



**Northern Border  
Regional Commission**



## **STRATEGIC PLAN 2017-2021**

A Federal-State partnership for economic development in northern Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) is a partnership between the federal government and the states Maine, New Hampshire, New York and Vermont. Created by the 2008 Farm Bill, the NBRC targets resources to promote economic growth strategies and projects in the northern areas of its member states.

The Commission is composed of a Federal Co-Chair appointed by the President and confirmed by the United States Senate, and the governors of each state in the region or their appointed alternates.

This strategic plan for 2017-2021 will guide the Commission's programs and investments as it seeks to help the Northern Border region emerge from a period of significant economic transition and challenge. The Commission's strategies are designed to capitalize on regional assets to grow and retain wealth in the region, and are informed by local priorities identified by public, private, and not-for-profit stakeholders.

By investing in projects that address shared regional challenges and catalyze common opportunities, the NBRC plays a critical role in helping Northern Border communities retool their economies for the future. The Northern Border region is poised for economic revitalization if it can modernize its infrastructure, invest in business and workforce development, and build its capacity for community economic development. The NBRC is uniquely positioned to make these pivotal improvements possible.

## ABOUT THIS PLAN

In its early years, NBRC investments were guided by the 2008 recommendations of the Northern Forest Sustainable Economy Initiative, a federally-funded regional economic assessment and strategy process led by the Northern Forest Center with support from the region's governors. In 2014, the Commission contracted with the Northern Forest Center to update that strategy as the basis for this strategic plan. The Northern Forest Center is a regional non-profit with a service area nearly identical to that of the NBRC.

This plan is informed by extensive engagement with NBRC stakeholders across the region and grounded in local, state, and regional economic development strategies already in place. This work included the following in 2015-2016:

- Stakeholders across all four states;
- Plans and strategies across the region, including
- Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) and other regional development strategies, the Northern Forest Sustainable Economy Initiative, and other relevant plans;
- Participation in economic development forums around the region;
- Assessment of strategic plans developed by other federal- state regional development commissions;



- A regional socioeconomic assessment commissioned from the New Hampshire Center for Public Policy Studies;
- A November 2015 conference of regional stakeholders; and
- Input from the NBRC federal co-chair and state members.

This plan marries the results of the stakeholder engagement and information collection with the NBRC statute (40 U.S.C, Subtitle V) to create a program and investment strategy that reflects the unique challenges and opportunities of the Northern Border Region and the economic priorities of its member states and communities.

The Plan was approved in October, 2016 by the Members of the Commission.



## **REGIONAL VISION**

The Northern Border region is known for its vital regional economies and thriving communities that provide for the well-being of the region's residents and support the stewardship of the region's natural and cultural assets.

## **MISSION**

The mission of the Northern Border Regional Commission is to catalyze regional, collaborative, and transformative community economic development approaches that alleviate economic distress and position the region for economic growth.



## INVESTMENT PRINCIPLES

In determining its investment priorities, the Commission is guided by the following principles:

- Invest for long-term community and economic impact;
- Support local initiatives that contribute to regional solutions;
- Encourage integrative approaches to building economic, community, and environmental well-being;
- Capitalize on local and regional assets to grow and retain wealth in the region;
- Use NBRC resources to fill gaps in the region's funding environment for community economic development; and
- Stimulate and integrate the capacity and resources of other partners and funders.

# GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

## Goal #1

**Infrastructure in Northern Border communities is modernized to better support business retention and expansion, and better position the region to compete in the global economy.**

Objective 1.1: Community infrastructure for business development. Revitalize and modernize essential infrastructure in Northern Border region communities.

Objective 1.2: Telecommunications. Increase access, affordability, and use of high speed telecommunications by Northern Border residents and businesses.

Objective 1.3: Energy. Stabilize and reduce electric and thermal energy costs.

## Goal #2

**Businesses in the Northern Border region are creating and sustaining jobs and wealth from the region's assets and are able to find employees with necessary skills.**

Objective 2.1: Asset-based business enterprise. Retain, expand and diversify business enterprise that capitalizes on the region's natural, cultural, and economic assets.

