



# Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

*Five Year Plan 2017-2022*

*Southeast Alabama Economic Development District  
Barbour, Coffee, Covington, Dale, Geneva, Henry and Houston Counties*



*October 2017*



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## The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Overview

This is the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Five-Year Plan for the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (SEARP&DC) prepared in accordance with U.S. Economic Development Administration guidelines. The CEDS contributes to effective economic development in America's communities and regions through a locally-based, regionally-driven economic development planning process. The CEDS should successfully serve as a means to engage community leaders, leverage the involvement of the private sector, and establish a blueprint for regional collaboration.

The CEDS planning process is intended to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency throughout the multi-county district for area residents. The CEDS planning process provides the opportunity for individuals, organizations, local governments, institutes of learning and private industry to engage in meaningful conversation and debate about what capacity building efforts would best serve economic development in the region.

A CEDS is required for designation by EDA as an Economic Development District (EDD). Furthermore, regions must update their CEDS at least every five years to qualify for EDA assistance under the Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance programs. The CEDS is a document and a process of analysis, planning, and taking action to generate new economic development activity and improve community infrastructure and services.

The purpose of the CEDS is to establish a process that will help create jobs, attract public and private investments, promote a more stable and diversified economy, and improve living conditions in the region. Having this plan in place allows for better coordination among individuals, organizations, local governments and private industries concerned with economic development. This strategy is based upon a set of specific goals and objectives designed to address various economic challenges of the region, prepared through the local planning process. The regional strategy was developed with broad-based and diverse community participation that addresses the economic problems and potential for the area.

The SEARP&DC along with the CEDS committee developed the CEDS Five-Year Plan 2017-2022. The development of the five-year CEDS was a multi-faceted process, involving input from community, businesses, government, human and health services, and the financial sector, compiled in an effort to identify the region's priorities and overseeing implementation of the plan. The planning process included the development of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) survey that was completed by partners throughout the region in order to prepare the SWOT analysis and develop the action plan by reviewing and updating existing goals, objectives and action.

The CEDS document consists of the following:

1. *CEDS Planning Process*: A description of the Planning Process
2. *Summary Background*: A summary background of the economic conditions of the region;



3. *SWOT Analysis*: An analysis of regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats;
4. *CEDS Action Plan*: The strategic direction and action plan developed from the SWOT analysis and other regional plans in the development of the CEDS.
5. *CEDS Implementation and Performance Measures*: An outline of SEARPDC's implementation plan and performance measures towards meeting the CEDS overall goals.



## Executive Summary

The Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (SEARP&DC) was created in June 1969 and is located in the extreme Southeast corner of Alabama. Elected officials and civic leaders initiated action to join several counties together in a common cause to promote and improve the economic status of all citizens residing in the six-county area. The counties consisted of Barbour, Coffee, Dale, Geneva, Henry and Houston, and the initial byline of the organization was “Planning Today to Preclude Problems of Tomorrow”.

The organization was originally known as the Southeast Alabama Economic Development District. The name was changed to the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission with the addition of Covington County in 1971. The commission now consists of a seven county area and is dedicated to the theme of “Progress through Planning”.



SEARP&DC has a staff of 183 individuals: Executive Director; Economic Development Director; Economic Development Specialist; Executive Secretary; Fiscal Director and 2 fiscal assistants; IT Director; Human Resources Director; 20 employees in the Transportation Department, including Director; 79 employees in the Senior Aides Department, including Director; and 75 employees in the Early and Head Start Department, including Director.

Services provided by SEARP&DC include:

- Grant Services – SEARP&DC assist communities in the district with grant writing and grant administration. SEARP&DC has written and administered hundreds of state and federally-funded grant projects. The Economic and Community Development Departments assist communities with Community Development Block Grants, Economic Development Administration grants, Economic Development Infrastructure grants, Planning Fund grants, USDA/Rural Development grants, FEMA grants including Hazard Mitigation, Firefighter Assistance and Law Enforcement grants, Land and Water Conservation Fund and Recreational Trail grants, and Industrial Access grants.
- Economic Development – The Economic Development Department provides vital development assistance through various grant and small business loan programs which assist start-up and expanding businesses and industries create permanent jobs for the



region. SEARP&DC manages 3 types of small business loan programs including the Intermediary Relending Program, Revolving Loan Fund and Microloan Program.

- Community Development – The Community Development Department provides a variety of planning services including: comprehensive planning, zoning ordinance creation and revision, transportation planning, land use planning, subdivision regulation planning and mapping services.
- Rural Planning Organization (RPO) – SEARP&DC oversees the Southeast Alabama RPO, which is a consultation process that emphasizes communication and transmittal of information between ALDOT and rural areas of the state for rural transportation planning. The last federal transportation bill, SAFETEA-LU, has provisions for states to allow consultation for rural transportation planning outside of urbanized areas.
- Head Start and Early Head Start– SEARP&DC operates 5 Head Start centers and 2 Early Head Start centers within the region. This effort directly touches the lives of over 300 children and their families. Head Start works toward bringing about a greater degree of social competence in pre-school age children of low income families. The program provides two meals and one snack per day and yearly medical, dental, eye and mental health examinations.
- Senior Employment Program – The Senior Employment Program places senior adults in host agencies throughout the region. Currently, SEARP&DC serves over 80 senior adults. Senior adults are afforded opportunities for growth, skill enhancement and economic independence. Participants must be age 55 or older and incomes based on the federal poverty level.
- Wiregrass Transit Authority – WTA provides transportation services to the general public in Dothan and Houston County. WTA also provides contract transportation to social services agencies within the Houston County and Dothan area.

SEARP&DC is governed by a 42-member Board of Directors, seven of which are at-large members. Each county in the EDD is represented by five directors. The Executive Director is responsible for the overall administration of all departments and personnel. SEARP&DC also has a Fiscal Department that is responsible for tracking and monitoring all costs.

SEARP&DC is a designated Economic Development District. Economic Development Districts are designated by EDA to create and retain full-time permanent jobs and increase income for the unemployed and underemployed in areas of economic distress. The following Five-Year Plan was a collaboration of over 40 people who participated in the development of this strategy.

### **Summary by Chapter**

**CEDS Planning Process:** Chapter 1 describes the planning process used to develop the CEDS. The Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (SEARP&DC) leads the CEDS process and adopts the plan on behalf of the region. SEARP&DC includes 7 counties



and 57 towns/cities in the southeast corner of Alabama. The SEARP&DC Board of Directors together with local mayors, county commission chairpersons and economic development corporations act as the CEDS Strategy Committee.

The role of the CEDS Committee is to provide the SEARP&DC Region with a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and project priorities. The CEDS process is driven by the CEDS Committee and involves setting goals, examining options to reach them, and the selection of courses of action. It is a continuous process designed to guide the economic growth of the Region.

The purpose of the CEDS Planning Process is to think and organize the activities required to achieve a desired goal. Planning involves the creation and maintenance of a plan. The planning process also includes forecasting or predicting what the future will look like. The development of the goals, strategies, and task lists was undertaken by the CEDS Committee to achieve the objectives of the CEDS.

Finally, there was a 30-day public comment period. The public had the opportunity to comment on the planning process as well as the priority projects. The draft report was posted on SEARP&DC's website, [www.searpc.org](http://www.searpc.org). There were no public comments received. The completed CEDS document was presented to the SEARP&DC Board of Directors and adopted.

**CEDS Regional Analysis:** Chapter 2 draws attention to trends that make the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission Economic Development District unique. The regional analysis consists of sets of methods that allow us to measure the dimensions and dynamics of the SEARP&DC population. Demographic analysis estimates are often considered a reliable standard for judging the accuracy of the census information gathered at any time. In the labor force, demographic analysis is used to estimate sizes and flows of populations of workers. Demographic analysis is used in a wide variety of contexts.

**CEDS SWOT Analysis:** Chapter 3 describes the SWOT analysis. Staff prepared a SWOT survey and submitted to mayors, county commissioners, economic developers, institutions of higher learning, chambers of commerce, utilities, etc. The SWOT was completed to identify what the Region does well, needs work on, challenges and opportunities. The regional economic development goals are the foundation of the CEDS. The CEDS Committee developed 5 goals.

**CEDS Strategic Direction and Plan of Action:** Chapter 4 is the economic development strategy for the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission Economic Development District over the next five years. Chapter 4 includes the vision statement which communicates both the purpose and values of the region. The CEDS Strategic Direction focuses on five regional goals, objectives and strategies. The CEDS Plan of Action is derived from these five regional goals.

**Implementation and Performance Measures:** Chapter 5 outlines the plan for implementation and for the annual evaluation of specific projects listed and the CEDS as a whole. Quantitative and qualitative measures have been identified for the projects.



**Economic Resilience:** Chapter 6 highlights Economic Resilience by discussing the framework for Economic Resilience that provides an approach for becoming better prepared for future disasters, including economic, manmade and natural, recovering from disasters, and then transitioning back to steady-state.

In summary, as you will read the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission region faces many of the same problems found in other rural areas including, loss of manufacturing jobs, lack of infrastructure, impacts of service industry jobs that do not pay living wages, a culture that is reliant on grant assistance in solving local problems, increasing operating costs for businesses and an aging workforce.

However, the SEARP&DC region has a lot to offer including a well-maintained state road network, numerous natural resources, effective training and education alignments. The level of leadership is a strength to the region and essential to creating a more economically independent region. The region has a foundation of assistance organizations that facilitate the growth and retention of local businesses and both communication and coordination are increasing. Coordination of their efforts will insure that the greatest possible progress is made toward shared and complimentary goals. The process of formulating the CEDS, and then using it as a resource into the future, will aid that coordination.

