America's crumbling infrastructure a grade of D on its 2009 Report Card. Five categories—drinking water, inland waterways, levees, roads and wastewater—received grades of D-, the lowest rating the society gives.

Two of those problem categories, roads and wastewater, were the top two concerns listed on the report cards for both North and South Dakota.

As of 2008, 25 percent of North Dakota's major roads and 29 percent of South Dakota's were in poor or mediocre condition. A mild winter and a very dry summer have allowed road crews to make good progress this year, but there are years of maintenance backlogs to overcome—in 2008, the deferred maintenance and construction needs in South Dakota's transportation system amounted to \$756 million, and that was figured before the flooding damage inflicted in 2010 and 2011.

While the numbers to fix the nation's infrastructure are "gargantuan large," the ASCE provided some other numbers that are just as overwhelming—the amount the nation is already paying in lost productivity, delays and other costs because of declining infrastructure. In the transportation category alone, that's \$129 billion a year—and it's likely to get worse.

"If investments in surface transportation infrastructure are not made soon, these costs are expected to grow exponentially," the ASCE said

Photo source: Stock photo

in its report. “Within 10 years, U.S. businesses would pay an added \$430 billion in transportation costs, household incomes would fall by more than \$7,000, and U.S. exports will fall by \$28 billion.”

And experts say the longer we wait, the more we’ll pay: Deferring maintenance on the nation’s infrastructure will result in a much larger bill later, as the prices of materials and labor tend to go up over time.

Many argue that Americans are going to be paying in any case—the question is whether there will be something to show for it after the bill comes due.

### Does Investing in Infrastructure Improve the Economy?

One argument for investing in infrastructure is that the construction of roads, water systems, bridges and the like creates jobs and otherwise sparks economic activity: “A massive infrastructure program would have numerous benefits — not least of which would be giving a boost to the economy when they could use one,” says author and strategist Barry Ritholtz.

Not everyone agrees, however, which is why the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (also known as the stimulus bill) sparked such a debate about whether spending money on infrastructure was really a good long-term investment.

Now that economists have had some time to look at the data, they can give a fairly definitive answer: The stimulus bill reduced the unemployment rate by about 1 percent, according to Andrew Goetz, a professor at the University of Denver. Whether a 1 percent reduction in the unemployment rate was worth \$800 billion and an increase in the national deficit is a relevant question.

Goetz points out, however, that this result shouldn’t necessarily cast a shadow on infrastructure spending in general.

While the numbers seemed very large to average Americans, the stimulus provided in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act wasn’t actually that big in relation to the economy as a whole. For example, the stimulus provided \$48.1 billion for transportation improvements. Compare that to the regular transportation spending Congress passed in 2005, which authorized \$286 billion over four years. The stimulus didn’t even give one year’s worth of a boost over regular spending.

There is also the long-term effect of having infrastructure to consider: once things like roads, bridges, railroads and the like are in place, they set the stage for economic activity to happen. The Global Competitiveness Report for 2011-12, put out by the World Economic Forum, says infrastructure is critically important to the vitality of a nation in the global market. The report explains that infrastructure determines where and what kind of economic activity can happen in a certain region, and it can reduce the effect of distance between regions.

And without that infrastructure, economic activity can’t happen as efficiently—farmers may not have access to certain markets, for example, or, as is seen in the oil fields now, a lack of housing means needed workers can’t relocate to where the jobs are.

There is a limit to how much good infrastructure spending can do. Goetz explains that for an area that is not very well developed, infrastructure spending makes a significant difference on the economy. The more developed an area gets, the lower the rate of return on infrastructure spending.

In the Dakotas, many of the infrastructure projects needed are more likely to be of immediate value for the quality of life of the states’ residents, such as repaired roads and improved water and sewer systems. Whether they improve the economy is less relevant to the decision-making

process—as long as the lack of infrastructure isn’t throwing a wrench in the works.

### Where Would the Money Come From?

The national deficit makes any discussion of additional spending difficult, no matter what the extenuating circumstances or long-term payoff. The two typical ways of increasing government budgets—borrowing or increasing taxes—are both politically unpopular.

There are some strong arguments for taking action in spite of the nation’s slow recovery from recession—or even because of it. All other factors being equal, a recession is a good time for a government to invest in infrastructure projects—it provides an immediate kick in needed jobs, and the fact that other parts of the economy are not as likely to be building means that there would be less competition for companies and resources needed to complete such projects.

Here are some possible funding sources and the pros and cons of using them:

#### **Borrow (i.e., Issue More Treasury Bonds)**

The U.S. debt is already ticking up toward \$16 trillion—that’s about \$140,000 per U.S. taxpayer. This presents a great deal of reluctance to borrow. However, considering the ASCE’s figures that Americans are already paying in other ways for deteriorating infrastructure, now would be a good time to borrow if we’re going to do it. “The interest rates on 10-year treasury bonds just hit a 220-year low,” Jordan Weismann, an editor for *The Atlantic*, pointed out in June. “We’re paying better rates than when George Washington was running unopposed for the presidency. When inflation is taken into account, we’re effectively getting paid by investors to hold their cash.”

#### **Increase Taxes**

Increasing taxes for national projects is not an easy sell. People in Florida don’t feel the need to pay for new

roads in the Dakotas, or (if we're honest) vice versa. The problem is that because rural areas have fewer people, infrastructure projects weigh more heavily per household in rural places than urban ones. (Easing this burden is a big part of why the Rural Development arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture exists.)

Convincing people of the need to increase taxes is easier if they are going to use the resulting infrastructure, which is why raising use taxes has been proposed. That's not always popular, either—for example, the gas tax has been the same since 1993, and governmental leaders have declared its increase a political nonstarter. Use taxes can also weigh more heavily on rural people—in the case of the gas tax rural people often have no choice but to drive long distances, and higher water or sewer rates weigh more heavily on older people with fixed incomes, of which rural places have a greater share.

## Public-Private Partnerships

In public-private partnerships, private investors put up some portion of the capital required for infrastructure projects and are paid back over time in user fees, or from the savings in state or local budgets. A number of these projects are in place in urban areas such as Massachusetts and Chicago.

Unfortunately, such partnerships don't work as well in rural places, where the return on investment likely won't meet investors' requirements. It is possible that investors could be found for infrastructure projects in rural places if they viewed it in part as a philanthropic venture, accepting the idea that it would take longer than usual to recoup their investments.

President Obama put forward the idea of a national infrastructure bank that would essentially do the same thing—leverage government money to attract private investment in infrastructure improvements that would be paid back incrementally—in his jobs bill last fall, but a shrunken-down proposal for such a bank went nowhere.

At the root of this is the fact that much of the public no longer feels that giving money to the government is all that wise.

Anne Mitchell Whisnant, author of a book about the history of the massive infrastructure project that was the Blue Ridge Parkway, which is now the most visited national park in the United States, says that it probably couldn't be built today.

"Our level of faith in the federal government [as] a doer of good for the public is nothing like it was in the '30s," she said in a National Public Radio interview.

Unfortunately, private entities are formed (by definition) to make a profit, not serve the public good; they also are unlikely to be able to do projects on a national scale. If these projects are going to get done, the government is still the entity most likely to be able to do them.

## How Do We Determine What Gets Done First?

This is where the national and statewide conversations such as "America 2050" and "North Dakota 2.0" come in. This lets more stakeholders have a say in what needs to be done, and if people have a say in the process, they are generally more satisfied with the result, even if their priority isn't the final result of the group.

Some groups have put forward other suggestions for prioritizing:

- **Emphasize maintenance over new construction.** According to Smart Growth for America, repair work on roads and bridges creates 16 percent more jobs than new construction. Maintenance also requires less new investment of raw materials, and it adds value to the initial investment made when the roads or bridges were first constructed.
- **Make sure projects address all three factors of the so-called "triple bottom line": a prosperous economy, a healthy environment,**

**and social equity.** Finding ways to implement projects that address these three factors is far easier in the planning stages than it is after the fact, if the economic value of a project had been the only consideration at the outset, according to the "America 2050" report. Environmental and social costs can lead to additional economic costs later.

Another suggestion put forward by the "America 2050" report may not be so well-received in the Dakotas. Its authors advocate for focusing infrastructure projects on eight "megaregions" in the United States, where most of the population is concentrated and most of the growth is occurring (the Northeast, the Texas Triangle, etc.). The Great Plains is not in any megaregion, and would therefore not be a funding priority for infrastructure projects, according to this way of thinking.

Jasper Schneider, director of North Dakota USDA Rural Development, says funding infrastructure in rural places is still in the national interest. "Two of the biggest bright spots in this economic recovery ... are happening in places like North Dakota and South Dakota," he said.

Middle America is a source for increased domestic energy production, both nonrenewable (shale oil) and renewable (wind power). Agriculture is a powerhouse for the economy, resulting in an approximately \$80 billion trade surplus and a reliable and safe food supply. To keep these parts of the economy humming, Schneider said, "you need the nuts and bolts stuff, the infrastructure, to make these industries run, and to make sure you have supporting rural communities and supporting rural workforces—and those take resources." ✨

[Find a list of sources for the information in this article at the end of this story on \*Dakotafire.net\*.](#)

# Communities Awash in Water Woes

REPORTING BY

**FAULK COUNTY RECORD, REPORTER & FARMER, CLARK COUNTY COURIER,  
BRITTON JOURNAL, GROTON INDEPENDENT AND TRI-COUNTY NEWS**

Getting drinking water to come into our homes and wastewater to move out, while ensuring the drinking water is drinkable, the wastewater is acceptable for dumping, and all the liquid stays in the pipes—this is the challenge that dominates town council meetings throughout rural America, and certainly in Dakota fire communities.

Many of the water and sewer systems in the Dakotas are at least a century old, built during the growing years in the Dakotas, and they are showing their age.

A lack of maintenance has added to the problems, according to Joe Dvorak, a field manager for Midwest Assistance Program, which provides technical assistance for communities working to make water and sewer improvements.

“A lot of it is the fault of the communities themselves,” said Dvorak, who works in North and South Dakota. “They haven’t kept up to date

with the revenues necessary to do the updating and repairs that need to be done, because they try to keep rates low—which is understandable. But the resources available to them have dwindled greatly over the past few years.”