Objective 2.2: Entrepreneurship and Innovation. Position the Northern Border region as an attractive and supportive place for creative and entrepreneurial people.



Objective 2.3: Workforce development. Support and expand a highly productive workforce with skills suited to existing and future business needs.

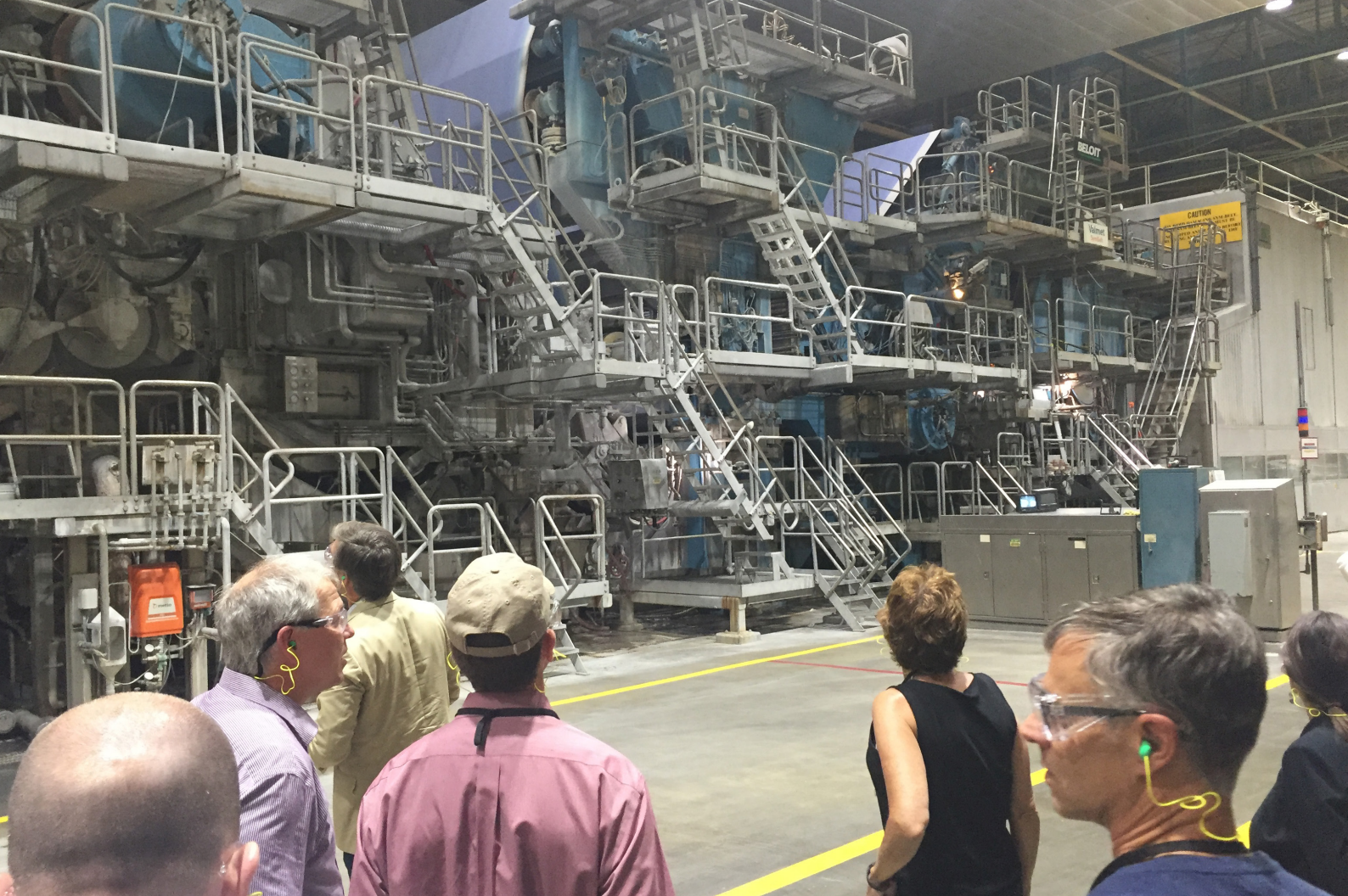
### **Goal #3**

**Northern Border communities and businesses are well positioned to anticipate and capitalize on changing trends.**

Objective 3.1: Leadership & community capacity. Foster entrepreneurial leadership and capacity for community economic development.

