

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REGION 7W: Central

Covers counties:
Benton, Sherburne,
Stearns, and Wright

2024 REGIONAL PROFILE

Updated January 2025

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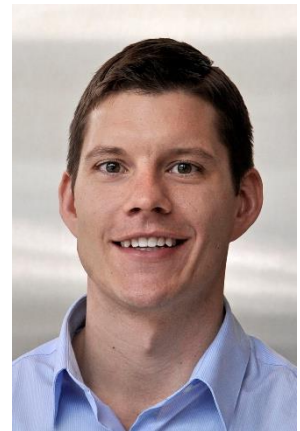
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DEMOGRAPHICS

POPULATION CHANGE

Economic Development Region 7W – Central includes a total of 4 counties, located in the larger 13-county Central Minnesota planning region. Region 7W was home to 455,933 people in 2023, comprising 7.9% of the state's total population. The region saw a 4% population increase since 2020, making it the fastest growing of the 13 economic development regions (EDRs) in the state, and is now the third largest in total population after gaining more than 17,700 new residents. In comparison, the state of Minnesota saw a 0.6% gain from 2020 to 2023, meaning Region 7W accounted for over half of the state's total population growth (Table 1).

	2020 Population	2023 Estimates	2020-2023 Change	
			Number	Percent
Region 7W	438,191	455,933	+17,742	+4.0%
Benton Co.	41,379	41,600	+221	+0.5%
Sherburne Co.	97,183	102,206	+5,023	+5.2%
Stearns Co.	158,292	160,977	+2,685	+1.7%
Wright Co.	141,337	151,150	+9,813	+6.9%
Minnesota	5,706,494	5,737,915	+31,421	+0.6%

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates](#)

All four counties in the region saw population gains since 2020, led by Wright County, which was the fastest growing county in the state and is now the 10th largest (of 87 counties in the state) with 151,150 people. Sherburne County was the second fastest growing and is now the 12th largest in the state, with 102,206 people. Stearns County was the 8th largest in the state with 160,977 people, and the 20th fastest growing in the state after gaining 2,685 new residents. Benton County is the smallest in the region with 41,600 people but is the 25th largest in the state and was the 42nd fastest growing from 2020 to 2023. These recent gains are part of a long-term trend in the region, which has been rapidly adding population since 1950.

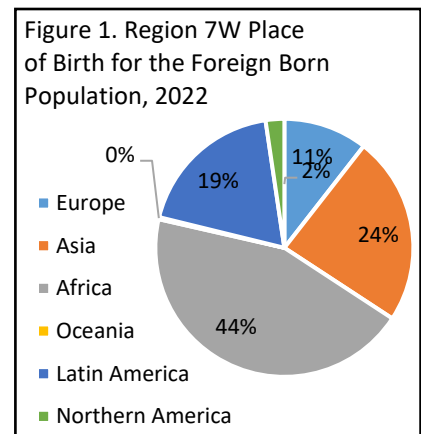
COMPONENTS OF POPULATION CHANGE

With a younger and fast-growing population, Region 7W experienced a natural increase – more births than deaths – of 6,412 people so far this decade. In addition, the region gained residents from in-migration, with 11,223 more people moving into the region than moving out. The vast majority of in-migration since 2020 has been from domestic residents (+8,648) rather than international sources (+2,575) (Table 2).

	Total Change	Natural Increase	Vital Events		Net Migration		
			Births	Deaths	Total	Inter- national	Domestic
Region 7W	+17,723	+6,412	17,774	11,362	+11,223	+2,575	+8,648
Minnesota	+31,111	+40,368	207,857	167,489	-11,352	+34,624	-45,976

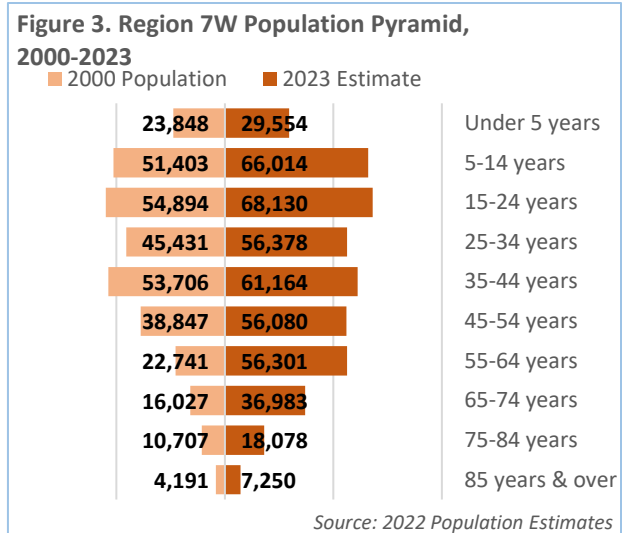
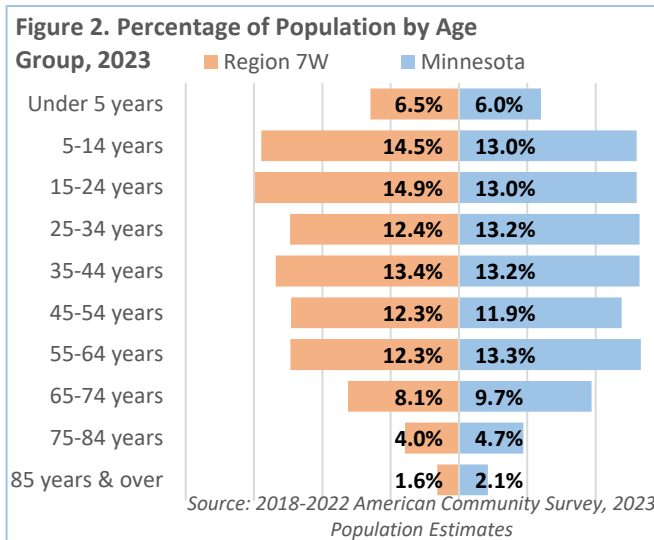
Source: [U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program](#)

Region 7W was home to 20,691 foreign born residents, or about 4.7% of the total population, compared to 8.5 % of the state's population. The number of immigrants in the region increased by 75.2% since 2010, more than doubling the statewide growth rate of 31.3%. Over 44% (9,176 people) of these immigrants were from Africa, while the second largest number of foreign born residents were from Asia, accounting for one fourth of immigrants. The fastest growing wave of new immigrants to Region 7W came from Africa, rising by 7,470 people from 2010 to 2022, a 438% jump, while the number from Asia increased about 22%. Another 19% of immigrants were from Central and South America, after increasing about 3.7% since 2010, and about 10.5% were from Europe and 2.3% were from Canada (Figure 1).



POPULATION BY AGE GROUP

Region 7W's population is younger than the state's, with 36% of the population aged 24 years and younger in 2022, compared to 32% statewide. Another 38.1% of people in Region 7W were between 25 and 54 years of age, which is typically considered the "prime working years," similar to statewide. Region 7W also had a much smaller percentage of people aged 55 years and older as the state, including just 14% of people aged 65 years and over (Figure 2).

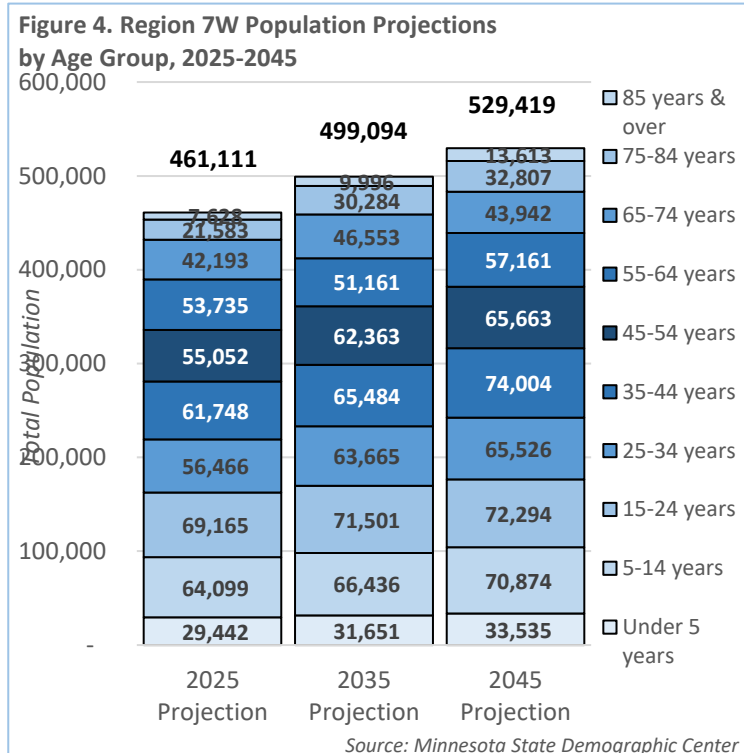


A large portion of the region's population is a part of the Baby Boom generation, people born between 1946 and 1964, which is creating a significant shift in the population over time. While the number of younger and middle-aged residents was rising steadily, the number of residents aged 55 years and over was rapidly increasing. This included a huge jump in the number of people from 55 to 74 years of age, and a 55% increase in people aged 65 years and over (Figure 3).