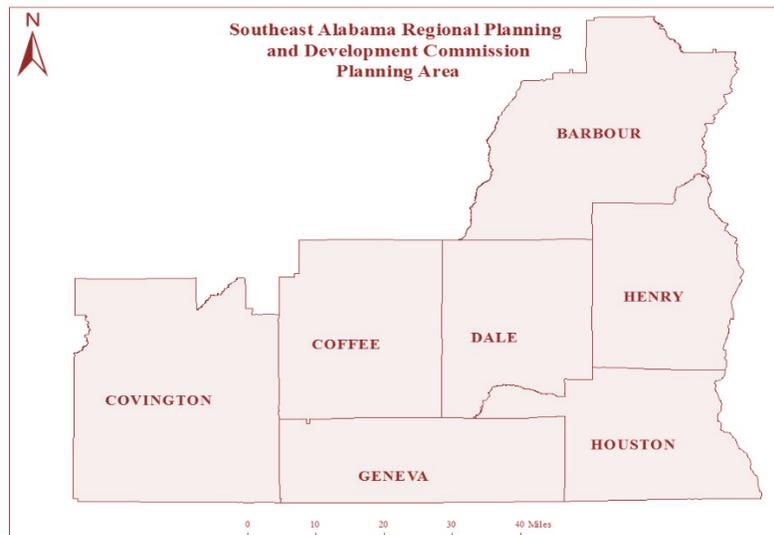


## CHAPTER 1 CEDS PLANNING PROCESS

### **The Southeast Alabama Region**

The Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission was created by Legislative Act 1126 in 1969 and is one of twelve regional councils in the state of Alabama. That act, with subsequent amendments, has provided the statutory authority for the operation of the regional councils in Alabama since that time. Much of the impetus for the creation of regional planning organizations in Alabama came from the passage of the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965 which provided for the establishment of Economic Development Districts (EDDs). Administrative funding was provided through the Economic Development Administration (EDA) for operation of districts tasked with responsibilities for strategic policy development to address economic development and quality of life issues on a multi-jurisdictional basis.

The Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission consists of 7 counties and 57 towns/cities.



### **The CEDS Planning Structure**

The SEARP&DC is the regional planning agency for the southeast Alabama region. The SEARP&DC is governed by a 42-member board representing all of the seven counties in the region. The Commission is supported by a staff of full and part-time employees in the areas of Economic Development, Community Development, Transportation, Senior Employment, Head Start and Accounting/Administration.

The Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission provides staff support to the CEDS Committee. The Economic Development Director is the CEDS Project Manager.



The SEARP&DC staff is responsible for but not limited to the following:

- ✓ Arrange and Facilitate the CEDS Committee meetings
- ✓ Provide various demographic data to assist in analysis, including employment, unemployment, population, housing, building permits and income statistics
- ✓ Gather data and record input from members and prepare meeting minutes
- ✓ Guidance and support in the development of goals and objectives
- ✓ Final organization and preparation of the CEDS
- ✓ Submit final document to CEDS Committee Members for approval

The SEARP&DC CEDS staff consists of the Executive Director, Economic Development Director, Economic Development Specialist, and Executive Secretary. One staff member is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma Economic Development Institute course. Two staff members are National Development Council Certified Economic Development Finance Professionals. In addition, one staff member is a graduate of the Community Development Institute and is a Professional Community and Economic Developer. SEARP&DC continues to expand and diversify by encouraging staff to further professional development training.

Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission
<u>Board of Directors</u> 24 Elected Officials 12 Business Executives 1 Chamber of Commerce Representative 5 Education Representatives 13 Minorities
<u>CEDS Staff</u> Executive Director Economic Development Director Economic Development Specialist II Executive Secretary

### **CEDS Strategy Committee**

The CEDS Committee for the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission District consists of forty-two members representing the public and private sectors. The Committee includes representation from local governments, economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, financial institutions, real estate companies, community colleges, vocational-technical schools, farming associations and local private businesses. The Committee represents all stakeholders as required by the CEDS process to make certain that viewpoints of the entire district have been considered and that local skills and resources have been utilized.

The role of the CEDS Committee is to provide the SEARP&DC Region with a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and a Plan of Action. The CEDS process is driven by the CEDS Committee and involves setting goals, examining options to reach them, and the selection of courses of action. It is a continuous process designed to guide the economic growth of the District.

The mission of the CEDS Strategic Committee is to emphasize regional cooperation and collaboration, support existing business, encourage development of new technologies and promote the regional workforce.



## **Community and Private Partnerships**

There have been many efforts in recent years to enhance the relationship between the public and private sector in the Southeast Alabama region. The private sector has become much more involved in the community and the CEDS.

### **Southeast Alabama Council for Economic Development (SEACED)**

The Southeast Alabama Council for Economic Development was formed in 1994 by regional economic developers. SEACED has 25 members made up of public and private sector organizations. Many of these members are involved in the CEDS process and in assisting with the implementation by fostering job creation through business recruitment.

### **Wiregrass Incubator Alliance**

In 2007, SEACED applied for and received a USDA/Rural Development grant to create the Wiregrass Incubator Alliance. The Wiregrass Incubator Alliance is comprised of regional Incubator Managers. Grant funds have been used to purchase marketing supplies including banners, brochures, pens, and trade show booths. The Wiregrass Incubator Alliance joined the National Business Incubator Association (NBIA). The Alliance has conducted several seminars including a Home-based Business Seminar and a Government Contracting Seminar.

### **Grow Dothan**

Grow Dothan is a public/private partnership for economic development for Dothan, Houston County, and the Wiregrass. Its mission is to work with businesses, governmental entities and citizens to build a thriving regional business network.

### **The Wiregrass Foundation**

This is a private foundation that promotes philanthropy and a spirit of giving in the region. The mission of the Wiregrass Foundation is to energize the spirit and potential of our local community through charitable investments that will have significant, measurable impact on our health, education and quality of life. The Wiregrass Foundation has provided grant funds to the SEARP&DC Dothan/Houston County Microloan program, as well as SEACED, to fund the development of a regional economic development marketing plan.

### **Southeast Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO)**

The RPO is a consultation process that emphasizes communication and transmittal of information between ALDOT and rural areas of the state for rural transportation planning. The last federal transportation bill, SAFETEA-LU, has provisions for states to allow consultation for rural transportation planning outside of urbanized areas.

### **Southeast AlabamaWorks!**

The mission of the Southeast AlabamaWorks is to facilitate implementation of the programs and services that support economic and workforce development in the region. Each program's ultimate goal is to address the workforce needs of new and existing businesses and industries. The council is business led and market driven and is an integral part of a comprehensive workforce development system serving individuals and employers.



## CHAPTER 2 CEDS REGIONAL ANALYSIS

The Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission Region consists of the seven most southeastern counties of Alabama. The counties are Barbour, Coffee, Covington, Dale, Geneva, Henry, and Houston. These counties include fifty-seven towns or cities. The land area of the Southeast Alabama Region is 3,117,740 acres and is predominately rural.

### Population

The population of the Southeast Alabama Region is estimated at 311,709 in 2016. Below is a table that shows the population of the seven counties and the fifty-seven towns or cities in the Southeast Alabama Region.

<i>Barbour County</i>				
<b>JURISDICTION</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>% CHANGE 00-10</b>	<b>2016</b>
<i>BARBOUR COUNTY</i>	29,038	27,457	-5.4%	25,965
<i>BAKER HILL</i>	329	279	-15.2%	261
<i>BLUE SPRINGS</i>	121	96	-20.7%	91
<i>CLAYTON</i>	1,475	3,008	103.9%	2,904
<i>CLIO</i>	2,206	1,399	-36.6%	1,470
<i>EUFAULA</i>	13,908	13,137	-5.5%	12,404
<i>LOUISVILLE</i>	612	519	-15.2%	477

<i>Coffee County</i>				
<b>JURISDICTION</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>% CHANGE 00-10</b>	<b>2016</b>
<i>COFFEE COUNTY</i>	43,615	49,948	14.5%	51,226
<i>ELBA</i>	4,185	3,940	-5.9%	3,893
<i>ENTERPRISE</i>	21,178	26,562	25.4%	28,024
<i>KINSTON</i>	602	540	-10.3%	539
<i>NEW BROCKTON</i>	1,250	1,146	-8.3%	1,157

<i>Covington County</i>				
<b>JURISDICTION</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>% CHANGE 00-10</b>	<b>2016</b>
<i>COVINGTON COUNTY</i>	37,631	37,765	0.4%	37,458
<i>ANDALUSIA</i>	8,794	9,015	2.5%	8,968
<i>BABBIE</i>	627	603	-3.8%	600
<i>CAROLINA</i>	248	297	19.8%	296
<i>FLORALA</i>	1,964	1,980	0.8%	1,952
<i>GANTT</i>	241	222	-7.9%	221
<i>HEATH</i>	249	254	2.0%	255
<i>HORN HILL</i>	235	228	-3.0%	227
<i>LIBERTYVILLE</i>	106	117	10.4%	114



<b>LOCKHART</b>	548	516	-5.8%	514
<b>ONYCHA</b>	208	184	-11.5%	183
<b>OPP</b>	6,607	6,659	0.8%	6,586
<b>RED LEVEL</b>	556	487	-12.4%	485
<b>RIVER FALLS</b>	616	526	-14.6%	523
<b>SANFORD</b>	269	241	-10.4%	245

<b>Dale County</b>				
<b>JURISDICTION</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>% CHANGE 00-10</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>DALE COUNTY</b>	49,129	50,251	2.3%	49,226
<b>ARITON</b>	772	764	-1.0%	741
<b>CLAYHATCHEE</b>	501	589	17.6%	573
<b>DALEVILLE</b>	4,653	5,295	13.8%	5,101
<b>GRIMES</b>	459	558	21.6%	542
<b>LEVEL PLAINS</b>	1,544	2,085	35.0%	2,006
<b>MIDLAND CITY</b>	1,703	2,344	37.6%	2,366
<b>NAPIER FIELD</b>	404	354	-12.4%	344
<b>NEWTON</b>	1,708	1,511	-11.5%	1,459
<b>OZARK</b>	15,119	14,907	-1.4%	14,610
<b>PINCKARD</b>	667	647	-3.0%	627

