

Blueprint Points Path Forward For North Dakota's Strained Local Newspapers

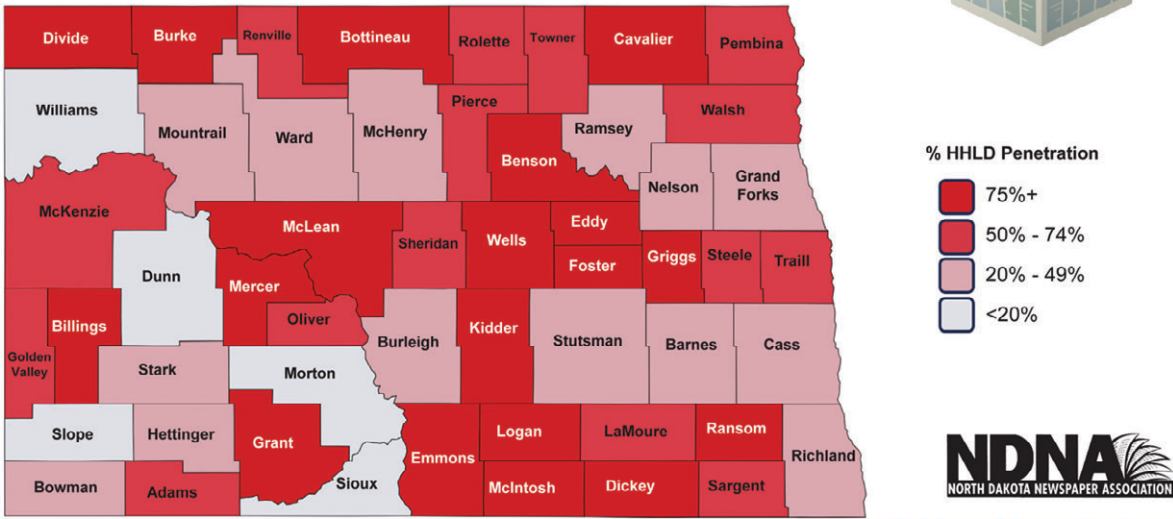
Strong public trust, willingness to support local journalism provides hope

RURAL EYES are on newspapers!

34 counties have newspaper circulation equivalent to 50 percent or more of all households, with 19 of the most rural counties having 75 percent or better.



County Coverage – Circulation HHL D Penetration



This graphic shows the rates of household penetration for print newspaper subscriptions, with some of the highest rates in the most rural counties of the state. Members of the steering committee for the Future of Local News Initiative say this shows potential for advertisers and other campaigns to reach audiences in these areas, providing a needed revenue source for newspapers. Courtesy of North Dakota Newspaper Association.

By Michael Standaert
North Dakota News Cooperative
Shrinking profit margins, aging ownerships and headaches from factors beyond their control like postal delays continue to strain local newspapers across North Dakota.

While some of the 73 local newspapers in the state are in critical condition, the bigger picture is not one of dying out, but of hope for the future anchored by their importance to local communities.

A two-year effort to gather data called the Future of Local News Initiative, led by the North Dakota Newspaper Association and the Rural Development Finance Corporation, finds some reasons for optimism and several paths forward for journalism prosperity.

The effort, supported by a grant from the Bush Foundation, brought together journalists and publishers from across the state to gather a rare data set through surveying newspaper owners, journalists and consumers. The group released a final report of their key findings on Jan. 29, with the data paving the way for pilot programs to address challenges going forward.

"This has been the most focused effort that the North Dakota Newspaper Association has ever done to quantify where we are at as an industry," said Cecile Wehrman, NDNA's executive director.

Trust in print
The data gathered includes finding that 9 out of 10 news consumers believe having a local newspaper is important, with a similar amount saying that losing a paper harms local communities.

Newspapers are also the most trusted local news source, according to the data gathered by research partner Coda Ventures. Chris Gesselle, a development specialist with the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives Cooperative who was involved with the effort, said that struck him most about what the research found.

