
Rick Scott
GOVERNOR



Hunting F. Deutsch
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

September 1, 2012

The Honorable Rick Scott
Governor of Florida
Plaza Level 05, The Capitol
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001

The Honorable Mike Haridopolos, President
The Florida Senate
Room 409, The Capitol
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100

The Honorable Dean Cannon, Speaker
Florida House of Representatives
Room 420, The Capitol
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1300

Dear Governor Scott, President Haridopolos and Speaker Cannon:

I am pleased to submit the Annual Report of the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI). The report covers the timeframe of July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012, as required by section 28.0656, Florida Statutes, and reports on REDI coordinated activities, preferential awards and waivers in the rural communities of the state.

During this period, REDI agencies reported granting 129 waivers and 158 preferential awards to eligible communities with an estimated value of more than \$98 million. Collectively, this REDI assistance to rural communities resulted in the creation or retention of 1,734 jobs. REDI agencies and organizations also provided substantial support to the rural areas in various other forms of financial and technical assistance, including loans, tax incentives and training.



Governor Scott, President Haridopolos, Speaker Cannon
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If you have questions or need additional information regarding this report, please contact me or Tom Beck, Director, Division of Community Development at (850) 717-8477.

Sincerely,



Hunting F. Deutsch
Executive Director

HFD/bl

Enclosure

cc: Gray Swoope, Secretary of Commerce, President and CEO, Enterprise Florida, Inc.
Tom Beck, AICP, Director, Division of Community Development, Department of
Economic Opportunity
Darrick D. McGhee, Chief of Staff and Director, Office of Legislative and Cabinet Affairs,
Department of Economic Opportunity



**RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE
(REDI)
ANNUAL REPORT**

**Division of Community Development
Florida Department of Economic Opportunity**

September 1, 2012

107 East Madison Street
Caldwell Building
Tallahassee, Florida 32399
www.floridajobs.org



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This annual report of the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) is submitted to the Governor, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives in accordance with section 288.0656(8), Florida Statutes, (F.S.), by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO). This report provides an overview of REDI and the activities and projects coordinated by and through REDI agencies between July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2012. REDI activities address issues affecting rural communities and promote economic and community development in Florida's underserved areas.

This report is based on information provided by REDI agencies and organizations as defined in section 288.0656 (6)(a), F.S. The purpose of this document is to report on the status of all projects currently coordinated through REDI, to identify the number of preferential awards and allowances given, the value of those awards, the recipients, a description of all waivers granted and the economic impact of these projects. Included are any recommendations based on the review and evaluation of statutes and rules having an adverse impact on rural communities.

Results for 2011/2012

During the reporting period of July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012, the participating REDI agencies reported making 158 preferential awards. The value of these preferential awards totaled over \$98 million. In addition, REDI agencies reported granting 129 waivers of match, fee or program requirements to applicants in rural communities. Collectively, these REDI activities within the 32 rural counties were reported as resulting in the creation or retention of 1,734 jobs. In addition to the preferential awards and waivers, rural local governments received a significant amount of support from REDI agencies and organizations through technical assistance, training, tax incentives and loans to further economic development efforts. No recommendations for statutory or rule changes were received for consideration by REDI and inclusion in the report.

REDI OVERVIEW

The Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) is established within the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) under section 288.0656, Florida Statutes, (F.S.) and REDI is managed by the Bureau of Economic Development within the Division of Community Development. REDI is a multi-agency endeavor that coordinates the efforts of regional, state and federal agencies to address the problems that affect the fiscal, economic and community viability of Florida's economically distressed rural communities. REDI works with local governments, community-based organizations and private organizations that have an interest in the growth and development of these communities to find ways to balance environmental and growth management issues with local needs and economic development.

The REDI agencies¹ include the following:

- Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Agency for Health Care Administration
- Department of Children and Family Services
- Department of Corrections
- Department of Education
- Enterprise Florida, Inc.
- Department of Environmental Protection
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences
- Department of Health
- Department of Juvenile Justice
- Florida Regional Council Association
- Department of State
- Department of Transportation
- VISIT FLORIDA
- Water Management Districts
- Workforce Florida, Inc.

¹ Section 288.0656(6)(a), F.S.

Participating REDI agencies designate a person to serve as the primary contact for the agency with REDI. Representatives help ensure a prompt, effective response is received to problems arising from rural issues. The representatives can also identify opportunities for preferential awards of program funds and waivers of program requirements when necessary to encourage and facilitate long-term private capital investment and job creation. Each representative is responsible for ensuring that each district office or facility is informed about REDI and for providing assistance throughout the agency in the implementation of REDI activities.²

RURAL COMMUNITIES

Section 288.0656(2)(e), F.S., defines a rural community as:

- a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer;
- a county with a population of 125,000 or fewer which is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer;
- a municipality within a county described above; or
- an unincorporated federal enterprise community or an incorporated rural city with a population of 25,000 or fewer and an employment base focused on traditional agricultural or resource-based industries, located in a county not defined as rural, which has at least three or more economic distress factors.³

REDI is responsible for coordinating and focusing the efforts and resources of state and regional agencies on the problems that affect the fiscal, economic and community viability of Florida's economically distressed rural communities.⁴ Counties that meet both the population standard and the requirements of economic distress factors⁵ are considered rural counties eligible for REDI assistance. Currently, the counties meeting these requirements are: Baker, Bradford, Calhoun, Columbia, DeSoto, Dixie, Flagler, Franklin, Gadsden, Gilchrist, Glades, Gulf, Hamilton, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Liberty, Madison, Nassau, Okeechobee, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, Union, Wakulla, Washington and Walton.

² Section 288.0656(6)(b), F.S.

³ Section 288.0656(2)(c), F.S., Economic distress includes such factors as low per capita income, low per capita taxable values, high unemployment, high underemployment, low weekly earned wages compared to the state average, low housing values compared to the state average, high percentages of the population receiving public assistance, high poverty levels compared to the state average, and a lack of year-round stable employment opportunities.

⁴ Section 288.0656(3), F.S.

