NDSU researchers Dean Bangsund and Nancy Hodur delivered their final **report** on population scenarios for western N.D. Bakken oil communities Thursday in Dickinson to the Vision West ND consortium.

Bangsund said they have three levels of oil price that drive population numbers- the low price of $25-$60 will give western communities about a 1-2% population increase which will be much more manageable than the growth in 2010-2014.

Bangsund said 20,000 jobs were cut with the oil price decline in western N.D.

“We’re not going back into what we had before,” Bangsund said.

“Price is not the only driver of what the (oil and gas) industry is going to do,” Bangsund advised the group.

Nancy Hodur said some jobs do not equate into a permanent resident. Some of the specialty service groups live in N.D. but maintain their home and residency in other states.

Hodur said service workers who don’t buy homes fall in 3 general categories.

They are:

 1) it’s a specific job, they complete it and they leave

2) they are unwilling to locate and will live in N.D. while employed

3) job uncertainty

60% of the workforce in the oil and gas industry is made up of North Dakota residents. Of the remaining 40% who are not residents, only 20% of that group are interested in settling in permanently in North Dakota. The remaining workers prefer company camp housing and the nomadic life style.

Hodur said with 600 wells drilled a year from 2016-2035, communities in the west will likely add 14,170 housing units.

She said to “keep an eye on the household makeups”. She said there will be a large group of 65 and older retirees who will be seeking housing that serve their needs. There is also a larger population of families with children seeking those 3 and 4 bedroom homes currently held by empty nesters.

There is also a need for first time home buyers and cost burdened seniors.

The Western Dakota Energy Association (formerly N.D. Association of Oil and Gas Producing Counties) paid for county by county webinars held in October on population projections as part of this study.

In other business, the group considered establishing an account with the North Dakota Community Foundation for charitable giving in both endowed and non-endowed accounts to allow Vision West ND to accept financial support.

Mark Resner, Mott, N.D., reported on the $125,000 USDA/REAP funded **study** for ferry costs on Lake Sakakwea. Shirley Brentrup, REAP advisor, met with tribal members and they do not want a bridge in that location.

The ferry is also being considered by MHA Nation along with water taxis to connect Twin Buttes segment in northern Dunn county with Parshall, N.D. in southern Mountrail county. MHA Nation received a TIGER federal grant to look at buses, along with other types of transportation alternatives.

Resner said a used ferry could cost about $6 milllion. They run for 60 years. The ferry could operate from April to December depending on the weather. It would carry only passenger cars, possibly 14-20 cars, 30 passengers at a cost of $10 each trip. The projected annual revenues would cover the cost of the operation once the dock and boat were purchased.

Right of way would need to be re-purchased, according to Resner, north of Twin Buttes. There would be 10 miles that would need to be built from Twin Buttes north to the ferry through badlands buttes. The current road has not been maintained. Total cost of the capital improvements for just the ferry operation is estimated at $16.4 million. A bridge in the same location would cost about $400 million.

A car ferry project at Lake Sakakwea would need 80% grants for both the land infrastructure and car ferry capital costs in order to operate viably, according to the Ulteig study submitted by Bob Youness.

**Background by Shirley Brentrup:** *In 2014, a committee of the Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP) / Vision West ND identified a car ferry on Lake Sakakawea as an important element for expanding transportation options in the region.  From that group a larger regional committee was formed to address actions necessary towards this goal.   REAP/Vision West ND provided $5,000 for an introductory investigation outlining next steps and to identify the elements of a full feasibility study.*

*From this work, REAP applied for a 2014 Rural Business Development Grant from the USDA Rural Development.  This $75,000 grant funded the Car Ferry Feasibility Study addressing the area along the old route of HWY 8 across the lake - north to south.   In 2015, a similar grant provided $20,000 to look at the feasibility of a car ferry system in the New Town and Mandaree areas.  In this work, we projected the use of a Water Taxi as a more feasible solution.  A Water Taxi moves only people and moves faster than a car ferry and connects with a land-side bus system or similar transportation service.  The MHA Nation is currently studying busing in a comprehensive transportation study to be completed in 2017.*

In other work, the Vison West ND members considered discrepancies in industrial valuations.Stacey Swanson, Committee Chair, gave an update on the central and local industrial tax valuation discrepancies and how the counties might learn how to get a professional assessment.

Dr. Tom Mitzel, President of Dickinson State University, presented an update on DSU and a historical perspective. He said the college with established by the business community of Dickinson in 1918. Their first president challenged his students to “Love and Service”. The college today takes pride in their school teaching, nursing, agriculture and business programs. The student population increased by 5% this year and they are on track to serve 2,000 students in the near future.