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Region 7W is projected to enjoy continued growth in the future as well. According to the [State Demographic Center](#), Region 7W is expected to gain about 68,300 net new residents from 2025 to 2045, a 14.8% increase (Figure 4). In comparison, the state of Minnesota is projected to grow 5.5% from 2025 to 2045.

Despite the region's younger population, much of this demographic growth is expected to be in the older age groups. Region 7W is projected to add almost 19,000 people aged 65 years and over, a 26.6% increase. But growth is expected across all age cohorts. The region is expected to gain over 21,250 people in the 25- to 44-year-old age group, as well as about 4,000 children under 5. The region's growth is enviable in comparison to other more rural parts of the state.



POPULATION BY RACE

Region 7W's population is less racially diverse than the state, but is becoming more diverse over time. In 2022, 87.9% of the region's residents reported White alone as their race, compared to 79.7% of residents statewide. Region 7W had a smaller

percentage of all other race groups than the state, with the largest populations other than white being Black or African American, Two or More Races, and Hispanic or Latino origin (Table 3).

Table 3. Race and Hispanic Origin, 2022	Region 7W				Minnesota	
	Number	Percent	Change from 2011-2022		Percent	Change from 2011-2022
			Numeric	Percent		
Total	440,285	100.0%	+41,691	+10.5%	100.0%	+7.9%
White	386,837	87.9%	+12,712	+3.4%	79.7%	-0.4%
Black or African American	20,276	4.6%	+12,490	+160.4%	6.7%	+44.3%
American Indian & Alaska Native	1,083	0.2%	-496	-31.4%	0.9%	-10.2%
Asian & Other Pac. Islander	6,696	1.5%	+878	+15.1%	5.1%	+37.1%
Some Other Race	7,242	1.6%	+3,617	+99.8%	2.3%	+84.7%
Two or More Races	18,151	4.1%	+12,490	+220.6%	5.3%	+159.6%
Hispanic or Latino origin	14,925	3.4%	+5,344	+55.8%	5.7%	+34.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

With 43% of adults aged 25 years and over having a college degree, Region 7W has lower educational attainment than the state, where 50% of adults have an associate, bachelor's, or advanced degree. In contrast, Region 7W has a higher percentage of people with some college but no degree, and a higher percentage of people with associate's degrees, but a lower percent of people with a bachelor's degree or higher (Table 4).

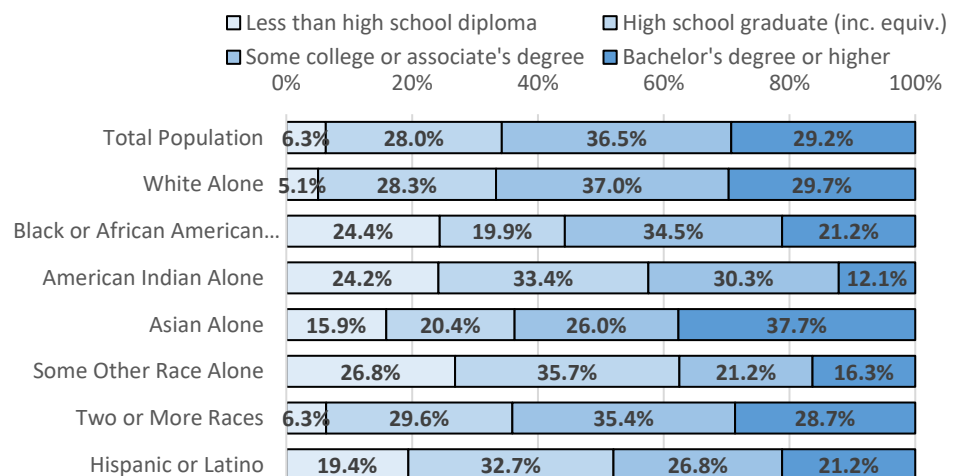
Table 4. Educational Attainment for the Adult Population, 2022	Region 7W		Minnesota
	Number	Percent	Percent
Total, 25 years & over	282,205	100.0%	100.0%
Less than high school	17,720	6.3%	6.3%
High school graduate (incl. equiv.)	79,014	28.0%	23.7%
Some college, no degree	63,421	22.5%	20.2%
Associate's degree	39,535	14.0%	11.7%
Bachelor's degree	56,834	20.1%	24.9%
Advanced degree	25,681	9.1%	13.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey

Educational attainment varied significantly by race and ethnicity in Region 7W. For example, almost 95% of the White alone population reported having at least a high school diploma or equivalent, compared to around 76% of Blacks and American Indians, and 81% of Hispanic or Latino residents. On the other end of the education spectrum, 38% of Asian residents aged 25 years and over had attained a bachelor's degree or higher, followed

by about 30% of both Whites and people of Two or More Races. Despite having the lowest share with the highest educational attainment, 30% of American Indians had attended some college or earned an associate's degree (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Region 7W Educational Attainment for the population aged 25 years & over by Race or Origin, 2022



Source: 2018-2022 American Community Survey

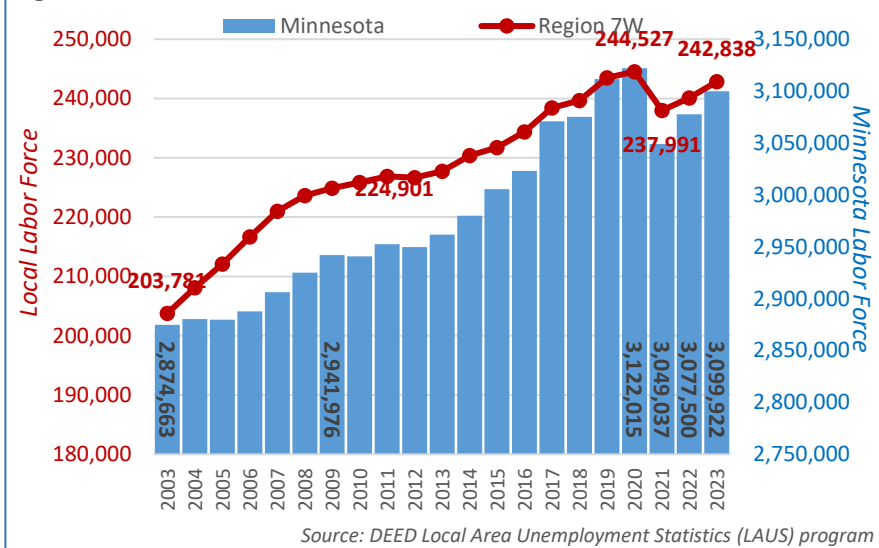
LABOR FORCE

LABOR FORCE CHANGE

According to data from DEED's [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#) program, Region 7W had an annual average labor force count of just over 242,800 workers in 2023. The regional labor force had been increasing since 2003, adding over 40,000 new workers from 2003 to 2019. But the pandemic and related recession reversed the growth trend and the region lost over 8,100 workers from 2019 to 2021.

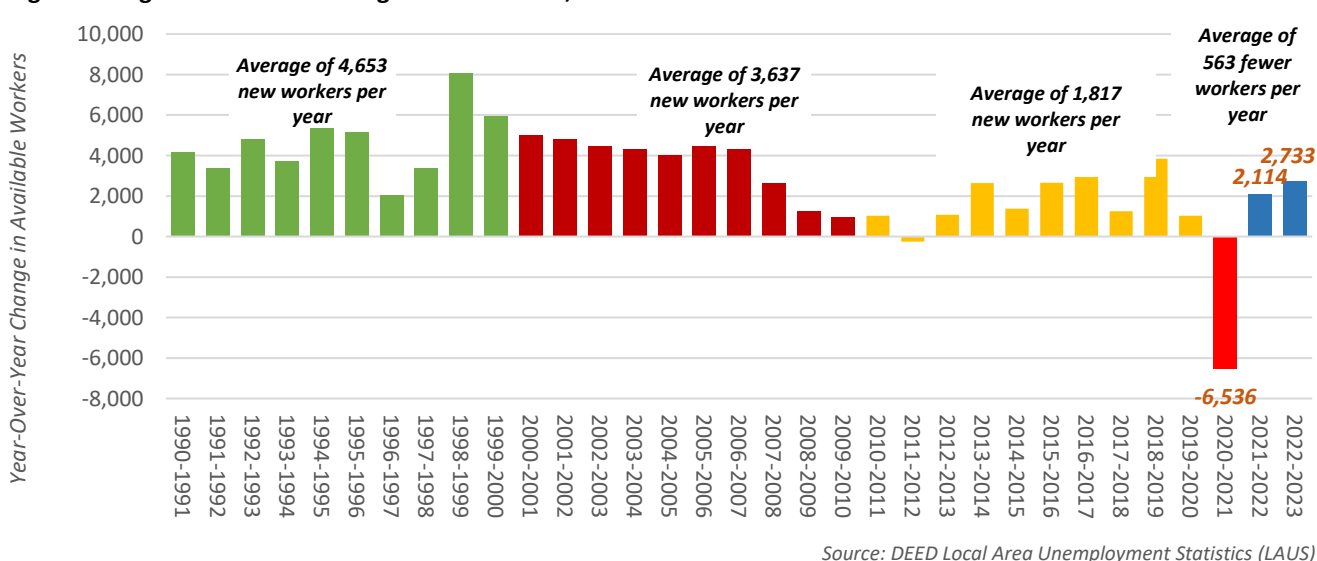
Region 7W saw a rebound in labor force growth in 2022 and 2023, similar to the state and nation. Although the regional labor force and economy continued to grow for years, the two-month pandemic recession and labor force exits created a situation where job losses and labor force exits from 2020 pushed many workers out of the labor force and the rebound has not yet recovered the areas labor force. (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Annual Labor Force Estimates, 2003-2023