⁵ See Appendix A

In addition to the counties listed above, section 288.0656(2)(e)4, F.S., allows communities located in non-rural counties to be designated as rural communities when they meet certain requirements. The rural designation approves them to request a reduction or waiver of match from REDI agencies or be eligible for REDI assistance. Eligibility is good for one year and, for the communities listed below, will expire on the corresponding dates as follows:

<u>Cities/Towns (County)</u>	<u>Expiration Date</u>
Center Hill (Sumter)	July 18, 2013
Coleman (Sumter)	September 28, 2012
Fort Meade (Polk)	December 22, 2012
Frostproof (Polk)	November 18, 2013
Hawthorne (Alachua)	September 29, 2011
Jay (Santa Rosa)	December 3, 2011
Mulberry (Polk)	October 4, 2011
Waldo (Alachua)	September 7, 2011

RURAL AREAS OF CRITICAL ECONOMIC CONCERN

A Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC) is a rural community, or a region composed of rural communities, designated by the Governor, that has been adversely affected by an extraordinary economic event, severe or chronic distress or a natural disaster or that presents a unique economic development opportunity of regional impact.⁶

Upon a recommendation from REDI, the Governor may designate up to three RACEC areas. Designations are for five-year periods. The RACEC designation establishes these areas as priority assignments for REDI and allows the Governor, acting through REDI, to waive criteria, requirements or similar provisions of any economic development incentives. There are currently three designated RACEC areas consisting of the following rural counties and communities:

- **North West Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (NW RACEC):** Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, Wakulla and Washington Counties and the City of Freeport in Walton County (Expiration Date: January 8, 2015).
- **South Central Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (SC RACEC):** DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands and Okeechobee Counties, and the Cities of Pahokee, Belle Glade,

⁶ Section 288.0656(1)(d), F.S

and South Bay (Palm Beach County), and the Immokalee area included within the Round II Federal Rural Enterprise Community (Collier County) (Expiration Date: April 22, 2016).

- **North Central Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (NCRACEC):** Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor and Union Counties (Expiration Date: June 11, 2013).

REDI ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

Preferential Awards

REDI agencies and organizations may provide preferential awards to rural communities in the way of extra points towards grants or other financial assistance. As an example, preferential awards offered by funding programs such as DEO's Bureau of Housing and Community Development provides additional points toward scoring for Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to RACEC counties. The preferential awards may also include an increase in allowance, such as for increased acreages approved in small scale land use changes through DEO's Bureau of Community Planning. The REDI agencies have reported a total of 158 preferential awards to the rural areas during the period July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012. The collective value of these preferential awards is estimated at over \$98 million.

Reduction or Waiver of Permit Fees or Match Requirements

REDI agencies and organizations may also waive or reduce match requirements for rural or RACEC communities.⁷ As an example, environmental resource permitting fees may be reduced or waived by water management districts or the Department of Environmental Protection for rural counties. In some cases, agencies may also waive or reduce the match requirements for their grant programs. For example, the Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs allows REDI eligible communities to demonstrate a match of in-kind services or materials instead of requiring a cash contribution. The REDI agencies have reported a total 129 waivers that were granted to the rural areas during the reporting period.

Preferential awards and waivers that were provided to the rural areas are summarized in Table 3, segregated by community and RACEC affiliation, if any. Also included is the estimated dollar value of the preferential awards that were made to the rural counties and communities as reported by the REDI agencies for this time period.

⁷Section 288.06561, F.S.

Table 3. The number of preferential awards, including the estimated dollar value, with the number of waivers granted by REDI agencies to rural communities and RACEC designation during the reporting period of July 1, 2011, through June 30, 2012.

COMMUNITY	NUMBER OF AWARDS	AMOUNT OF AWARDS	NUMBER OF WAIVERS
North West RACEC			
Calhoun	3	\$1,538,819	3
Franklin	7	\$5,249,951	2
Gadsden	12	\$4,775,746	8
Gulf	2	\$230	3
Holmes	4	\$2,450,000	-
Jackson	13	\$8,585,079	-
Liberty	2	\$1,300,000	-
Wakulla	4	\$1,278,391	-
Washington	9	\$2,500,000	-
City of Freeport	1	\$500	1
Total	57	\$27,678,716	17
North Central RACEC			
Baker	3	\$1,300,000	1
Bradford	6	\$3,253,000	3
Columbia	6	\$1,578,015	13
Dixie	1	\$650,000	5
Gilchrist	2	\$115	3
Hamilton	7	\$2,679,630	6
Jefferson	1	\$700,000	1
Lafayette	3	\$133,369	2
Levy	10	\$4,638,819	2
Madison	5	\$2,940,291	4
Putnam	9	\$4,100,000	5
Suwannee	-	-	3
Taylor	4	\$1,650,000	3
Union	4	\$1,286,860	8
Total	61	\$24,910,099	59
South Central RACEC			
DeSoto	6	\$2,200,700	2
Glades	3	\$650,230	8
Hardee	4	\$2,100,115	3
Hendry	2	\$35,850,000	6
Highlands	9	\$750,000	-
Okeechobee	2	\$700,000	3
Pahokee	1	-	1
Belle Glade	1	\$750	1
South Bay	-	-	1
Immokalee	-	-	-
Total	28	\$42,251,795	25
Rural Only			
Flagler	4	\$1,400,500	22
Nassau	5	\$2,050,000	3
Walton	3	-	3
Total	12	\$3,450,500	28
GRAND TOTAL	158	\$98,291,110	129

Assistance with Pre-clearance Reviews

A significant form of assistance provided by REDI is the coordination of state agencies and regional organizations to assist with pre-clearance reviews for projects in rural communities. Upon request from the Rural Coordinator, the rural representative from each agency will coordinate the resources of that agency to provide assistance to the rural area. This type of assistance can range from advising the community about regulatory requirements to actually assisting in meeting those requirements. There were no reports of this type of assistance by the REDI agencies during this reporting period.

Other Types of Assistance

In addition to the preferential awards, city and county governments received a significant amount of support from REDI agencies and organizations in the way of training and other technical assistance, tax incentives or loan programs to further economic development efforts. The agencies have reported these technical assistance efforts in electronic format and the information is available upon request. Highlights of these activities are provided in this report under the REDI activities section.

CATALYST SITES AND PROJECTS

REDI facilitates the location of major economic development projects of significant scale in rural communities. The Rural Economic Development Initiative's Catalyst Projects target tomorrow's industries with the goal of creating high value-added jobs, capital investment and an economic ripple throughout each RACEC. Catalyst projects involve a business locating or expanding in a RACEC to serve as an economic generator of regional significance for the growth of a regional target industry cluster. The project must provide capital investment on a scale significant enough to affect the entire region and result in the development of high-wage and high-skill jobs. Each RACEC may designate catalyst projects provided that each catalyst project is specifically recommended by REDI, identified as a catalyst project by Enterprise Florida, Inc., and confirmed as a catalyst project by DEO. Section 288.0656(7)(c), F.S., authorizes all state agencies and departments to use all available tools and resources to the extent permissible by law to promote the creation and development of each catalyst project and the development of catalyst sites.

