St. Croix County – Synopsis

Demographics. St. Croix County, with a 2012 population of 84,836 is in the middle of the Lower St. Croix Valley, which also includes Pierce and Polk Counties in Wisconsin and Washington and Chisago Counties in Minnesota. St. Croix County grew by 10.8% between 2005 and 2012, adding over 8,200 residents. As Figure 1 indicates, the population of St. Croix County has grown nearly 4 times faster than the Wisconsin state average, and continues to be among the fastest growing counties in Wisconsin. St. Croix County has relatively few foreign-born residents (1.7%) and a relatively small non-White population (4.1%) compared to the Wisconsin average (4.7% foreign-born and 13.0% non-White).

Income and Poverty. Most measures of economic well-being in St. Croix County are better than the comparable Wisconsin averages. Figure 2 indicates median household income in 2012 in St. Croix County was $67,098, which is significantly higher than the average for the state of Wisconsin ($51,340). While the recession reduced the median household incomes in St. Croix County more sharply than for the state of Wisconsin, the County is slowly recovering. Household income has not returned to pre-recession levels. (Figure 3). Although measures of poverty have increased in St. Croix County (from 5.5% in 2007 to 7.8% in 2011), the percentage of St. Croix County individuals in poverty is substantially below the Wisconsin average (12.9% in 2011). Similarly, the rate of St. Croix County families in poverty (5.5% in 2012) is below the Wisconsin average (9.0%). The unemployment rate in St. Croix County (4.8% in 2012) is well below the Wisconsin average (6.7%).

Housing. St. Croix County has a relatively high proportion of owner-occupied homes. More than 78% of St. Croix County households reported that they own their home in 2012, which is 10.3% higher than the state average. Thirty-one percent of St. Croix County households are classified as “cost burdened,” which is slightly below the state average of 34%.
Community Engagement. Between 2007 and 2010 St. Croix County’s rate of in-migration from other counties or states declined from 7.9% to 5.9%, before increasing slightly to over 6% in 2011 and 2012. While the rate of in-migration is greater than the Wisconsin average, the difference has shrunk over time. As shown in Figure 4, St. Croix County residents participate in elections at a higher rate than the state average. More than 40% of workers in St. Croix County commute more than 30 minutes each direction, much higher than the 26% average for the state. Long commutes may make civic engagement more challenging.

Health. The proportion of the population without health insurance in St. Croix County (7.6%) is lower than the state average (10.4%), which suggests better than average access to health services in the County (Figure 5). Figure 6 indicates a disturbing trend in the county, a persistent increase in the proportion of adults classified as obese. At a time when the state rate of obesity has actually declined by more than 1%, St. Croix County’s obesity rate increased by more than 2%.

Food Security. One measure of food insecurity is the percentage of school children eligible for free/reduced price school lunches. As shown in Figure 7, the percentage of school children eligible for free/reduced price school lunches in St. Croix County (24% in 2012) was substantially lower than the Wisconsin average (42%) and is likely related to the relatively high median household income in St. Croix County compared to the state. The percentage of students eligible for free/reduced price school lunches has increased in both St. Croix County and Wisconsin between 2005 and 2012. USDA defines food secure households as those who have “access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.” Feeding America estimates that 8.5% of the St. Croix County residents were food insecure in 2011, which is below the Wisconsin average (13%).

Education. Most measures of education indicate that St. Croix County fares well when compared to Wisconsin state averages. The high school graduation rate in St. Croix County (96%) is nearly 8% higher than the Wisconsin average. Third grade reading proficiency (43%) is also well above the state average of 35%. (NOTE: Reading proficiency standards were changed in 2013). The proportion of adults with low literacy (5%) is 2% better than the state average. The St. Croix County adult population is well-educated, with nearly 33% having a 4-year college degree or better, which is 6% above the Wisconsin average (27%).

Summary. The population of St. Croix County has grown rapidly, increasing at nearly 4 times the Wisconsin average. Most measures of economic well-being are better in St. Croix County than for Wisconsin. Median household income is higher, poverty rates are lower, and unemployment rates are lower. Educational measures are also above their comparable state averages, including the high school graduation rate, reading proficiency, and college graduates. The percentage of “cost-burdened” households is also slightly below the state average. Food insecurity and obesity rates have increased in the County but a lower percentage of St. Croix County residents are without health insurance than the state average.