Averaging a net gain of 4,653 additional labor force participants per year between 1990 and 2000, employers in Region 7W were able to tap into a large and growing pool of talented workers. Although the regional labor force and economy continue to grow, the rate of labor force growth has slowed down considerably, demonstrated by Region 7W adding an average of 1,817 workers per year from 2010 to 2019 (Figure 7). A relatively tight labor market and a smaller labor force is now recognized as one of the most significant barriers to future economic growth in Region 7W. It's probable that labor force growth will continue in the future, but how long it takes to recover to pre-pandemic labor force levels is uncertain. Thankfully, 2023 welcomed a number of new workers similar to the average annual growth in the early 2010's.

Figure 7. Region 7W Annual Change in Labor Force, 1990-2023



LABOR FORCE PROJECTIONS

Applying current labor force participation rates to future population projections by age group, as shown in Figure 4 above, would lead to a steady increase in labor force in Region 7W, adding about 1,800 additional workers per year through 2035 (Table 5). The labor force will also see a shift in composition over time, with gains in the number of workers aged 65 years and over wiping out declines in the number of workers aged 55 to 64 years. The region is also projected to gain younger workers, and the largest number of new workers are expected to be 25 to 54 years old.

	2025 Labor Force Projection	2035 Labor Force Projection	2025-2035 Change	
			Numeric	Percent
16 to 19 years	16,437	16,794	+357	+2.2%
20 to 24 years	29,858	31,217	+1,359	+4.6%
25 to 44 years	105,540	115,303	+9,763	+9.3%
45 to 54 years	49,846	56,465	+6,620	+13.3%
55 to 64 years	40,551	38,608	-1,942	-4.8%
65 to 74 years	11,036	12,176	+1,140	+10.3%
75 years & over	1,790	2,469	+678	+37.9%
Total Labor Force	255,058	273,032	+17,974	+7.0%

Source: calculated from [MN State Demographic Center projections](#), and [2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates](#).

EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

With 72.1% of the population aged 16 years and over in the labor force, Region 7W had a higher labor force participation rate than the state's 68.7%. The region had higher participation rates than the state in all of the age groups, except for workers 65 years and older (Table 6). The region also had higher participation rates than the state for several races such as Blacks, Asians, and Hispanic or Latinos. The highest unemployment rates were reported for Blacks and American Indians.

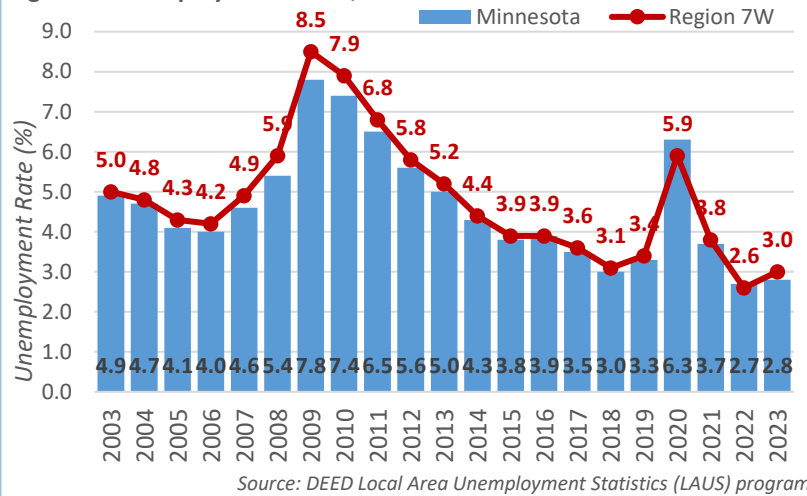
	Region 7W			Minnesota		Percent of Total Labor Force	
	In Labor Force	Labor Force Partic. Rate	Unemp. Rate	Labor Force Partic. Rate	Unemp. Rate	Region 7W	Minnesota
Total Labor Force	246,312	72.1%	3.3%	68.7%	4.0%		
16 to 19 years	16,144	60.2%	6.8%	53.0%	9.8%	6.6%	5.1%
20 to 24 years	27,846	85.2%	5.6%	83.1%	6.7%	11.3%	9.7%
25 to 44 years	101,339	89.3%	3.0%	88.8%	3.5%	41.1%	42.8%
45 to 54 years	49,034	90.5%	2.5%	87.8%	2.9%	19.9%	19.0%
55 to 64 years	41,029	75.5%	2.6%	72.8%	3.1%	16.7%	17.6%
65 to 74 years	9,341	26.2%	2.4%	27.6%	3.3%	3.8%	4.9%
75 years & over	1,499	6.1%	0.6%	6.6%	3.2%	0.6%	0.8%
Employment Characteristics by Race & Hispanic Origin							
White alone	219,948	71.8%	2.9%	67.8%	3.4%	89.3%	81.3%
Black or African American	10,365	75.8%	12.2%	71.5%	8.7%	4.2%	6.1%
American Indian & Alaska Native	506	58.2%	12.0%	57.6%	11.9%	0.2%	0.7%
Asian or Other Pac. Islanders	4,121	74.9%	3.5%	73.9%	3.6%	1.7%	5.2%
Some Other Race	4,026	75.5%	1.4%	76.1%	6.1%	1.6%	2.3%
Two or More Races	7,308	73.8%	4.6%	74.3%	6.6%	3.0%	4.3%
Hispanic or Latino	7,652	78.0%	3.4%	77.0%	6.3%	3.1%	5.4%
Employment Characteristics by Veteran Status, 18-64 years							
Veterans, 18 to 64 years	8,374	78.7%	3.2%	81.1%	4.0%	3.7%	3.4%
Employment Characteristics by Disability							
With Any Disability, 20 to 64 years	11,667	56.9%	9.3%	54.4%	10.2%	5.3%	5.9%
Employment Characteristics by Educational Attainment							
Population, 25 to 64 years	191,443	86.2%	2.8%	84.4%	3.3%	77.7%	79.5%
Less than H.S. Diploma	8,430	69.5%	3.3%	67.2%	4.6%	4.4%	4.7%
H.S. Diploma or Equivalent	44,537	80.1%	1.7%	76.8%	2.5%	23.3%	19.0%
Some College or Assoc. Degree	75,233	88.3%	3.3%	85.1%	3.6%	39.3%	32.8%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	63,198	91.4%	1.4%	90.3%	2.0%	33.0%	43.4%

Source: 2018-2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

Region 7W has consistently reported very similar unemployment rates to the state, typically hovering just slightly above, but within 0.2% of the state rate. According to DEED's [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#), Region 7W's rate rose as high as 8.5% in 2009, which was 0.7% above the state rate. Since then, the state and region's economies recovered before spiking briefly during 2020 due to COVID-19. By 2021, unemployment rates dropped to historic lows in the region, a nod to the tight labor market facing employers (Figure 8).

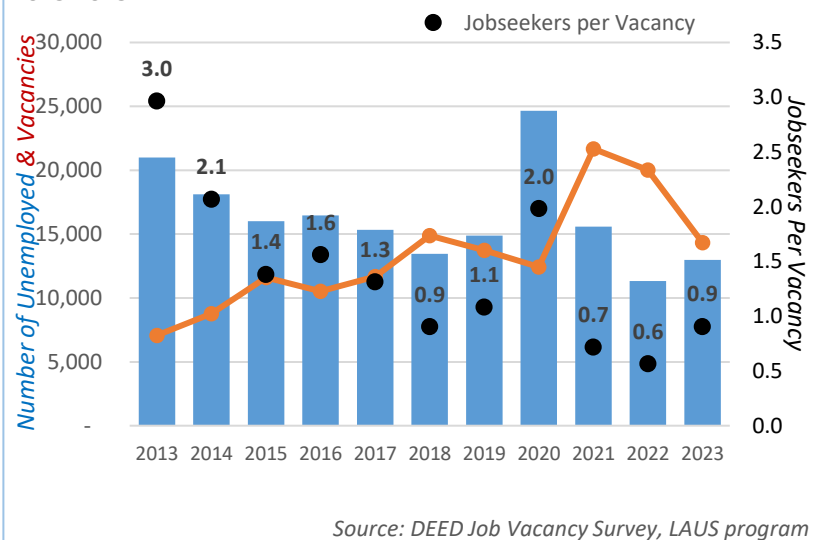
Figure 8. Unemployment Rates, 2003-2023



JOBSEEKERS PER VACANCY

As the growth in the number of available workers slowed and then declined in 2020 and 2021, the number of unemployed workers dropped as well, most recently the number of unemployed workers increased in 2023. One clear demonstration of the labor market conditions is the ratio of unemployed jobseekers per vacancy, which now stands at 0.9-to-1 in Region Central Minnesota. According to the recent Job Vacancy Survey results, the number of openings have been falling steadily since peaking in 2021. The ratio climbed as high as 10.7-to-1 in the depths of the recession in 2009 when labor was in surplus (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Jobseekers Per Vacancy, 2013-2023



COMMUTE SHED AND LABOR SHED

According to commuting data from the [Census Bureau](#), Region 7W is a net labor exporter, having more workers than available jobs. In sum, 122,173 workers both lived and worked in Region 7W in 2022, while 50,224 workers drove into the region from surrounding counties for work, compared to 103,660 workers who lived in the region but drove to surrounding counties for work (Table 7).

