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# Sustaining Wisconsin

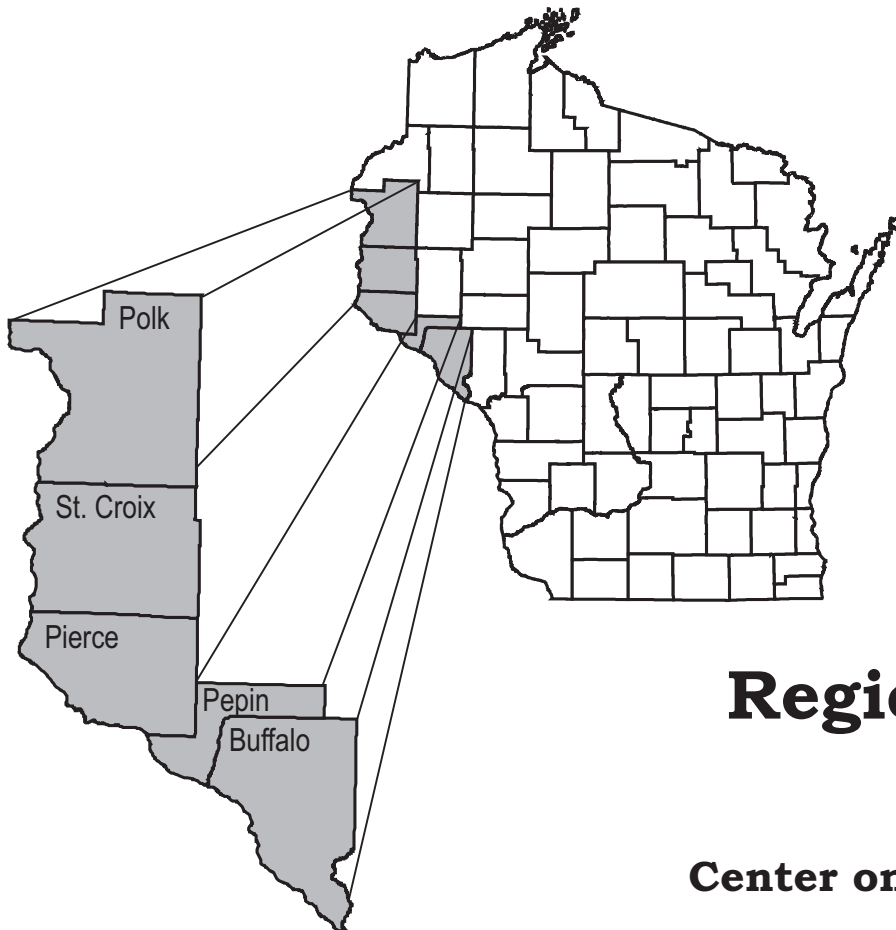
A Statewide Dialogue on Wisconsin's Future

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A project of the Center on Wisconsin Strategy (COWS), UW-Madison

## Buffalo, Pepin, Pierce, Polk, & St. Croix Counties

An Economic, Social, Environmental, and Political Snapshot



November 2002

## Regional Briefing Paper Series

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## **Preface: Why we need State of the Region Reports**

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In January 2001 the Center on Wisconsin Strategy (COWS) launched an 18-month statewide grassroots public education campaign — complete with coordinated media outreach, public discussion forums, an interactive web site, and regular electronic mailings — on major issues of concern to the state. “Sustaining Wisconsin” offers a model for mass education on public policy and involvement that will produce real results now and can be used elsewhere in the future.

A central component of Sustaining Wisconsin is providing useful, accessible information to people in their communities. Integral to this mission is a series of regional reports we are releasing throughout the campaign. The regional reports are an attempt to understand and portray issues and matters that are of specific importance to residents in particular areas of Wisconsin. The regional reports focus more detailed attention on the many facts within Sustaining Wisconsin’s five broad issue categories: Jobs and the Economy, Families and Communities, The Future, Environment and Natural Resources, and Democracy and Civic Participation.

The regional reports are also part of a larger project currently underway at COWS to explore the state of rural Wisconsin. The rural areas of Wisconsin vary significantly depending on the region. In the northern part of the state, rural economies are facing unique challenges as tourism grows and the mining and timber industries change. In the southern part of the state, the pressures of suburban development and the current low prices for agricultural commodities, including milk, Wisconsin’s farming backbone, are forcing many farmers into heavier debt and often foreclosure.

There are similarities behind the concerns facing residents of rural Wisconsin, as there are common features in the concerns that face us all. Our rural areas do not exist independently of the urban areas and the state of rural affairs is directly related to the state as a whole. By dividing the state into regions comprised of three to six counties, and then exploring in detail the particular issues, trends, opportunities and challenges, we believe that we can better understand our state as a whole, and for the first time begin to articulate a policy agenda for long-term, statewide economic sustainability.

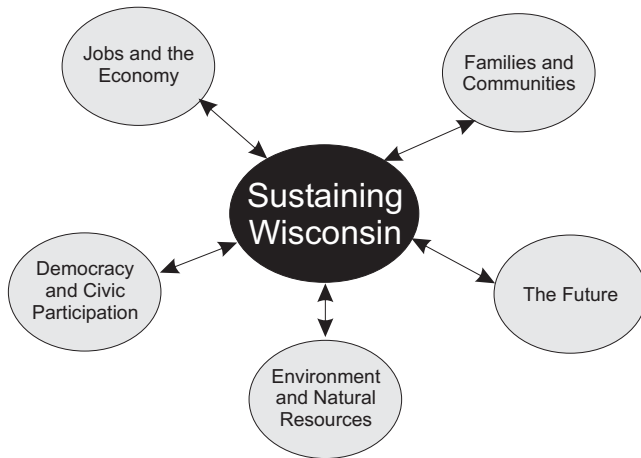
Many decisions that impact our daily lives are made at the local and regional levels. More information about job growth, unemployment, health and social services, schools, lakes and rivers, and political participation can help us in making the right policy choices in our local areas. The regional reports are designed to contribute to the discussion around these issues, and draw attention to important choices and challenges that we face right in our own backyards.

The differences in geographical location, landscape, industry base, political affiliations, and environmental concerns all offer a chance to compare one area of Wisconsin to another area and to the state as a whole.

As with virtually all regions in Wisconsin, the counties explored in this regional report highlight how great it is to live here. The challenge before us as a state is to preserve our strongest traditions while confronting our greatest challenges.



## Findings: The State of the Buffalo, Pepin, Pierce, Polk, & St. Croix Region



Even a quick review of the challenges we face — that is, the problems we need to solve and the opportunities we need to preserve — reveals important connections between seemingly unrelated issues. The choices we and our leaders make should embrace those connections.

### ***Jobs and the Economy***

- With the exception of St. Croix County, all counties in the region had per capita incomes below the state average in 1999.
- Pepin County had the sixth lowest labor force participation rate in the state in 1999.
- Nearly sixty percent of workers in Pierce County did not earn enough in their primary job to lift a family of four out of poverty in 1998.
- Pepin County ranked lowest in the state for travelers' spending in 2001. Buffalo and Pierce counties ranked fifth and tenth lowest, respectively.

### ***Families and Communities***

- Pierce and St. Croix counties had the highest median family incomes in the state in 2001.
- St. Croix County had the fifth lowest overall and child poverty rates in the state. Poverty rates in Buffalo and Pepin counties were higher than the statewide average in 1997.
- More than 30 percent of families in the region could not afford the Fair Market Rent.
- Pepin County was one of the few counties in Wisconsin with no welfare recipients in 2001.

### ***The Future***

- Pierce, Polk, and St. Croix counties showed dramatic population increases between 1970 and 2000, while the populations in Buffalo and Pepin counties largely held steady.
- St. Croix County showed 86 percent of women seeking prenatal care in the first trimester. Pepin County had the second lowest prenatal care rate in the state.
- Buffalo, Pierce and St. Croix counties had higher infant mortality rates than the Wisconsin average in 1998.
- Buffalo and Pepin counties had the fifth and third lowest adult arrest rates, respectively, in 1999.

### ***The Environment and Natural Resources***

- Pierce County had the smallest percentage of wetlands among all counties statewide, and St. Croix and Pepin counties were both within the bottom ten statewide for wetlands acreage.
- Pierce and Polk counties had the smallest percentage of recreation and conservation land in the region. Polk County had the least amount of such land of any county in the state.
- This region contained a total of 13 Superfund sites in 1999. Ten of these sites are located in St. Croix County. Pepin County is one of only twelve Wisconsin counties with no Superfund sites.

### ***Democracy and Civic Participation***

- Democrats represent five of the eight state legislative districts in the region.
- A November 2000 advisory referendum to place limits on campaign spending passed by at least 90 percent in the four counties which had the referendum on their ballot.
- Pepin County had the highest voter participation rates in the region in 2000; Buffalo County had the lowest voter turnout rate.

#### **Top 10/Bottom 10 in WI**

- **Decrease in Land Used for Farming** — Pepin 7<sup>th</sup> largest
- **Workers with Poverty Earnings** — Pierce 10<sup>th</sup> highest
- **Labor Force Participation Rate** — Pepin 6<sup>th</sup> lowest
- **Travelers' Spending** — Pepin lowest; Buffalo 5<sup>th</sup> lowest; Pierce 10<sup>th</sup> lowest
- **Total Jobs in Tourism** — Pepin lowest; Buffalo 5<sup>th</sup> lowest
- **Unemployment** — St. Croix 7<sup>th</sup> lowest
- **Median Family Income** — Pierce and St. Croix highest
- **Single Parent Families** — Buffalo 8<sup>th</sup> lowest; Pepin 10<sup>th</sup> lowest
- **Teen Births** — St. Croix 5<sup>th</sup> lowest; Buffalo 7<sup>th</sup> lowest
- **Total Poverty** — St. Croix, 5<sup>th</sup> lowest
- **Child Poverty** — St. Croix 5<sup>th</sup> lowest; Pierce 9<sup>th</sup> lowest
- **Children Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch** — St. Croix 4<sup>th</sup> lowest; Pierce 7<sup>th</sup> lowest
- **Fair Market Rent** — Pierce and St. Croix highest
- **Hourly Wage Needed to Afford FMR** — Pierce and St. Croix highest
- **Change in Renter Households** — Pepin 2<sup>nd</sup> largest decrease; St. Croix 2<sup>nd</sup> largest increase
- **Welfare Recipients** — Pepin lowest
- **Prenatal Care** — Pepin 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest
- **WIC recipients** — St. Croix 9<sup>th</sup> lowest
- **Badger Care Participation** — St. Croix 10<sup>th</sup> lowest
- **Adult Arrests** — Buffalo 5<sup>th</sup> lowest; Pepin 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest
- **Juvenile Arrests** — Pepin 6<sup>th</sup> lowest; Buffalo 4<sup>th</sup> lowest



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## Jobs and the Economy

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While Wisconsin as a whole has recently experienced an economic boom, we continue to face challenges in building a sustainable future for our state. The nature of work in Wisconsin is changing, as the economy shifts from family-supporting jobs in the manufacturing sector to low wage, dead-end jobs in the retail and service sectors. As wages drop, people are working longer hours to maintain their standards of living. Furthermore, not all citizens have shared equally in the economic boom. The wealthy have benefited disproportionately from the growth in the last decade, the middle class is largely stuck, and the poor are slipping further behind.

The construction and manufacturing sectors led job growth in the region in the latter half of the 1990s, although the services sector also saw some job growth. The relative increase of jobs in the service sector is of some concern, as this industry tends to pay lower wages and provide fewer benefits than those in manufacturing and construction, and the challenge ahead lies in promoting wages and benefits that can support families and reduce worker turnover.

The labor force participation rates in the region, with the exception of Pepin County, were above the Wisconsin average. In 1999, Pepin County had the sixth lowest labor force participation rate in the state. The unemployment rates in the region vary, with Buffalo, Pierce and St. Croix counties slightly below the state average, and Pepin and Polk counties above the state average. The percentage of workers with poverty earnings in 1998 was more than 40 percent in each county in the region; nearly 60 percent of workers in Pierce County had poverty earnings in 1998.

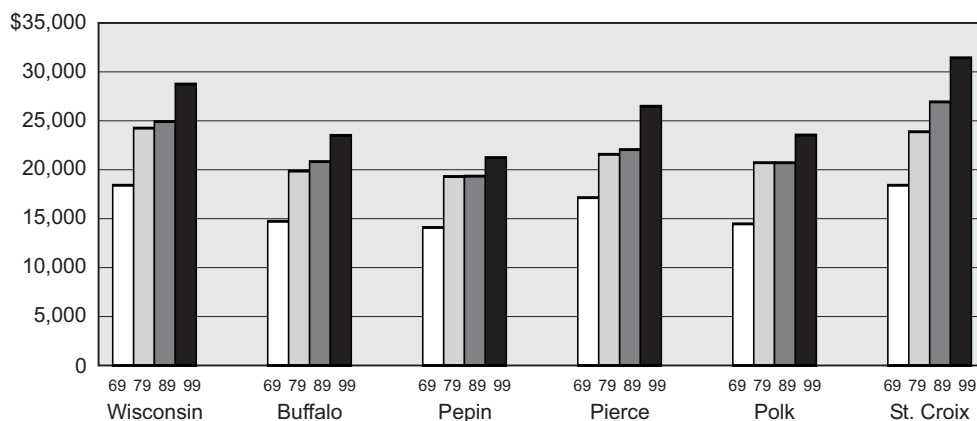
Throughout Wisconsin, there is a general trend toward large, “factory” farms, which are farms larger than 1000 acres. The region saw a similar increase in the number of factory farms between 1992 and 1997, although the change in percentage of land used for farming generally decreased in the region during the same time period.