<b>Geneva County</b>				
<b>JURISDICTION</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>% CHANGE 00-10</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>GENEVA COUNTY</b>	25,764	26,790	4.0%	26,614
<b>BLACK</b>	202	207	2.5%	207
<b>COFFEE SPRINGS</b>	251	228	-10.1%	227
<b>GENEVA</b>	4,388	4,452	1.5%	4,424
<b>HARTFORD</b>	2,369	2,624	10.8%	2,638
<b>MALVERN</b>	1,215	1,448	19.2%	1,437
<b>SAMSON</b>	2,071	1,940	-6.3%	1,912
<b>SLOCOMB</b>	2,052	1,980	-3.5%	1,956

<b>Henry County</b>				
<b>JURISDICTION</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>% CHANGE 00-10</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>HENRY COUNTY</b>	16,310	17,302	6.1%	17,164
<b>ABBEVILLE</b>	2,987	2,688	-10.0%	2,603
<b>HALEBURG</b>	108	103	-4.6%	101
<b>HEADLAND</b>	3,523	4,510	28.0%	4,741
<b>NEWVILLE</b>	553	539	-2.5%	517

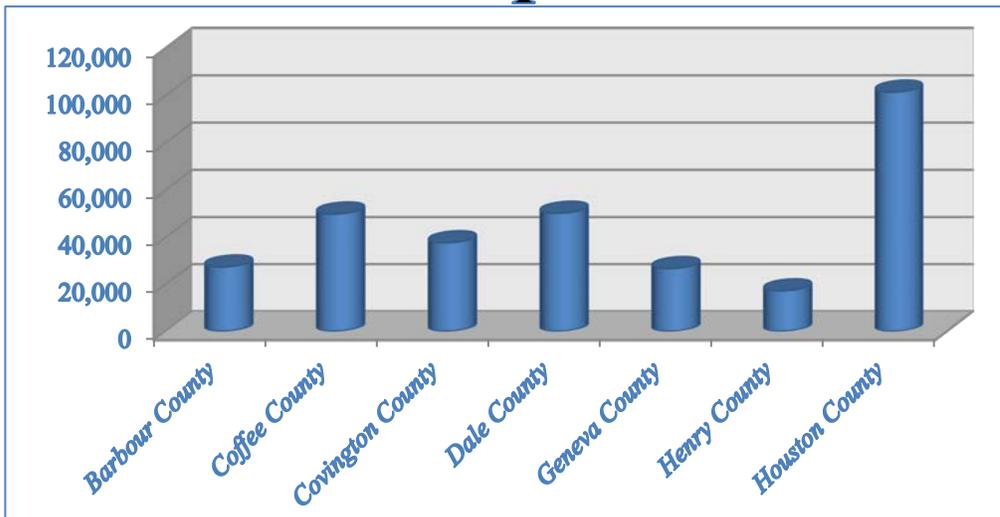
<b>Houston County</b>				
<b>JURISDICTION</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>% CHANGE 00-10</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>HOUSTON COUNTY</b>	88,787	101,547	14.4%	104,056



<b>ASHFORD</b>	1,853	2,148	15.9%	2,149
<b>AVON</b>	466	543	16.5%	505
<b>COLUMBIA</b>	804	740	-8.0%	729
<b>COTTONWOOD</b>	1,170	1,289	10.2%	1,255
<b>COWARTS</b>	1,546	1,871	21.0%	1,994
<b>DOTHAN</b>	57,737	65,496	13.4%	68,468
<b>GORDON</b>	408	332	-18.6%	327
<b>KINSEY</b>	1,796	2,198	22.4%	2,187
<b>MADRID</b>	303	350	15.5%	338
<b>REHOBETH</b>	993	1,297	30.6%	1,482
<b>TAYLOR</b>	1,898	2,375	25.1%	2,393
<b>WEBB</b>	1,298	1,430	10.2%	1,396

As seen in the above tables, the counties with growth in population since 2010 are Coffee and Houston Counties. The Southeast Alabama Region experienced minimal growth of 0.21% since 2010. To see a comparison, the below graph of the population of the Region's counties was created.

## 2016 Population





Characteristics of the Region’s population are shown in the below table. In the Region, 73 percent of the people are white, 4 percent are Hispanic or Latino, and 50.6 percent are females. The median age of the Southeast Alabama Region is 40.2, which is higher than Alabama’s median age of 38.4.

	<i>Barbour</i>	<i>Coffee</i>	<i>Covington</i>	<i>Dale</i>	<i>Geneva</i>	<i>Henry</i>	<i>Houston</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Alabama</i>
Population (2015)	26,932	50,884	37,886	49,866	26,815	17,252	103,534	313,169	4,830,620
White	12,756	39,067	31,954	37,232	23,195	12,140	72,170	228,514	3,325,464
Black	12,595	8,829	4,933	9,798	2,387	4,891	27,359	70,792	1,276,544
Asian	244	627	117	588	329	0	792	2,697	59,599
American Indian/Alaska Native	52	475	171	258	87	0	383	1,426	23,850
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0	0	23	10	0	0	35	68	2,439
Other	928	398	170	593	303	67	853	3,312	61,078
Two or more Races	357	1,488	518	1,387	514	154	1,942	6,360	81,646
Hispanic or Latino	1,241	3,276	580	2,980	973	429	3,338	12,817	193,492
Non Hispanic or Latino	25,691	47,608	37,306	46,886	25,842	16,823	100,196	300,352	4,637,128
Male %	53.8%	49.5%	48.4%	49.5%	49.1%	47.9%	47.9%	49.4%	48.5%
Female %	46.2%	50.5%	51.6%	50.5%	50.9%	52.1%	52.1%	50.6%	51.5%
Median Age	38.8	38.8	42.6	36.8	42.2	43.0	39.0	40.2	38.4

The total number of households in the Southeast Alabama Region is 143,896. The number of occupied households for each county in the region is as follows: Barbour County – 9,222; Coffee County – 19,160; Covington County – 14,949; Dale County – 19,018; Geneva County – 10,754; Henry County – 6,894; and Houston County – 39,197.

**Income**

Per Capita Income is the average income or income per person and is a measure of mean income within an economic aggregate, such as a county or city. Per Capita Income is often used as a measure of wealth of the population of an area in comparison to other areas. The following table shows the per capita income for the Southeast Alabama Region’s counties, Alabama, and the United States.

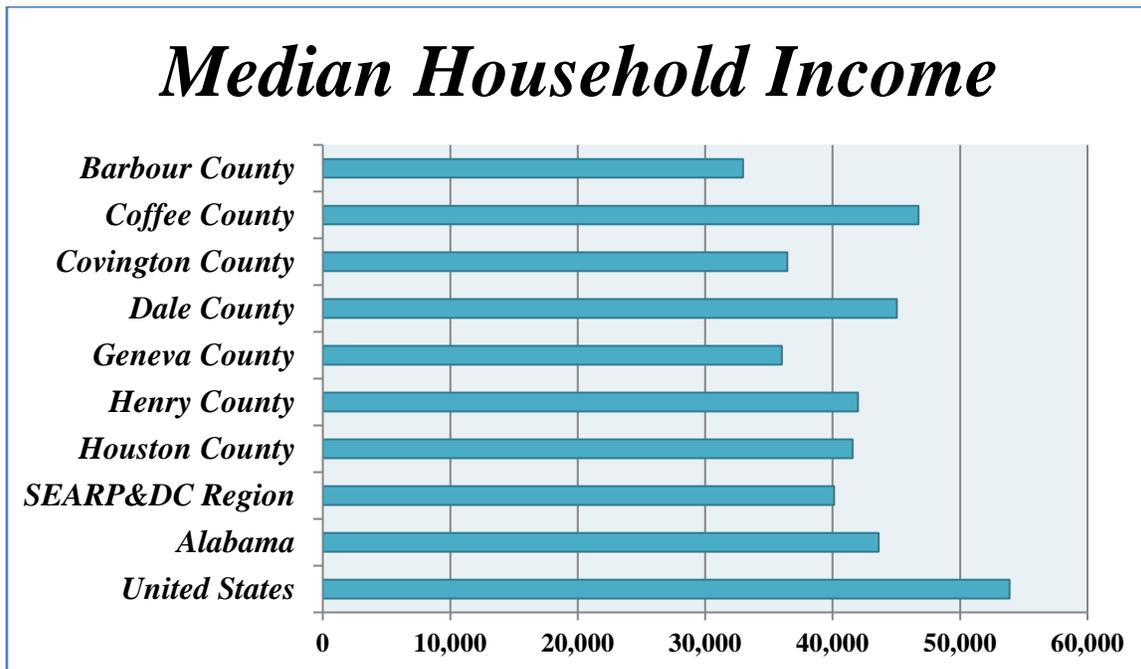
<i>Per Capita Income</i>	
<i>Barbour County</i>	\$16,824
<i>Coffee County</i>	\$24,936
<i>Covington County</i>	\$20,977
<i>Dale County</i>	\$22,566



<b>Geneva County</b>	\$20,224
<b>Henry County</b>	\$22,931
<b>Houston County</b>	\$23,925
<b>Southeast Alabama Region</b>	\$21,769
<b>Alabama</b>	\$24,091
<b>United States</b>	\$28,930

All of the counties in the Southeast Alabama Region except Coffee County have a per capita income lower than that of Alabama. All of the counties in the Region have a per capita income lower than the United States.

