

Throughout 2024, the Itasca Economic Development Corporation convened a task force to participate in the Sparking Change: Diversifying Our Regional Economy process. This process sought to identify community impacts, aspirations, and pathways forward for economic diversification and resilience.

The steering committee, task force, businesses, and community members from across northern Minnesota gathered to develop high-level strategies and specific actions that will advance the Sparking Change vision:

**A thriving community invested in our future sustainable energy shift.**

## THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

Economic shifts impact every member of our community, and it's up to us to learn from others who have faced similar challenges and build strategies that align with the region we want to see in the future. We believe in the power of this community and the potential positive impact of the six high-level strategies outlined in the Sparking Change report.

Check out the full report for more information on each strategy, including potential partners, next steps and actions to build momentum, and community case studies that detail how communities around the country approached and solved similar economic challenges. The report also details local, state, and federal funding opportunities to support the work required to transform our regional economy.

There's much to be done, and with community-wide participation and collaboration, we can build a stronger and more prosperous regional economy and a sustainable future for all. **Thank you for being a part of the solution.**



SCAN HERE

Download the full Sparking Change report to learn more about how we are going to transform our regional economy.

This project was generously funded by a grant from the Just Transition Fund and a U.S. Department of Energy Capacity Building for Repurposing Energy Assets grant.

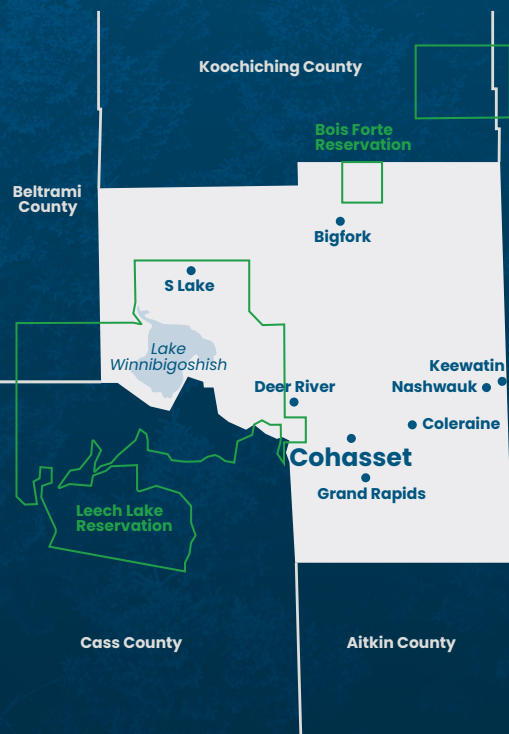
**Thank you to our steering committee and task force!**



**Sparking Change** process participants created a framework for continued economic growth and success, identifying six high-level strategies. These strategies provide a starting point acknowledging past work and a commitment to a shared path forward.

## JUST TRANSITION

The state of Minnesota has identified Itasca County and the city of Cohasset as transition communities. Minnesota Power owns and operates the Boswell Energy Center. Boswell is a coal-fired power plant that opened its first unit in 1958 and has operated continuously for over 65 years. Units 1 and 2, Boswell's oldest units, ceased operations in 2018. Minnesota Power's 2021 Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) identified that the company plans to cease coal operations at Unit 3 by the end of 2029 and at Unit 4 by 2035.



## Develop Entrepreneur and Business Opportunities

Foster community innovation, diversification, and relationships that continue to stimulate the local economy.

### OUTCOMES

1. Increased participation in entrepreneurship programs
2. A thriving entrepreneur support ecosystem
3. Increased and more diverse businesses
4. Traditional assets (water, wood, iron ore) produce value-added products
5. Expanded downtown business association support and participation
6. Enhanced tourism attraction

## Promote Economic and Community Development

Sustain commitment to coordinated economic and community development across the region.

### OUTCOMES

1. Strong partnerships between Tribal and non-Tribal entities
2. Organizations align to large funding opportunities
3. Coordinated efforts to build infrastructure
4. Small business support efforts have sustainable funding
5. A complete list of developable sites that are site-ready or plan to be site-ready
6. The community understands economic diversification needs

## Mobilize Community Engagement

Raise awareness and energy within the community about the Sparking Change initiative and other economic diversification efforts in the region.

### OUTCOMES

1. A strong marketing campaign to communicate the significance of energy transition
2. The Sparking Change task force becomes a trusted public messenger and point of contact
3. Volunteer committees communicate the action plan
4. Community surveys show an increase in the understanding of energy transition
5. The community is inspired to innovate and implement action

## Leverage Partnerships and Advocacy

Strengthen partnerships focused on collective advocacy in the legislative and regulatory space to support economic diversification.

### OUTCOMES

1. Coordinated advocacy approach
2. A shared policy agenda aligned with other coal communities
3. Clarity on possible energy sources for Boswell
4. Sufficient, cost-competitive energy generation

## Provide Workforce Support

Support, grow, and retain the workforce in Itasca County through career pathways and training programs, new businesses and industries, and increased housing and childcare options.

### OUTCOMES

1. New employment options
2. Abundance of skilled workforce
3. Increased use of workforce training grants and programs
4. More housing options
5. More accessible childcare spots
6. Broadband access for all who need it

## Advance Sustainability Initiatives

Engage the community and utilities in leveraging the benefits of the clean energy transition.

### OUTCOMES

1. Expanded power generation options
2. Household incentives for clean energy
3. Increased awareness for the sustainable transition

For more details on each of these strategies, scan the QR Code.