### **Economic Growth**

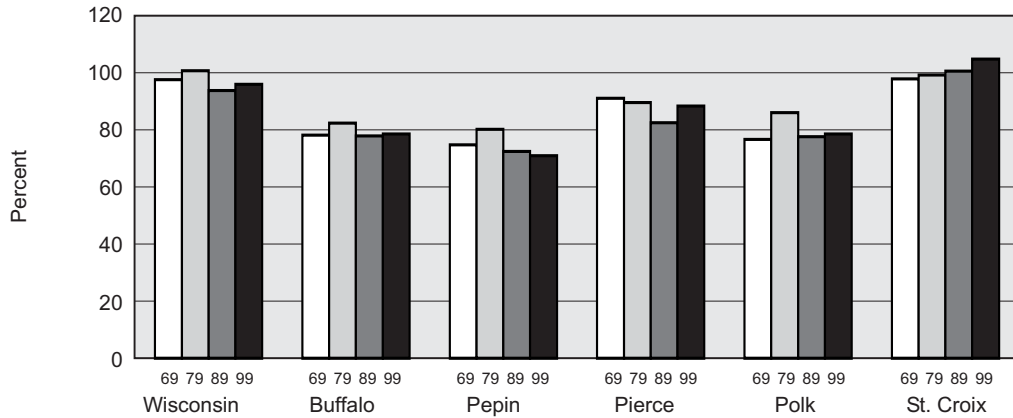
- With the exception of St. Croix County, all counties in the region had per capita incomes below the state average in 1999.
- St. Croix County was the only county that exceeded per capita income as a percentage of U.S. per capita income between 1969 and 1999.

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**Per Capita Income, 1969–99**  
(adjusted for inflation, 2001 dollars)



**Per Capita Income as a Percentage of the U.S. Per Capita, 1969–99**



***Labor Force Participation and Unemployment***

Wisconsin rightfully takes pride in its strong work ethic, which is demonstrated in the region.

- Each county in the region, with the exception of Pepin County, had labor force participation rates above the national rate in 1999.
- Pepin County had the sixth lowest labor force participation rate in the state in 1999.

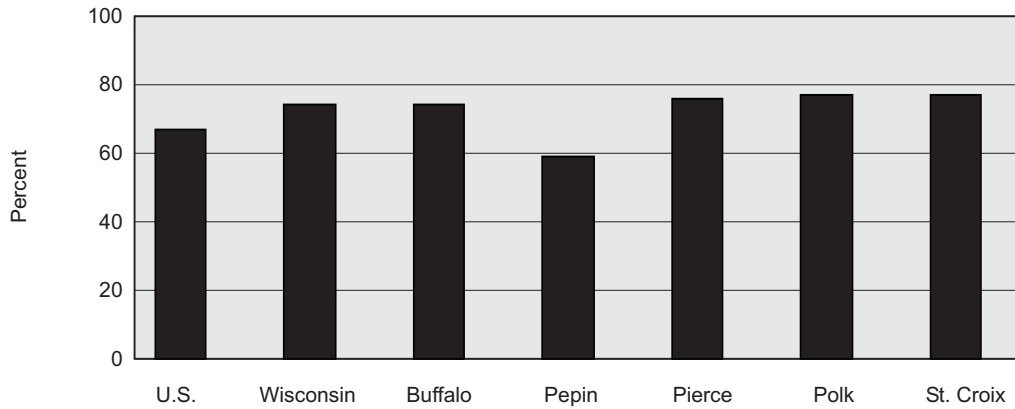
Through the 1990s, unemployment rates were at historic lows in Wisconsin. Similarly, each county in the region experienced an overall decline in unemployment in the same decade.

- St. Croix County had the seventh lowest unemployment rate in the state in 2000.
- Pepin and Polk counties showed unemployment rates above the statewide average from 1994 to 2000.

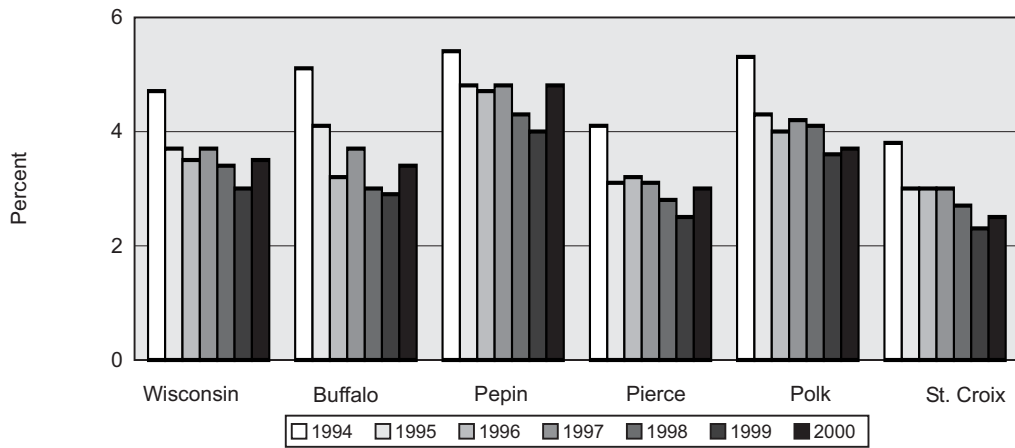
Unemployment rates fluctuate and change with seasons. Seasonal unemployment rates take into account jobs, such as those in the hospitality sector, that are added during the summer to meet increased tourist demands, revealing cycles of economic activity in particular areas.

- Pepin and Polk counties showed the largest swings in unemployment between summer and winter.

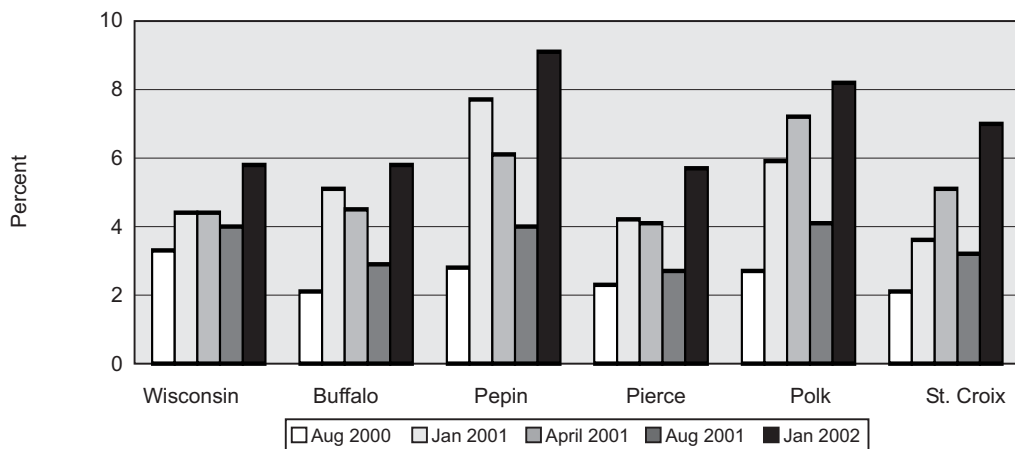
**Labor Force Participation Rate, 1999**



**Unemployment Rates, 1994–2000**



**Recent Seasonal Unemployment Rates**



**Job Growth**

In addition to labor force participation and unemployment trends, job growth across sectors is an important indicator of the nature and quality of a region’s economy.

- The construction industry led job growth in the region, with the exception of Pepin County, between 1994 and 1999.
- The service sector saw the largest increase in St. Croix County, but decreased in Buffalo and Pepin counties.

**Employment by Sector**

**Buffalo County**

More than one third of non-farm employment in Buffalo County in 2001 was in the transportation, communication and utilities industries. Service, trade, and governmental jobs made up the bulk of the remaining non-farm employment in 2001.

**Pepin County**

Trade accounted for approximately one-third of non-farm employment in Pepin County in 2001. Government jobs constituted 26 percent of non-farm employment.

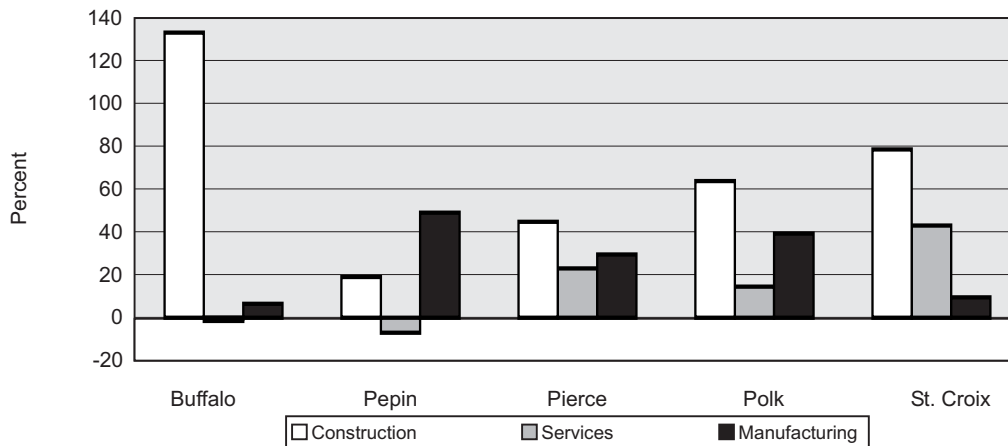
**Pierce County**

Thirty-one percent of jobs in Pierce County were in the government sector. Trade and services together constituted 45 percent of total non-farm employment in 2001.

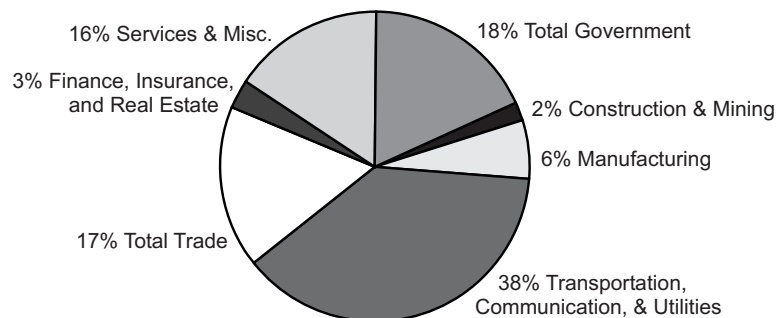
**Polk County**

Approximately one third of Polk County’s primary non-farm employment in 2001 was in the manufacturing sector. Services, trade and government made up the bulk of remaining non-farm employment.

**Change in Employment Across Sectors, 1994–99**



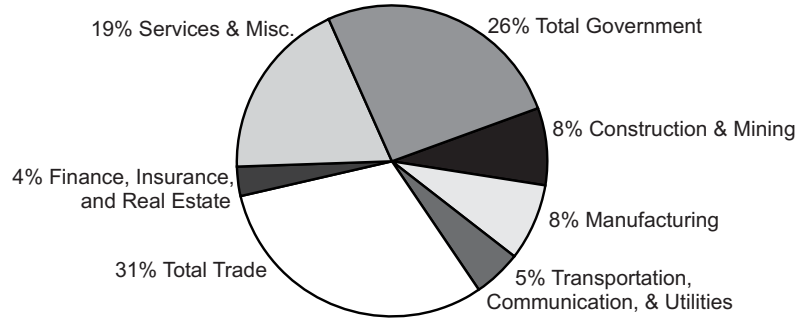
**Buffalo County Non-Farm Employment by Sector, 2001**



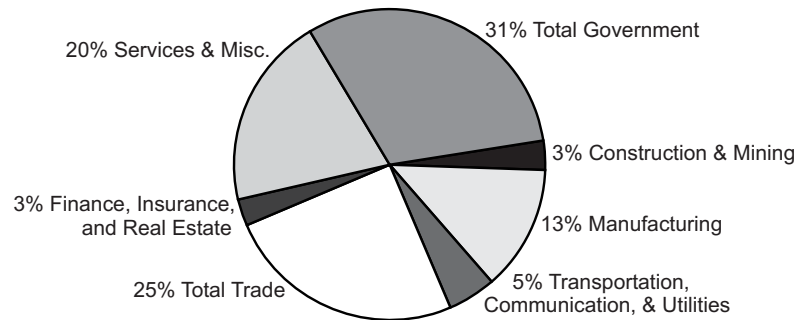
**St. Croix County**

Manufacturing, trade and services each constituted about 25 percent of St. Croix County’s non-farm employment in 2001. The government sector constituted the bulk of the remaining non-farm employment.

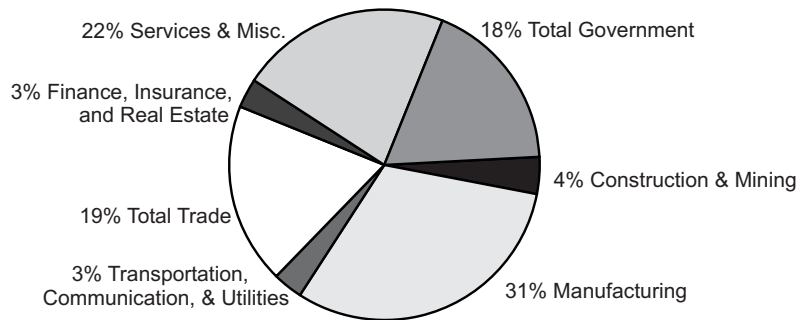
**Pepin County Non-Farm Employment by Sector, 2001**



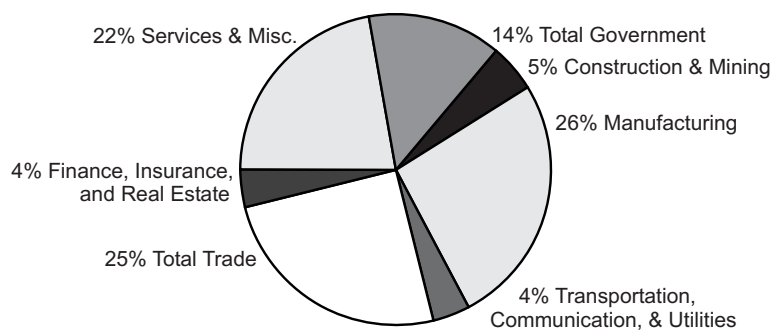
**Pierce County Non-Farm Employment by Sector, 2001**



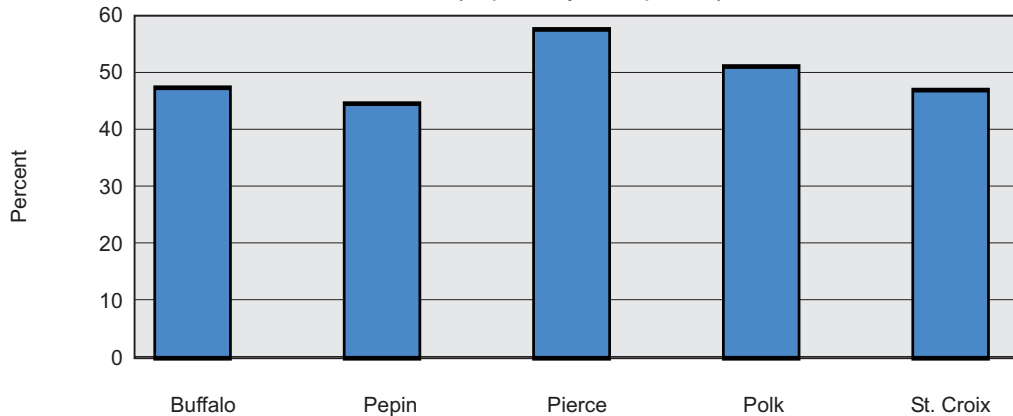
**Polk County Non-Farm Employment by Sector, 2001**



**St. Croix County Non-Farm Employment by Sector, 2001**



**Workers with Poverty Earnings, 1998**  
(in primary occupation)



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***Workers with Poverty Earnings***

A significant number of workers in the region had poverty level earnings in their primary jobs in 1998. The prevalence of workers with poverty earnings – \$17,650 for a family of four in 2001 – in itself, however, does not mean that people are living in poverty. These workers may live with another wage earner, work multiple jobs, or draw on alternative income sources. But poverty earnings are reflective of the types of jobs available in particular counties in Wisconsin, as well as of the opportunities residents have for securing the wages and the benefits sufficient for a basic quality of life.