The Southeast Alabama Region’s median household income is \$40,108, which is lower than that of Alabama and the United States. This was calculated by averaging the seven counties’ median household income. However, Coffee County and Dale County have median household incomes higher than Alabama. All counties in the Region have lower median household incomes than the United States. The graph below shows the comparison.



The Poverty Rate is the percentage of people who are below poverty. Poverty is the state of privation or lack of usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions. The United States Poverty Rate in 2015 was 15.5%. The Alabama Poverty Rate in 2015 was 18.8%. As seen in the following table, the poverty rates for Barbour County, Covington County, Dale County, and Geneva County are higher than the United States Poverty Rate and the Alabama Poverty Rate. The Southeast Alabama Region Poverty Rate of 20.0% is higher than both also.



<b>Poverty Rate</b>	
<b>Barbour County</b>	26.7%
<b>Coffee County</b>	17.1%
<b>Covington County</b>	20.2%
<b>Dale County</b>	19.1%
<b>Geneva County</b>	23.2%
<b>Henry County</b>	15.6%
<b>Houston County</b>	18.3%
<b>Southeast Alabama Region</b>	20.0%
<b>Alabama</b>	18.8%
<b>United States</b>	15.5%

**Education**

The percentage of individuals 25 years old and older with a high school diploma or higher in the Southeast Alabama Region is 80.8%; which is lower than the Alabama percentage of 84.3% and the United States percentage of 86.7%. Thus 19.2% of the Region’s individuals 25 years and older do not have a diploma or equivalent. The following table gives the percentages for each county.

<b>Percentage of Individuals 25 years old and older with High School Diploma or More</b>	
<b>Barbour County</b>	73.3%
<b>Coffee County</b>	84.6%
<b>Covington County</b>	79.8%
<b>Dale County</b>	85.4%
<b>Geneva County</b>	79.0%
<b>Henry County</b>	78.8%
<b>Houston County</b>	84.7%
<b>SOUTHEAST ALABAMA Region</b>	80.8%
<b>Alabama</b>	84.3%
<b>United States</b>	86.7%

The Southeast Alabama Region’s education system is comprised of approximately 108 public schools and 33 private schools. Also, 7 colleges are located in the Region as seen below.

<b>Colleges in SOUTHEAST ALABAMA Region</b>	
<b>College</b>	<b>County</b>
<i>George C. Wallace Community College</i>	<i>Barbour County and Houston County</i>
<i>Enterprise State Community College</i>	<i>Coffee County</i>
<i>Lurleen B. Wallace Community College</i>	<i>Covington County</i>
<i>Alabama Aviation College</i>	<i>Dale County</i>
<i>Troy University</i>	<i>Houston County</i>
<i>Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine</i>	<i>Houston County</i>



**Workforce**

The Southeast Alabama Region has a total civilian labor force available of 127,016. The Region’s current average unemployment rate is 5.2%, which is higher than the unemployment rate of Alabama (4.5%) and the United States (4.3%). The average yearly wage for the Region is \$35,703. The top three industry sectors ranked by greatest employment for the Southeast Alabama Region are Manufacturing, Retail Trade, and Health Care and Social Assistance. These three sectors employ 42,047 people in the Southeast Alabama Region. Tables and charts below show the labor force, unemployment rate, average yearly wage, and top three sectors of each county located in the Southeast Alabama Region.

	<i>Civilian Labor Force</i>	<i>Current Unemployment Rate</i>	<i>2016 Average Unemployment Rate</i>	<i>Unemployment Rate One Year Ago</i>
<b><i>Barbour County</i></b>	8,185	6.7%	8.6%	9.4%
<b><i>Coffee County</i></b>	20,688	4.8%	6.1%	6.2%
<b><i>Covington County</i></b>	15,602	5.8%	7.0%	7.3%
<b><i>Dale County</i></b>	19,984	4.8%	5.9%	6.2%
<b><i>Geneva County</i></b>	11,064	4.5%	5.9%	6.0%
<b><i>Henry County</i></b>	6,778	5.0%	6.6%	6.8%
<b><i>Houston County</i></b>	44,715	4.6%	5.9%	6.1%
<b><i>Southeast Alabama Region</i></b>	127,016	5.2%	6.6%	6.9%

As seen from the previous table, the Southeast Alabama Region’s current unemployment rate has decreased by 1.7% since the same time last year; whereas, Alabama’s unemployment rate has decreased by 1.4% and the United States’ unemployment rate has decreased by 0.6% in the last year.

***Unemployment Rate***





<b>Average Annual Wage</b>	
<b>Barbour County</b>	\$34,580
<b>Coffee County</b>	\$32,292
<b>Covington County</b>	\$33,800
<b>Dale County</b>	\$52,520
<b>Geneva County</b>	\$31,044
<b>Henry County</b>	\$36,920
<b>Houston County</b>	\$38,740
<b>Southeast Alabama Region</b>	\$37,128
<b>Alabama</b>	\$43,420
<b>United States</b>	\$51,428

As seen from the previous table, the average annual wage of the Southeast Alabama Region of \$37,128 is lower than that of Alabama and the United States.

<b>Top 3 Industry Sectors</b>			
<b>Barbour County</b>	Manufacturing	Government	Retail Trade
<b>Coffee County</b>	Manufacturing	Government	Retail Trade
<b>Covington County</b>	Manufacturing	Government	Retail Trade
<b>Dale County</b>	Government	Manufacturing	Retail Trade
<b>Geneva County</b>	Government	Retail Trade	Manufacturing
<b>Henry County</b>	Government	Manufacturing	Health Care and Social Assistance
<b>Houston County</b>	Government	Retail Trade	Health Care and Social Assistance
<b>Southeast Alabama Region</b>	Government	Manufacturing	Retail Trade

Alabama's top three industry sectors are Federal, State, and Local Government, Manufacturing, and Retail Trade. The Southeast Alabama Region has the same top three industry sectors. Total average employment of all industries in the Southeast Alabama Region is 108,771. The following table shows the average employment of several industries in the Southeast Alabama Region.

<b>Average Employment</b>	
<b>Federal, State, and Local Government</b>	22,109
<b>Manufacturing</b>	17,044
<b>Retail Trade</b>	15,941
<b>Health Care and Social Assistance</b>	13,009
<b>Accommodation and Food Services</b>	9,660



**Infrastructure**

Southeast Alabama Region’s infrastructure is examined in this section of the CEDS. The Region’s water supply and sewer facilities, business and manufacturing space, telecommunications/ broadband, transportation and energy distribution systems are reviewed.

➤ Water and Sewer Facilities

The following table shows communities throughout the Region that have and do not have community water and sewer services. Most communities have received state and federal funding through the years to install new infrastructure or improve existing infrastructure including water tanks and wells, sewage treatment plants, water and sewer mains and streets. Most communities simply cannot afford to construct or maintain infrastructure without assistance from state and federal agencies. The majority of the available funding is awarded on a competitive basis and some communities do not meet the eligibility requirements for assistance. Most of the communities in the Region are in need of infrastructure improvements, including street paving and resurfacing. More funding is needed to meet these needs throughout the Region.

**Water and Sewer Facilities by County**  
**Source: Communities**

<b>Barbour County</b>	<b>Water</b>	<b>Sewer</b>
Baker Hill	Yes	No
Blue Springs	Yes	No
Clayton	Yes	Yes
Clio	Yes	Yes
Eufaula	Yes	Yes
Louisville	Yes	Yes

<b>Covington County</b>	<b>Water</b>	<b>Sewer</b>
Andalusia	Yes	Yes
Babbie	Yes	No
Carolina	Yes	No
Florala	Yes	Yes
Gantt	Yes	No
Heath	Yes	No
Horn Hill	Yes	No
Libertyville	Yes	No
Lockhart	Yes	Yes
Onycha	Yes	No
Opp	Yes	Yes
Red Level	Yes	No
River Falls	Yes	No
Sanford	Yes	No

<b>Houston County</b>	<b>Water</b>	<b>Sewer</b>
Ashford	Yes	Yes
Avon	Yes	No
Columbia	Yes	Yes
Cowarts	Yes	Yes
Dothan	Yes	Yes

<b>Coffee County</b>	<b>Water</b>	<b>Sewer</b>
Elba	Yes	Yes
Enterprise	Yes	Yes
Kinston	Yes	No
New Brockton	Yes	Yes

<b>Dale County</b>	<b>Water</b>	<b>Sewer</b>
Ariton	Yes	Yes
Clayhatchee	Yes	No
Daleville	Yes	Yes
Grimes	Yes	Yes
Level Plains	Yes	No
Midland City	Yes	Yes
Napier Field	Yes	Yes
Newton	Yes	Yes
Ozark	Yes	Yes
Pinckard	Yes	No

<b>Geneva County</b>	<b>Water</b>	<b>Sewer</b>
Black	Yes	No
Coffee Springs	Yes	No
Geneva	Yes	Yes
Hartford	Yes	Yes
Malvern	Yes	No
Samson	Yes	Yes
Slocomb	Yes	Yes

<b>Henry County</b>	<b>Water</b>	<b>Sewer</b>
Abbeville	Yes	Yes
Haleburg	Yes	No



Gordon	Yes	Yes
Kinsey	Yes	Yes
Madrid	Yes	No
Rehobeth	Yes	No
Taylor	Yes	Yes
Webb	Yes	Yes

Headland	Yes	Yes
Newville	Yes	Yes

➤ Business/Manufacturing Space (Industrial Parks)

The Southeast Alabama Economic Development Region has five (5) small business incubators. These centers provide affordable space for lease, professional support staff, and internet access to new and expanding businesses.