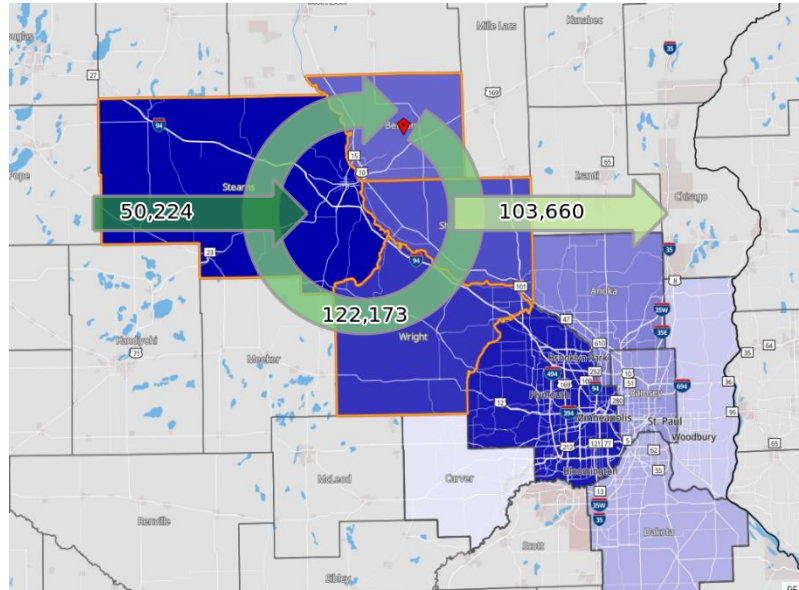
Table 7. Region 7W Inflow/Outflow Job Counts (All Jobs), 2022	2022	
	Count	Share
Employed in the Selection Area	172,397	100.0%
Employed in the Selection Area but Living Outside	50,224	29.1%
Employed and Living in the Selection Area	122,173	70.9%
Living in the Selection Area	225,833	100.0%
Living in the Selection Area but Employed Outside	103,660	45.9%
Living and Employed in the Selection Area	122,173	54.1%

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap](#)

Figure 10. Region 7W Labor and Commute Shed, 2022

Anchored by St. Cloud, Stearns is the largest county and the largest employment center in the region and was the biggest draw for workers, actually seeing a net import of workers. In contrast, Benton, Sherburne, and Wright had significant labor outflows, primarily into the Twin Cities metro area as well as St. Cloud (Figure 10).

In sum, Region 7W has a net outflow of workers, being commuter counties. Many people live in the region but drive to the Twin Cities for job opportunities.



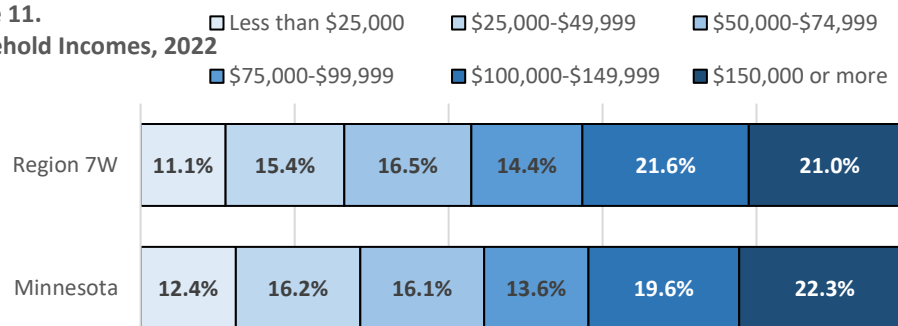
INCOMES, WAGES AND OCCUPATIONS

HOUSEHOLD INCOMES

Median household incomes were slightly higher in Region 7W than the rest of the state. The median household income in Region 7W was \$87,850 in 2022, compared to \$84,313 in Minnesota. About 26.5% of the households in the region had incomes below \$50,000 in 2022, compared to 29% statewide. Another 31% of households earned between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in the region. 43% of households in Region 7W earned over \$100,000 per year, a half point higher than statewide (Figure 11).

Figure 11.

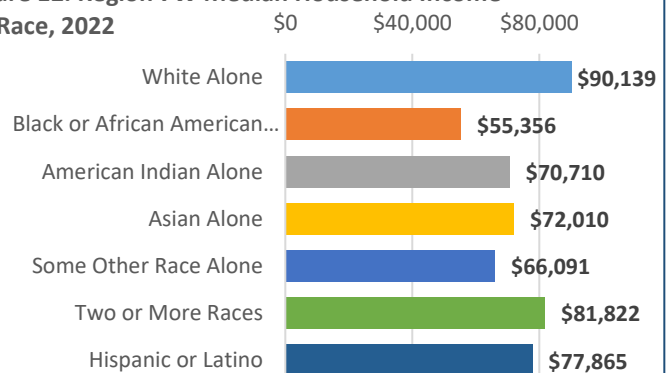
Household Incomes, 2022



Source: 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Median household incomes varied by race or origin in the region. Whites accounted for 89% of households reporting incomes in 2022 and had the highest median income level. But incomes were relatively high across all but one race, with Black or African American households reporting the lowest incomes in Region 7W, with a median of \$55,356. All other races had median incomes well above \$60,000 per year, though with small sample sizes, the reliability causes large margin of error (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Region 7W Median Household Income by Race, 2022



Source: 2018-2022 American Community Survey

COST OF LIVING

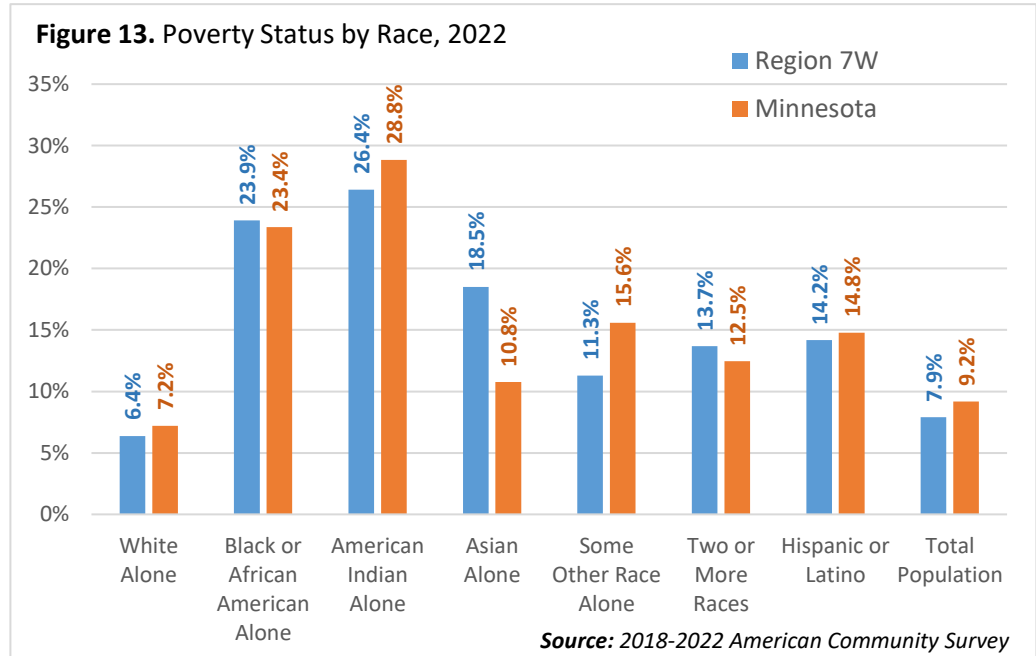
According to DEED's [Cost of Living tool](#), the basic needs budget for an average Minnesota family (which consists of 2 adults and 1 child, with 1 full-time and 1 part-time worker) was \$67,320 in 2023. The cost of living for a similar family in Region 7W was \$66,252 – which was the third highest of the 13 economic development regions in the state, behind only the Twin Cities metro area and Region 7E. The highest monthly costs were for transportation, housing, and food. In order to meet the basic cost of living for the region, the workers in the family scenario described would each need to earn \$21.23 per hour over the course of 60 hours per work week (Table 8).