The percentage of workers with poverty earnings varied somewhat from county to county in the region in 1998.

- More than 50 percent of workers in Pierce and Polk counties did not earn enough in their primary job to lift a family of four out of poverty in 1998.
- Pierce County was ranked tenth highest statewide in 1998 for percentage of workers with poverty earnings.

**Agriculture**

Agriculture has always played an important role in Wisconsin, yet this role is declining as farmers continue to be squeezed by low commodity prices and development pressures. Farmers spend roughly seventy-five cents in the local economy for every dollar they earn, and as a result, as farms disappear, many local businesses may follow. The future of these farms will affect all residents of these counties, not only in the supermarket, but also in terms of the environment and the local economy.

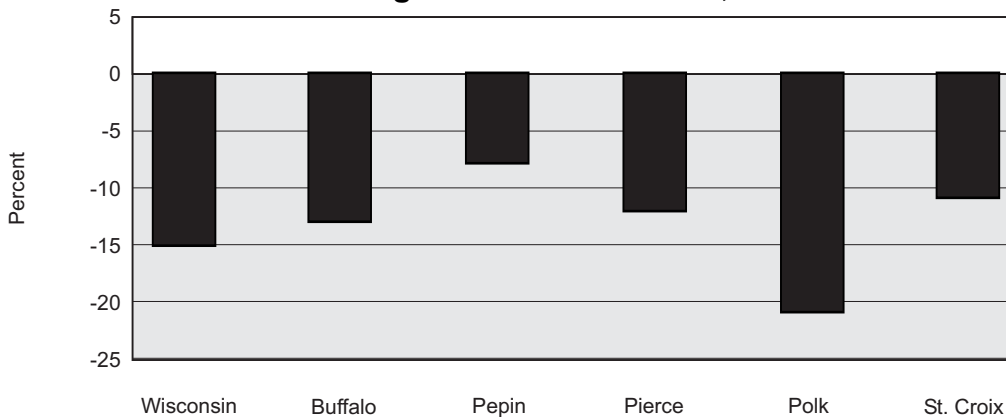
- As was the case statewide, the number of full-time farms declined in the region between 1992 and 1997. Polk County saw a faster rate of decline than that of the state.
- Between 1992 and 1997, the amount of land used for farming decreased in Buffalo, Pepin, Pierce and Polk counties. Pepin County had the seventh fastest rate of decrease statewide.
- St. Croix County was the only county in the region to see an increase in the amount of land used for farming between 1992 and 1997.

The number of farms larger than 1,000 acres in Wisconsin increased 32 percent between 1987 and 1997. By contrast, the number of farms with more than 1,000 acres in the United States increased by just 4.3 percent over the same time period.

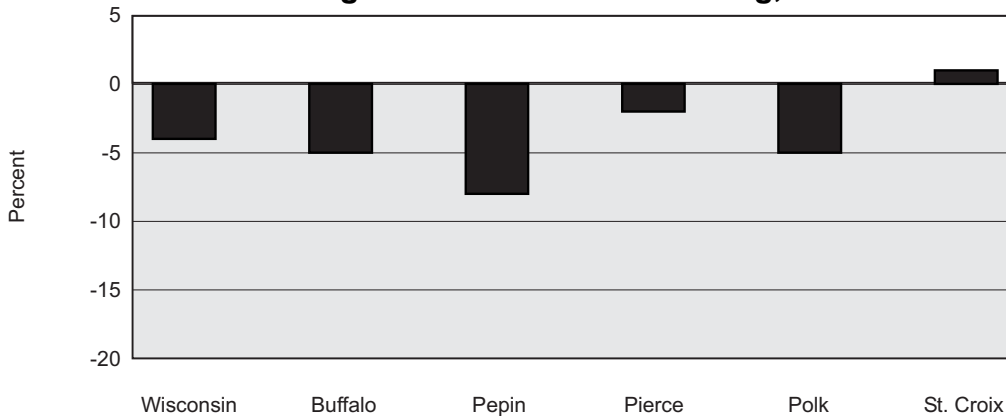
- The number of large farms increased between 1992 and 1997 in Pierce, Polk and St. Croix counties. St. Croix County now leads the region with 30 farms that are larger than 1,000 acres in size
- Pepin County was the only county in the region to see a drop in the number of large farms in this period.

The characteristics of farmers in Wisconsin are also changing. The average age of farmers is slowly increasing, and farming households are more likely to rely on additional non-farm income and income earned from two workers.

**Change in Full Time Farms, 1992–97**



**Change in Land Used for Farming, 1992–97**

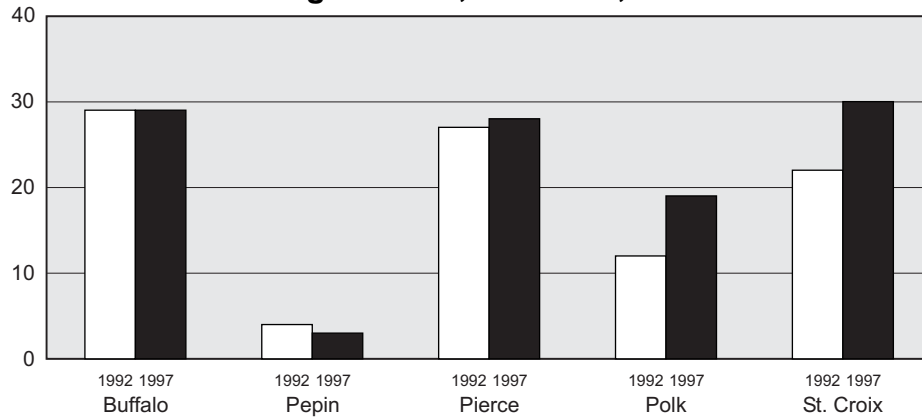


- The percentage of farmers who report farming as their principal occupation decreased in every county in the region, following the statewide trend. The rate of decline in Polk County was faster than the Wisconsin average.

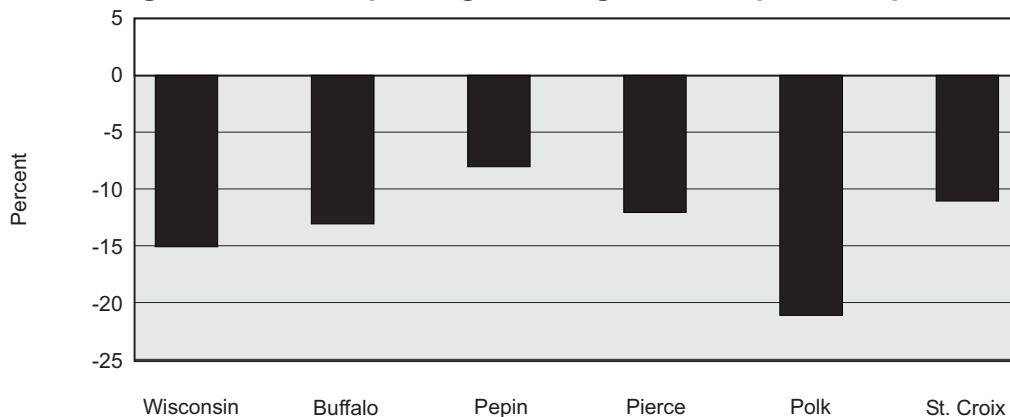
The average age of Wisconsin farmers is increasing slightly, as young people are not entering the occupation as quickly as older farmers are retiring. In Wisconsin, the average age of farmers increased from 50 years in 1992, to 52 years in 1997.

- The average age of farmers in Pierce, Polk and St. Croix counties was higher than the state average in 1997.

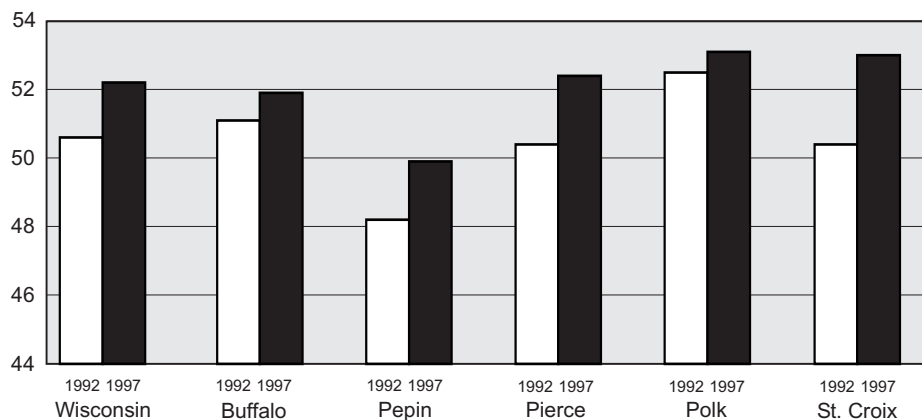
**Farms Larger than 1,000 Acres, 1992 and 1997**



**Change in Those Reporting Farming as Principal Occupation, 1992–97**



**Average Age of Farmers, 1992–97**

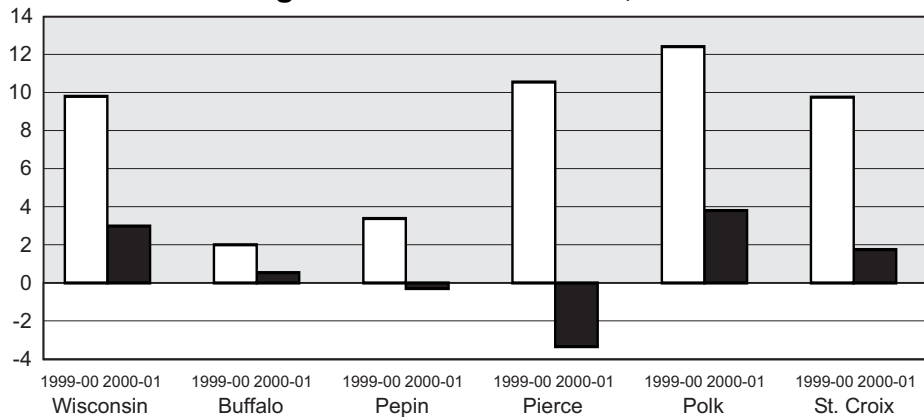


**Tourism**

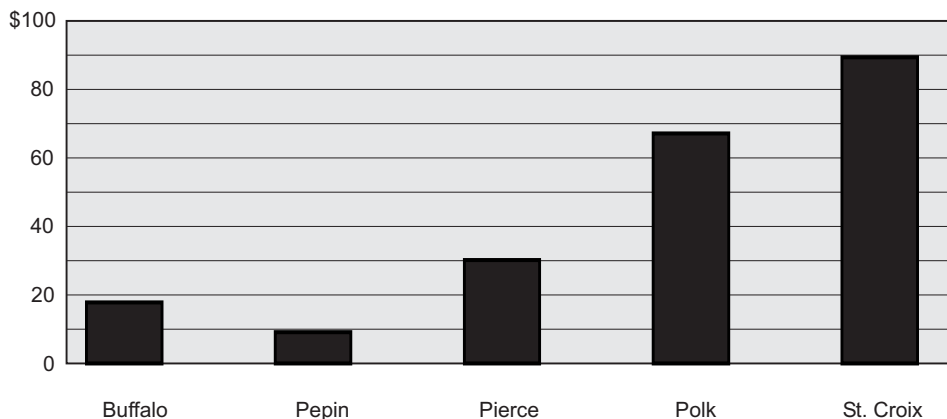
Tourism is an important industry throughout Wisconsin, as revenue from this sector supports job growth and local businesses. Yet, jobs within the industry are frequently low-wage and seasonal. As such, while the industry can be a good source of revenue for a county, the distribution and organization of tourism jobs must be carefully planned to ensure that they provide sustainable, family-supporting incomes.

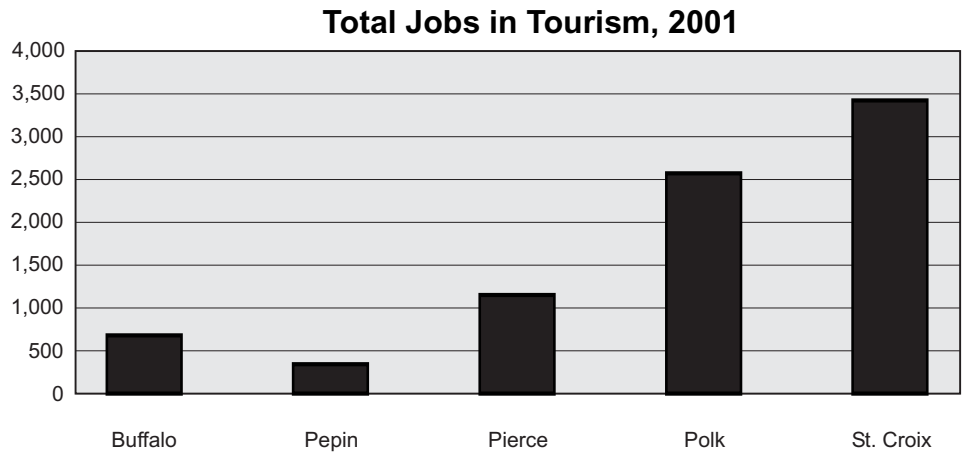
- Tourism revenue in Buffalo, Polk and St. Croix counties increased between 1999 and 2001.
- Pepin and Pierce counties were the only two counties in the region to see a decrease in tourism revenue between 2000 and 2001.
- Pepin County ranked lowest in the state for travelers’ spending in 2001. Buffalo and Pierce counties ranked fifth and tenth lowest, respectively, for travelers’ spending in 2001.
- Pepin and Buffalo counties ranked lowest and fifth lowest statewide, respectively, for total jobs in tourism in 2001.
- St. Croix leads the region in both traveler’s spending and total jobs in tourism. Tourists spent nearly \$90,000,000 dollars in St. Croix County in 2001, supporting nearly 3,500 jobs.