1. Covington County Business Development Center – Andalusia/Opp Airport (Covington County)
2. Enterprise Business Incubator – Enterprise (Coffee County)
3. Mixson Business Center – Dothan (Houston County)
4. Ozark-Dale County Technology Center – Ozark (Dale County)
5. East Gate Business Park – Ozark (Dale County)

Industrial parks are a tremendous asset to communities in new industry recruitment by providing integrated infrastructure in one location. The Region has several industrial parks and available buildings that are advertised on state websites, [advantagealabama.com](http://advantagealabama.com), and local websites. Most of the parks have water, sewer and electricity available. Rail service is available at some parks, as well.

Barbour County

Eufaula Industrial Park (Eufaula); Lakepoint Industrial Park (Eufaula)

Coffee County

Coffee County Industrial Park (Elba); Yancey Parker Industrial Park (Enterprise); Yancey Parker Industrial Park Phase II (Enterprise)

Covington County

Floralia Industrial Park (Floralia); Huggins Southern Industrial Park (Andalusia); Opp Industrial Park (Opp); South Alabama Regional Airport Industrial Park (Andalusia); Sutton Road Industrial Park (Andalusia)

Dale County

Dothan Airport Industrial Park (Dothan); Ozark Corporate Park (Ozark)

Geneva County

Geneva County Industrial Park (Hartford)

Henry County

Abbeville Industrial Park (Abbeville)



### Houston County

Ashford Industrial Park (Ashford); Golf Creek Business Park (Dothan); Houston County Port Authority Industrial Park (Columbia); Westgate Industrial Park (Dothan); Houston County Distribution Park (Dothan)

#### ➤ Telecommunications/Broadband

The lack of quality broadband is one of the biggest threats to the rural areas of the Southeast Alabama Region. Many of the communities in southeast Alabama lack access to high-speed broadband internet. The State of Alabama has made efforts to upgrade the state's broadband infrastructure in rural and underserved areas of the state and the Region has benefitted from these efforts, but there remains a long way to go. Troy Cablevision, Inc. was recently awarded over \$26 million to deploy a fiber-optic network to provide a critical new broadband route between four southeast Alabama counties, including Coffee and Dale County, and provide a key internet point of presence in Dothan. However, the Region remains at a great disadvantage in economic development without high speed internet in rural areas. In economic development recruitment, high speed internet is just as important as water and electricity. Furthermore, the digital divide is widening, where there is a lack of access to high-speed internet leaving rural students and schools further behind.

The Alabama Legislature passed the "WIRED Act" in 2016, which provides \$12 million in funding so that Alabama public school systems can get the matching dollars to apply for federal technology dollars in working to provide wireless broadband access in all of the state's K-12 public schools. While steps are being made, rural broadband access remains an issue among the legislature with some lawmakers seeing the importance of broadband and others do not.

Dothan, the largest city in Region, is a very competitive market, with almost 20 internet providers and the City of Enterprise has 16 providers; however, these are not representative of the entire Region. The biggest reason that high-speed broadband internet is lacking in rural southeast Alabama is the prohibitive cost of installing the infrastructure. Expanding broadband is very expensive. As the Region looks to the future, nevertheless, adequate broadband infrastructure is essential for local and regional economic growth.

According to broadbandnow.com, no one in Barbour County has access to a fiber optic broadband connection and approximately 12,000 people (46% of county population) do not have access to even the minimum 25 mbps wired broadband. In Coffee County, fiber optic is available to 63% of Coffee County residents and only 6,000 (12% of county population) do not have access to the minimum 25 mbps wired broadband. Over 75% of the citizens in Andalusia, which is the largest city in Covington County, are serviced by multiple wired providers and only about 2,000 people that reside in the County do not have access to some type of service. Only 1,000 people (2% of county population) in Dale County do not have access to any wired internet. Geneva County has approximately 12,000 people (45% of county population) that do not have access to at a minimum 25 mbps wired broadband. In Henry County, around 8,000 people do not have access to even the minimum 25 mbps wired broadband, which is 47% of the county



population. Houston County has approximately 15,000 people (14% of the county population) that do not have access to at a minimum 25 mbps wired broadband.

Adequate broadband technology will provide for a more prosperous future for our children, allowing them to integrate technology into their classrooms and studies at home. High speed internet will improve healthcare by providing rural doctors with access to physicians at larger facilities in the United States through telemedicine. High-speed internet access also affords businesses the opportunities to work more efficiently and create jobs by bringing more employers and opportunities to rural communities.

➤ Transportation

A quality transportation infrastructure is important to economic development. Without a comprehensive and maintained infrastructure along which to move goods and other resources between industries and users, the area in question will not be appealing to a company that wants to move or expand in that area. The Southeast Alabama Region has a mixture of roads, rail, air, and water transportation. This section evaluates these modes of transportation within the Southeast Alabama Region.

Roadway

The Southeast Alabama Region does not have any existing interstates within it. Interstate Highway 10 (I-10), a primary route across the southern United States, passes 15 miles south of Houston County (35 miles from Dothan). Interstate Highway 65 (I-65), an important route between the Gulf Coast and the Great Lakes, passes 10 miles northwest of Covington County (30 miles from Andalusia). These two areas are the nearest to the interstate highway system in the Southeast Alabama Region. Many visitors travel down the interstate system to Montgomery and then travel U.S. 231, a four-lane highway, south through Dale and Houston Counties to connect with I-10. U.S. 231 is a heavily traveled highway and in some locations has a higher traffic count than the nearby interstates. Federal highways are present in every county in the region but Geneva County.

It is obvious from viewing a U.S. Interstate Highway map (Figure 29) that an interstate highway connector needs to be built from Montgomery to I-10. This is in part due to the fact that U.S. 231 was not designed for the increasingly heavy traffic and its quality has diminished over the years. However, improvements are taking place including widening, shoulder paving, turn lanes and road resurfacing. The Dothan bypass, known as the Ross Clark Circle, has been widened to six lanes in portions.

With the continued growth of both Georgia and Florida, there should be excellent regional business and development opportunities for the region. While most of the region is within three to four hours from Atlanta, Birmingham, and Mobile by auto or truck, the proximity of these two emerging states allows for increased activity for interstate commerce and development.

Within the past decade, many highway improvements have taken place and development barriers have been reduced greatly. This has not only helped economic development efforts, but also has created numerous construction jobs throughout the Region providing an economic stimulus to



the area. Continued improvements and additions have become a major priority for the state and for local officials.

### Air

The Southeast Alabama Region has twelve state licensed airports. Runway lengths are from near 3,000 feet in some of the more rural communities to 8,500 feet in Dothan. Andalusia/Opp, Enterprise, and Eufaula all have 5,000-foot runways. The Dothan Regional Airport is the only airport with scheduled passenger service.

Airport industrialized parks exist in Headland, Dothan, Andalusia, and Ozark. Dothan and Andalusia Airport Industrial Parks were EDA funded projects and continue to have favorable economic development potential.

Commercial air service is important to the attractiveness of the region as employee travel is necessary for most businesses. The Dothan Regional Airport currently only offers daily scheduled non-stop jet service connecting to Atlanta, provided by Delta connection regional service ExpressJet. An additional carrier would be advantageous to the customers of the airport. Currently, the Dothan/Houston County Airport Authority has a public awareness program to inform citizens of the importance of planning trips from Dothan rather than the other nearby regional airports located at Panama City, Columbus, and Montgomery. Together with the increased air travel of recreational and occasional travelers, this service is expected to remain for an indefinite period.

The advent of several air based industries in the area over the past few years has greatly enhanced the Region's ability to market itself as an air flight service and maintenance base. The Dothan Regional Airport has industries, such as Commercial Jet, that provide needed services for pilots and airport customers.

### Rail

Railroads have become limited in the Region over the past decade. There is only one primary long haul carrier in the Region: CSX. The Region is also serviced by several "short line" carriers: the Bay Line R.R., the Georgia Southwestern R.R., Wiregrass Central R.R., and the Chattahoochee Bay R.R. Geneva County has no rail service.

With right of ways continuing to be sold, it is unlikely that communities that have lost service will have railroad services in the future, however, the upside to this is that those communities with the remaining rail service are becoming more viable for heavy industrial project sites that require heavy load, long hauling, such as steel mills, fabricators, or other large product manufacturers.

### Water

The Southeast Alabama Region has only one navigable waterway, the Chattahoochee River. State dock facilities are located at Columbia in northern Houston County and Eufaula in Barbour County. There has been considerable discussion among water transportation advocates and organizations about problems related to waterway traffic, particularly the lack of traffic.



The problems surrounding the use of the Chattahoochee River System for agricultural and industrial barge usage are many. First of all, Alabama leaders are in an ongoing feud with Georgia over Georgia's attempt to withdraw more water from the Chattahoochee River and the discharging of large amounts of wastes back into the system that cause effluent levels that fail to meet acceptable standards of water discharge quality. Also related is the lack of sufficient water flow that is necessary in order to maintain the minimal depth of water necessary for barge traffic. This has become an environmental concern to both Alabama and Florida. Florida additionally has numerous other environmental concerns about the dredging and industrial pollutants that affect their fishing industry.

Several other issues are of concern to the waterway including the development of sites along the route. The Houston County Port Authority has over 200 acres of land available adjacent to the state dock facility. This site is adequately served with good highways and the Chattahoochee Bay Railroad. This has excellent potential, but marketing remains dormant at this time. The Eufaula State Docks Facility has very limited acreage available for industrial expansion.

On a positive note, the Chattahoochee, Choctawhatchee, Pea, and Conecuh Rivers, as well as other fisheries throughout the Region, provide valuable recreational and tourism economic development benefits and are all undergoing transition development in which to enhance the usage of these waterways as secondary development markets.