The communities who are trying to deal with the systems are often ill-equipped to do so, Dvorak said, with a significant proportion of residents who are aging along with the water systems.

“The people on these boards, they’re often there because no one else will run. The finance officer and the operator or city maintenance

person, they are the only salaried people in town,” he said. “They can’t say on top of this. There’s just no way.”

Dvorak added that many communities are having a difficult time getting certified operators. “The operators they have are getting older and they don’t want to do it anymore, and they can’t find anybody to replace them. That becomes more and more of a compliance problem.”

That’s where the Midwest Assistance Program can help. They provide training for boards and operators, and they also assist with all aspects of putting a water or wastewater project in place, from helping with technical guidance to advising on grant applications to just giving advice on good practices.

Here is one piece of advice Dvorak tries to share with all the communities he works with: “Operate [your] water and wastewater systems as a private business. You can’t operate a business on Main Street, U.S.A., without understanding what the fixed costs are and charging accordingly.”

A number of communities have now adjusted their charging practices so they are better in line with costs—by, for example, increasing rates by the same percentage as the cost of living each year. This leaves communities in a better position to deal with emergency repairs or needed upgrades.

Dvorak said the budget for the Midwest Assistance Program has been cut in half in the past year and a half, so they don’t have the resources to be able to help all the communities that need assistance.

And if these communities don’t get help from Dvorak or someone like him?

“They just kind of muddle through as best they can,” Dvorak said. “Or, worst-case scenario, they don’t do anything. They just sit and wait. Sitting and waiting only means the situation gets worse and the costs get higher.”

→ Installation of a new sewer lagoon begins near Gackle, ND, in August.  
*Tri-County News photo.*



→ Sewer jetting and televising lines in Britton. Britton Journal photo.



## + SO WHERE DO THEY GET THE MONEY?

Funding is available for water and sewer projects, but most of it has specific criteria or limited availability. We've put together an overview of the funding sources that rural communities can use for these infrastructure projects on [Dakotafire.net](http://Dakotafire.net)—go there and search for "water funding."

**Cost:** \$70,575 for excavation.

**Funding sources:** Cash on hand. Town board will also seek a state water/sewer grant because the bid came in higher than expected.

**Timeframe:** Construction should start this fall.

### BRITTON

**Background:** A line rupture and heavy rains in summer 2011 pointed out serious problems in the sewer system. The line that ruptured was clay and had disintegrated; further investigation showed that many connections between sections of old pipe had deteriorated, which was allowing water from the ground to seep into the sewer system and overload it. "This was observed as a rise in the water level of the sewer lagoon," said Britton Mayor Dr. David Kleinberg. "That, in addition to the line rupture, brought the magnitude of the problem to our attention."

**Planned project:** Repairing sewer lifts and adding a propane power source for them, replacing 60 percent of sewer pipes (40 percent are newer PVC pipe and are in adequate shape yet), installing rip-rap around the sewer lagoons and adding floats to them.

## WHAT'S FLOWING, WHAT'S NOT

Some communities in the Dakotafire region have already completed their water and sewer upgrades; others are still in the thick of things. Here's a look at water and sewer projects around the region.

### ANDOVER

**Background:** Currently Andover has no discharge permit for its 2.5-acre, single cell, bi-level stabilization pond. With additional treatment capabilities, the town's permit could be reinstated to allow discharges from the facility.

**Planned project:** Major improvements to wastewater treatment facility: a new two-acre treatment cell next to the current pond, conversion of the existing treatment pond into two cells, constructing a lift station, and cleaning and televising the collection system.

**Cost:** \$463,700.

**Funding sources:** \$194,000 through the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund; \$269,700 from a water quality grant.

**Timeframe:** Construction should start this fall.

### BRISTOL

**Background:** Users in certain parts of town had sewer trouble last year when there was high water and a subsequent investigation found the storm sewer lines on the east side of town were inadequate during significant water events.

**Planned project:** Installation of larger sewer lines in the trouble spots.



→ A manhole cave-in in Clark started the process of an overhaul of the sewer piping system. *Clark County Courier photo.*

**Cost:** Project has received a \$1.04 million loan

**Funding sources:** Clean Water State Revolving Fund

**Timeframe:** First phase of project, repairing sewer lifts, was to begin in September. More funding may be needed to go on to repairing the lines.

## CLARK

**Background:** An intersection caved in in June 2011. “Our problem is that because of so many sump pumps run through the sewer system, with an antiquated sewer system, the overload on the water treatment plant really puts us in a crisis situation,” said water/sewer superintendent Darin Altfillisch.

**Projects:** Relining of sewer piping system and manholes and a new water treatment plant.

“Now, the inlets entering the main lines seem to be the issues, and we would like to know for sure where these leaks are so we can handle accordingly,” said Clark councilman Terry Binger, who nevertheless is pleased by the results of the relining project. “I guess I would really like to show people what we’re doing and how we’re doing it. They would be amazed.”

**Cost:** The cost for the sewer relining project was \$280,980.

**Funding sources:** A \$365,000 loan from USDA Rural Development. The leftover money will likely be shifted to future sewer projects.

**Timeframe:** The sewer relining project was completed this summer. The water treatment plant is expected to be done in November.

## FAULKTON

**Background:** The city just finished a massive water project: a new 125,000 water tower, replacing all water meters, and replacing about 82 blocks of water mains, at a cost of \$3.5 million. Now it’s on to the sewer system, which is aging and overloaded.

**Planned project:** The first phase of the project is inspecting and televising a portion of the collection system, disconnecting storm sewer catch basins from the system, and eliminating sludge build-up in the primary holding pond, according to finance officer Lisa Raethz.

**Cost:** \$902,000

**Funding sources:** The city has applied for a loan from the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund. Sewer rates will increase from \$11 to \$24 per month to pay for the loan.

**Timeframe:** This fall

## GACKLE

**Background:** The town finished its sewer line renovation project last year, but they still faced problems on another front: The town’s lagoon is located near Logan Lake. A string of wet years has increased the lake’s water levels so much that lake water inundated the lagoon.

**Planned project:** The town has purchased 17 acres of land for two new lagoon cells. One cell, built in 2000, is still functional and will be part of the new system. A lift station will also be developed to replace the current gravity flow system.

**Funding sources:** Because the problem is related to flooding, Gackle was able to apply for funding assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

**Timeframe:** Work started in August.

# Municipal Water & Sewer Systems

In a typical municipal system, every joint, pump, and pipe is a potential weak point and therefore requires ongoing maintenance—and ongoing spending.

Graphic by Troy McQuillen

Water comes from a rural water supplier (WEB, for example).

Water is supplied to many rural communities.

Aging, leaky pipes can result in towns paying for water they aren't using.

Water enters a home through a water meter. Aging meters run more slowly, meaning the city loses revenue.

A "combined" sewer system allows road runoff to enter sanitary sewer. This shortens the life of the treatment facilities, and during heavy rains, untreated sewage is sometimes released into waterways.

Sewage is treated in holding ponds or "lagoons" while it is broken down.

Sanitary sewers may require a lift station to move waste toward treatment.

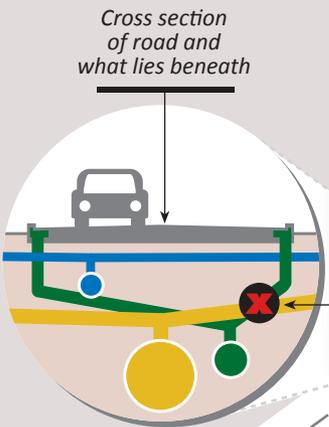
If homeowners drain sump pumps into sanitary sewer system (through basement floor drains), the system has to work that much harder. The excess water could lead to sewer backups.

Water from sump pumps should join the runoff from streets and empty directly into river.

Whenever aging pipes pass near one another, cross contamination can occur. Often, stormwater gets into the sanitary sewer pipes, taxing the system.