**Change in Tourism Revenue, 1999–2001**



**Travelers’ Spending, 2001**  
(millions of dollars)





## Families and Communities

Strong families and communities are integral to the realization of the American dream. In Wisconsin, work is up and welfare rolls are down, yet many workers remain poor. Shelter is considered a fundamental right, yet many of our citizens do not have access to affordable housing. Even as incomes rise, the percentage of families who cannot afford the Fair Market Rent in their communities remains high. By supporting working families, we promote strong communities. We must ensure that local economies can provide family-supporting wages, that our children and those in need are cared for, and that we provide affordable housing options to all residents of our state.

This region has experienced increasing median family incomes, varied Fair Market Rents, and a lower percentage of students eligible for free or reduced cost lunch as compared to the state. Higher incomes and fewer children requiring social services demonstrate that this region is moving in the right direction.

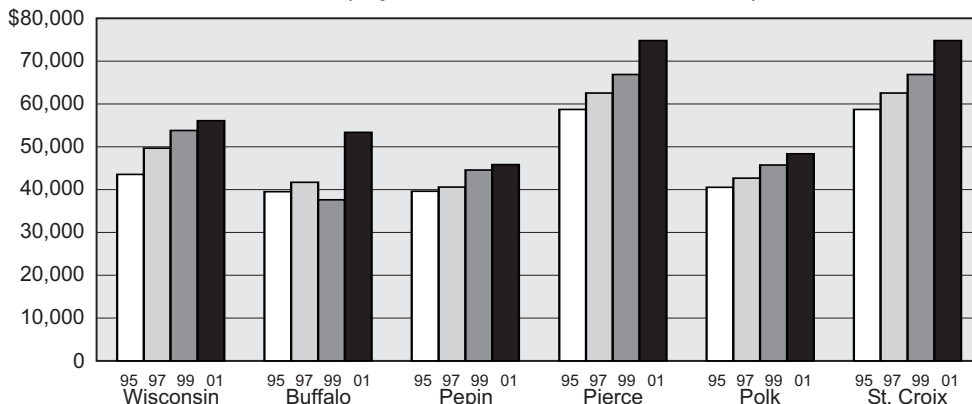
Yet, as this area moves forward, it remains important to address the needs of all of its families, particularly those who have not benefited equally from the growing economy. Three counties in the region have a lower median family income than the state as a whole, and more than 30 percent of families in all five counties could not afford Fair Market Rent in 1999. These challenges and others will become increasingly visible as the population continues to grow.

### Family Income

The median family income in the region has experienced an overall increase since at least 1995. The reasons for this growth must be looked at closely, however, as it is often the result of longer working hours and an increased number of households with two income-earners, both working at or near full time. In fact, the typical married couple in Wisconsin now works the equivalent of 1.9 full-time jobs.

- Median family income in Buffalo, Pepin and Polk counties remained below the statewide average in 2001.
- Pierce and St. Croix counties had the highest median family incomes in the state in 2001.

**Median Family Income, 1995–2001**  
(adjusted for inflation, 2001 dollars)



\*Median Family Income data is for the “Minneapolis-St. Paul” Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), of which Pierce and St. Croix counties are a part. Thus, Median Family Income will be identical for both counties.

### **Single Parent Families**

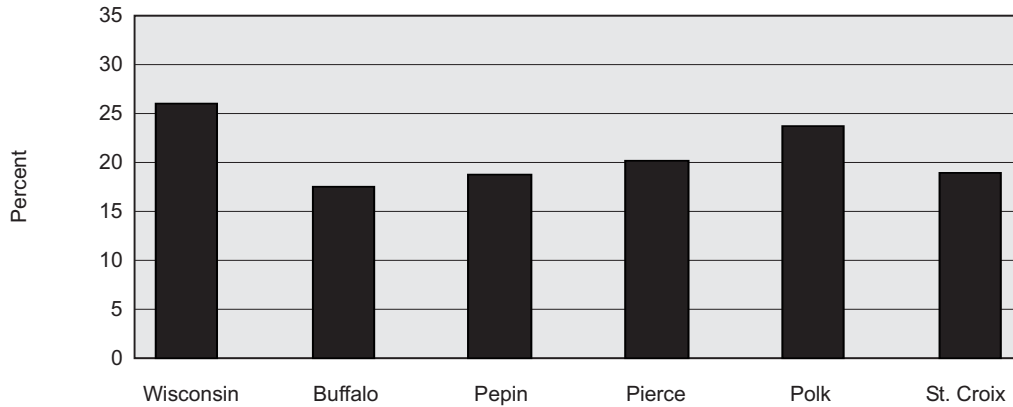
Single parent families often have lower family incomes than their two-parent counterparts, and must often spend a significant portion of their income on child care costs and other family expenses, making it more difficult to make ends meet.

- The percentage of single parent families in each county in this region was below the statewide average in 2000.
- Buffalo and Pepin counties had the eighth and tenth lowest percentages, respectively, of single parent families in the state.
- Polk County had the highest percentage of single parent families in the region.

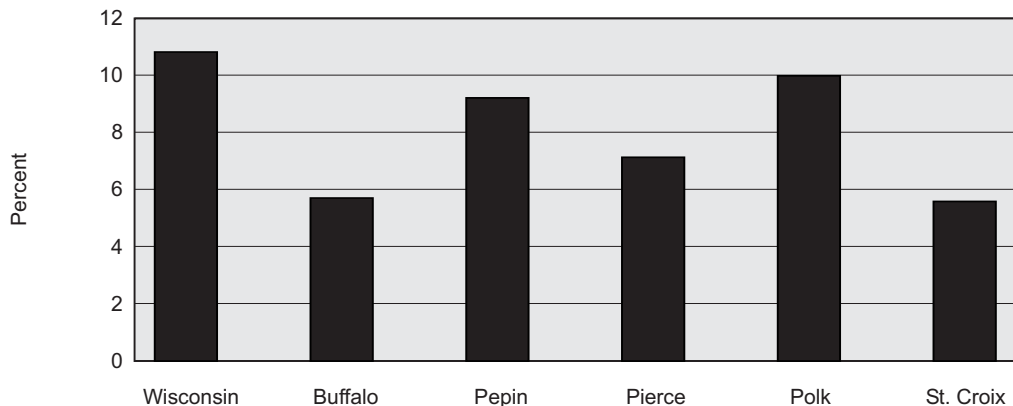
The rate of teen births is also an area of concern, as teen parents often require additional services to support them in raising their families. As these services become more costly, the region and the state will have to explore new methods for ensuring that they remain accessible to all families.

- The percentage of teen births in the region remained below the statewide average in 1999.
- St. Croix and Buffalo counties had the fifth and seventh lowest rates, respectively, of teen births in the state.
- Polk County had the highest percentage of teen births in the region.

**Single Parent Families, 2000**



**Teen Births, 1999**



**Poverty**

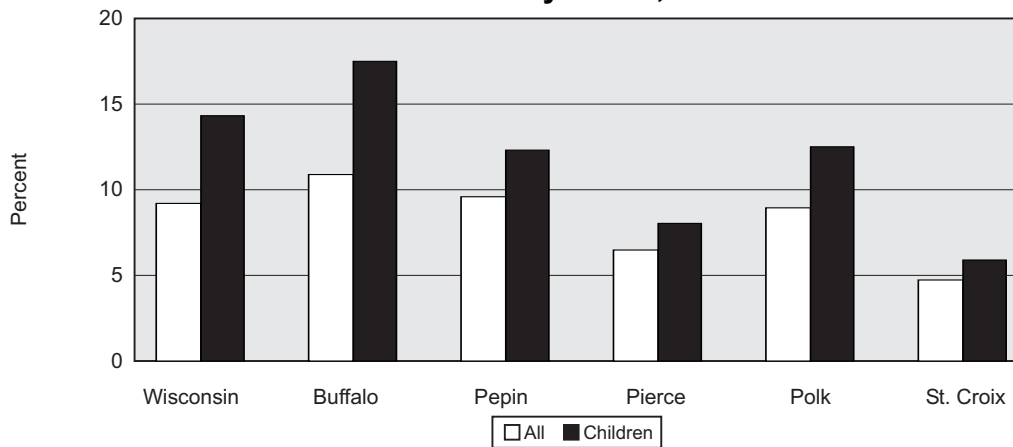
Poverty rates — defined as having income at or below \$17,650 for a family of four in 2001 — varied dramatically in this region.

- Poverty rates in Buffalo and Pepin counties were higher than the statewide average in 1997.
- The child poverty rate in Buffalo County surpassed the state average in 1997.
- St. Croix County had the lowest poverty rates in the region, and the fifth lowest overall and child poverty rates in the state. Pierce County had the ninth lowest child poverty rate in the state.

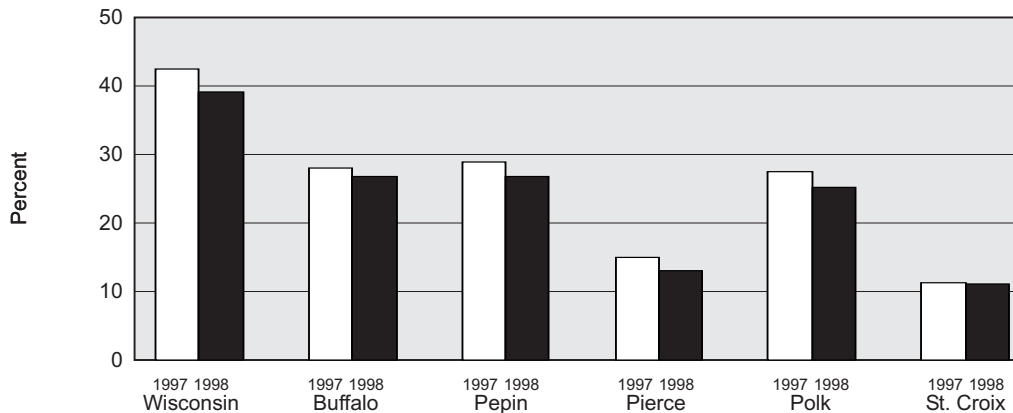
Overall, this region had relatively low numbers of children eligible for free or reduced cost lunch programs as compared to Wisconsin as a whole.

- St. Croix and Pierce counties had the fourth and seventh lowest percentages, respectively, of children eligible for free or reduced cost lunch in 1998.

**Poverty Rates, 1997**



**Children Eligible for Free or Reduced Cost School Lunch, 1997–98**



**Affordable Housing**

Wisconsin’s building industry has been at the forefront of the recent economic boom. Unfortunately, not all residents have benefited equally. Construction rates for single-family residences have increased, but apartments and other affordable housing options lag desperately behind. As a result, prices for rental units increase in areas where demand is highest, reducing the number of affordable housing options and placing greater strain on household budgets.

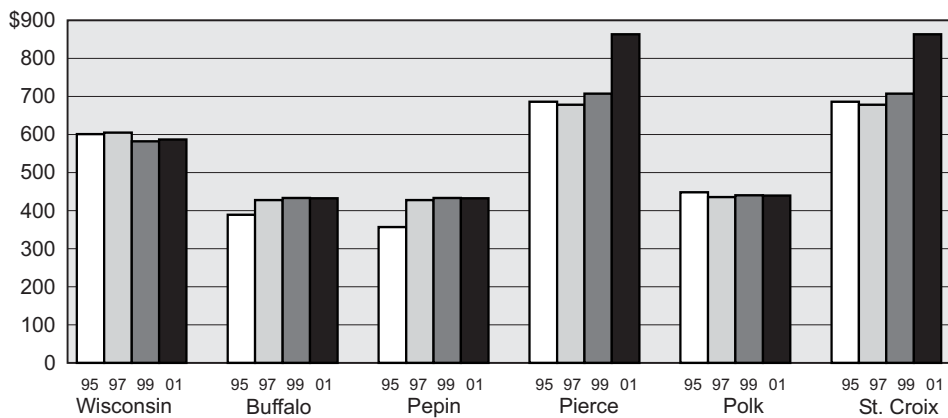
Fair Market Rent (FMR) is defined as a “gross rent estimate”, including the cost to rent a home or apartment plus the cost of all utilities. “Affordable FMR” is commonly calculated to be 30 percent of a household’s total gross income. Even where real Fair Market Rent held steady or slightly decreased, many residents remain priced out of a significant portion of the rental housing in each of the region’s counties.

- More than 30 percent of families in this region could not afford FMR in 2001.
- Pierce and St. Croix counties had the highest FMRs in the state, and the highest percentage of families that could not afford FMR in the region.
- Pierce and St. Croix counties had the highest hourly wage statewide needed to afford FMR.

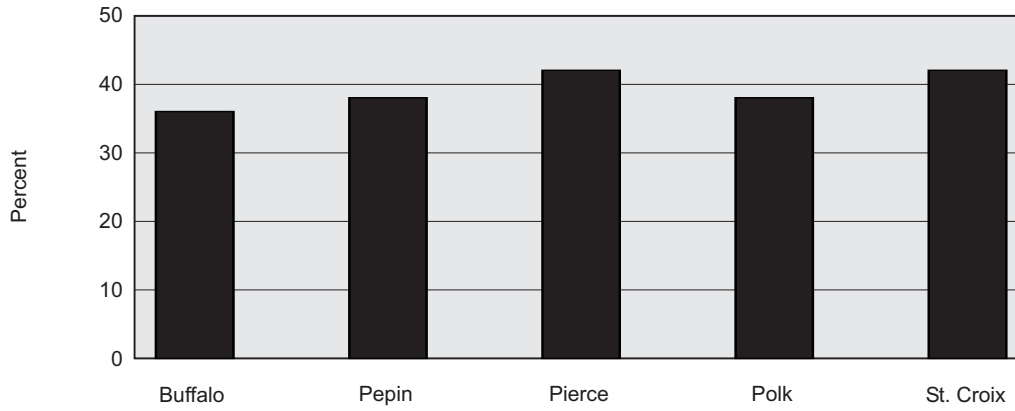
Home ownership has become increasingly expensive and out of reach for many Wisconsin residents, increasing the demand for rental units. The number of rental households in Wisconsin between 1990 and 2000 increased by more than eight percent.