Currently, there are four identified catalyst sites that are located in Calhoun, Columbia, Suwannee and Highlands Counties. The North Central RACEC region has identified two sites as the region is comprised of 14 counties and is twice as large as the other two RACEC regions. These sites are a parcel or parcels of

land within a RACEC region that have been prioritized as geographic sites for economic development through partnerships with state, regional and local organizations.

Florida's Rural Areas of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC) and Location of Catalyst Sites

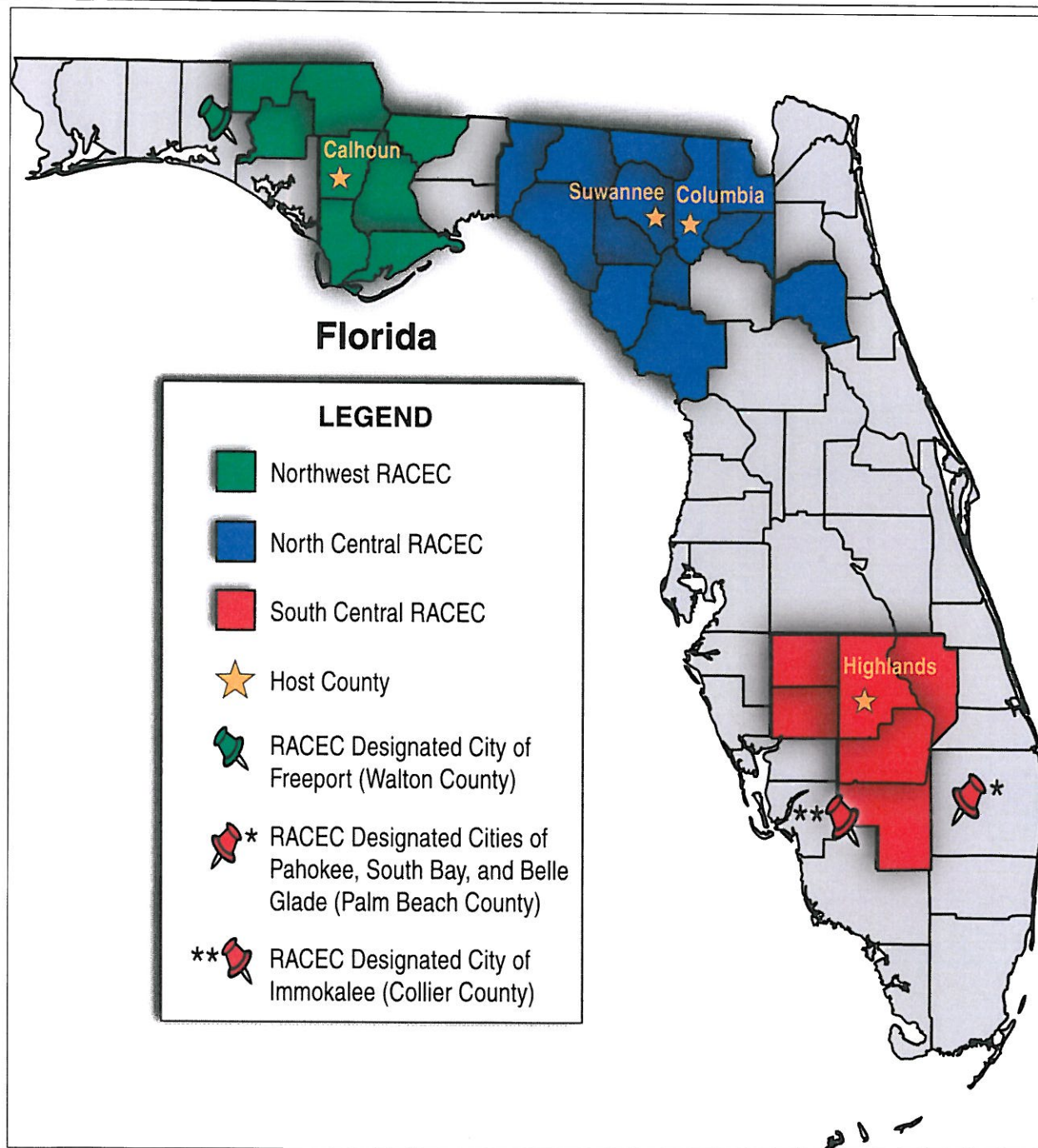


Figure 2. Designated Rural Areas of Critical Economic Concern and location of Catalyst Sites.

North Central RACEC (NC RACEC)

Columbia County Catalyst Site

The 500-acre NC RACEC Catalyst Site is poised to create high wage jobs and capital investment. Located along U.S. Highway 90, east of Lake City, the Catalyst Site is an established rural Enterprise Zone, allowing the Columbia County Economic Development Department to encourage economic growth and investment through tax advantages.



Figure 2. Site Map of the 500-acre Mixed-Use Catalyst Site in Columbia County.

Columbia County has been working with DEO and Plum Creek, the property owner, to bring NC RACEC projects to fruition. The participation of the other REDI agencies has been a critical element in the progress made on this project during this reporting period.

The major activities coordinated through REDI include two interagency and stakeholder meetings held in August and November 2011 and coordination with Plum Creek, Columbia County and Enterprise Florida, Inc. in discussions with a potential end user, Project Harvest. REDI also coordinated meetings with the U.S. Forest Service in attempts to negotiate access for a rail spur on the Catalyst Site. Rail access is an important part of the project and involves attaining a connection to the CSX rail line that runs north of the Catalyst Site through the Osceola National Forest. To date, there has been extensive coordination with the U.S. Forest Service in order to acquire a Special Use Permit Authorization (previously denied) for access to what is now estimated as 6.1 acres in the Osceola National Forest for construction of a rail spur. The county and its partners continue to work with the U.S. Forest Service to acquire the access for a rail spur that would increase the economic development potential of the site.

