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Comments: RE: Socioeconomic Conditions Supplement Report

This report is missing a critical component, the use of intraOhio data is misleading for those counties in the southern border of the 17 counties; because even though the counties are bordered, on the south, or east, the bordering counties are in other states. I should like to suggest that information from Cabell and Wayne Counties in WV and Boyd and Greenup Counties in KY be included for the IRD. Substantial information is available on the web site of the KYOVA interstate planning commission. I am less familiar with the situation in the Marietta/Parkersburg Community, which could include Wood County WV, and even less familiar with communities further up the Ohio River. While Lake Vesuvius might attract visitations from Columbus, it is far more likely that day trips originate in Huntington, WV or Ashland, Ky. There are significant timber buying companies in Ky. not far from Portsmouth OH. Businesses: retail, wholesale and service activities are all regional, not state, based. Social connections are also cross-border, so should this report be.

Lawrence and Scioto Counties have seen recent industrial development, not what it was, but new. Employees regularly cross borders in all directions from work to home and seldom distinguish between them, other than being effected by tax structures and some vehicle laws. When floods or fires come they do not respect state boundaries, nor does the need for cooperation in relief and rescue. Housing is where you find it. There has been an upsurge in new developments on the periphery of the urban areas, much of it of higher quality than the existing stock.

Page 8 one of the larger tax exempt properties in Scioto County is the state prison, the infrastructure there is significant. In some counties tax delinquencies and tax avoidance contribute to significant revenue losses.

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Special Uses. At one time there were permits for military training (ROTC) is this still a special use today?

Non timber forest products One interesting condition I have encountered involves wineberry, when proposed as a problem NNIS there was local objections based on its use as a valued source of vitamin C, which otherwise would be lacking in some residents.

In demographics the young are stressed as necessary for economic growth, however there may be some potential in relatively well off retired household units. There is some antidotal reporting that this group is beginning to "discover" the area. Tennessee would be an example of a state that is exploiting this niche. North Carolina has positioned itself well in this market. This has implications for the growth of health services and home attendant care (housekeeping), recreation and volunteer availability.

There is some interest in repositing former surface mining lands as the site for solar installations. Usually utilities and infrastructure are in place and can be easily converted to solar. In other cases, coal burning power stations are transiting to natural gas as a bridge fuel. One plant, Dynergy (now part of Vistra), on the Lawrence/Scioto border was originally designed to be coal powered but changed to natural gas prior to startup. Originally it was also conceived as a peak plant but now runs almost continuously, except for planned maintenance.

Please consider the impact of redirecting reclamation funds to shoring up the retirement payouts to miners. This limits the amount of money available for reclamation as it also supports the economic base of the communities through retirement income.

Longer term the abandonment or retirement of a natural gas-related infrastructure, including pipelines, needs to be considered. As with surface and subsurface mining the cessation of activity on WNF lands would present problems of safety and land use.

Recreation might also enumerate the boating opportunities on Timber Ridge Lake as being more secluded and currently often used by those coming in horse drawn vehicles. Other outdoor activities such as caving, zip lining, geocaching, nature viewing might be more applicable to the Wayne than skiing in calculating economic benefits. Any and all facilities for the alternative abled population might also be included here.

I should like for a link in the supplement to the five-year Recreation Facility Strategy, as is provided for shared stewardship (page 24).

The expansion to 26 counties, while ignoring the adjacent counties that are interstate, may severely distort the results, particularly in areas of shared borders. Figure 10 clearly shows re this opportunity for a more inclusive area of influence.

Under regional economic structure transportation seems to be underplayed. There is active barge servicing and transportation on the Ohio River, although it is declining with the reduction in barging of coal. The improvements in transportation such as the Nelsonville and Portsmouth bypasses, upgrading of US 35, and 52 and other smaller projects have increased access to the area and encouraged development and increased viability of the region.