- Pepin County experienced the only decrease in renter households in the region and the second largest decrease in the entire state.
- St. Croix County experienced the second largest increase in renter households in the state.

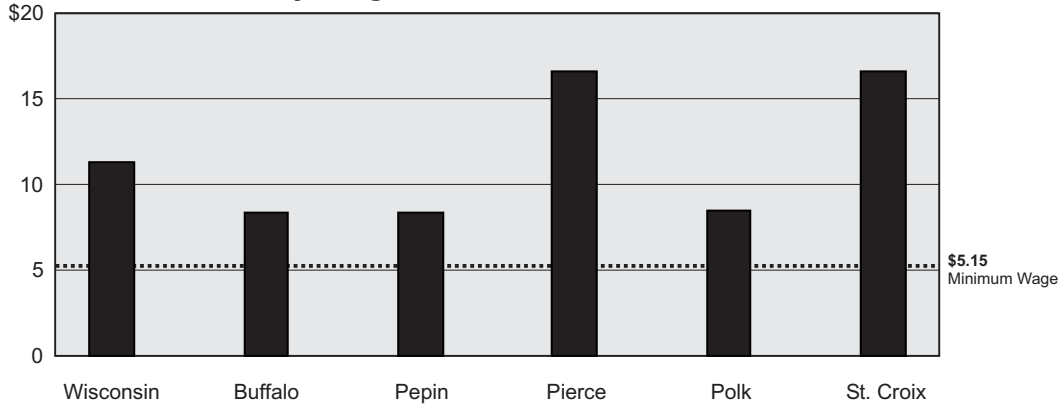
**Fair Market Rent (FMR) For a Two Bedroom Apartment, 1995–2001**  
(adjusted for inflation, 2001 dollars)



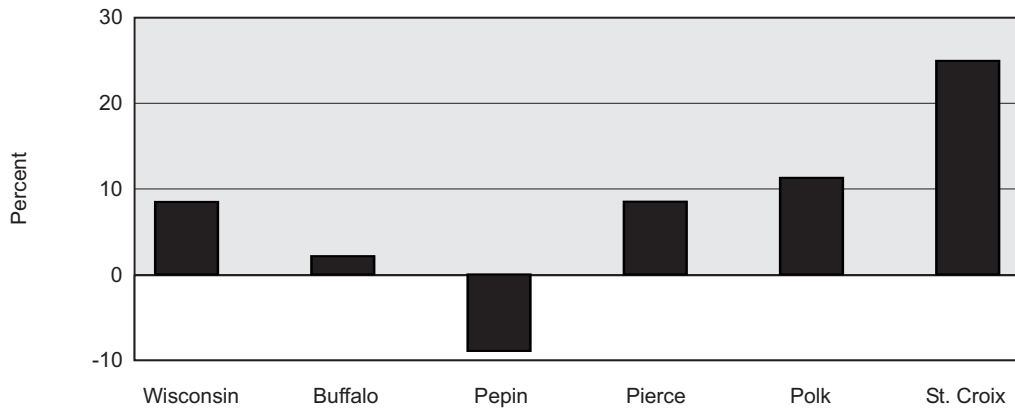
**Families That Could Not Afford FMR, 1999**



**Hourly Wage Needed to Meet FMR, 2001**



**Change in Renter Households, 1990–2000**

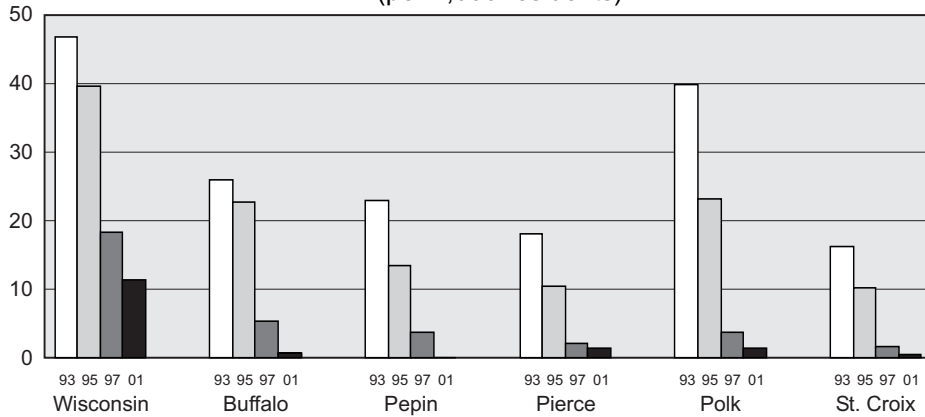


**Welfare Reform**

Wisconsin’s landmark welfare reform — W2 — has significantly altered the social services system. Welfare rolls have been cut by almost two-thirds in the state. While encouraging work as a solution, close attention should be paid to the jobs that are available and whether these jobs provide the resources necessary to support working families. In all of the counties in this region, as in Wisconsin as a whole, the number of recipients of AFDC/W2 declined significantly between 1993 and 2001.

- Pepin County is one of the few counties in Wisconsin that had no welfare recipients in 2001.

**AFDC/W2 Recipients, 1993–2001**  
(per 1,000 residents)



## The Future

This five county region is undergoing significant transformations. As the population changes and ages, the future of these counties will depend on how well the needs of all residents are met. The growth in the number of young people aged 16-24 highlights the importance of such issues as education and family services, and the even greater increase in the number of people aged 40-64 indicates a need for increased attention to specialized health services as the baby boom generation heads toward retirement.

Participation in public health care programs is an indicator of the level of need among lower-income families. Enrollment in these programs differed across the counties in this region; WIC and Badger Care participation rates in Pierce and St. Croix counties were significantly lower than rates in Buffalo, Pepin and Polk counties.

Overall, arrest rates in the region were well below the statewide average, a positive indicator for the overall quality of life.

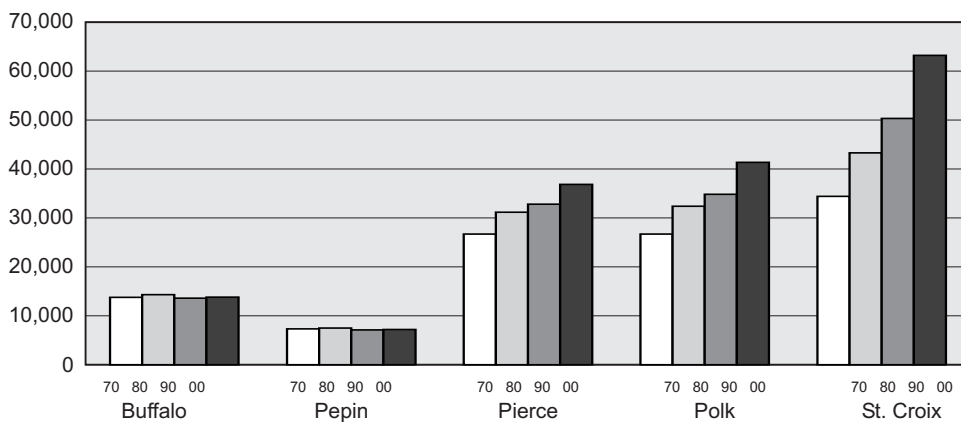
Also essential to a vital future is maintaining the strong foundation in education in all communities across our state. Although the five counties in this region vary in terms of educational indicators, overall dropout rates in all but one school district were lower, and graduation rates for all school districts in the region were higher, than the statewide averages. ACT scores in these counties are in line with the rest of the state.

### Population

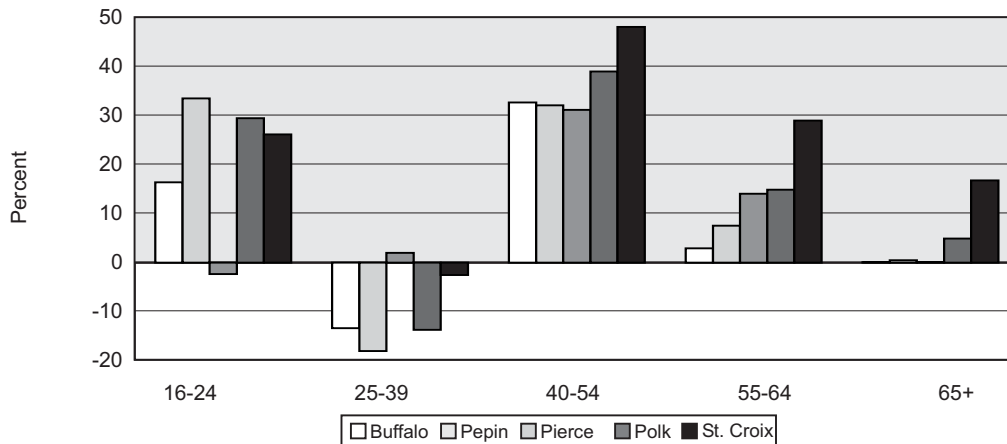
The population throughout most of the region has increased steadily between 1970 and 2000, although not uniformly across age groups, reflecting the overall statewide trend.

- Pierce, Polk, and St. Croix counties showed overall population increases between 1970 and 2000. In contrast, the populations in Buffalo and Pepin counties largely held steady over the same time period.
- The percentage of residents aged 40-54 showed a greater increase than other age groups from 1990 to 2000. St. Croix County showed the largest increase, with a 48 percent jump in population among residents in this age group.
- Pepin County saw the largest percentage increase in those aged 16-24, with a 33 percent increase, while Pierce County saw a two percent decline in that age group.
- Pierce County was the only county in the region that did not experience a decline in residents aged 25-39.

**Population, 1970–2000**



**Change in Population by Age Group, 1990–2000**



### **Health Services**

Wisconsin is among the nation’s leaders when it comes to quality health care and employer-provided health insurance. Continued attention, however, must be paid to access to coverage as well as the increasing costs, especially as county agencies must support a growing portion of safety net services.

Prenatal care initiated in the first trimester decreases the likelihood of complications during childbirth and helps to ensure that both women and infants are healthy. Continued attention should be paid to access to such care, in particular to the availability of these services for low-income women.

- Pepin and Polk counties had lower prenatal care rates than the Wisconsin average from 1991 to 1998. Pepin County had the second lowest prenatal care rate in the state in 1998.
- St. Croix County led the region in 1998, with 86 percent of women seeking prenatal care in the first trimester.

Federal aid for women, infants, and children (WIC) is a program that provides pregnant or breastfeeding women and children up to age five with necessary medical care if the family is earning less than 185 percent of the federal poverty level (\$32,652 for a family of four in 2001).

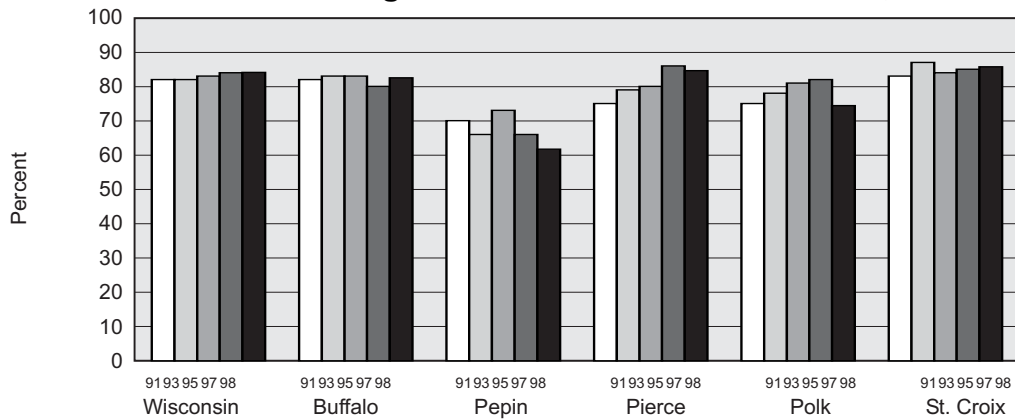
The measure of WIC rates can be read in at least two ways. The first is that participation rates indicate that residents in need of WIC assistance are receiving the services they require. On the other hand, higher rates of WIC assistance indicate more families in need, a concern that should be addressed throughout this region. In addition, the correlation of WIC recipient rates with child poverty rates indicates a significant number of children under age five living in households in which the primary earner’s income barely exceeds the poverty level.

- Pepin and Polk counties had WIC participation rates above the statewide average in 2000.
- St. Croix County had the lowest WIC participation rates in the region and the ninth lowest participation rate in the state in 2000.
- Overall, WIC participation rates in the region fell between 1997 and 2000.

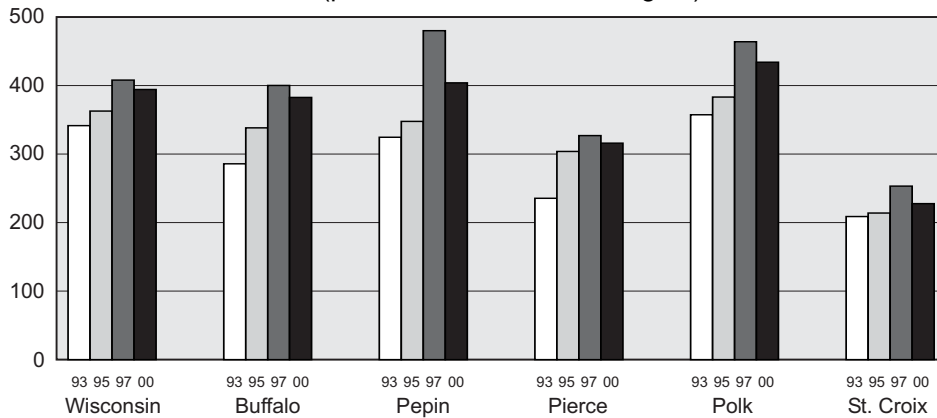
Infant mortality rates are also a significant measure of the overall quality of life in Wisconsin. Infant mortality rates are based on live births, and measure the rate of deaths occurring within the first year of an infant’s life; as such, they are one indication of the level and quality of care and nutrition received during that first year.