Objective 3.2: Regional knowledge. Inform and align local, state, and regional economic development decision making with regional data and perspectives.







## **FIVE YEAR PERFORMANCE GOALS**

Assuming consistent annual funding, the Commission will gauge its success and impact against its strategic goals and objectives between 2017 and 2021 with these performance measures:

- 5,000 jobs created or retained
- 10,000 households and businesses with access to improved infrastructure
- 1,000 businesses representing 5,000 employees benefit from NBRC investments
- 7,500 workers provided with skills training
- 250 communities and 1,000 leaders engaged in regional leadership, learning and/or innovation networks supported by the NBRC
- 3:1 NBRC investment leverage

## **ABOUT THE NORTHERN BORDER REGION**

The Northern Border region encompasses 1,100 towns and small cities and 36 counties across the northern reaches of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York. Home to over 2 million people and the largest intact forest east of the Mississippi, the Northern Border region has been shaped over the centuries by the interactions between people and land and, more recently, a focus on conserving the landscape and developing the economy in tandem.

In the 1800s the region's farms and forests provided the raw materials that built some of Northeast's largest cities. In the 20th century new industries emerged and the region was known globally as the birthplace of modern pulp and paper making, with whole communities built around massive mills that employed tens of thousands across the region. During the same era, the region established itself as a premier recreation destination, drawing millions of visitors to enjoy its mountains, lakes, and fresh air.

In more recent decades, global economic pressures have caused forest-based industries to shed tens of thousands of jobs, altered markets for the region's products and services, and spurred land speculation and continuous land sales. Like many rural parts of America, the Northern Border region is grappling with a changing economy and a transition from manufacturing dependence to a more diversified, service-driven economy.