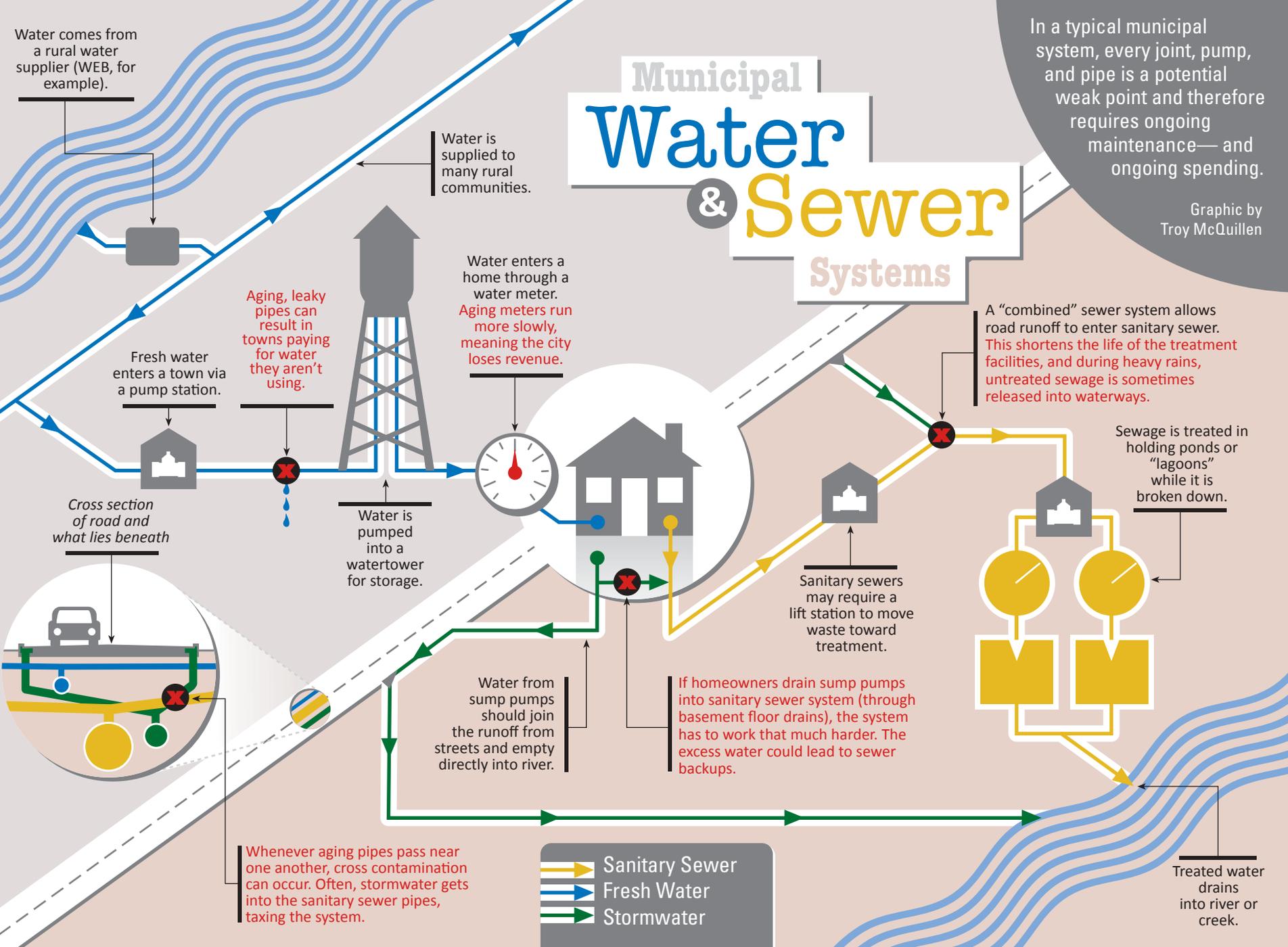


Treated water drains into river or creek.



Fresh water enters a town via a pump station.

Water is pumped into a watertower for storage.



## GROTON

**Background:** The city would like to replace a set number of blocks of water, sewer and streets each year, but flooding in recent years has caused sewer main collapses and road deterioration, leaving the city overwhelmed with projects. Residents have been forced to be patient, as not all streets could be redone immediately.

**Project:** In 2012, the city did street repairs and some sewer repairs. No water repairs were done because the city ran out of funds.

**Cost:** For 2012, streets, \$1.5 million; sewer repairs, \$100,000. In the past five years, Groton has spent more than \$2.3 million on streets, \$1.5 million on sewer mains, and \$186,000 on water mains. In a normal year, the city budgets for \$150,000 in street repairs and \$75,000 for water and sewer repairs.

**Funding sources:** Budget allocations, grants and loans.

**Timeframe:** The city hopes to be back to a more normal maintenance schedule and budget after another three years.

## LEOLA

**Background:** Cracks in aging clay pipes in the sewer system have resulted in storm water flowing into the sewer system, taxing its capacity.

**Planned project:** Convert a single-cell sewer treatment pond to a three-cell system, and replace sewer pipes.

**Cost:** \$2.5 million

**Funding sources:** A \$1,327,000 loan and a \$1,201,000 grant from the USDA Rural Development's Rural Utilities Service.

## PIERPONT

**Background:** Drinking water users have



→ Crews prepare ground for Webster's new lagoon two years ago. Reporter & Farmer photo.

experienced erratic pressure from the 100-year-old system.

**Planned project:** Water improvement: Removal and disposal of existing pressure tank and pipes, installing a 37,000-gallon potable water ground storage tank with a pole barn pump house and new pipes.

**Cost:** Town received \$551,200.

**Funding sources:** \$413,400 from Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund; \$137,800 in a 30-year low-interest loan; and a surcharge of \$9 a month for water customers.

**Timeframe:** Construction should start this fall.

## WEBSTER

**Background:** Discharges at Webster's sanitary sewer treatment plant exceeded storage capacity in 2006, which meant that when the lagoon filled up, discharges went in a stream that eventually flowed into Waubay Lake. According

to Department of Environment and Natural Resources rules, they had five years to fix the problem. The root cause was aging sewer lines and residents who put their sump pumps into the sanitary sewer instead of storm drains. "The problem is all of this water coming in flows," said water superintendent Adrian Rumpza in 2006. "Normal use per capita at the lagoon is about 180,000 gallons a day, but when there's a three-inch rain the flow jumps up to 462,000 gallons a day."

**Project:** New sewer lines, a replacement lift station, a new lagoon cell and tougher enforcement of existing regulations.

**Cost:** \$5.4 million

**Funding sources:** \$1,496,000 grant and a \$2,156,000 low-interest federal loan from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, plus other grants and loans. Rates for sewer customers also increased.

**Timeframe:** Completed in 2010

# THE MYSTERY OF HECLA'S DISAPPEARING WATER

BY THE BRITTON-JOURNAL

It might have been an entertaining puzzle for the town of Hecla if the mystery of their missing water didn't cost so much.

For the first six months of 2012, the City of Hecla billed its residents for 3.6 million gallons of water. Unfortunately, the city purchased 7.7 million gallons from BDM Rural Water. Those missing 4.1 million gallons were worth \$6,150.

"If you look at what we're billing and what we're pumping, we are losing about half our water somewhere," Hecla Finance Officer Gayle Lloyd said in early August.

Lloyd said she suspects the city long had a problem of losing some water, but city officials really had no way to measure it until going on the BDM system in February 2008. Then the problem became significantly worse this year.

The gallons lost for all of 2011 were 3.3 million, nearly the same amount that has been lost in the first five months of 2012. Losses in 2010 totaled 1.6 million gallons, and in 2009 the total loss was just 542,000 gallons.

Some water loss is expected in the process of transmitting it to customers, but Hecla Mayor Lloyd Trautmann said that engineers have told him that the loss should not be any greater than 15-20 percent. In 2010 the water loss was 35 percent, and so far this year it has mushroomed to 54 percent.



“We figured that if we have a leak it should show up above ground sooner or later,” Trautmann said in early August. “But we just can’t seem to locate anything.”

The city looked at possible meter problems and at some water lines that may not have been hooked into the water system, but with the amount of water loss something else had to be happening.

The Hecla mayor said that the South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems of Madison has a special unit that can check for where water loss is occurring, but there was a problem: All curb stops and main valves to the water mains have to be functional.

“Unfortunately, some of those curb stops and valves have not been used for so long that we’re not sure we can get them to work,” Trautmann said.

In the meantime, the town had a meeting on Aug. 8 to ask residents to look for clues to where the water might be—lush green patches of lawn, for example. No one had any answers.

Then there was a break in the case. Or, actually, a case of finding the break.

A resident was out walking early one recent morning and noticed water bubbling through a crack in the asphalt. But what still mystifies Trautmann, as well as engineers, is why the water didn’t show up much sooner.

“We shut off water mains in various places to see if we could find where the leak was

## “We are losing about half our water somewhere.”

occurring,” explained Trautmann. “The water seems to have surfaced when we turned the valves back on again. So maybe that slight jolt is what made it finally surface.”



City officials still don’t know where the water was going. Several neighbors near the leak have deep sump pumps, and those pumps had not been running. The city also didn’t have any indication that excess water was showing up in the sewer lines.

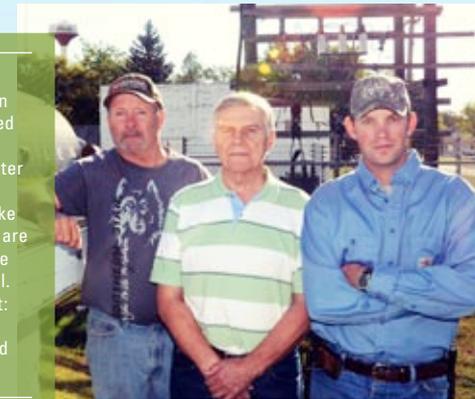
Hecla does not yet have any numbers to see how much difference repairing the leak has made. Water billing is always a month behind, so once those billing numbers are in, officials will be able to determine if any other major water leaks likely exist.

“The very first morning after we repaired the leak we did get a call from BDM asking if we had

trouble with our power because the pumps had not turned on overnight,” said Trautmann. “We’ve definitely seen a substantial drop in the water that is going through our meters.



Hecla’s water monitoring is done in a building which used to be the town jail. They still log the meter reading by hand in a ledger near the intake pipes. The numbers are then entered into the computer at city hall. Pictured left to right: Dennis Shelton, Lloyd Trautmann and Brandon Casey.



“We’re smiling at that much improvement,” Trautmann said. “We’ll see what happens in two months when we can get better figures.”

But he also expects that future problems will likely occur.

“A year ago we had exactly the same thing happen when a galvanized pipe rusted through, and we don’t know exactly how many other old galvanized connections there are from residences to curb stops. There could be others that are in the process of minor leaks.

“But usually you can tell when you have a major leak because the water comes to the surface rather quickly. Why this one didn’t show up for so long is totally baffling to us and to engineers.” ✨

These stories are the result of a collaborative effort of weekly newspapers in the James River watershed area. Read the full stories at [www.dakotafire.net](http://www.dakotafire.net) and watch the site for a new feature story about the region every two weeks!

## Many Rural Counties, Including in the Dakotas, are Seeing a 'Brain Gain' Trend

Although the overall population trendline is for the rural Great Plains is down, there is a bright spot in the data that's often overlooked: The number of people between the ages of 30 and 49 has increased in many of those same counties.

Ben Winchester, a research fellow at the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality, has been working to shine a light on this good-news piece of the rural narrative. Winchester, a demographer, had read the headlines about the "brain drain" in rural America, but he realized that couldn't be the entire picture.

"If we've been losing our kids (since the 1930s) and nobody ever came back, our small towns would probably have died 50 years ago," Winchester said. "So there must be something more going on than just losing the kids."

The trend he found he called the "brain gain." What happens, he explained, is that rural areas lose young people with a high school education and very low immediate earning prospects. What they are gaining are people with higher education levels, job experience, and networks they can draw upon from their time in the working world. These people can serve as a great asset to the rural communities where they settle, Winchester said.

"We are losing our kids, but if we keep using the term 'brain drain,' we are doing a horrible disservice to those people who are moving back," he said. ✨

## SDSU Extension Reorganization is a Work in Progress

About eight months after South Dakota State University Extension went through its biggest reorganization since its founding in 1914, Barry Dunn gives the organization's efforts a solid B.