- Buffalo County had a significantly higher infant mortality rate in 1999 compared to both the region and the state. Pierce and St. Croix counties also had higher infant mortality rates than the Wisconsin average.
- Pepin County had an infant mortality rate of zero in 1999.

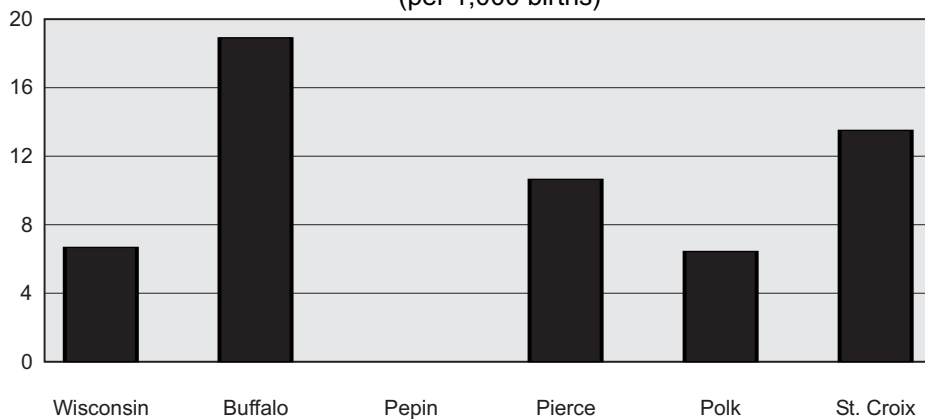
**Women Seeking Prenatal Care in First Trimester, 1991–98**



**Children Under Age 5 Receiving WIC Services, 1993-2000**  
(per 1,000 children under age 5)



**Infant Mortality Rates, 1999**  
(per 1,000 births)

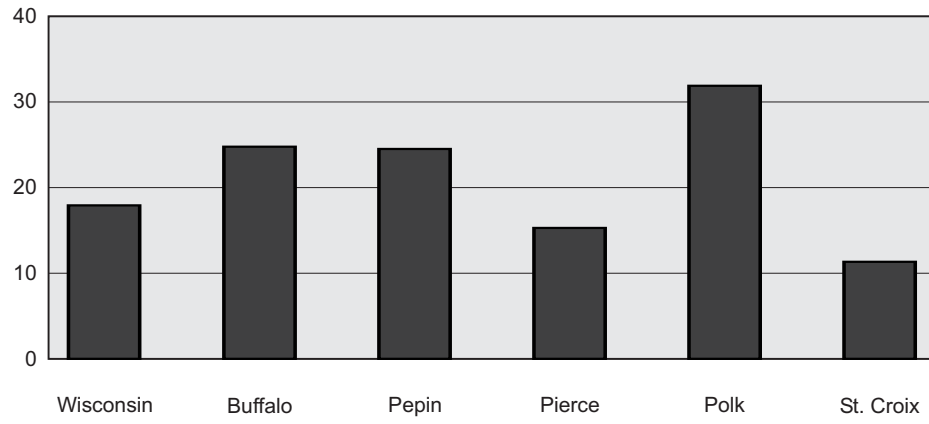


Badger Care is a health insurance program for families whose income does not exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty line, who are not covered by an employer’s group plan that pays 80 percent or more of the premium, and who are not eligible to be covered by Medicaid. As with other assistance programs, Badger Care participation rates indicate the presence of people in need.

- In 1999, Pierce and St. Croix counties had lower Badger Care participation rates than Wisconsin as a whole. St. Croix County had the tenth lowest rate in the state.
- Buffalo, Pepin, and Polk counties all had higher Badger Care participation rates than Wisconsin as a whole.

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**Badger Care Enrollment, 1999**  
(per 1,000 residents)



**Education**

Wisconsin’s history demonstrates the importance that our state places on education. The region has had varying degrees of success in maintaining or improving the quality of educational services when looking at indicators such as student-to-teacher ratios, dropout rates, and graduation rates.

A “dropout” is officially defined as a student who was enrolled in school at some point during the school year, but who was not enrolled in school during the following school year and who did not graduate.

- Only the Luck School District in Polk County had a higher dropout rate than the statewide average in 2000–2001.
- Several school districts in the region had no dropouts during the 2000-2001 school year.

The “graduation rate” is the number of graduates divided by the total number of graduates and dropouts over a four-year period.

- All of the school districts in the region had significantly higher graduation rates than the statewide average during the 2000–2001 school year.

There are many concerns surrounding the use of test scores as indicators of district achievement, in part because only students planning to enter post-secondary education programs take the ACT test. Standardized test scores, however, do enable comparisons of academic performance on specific tasks across the state.

- ACT scores throughout the region hovered just above or below the statewide average during the 2000–2001 school year. Students in the Hudson School District in St. Croix County led the region with ACT scores averaging 23.2.

**Public School Information, 2000–2001**

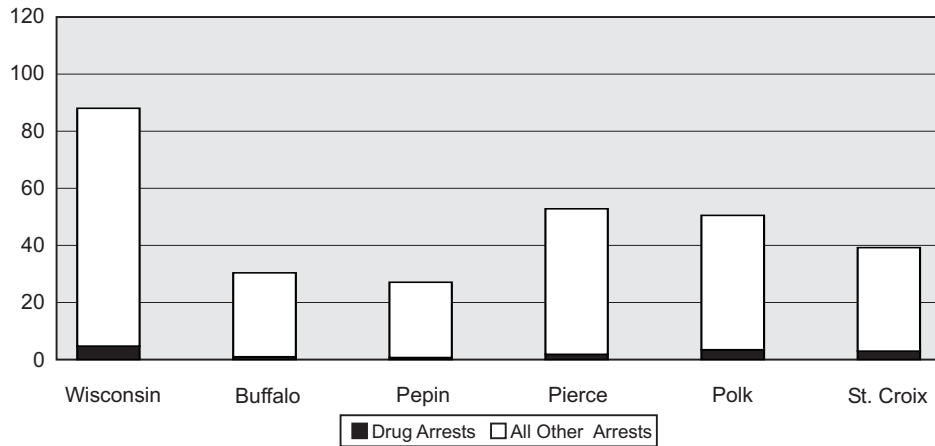
| County           | District                 | Student/Teacher Ratio | Dropout Rate | Graduation Rate | ACT Average |
|------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------|
| <b>Wisconsin</b> |                          | <b>12.8</b>           | <b>2.1%</b>  | <b>90.0%</b>    | <b>22.2</b> |
| Buffalo          | Cochraine- Fountain City | 11.6                  | 1.1          | 97.0            | 22.5        |
|                  | Gilmanton                | 9.9                   | 0.0          | 100             | 20.7        |
|                  | Mondovi                  | 13.4                  | 1.2          | 96.2            | 21.7        |
| Pepin            | Durand                   | 11.6                  | 0.2          | 99.2            | 22.9        |
|                  | Pepin Area               | 11.5                  | 0.8          | 100.0           | 20.0        |
| Pierce           | Ellsworth Community      | 12.9                  | 0.1          | 99.3            | 21.1        |
|                  | Elmwood                  | 11.7                  | 0.0          | 100             | 22.6        |
|                  | Plum City                | 11.3                  | 0.7          | 96.7            | 20.6        |
|                  | Prescott                 | 11.4                  | 0.0          | 97.8            | 21.0        |
|                  | River Falls              | 13.3                  | 0.9          | 95.9            | 22.7        |
|                  | Spring Valley            | 12.0                  | 0.8          | 95.7            | 20.6        |
| Polk             | Amery                    | 14.0                  | 0.0          | 100.0           | 21.4        |
|                  | Clayton                  | 10.2                  | 0.0          | 100.0           | 20.4        |
|                  | Clear Lake               | 12.9                  | 0.0          | 100.0           | 21.6        |
|                  | Frederic                 | 11.8                  | 0.5          | 97.6            | 20.7        |
|                  | Luck                     | 12.5                  | 2.7          | 91.5            | 21.1        |
|                  | Osceola                  | 14.7                  | 0.5          | 98.3            | 22.3        |
|                  | St. Croix Falls          | 12.8                  | 0.5          | 95.7            | 20.6        |
|                  | Unity                    | 12.6                  | 0.5          | 97.9            | 21.1        |
| St. Croix        | Baldwin-Woodville Area   | 14.0                  | 0.0          | 100             | 21.5        |
|                  | Glenwood City            | 11.9                  | 0.7          | 95.3            | 20.1        |
|                  | Hudson                   | 12.9                  | 0.2          | 98.9            | 23.2        |
|                  | New Richmond             | 14.2                  | 0.4          | 98.3            | 22.2        |
|                  | St. Croix Central        | 12.4                  | 1.2          | 94.5            | 22.4        |
|                  | Somerset                 | 12.9                  | 0.3          | 98.4            | 21.6        |

**Crime**

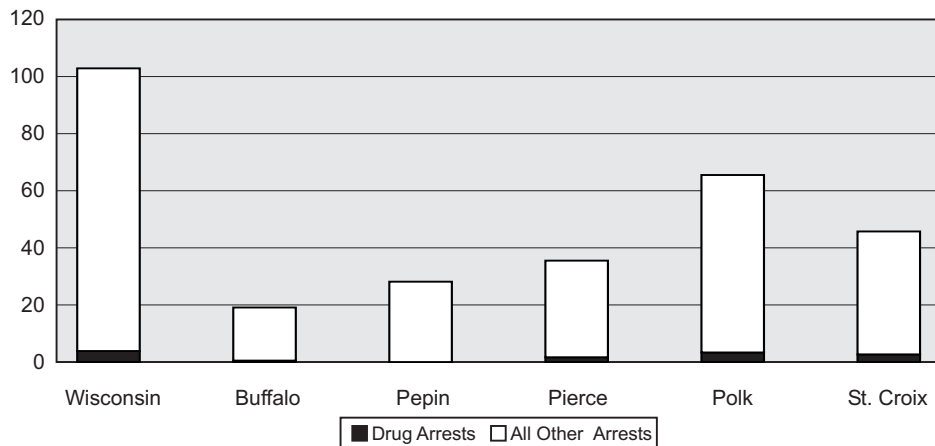
While crime rates are not the only determinant in assessing the quality of life in an area, they nevertheless remain a central concern in all of our communities.

- All counties in the region had lower adult arrest rates than the statewide average in 1999.
- Buffalo and Pepin counties had the fifth and ninth lowest adult arrest rates, respectively, in the state.
- Buffalo, Pepin and Pierce counties had a significantly lower percentage of drug-related arrests than the rest of the region and the state.
- Pepin and Buffalo counties had the sixth and fourth lowest juvenile arrest rates, respectively, in the state.
- The juvenile arrest rates in all five counties were lower than the statewide average in 1999.

**Total Adult Arrests, 1999**  
(per 1,000 adults)



**Total Juvenile Arrests, 1999**  
(per 1,000 juveniles)



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## The Environment and Natural Resources

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The environment and natural resources are keys to a successful future in all regions of Wisconsin. Water, air, and land quality is important for jobs, families, communities, and health. Whether used for industry, recreation, or consumption, Wisconsin's natural resources must be safeguarded.

Wisconsin's environment has always been a source of pride for its citizens. Yet, our state faces continuing threats to clean air, clean water, and open space that put Wisconsin's health, economy, and green legacy at risk. While it is vital that other regions in the United States share responsibility for improving air quality, immediate action is necessary in Wisconsin to protect our most vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, and those with respiratory ailments. Urban sprawl and farmland conversion are reducing open space and drastically changing Wisconsin's landscape, and continued reliance on short-term land use policies forces farmers to reduce their productive acreage and causes urban centers to deteriorate.

On the whole, this region contains substantial acreage of forests, but small amounts of wetlands and recreation and conservation land. Public health issues related to the prevalence of polluted water bodies and contaminated hazardous waste sites are of particular concern in some of the counties in this area.

### **Water Quality**

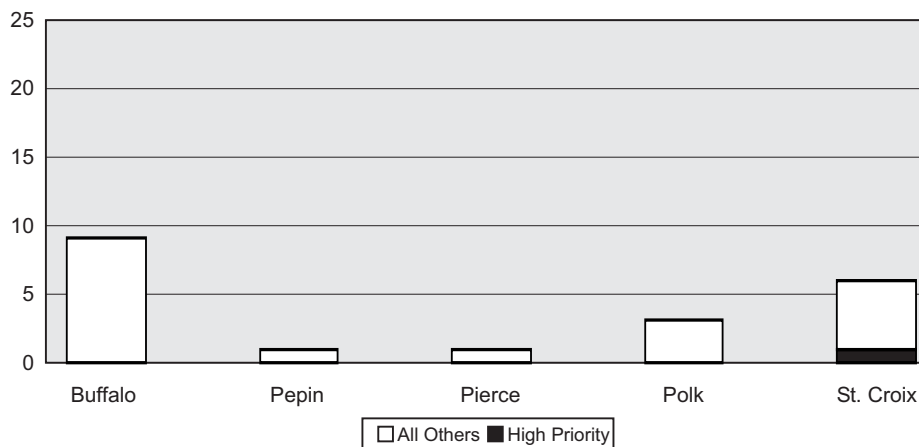
A number of water bodies in the region are polluted enough to be listed as "impaired waters" under the terms of the Clean Water Act, which requires states to identify waters that do not meet federal water quality standards. States are obligated to establish a priority ranking for these waters, taking into account their designated uses and pollution severity.

- This five-county region had 20 impaired water bodies in 2000. Pepin and Pierce counties each had only one impaired water body, placing them among the bottom ten counties statewide for the number of impaired waters.
- St. Croix County had one water body listed as high priority for cleanup; it is the only high priority water body in the region.

As with the rest of the state, this region faces some threat from mercury contamination in area bodies of water and the fish that inhabit them. Recently, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources expanded its mercury warning to include all Wisconsin inland water bodies, noting that it may be unsafe for women who are pregnant or of childbearing age to consume fish from any Wisconsin inland water body.