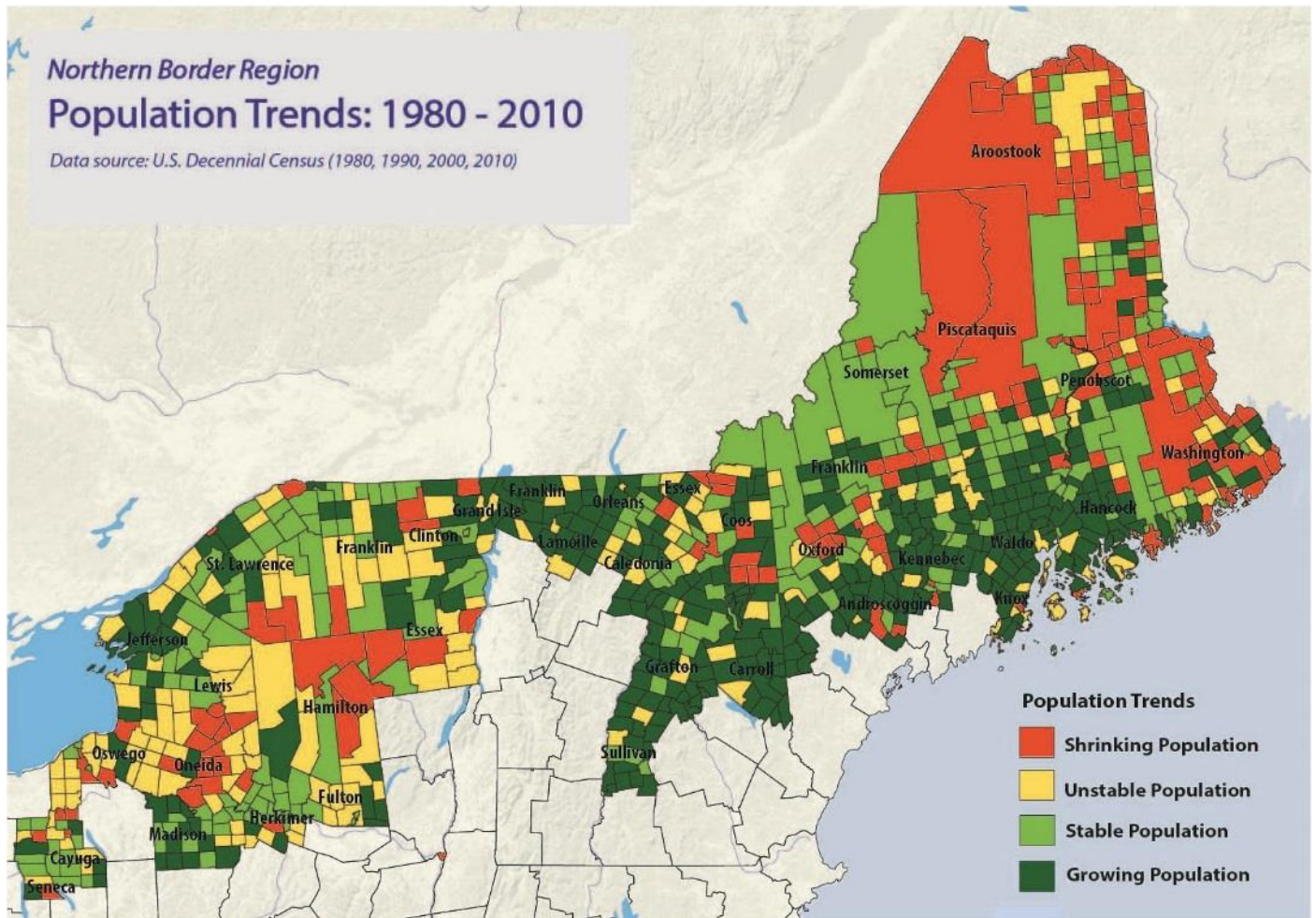




## Northern Border Region

# Population Trends: 1980 - 2010

Data source: U.S. Decennial Census (1980, 1990, 2000, 2010)



## **Current Socioeconomic Trends**

### **POPULATION SHIFTS**

After several decades of change, overall population has stabilized in much of the Northern Forest, but the major extraction-based manufacturing communities and remote areas continue to lose population. Population is growing most quickly in percentage terms in recreation-based communities, but in terms of sheer numbers of people, most population growth is in communities whose economies are based on state/federal employment or services.

## **Current Socioeconomic Trends**

### **AGING POPULATION**

The Northern Border region as a whole is slightly older than the southern tiers of its member states, and its population is aging more quickly. Between 2003 and 2013, the share of the population over the age of 65 increased by almost 22%. These changes are occurring primarily because of low birth rates and because people are ‘aging in place,’ but also because these communities are having difficulty retaining younger people. This has important implications for the economy, as human capital is one of the principal forces behind economic development.