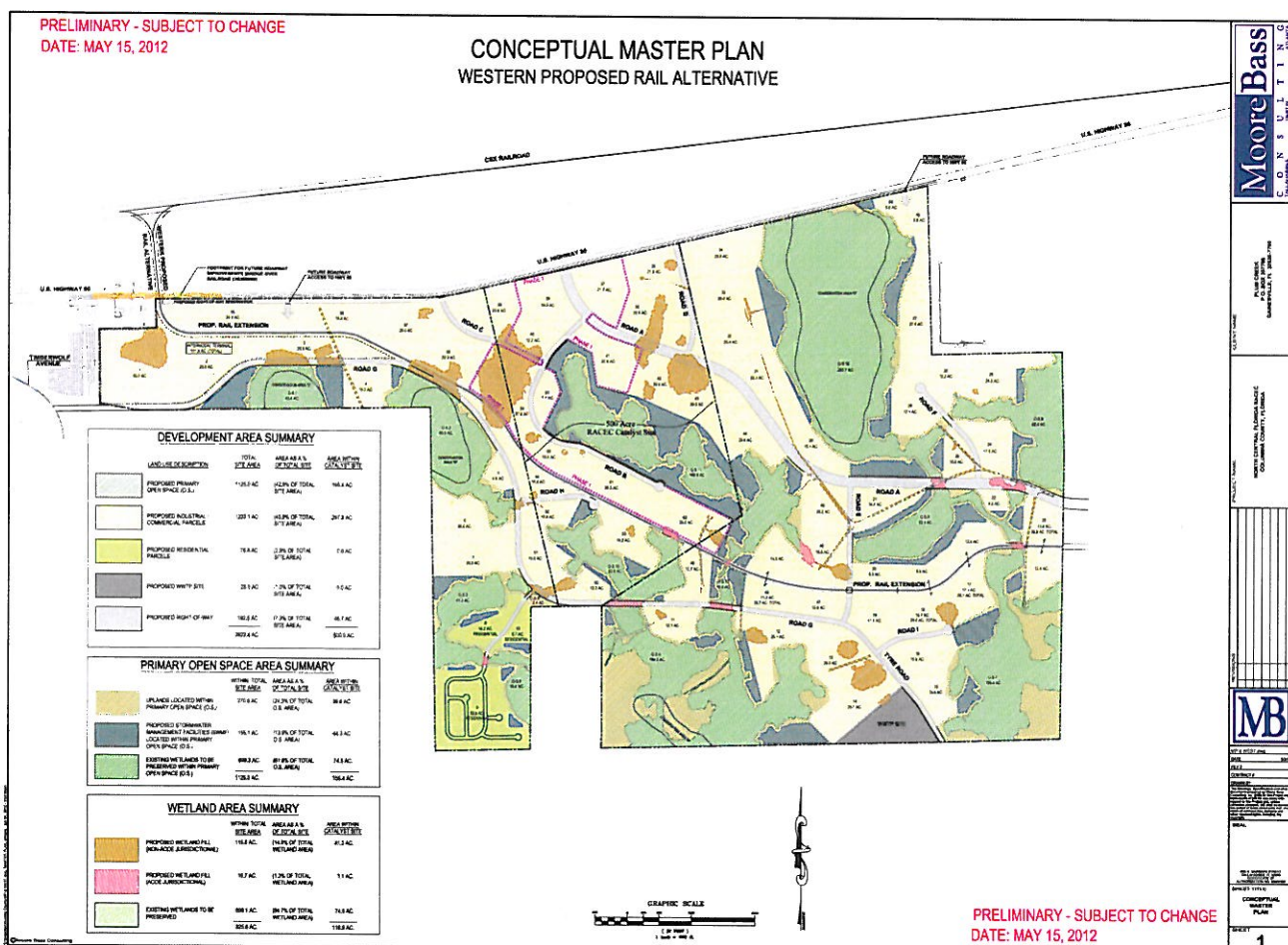


Figure 3. Conceptual Master Plan for the 500-acre Columbia County Catalyst Site with proposed rail spur development on surrounding Plum Creek lands.

Work that has been completed or remains in progress by the county and the Plum Creek landowners for the NC RACEC Catalyst Site for the reporting period includes completion of: a cultural resource survey, boundary survey, LiDAR topographic survey, legal descriptions, environmental review, Phase I environmental site assessments and a preliminary geo-technical report. Wetlands, floodplains, transportation and utilities analyses are currently being undertaken, as well as master planning, including zoning and mega-site certification.

Suwannee County Catalyst Site

Suwannee County's Catalyst Site consists of 500 +/- acres adjacent to the CSX Railroad running along the U.S. Highway 90 corridor and within two miles of the I-10/ Hwy. 90 Interchange. Suwannee County received a Rural Infrastructure Fund Grant to assist in master planning and completion of a feasibility study

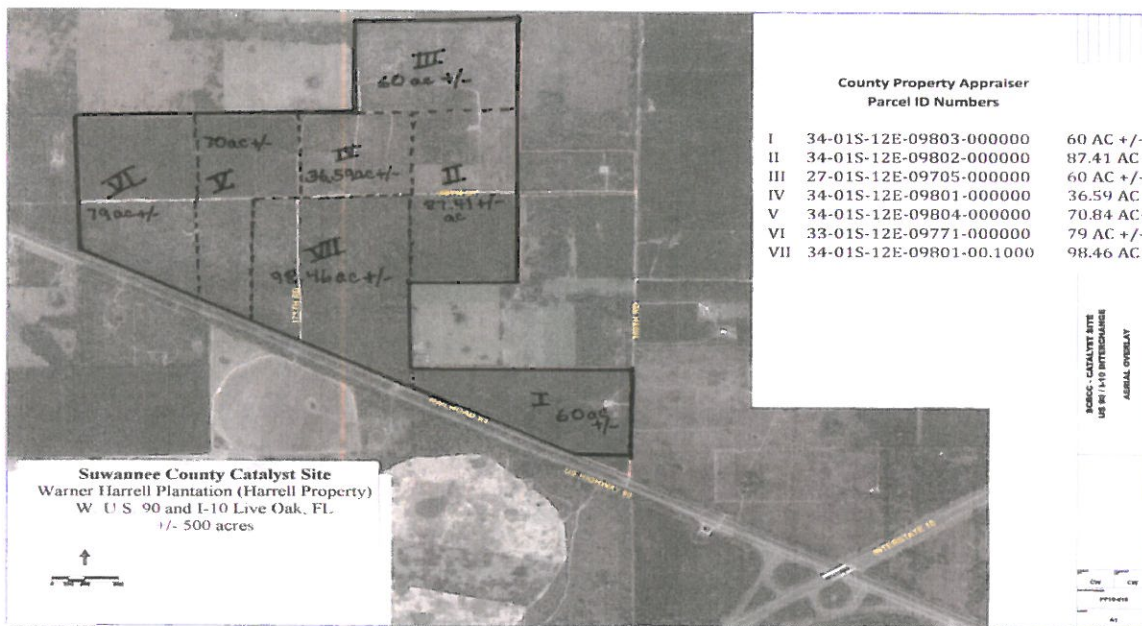


Figure 4. Parcel map of the 500- acre Suwannee County Catalyst Site showing configuration of map in relation to U.S. Highway 90 and the I-10 Interchange.

to determine the infrastructure needed to develop and serve the site. The county and its consultants have continued to adjust site development plans over the past two years to incentivize potential prospects. Suwannee County received a referral on December 23, 2010, from a company proposing to build a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility. Suwannee County and the REDI agencies continue to work diligently with this *confidential* project known as Project Christmas. Suwannee County has continued to prepare for

expedited site development which includes on-site water, wastewater collection and treatment and road and rail improvements. When Project Christmas began their due diligence process, it was apparent that a different rail design was required. A railroad engineering firm is in the process of preparing a conceptual plan for the entire Catalyst Site. Also, during the past year, further surveying and testing has been completed on the property that includes: topographic and boundary surveys, preliminary geotechnical exploration and a Phase I Environmental Assessment. Permitting requirements have been studied and pre-permitting coordination has occurred so that when the project announcement is made, all permitting can be expedited. During this time, there have been three other companies that have expressed an interest in locating at the Catalyst Site. One of these is a wood product manufacturer and the others are companies that grow, process and distribute agricultural products. Suwannee County continues to work with these potential projects as well.