Table 8. Region 7W Cost of Living, 2023										
Family Composition	Number of Workers	Yearly Cost of Living	Hourly Wage Required	Monthly Costs						
				Child Care	Food	Health Care	Housing	Transportation	Other	Taxes
Region 7W										
Single, 0 children	1 FT	\$34,824	\$16.74	\$0	\$410	\$161	\$1,011	\$601	\$340	\$379
Single, 1 child	1 FT	\$56,952	\$27.38	\$914	\$603	\$400	\$1,262	\$606	\$446	\$515
2 parents, 1 child	1 FT, 1 PT	\$66,252	\$21.23	\$457	\$935	\$578	\$1,262	\$1,049	\$526	\$714
2 parents, 2 children	2 FT	\$92,244	\$22.17	\$1,325	\$1,216	\$587	\$1,709	\$1,090	\$700	\$1,060
State of Minnesota										
Single, 0 children	1 FT	\$34,704	\$16.68	\$0	\$419	\$160	\$1,021	\$572	\$345	\$375
2 parents, 1 child	1 FT, 1 PT	\$67,320	\$21.58	\$544	\$955	\$574	\$1,285	\$977	\$536	\$739
Source: DEED Cost of Living tool										

Source: DEED Cost of Living tool

DEED's Cost of Living tool provides estimates for household compositions including single people, partnered couples, and up to 4 children. For a single person living alone and working full-time, the estimated yearly cost in Region 7W would be \$34,824, which would require an hourly wage of \$16.74 to meet the basic needs standard of living. That was also the third highest of the 13 EDRs in the state.

Overall, Region 7W's poverty rate was 8%, which was just below the statewide rate of 9%. Like incomes, poverty levels varied widely by race and origin. It was estimated that over 20% of the region's Black and American Indian population was below the poverty level in 2022, compared to 6.4% of the White population. Likewise, poverty levels hovered near 15% for other races and ethnicities. The region's poverty rate was lower than the state's poverty rate for Whites, American Indians, some other race, and Hispanic or Latinos (Figure 13).



WAGES AND OCCUPATIONS

According to DEED's [Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics](#) program, the median hourly wage for all occupations in Region 7W was \$23.85 in the first quarter of 2024, which was the third highest wage level of the 13 EDRs in the state. Region 7W's median wage was \$1.15 below the state's median hourly wage, equaling 95% of the statewide wage rate, and \$3.93 below the median hourly wage in the 7-County Twin Cities metro area, which would amount to over \$8,170 per year for a full-time worker. Region 7W had much higher wages than surrounding regions like Region 4, 5, 7E, and 6E, (Table 9).

Region 7W had a higher share of jobs in Construction & Extraction occupations, which was much more concentrated than in the state as a whole. Based on location quotients, Region 7W also had a higher share of workers in Production; Education, Training, & Library; Installation, Maintenance, & Repair; Transportation & Warehousing; Building & Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance, Food Preparation & Serving, and Sales & Related occupations. The largest employing occupational group was Office & Administrative Support, followed closely by Production, Transportation & Material Moving, and Sales & Related occupations (Table 10).

Table 9. Occupational Employment Statistics by Region, 2024	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Regional Employment
EDR 1 - Northwest	\$23.51	35,370
EDR 2 - Headwaters	\$22.68	32,230
EDR 3 - Arrowhead	\$23.41	138,010
EDR 4 - West Central	\$23.04	89,340
EDR 5 - North Central	\$21.89	62,970
EDR 6E - Southwest Central	\$22.72	50,190
EDR 6W - Upper MN Valley	\$22.61	16,230
EDR 7E - East Central	\$23.18	48,440
EDR 7W - Central	\$23.85	175,560
EDR 8 - Southwest	\$22.81	52,080
EDR 9 - South Central	\$23.24	100,990
EDR 10 - Southeast	\$24.26	240,340
EDR 11 - 7-County Twin Cities	\$27.78	1,743,500
State of Minnesota	\$25.22	2,881,100

Source: [DEED Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics](#)

Table 10. Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics, 2024							
Occupational Group	Region 7W				State of Minnesota		
	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Regional Employment	Share of Total Employment	Location Quotient	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Statewide Employment	Share of Total Employment
Total, All Occupations	\$23.85	175,560	100.0%	1.0	\$25.22	2,881,100	100.0%
Management	\$49.28	10,050	5.7%	0.8	\$57.75	201,710	7.0%
Business & Financial Operations	\$36.54	7,440	4.2%	0.6	\$39.26	202,700	7.0%
Computer & Mathematical	\$39.21	2,020	1.2%	0.3	\$50.83	98,240	3.4%
Architecture & Engineering	\$40.46	2,180	1.2%	0.6	\$42.97	58,320	2.0%
Life, Physical & Social Science	\$38.17	970	0.6%	0.5	\$39.93	29,220	1.0%
Community & Social Service	\$29.06	3,000	1.7%	0.8	\$27.92	57,930	2.0%
Legal	\$42.84	610	0.3%	0.5	\$51.15	19,040	0.7%
Education, Training & Library	\$29.80	11,820	6.7%	1.2	\$28.22	163,340	5.7%
Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media	\$24.61	1,410	0.8%	0.6	\$29.01	36,160	1.3%
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	\$41.29	11,000	6.3%	1.0	\$43.01	184,410	6.4%
Healthcare Support	\$17.97	9,000	5.1%	0.9	\$18.07	169,580	5.9%
Protective Service	\$30.48	2,750	1.6%	1.0	\$28.87	45,860	1.6%
Food Preparation & Serving Related	\$14.86	15,280	8.7%	1.1	\$15.07	232,190	8.1%
Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	\$18.49	5,480	3.1%	1.1	\$18.83	79,660	2.8%
Personal Care & Service	\$17.27	3,330	1.9%	0.9	\$17.60	59,420	2.1%
Sales & Related	\$18.13	16,610	9.5%	1.1	\$18.82	242,440	8.4%
Office & Administrative Support	\$23.15	20,100	11.4%	0.9	\$23.86	352,250	12.2%
Farming, Fishing & Forestry	\$19.15	190	0.1%	0.9	\$22.13	3,520	0.1%
Construction & Extraction	\$31.65	10,400	5.9%	1.5	\$32.44	110,960	3.9%
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	\$29.23	7,460	4.2%	1.2	\$29.54	104,530	3.6%
Production	\$23.06	18,010	10.3%	1.5	\$23.05	203,810	7.1%
Transportation & Material Moving	\$22.19	16,470	9.4%	1.2	\$22.86	225,820	7.8%

Source: [DEED Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics, Qtr. 1 2023](#)

Not surprisingly, the lowest-paying jobs are in Food Preparation & Serving, Personal Care & Service, Sales, and Healthcare Support, which tend to have lower educational and training requirements. For the most part, the gap in pay between Region 7W and the state is lower in these jobs. In contrast, the highest paying jobs are found in Management, Computer, Business & Financial Operations, Healthcare Practitioners, and Architecture & Engineering occupations, which all need higher levels of education and experience, including many that require postsecondary training. The pay gaps between the region and state are bigger in these occupations.

JOB VACANCY SURVEY

Employers in Central Minnesota reported 14,320 job vacancies in 2023, a 29% decrease from 2022. The median hourly wage offer was \$19.13 across all occupations but ranged from a low of \$14.55 per hour for Personal Care and Service, to more than \$32 per hour for Computer and Mathematical occupations. Reflecting changing demand for occupations and for the workers to fill the openings, nominal wage offers increased, but record high inflation limited real wage offer growth during this period. With increasing slack in the labor market becoming evident the ability to maintain real wage growth will be challenged.

Table 11. Job Vacancy Survey Results, 2023

Central Minnesota	Number of Total Vacancies	Median Hourly Wage Offer	Percent Part-Time	Percent Temporary or Seasonal	Requiring Postsecondary Education	Requiring 1 or More Years of Work Exp.	Requiring Certificate or License	Job Vacancy Rate
Total, All Occupations	14,320	\$19.13	31%	6%	33%	36%	48%	5.2%
Management	281	\$28.24	3%	1%	91%	97%	80%	1.9%
Business & Financial Operations	220	\$26.20	11%	15%	63%	70%	28%	2.1%
Computer & Mathematical	132	\$32.07	3%	1%	34%	92%	10%	4.4%
Architecture & Engineering	230	\$30.57	3%	1%	56%	74%	52%	6.4%
Life, Physical & Social Sciences	60	\$31.02	2%	2%	60%	52%	70%	3.5%
Community & Social Service	417	\$25.91	24%	3%	83%	89%	91%	7.9%
Legal	40	\$31.72	0%	2%	100%	100%	100%	4.2%
Education, Training & Library	597	\$19.04	30%	22%	71%	14%	78%	3.3%
Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media	187	\$17.70	85%	67%	43%	21%	46%	7.9%
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	1,967	\$28.25	33%	1%	86%	40%	97%	11.6%
Healthcare Support	1,097	\$17.11	57%	1%	45%	16%	81%	6.8%
Protective Service	272	\$24.39	36%	9%	42%	53%	85%	6.3%
Food Preparation & Serving Related	2,319	\$14.84	48%	3%	1%	16%	6%	9.9%
Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	318	\$16.27	39%	7%	0%	15%	17%	3.9%
Personal Care & Service	433	\$14.55	25%	7%	16%	13%	41%	8.2%
Sales & Related	1,632	\$17.55	29%	3%	5%	22%	15%	6.5%
Office & Administrative Support	747	\$17.98	15%	4%	11%	47%	17%	2.5%
Construction & Extraction	297	\$23.74	0%	1%	27%	69%	70%	1.9%
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	589	\$24.92	4%	1%	33%	51%	56%	5.2%
Production	993	\$20.14	9%	7%	18%	46%	5%	3.5%
Transportation & Material Moving	1,275	\$19.17	43%	11%	4%	41%	78%	5.1%