#### Public/Private Transportation

According to *The Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Southeast Alabama Region 2015-2017*, the primary mode of transportation within Southeast Alabama is use of a private vehicle. Within the Southeast Alabama Region, there is a range of transportation options, including public demand-response transit, specialized elderly bus or van programs, and private taxi or charter services. Though these resources exist and provide services to areas within the region, many of these operations are underutilized and can be inefficient. Also, there are many areas that individuals are unable to access those services, due to geography, fiscal circumstances, or disabilities. The limitations in the current system provide a barrier for multiple elements of the population to access essential services. In this era of increasingly limited public funding, increased efficiencies and partnerships are very important to expand transportation options to the citizenry. Increased mobility for individuals may improve local economic conditions by providing increased options for working hours if the transportation is available and quality of life by growing connections to social and health networks. The ability to be mobile and utilize transportation is a vital need for individuals, in order to connect with other people, to reach jobs, education, commerce, and recreation, and for many other needs.

The Southeast Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) is a rural transportation planning process in the areas of Southeast Alabama (Barbour, Coffee, Covington, Dale, Geneva, Henry, and Houston counties) not represented by the Southeast Wiregrass Area Metropolitan Planning Organization. The RPO is sponsored by the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) and the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission to effectively manage the rural transportation planning process. Policy Committee and Technical Coordinating Committee meetings and local public forums are held to gather, maintain, and distribute data related to the transportation planning process and to inform the public of the rural transportation



planning process and to actively seek public involvement. The Southeast Alabama Rural Planning Organization is committed to ensuring public participation in the development of all transportation plans and programs. It is the goal of the RPO that the transportation planning process will be accessible, transparent, and inclusive.

The Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Southeast Alabama Region 2015-2017 is the most recent coordinated transportation planning process, which is in coordination with the ALDOT and the Alabama Association of Regional Councils (AARC). The Plan's primary focus pertains to the needs of the target populations that are more susceptible to transportation challenges. However, the goals for coordinated transportation planning also benefit the general public.

Overall, the Southeast Alabama Region has very significant transportation needs. More than half of the region does not have any service from public transportation agencies. The Southeast Alabama Region is underserved, or not served in many areas, by public transportation services. More than half of the Southeast Alabama Region does not have public transportation services, and the services offered in areas with established public transportation are limited. Currently, there is no public transportation service in three counties within the Southeast Alabama Region: Coffee, Dale, and Geneva. There is limited service in two counties: Barbour and Henry. The Eufaula-Barbour Transit Authority operates in Barbour County, but primarily serves the City of Eufaula only. Wiregrass Transit Authority has partnered with the City of Headland, in Henry County, to provide limited non-emergency medical transportation to Dothan, as Headland is within the Dothan metropolitan area. However, service in Barbour and Henry counties outside of those limited areas is basically non-existing. Covington County has a countywide public transportation system administered by the Covington Area Transit System (CATS). However, their resources are limited and Covington County is a very large spatial area, so many needs are unmet due to those limitations. Houston County has the most comprehensive transportation coverage of the Southeast Alabama Region's seven counties administered by the Wiregrass Transit Authority, but services, especially outside of Dothan are limited.

In many instances there are some resources for transportation of target populations to specific purposes, including nutrition programs or specialized medical services, which may be reimbursed or facilitated through agency contracts. Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom activities may also provide transportation opportunities for the target population groups with the coordination of service agencies and transportation providers.

For most local governments in the Region, including Barbour, Coffee, Dale, Geneva, and Henry counties, the resources required to fund and operate systems are deemed infeasible for the level of use that is estimated. For those local governments that operate public transportation system, including the cities of Dothan and Eufaula and Covington and Houston counties, any expansion of services requires additional local funding, as well.

#### ➤ Energy Distribution Systems

The Southeast Alabama Region is home to the Joseph M. Farley Nuclear Plant, located along the Chattahoochee River near Dothan and is owned by Alabama Power Company and operated by



Southern Nuclear. Farley generates electricity through a pressurized water reactor type system. As people continue to move to the southeastern United States and use greater amounts of electricity, additional power plants using nuclear energy, are needed. Nuclear power plants continue to be an important and strategic energy resource for the United States. Farley is one of the largest employers in the Region, employing approximately 950 people and is a vital economic development resource for southeast Alabama.

The Southeast Alabama Region’s primary energy distribution systems are Alabama Power Company and PowerSouth Energy Cooperative headquartered in Andalusia. PowerSouth provides wholesale power needs to 20 members in Alabama and northwest Florida. Members in the Southeast Alabama Region include Wiregrass Electric Cooperative, Pea River Electric Cooperative, and Covington Electric Cooperative. In addition, some municipalities have energy distribution systems including City of Andalusia, City of Opp, City of Dothan, City of Elba, and City of Hartford.

**Public Safety and Health Care**

According to the U. S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, the Southeast Alabama Region has over 6,200 protective service, fire protection, and law enforcement workers. This does not include the volunteers of these type services in the Region. The Southeast Alabama Region has many health care facilities including: assisted living facilities, end stage renal disease treatment centers, federally qualified health centers, home health agencies, hospitals, independent clinical laboratories, nursing homes, rural health clinics, sleep disorder centers, ambulatory surgical centers, community mental health centers, hospices, independent physiological laboratories, rehabilitation centers, and residential treatment facilities. The following chart lists some of the facilities in our region, county locations, and number of licensed beds.

<b>Health Care Facilities</b>		
<b><u>Facility</u></b>	<b><u>County</u></b>	<b><u>Licensed Beds</u></b>
<b>Medical Center Barbour</b>	Barbour	74
<b>Crowne Health Care of Eufaula</b>	Barbour	180
<b>Medical Center Enterprise</b>	Coffee	99
<b>Enterprise Health &amp; Rehabilitation Center</b>	Coffee	257
<b>Elba Nursing and Rehabilitation Center</b>	Coffee	111
<b>Andalusia Regional Hospital</b>	Covington	88
<b>Mizell Memorial Hospital</b>	Covington	99
<b>Andalusia Manor</b>	Covington	154
<b>Floral Health and Rehabilitation</b>	Covington	85
<b>Opp Health and Rehabilitation</b>	Covington	197
<b>Dale Medical Center</b>	Dale	89
<b>Oakview Manor Health Care Center</b>	Dale	138
<b>Ozark Health and Rehabilitation</b>	Dale	149
<b>Wiregrass Medical Center</b>	Geneva	83
<b>Hartford Health Care</b>	Geneva	86



<b>Wiregrass Rehabilitation Center &amp; Nursing Home</b>	Geneva	96
<b>Henry County Health &amp; Rehabilitation Facility</b>	Henry	142
<b>Flowers Hospital</b>	Houston	235
<b>HealthSouth Rehab Hospital</b>	Houston	51
<b>Laurel Oaks Behavioral Health Center</b>	Houston	38
<b>Noland Hospital</b>	Houston	38
<b>Southeast Alabama Medical Center</b>	Houston	420
<b>Extendicare Health Center</b>	Houston	170
<b>Wesley Place</b>	Houston	166
<b>Westside Terrace Health and Rehabilitation</b>	Houston	165

**Geography, Environment, and Resources**

Geography involves the physical features of an area, the land use of an area, the climate of an area, the environment of an area, and the resources in an area. Natural resources include water, land and location. Land is the primary resource and has a number of basic economic uses including agricultural production, forestry, commercial and residential development, mineral value and recreational use. Lakes, ponds and streams provide utility to the land resources in the Region.

The Southeast Alabama Region is in the Coastal Plain. Soils in the Southern Coastal Plains range from sandy to clayey and from somewhat excessively drained to very poorly drained. The topography in the region is varied, ranging from highly dissected uplands that have high relief to broad, nearly level stream terraces and floodplains along the Chattahoochee and Pea Rivers and other major streams.

According to the Soil Conservation Service and Auburn University, the Southeast Alabama Region comprises the largest contiguous area of prime farmland in Alabama. The predominate soil types are: Troup-Luverne-Dothan-Orangeburg, which is well drained, deep and moderately deep soils on gently sloping to sloping ridgetops and sideslopes. The Luverne soils are clayey and Troup soils have thick (40 to 60 inches) sandy surface layers. These soils are found in eastern and northern **Barbour County**, eastern and western **Henry County**, and over most of **Dale County**. Predominate soils found in central and southern **Henry County**, much of central and southern **Coffee County**, and northern **Covington County** are Orangeburg-Red Bay-Dothan-Troup, which are well drained deep soils on broad gently sloping to sloping ridgetops. Dothan-Orangeburg-Esto, are well drained deep soils on broad nearly level to gently sloping plateaus and are found covering **Houston County**, eastern and western **Geneva County**, and southern **Covington County**.

Problems associated with the Region’s soils include erosion, sedimentation, low fertility, and drought. Sheet erosion of soils in the Region is due primarily to poor farming practices. Low fertility is a characteristic of Coastal Plains soils because the subsoil contains a high sand content that causes rapid leaching of mineral elements. Water holding capacities are also low for the same reason, resulting in drought damage to crops in certain areas during times of either limited



or unevenly distributed rainfall. Most of the problems associated with soil conditions can be overcome with proper planning and conservation techniques.

There is an estimated 1.6 million acres of land in the Region classified as prime farmland. This represents nearly 40% of the total land area in the Region. The Alabama Soil Conservation service describes prime farmland as “land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, fuel, fiber, forage and oilseed crops and is available for these uses. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods”. Some factors considered in classifying prime farmland are adequate soil moisture, favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable pH, few or no rocks, not excessively erodible, not saturated with water for long periods of time, and not prone to frequent flooding events during the growing season.

Agriculture and forest products have sustained the economy of the region and are the main use of the land in the Southeast Alabama Region. Cotton, corn and peanuts are the principal crops. Beef cattle, hogs and dairy cattle are the main livestock enterprises. In addition, Barbour County has experienced significant growth in the pond-raised catfish industry. Forest land use accounts for approximately 67% of the land area in the region. The forest industry provides raw materials for local sawmills and pulp and paper producers.

