



East Range Summit 2025



10am Welcome & Introduction

- ERJPB Overview
 - ERJPB background
 - Business visits and loan funds
 - Childcare
 - Marketing committee

10:15-11:30 Keynote: Ben Winchester - Rural Living in 2025

11:30 Lunch

11:45-11:55 Carson Gorecki - MN DEED Data and Tools available

11:55-12:50 Panel 'Innovation on the East Range'

- Beth Pierce, Discover the Range
- Miriam Kero, Hello Range / Miriam Kero Consulting
- Steve Rahkola, Entrepreneur Fund / East Range Marketing Committee
- Jeff Burgess, Mesabi East School District
- Josh Woolery, Giants Ridge

12:50 Wrap Up - Questions & Cards

Keynote

Ben Winchester - University of Minnesota Extension

Ben has been working both in and for small towns across the Midwest for over 25 years. He lives in St. Cloud, Minnesota with his wife and two children. Ben is trained as a Rural Sociologist and works for the University of Minnesota Extension. He conducts applied research on economic, social, and demographic topics surrounding a theme of “rewriting the rural narrative”. He received the 2021 Rural Renewal Research Prize from Oklahoma State University for his work.



DEED Data and Tools

Carson Gorecki – MN DEED

Carson is the Regional Labor Market Analyst for Northeast Minnesota. Based out of Duluth, he has a bachelor's degree in geography and statistics from Macalester College and a master's of urban and regional planning (MURP) from Portland State University. He is an expert on the Northeast economy and job market, industry trends, workforce availability, hiring demand, long-term occupational and industry employment projections, short-term employment forecasts, forecasting methods, economic cycles and recessions.



Panelists

Beth Pierce – Discover the Range

Beth Pierce has been the director of Discover the Range (formerly Iron Range Tourism Bureau) since 2012, promoting northeastern Minnesota's Iron Range as a vacation destination. She serves on numerous regional and statewide boards, including the Minnesota Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus and the Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce. A founding member of the Northern St. Louis County Trails Task Force, Beth lives in Hibbing with her cocker spaniel and has a 24-year-old daughter.



Steve Rahkola – Entrepreneur Fund / East Range Marketing Committee

Steve is a marketing leader dedicated to empowering small businesses across the Upper Midwest. As Director of Marketing at the Entrepreneur Fund (formerly Director of Sales & Marketing at Giants Ridge), he helps grow our region through local storytelling, and impactful campaigns. Small businesses are the engine of regional growth—creating jobs, fueling innovation, and keeping our East Range communities strong and vibrant. As a longtime fan of outdoor recreation, he's passionate about supporting the people and places that make this region such a great place to live, work, and explore.



Josh Woolery – Giants Ridge

Josh Woolery is a seasoned marketing leader with 15+ years in brand advertising, consumer marketing, and resort promotion. He has led integrated campaigns for major brands, combining creative vision with strategic discipline to drive growth. A passionate advocate for outdoor recreation, Josh has aligned his work with his love for the outdoors—most notably at Winter Park Resort and now Giants Ridge, Minnesota's premier four-season destination. He brings a community-first mindset and data-driven approach to growing visitation, building brand equity, and launching new experiences.



Miriam Kero – Hello Range / Miriam Kero Consulting

Miriam is owner of Miriam Kero Consulting and the coordinator of Hello, Range!, the Mesabi's resident attraction and retention initiative. With over 25 years experience in secondary education, non-profit, and for-profit institutions, Kero specializes in communications, community development and inclusion, with experience in strategic planning, grant-writing/management, and marketing strategy. Her GOAL: to see the Mesabi Iron Range population stay and GROW!



Jeff Burgess – Mesabi East

Jeff Burgess is the superintendent of Mesabi East School District. Jeff graduated from St. Cloud State University with a Bachelor of Science in Social Studies Education. He then went on to earn his Master of Science and Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership from Minnesota State University of Moorhead. The Mesabi East school district has tried to meet community need in providing new childcare services for the community.