"We certainly accomplished a great deal," said Dunn, dean of the South Dakota State University College of Agriculture and director of SDSU Extension. But he adds there's more to be done.

The Extension program was forced to reorganize last year after the state portion of its budget was cut by 10 percent. This rattled the structure of the organization, which had been little changed for decades.

Having an Extension office in each county was no longer possible with those budget constraints. This is the change that the public is having the hardest time getting used to.



"The county offices were the heartbeat of a lot of those counties," Dunn said, adding that he's heard a number of people say they'd like to go back to the old system. "We just don't have the dollars to be able to do that."

Part of Extension leaders' thinking during the reorganization was to adapt to the way that people increasingly search for information today: on the Internet. Extension leaders developed iGrow, a new online resource for Extension information. Dunn said iGrow is living up to expectations, at least in part.

"It is doing a great job," Dunn said, "but we still need to get the word out." ✨

## Low Unemployment Rate Can Make Finding Workers Difficult For Dakota Companies

While the rest of the nation deals with an unemployment rate stubbornly stuck above 8 percent, the Dakotas have a different problem: Jobs that are going unfilled.

The unemployment rate in South Dakota was 4.4 percent in July. The oil boom in western North Dakota has driven the state's unemployment rate down to a miniscule 2.9 percent, which hasn't happened nationwide since 1953. If more housing was available near the oil fields in North Dakota to support more workers, the N.D. unemployment rate might be even lower.

Dawn Dovre, public affairs director for South

Dakota's Labor and Regulation Department, said North Dakota's oil boom has had an effect even hundreds of miles away. "We have heard of some workers commuting to the oil fields in North Dakota from the Mobridge, Aberdeen, and Spearfish communities," Dovre said.

The low unemployment rate is visible in the South Dakota Jobs database. The number of job openings logged in the database is up 30 percent from last year—11,381 in July, compared to 8,722 in July 2011. On the other side, the number of workers in the database is on track to be down about 3 percent for the year, if the current situation continues through December. ✨

## 2012 Scholarship Winners

Dacotah Bank's high school scholarship program reaches across North Dakota and South Dakota, often referred to as "the Territory." Each year over 100 graduating high school seniors apply for scholarships from Dacotah Bank ranging from \$500 to \$1,000 each. Every Dacotah Bank market recognizes at least one deserving student with a scholarship based on established criteria: academic, civic, and written essay. A panel of judges who have no customer relationship with the bank review each application and submit scores. The combined scoring determines scholarship winners at the local level and additional recipients of \$1,000 scholarships, which are co-funded by the South Dakota Bankers Association. Applications are distributed to high school guidance counselors' offices and are posted at on the bank's website [dacotahbank.com](http://dacotahbank.com) prior to the holiday season.

## \$1000 SDBA/Dacotah Scholarship Winners



**Emily Benson**  
Lemmon High School  
University of South Dakota



**Adam Fjeldheim**  
Watertown High School  
South Dakota  
State University



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## \$1000 SDBA/Dacotah Scholarship Winners



**Mindy Grensberg**  
Willow Lake High School  
South Dakota  
State University



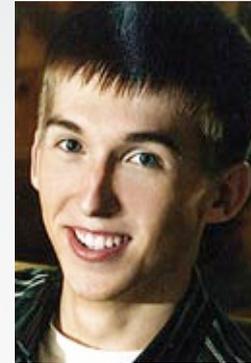
**Megan Minatra**  
Waverly South Shore  
High School  
Augustana College



**Nate Vinzant**  
University of  
South Dakota



**Alexa Volesky**  
Webster Area  
High School  
Presentation College



**Wyatt Warkenthien**  
Willow Lake High School  
Northern State  
University

## \$500 Dacotah Star Scholarship Winners



**Heidi Artz**  
Bottineau High School  
North Dakota  
State University



**Hannah Brenden**  
Aberdeen Central  
High School  
University of  
Nebraska-Lincoln



**Elizabeth Burckhard**  
Our Redeemer's  
Christian School  
Dordt College



**Derek Clausen**  
Webster Area  
High School  
South Dakota  
State University

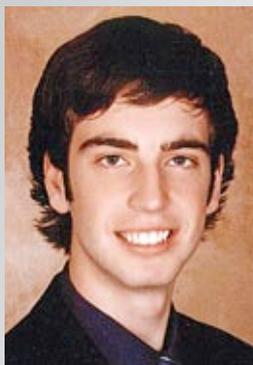


**Hayley Fisher**  
Rosholt High School  
South Dakota  
State University



**Kaitlin Galinat**  
Rapid City Central  
High School  
Augustana College

## \$500 Dacotah Star Scholarship Winners



**Kirby Greger**  
Mobridge-Pollock  
High School  
University of  
Mary, Bismarck



**Jenna Gullickson**  
Barnes County  
North East  
North Dakota  
State University



**Tyler Hagen**  
Webster Area  
High School  
University of  
South Dakota



**Alexandra Hagman**  
Brookings High School  
Pennsylvania  
State University



**Lindsey Hendrickson**  
Bison High School  
Creighton University



**Trevor Jerome**  
Mobridge-Pollock  
High School  
North Dakota  
School of Mines



**Molly Lee**  
Faulkton High School  
North Dakota  
State University



**Shauni Lyon**  
Lemmon High School  
Black Hills  
State University



**Morgan Pandolfo**  
Bowbells Public School  
University of  
Mary, Bismarck



**Megan Petersen**  
Lemmon High School  
University of Mary,  
Bismarck



**Krista Petersen**  
Watertown High School  
South Dakota  
State University



**Rachel Peterson**  
Aberdeen Christian  
High School  
Bethel University,  
St. Paul

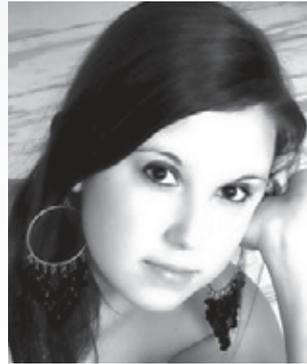
## \$500 Dacotah Star Scholarship Winners



**Briana Rabenberg**  
Sisseton High School  
Minnesota State University  
Moorhead



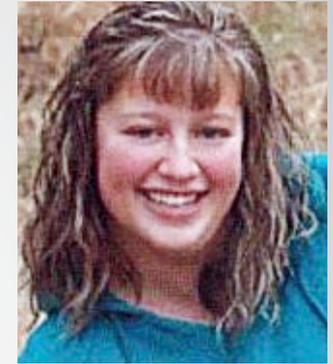
**Shannon Schilder**  
Faulkton High School  
South Dakota State University



**Callie Sivertson**  
St. John Public High School  
University of North Dakota



**Kendra Stromsness**  
Clark High School  
South Dakota State University



**Alyssa Thooft**  
Brookings High School  
University of Wisconsin  
River Falls



**Ashley Timm**  
Hettinger High School  
Black Hills State University



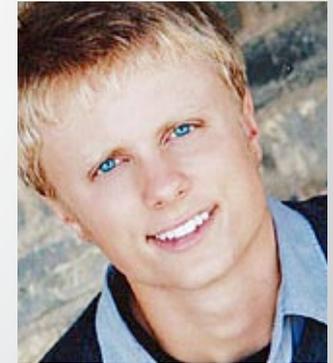
**Jenna Varilek**  
Clark High School  
Augustana College



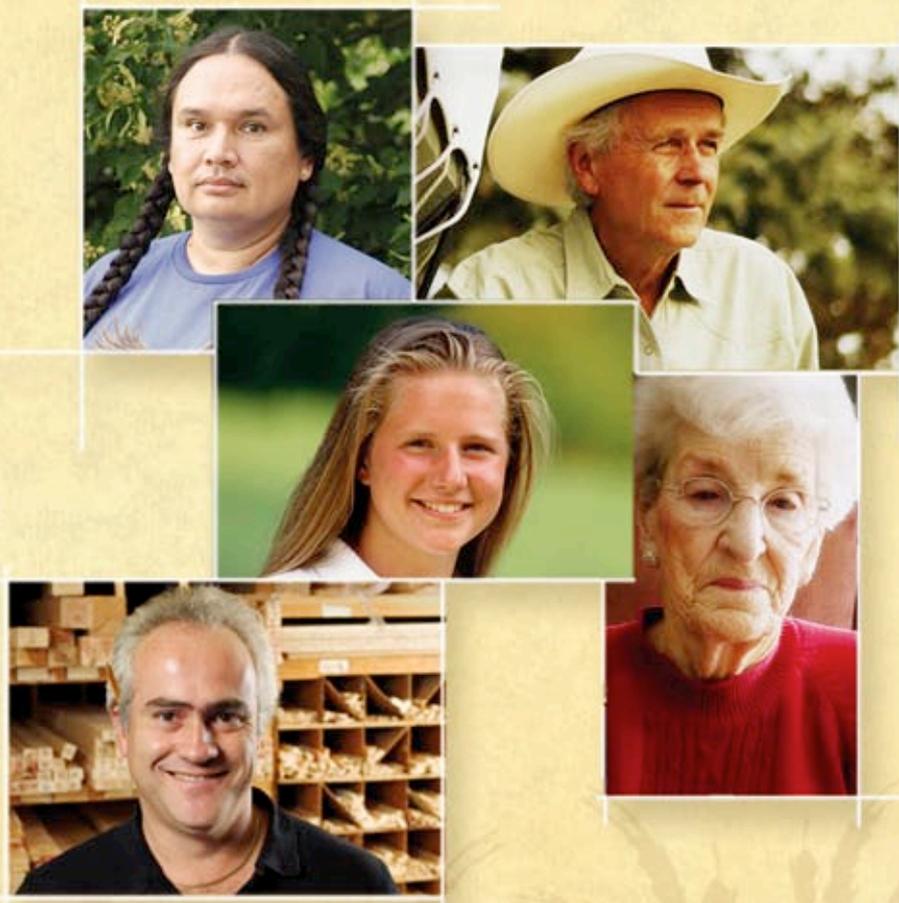
**Soren Wahlstrom**  
Custer High School  
South Dakota State University



**John Waltz**  
Home-Schooled  
South Dakota State University



**William Whitlock**  
Watertown High School  
University of South Dakota



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## Bad Bridges: Do Repairs Make Sense?