The Region continues to have a valuable resource in its high quality prime farmland, which could be used as a regional advantage in attracting new and diversified agricultural partners for economic development and job growth. This potential development advantage needs to be fully explored to determine how new investment and jobs can be brought to the region. Diversification efforts have begun and farm producers are looking into new ways to develop additional cash incomes from other crops. These diversification efforts must continue and be accelerated in order to develop new strategies to sustain and grow the agricultural base in the region. With the dramatic end of the peanut quota program, producers are uncertain of the future profitability of peanuts, and other crops may be considered that have the potential of earnings above production costs.

Three main river basin systems flow through Southeast Alabama, which are important water resources for the Southeast Alabama Region. The Apalachicola basin consists of the Chattahoochee and Chipola Rivers in the Region. It encompasses the eastern sections of Barbour, Henry, and Houston counties. The Choctawhatchee basin consists of the Choctawhatchee, Pea, and Yellow Rivers. It encompasses Dale County entirely, nearly all of Coffee and Geneva counties, the western sections of Barbour, Henry, and Houston counties, and southeastern Covington County. The Escambia basin consists of the Conecuh and Blackwater Rivers. It encompasses most of Covington County and a small portion of Coffee County.

The Chattahoochee River is the only navigable waterway in the Region. It has two inland docks, in Eufaula and Columbia. A 9 foot deep by 100 foot wide channel is available to barge traffic at most times. However, times of low water levels occur that impede navigation.



The largest reservoir of the Region, Walter F. George Lake (Lake Eufaula), covers 45,200 acres and borders Barbour and Henry Counties. The lake has the seventh highest visitation of any impoundment in the country. It provides considerable economic benefit to Barbour and Henry Counties. Lake George W. Andrews covers 1,540 acres bordering Henry and Houston Counties. Lake Seminole primarily is in Florida and Georgia, but the Chattahoochee River up to the Andrews Lock and Dam is considered part of that reservoir. All three reservoirs are part of the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River (ACF) system. The ACF system provides hydroelectric power, flood control, and recreation. Currently, there are more than 3,500 man-made small ponds and lakes in the Region that provide water for fish and wildlife, livestock, fire control, spray purposes and recreational uses.

Due to the critical importance of the Region's water resources, maintenance and enhancement need to be coordinated. A regional water authority can address these needs by assessing the quality and supply of water in Southeast Alabama. An authority would also integrate planning and implementation of grants and other forms of funding to coordinate management of the Region's water resources.

The climate of the Southeast Alabama Region consists of long, hot summers because moist tropical air from the Gulf of Mexico persistently covers the area. Winters are cool and fairly short. Precipitation is fairly heavy throughout the year and prolonged droughts are rare. Summer precipitation, mainly in the form of afternoon thunderstorms is usually adequate for all locally grown crops. However, in 2007, 2012, 2013, and 2016, all counties in the Southeast Alabama Region were declared natural disaster areas by the Federal Government due to the persistent drought conditions that the Region had suffered.

The average high temperature for the Southeast Alabama Region is 77.8 degrees. The average low temperature is 53.6 degrees. Therefore, the average temperature for the Region is 65.7 degrees. The average annual total precipitation is about 56 inches. Of this, 36 inches, or about 64 percent, usually falls in March through October. The average seasonal snowfall is 0.3 inches. On an average, less than 1 day per year has at least 1 inch of snow on the ground. The average relative humidity in mid-afternoon ranges from about 45 percent in April to about 60 percent in July and August. Humidity is higher at night, and the average at dawn is about 90 percent in most months.

The Southeast Alabama Region's location provides exposure to several natural hazards. The three natural hazards that are commonly regarded as most significant include flooding, hurricanes, and tornadoes. Other natural hazards that potentially affect the region, at least minimally, include dam failures, drought and extreme heat, wildfires, and winter storms. More explanation of the primary regional hazards are below.

### Flooding

Flooding is the most widespread hazard that occurs in the Southeast Alabama Region, causing substantial property and public infrastructure damage. Flash flooding primarily occurs due to sustained rainfall events (sometimes tropical-related) that overwhelms drainage capacity and can affect the area substantially, potentially affecting most households in the Region. The Choctawhatchee and Pea Rivers, in central areas of the Region, are susceptible to riverine



flooding and have heavily inundated and damaged the Elba and Geneva areas multiple times. Though historically Elba and Geneva have been the regional communities most affected by flooding, other areas along rivers and streams also have some susceptibility to riverine flooding. Riverine flooding can be forecasted over a few days, but flash flooding is normally a quick onset hazard with little warning. Flooding can occur any time of year, but sustained rainfall events are more prevalent in winter and spring, and tropical systems affect the Region during the summer.

### Hurricanes

Portions of the southern periphery of Southeast Alabama are only 50 miles from the Gulf of Mexico, which makes the Region susceptible to hurricanes. Flooding from torrential rains may affect extensive areas and is the primary threat to the Region, while impacts from high winds and weak tornadoes that occur from hurricanes also normally occur. In the past 20 years, approximately ten (10) hurricanes or tropical storms have impacted the Region. Normally, there are a few days of warnings before a hurricane impacts Southeast Alabama, allowing for preparations.

### Tornadoes

The entire Southeast Alabama Region is susceptible to tornadoes. The most likely period for tornadoes are during the spring months from March through May, with a secondary peak of activity in November, but tornadoes have occurred in every month. Tornadoes are the most frequent major hazard in the Region. Tornadoes are possibly more destructive than hurricanes, but their impacts are far more localized.

### Regional Vulnerability

The following table assesses the Southeast Alabama Region's vulnerability based on the geographic breadth of the hazard's impact, the probability of being affected by the hazard, and the magnitude of the damage likely to occur as a result. An explanation of the table is below.

<b>Hazard Ranking for the Southeast Alabama Region</b>				
<b>Type</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Magnitude</b>	<b>Total Rank (Max. Score = 10)</b>
Dam Failure	1	1	2	4
Drought / Extreme Heat	3	2	2	7
Earthquake	3	1	1	5
Flooding	3	3	3	9
Hurricane	3	3	3	9
Landslide	1	1	1	3
Severe Thunderstorm	3	3	1	7
Tornado	3	3	3	9
Wildfire	2	2	3	7
Winter Storm	3	1	1	5

### Location of Impact

**1 = small (isolated)**

**2 = medium (multiple areas)**

**3 = large (widespread areas)**

### Frequency of Occurrence



- 0 = none (no probable occurrence with damage)**
- 1 = low (possible major damage in a 100 year period)**
- 2 = medium (probable major damage in a 10-50 year period)**
- 3 = high (probable major damage in a 1-10 year period)**

Impact of Damage

- 1 = limited (minor injuries; shutdown of critical facilities and services for less than one day; low property damage)**
- 2 = significant (moderate injuries; shutdown of critical facilities for up to one week; severe property damage)**
- 3 = critical (major injuries; shutdown of critical facilities for weeks; severe property damage)**
- 4 = catastrophic (casualties; complete shutdown of facilities for months; total property damage)**

All counties in the Southeast Alabama Region have FEMA-approved and adopted hazard mitigation plans that provide a risk assessment, vulnerability overview, and mitigation goals and strategies for all jurisdictions.

**Military Relations**

Fort Rucker, the United States Army Aviation Center of Excellence, is located in southeastern Coffee and southwestern Dale counties. The main reservation encompasses 57,785 acres, while an additional 3,626 acres are owned outside of the main reservation (aviation facilities), and an additional 1,734 acres are leased. Since Fort Rucker is the training center for U.S. Army aviators, the entire Southeast Alabama Region is part of the “Local Flying Area” of 32,000 square miles (encompassing much of southern Alabama, southwestern Georgia, and northwestern Florida) in which flight operations occur. Fort Rucker is adjacent to the municipalities of Daleville, Enterprise, Level Plains, Newton, and Ozark. The base is occupied by the following military assignments, as well as several U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard units:

- ❖ 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade
- ❖ 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 13<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 13<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 145<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 110<sup>th</sup> Aviation Brigade
- ❖ 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 11<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 14<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 212<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 223<sup>rd</sup> Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 128<sup>th</sup> Aviation Brigade
- ❖ 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 210<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 210<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 222<sup>nd</sup> Aviation Regiment
- ❖ Directorate of Evaluation and Standards



- ❖ Directorate of Simulation
- ❖ Directorate of Training and Doctrine
- ❖ Noncommissioned Officers Academy

The cantonment area is on the southern periphery of Fort Rucker. Much of the remaining reservation is undeveloped, with the exception of scattered aviation facilities. Fort Rucker is primarily forested, with plentiful water resources, including rivers, streams, lakes, and wetlands throughout the reservation. Fort Rucker has a substantial environmental compliance program, and is involved with the Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS), which promotes regional conservation efforts by promoting sustainable operations, resource conservation, and compatible development around military properties.

Military training in the area to become Fort Rucker (then known as Camp Rucker) began early in World War II, when the U.S. Army trained several divisions on property that was purchased by the federal government in the 1930s. After World War II, the U.S. Army camp was vacated, but was reactivated temporarily during the Korean War, and permanently reopened as the Army Aviation School in 1954. Camp Rucker was changed to Fort Rucker in 1955. Army rotary-wing training was consolidated at Fort Rucker in 1973, and today Fort Rucker supports a daily population of over 20,000 people, in addition to almost 50,000 other military, dependent, and retiree populations within 40 miles of the base.

Fort Rucker is a significant economic engine for the Southeast Alabama Region. Fort Rucker provides an economic impact of approximately \$1.5 billion annually and is responsible for over 23,000 jobs in the region. During the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, Fort Rucker was slated to receive the Aviation Logistics School (and over 2,000 jobs) from Fort Eustis, but the recommendation was reversed and the Army Aviation Technical Test Center was moved to Redstone Arsenal causing Fort Rucker to lose approximately 350 highly technical positions. Support organizations, including Friends of Fort Rucker, and local communities are taking a highly proactive approach in preparation for future rounds of BRAC in order to demonstrate Fort Rucker's prime importance to the United States military, as well as the economic importance to the Region.