Source: DEED Job Vacancy Survey, 2023

The largest number of vacancies were in Food Prep & Serving occupations, followed by Healthcare Practitioners and Sales and Related occupations. Overall, 31% of the openings were part-time, only 33% required any postsecondary education, and 36% required a year or more of experience (Table 11). In sum, educational requirements in the region have been declining over the past decade, while previous work experience requirements were rising, largely the result of an expanding economy and tightening labor market. However, 2023 data show a slight back step, with a larger share of openings requiring higher education as the labor market is cooling.

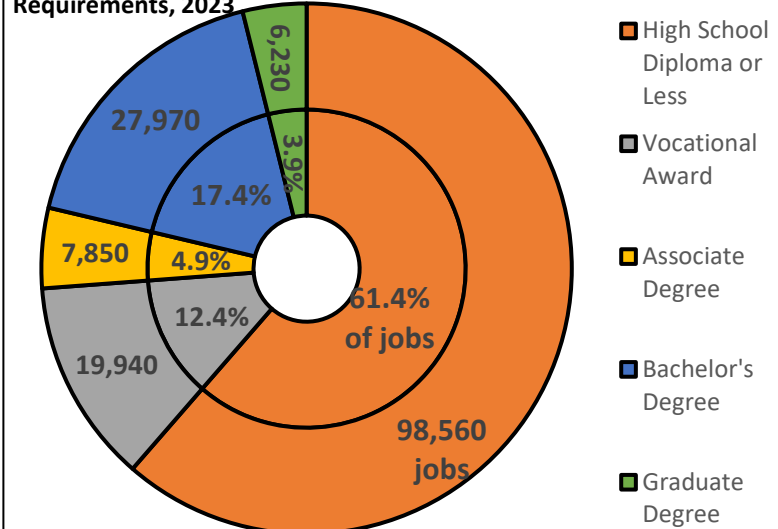
EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Similar to Job Vacancy Survey results, data from DEED's Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics program shows that about 40% of jobs in the region require postsecondary education for entry. The other 60% can be started with a high school diploma or less and some amount of on-the-job training (Figure 14).

Certain careers – such as Dentists, Lawyers, and Teachers – require a college education, while other jobs – including Cost Estimators, Sales Representatives, and Correctional Officers – do not. College is an excellent way to move up career ladders and open windows of opportunity to licensed fields that would otherwise be closed, such as Nursing or Engineering.

Many of these occupations offer high wages and are in high demand in the marketplace. While education is typically a worthwhile investment, college can be expensive – with average annual expenses ranging between \$13,000 and over \$54,000 per year in Minnesota. For those who go to college, choice of major matters – different programs lead to jobs that earn different amounts of money.

Figure 14. Region 7W Share of Jobs by Educational Requirements, 2023



Source: DEED Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics (OEWS)

EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS

Overall, the 13-county Central Minnesota planning area is projected to grow 5.2% from 2022 to 2032, a gain of 16,302 new jobs. The revised faster growth projection makes the region the fastest growing region out of the 6 planning areas. In addition, the region is also expected to need 160,516 replacement openings to fill jobs left vacant by retirements and other career changers. Healthcare Support, Architecture and Engineering and Computer and Mathematical occupations are expected to see the most new growth, but every occupational group will show some future demand either through new jobs or replacement openings (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Central Minnesota Regional Employment Projections, 2022-2032



Source: DEED 2022-2032 Employment Outlook

OCCUPATIONS IN DEMAND

According to DEED's [Occupations in Demand](#) tool, there are roughly 300 occupations showing relatively high demand in the region, with training and education requirements ranging from short-term on-the-job training to postsecondary education to advanced degrees. These occupations are spread across different sectors but are also concentrated in the region's major industries. For example, Nursing Assistants, Personal Care Aides, Home Health Aides, Licensed Practical and Registered Nurses, Electricians, Industrial Engineers, Machinists, Truck Drivers, and Teachers are all in high demand (Table 12).

Table 12. Central Minnesota Regional Occupations in Demand, 2024

High School or Less	Vocational Training	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Retail Salespersons \$35,817/yr	Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers \$60,953/yr	Registered Nurses \$97,279/yr	General & Operations Managers \$82,833/yr
Home Health & Personal Care Aides \$35,952/yr	Nursing Assistants \$40,289/yr	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians \$79,926/yr	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education \$65,116/yr
Fast Food and Counter Workers \$30,548/yr	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses \$58,035/yr	Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers \$78,056/yr	Secondary School Teachers, Exc. Special and CTE \$66,539/yr
Cashiers \$31,985/yr	Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics \$49,872/yr	Industrial Engineering Technologists and Technicians \$64,316/yr	Medical and Health Services Managers \$108,690/yr
Stockers and Order Fillers \$38,723/yr	Machinists \$61,397/yr	Calibration Technologists and Technicians \$51,876/yr	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education \$38,309/yr
Janitors and Cleaners \$37,511/yr	Emergency Medical Technicians \$43,830/yr	Dental Hygienists \$95,926/yr	Accountants and Auditors \$73,436/yr
Waiters and Waitresses \$24,272/yr	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks \$49,071/yr	Detectives and Criminal Investigators \$77,932/yr	Child, Family, and School Social Workers \$65,914/yr
Childcare Workers \$32,303/yr	Electricians \$79,223/yr	Surgical Technologists \$66,288/yr	Industrial Engineers \$97,918/yr
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers \$47,389/yr	Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors \$54,808/yr	Human Resources Assistants, Except Payroll and Timekeeping \$49,531/yr	Project Management Specialists \$85,453/yr
Customer Service Representatives \$44,527/yr	Medical Assistants \$48,462/yr	Veterinary Technologists and Technicians \$46,438/yr	Special Education Teachers, Secondary School \$69,045/yr

Source: DEED [Occupations in Demand](#)

ECONOMY

INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT

According to DEED's [Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages \(QCEW\) program](#), Region 7W was home to 12,014 business establishments providing 178,465 covered jobs through 2023, with a total payroll of just over \$10 billion. That was about 6.1% of total employment in the state of Minnesota, making it the third largest of the 13 EDRs in the state. Average annual wages were \$56,848 in the region, which was about \$14,700 lower than the state's average annual wage.

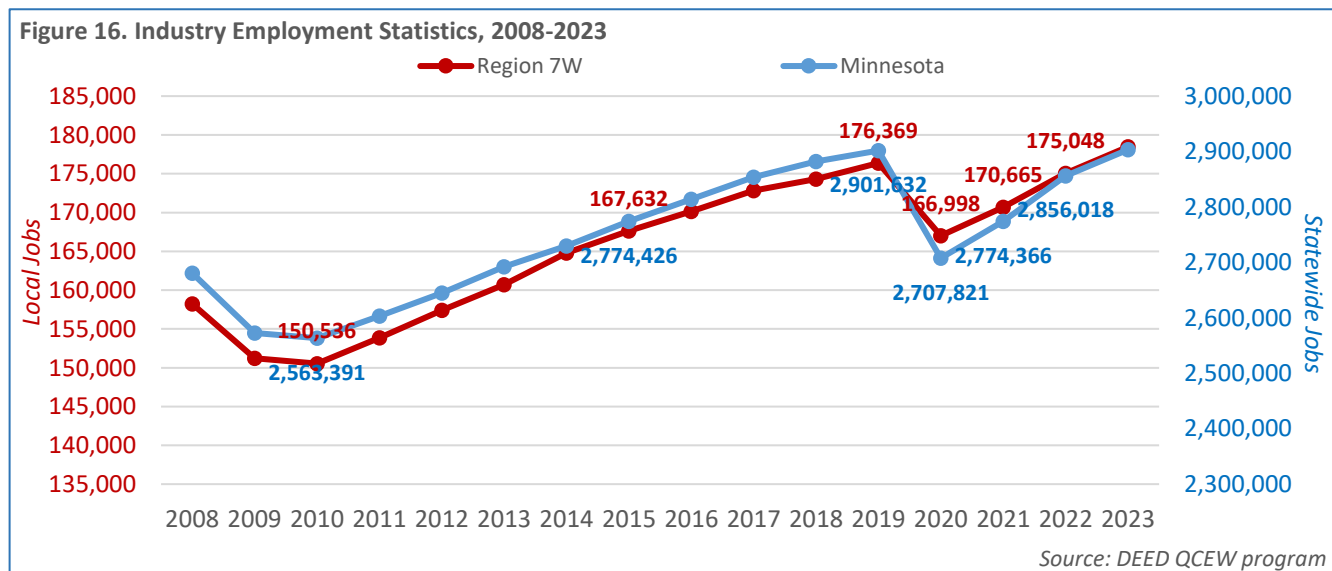
Stearns County is the largest employment center in the region and the seventh largest in the state, with 85,999 jobs at 4,666 firms; accounting for about half of the region's jobs. Wright County was the next largest, with 47,199 jobs at 3,852 firms, followed by Sherburne County with 2,439 firms and 27,603 jobs and Benton County with 17,664 jobs at 1,057 firms. The region lost a smaller share of jobs in the pandemic recession but has also

managed to grow faster from 2022-2023. In fact, Stearns County is the only county in the region that hasn't fully recovered to 2019 employment levels, while Wright, Sherburne, and Benton are all above 2019 job counts (Table 13). Large losses in Administrative Support and Waste Management along with losses in nine other industry sectors has pushed Stearns County employment down to levels not seen since 2017.