**W**hen an Interstate 35 bridge collapsed in Minneapolis in 2007, many Americans were shocked that such a thing could happen in the United States. As people started looking into the state of the nation's bridges, the bigger surprise was that we haven't had many more such tragedies: Many of our bridges are at the end of their expected lifespans and need maintenance or replacement.

That I-35 bridge was determined to be both structurally deficient and fracture-critical—designations that serve as warning signs for possible disaster.

Engineers deem a bridge *structurally deficient* if key features are rated as poor. More than 11 percent of the nation's bridges are structurally deficient due to lack of maintenance. "While not inherently unsafe, states must post limits for both speed and the number of vehicles permitted to travel across these bridges," according to [saveourbridges.com](http://saveourbridges.com), a website run by author and infrastructure advocate Barry LePatner. "In short, structurally deficient bridges no longer meet the original design standards for which they were designed and therefore, from an engineering standpoint, have already 'failed.'"

A bridge is *fracture-critical* if it was built without certain redundancies, so that if one key piece fails, the whole structure collapses.

Bridges that are both structurally deficient and fracture critical "pose a danger to the public unless they are soon remediated," according to [saveourbridges.com](http://saveourbridges.com).

The Dakotas are in pretty bad shape compared to much of the nation—fifth and ninth of the list of states with the

highest percentage of structurally deficient bridges, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers' Infrastructure Report Card. But some officials have argued that this designation (without the "fracture critical" label) doesn't mean the bridge is inherently unsafe—unless a bridge gets that designation, is not likely to be repaired or replaced, since such bridges get priority. That might result in some relatively safe bridges getting a "structurally deficient" designation just so they get on the maintenance schedule.

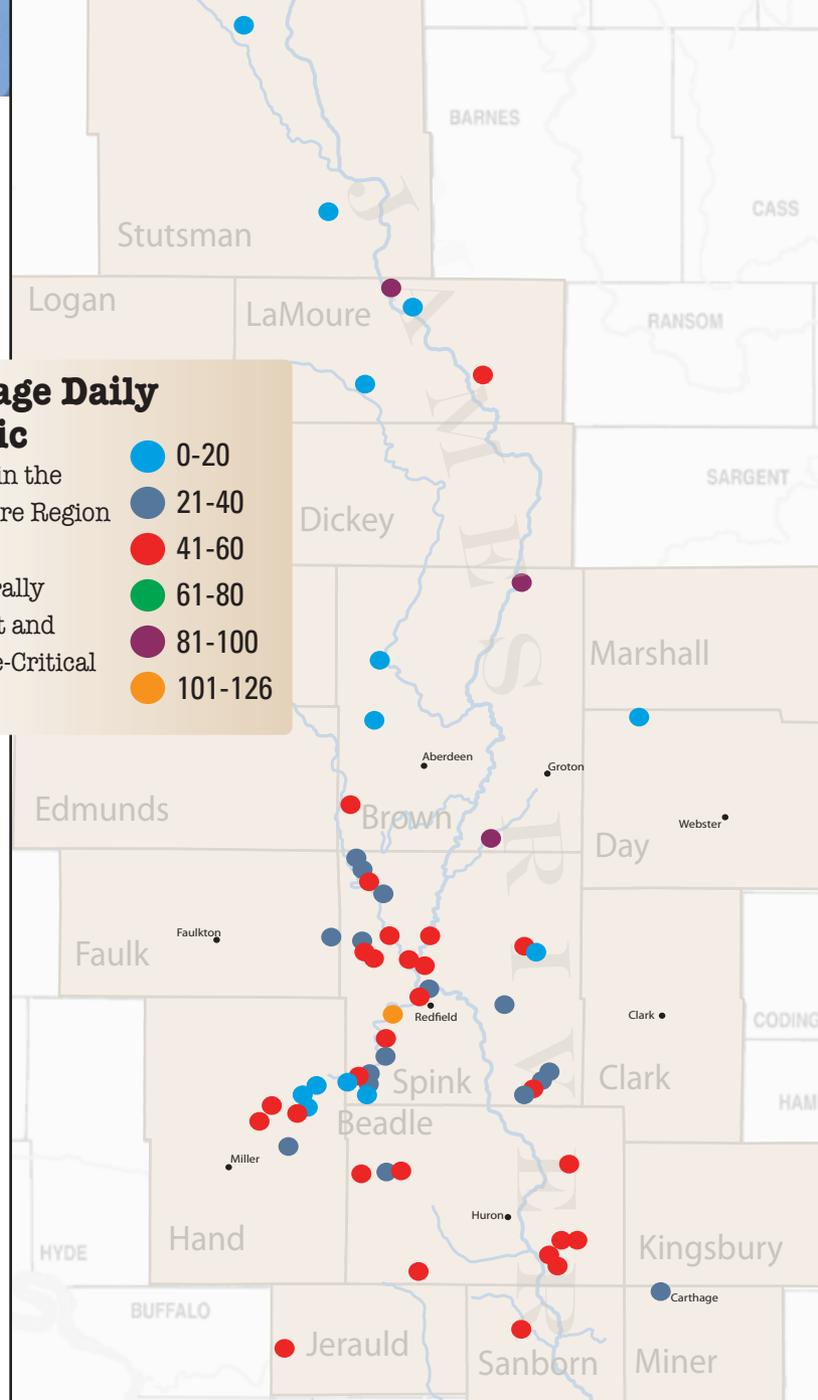
The other problem is how these projects look in a cost-benefit analysis. Bridge repairs are costly—few people would benefit from their repair. Most of these bridges have fewer than 100 vehicles a day on them. Some of them have fewer than 20 cars per day. The counties and townships that are responsible for these bridges hear a great many more complaints about potholes than they do about a bridge that is still standing.

That makes the cost-benefit analysis a pretty easy math problem for cash-strapped local governments, but it's harder for the farm family that has to cross a bridge daily to get to town or to school. Their lives are the ones potentially at risk.

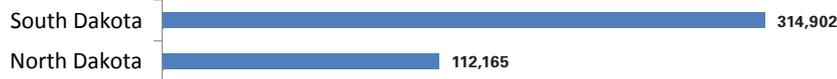
But when there's no money, there's no money. Some townships have removed small bridges, replacing them with culverts; others have placed load limits on them. No matter what labels the bridges have, the math doesn't work to do much else. ✨

### Average Daily Traffic

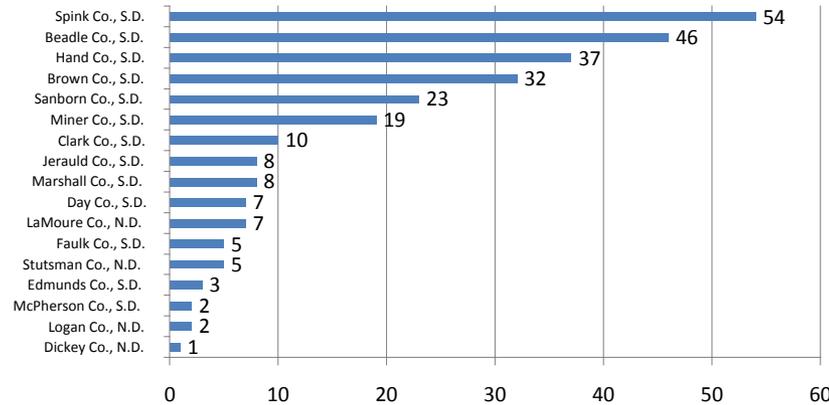
- Bridges in the Dakotafire Region that are Structurally Deficient and Fracture-Critical
- 0-20
  - 21-40
  - 41-60
  - 61-80
  - 81-100
  - 101-126



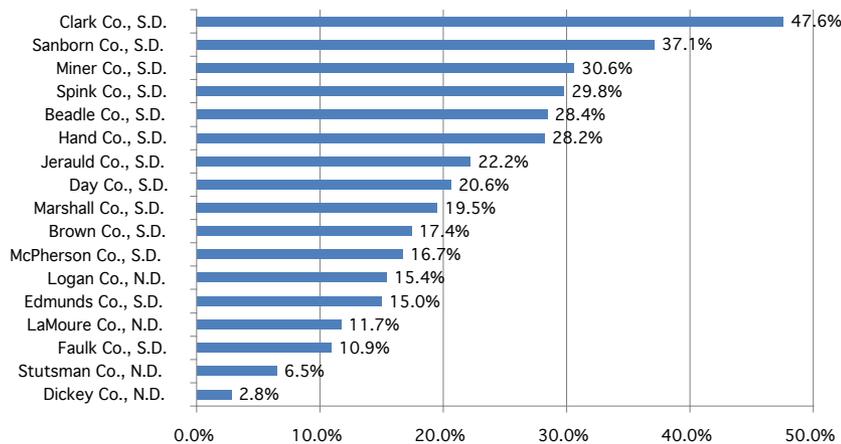
### Average Daily Traffic on Structurally Deficient Bridges



### Number of Structurally Deficient Bridges



### Percent of Bridges That Are Structurally Deficient



Note: The statistics on this page refer to bridges that are structurally deficient. Some, but not all, are fracture critical. Source: American Society of Civil Engineers' Infrastructure Report Card.

## Roads are a Constant Concern

Roads topped the lists of infrastructure problems for both North and South Dakota, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers' Infrastructure Report Card. Thirty-three percent of South Dakota's major roads and 23 percent of North Dakota's are in poor or mediocre condition.

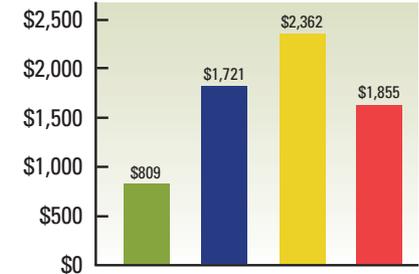
The hot, dry summer that caused a multitude of other problems did have the positive side effect of providing long stretches in which road work could be done, but the damage done from water in 2010 and 2011 can't be fixed in one season. "Hopefully people will realize that with all the damage that was done, it's not a one-year fix. It's probably a 10-year fix," said Jan Weismantel, Brown County, S.D., highway superintendent, for a March *Dakotafire* story.