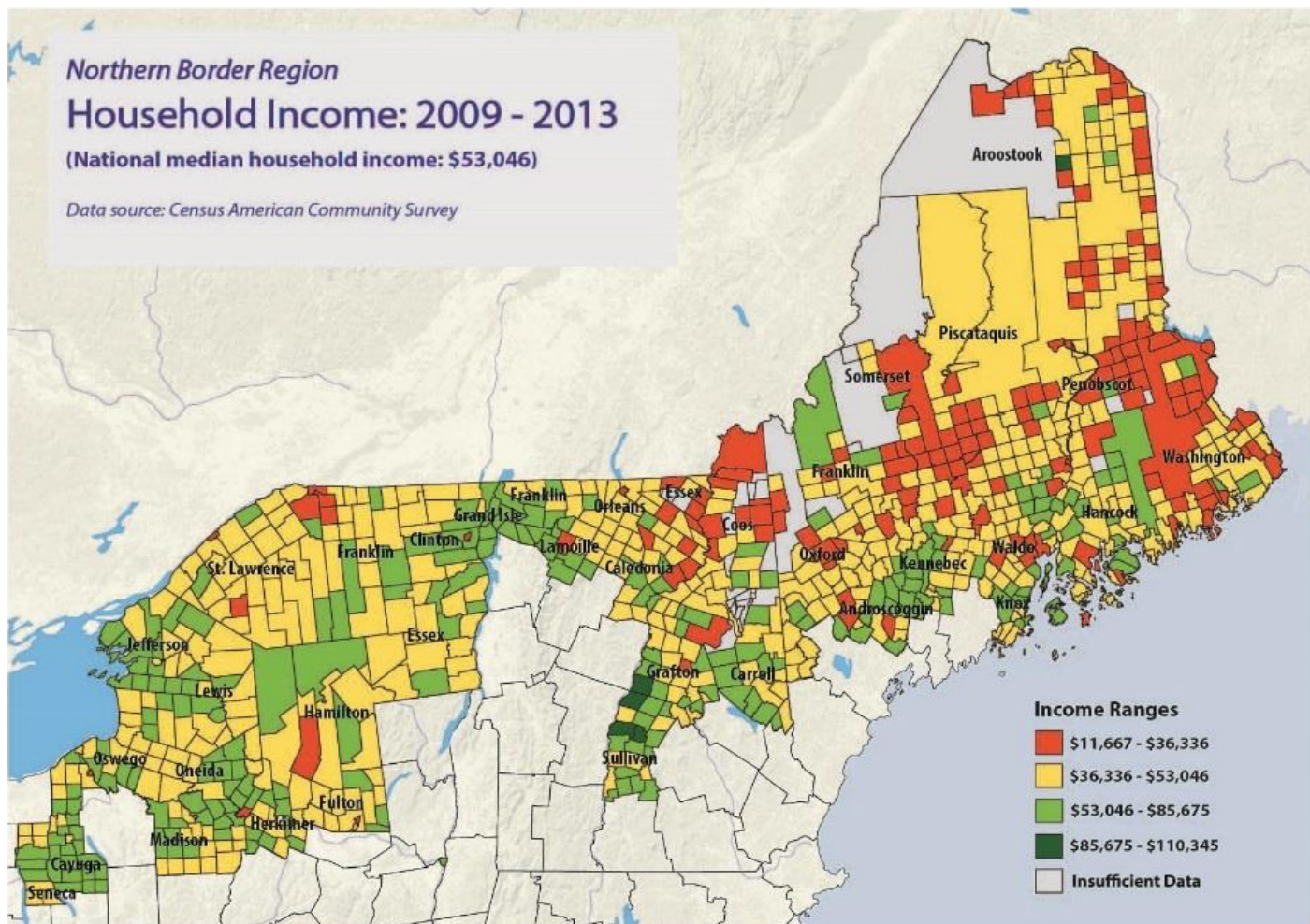


## Northern Border Region

# Household Income: 2009 - 2013

(National median household income: \$53,046)

Data source: Census American Community Survey





## **Current Socioeconomic Trends**

### **DISTRESSED COMMUNITIES**

A challenging combination of job and population loss, decaying infrastructure, and low economic diversification has left many of the region's historic population centers grappling with low income and high rates of poverty. Distress is most apparent in parts of the region that were historically dependent on manufacturing, and/or that are most remote.