"People trust newspapers," Gesselle said. "They view them as one of the more accurate media outlets or media forms out there."

Residents of the three counties where papers no longer exist - Sioux, Dunn and Slope - value papers even more, showing how those losses impact communities.

In those counties, 96% said having a newspaper is important, 87% said they would subscribe to a paper if it existed, and 21% said they would be willing to donate to help fund a newspaper beyond subscribing.

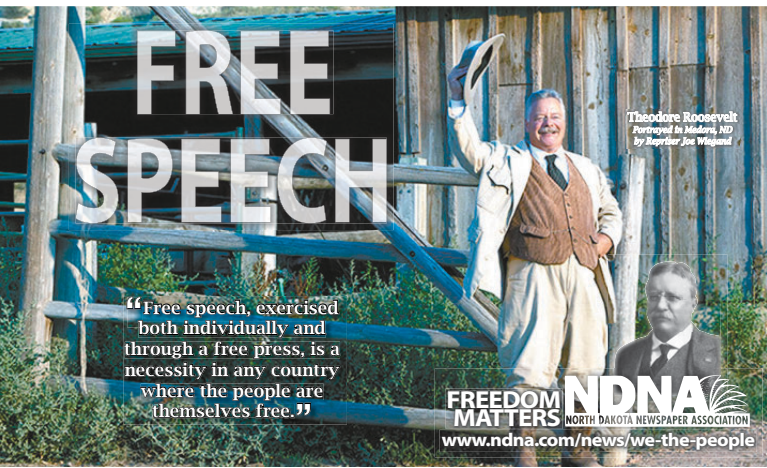
"The absence of papers is really noticed in those communities," Gesselle said.

Joy Schoch, publisher of the Dickinson Press, a Forum Communications newspaper, said having data to back up the vital importance of newspapers has been an important outcome from the project. "It's essential," she said. "It's essential to keep people informed. It makes a healthy community."

The next step in the effort is to pilot several solutions that tap into the deep reservoirs of trust, demand and opportunity while acknowledging the current structural risks many newspapers face.

"This is a vital, trusted, necessary industry that people want and need, and we need to find a way collectively forward that benefits society," Wehrman said.

Translating the value



Currently, 24% of households across the state are reached by a newspaper, but looking deeper at county-level data shows much deeper penetration.

Out of 53 counties, 20 have over 75% of households receiving a local newspaper and 15 more show figures of between 50-75%.

Wehrman said those numbers more accurately reflect the impact newspapers have locally, and losing them means communities lose out.

With the \$199 million in federal Rural Health Transformation funding being rolled out in the coming year, the importance of local newspapers in communicating what programs are available and how the funding can be used in those communities is crucial, Wehrman said.

People need to understand newspapers are "not a public utility," she said. "These are individual businesses that need the support of their local communities in order to continue doing the work people value so highly." That disconnect between valuing newspapers and being willing to support them through subscriptions or donations is something that needs to be tackled by both the newspapers themselves and the communities they serve if their survival is to continue.

"People aren't seeing newspapers as a business like they see their hardware store as a business, and they may not be aware of their struggles," said Ellen Huber, rural development director for NDAREC.

"We talk a lot about retaining and growing other kinds of businesses in the state, but I don't think anyone has thrown newspapers in that bucket of important, vital businesses, and ones that are worthy of focusing on, retaining and strengthening and growing," Huber said.

The real value of local newspapers needs to be better communicated to the wider public, participants in the initiative said.

"People think it should be free," Schoch said. "I think people forget about us. People forget about it until they really need us."

Piloting real action
The next step for the initiative is taking forward several pilot projects centered on succession planning, exploring new revenue models, providing print and digital samples for the next generation of news consumers, and developing readymade promotions and content that can be adopted statewide.

Whether those have a deep impact or not depends on securing grant funding to take them forward, Wehrman said.

The hope is that these don't become moonshots, but practical, replicable interventions.

One of the most immediate concerns is the succession planning component, since so many independent publishers are close to retirement age.