If counties ever do get caught up enough on repairs that they can focus on maintenance, they (and the public, and the county commissioners) can rest assured as they look at the highway budget that the maintenance expenses are worth the cost.

It costs about three times as much to maintain a road in fair condition as it does a road in excellent condition. This means that the goal of good maintenance is to do repairs early enough in a paved road's life to keep it in excellent condition, which lessens the need for expensive repairs.

The only reason a road in poor condition costs less is because managers have given up on restoring it—which is happening with greater

### Pavement Maintenance Costs Per Mile



Source: S.D. Department of Transportation 2010 Annual Report. Illustration by Dakotafire Media

frequency around the country. Some counties, including Stutsman County, N.D, have converted some asphalt roads back into gravel ones. Brown County is discussing the possibility; traffic studies are being done around Brown County, S.D. to provide data for the discussion. The cost to convert the road is high, but gravel roads require cheaper maintenance in the long run.

"When [counties] had lots of money, they paved a lot of the roads and tried to make life easier for the people who lived out here," said Stutsman County Highway Superintendent Mike Zimmerman in a *Wall Street Journal* story about the practice. "Now, it's catching up to them."

Some have tried to argue against the practice: a professor at Purdue University organized a seminar called "Back to the Stone Age" to discuss it, and a columnist on Daily Kos said that it might save money, but "it reflects poorly on us as a nation that we have abandoned our rural communities in yet another way." ★

## WE ASKED CANDIDATES FOR MAJOR OFFICES IN NORTH AND SOUTH DAKOTA TO RESPOND TO THIS QUESTION:

"Many rural communities in the Dakotas are under strain, facing problems of declining school enrollment, crumbling infrastructure, and in general fewer resources to address their needs because of declining population trends. How will you, as a public servant, address these problems?" **WE RECEIVED THESE RESPONSES:**

### U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM SOUTH DAKOTA



**Kristi Noem, Republican,**  
Castlewood, S.D.

I grew up in rural South Dakota and have farmed my whole life. I realize that agriculture is critical to our rural communities and middle class families. Unfortunately, too few young people are staying on the farm. **I want to ensure**

**our government is working for agriculture, not against it.** For example, I helped lead the fight to stop proposed Labor Department regulations that would have banned kids from working on farms. We have to give the next generation certainty that they have a future on the farm. That means stable farm and tax policies. I'm supporting a Farm Bill that would ensure a strong safety net and continue the beginner farmer program. I'm also fighting for the elimination of the death tax, which threatens our family farms. Additionally, as a mother whose children attend rural schools, **I'm committed to making sure our rural schools have the resources they need.**



**Matt Varilek, Democrat,**  
Sioux Falls, S.D.

As a native of Yankton and Tabor, **I am passionate about the need to promote economic opportunity in South Dakota's rural communities.**

For almost seven years I worked as an economic development specialist on the staff of Senator Tim Johnson, working with local leaders on projects in every corner of our state. We must pass a Farm Bill, strengthening the ag sector that is the foundation of our rural economy. We should promote private industries that specifically create opportunities in rural areas –

biofuels, other value-added ag, and wind energy, among others. We must invest in rural infrastructure such as broadband, water and wastewater, and electricity transmission, which allow private businesses to thrive. And we must not sacrifice these investments to finance new tax breaks for Big Oil companies or other wealthy interests. Finally, **I agree strongly with those who have called education our best economic development policy.**

### U.S. SENATOR FROM NORTH DAKOTA



**Heidi Heitkamp, Democrat-NPL,**  
Mandan, N.D.

There are programs in existence that help address the needs of rural communities in North Dakota. **I'll fight to protect these programs like the USDA Rural Development program and the Department of Education**

**Rural Education Achievement Program,** which offer assistance for housing, infrastructure, business development, utilities, and education. I will work to ensure we provide the conditions necessary to keep our rural communities thriving.

What's more, **I'll fight burdensome government regulations that impede the ability of small banks and credit unions to serve rural communities.** And I'll push for a fair regulatory environment for our rural electric cooperatives that provide affordable energy and good jobs to rural North Dakotans. The Senate version of the Farm Bill, which supports 16 million jobs, must be passed in order to provide certainty and crucial crop insurance to our farmers and ranchers. Alternative forms of energy like wind and biofuels provide jobs in rural communities, and I'll fight to support domestic forms of energy so we can reduce our dependence on Mideast Oil.

### U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM NORTH DAKOTA



**Kevin Cramer, Republican,**  
Bismarck, N.D.

Our state is experiencing the largest economic boom in the country right now, and while infrastructure development lags behind, it is starting to catch up. The population is declining in some areas, but rapidly expanding

in others. Both energy and agriculture industries are growing, but we need to ensure that continues on a long-term basis, and in doing so produce more wealth in our rural counties. On a federal level that means **rolling back the mountains of red tape and regulations that President Obama has piled onto ag and energy producers and small businesses,** unnecessarily pushing up the costs and complexities of doing business. We need a predictable regulatory environment along with a stable tax structure that attracts investments. We also need to **promote the development of all our energy resources,** creating energy security and driving down the high fuel costs that can cripple agricultural producers and rural residents.



**Pam Guleson, Democrat-NPL,**  
Fargo, N.D.

Due in part to the recent oil boom in North Dakota, we have low unemployment and a large state surplus. But that boom has impacted these rural communities greatly.

**Our state government should reinvest more of its surplus into infrastructure**

**improvements** in rural housing, roads, emergency services and schools. In order to keep jobs here in North Dakota and reverse the declining population trends, we need to do more to develop our workforce in rural areas, and we should build more refineries for our oil to keep jobs right here.

The federal government can assist with roads and housing by directing more federal transportation funds, HUD and USDA Rural Development. Agriculture is still the backbone of North Dakota's economy and **it is essential that we pass a Farm Bill** to provide an important safety net for farmers and support for rural development.

*We did not receive a reply from Eric Olson.*

#### **NORTH DAKOTA GOVERNOR**



**Jack Dalrymple,**  
Republican,  
Bismarck, N.D.

As a public servant I've had unique opportunities to be involved in North Dakota's forward movement. Reworking the K-12 school formula for equitable, adequate funding for schools was just one important step. As North Dakota's population grows for the first time in decades, we are now able to create the future we want. **We are investing surplus funds in our state, county and township roads, our sewer systems, and our water infrastructure,** and incentivizing affordable housing construction. This includes non-oil producing counties and townships.

We have worked hard to cover a larger share of K-12 education costs, including low-interest loans to build schools. At the same time, **we continue offering meaningful tax relief for North Dakotans.** A growing economy is the best way to support a growing community and vice versa. These are exciting times. As your Governor, I will work with you to create the future we want.



**Ryan M. Taylor,**  
Democrat-NPL,  
Towner, N.D.

We're blessed in North Dakota with abundant resources, but while lots of attention is being paid to the development of oil, we must not forget our rural roots. Agriculture is a big part of our state's current bounty. It is our obligation to **invest a part of our \$2 billion surplus to ensure rural funding for safe roads, quality schools and emergency services.** I'm a rancher raising my family in rural North Dakota, and I spent 10 years representing one of our state's most rural senate districts. I know, first-hand, how important these investments are. Our campaign for governor has laid out plans at [taylorfornd.com](http://taylorfornd.com) for these investments to make sure our rural communities remain vital today and in our next economy after our "one-time harvest" of oil and gas. **We must invest in our young people and their education** whether they come from Wishek or Williston. A budget surplus is only as good as our ability as leaders to keep what makes our state special.

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# Dakotafire

SPARKING RURAL REVIVAL

## Livestock Producers Feel the Squeeze From Drought and High Feed Prices, but No Big Selloffs Locally



Unlike their West River counterparts, most Day County and northeast South Dakota livestock producers aren't culling their herds due to drought and/or the specter of high feed prices.

A check with several state farm agencies and sale barns found that cattle sales the past few months are on par with previous years, indicating producers are in no rush to dump cattle because of a feed shortage.

Warren Rusche, an SDSU Extension Service cow/calf field specialist in Watertown, said he has seen little culling in his regional travels up to this point. He says that's because conditions here

are better than in the western part of the state where big numbers of cattle have been showing up at sale barns due to the drought.

Mark Hanson, a Day County cattle feeder and livestock hauler, thinks local cattle producers haven't had to sell off their herds yet, but warns if drought goes into next year that will change.

Andover area dairy farmer Andy Paulson is one of the victims of the high price of feed/drought. He recently took his herd of 30 milkers to another dairy farm that has enough feed to carry them through the winter and has taken a full-time job in Aberdeen. Paulson controls about 360 acres and raises 200 acres of corn, most of which is in contracts to the ethanol plant or grain elevator.

"We don't have a lot of pasture or hay land, and the high cost of corn really hurts," he said. "Last year we used 300 round bales and this year we got 45. It's been a rough summer, but you have to take what Mother Nature gives you."

"Everyone (dairy farmers) is in a survival mode right now," said Paulson who took over his herd in 2003. "I love doing this, and I'll get right back into it once I know I can get enough feed."

—(Webster) Reporter & Farmer ★

## Manufacturing Business in Faulkton Breaks Ground on a New Facility

Common Sense Manufacturing in Faulkton aims to have a roomier place to work by late spring. The company, which makes durable agriculture equipment such as bale feeders and calf shelters, broke ground on the facility July 16.

"It's going to be a big building," said owner Kelly Melius. "The plans for the building will be 120 feet wide by 200 feet long and 25 feet tall. We

## Dakota Style Is Spitting Out Sunflower Seeds All Across the Nation

Dakota Style continues to put Clark, S.D., on the map—most recently with a booming business in sunflower seeds and kernels.

A new warehouse/office space is now in use at the Clark Industrial Park, primarily for sunflower seed production. The Dakota Style brand started with potato chips, but sales of sunflower seeds, up 50 percent from last year, have surpassed chips sales for the company.