## **Current Socioeconomic Trends**

### **DIVERSIFYING ECONOMY**

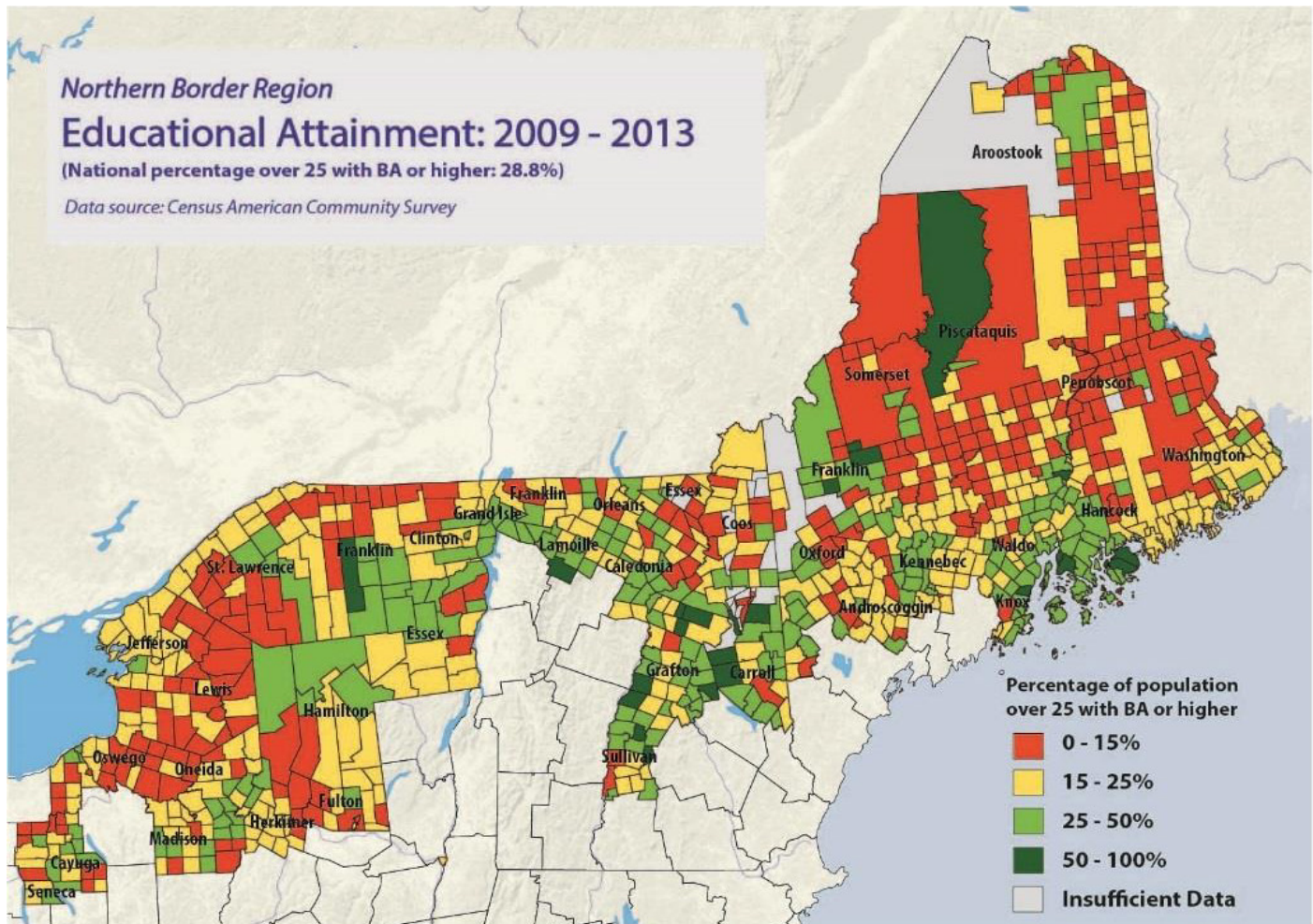
Across the United States, health care, social assistance and government account for an ever increasing share of the national economy, with manufacturing on the decline. The Northern Border region is no different. Manufacturing's contribution to the regional economy (as measured by worker compensation), while still significant, declined by 16% between 2003 and 2013, as contributions from the government, health care and social assistance, and leisure and hospitality sectors grew.

## Northern Border Region

# Educational Attainment: 2009 - 2013

(National percentage over 25 with BA or higher: 28.8%)

Data source: Census American Community Survey



## **Current Socioeconomic Trends**

### **CHANGING WORKFORCE NEEDS**

Today's economy demands a very different type of skill set than in the past. Many of the region's historic manufacturing communities have levels of college education well below the national average, reflecting a time when getting a well-paying job in a mill required a high school diploma and a willingness to work. As high-skill work becomes more important in all sectors of the economy, a significant segment of the region's workforce is at a disadvantage, mismatched with the needs of many existing and potential new businesses.

**Approved Unanimously on October, 2016 by Members or their Alternates**

Representing the Federal Government  
**Mark Scarano, Federal Co-Chair**

Representing the State of Maine  
**The Hon. Paul LePage, Governor**

Representing the State of New Hampshire  
**The Hon. Maggie Hassan**

Representing the State of Vermont  
**The Hon. Peter Schumlin**

Representing the State of New York  
**The Hon. Andrew Cuomo**

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