Currently, while group-owned newspapers show stronger margins and sustainability, independent, family-owned papers are under pressure from owners nearing retirement, the high cost of printing and distribution, and the heavy reliance on revenue from public notices.

Younger journalists are interested in taking over the reins of these papers, but are constrained by a lack of training and the need for financing to sustain operations, the research found.

"Succession planning is something that we need to offer newspapers, because there is an urgent need

NDSU Extension Sets Sheep Producers Workshop

Area sheep producers and anyone interested in learning more about sheep health and production are invited to North Dakota State University Extension's sheep producers workshop on February 28 at Lillehaugen Farms near Broomfield, North Dakota.

The afternoon will focus on practical, up-to-date information for both new and experienced producers. The workshop is organized by Traci Trostad, NDSU Extension agriculture and natural resources agent in Nelson County, and Bailey Schroeder, NDSU Extension agriculture and natural resources agent in Walsh County.

"This will be a great chance for

producers to visit with specialists, ask questions and see a working operation," says Trostad. "We want folks to go home with ideas they can put to work right away in their own flocks."

The program will begin at noon in the farm garage with a lamb-based meal catered by Dee Lillehaugen. The meal is provided at no cost to attendees due to sponsor support.

Following the meal, Luke Lillehaugen will share the history and overview of Lillehaugen Farms.

Dr. Jake Galbreath, NDSU Extension veterinarian, will provide updates on sheep health and veterinary issues. Lacey Quail, NDSU Extension livestock management specialist, will present on lambing preparation. Kelly Froehlich, American Sheep Industry Association education program developer, will discuss sheep dystocia. Travis Hoffman, NDSU Extension sheep specialist, will help facilitate discussion and questions throughout the afternoon.

The workshop will wrap up with a tour of the farm at 3 p.m. Register at ndsug.ag/sheep-prod-26. For more information, including directions and registration details, contact the NDSU Extension offices in Nelson or Walsh counties. Lillehaugen Farms is located at 5427 115th Ave NE, east of Broomfield.

Primary Election Season Underway

The Primary Elections are set for Tuesday, June 9. Candidates have begun circulating petitions for the various positions to be voted on in Mountrail County.

Candidates were able to start circulating petitions on January 1 with the filing dates for certificate of endorsement or petition of nomination able to be filed starting on January 2. The deadline to file is Monday, Apr. 6 at 4:00 p.m. Every candidate filing must also file an affidavit of candidacy and a statement of interests.

County positions to be elected this year are County Commissioner in District 2, County Commissioner in District 3, County Commissioner in District 4, County Auditor, County State's Attorney, County Recorder, County Treasurer, County Sheriff and Official County Newspaper.

Each candidates petition must contain signatures each to 2% of the vote from the last general election in that position, ranging from 44 to 46 and no more than 300.

Petition information for county elections can be picked up at the Mountrail County Auditor's Office in Stanley. The information is also on Mountrail County's website. It can be found under the directory for the Auditor's Office with wording labeled Election Info for 2026.

City elections will also be held on Tuesday, June 9. Stanley School Board election is set for the same date. Candidates for those offices also have until April 6 at 4:00 p.m. to file their necessary documentation.

Candidates in the county races will advance to the November General Election. The city and school elections will be determined in the June 9 elections.