The scale of industrial development is declining and the recruiting of firms with a smaller work force is more likely to bring results than chasing one huge employer. The slow, steady growth of the Point in South Point is an example of this type of incremental growth.

Page 29 bullet points A comparable bullet for recreation would seem to be in order, while it is covered in text, the format makes direct comparison with timber and minerals difficult.

Table 11 is difficult to understand without the underlying assumptions, using just the raw figures it seems to be improbable in places. As an example, when comparing Health care and social assistance with arts, entertainment and recreation the initial impressions seems to be unbalanced.

From a specific Lawrence County perspective the health facilities situation is both challenging and misleading. There is currently no hospital in the county, although there are out patient facilities, one of which is closing quite soon. But there is a major complex of two large hospitals in Huntington WV (Mountain Health Network), which is also supported by the Marshall University Medical School: Kings Daughters in Ashland Ky., Holtzer in Gallipolis and Southern Ohio Medical Center in Portsmouth. Thus, there are services, but they are located outside the county and in some cases outside the state. This makes the metrics for health look poor although ample services are available.

The skewed age distribution, with a larger proportion of older residents than found nationally distorts the comparison with other communities with respect to the amount of earned from labor vs. passive income. However, under many economic assumptions this is reflective of what the much larger community will look like in the relatively near future. This may indicate that the potential for embracing, instead of rejecting, older in migrants with a secure income stream into the region should be considered. Providing the services that such a population is accustomed to, and demands, would aid in economic diversification while increasing the availability of opportunities in health, including food availability, and life support for all residents.

The IRD has limited income from leases and severance taxes are a non issue. However, industrial activity along the Ohio River does generate taxes for the schools, although this is diluted by tax breaks granted to such entities.

Demand for fine hardwoods is dependent upon worldwide fashion and style in the furniture and decorative arts market; remember walnut in the 50's and 60's. It is very hard to predict fickle tastes, all one can do is predict change will happen, thus a diverse forest suite of products is more likely to have a long range economic impact than monocultures or monoecosystems.

Recreation is also subject to changing tastes and fads, and to keep with the 50's, think bowling and the current ongoing decline in golf courses. Again the implications are that investments in hard scapeing for recreation with the resultant inevitable decline in use is not a wise investment.

Education might be expanded to further discuss the large number of local districts in many counties and the advantages and disadvantages this presents. But missing is the interaction with the forest with the primary/secondary age group. There is currently a weekend education component offered to students in Athens and in the past a nature center was operated in the IRD which provided not only for student experiences, public programs, but also, through OUS, continuing education credits and assistance in grant writing for environmental education grants. In order to increase appreciation and understanding of forest opportunities, as well as career awareness, attention should be given to increasing activity in this realm.

Career Centers all counties in the 17 counties should be enumerated to show the extent of the efforts and funds expended throughout the region. Any STEM (with or without additions) located in the region should also be mentioned. Surrounding higher education also deserves a mention, WVU Parkersburg, Marshall University, several programs in Kentucky provide degree work. In many cases these schools have a regional tuition which is less than out of state and more than in state. The opportunity to commute and avoid not living at home and/or driving long distances makes this a choice for students.

Heritage and Identity - In this category there seems to be no mention of museums, yet there are many, with different specialities. The attendance at the International Quilt Show at the Dairy Barn would be a significant example of the draw of museums. I was surprised to see large scale photographs of iron furnace activity at Tanner Hill State Park in Alabama. These were, taken from the Ohio History Connection, which were photographed in locations now on the Wayne. Have these photos ever been exhibited in the region and have the collections been explored for relevant materials?

Additional festivals/celebrations which might be of interest include; the apple festival in Jackson, the Roy Rodgers celebrations in Portsmouth, the memorial day parade in Ironton a wide assortment of beer and wine events. A mention of farmers' markets and concert venues highlight another part of heritage and identity. Currently restoration of historic theaters is seemingly going on in almost all counties.

Family heritage also includes numerous small, family cemeteries which require attention as to access and respect.