Northwest RACEC (NW RACEC)

Calhoun County Catalyst Site

Calhoun County, in conjunction with the City of Blountstown, the Town of Altha and the Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce prepared a conceptual site plan for the Calhoun County Catalyst Site. The county is working with Preble-Rish (PRI) and reports the following accomplishments:

- Prepared an overview of the hydraulic water model of the Catalyst Site and city's water systems.
- Prepared the Catalyst Site Utility Master Plan Report, which identifies all the needed utility improvements to support the development.
- PRI has completed 100 percent of the design and construction drawings and permit applications.
- All permit applications have been submitted and all permits and Notices of Intent have been received.
- A funding meeting was held to discuss potential funding sources for the proposed improvements.
- \$300,000 has been identified to begin construction of building-ready sites in Fall 2012 on Lots 1 and 2, consisting of grading and drainage improvements with existing utilities sufficient to serve these lots.

As more funding becomes available the remaining elements of the project will be constructed.

South Central RACEC (SC RACEC)

Sebring, Highlands County Catalyst Site

The 100-acre SC RACEC Catalyst Site is adjacent to the Sebring Airport in Highlands County and will provide an ideal business location for a regional commercial/industrial park. The Sebring Airport Authority received a \$992,844 Rural Infrastructure Grant from DEO to complete a feasibility study for design and engineering cost estimates for construction of storm water ponds, utilities, road improvements that was completed in September 2011. Engineering plans include roadway, stormwater, utility and site grading design. Environmental resource permitting has been completed through the South Florida Water Management District and the Department of Environmental Protection. The airport layout plan has been updated and approved through the Federal Aviation Administration.

The plan package for the catalyst site is now complete and ready to be placed “on the shelf” until potential businesses and further funds have been identified for bidding and construction. Prior to bidding, the plans and specifications will need to be re-packaged to reflect a phased construction approach, as needed, to matching available funding. Once funds have been secured, the plans and specifications can be repackaged and bid within 60 days. The construction permits are valid for 5 years. Water and sanitary lines will still need to be permitted through DEP once a contractor has been selected and construction has begun.

REDI ACTIVITIES

REDI provides improved access to local, state, and federal resources and addresses issues facing rural communities. The following are highlights of activities reported by the REDI agencies during July 1, 2011 through June 20, 2012:

Florida Department of Economic Opportunity

Division of Community Development

The Rural Program is housed within the Division and three positions are dedicated to assisting the rural areas of the state with their economic development activities including the coordination of the REDI agencies and administration of the Regional Rural Development grant, Rural Infrastructure grant and Rural Revolving Loan programs.

- **Grants**
 - ✓ **Rural Infrastructure Grants:** A total of \$1,581,244 for feasibility and engineering studies was awarded during the reporting period to the following communities:
 - City of Blountstown, Calhoun County - \$300,000 for the NW RACEC Catalyst Site.
 - City of Gretna, Gadsden County - \$215,000 for the Equestrian Facility.
 - Suwannee County - \$1,066,244 for the NC RACEC Catalyst Site.
 - ✓ **Regional Rural Development Grants:** A total of \$135,000 was awarded to regional economic development organizations in the NC RACEC to build the professional capacity of the organizations.
 - ✓ **Technical Assistance Grants:**
 - Taylor County received \$47,000 to update the county's comprehensive plan and land development code.
 - The City of Freeport in Walton County received \$25,000 for development of their community visioning plan.
- **Governor Scott's Roundtable Tour** - the REDI Rural Coordinator accompanied Governor Scott on a multiple rural county Question & Answer Roundtable tour held from June 4 - 12, 2012. Separate meetings were held in 14 rural counties and included local government officials, business leaders, economic development professionals and educators representing Gadsden, Jackson, Washington, Holmes, Calhoun, Liberty, Bradford; Union, Baker, Hamilton, Suwannee, Columbia, Okeechobee, Highlands, Glades and Hendry Counties.
- **Strike Team Visits** - coordinated by REDI and composed of DEO staff, as well as other state agencies, stakeholders and Enterprise Florida, brought together to assist in addressing specific issues, were made to the following RACEC sites:
 - ✓ **Putnam County:** The DEO Strike Team toured the St. Johns River State College, the Putnam Community Medical Center, the Putnam Community Business Park, the Palatka Municipal Airport, the Georgia Pacific factory, the Putnam County barge port and downtown Palatka. The team discussed the role of agriculture and the current challenges and opportunities with respect to agriculture in the county. Also discussed were other shovel ready sites such as the WalMart distribution center and the water and wastewater issues associated with eastern Putnam County.
 - ✓ **City of Marianna and Jackson County:** Home Source International, which manufactures and sells bedding products and towels, is headquartered in Atlanta and desires to move its headquarters, manufacturing and warehousing to Jackson County. Estimates are that this business would create 303 jobs, phased in over several years. The DEO Strike Team discussed

grants and incentives available to rehabilitate the existing facility and infrastructure, as well as job training for potential employees. Subsequently, Enterprise Florida, Inc. and the Division of Strategic Business Development created an incentives package and DEO staff helped to determine CDBG funding. The project was approved for \$1.4 million from the Quick Action Closing Fund and the contract between Enterprise Florida, Inc., DEO and Home Source International was finalized. Additionally, the City of Marianna has received \$2.4 million in CDBG funds for infrastructure improvements.