Geography	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Total Payroll	Average Annual Wage	2022-2023		2019-2023	
					Change in Jobs	Percent Change	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Region 7W – Central	12,014	178,465	\$10,145,395,601	\$56,848	+3,417	+2.0%	+2,096	+1.2%
Benton Co.	1,057	17,664	\$951,674,404	\$53,876	+48	+0.3%	+247	+1.4%
Sherburne Co.	2,439	27,603	\$1,537,654,195	\$55,706	+650	+2.4%	+1,240	+4.7%
Stearns Co.	4,666	85,999	\$5,126,911,040	\$59,616	+1,691	+2.0%	-1,538	-1.8%
Wright Co.	3,852	47,199	\$2,529,155,962	\$53,585	+1,028	+2.2%	+2,148	+4.8%
State of Minnesota	207,647	2,903,264	\$207,665,582,979	\$71,528	+47,246	+1.7%	+1,632	+0.1%

Source: [DEED Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages \(QCEW\)](#)

Region 7W has seen job gains and losses over the past decade but ended 2023 with about 2,000 more jobs than it had in 2019, the first year since the pandemic to fully recover jobs lost in 2020. In comparison, the state was up just 0.1% from its 2019 employment peak. Like the state, the region suffered severe job declines in 2009 and 2010 and again in 2020. Since then, Region 7W has seen a recently slightly faster recovery than the rest of the state, which gained jobs at a 1.4% clip from 2021 to 2022, compared to a 2% increase in the region. The slightly faster job growth in 2023 is somewhat a result of a more resilient economy during 2020 that saw a smaller share of jobs lost (Figure 16).



With 29,663 jobs at 1,583 firms, Health Care and Social Assistance is the largest employing industry in Region 7W, accounting for 16.6% of total jobs in the region. Due to the region's population growth and regional hub status, the largest sectors were Ambulatory Health Care Services and Hospitals, which both had over 8,300 jobs but are below 2019 employment levels. The region also had 6,656 jobs in Nursing and Residential Care Facilities and 5,076 jobs in Social Assistance.

After regaining about 1,879 jobs since 2014, Manufacturing lost jobs huge numbers of jobs in 2020. By 2023 the sector was roughly recovered, down just 15 jobs compared to 2019. Annual wages in Manufacturing were \$9,651 higher than in the total of all industries. In contrast, wages were relatively low in Retail Trade, the region's third largest industry, with 23,575 jobs at 1,277 stores. The related Accommodation and Food Services

Industry had 14,094 jobs at 802 establishments. Combined, those two industries provide 21% of total jobs. Despite suffering from Pandemic related jobs losses the two sectors held employment remarkably well compared to other areas of the state and the Twin Cities in particular. Fifteen of the 20 main industries in the region lost jobs since 2019, and five of 20 industries lost jobs in the past year (Table 14).

Table 14. Industry Employment Statistics, 2023

Region 7W	2023 Annual Data				2022-2023		2019-2023	
NAICS Industry Title	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Total Payroll (\$1,000s)	Avg. Annual Wage	Change in Jobs	Percent Change	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Total, All Industries	12,014	178,465	\$10,145,396	\$56,848	+3,417	+2.0%	+2,096	+1.2%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & Hunt	221	2,510	\$119,027	\$47,421	+106	+4.4%	+332	+15.2%
Mining	12	266	\$19,153	\$72,003	+21	+8.6%	-2	-0.7%
Construction	1,820	14,874	\$1,189,515	\$79,973	-86	-0.6%	+1,447	+10.8%
Manufacturing	714	26,038	\$1,731,496	\$66,499	+288	+1.1%	-15	-0.1%
Utilities	29	1,745	\$226,179	\$129,616	+92	+5.6%	+37	+2.2%
Wholesale Trade	419	7,739	\$563,617	\$72,828	+337	+4.6%	+817	+11.8%
Retail Trade	1,277	23,575	\$847,137	\$35,934	+199	+0.9%	-548	-2.3%
Transportation & Warehousing	449	6,980	\$422,742	\$60,565	+194	+2.9%	+48	+0.7%
Information	150	1,786	\$123,038	\$68,890	-107	-5.7%	-145	-7.5%
Finance & Insurance	548	5,097	\$463,550	\$90,946	-56	-1.1%	+119	+2.4%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	377	1,378	\$56,340	\$40,885	+39	+2.9%	-61	-4.2%
Professional & Technical Services	816	3,762	\$283,729	\$75,420	-99	-2.6%	-448	-10.6%
Management of Companies	62	1,574	\$164,228	\$104,338	+39	+2.5%	-1,071	-40.5%
Admin. Support & Waste Mgmt. Svcs.	555	6,605	\$310,759	\$47,049	-541	-7.6%	-638	-8.8%
Educational Services	245	15,762	\$846,693	\$53,717	+325	+2.1%	-100	-0.6%
Health Care & Social Assistance	1,583	29,663	\$1,780,657	\$60,030	+1,409	+5.0%	+1,273	+4.5%
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	231	2,237	\$39,547	\$17,679	+224	+11.1%	+209	+10.3%
Accommodation & Food Services	802	14,094	\$294,754	\$20,913	+587	+4.3%	+579	+4.3%
Other Services	1,503	5,906	\$213,351	\$36,125	+286	+5.1%	+27	+0.5%
Public Administration	205	6,869	\$449,884	\$65,495	+159	+2.4%	+237	+3.6%

Source: DEED Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages (QCEW) program

EMPLOYMENT DIVERSITY

According to DEED's Quarterly Employment Demographics (QED) program, the workforce in the region was aging over the past 10 years. Over one-in-five (21.7%) of workers in the region were 55 years or older, compared to 22.1% statewide and just 16.7% in the region one decade earlier. Gains in the percentage of teenaged workers reversed

previous downward trends in 2020, and both wages and the number of hours worked was going up recently (Table 15).

Table 15. Workforce Demographics by Age Group and Gender, Total of All Industries, 2012-2022

Region 7W	Percentage of Workers		Percent of Workers, Minnesota		Median Hourly Wage		Median Hours Worked (Per Qtr.)	
	2022	2012	2022	2012	2022	2012	2022	2012
Total, all ages	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	\$22.68	\$14.95	409	401
19 years & under	9.1%	8.7%	6.6%	6.3%	\$14.81	\$8.00	126	124
20 to 24 years	10.5%	13.3%	9.2%	11.3%	\$19.01	\$10.43	300	252
25 to 44 years	41.0%	40.5%	43.6%	42.3%	\$25.94	\$17.24	462	462
45 to 54 years	17.8%	20.8%	18.4%	21.9%	\$27.75	\$18.84	485	480
55 to 64 years	16.3%	13.2%	16.7%	14.7%	\$25.26	\$18.03	480	466
65 years & over	5.3%	3.5%	5.4%	3.5%	\$18.59	\$12.70	231	206
Male	50.2%	48.8%	49.1%	49.1%	\$25.28	\$16.84	477	470
Female	49.8%	51.2%	50.9%	50.9%	\$21.37	\$13.74	355	345

Source: DEED Quarterly Employment Demographics

Wages were highest for workers between 45 and 64 years of age, and males worked substantially more hours than females. Interestingly, from 2010 to 2020 jobs held by workers 45 to 54 years saw the largest decline in the share of jobs they hold, dropping from 22.2% in 2010 to 18.2% in 2020.

People of color account for 9.5% of the total labor force in Central Minnesota and hold a slightly higher share of jobs, compared to the state overall where they amount to 19.7% of the labor force. According to data from the Quarterly Workforce Indicators program, people of color held 35,162 jobs in Central Minnesota, compared to 255,251 jobs held by White workers. The number of jobs has nearly doubled since 2003 when People of color held 13,420 jobs (Figure 17).