Mountrail County Five Commissioner Districts Approved 12-17-21

108-04 BICKER 64	108-07 POWERS LAKE 71	108-07 POWERS 35	108-07 LOSTWOOD 55	108-00 SIOUXA 27	108-00 CROWFOOT 11	108-08 LOKLAND 44
107-04 WHITE EARTH TWP 82 82	107-03 SOKNESS 26	107-02 COTTONWOOD 28	107-01 JAMES HILL 98	107-00 CLEARWATER 37	107-00 REDMOUND 16	107-00 STAVE 26
105-04 WHITE EARTH CITY 100 100	105-03 MANTOU 68	105-02 ROSS TWP 109	105-01 ROSS CITY 95	105-00 PALERMO TWP 41	105-00 MCGAHAN 34	105-00 EGAN 50
105-04 UNORGANIZED 59	105-03 DEBING 50	105-02 ALGER 50	105-01 PURCELL 82	105-00 BURKE 58	105-00 MCALMOND 54	105-00 KICKAPOO 18
104-04 UNORGANIZED 51	104-03 RAT LAKE 17	104-02 BROOKBANK 17	104-01 SKES 97	104-00 AUSTIN 24	104-00 OAKLAND 36	104-00 OSLOE 30
103-03 UNORGANIZED 53	103-02 KNIFE RIVER 53	103-01 CRANE CREEK 55	103-00 WAYZETTA 23	103-00 SHELL 36	103-00 SPRING COULEE 77	103-00 PLAZA CITY 211
102-03 UNORGANIZED 292	102-02 OSBORN 292	102-01 VAN HOOK 275	102-00 PARSHALL TWP 85 85	102-00 MODEL 31	102-00 PLAZA 45	102-00 PLAZA 211
101-03 BIG BEND 36	101-02 HOMER 42	101-01 LIBERTY 39	101-00 FERTILE 65	101-00 BANNER 37	101-00 MOUNTAIN 20	101-00 MOUNTAIN 20

DISTRICTS

#1 - BLUE
#2 - GREY
#3 - GREEN

#4 - WHITE
#5 - YELLOW

TOTALS

10%

1,978

1,900

2,008

2,016

1,907

9,809

10%

9,809 ÷ 5 = 1,961.80

1,961.80 X 10% = 196.18

LOW - 1,765.62

HIGH - 2,157.98

1,961.80 X 10% = 196.18

LOW - 1,765.62

HIGH - 2,157.98

701-628-2424

Mountrail County Medical Center

Many Avenues - One Goal... Your Health

Dr. Mark Longmuir, MD

Tara Nardacci, DNP-NP-C

Tammie Baasf, FNP-C

Abbey Ruland, PA

Jessica Charon, DNP

Brittany Houghtved, FNP

Carol Hynke, DNP FNP-C

MCMC Visiting Specialists

Dr. Ravindra Joshi, MD McKenzie County Specialty Clinics Orthopedics Specialist	701-444-8730
Dr. Tyson Williams, DPM Trinity Health Podiatry Specialist	701-628-8621 If no answer, please leave message with your Name and Phone Number and your call will be returned
Dr. David Amsbury, DO Trinity Health OB/GYN Specialist	1-800-477-1046 or 701-857-7385
Dr. Tracy Tomjack, DO McKenzie County Specialty Clinics Orthopedics Specialist	701-444-8730
Lisa Risovi of Hearing Dynamics Hearing Dynamics at the Stanley Clinic Hearing Instrument Specialist	701-839-8964
Dr. Erin O'Leary Professional Hearing Services Audiologist	701-852-6565 or 800-735-5866

Grand Opening Celebration!

JOIN US

Wednesday, March 4th 2:00 PM

For Prayer, Dedication and Open House for the new Mountrail Bethel Home in Stanley!

ADDITIONAL CLINIC SERVICES OFFERED

- MYRIAD MYRISK**
 - Hereditary Cancer and Genetic Testing
- COLOGUARD**
 - At home colorectal cancer screening
- ZIO PATCH**
 - Cardiac heart monitoring
- GENE SIGHT**
 - Finds what mental health medication will work best for you based on your genetic makeup
- FOOD SENSITIVITY**
 - This looks at foods to which your body is sensitive
- DUTCH**
 - Tests patient hormone levels
- SCLEROTHERAPY**
 - A method used to eliminate varicose veins and spider veins
- LOW-DOSE LUNG SCREENING**
 - Preventive lung cancer screening
- CT CARDIAC SCORING**
 - Special x-ray to produce pictures of arteries

Mountrail County Medical Center
Rural Health Clinic

615 6th St. SE • P.O. Box 399
Stanley, ND 58784

Clinic Phone: 701-628-2505
Clinic Fax: 701-628-3078

HAVING TROUBLE PAYING YOUR BILL?

Please contact the Revenue Cycle Team at 701-628-8639