With 25,000 points of distribution, sales have increased dramatically, and the company is expanding, adding second shifts at both the potato chip plant and the sunflower seed packaging plant. The packaging plant opened in February.

The company currently has 14 workers at the original location northeast of Clark and five employees at the warehouse on Industrial Road in Clark. Their expansion calls for more warehouse space, more jobs and more lines of more flavors in the future.

"We have had a great home here in this community, and the payoff will increase in the future with more jobs," said Riley Dandurand, general manager of Dakota Style.

—Clark County Courier ★

needed the extra height for all the raw materials we'll have inside and something big enough to house them. It will have a built-in hoist system so we can accommodate large semi-trucks coming in with large bundles of steel, so my employees have as much room to work as possible."

The company employs up to 16 people during their winter busy season.—Faulk County Record ★

## Water Problems Made Worse By Confusing Statutes, Farmers Say



South Dakota, and much of the country, is experiencing one of the driest summers in recent years, but water is still the source of frustration for many area producers.

About 50 people attended a meeting in Britton Aug. 6 hosted by South Dakota Farmers Union to address the problem of water management in the region and state.

"Water management is really something that touches the lives of everyone in South Dakota," said SD Farmers Union President Doug Sombke.

"Based on the numbers of acres that were taken out of production, it's had a major impact on our state's economy over the past few years and cost the federal government millions of dollars."

It's also not just farmers that are affected by the water problems. Seed, fertilizer, and chemical companies feel the trickle-down effect, as do grain elevators, fuel companies, equipment dealers, and Main Street businesses.

The resounding message coming from attendees at the meeting was that there really is not a plan to manage the water, and state statutes are confusing and difficult to navigate when it comes to organizing watershed districts. There are also very few coordinated efforts, even between townships or counties, to try and improve the flow of water.

That's one of the reasons that the South Dakota Legislature set up a water management task force during the 2012 session. The group held its first meeting in July.

"Our main goal is to make some sort of progress in managing water, and we have a lot of work to do," said Jason Frerichs, District 1 state senator and a member of the task force. "There's also a lot of education that needs to take place and public input will guide this discussion. My hope down the road is that we can set up a regional watershed, but in the meantime we need to look at baby steps to try and get our arms around the issue."

—*Britton Journal* ★

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## Groton Group Provides Weekend Food For Needy Students, When They Don't Have School Lunch



The National School Lunch Program ensures that all students get a mid-day meal each school day, giving them the nourishment and fuel they need to focus on learning. Some Groton residents recognized that the program doesn't guarantee that students will have the food they need over the weekend to arrive at school ready to learn on Monday morning.

Last year those residents formed a new organization designed to provide assistance to school-age children in the Groton School District who may not be receiving adequate meals on weekends. The new organization is called Building Academic Groton Students for Tomorrow, or BAGS for short.

The organization puts together a bag of food for students to take home at the end of the school week. The bag of food is designed to supplement the student's food intake over the weekend and allow the student to come to school on Monday properly nourished and ready to learn. Each bag contains food for two meals a day plus snacks for each day.

"By meeting a student's basic needs, such as hunger," Groton Elementary Principal Dan Dalchow said, "we can make learning much easier for a student."

—*Groton Independent* ★



→ Kristie Olson, who teaches an entrepreneurship class at Madison High School, talks with Tyler Wiebe, a senior at Madison and a member of the Future Business Leaders of America. Photo by Becky Froehlich

# Teaching Kids to Forge Their Own Paths

Entrepreneurship Education Can Help Young People Build Up Their Communities

BY **HEIDI MARTTILA-LOSURE**  
REPORTING BY **BECKY FROEHLICH**

**D**o the young people in your community want to live and work there someday, when they are ready to settle down?

Many adults in rural communities think they know—but they might be surprised at the answer if they stop to ask the young people in question, according to Craig Schroeder, senior associate with the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship at the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI).

Recently, the center asked about 25,000 middle and high school students from rural places across the nation what they thought about their hometowns.

When they were asked whether they expected to live in their hometowns someday, they gave a half-hearted response. But when those same students were asked if they'd live there if good career opportunities were available, more than half answered "yes."

The seven-year survey shows that the problem is not "dull" hometowns—it's the perceived lack of career options there.

And, indeed, the variety of jobs in the rural Dakotas (if not the number—some jobs are going unfilled, as Dakotafire reported in August) can be lacking. Young people who don't see their desired career represented in the jobs available often assume they have to leave to pursue their dreams.

A small but growing number of rural schools are trying to present young people with another option: They can create their own opportunities as entrepreneurs. That provides rewards for the communities as well as the young people, according to Schroeder.

"Rural places that tie their economic development resources to entrepreneurship education can help these young people pursue their dreams and, in turn, revitalize, grow and diversify their own local economies," Schroeder wrote in a recent article for *The Daily Yonder*.

In the past decade, 18 schools in South Dakota and 45 in North Dakota have started offering entrepreneurship classes that teach skills such as

how to evaluate business ideas and opportunities in their communities, how to finance a venture, and how to market a service or product.

"I try to go through all the basic concepts that a young entrepreneur would need to know," said Kristie Olson, who teaches entrepreneurship at Madison High School.

The final result is a business plan that showcases all the strategic thinking that goes into starting a business, Olson explained—thinking that the students can put into practice later.

"I just talked to a former student this weekend and he completed a business plan in the past month to try to get financing to start an outdoor guide business," Olson said. "He said he actually remembered a lot from class and the business plan was somewhat easier to write (because of taking the class)."

In Howard, the entrepreneurship class incorporates a computer simulation.

"As the students go through these lessons, they are put in the position of a convenience store owner, having to make all the decisions on all aspects of their store," explained David Carmon, who teaches the class. "As they become more successful and profitable making the right decisions, they can move on to new levels, which present additional opportunities and challenges."

Carmon said the simulation can quickly give students feedback on whether their business decisions are profitable (or point out clearly that they are not), and which strategies in pricing, staffing, marketing and so on are better than others.

## Creating a New Path

The best of these classes are not only about teaching skills but also about changing a mindset, according to Schroeder.

"You've got to start young to help them (students) think differently about what their options are," Schroeder said in a phone interview. "(Currently) they are not getting input from their adults in their community about what is possible."

When students see that their rural communities may have an opportunity for someone with the right skills, both entrepreneurial and otherwise, the students sometimes adjust their post-high school plans accordingly. Schroeder gave the example of a young woman he met who wanted to run a newspaper. She went to college to get a journalism degree, then came home and purchased her local paper.

This example shows one key aspect to successful entrepreneurship education classes: They are connected to the community beyond the school, helping the students form relationships with business and community leaders, and also to understand the needs and aspirations of the community. "You can't just put a class in place and run it and not connect it with anything," Schroeder said. "It has to be tied in with everything you want to do."

**“We all learn the most from our failures.”**

Even without the goal of drawing young people back to their communities, entrepreneurship classes are still a good idea for schools, Schroeder said. Many of them are focused on hands-on learning, and since some students learn better through hands-on projects than textbook-based lessons, it can give those students a way to succeed.

That's better for the kids, the schools, and the community, Schroeder said.

He also recognizes that many students will leave after high school to pursue educational opportunities or work experience elsewhere, which is why he prefers the term "youth attraction" to "youth retention." The goal is making the community an attractive place to settle—some of which is the job of the community, and some of which is helping young people see its opportunities.

## Getting a Class in Place

Schroeder has traveled across the country giving presentations and training about the Home Town Competitiveness framework for communities, which includes the implementation of entrepreneurship education. He said communities have used different approaches to get entrepreneurship programs going: Sometimes a group of students will approach the administration about wanting to gain these skills, or the initiative can come from a community development group that wants to connect with the school. Entrepreneurship education doesn't have to take place in school, either—4-H, FBLA and other youth development organizations have provided these lessons.

Starting a high school entrepreneurship class can run into several barriers, such as a lack of time in the schedule, a qualified teacher, or adequate funding. Solving these problems is easier when all the resources of the community are considered, Schroeder said. For example, if a teacher is not from the community in which he or she teaches and therefore doesn't have a clear idea of what opportunities might be available in that community, a local economic development director could provide some parts of the instruction or connect with business leaders who could share their skills.

"Some of these barriers, if we just think differently about how we support the school, we can overcome fairly directly," Schroeder said, and in doing so the problem actually becomes a benefit.

One problem Schroeder has observed is that adults may not think the ideas that young people come up with can work in their community, and to keep the kids from failing, they give the subtle message that they shouldn't try.

But even if the plans do fail, not letting kids try denies them a valuable learning opportunity, Schroeder said: "We all learn the most from our failures."

And if they succeed, the young entrepreneurs and their communities will all reap the rewards. ✨

# The Culture of Rural Places Has a 'Leaving' Theme

BY DAVID NEWQUIST

From the time they are born, rural children grow up in a culture that teaches them to leave the places they call home.

That's the way it's been throughout American history. When the first immigrants came to America, they were determined to provide their children with better lives than they had. One of their first concerns was building schools to give their children the knowledge and skills they would need to succeed in the developing nation. They also taught their children not to submit to repression and exclusion from opportunity, as they had been in the Old World. The result of those lessons was often the outmigration of young people from the rural communities in which they were raised to seek more fulfilling lives elsewhere.

This phenomenon is described in a significant segment of American literature. Hamlin Garland, for example, described his family's move to a homestead claimed by his father near Ordway, S.D. He tells of the onerous labor that he and his brother were expected to perform to keep the farm running, but also of the liberating role that school played in their development. When Garland's family moved to the James River Valley, he had graduated from public school and had aspirations for less menial and more intellectually challenging work.

His experience as a homesteader in McPherson did not convince him otherwise. During a trip to his claim, Garland was caught in a blizzard, which nearly cost him and his horse their lives.

Adding to Garland's discontent with rural life was watching the deteriorating effect it had on his mother, who was worn down by the fatigue and isolation of frontier life. When he became a literary success, he bought a home in Wisconsin for his parents near where

they had once lived, with family close by. Garland's account of his own life reflected a trend pursued by many young people of talent and ambition.