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**Impaired Water Bodies, 2000**



### **Wetlands**

In January 2001, a United States Supreme Court ruling limited the wetland protections of the Clean Water Act to only those wetlands connected to navigable waters. This decision removed many of Wisconsin's wetlands from protection, some of which were filled in within weeks following the Court's decision. In May 2001, the governor signed Act 6, reestablishing protections for all wetlands in the state, including those not connected to navigable waters.

- Just seven percent – 134,741 acres – of the region's total area is wetlands.
- With less than five percent each, Pepin, Pierce, and St. Croix counties have the smallest percentage of land designated as wetlands in the region; Pierce County has the second lowest percentage of wetlands in the state, and St. Croix County has the sixth lowest statewide.

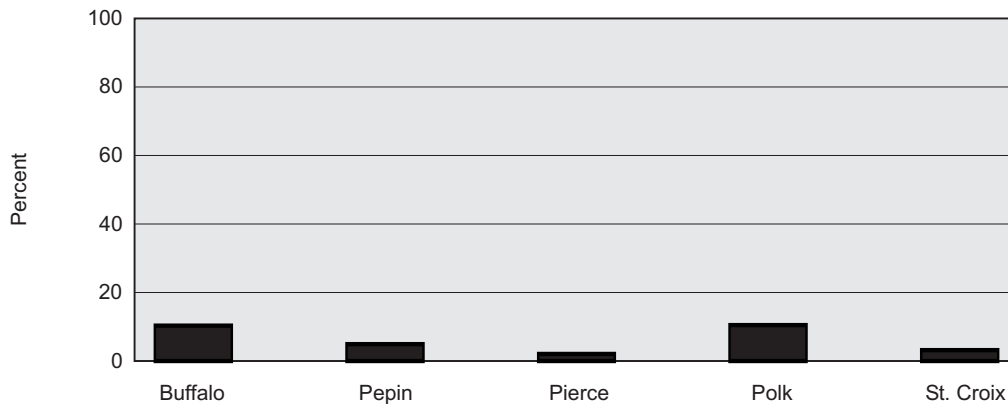
### **Forest Land**

Forests cover more than 45 percent of Wisconsin's land area, although more than 98 percent of these forests are unprotected timberlands. Overall, forests cover a far lower percentage of land in this region, compared to Wisconsin as a whole.

- Polk County, with 44 percent of its area forested, had the greatest percentage of such land in the region in 1996. St. Croix County, with just 15 percent of its land forested, had the smallest amount of forestland in the region.

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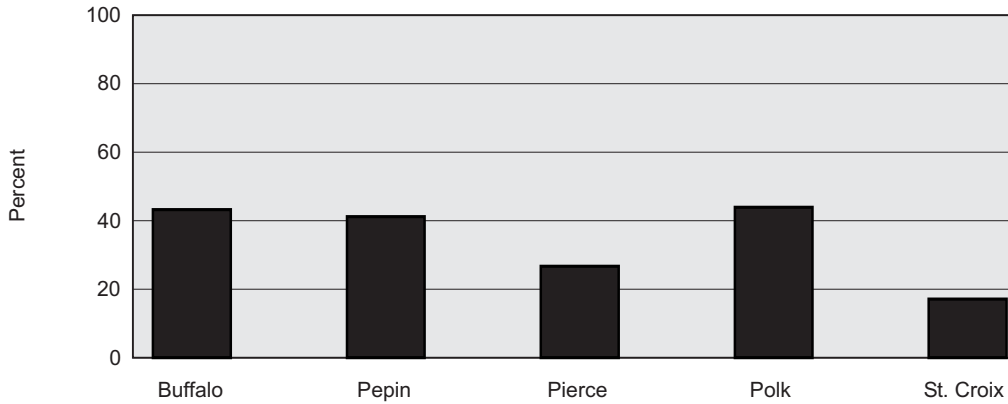
**Acreage in Wetlands\***



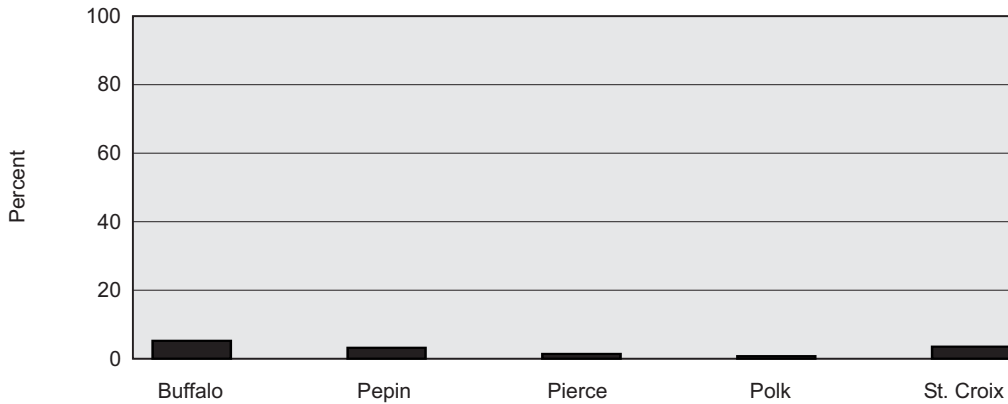
\* See Sources for year of data collection

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**Acreage in Forests, 1996**



**Acreage in Conservation and Recreation Land, 2000**



***Conservation and Recreational Land Use***

Wisconsin is known for its strong tourism industry, much of which is fueled by the relatively high proportion of land designated for conservation and recreation purposes. These include federal land, state forests, DNR-owned land, county parks and forests, and privately held recreation areas.

- Buffalo County led the region, with five percent of its total surface area reserved as recreation and conservation land in 2000.
- With approximately one percent recreation and conservation land, both Pierce and Polk counties were ranked among the bottom ten counties in the state.

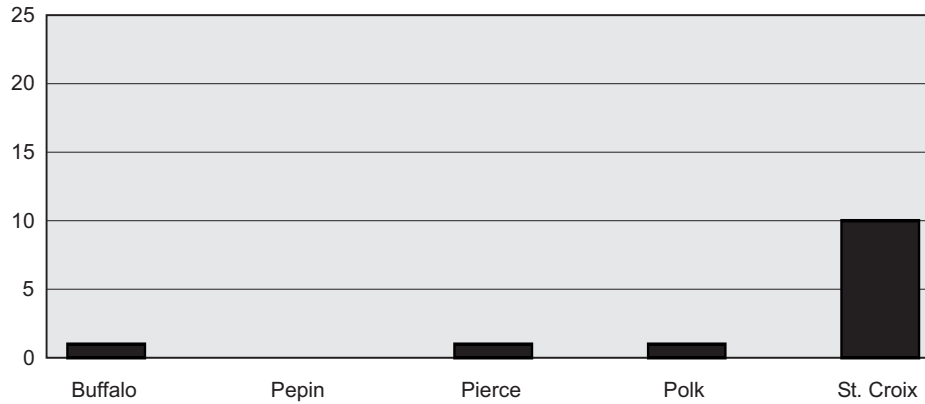
### ***Superfund Sites***

In general, Superfund sites include regions where public health is threatened by the existence of serious environmental hazards to such a degree that cleanup has become a national priority.

- This region contained a total of 13 Superfund sites in 1999. Ten of these sites are located in St. Croix County.
- Buffalo, Pierce, and Polk counties contained just one Superfund site each.
- Pepin County is one of only 12 Wisconsin counties with no Superfund sites.

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**Superfund Sites, 1999**



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## Democracy and Civic Participation

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Wisconsin has a strong tradition of political independence, clean government and civic engagement. Unfortunately, today that tradition is waning. Lax civic participation and an unresponsive government are caught in a downward spiral fueled by big money and special interests. This is further exacerbated by a lack of substantive media coverage on issues and candidates, ultimately hurting voters who rely on such sources to inform their decisions.

Wisconsin's political system is awash in money, and the cost of running a state-level campaign is skyrocketing. Legislative candidates spent \$7.1 million, and special interests a reported \$2.5 million, setting new spending records in election year 2000; overall spending was 26 percent higher than in election year 1998, when candidates spent approximately \$5.6 million.

The challenge facing our state is how to recapture our strong grassroots political tradition, including providing citizens with the information they need and encouraging all to actively participate in the political process.

### ***Voter Choice***

Statewide in 2000, 36 percent of all legislative seats were uncontested. In the remaining races, only a handful were truly competitive. (Competitive here means any race where the winner garnered less than 60 percent of the total votes cast.) Unfortunately, these same races also draw an inordinate amount of special interest money and large individual contributions from outside the candidate's district.

- Five State Representatives and three State Senators represent this region in the state legislature. All of the Assembly seats and one of the Senate seats were up for election in November 2000.
- Five of the six state legislative races held in the region in 2000 were contested by more than one candidate. None of the incumbent candidates faced opposition in their primary elections, and only three races were competitive, with the winner garnering less than 60 percent of the votes cast.

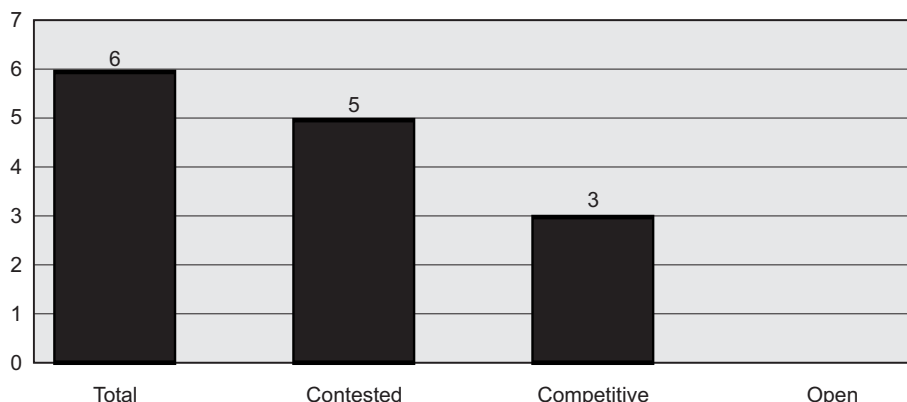
### ***Campaign Spending***

On average in Wisconsin, the cost of a competitive State Senate campaign in 2000 was \$224,888; it took roughly \$46,732 to run the average competitive State Assembly race. Incumbent spending was nearly double that of spending by challengers; not surprisingly, only three of sixty-two challengers statewide won contested seats in the 2000 state legislative elections.

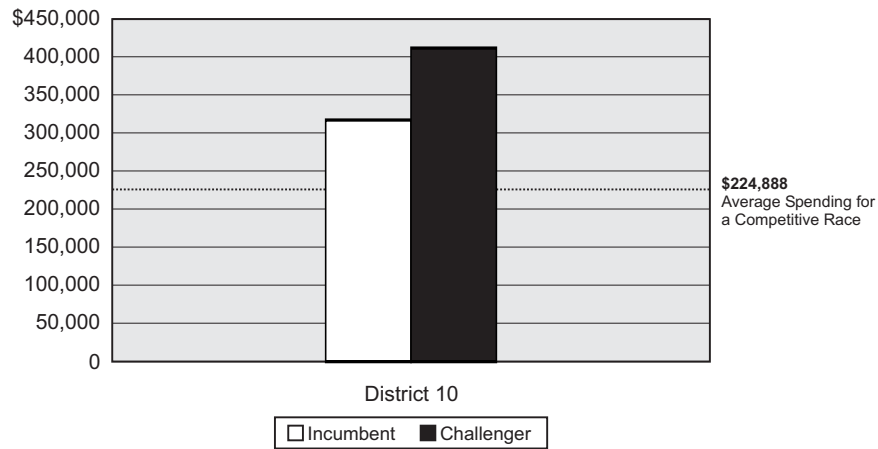
This region saw a slightly different trend, as in three of the five contested races, the challengers outspent the incumbent candidates. In two of those three, however, the incumbent won the election and maintained the seat.

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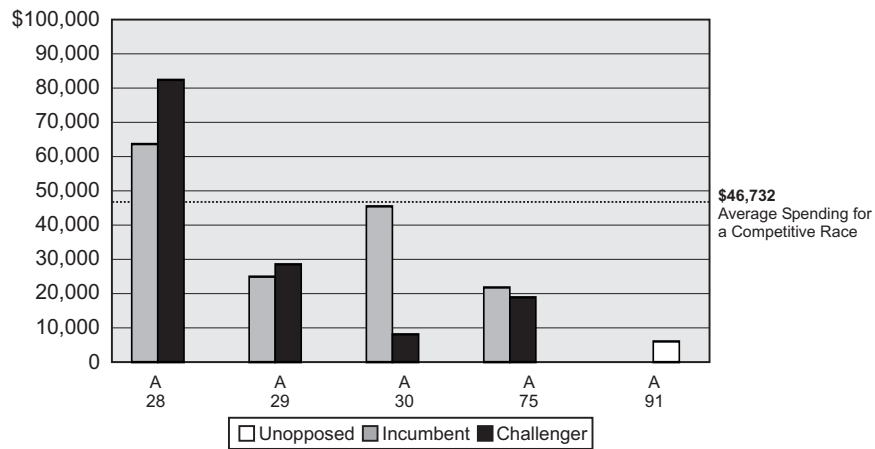
**Voter Choice, State Legislative Races, November 2000**



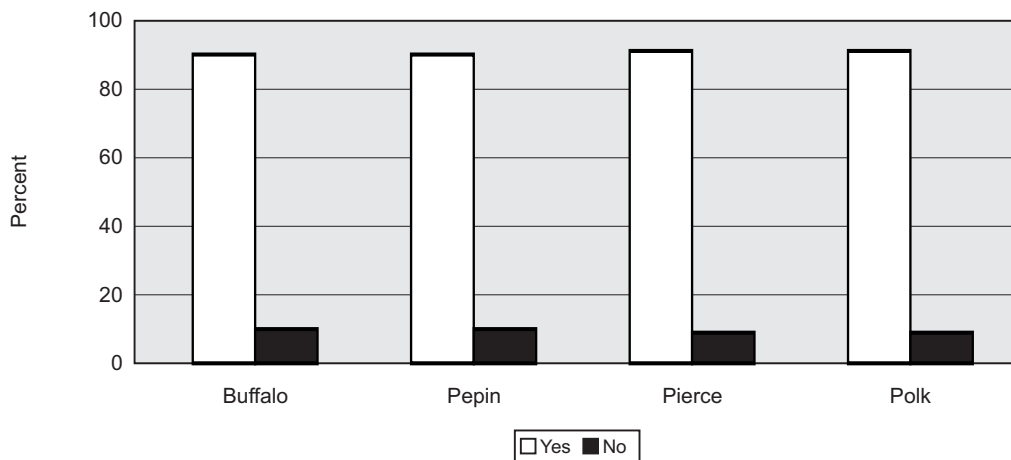
### Candidate Spending, State Senate, November 2000