People of color held an additional 21,041 jobs since 2003 compared to 2,831 by White workers. Hispanic/Latino workers hold the largest number of jobs of the racial and ethnic minority groups with 14,609 jobs in 2023, almost half of all minority held jobs. The next largest number of jobs held by a minority group was Black or African American, holding 9,571 jobs in 2023. The number of jobs held by this race has increased by 7,052 since 2003, amounting to a 280% increase (Figure 18).

The Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting sector and Manufacturing sector have the highest share of non-White employment at 28% and 20%, respectively. Accommodation & Food Services and Health Care and Social Assistance also have 15% of jobs held by non-White workers. The largest numbers of non-White workers are employed in Manufacturing (10,066 jobs) and Health Care & Social Assistance (7,482 jobs). The least diverse industries include Utilities and Mining (Figure 19).

Figure 17. Employment of People of Color, All Industries, Central Minnesota

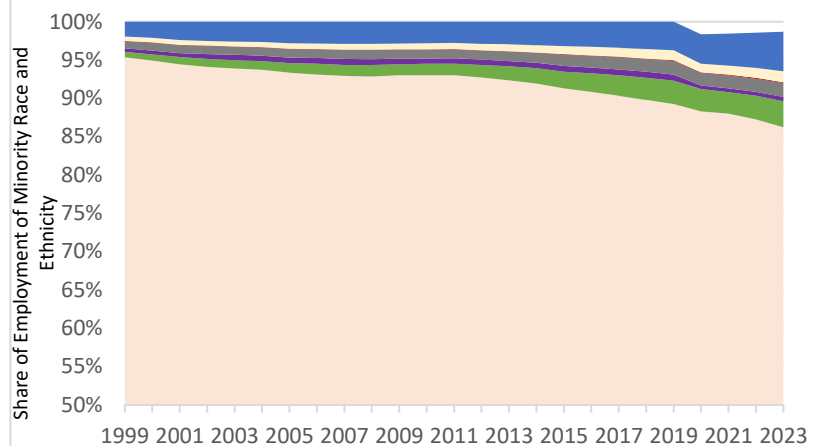


Figure 18. Employment of People of Color, All Industries, Central Minnesota

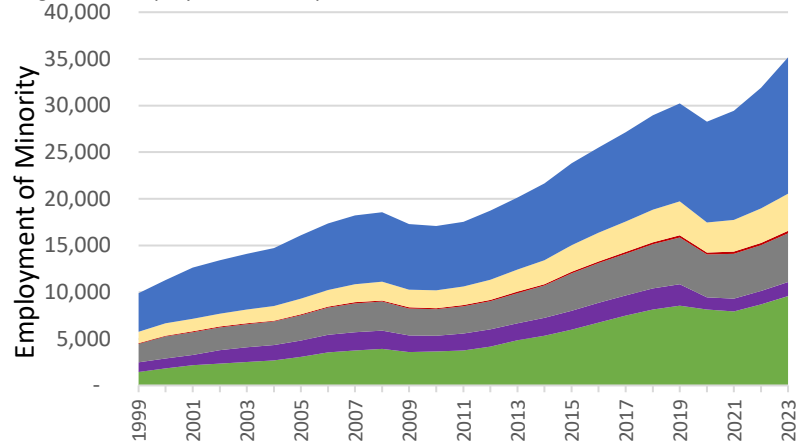
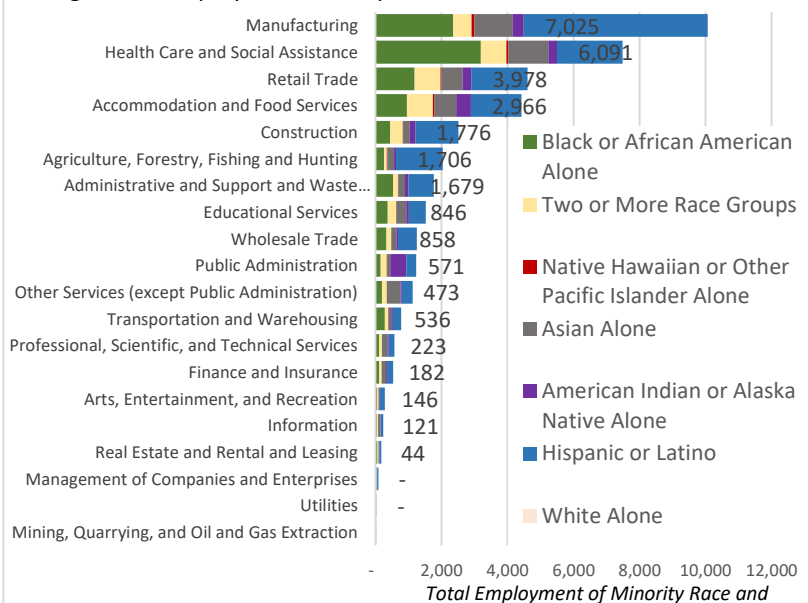


Figure 19. Employment of People of Color in Central Minnesota



Source: DEED, Census LEHD, QWI

INDUSTRY PROJECTIONS

Central Minnesota is projected to grow 5.2% from 2022 to 2032, a gain of 16,302 new jobs, which would make it the fastest growing region in the state. The largest growing industry is expected to be Health Care and Social Assistance, which may account for one-quarter of total projected growth in the region by 2032.

The fastest growth (10.9%) in the region is expected to be in the Construction industry, continuing a decades long trend of rapid growth. Professional and Technical Service is also expected to grow twice as fast as the overall region. (Table 16).

Table 16. Central Minnesota Industry Projections, 2022-2032

Industry	Estimated Employment 2022	Projected Employment 2032	Percent Change 2022-2032	Numeric Change 2022-2032
Total, All Industries	315,929	332,231	+5.2%	+16,302
Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & hunt	5,295	5,457	+3.1%	+162
Mining	354	352	-0.6%	-2
Utilities	1,986	1,998	+0.6%	+12
Construction	20,532	22,780	+10.9%	+2,248
Manufacturing	41,539	44,543	+7.2%	+3,004
Wholesale Trade	11,219	12,105	+7.9%	+886
Retail Trade	35,711	35,808	+0.3%	+97
Transportation & Warehousing	9,287	10,143	+9.2%	+856
Information	3,002	3,214	+7.1%	+212
Finance & Insurance	8,346	8,644	+3.6%	+298
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	1,796	1,884	+4.9%	+88
Professional & Technical Services	7,080	7,833	+10.6%	+753
Management of Companies	1,960	2,146	+9.5%	+186
Admin. Support & Waste Mgmt.	10,369	11,004	+6.1%	+635
Educational Services	24,622	24,913	+1.2%	+291
Health Care & Social Assistance	45,668	49,836	+9.1%	+4,168
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	4,858	5,168	+6.4%	+310
Accommodation & Food Services	21,188	22,474	+6.1%	+1,286
Other Services	10,880	11,311	+4.0%	+431
Public Administration	20,424	21,077	+3.2%	+653

Source: DEED Employment Outlook

NONEMPLOYER ESTABLISHMENTS

Region 7W was home to 32,184 self-employed businesses or “nonemployers” in 2021, which are defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as “businesses without paid employees that are subject to federal income tax, originating from tax return information of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).” Region 7W saw a substantial increase in nonemployers over the past decade, but most of this difference is from the Pandemic

Recession disruption in 2020, which created a massive increase in nonemployers over the previous decade. In sum, the region added 3,618 nonemployers from 2010 to 2021, a 12.7% increase. In sum, these nonemployers generated sales receipts of over \$1.7 billion in 2021. Every county in Region 7W saw increases in nonemployers, and only Benton did not exceed statewide growth (Table 17).

Table 17. Nonemployer Statistics, 2021

	2021		2010-2021	
	Number of Firms	Receipts (\$1,000s)	Change in Nonemps.	Percent Change
Region 7W	32,184	\$1,714,711	+3,618	+12.7%
Benton Co.	2,737	\$142,608	+161	+6.3%
Sherburne Co.	7,201	\$358,495	+829	+13.0%
Stearns Co.	11,572	\$698,533	+1,420	+14.0%
Wright Co.	10,674	\$515,075	+1,208	+12.8%
Minnesota	429,672	\$22,727,564	+41,117	+10.6%

Source: U.S. Census, Nonemployer Statistics program

CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

Like other parts of Greater Minnesota, agriculture is also a key industry in Region 7W, including 5,186 farms producing just over \$1.7 billion in the market value of products sold in 2022 according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. With almost 2,700 farms, Stearns County is the highest ranked agriculture county in the state. Like the state, the number of farms in the region is quickly declining over time, but Region 7W still accounts for 8% of the farms in the state (Table 18).

Table 18. Census of Agriculture, 2022

	Number of Farms	Market Value of Products Sold	State Rank
Region 7W	5,186	\$1,703,352,000	8
Benton Co.	687	\$278,263,000	49
Sherburne Co.	494	\$120,592,000	61
Stearns Co.	2,695	\$1,021,472,000	1
Wright Co.	1,310	\$283,025,000	48
Minnesota	65,531	\$28,482,097,000	

Source: 2022 Census of Agriculture

Upon request, this information can be made available in alternate formats for people with disabilities by contacting

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