- ✓ **Calhoun County:** The DEO Strike Team visited the NW RACEC Catalyst Site, to assist with plans for the inland economic development project focused on logistics and distribution as a priority target. Technical assistance for amending the comprehensive plan to expand the County's Industrial Park, where the catalyst site is located, by 310 acres was provided. Based on the number of jobs created in the initial phase, the Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce is expecting an average annual economic impact of \$38 million to the region.
- ✓ **Suwannee County:** The DEO Strike Team visited the North Central RACEC Catalyst site to assist the County with a potential end user, Project Christmas.
- ✓ **Gulf County and the City of Port St. Joe:** The DEO Strike Team visited with representatives of Gulf County, the City of Port St. Joe and the Port St. Joe Port Authority to discuss redevelopment and infrastructure needs of the City's downtown and approximately 150 acres of undeveloped port property. Since the visit, the DEO Strike Team has coordinated with city officials on an update to the Port Master Plan and Port Element in the city's comprehensive plan. They have also explored the funding options available for replacing the area's substandard potable water distribution system and a portion of this funding has already been awarded to the city. DEO is also assisting to identify funding to pay for an update of the Port Master Plan. The Port Authority and its partners are taking a fresh look at the area's potential to generate local, regional and statewide economic benefits. Also, the Eastern Shipbuilding Group, with 500 anticipated jobs, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Port Authority and the St. Joe Company to locate there.
- ✓ **Madison County:** The DEO Strike Team saw first-hand the results of Madison County's ongoing planning and economic development initiatives. While visiting the Nestle water bottling facility, representatives shared the factors considered in choosing Madison County for plant operations. The DEO Strike Team also visited the Smithfield chicken processing plant, which will become home to a new hot dog processing facility. The tour also included a visit with members of the North Florida Workforce Development Board to see the region's employment training facilities. DEO staff has since provided the county with additional

information on the process for amending its Enterprise Zone boundary and obtaining marketing assistance from Enterprise Florida.

- **Sector Planning** - Bureau of Community Planning staff provided technical assistance and approved two conversions of a large-scale plan amendment into Sector Planning Areas pursuant to section 163.3245(11), F.S., for the following areas:
 - ✓ **Hendry County:** (Rodina Sector Plan) covering 25,826 acres, allowing 21,000 residential units, and 4,350,000 sq. ft. of non-residential uses and 400 hotel rooms.
 - ✓ **Nassau County:** (East Nassau Community Plan) covering 22,675 acres, allowing 24,000 residential units and 11 million sq. ft. of non-residential uses. In addition, DEO staff assisted in providing examples and drafting language for the agreement.
- **Glades County** - Bureau of Community Planning staff provided assistance in the development of an Economic Development Element for the county's comprehensive plan.

Division of Strategic Business Development - Section 20.60, F.S. charges DEO's Division of Strategic Business Development with development of the first-ever statewide strategic plan for economic development. Specific provisions for the stimulation of economic development and job creation in rural areas, including strategies for rural marketing and the development of infrastructure in rural areas are required. The plan is community driven and created by consensus building among Florida's diverse stakeholders. In order to accomplish this, DEO staff held dozens of workshops throughout the state to gather recommendations for the plan, from February through April 2012. Florida's rural communities were represented at each of these forums, in addition to a day-long, interactive, rural-specific workshop, held on March 14, 2012, sponsored by Opportunity Florida and REDI. Going forward, the Florida Strategic Plan for Economic Development will serve as a framework for statewide planning efforts. Having the rural voice incorporated into this guiding document ensures that they continue to have a seat at the economic development table.

Workforce Florida, Inc. - charged with overseeing the state's workforce system, Workforce Florida, Inc., a statewide, business-led workforce policy board, develops strategies to help Floridians enter, remain and advance in the workforce while supporting economic development priorities and strengthening the state's business climate. Examples of funding for customized training to existing for-profit businesses that are important in the rural areas are the Incumbent Worker and Quick Response Training grants, providing funding for customized training to new or expanding businesses.

Florida Department of State

Division of Cultural Affairs

- *Shands Arts in Medicine, “Arts in Healthcare for Rural Communities”* project continues the dissemination of arts in healthcare programs in rural Florida communities. The project has developed arts in healthcare programs in Franklin, Gulf, Calhoun and Columbia Counties. This project has included development and implementation of programs, documentation of a model for arts in healthcare program development on a national level, development of tools for program dissemination and an annual Arts in Healthcare training for rural communities. Expansion of this project established five new rural communities, including Bradford, Jackson and Okeechobee Counties.

Division of Library and Information Services

Several statewide programs benefit REDI counties and communities as follow:

- **Florida Electronic Library (FEL)** is a gateway to select Internet resources that offers access to comprehensive, accurate and reliable information. It offers information for all age groups, including homework help for students and resources for teachers. FEL also offers access to business resources.
- **Small Business Resource Center** is home to the entire *Business Plans Handbook* series, which contains hundreds of sample business plans created by real life entrepreneurs. The database also includes nearly 200 business journals – both specialty/vertical market and general business.
- **DemographicsNow** offers demographic information, including income, housing, race, age, education, consumer expenditures and more, so that users have immediate access to untapped opportunities to significantly enhance their current business intelligence.
- **Florida Memory Project** presents a selection of historical records that illustrate significant moments in Florida history, educational resources for students of all ages and archival collections for historical research. The Online Classroom on the Memory Project website is designed to help educators use photographs, documents, sound recordings and film footage from the State Library and Archives of Florida.

Counting all types of libraries – such as school media centers, small municipal libraries, academic libraries, and public libraries – FEL and Florida Memory serve 247 individual libraries within 16 public library systems in REDI-eligible counties and communities.

VISIT FLORIDA - topic-based tourism webinars are provided by the Industry Relations Department to small businesses on how to engage in VISIT FLORIDA marketing programs. The presenters provided expert knowledge about tourism marketing trends to 134 businesses from RACEC communities that participated in VISIT FLORIDA webinars during the reporting period. A free web listing opportunity for Florida tourism-based businesses was also provided to the 736 businesses from RACEC and/or rural communities that participated. In addition, 222 tourism industries from RACEC and/or rural counties and communities engaged as partners with VISIT FLORIDA during this time.

Florida Regional Planning Councils - serve on economic development organization boards; prepare grant applications for federal and state infrastructure funds for economic development projects on request; and can administer revolving loan funds. Technical assistance in the area of community development is also provided and may include: preparation of comprehensive plan amendments; rezoning applications; variances and ordinances; development proposals; evaluation and appraisal assessments; land development regulations; water supply plans and special permits and exceptions.

Apalachee Regional Planning Council (ARPC) - what is being called the largest solar farm in the southeastern U.S. is locating in Gadsden County. The company, National Solar Power, will partner with Tallahassee Community College to create a solar energy educational and training center that will feature a 2MW utility scale solar farm in Gadsden County. The solar project is anticipated to create 400 jobs during the five-year construction period and up to 120 permanent operation jobs. National Solar Power and Liberty County also entered into a 100MW solar energy project agreement. It is estimated that project will create up to 100 jobs during the five-year construction phase and up to 25 permanent operations jobs.

Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC) - the “Year of Economic Engagement” is a coordinated effort between the CFRPC, the Heartland 2060 Consortium, Heartland Workforce, Florida’s Heartland Regional Economic Development Initiative and Polk Vision that targets regional collaboration and furthers common economic development goals and activities. The Heartland 2060 Vision plan is serving as the foundation for Building Blocks of the Heartland, which harnesses goals and principals of education, workforce and economic development. These efforts tie together the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which analyzes the regional economy and creates a road map to economic diversity through private sector investment and job creation, with the Florida Eight, which builds regional capacity, job and business retention, international diversification, and empowers regional collaboration. Additionally, the CFRPC assisted DEO in hosting a regional forum, including its rural counties, in the Florida Statewide Strategic Plan for Economic Development effort.

West Florida Regional Planning Council (WFRPC) - the activity in the Brownfields Revolving Loan and Assessment programs extends into many rural communities enabling communities to speed their recovery from sites where the harmful impacts of hazardous or petroleum related exposure would have persisted for years or decades. The recently awarded assessment portion of the grant was activated this year by a project in the Town of Century in northern Escambia County. The WFRPC has been instrumental in developing new and improved housing opportunities in the rural areas with the Affordable Housing Program. This program, administered through the Federal Home Loan Bank system, provides a large percentage of the dollars awarded directly into homes in the rural area. Last year, approximately \$287,000 was expended in rural areas to supplement on-going state housing programs.

North Central Florida Regional Planning Council (NCFRPC) - has been actively engaged in developing the two catalyst sites in the NC RACEC. The NCFRPC is a member of the North Florida Economic Development Partnership and serves on the Partnership's Board of Directors. The NCFRPC is the lead agency in preparing a \$3 million Florida Small Cities Community Development Block Grant application for infrastructure improvements to enable a private business to create 350 jobs by locating at the site. The NCFRPC also successfully prepared a grant application to secure a \$1.1 million Florida Rural Infrastructure Grant for the Suwannee County Catalyst Site project.

Water Management Districts

South Florida Water Management District - continues to work with Glades, Highlands, Okeechobee and Hendry Counties, as well as the Cities of Belle Glade, South Bay and Pahokee, to provide input on water resource management issues to local government comprehensive plans, Development of Regional Impacts and 10-Year Water Facilities Work Plans. Staff also provides technical information to the communities regarding topics linked to water resources, including flood control, water supply, restoration initiatives and stormwater management. Additionally, the District provides funding for local stormwater projects, environmental restoration projects, alternative water supply projects, water conservation projects and outreach initiatives.

Florida Department of Transportation

- **Growth Management** - The Florida Department of Transportation (DOT) participates as a review agency and provides technical assistance to the rural areas in the comprehensive planning process. An example is the assistance provided to South Bay in August/September 2011 with a transportation impact analysis for Future Land Use Map amendments, including a 100-acre annexation. Efforts included working with city staff and planning consultant to determine the parcels affected and the development potential for each.

- **Freight & Goods Movement** - The 2008 Inland Port Facility market analysis from Phase II of the South Florida Inland Port Feasibility Study was updated to reflect current economic trends. The results indicate that statewide demand projections for an Intermodal Logistics Center increased to 145 million square feet and that 30 to 35 percent could be built in the South Florida area, including the REDI communities of Belle Glade, South Bay and Pahokee.
- **Heartland Rural Mobility Plan Implementation** - The goal of the Heartland Rural Mobility Plan is to provide rural public transportation, particularly to support job training, education, and jobs-related transportation. During this reporting period, District One continued its partnership with the CFRPC for Heartland Rural Mobility Plan implementation. The CFRPC hired a Mobility Manager through DOT administered Federal Transit Administration mobility management grants.
- **Other Projects**
 - ✓ **Belle Glade/South Bay** - DOT planted trees and palms to shade a sidewalk that was installed in conjunction with a roadway resurfacing project in a prior year with funding in the amount of \$41,896.
 - ✓ **Pahokee** - DOT District Four Design staff attended a Pahokee Visioning Day event. Staff participated in a work tour of Pahokee to learn about and observe transportation issues and what transportation improvements would benefit the city. Review was provided for a proposed canal pedestrian bridge and boardwalk at Canal Point, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Pahokee. Safe Routes to Schools (federal safety grant) information was provided to Pahokee that could improve safety for students walking to school.
- **Suwannee County** - DOT is under contract with Suwannee County to provide funding to design and construct widening and a turn lane from U.S. 90 into the Catalyst Site. DOT is handling the necessary rail crossing upgrade on behalf of Suwannee County.

Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission - Technical assistance was provided to landowners and local governments in the rural counties during the reporting period. This technical assistance included 1,820 written fish and wildlife and growth management related reviews for comprehensive plan amendments and permit applications through the Land Use Planning Program. It also included wildlife-related technical assistance, conservation planning, and financial assistance documentation to landowners through the Landowner Assistance Program.

Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Division of Aquaculture

- **Franklin County:** The Division of Aquaculture provided training to 243 individuals to obtain an Apalachicola Bay Oyster Harvesting License for the first time. In addition, the Division contracted with the Franklin County Board of County Commissioners to rehabilitate oyster reefs by providing \$224,000 to plant about 1,600 cubic yards of processed oyster shells in Apalachicola Bay in Franklin County. The project will be completed in August 2012.
- **Wakulla:** The Division of Aquaculture contracted with the Wakulla County to rehabilitate oyster reefs by providing \$49,820 to relocate 22,142 bushels of oysters in Wakulla County.

Additional Agency Activities: Participating REDI agencies have submitted activity data to DEO, including preferential awards and waivers granted along with various forms of financial and technical assistance. These REDI activities have been electronically compiled into a statewide list that can be sorted by RACEC region, county, agency, awards, grants or waivers and is available upon request.