American literature also suggests that certain disaffecting characteristics of rural life have motivated young people to leave. Willa Cather captures these qualities in her novel *My Antonia*. Antonia and other young women find domestic work in a small town, but they also find the very repression that caused their parents to flee the Old World replicated in small-town society. Antonia marries and builds a life for her family on the farm, removed from the small-minded and gossiping factions that rule town life, but the young women are expected to submit to servitude, are under disapproving sanctions for going to dances, and are the objects of social and sexual predators. Most move on to larger communities to escape the oppression and dismal prospects of rural life.

Our education system has continued the same lesson running through this literature: It has done a tremendous job preparing young people for life in other places and has served largely to transition them from rural life to urban life. Our colleges have aggressively recruited students with the claim that they will prepare them for success anywhere.

The need for science and technology in our curricula to meet the future is indisputable—but this emphasis has had the effect of diminishing the humanities and the arts. In many colleges, humanities departments have been reduced to providing a smattering of courses so that students can be said to have a well-rounded education. Few students have

an understanding of the forces that actually created American culture. The teaching has been concentrated on vocational skills that prepare students to move, with little attention paid to how communities are built and lived in.

For those interested in rural revival, American letters offer a reservoir of ideas. Our history shows a quest for financial success, but it also shows a quest for cultural development that satisfies the needs of the human spirit. The attraction of urban society is that it offers a multitude of ways to satisfy those needs. Our government and our technology developed as a means of providing not merely a living but of reasons to live fully and actively. Literature depicting "the revolt from the village" is laden with analysis of why some communities do not work. People are offended at the critical portrayals of rural community life, but they show one important reason why young people move away.

There is much concern in South Dakota over the "brain drain" as young people move through the education system to venture to other places. However, colleges are also cultural centers that participate in community life. They possess knowledge and skill sets that could be directed toward rural renewal. If the knowledge and creative energy contained in them were unleashed on rural problems and given support of the level approaching athletic programs, they would become community centers rather than transition stations.

Many of the factors that have shaped rural life are known, others still have to be carefully defined—but if bright people were given the task, many would stay around to take on the job of building the kind of community where people would like to stay. ✨

→ **David Newquist** is a retired Northern State University professor who lives in Aberdeen, S.D. He blogs at [northernbeacon.blogspot.com](http://northernbeacon.blogspot.com)

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# An Advocate for Rural Education, M.M. Guhin Shaped Hundreds of Lives

BY EMILY JESSUP GUHIN

For much of the history of the Dakotas, rural people received their early educations in the one-room schoolhouses that used to dot the countryside. Here was the place where many of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents learned to read, write and do arithmetic, but also to help one another, to work together on common projects and to be good citizens. From those schoolhouses, they went on to serve in their professions and communities.

Michael Miles Guhin (1887-1941) was one individual who was instrumental in promoting that rural education system. From his days as Brown County Superintendent of Schools, through his years at the S.D. Superintendent of Public Instruction Office and on to his years of training teachers as a professor at Northern State Teachers College, Guhin always strived to improve the schools, inspire the teachers and interact with the children.

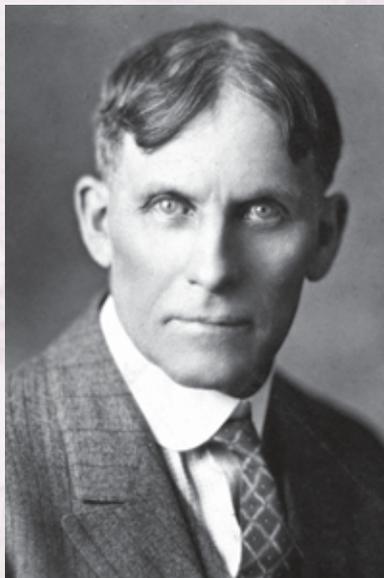
Guhin promoted a special project called the Young Citizens League, a club run by the students themselves that helped them understand that they had a part to play in their world. They learned parliamentary procedure, how to speak to groups, and how to organize and carry out an activity on their own. Loyalty and personal responsibility for

their actions were encouraged.

In a publication about the Young Citizens League, Guhin wrote that the League promoted “the startling idea that CHILDREN ARE PEOPLE. It is a kind of CHALLENGE in which the children

say ‘We propose to stand on our own feet, work with our own hands and think our own thoughts — and we invite the world to watch us do it.’” Guhin believed strongly that the League provided the students with the tools to live more productive lives in the years ahead. “It is conceivable that a citizenry which has had eight years of training in self-determination may be more resistant to insidious propaganda, more loyal to oaths of office, more law-abiding, more public spirited, more patriotic and at the same time less chauvinistic, and more prone to observe common sense rules of safety first, health, sanitation, decency, and courtesy,” Guhin wrote in 1935.

Michael was also a strong advocate for the proper funding of schools. One outstanding example was the seven-page editorial he wrote in his magazine, *Better Rural School Bulletin*, in September 1927. That year the state legislature had drastically cut funding for education, and with it, the state aid to schools that had been in place



for many years. (Sound familiar?) He deplored the fact that mismanagement and poor decisions on the state level were corrected by depleting the education budget. Whereas the tax burden for education in past years had been spread over the whole state and involved railroads, mines, public service corporations, and cities large and small, it was now being transferred to the farmers. He asked why a measure that vitally affected the farm communities of the state was passed by the legislature. He felt that it was because the farmers were not organized to protect their rights. They had no lobbyist at Pierre to look after the interests of their children. The farm communities were simply “easy marks” on which to concentrate the “economy” required to balance the budget. He urged justice for the rural children of South Dakota.

The name of M.M. Guhin, which also graced a Liberty ship named in his honor, was once well-known across the state, but memories of him have faded with the passage of time. His philosophy of the importance of rural communities, as well as the standard of excellence he expected for rural teachers and students, is still relevant today. ✨

→ *Emily Jessup Guhin of Aberdeen, S.D., is the author of **Children Are People**, a book documenting the impact that Michael Miles Guhin had on rural education, which will be published this fall. The book will be for sale at the Dacotah Prairie Museum in Aberdeen.*

# The Beotia Township Smoking Parlor

BY ROD EVANS

During the homesteading boom of the 1880s, one farm in north central South Dakota was pretty much like the next, which in those days was merely a half-mile or mile away. Most farms had only one or two quarters of land and three or four buildings at most. But it didn't take long for a few of the homesteaders to give up on the stubborn land and look for something better, and that was when farms started becoming bigger and more complex.

When Farmer Jones first filed his homestead or tree claim, all the neighbors knew exactly where the Jones homestead was, and they knew the extent of everything Farmer Jones owned. But when Farmer Smith sold out to Farmer Jones, then it wasn't quite as easy to keep track of what was going on, or to use a common saying in a slightly different context, it wasn't as easy to keep up with the Joneses. Sometimes neighbors couldn't even agree on whether to call a certain piece of ground

the Jones land or the Smith land, or to refer to the structures as the Smith buildings or the Jones buildings, especially if Farmer Jones moved Farmer Smith's buildings onto the Jones homestead.

You can see how quickly matters became complicated, and it only got more so as there were fewer and fewer farmers. Two generations later, my father decided early on in his farming career that the best way to survive was to take a few risks and expand whenever possible. When a nearby quarter of land came up for sale, he'd spend some time on his calculator and then put in a competitive bid. Eventually he ended up with one of the larger farms in the area, and that meant he owned a lot of buildings as well as a lot of land.

Having grown up in the 1930s, Dad was a child of frugality. If the buildings on the newly acquired land were structurally sound, he'd take the Farmer Jones scenario to the extreme and have them all moved to our farm, and if they weren't, Dad and my brothers and I would tear them down, pull the nails out of the lumber, sort the wood, haul it home, and store it until a use could be found for it.

Before long our farm was dotted with buildings of all shapes, sizes, and purposes. The newly acquired structures were usually used as initially intended, such as the Robinson hog house and the Wettstein granary, but Grandma's cook car became a garage, the Robinson barn was converted into a repair shop, and the Hitchcock house was made into a granary before it was demoted to an oil room.

The building that ended up the furthest from its original intent was the old Beotia Township Post Office. It was actually more of a shack than a building by the time I was a kid, and it was too small for any constructive purpose; therefore, it

was basically abandoned property. My brothers and I, however, immediately came up with an idea for its use—a smoking parlor ... no, not for adults, but for my brothers and me.

How old were we? Certainly young enough to be stupid and old enough to know better, but not quite old enough to know that we shouldn't have excluded our sister. I wonder if she started getting suspicious when we boarded up the door and windows with Dad's precious scrap lumber, cut an entrance/exit through the roof, and made that opening accessible only by ladder. It was hard to tell because she always had that innocent look about her—the look we tried to imitate with little success.

Once we boys were on the roof with the ladder pulled up beside us, we were able to climb down into our new digs, pockets stuffed with cigarettes pilfered from our uncle's car, free and alone, puffing away to our hearts' content ... but not for long. Our disgruntled sister headed straight for our parents and blabbed everything.

It did not go well for us. I remember that we were grounded for much of the summer, but I don't remember for sure what happened to our Beotia Township Smoking Parlor. I'm guessing maybe Dad accidentally backed over it with a tractor after deciding that our farm was getting just a little too big. ✨

→ **Rod Evans** is a *Speaker's Bureau Scholar and One Book South Dakota discussion leader for the South Dakota Humanities Council, as well as an award-winning playwright and author of the book Palaces on the Prairie, which was published in 2009 by the North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies. Evans lives in Aberdeen, S.D., with his wife, Vicki.*

## Send us a 'Postcard'!

In each issue of *Dakotafire* and regularly online at [Dakotafire.net](http://Dakotafire.net), we will feature a "Postcard"—a short, evocative story about an event, person or place, written as if you were telling the story to a friend. Some ideas: hunting stories, the highlight of a big basketball game, or a moment in history. The story must have a photo to accompany it. Digital images (a minimum of 1000 pixels wide) are preferred; you can also send a photo by mail. E-mail submissions to [heidi@dakotafire.net](mailto:heidi@dakotafire.net), or mail to **Dakotafire Media, Postcard Submission, PO Box 603, Frederick, SD 57441.**

→ Rod Evans (on the ladder) and his siblings work on one of their “construction projects” during their childhood on the farm. Photo courtesy Rod Evans



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