### Candidate Spending, State Assembly, November 2000



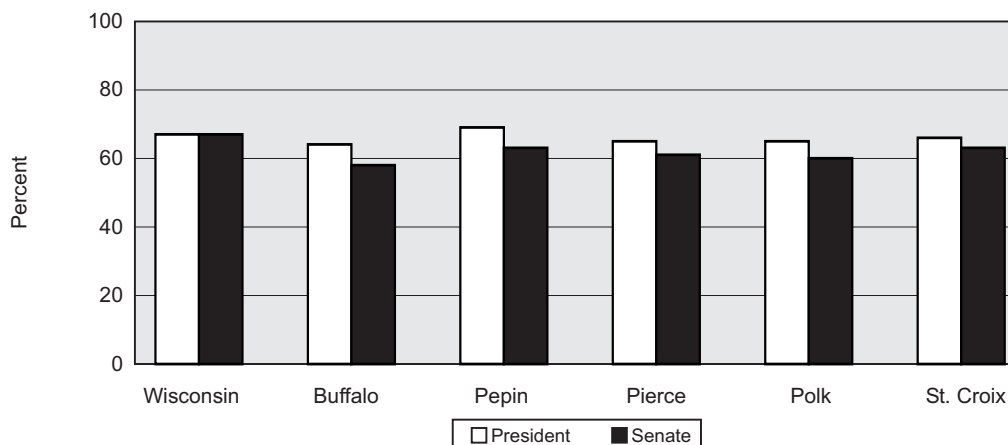
### Campaign Finance Reform Referendum, 2000



\*Referendum was not on the ballot in St. Croix County.

## Voter Turnout, November 2000

(based on voting age population)



- In Assembly District 28, the incumbent spent less than the challenger, but benefited from over \$37,000 in independent expenditures made on his behalf.

Statewide in 2000, seventy-three candidates running for state legislative office agreed to spending limits in exchange for publicly-funded grants under the Wisconsin Election Campaign Fund (WECF) program. Under the terms of the program, however, overall campaign spending in a race is limited only if both major party candidates agree to participate in the grant program.

In only ten legislative districts in Wisconsin did both candidates accept the WECF grant and agree to limit their spending.

- In Assembly District 75, both candidates agreed to spending limits in exchange for public campaign funds. Spending in the race remained significantly below the statewide average.

With the increased role of campaign money and the power of incumbency acutely evident in this region, it should come as no surprise that residents here have shown a desire to reduce the undue influence of money in the electoral process.

- A November 2000 advisory referendum to place limits on campaign spending passed by at least 90 percent in the four counties which had the referendum on their ballot.

### ***Voter Turnout***

Statewide voter turnout in the fall general elections was nearly 67 percent in 2000.

- Pepin County had the highest voter participation rates, with 69 percent in the Presidential election and 63 percent in the U.S. Senate race.
- Buffalo County had the lowest turnout, with 64 percent in the Presidential and 58 percent in the Senate elections.

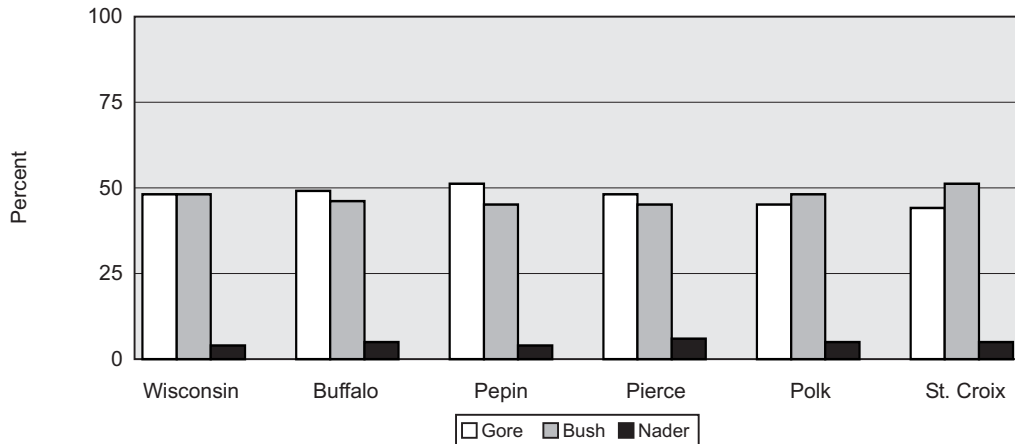
### ***Political Independence***

Wisconsin maintains a long tradition of independent, split-ticket voting. Our state currently has four Republican U.S. House members and five Democrats; two Democratic U.S. Senators; a Republican governor; a Republican controlled State Assembly; and a State Senate with a Democratic majority.

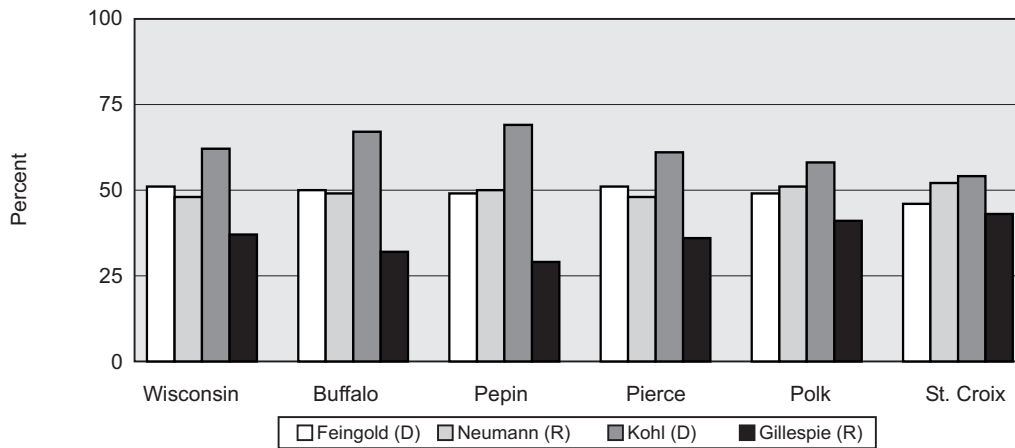
This region shows a similar trend in voter independence, although voting tends to slightly favor Democratic candidates in both national and state elections.

- All counties except Polk and St. Croix counties gave the majority of their votes to the Democratic candidates in the U.S. Presidential elections. With the exception of Buffalo and Pierce counties, the region elected the Republican candidate in the 1998 U.S. Senate race and the Democratic candidate in the 2000 U.S. Senate race.
- Democrats represent five of the eight state legislative districts in the region.

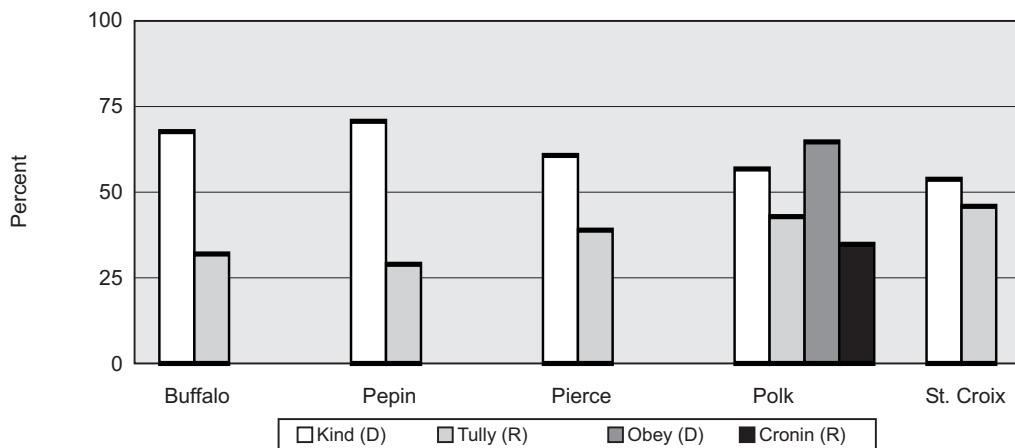
**Vote Distribution, U.S. Presidential Election, November 2000**



**Vote Distribution, U.S. Senate Elections, November 1998 and 2000**



**Vote Distribution, U.S. Congressional Elections, November 2000**



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## Sources

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### ***Jobs and the Economy***

- *Per Capita Income* and *Per Capita Income as a Percentage of the U.S. Average* from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce at <http://www.bea.doc.gov/bea/regional/reis>.
- *Labor Force Participation Rate* from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development at [http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/lmi/cp\\_pdf/cp\\_mainx.htm](http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/lmi/cp_pdf/cp_mainx.htm).
- *Unemployment Rates, Recent Seasonal Unemployment Rates, and Change in Total Employment* from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development at [http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/lmi/employ\\_civilianlaborForce.htm](http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/lmi/employ_civilianlaborForce.htm).
- *Change in Employment and Non-farm Employment by Sectors in each county* from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development at [http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/lmi/cp\\_pdf/cp\\_mainx.htm](http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/lmi/cp_pdf/cp_mainx.htm).
- *Workers with Poverty Earnings* from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development Wisconsin Labor Market Information website at <http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/lmi/>.
- *Change in Full Time Farms, Change in Land Used for Farming, Farms Larger than 1000 Acres, Change in Those Reporting Farming as Principal Occupation, and Average Age of Farmers* from the 1997 Census on Agriculture by the U.S. Department of Agriculture at <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/census97/profiles/wi/wi.htm>.
- *Change in Tourism Revenue, Traveler's Spending, and Total Jobs in Tourism* from the Wisconsin Department of Tourism at [http://agency.travelwisconsin.com/Research/EconomicImpact\\_Active/01countydata.shtm](http://agency.travelwisconsin.com/Research/EconomicImpact_Active/01countydata.shtm).

### ***Families and Communities***

- *Median Family Income 1995-2001* from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development at <http://www.huduser.org/datasets/il.html>. Please note that median family income for all indicated years are estimates based on data from the 1990 census and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. See the HUD site for how these estimates are calculated.
- *Single Parent Families and Teen Births* from the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families WisKids Count 2001 at <http://www.wccf.org/index.html>.
- *Poverty Rates* from the US Census Bureau at <http://www.census.gov/datamap/www/55txt.html>.
- *Children Eligible for Free and Reduced Cost Lunch* from the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families WisKids Count 2001 at <http://www.wccf.org/index.html>.
- *Fair Market Rent* from the National Low Income Housing Coalition report "Out of Reach" at <http://www.nlihc.org/oor2001/index.htm#data>.
- *Families That Could Not Afford FMR* from the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families WisKids Count 2000 at <http://www.wccf.org/wiskidcounties.html>.
- *Hourly Wage Needed to Meet FMR* from the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families WisKids Count 2001 at <http://www.wccf.org/index.html>.
- *Change in Renter Households* from the National Low Income Housing Coalition at <http://www.nlihc.org/cgi-bin/oor2001.pl?getstate=on&getcounty=on&county=-all&state=WI>.
- *AFDC/W2 Recipients* from the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families WisKids Count 2001 at <http://www.wccf.org/index.html>.

### ***The Future***

- *Change in Population 1970-2000* and *Change in Population by Age Group* from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development at [http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/lmi/cp\\_pdf/cp\\_mainx.htm](http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/lmi/cp_pdf/cp_mainx.htm).
- *Women Seeking Prenatal Care in First Trimester* from the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families WisKids Count 2000 at <http://www.wccf.org/wiskidcounties.html>.
- *Children Under Five Receiving WIC Services, Infant Mortality Rates, and Badger Care Enrollment* from the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families WisKids Count 2001 at <http://www.wccf.org/index.html>.
- *Public School Information* from the Department of Public Instruction web site at <http://www2.dpi.state.wi.us/spr/topselect.asp>.
- *Total Adult Arrests* from the Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance at <http://oja.state.wi.us/static/crime1998.asp>.
- *Total Juvenile Arrests* from the Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance at <http://oja.state.wi.us/static/crime1999.asp>.

### ***Environment and Natural Resources***

- *Impaired Water Bodies* from the Department of Natural Resources website at <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/wm/wqs/303d/waterbody.html>.
- *Acreage in Wetlands* from the Department of Natural Resources website at <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/fhp/wetlands>.
- *Acreage in Forests* calculated by COWS based on data from US Department of Agriculture publication Wisconsin Forest Statistics 1996 pp. 35–36.
- *Acreage in Conservation and Recreation Land* calculated by COWS based on data from the Wisconsin Blue Book 2001–2002, p. 649, and the Department of Natural Resources website at <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/fhp/wetlands>.
- *Superfund Sites* compiled from data provided by the Environmental Protection Agency, at Toxic Alert at <http://www.cqs.com/esuper.htm>.

### ***Democracy and Civic Participation***

- *Voter Choice, State Legislative Races* compiled from data available on the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign web site at <http://www.wisdc.org>.
- *Candidate Spending, State Senate, and State Assembly* compiled from public records maintained by the State Elections Board by the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign at [http://www.wisdc.org/2000Campaign\\_Profiles\\_Links.html#top](http://www.wisdc.org/2000Campaign_Profiles_Links.html#top).
- *Campaign Finance Reform Referendum* from the Wisconsin Counties Association at <http://www.wicounties.org/LegInfo/wlegis.html>.
- *Voter Turnout* calculated by COWS from data provided by the US Census Bureau at <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/55000.html>, and the Wisconsin State Elections Board at <http://badger.state.wi.us/agencies/elections/>.
- *Vote Distribution, Presidential, Senate, and Congressional Elections* compiled by COWS from data maintained by the Wisconsin State Elections Board at <http://badger.state.wi.us/agencies/elections/sebpage38.html>.