Additional information regarding the Rural Economic Development Initiative is available from:

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APPENDIX A: Economic Distress Factors for Rural Counties⁸

Overall Rural County Rank	County	Per Capita Income	Avg Annual Wages	Transfer Payments as % of Personal County Income	% in Poverty	Per Capita Taxable Value	Avg Just Value Residential	Avg Annual Unemployment Rate %	Employment Stability	Composite Rank
1	Dixie	\$22,140	\$28,641	37.9%	26.6	\$29,225	\$59,126	12.8	0.55	67
2	Madison	\$20,817	\$29,237	33.2%	23.4	\$31,938	\$65,804	11.5	0.72	66
3	Levy	\$27,895	\$27,892	31.9%	27	\$42,287	\$75,728	11.3	0.58	65
4	Hendry	\$26,088	\$31,936	22.7%	26.7	\$43,842	\$64,034	14.4	2.47	64
5	Calhoun	\$18,421	\$27,861	30.8%	22.1	\$24,817	\$68,213	9.5	0.60	63
6	Okeechobee	\$24,455	\$31,425	29.4%	22.3	\$39,416	\$68,537	11.7	0.94	62
7	Hamilton	\$27,985	\$39,119	35.6%	30.8	\$48,632	\$55,208	11.3	0.68	61
8	DeSoto	\$27,380	\$31,936	28.8%	32.9	\$41,512	\$72,531	9.9	1.13	60
9	Washington	\$27,355	\$30,508	33.1%	21.1	\$34,102	\$67,527	10.9	0.51	59
10	Hardee	\$29,682	\$28,943	25.0%	30.3	\$53,570	\$60,524	10.3	1.35	58
11	Holmes	\$25,550	\$27,108	33.7%	22.5	\$20,253	\$59,160	8.2	0.45	57
12	Highlands	\$28,222	\$29,295	33.0%	20.7	\$47,788	\$86,844	10.4	0.75	55
12	Gadsden	\$25,236	\$31,964	28.1%	23.8	\$28,109	\$80,690	10.3	0.57	55
14	Lafayette	\$22,240	\$27,687	22.6%	26	\$24,875	\$67,907	8.1	0.47	54
15	Punam	\$19,349	\$34,503	33.3%	26.7	\$47,077	\$85,239	11.9	0.47	53
16	Liberty	\$28,630	\$30,859	23.5%	22.9	\$24,739	\$58,795	8.3	0.48	52
17	Glades	\$30,601	\$37,164	20.2%	21	\$43,160	\$66,890	10.2	1.08	50
17	Jackson	\$24,091	\$31,570	30.8%	19	\$28,525	\$69,451	8.1	0.63	50
19	Gilchrist	\$25,824	\$29,737	23.4%	21	\$34,657	\$80,624	9.8	0.67	49
20	Suwannee	\$22,957	\$28,244	31.8%	20.9	\$34,164	\$78,492	9.3	0.44	48
21	Union	\$23,782	\$33,075	26.2%	24.3	\$14,221	\$69,714	8.2	0.40	46
22	Taylor	\$27,454	\$36,470	28.5%	20.6	\$52,838	\$72,865	10.9	0.55	45
23	Jefferson	\$25,684	\$28,413	25.2%	18.5	\$36,419	\$92,268	8.9	0.56	42
24	Baker	\$31,904	\$30,733	24.9%	17.5	\$28,812	\$93,265	9.9	0.46	41
25	Bradford	\$28,711	\$30,843	25.0%	19.4	\$28,978	\$86,376	8.8	0.41	39
26	Columbia	\$28,544	\$33,274	27.5%	19.5	\$33,493	\$89,561	9.7	0.40	38
27	Gulf	\$27,821	\$32,590	29.7%	21.1	\$92,260	\$125,231	10.2	0.54	37
28	Flagler	\$43,010	\$30,847	25.0%	15.5	\$68,176	\$139,623	14.1	0.54	35
29	Wakulla	\$26,885	\$30,819	18.6%	14.1	\$35,543	\$96,651	8.3	0.41	29
30	Franklin	\$24,836	\$28,100	26.5%	24.2	\$164,459	\$191,733	7.9	0.34	27
31	Sumter	\$18,620	\$34,921	42.8%	13	\$68,452	\$141,545	8.5	0.36	26
32	Walton	\$23,400	\$30,673	18.7%	16.5	\$197,320	\$232,295	7.1	0.64	15
33	Nassau	\$27,306	\$38,380	15.7%	11.3	\$89,627	\$195,272	9.6	0.74	10
	Statewide	\$38,210	\$42,311	18.8%	16.5	\$68,039	\$157,068	10.5	0.46	—

⁸ Provided by DEO, Division of Workforce Services, Labor Market Statistics, see description of fields attached.

APPENDIX A: Economic Distress Factors for Rural Counties

1. **Per capita income** – This is 2010 personal income from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) divided by Census Bureau midyear population estimates. These estimates reflect county population estimates available as of April 2012. Counties may have large personal income differences simply because of population differences. These population differences make comparisons of personal income among counties difficult. By dividing by population, one can compare the per person personal income of counties regardless of differences in size. **A declining per capita income is a sign of distress.**
2. **Average annual wage** – This is the 2011 average annual wage for all industries and all ownerships (private, federal, state, and local) in a particular county. This number comes from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages program (QCEW) of the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Labor Market Statistics Center. **A shrinking average annual wage is a sign of distress.**
3. **Transfer payments as a percentage of personal income** – This is calculated by first taking the sum of 2010 retirement and disability insurance benefits, medical benefits, income maintenance benefits, and unemployment insurance compensation from BEA. This sum is then divided by BEA 2010 personal income and multiplied by 100. **A growing share of personal income could be a sign of distress, especially if it is driven by income maintenance and unemployment compensation.**
4. **Poverty** – This is the 2010 percentage of the population in poverty from the U.S. Census Bureau. This number comes from the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates program (SAIPE). The definition of the poverty thresholds can be found at: www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/about/overview/measure.html. **An increasing percentage is a sign of distress.**
5. **Per capita taxable value** – Taxable value is defined by the Florida Department of Revenue as the assessed value of property minus the amount of any applicable exemption provided under s. 3 or s. 6, Art. VII of the State Constitution and chapter 196. Per capita taxable value is 2011 taxable value from the Florida Department of Revenue divided by 2011 population estimates from the Bureau of Economic and Business Research of the University of Florida. The per capita taxable values are provided by the Florida Legislature's Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR). **It is hard to say whether or not this is a sign of distress by looking at this field in isolation.** Per capita taxable value could increase if people left the county and decrease if people moved in to the county and there was no change in taxable value.
6. **Average just value of residential property** – Just value is the assessed value of property. This field is the total of the just values for six residential property types divided by the sum of the parcel counts for the six property types. This calculation is performed for each county and the state.
7. **Average annual unemployment rate** – This is the 2011 average unemployment rate from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics Program (LAUS). **A growing unemployment rate is a sign of distress.**
8. **Employment stability** – This is the standard deviation of the LAUS unemployment rate for 2011. **A large unemployment rate standard deviation indicates greater volatility in the unemployment rate and is a sign of distress.**