Fort Rucker and adjacent regional communities prepared a Joint Land Use Study, completed in 2009, that was a cooperative land use planning exercise to provide guidance to Fort Rucker and local governments to implement objectives to increase future land use compatibility in the region and strengthen the relationship between the military and civilian communities. This study was spawned from increasing growth and development in communities surrounding Fort Rucker and its outlying aviation facilities that gave concern to incompatible development in areas that might restrict aviation training, jeopardizing Fort Rucker's mission in the future.

### Clusters

A cluster refers to a geographic concentration of interconnected businesses, suppliers, and associated institutions in a particular field. Clusters make regions uniquely competitive for jobs and private investment. Clusters are typically considered to increase productivity with which



companies can compete, nationally and globally. This section of the CEDS focuses on total employment by clusters for the Southeast Alabama Region.

Clusters play a fundamental role in driving regional economic competitiveness by encouraging higher rates of job growth, wage growth, new business formation, and innovation in the regions they are located in. Every regional economy has its own distinct profile of clusters. In order to standardize clusters and allow for useful comparisons of clusters across regions, the U.S. Cluster Mapping Project provides a set of benchmark cluster definitions that are the same in all U.S. regions. The U.S. Cluster Mapping website is where the cluster profile for the Southeast Alabama Region was derived.

The eleven “Strong **Traded** Clusters” (clusters that have high employment specialization) identified in the Region include:

<b>Transportation and Logistics</b>
<b>Livestock</b>
<b>Textile Manufacturing</b>
<b>Electric Power Generation and Transmission</b>
<b>Downstream Metals (metal products, ammunition, fabricated metal)</b>
<b>Vulcanized and Fired Materials (clay products, glass products, rubber products)</b>
<b>Aerospace and Defense</b>
<b>Trailers, Motor Homes and Appliances</b>
<b>Forestry</b>
<b>Leather Products</b>
<b>Metal Mining</b>

The eleven “Strong **Local** Clusters” identified in the Region include:

<b>Health Services</b>
<b>Hospitality</b>
<b>Real Estate, Construction, Development</b>
<b>Motor Vehicle Products and Services</b>
<b>Retail Clothing and General Merchandise</b>
<b>Commercial Services</b>
<b>Food and Beverage Processing and Distribution</b>
<b>Community and Civic Organizations</b>
<b>Financial Services</b>
<b>Personal Services (non-medical)</b>
<b>Household goods and services</b>

While the Region has many growing clusters, it has also suffered due to a decline in some clusters including Apparel & Textiles and Agribusiness in some counties. One cluster that was not mentioned above is Defense and Security. This cluster is an extremely important cluster for the Region due to the Region’s economic dependence on Fort Rucker located in Dale County.



## CHAPTER 3 SWOT ANALYSIS

As part of the planning process for the CEDS Five-Year Plan, SEARP&DC staff performed a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of the Region. Determining and analyzing what the region already possesses that could be leveraged better to build the capacity for growth is critical to developing the strategic direction and implementation plan to promote regional economic vitality. Staff prepared a SWOT survey and submitted to mayors, county commissioners, economic developers, institutions of higher learning, chambers of commerce, utilities, etc. The SWOT survey results by County appear on the following pages. The SWOT was completed to identify what the Region does well, needs work on, challenges and opportunities.

**SWOT Table by County**

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p><b><u>Barbour County</u></b> Poultry Production K-12 Public Education - Schools Farming/Agriculture</p>	<p><b><u>Barbour County</u></b> Out-migration/people leaving county Aging infrastructure</p>
<p><b><u>Coffee County</u></b> Four large companies – 750 + employees Low cost of living – low property taxes, inexpensive real estate Quality living – outdoor recreation, low crime, near beaches Schools/K-12 and Post-Secondary Diverse Economy</p>	<p><b><u>Coffee County</u></b> Aging infrastructure Empty retail stores in business district Lack of new housing options Rural roads Income gap between skilled and unskilled Lack of North-South 4-lane Highway 167 Retaining younger, talented, educated citizens</p>
<p><b><u>Covington County</u></b> K-12 Public Education - Schools Community Activities Leisure time-outdoor activities Public services provided to citizens Low crime Poultry</p>	<p><b><u>Covington County</u></b> Lack of industry Aging infrastructure Transportation – I10 and I65 connectors Job retention Low workforce participation Retail opportunities Lack of medical services</p>
<p><b><u>Dale County</u></b> Poultry and Feed Production Aviation Training and Education Education System, K-12, Community College Schools producing quality workforce</p>	<p><b><u>Dale County</u></b> Emergency services Aging infrastructure Good paying jobs that pay a living wage Lack of growth</p>



<p>Agriculture Friendly place to raise a family Fort Rucker Military Base Low crime</p> <p><b><u>Geneva County</u></b> Public school system, K-12 Low cost of living Low crime Partnerships between schools and local government</p> <p><b><u>Henry County</u></b> Agriculture Regionalism Emphasis on serving those in need Timber, Treated Lumber Product Poultry</p> <p><b><u>Houston County</u></b> Low cost of living Friendly Recreation Continuous improvements to downtown and recreation - Dothan Career-Technical Education Healthcare City/County Leadership Active Business Leadership focus on growth and development Retail choices Emergency Services</p> <p><b><u>Other Survey Participants</u></b> Vibrant, livable communities Education opportunities, K-12 to community college to 4-year college, medical college Regional economic development Aviation industry and training</p>	<p>Affordable housing Retail opportunities Abandoned properties/nuisance Drugs</p> <p><b><u>Geneva County</u></b> Lack of infrastructure to lure more businesses Lack of jobs Graduates not returning/out-migration Aging school buildings Lack of industry</p> <p><b><u>Henry County</u></b> Aging infrastructure Emergency services Lack of industry Graduates not returning/out-migration Lack of high paying jobs</p> <p><b><u>Houston County</u></b> Quality jobs Lack of focus on the future – no vision Public school system Public transportation Vacant downtown buildings Aging infrastructure Manufacturing recruitment Public education test scores Limited resources for small communities</p> <p><b><u>Other Survey Participants</u></b> Aging Infrastructure Region not on Interstate Workforce development</p>
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<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p><b><u>Barbour County</u></b> Vegetable Farms</p>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <p><b><u>Barbour County</u></b> Lack of federal awareness of need</p>
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<p><b><u>Coffee County</u></b>                      Workforce housing availability                      Vacant retail stores in business district                      Tourist promotions                      Local lakes and properties                      Beach traffic                      Services for aging population                      Fiber optic loop                      Collaborations between school systems for workforce development</p> <p><b><u>Covington County</u></b>                      Vacant buildings                      Good Workforce                      Post-Secondary education                      Vocational training                      Farmer’s Market                      Large area for industrial park development</p> <p><b><u>Dale County</u></b>                      Farm Fresh Foods/Farmer’s Market                      Recruiting youth for skilled jobs                      Available land for developing on major roads                      Vacant Buildings                      Quality workforce                      Local consumers                      Increase community activities                      Business friendly environment                      Promoting Ozark airport</p> <p><b><u>Geneva County</u></b>                      Development of city owned lands                      Vacant industrial buildings                      Utilizing more economic grant opportunities</p> <p><b><u>Henry County</u></b>                      Lake Eufaula                      Labor force working in adjacent counties                      Vacant buildings                      Undeveloped land close to larger cities                      Large population of retired persons</p>	<p><b><u>Coffee County</u></b>                      Lack of federal and state money                      Need for central business district to be unique                      Rural road safety                      Bias of urban vs. rural                      Lack of rural broadband                      Lack of rail infrastructure                      Lack of north to south highway</p> <p><b><u>Covington County</u></b>                      Job opportunities for young people                      Completion of Covington County water system                      Lack of good retail shops                      Healthcare needs                      Lack of exportable goods                      Lack of broadband                      Declining federal grant funds</p> <p><b><u>Dale County</u></b>                      Stable funding for disaster emergency                      Good farm programs                      Lack of federal support of projects                      Dirt roads                      Lack of growth in general fund compared to rising costs                      Lack of funding                      Lack of industries                      Lack of interest from youth                      Future of Fort Rucker                      Aging population</p> <p><b><u>Geneva County</u></b>                      Infrastructure                      Jobs                      Retention of jobs/families/graduates</p> <p><b><u>Henry County</u></b>                      County roads                      EMS services                      Unified law enforcement                      High poverty rate                      Lack of aggressive leadership</p>
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<p><b><u>Houston County</u></b>                  Willing leaders                  Willing citizens                  Vacant buildings                  Traffic into Dothan on a daily basis                  Utilizing southern Pine inventory                  Regionalism and Cooperation                  Aviation recruitment to Dothan Airport</p> <p><b><u>Other Survey Participants</u></b>                  Strengthen regionalism                  Quality of life and tourism                  Career tech education                  Cluster industry opportunities                  Consumption of farm fresh foods</p>	<p><b><u>Houston County</u></b>                  Funding                  Unified goals                  Education for future business environment                  Traffic in Dothan                  Homelessness                  Helping small communities market themselves                  K-12 education is poor, private schools expanding                  Residential development in downtown                  Developing east side of Houston County                  Aging infrastructure</p> <p><b><u>Other Survey Participants</u></b>                  Labor force challenges with changing demands for specialized skills                  Funding for infrastructure maintenance and growth                  Perception and realities with public schools and education program, resistance to tax increase                  Local leadership development                  Lack of federal awareness of needs of rural areas</p>
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After analyzing the SWOT survey results, SEARP&DC staff summarized what was felt to be the most significant economic development themes for the Region as a whole reflected in the responses.

**Strengths and Opportunities**

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- ✓ Low Cost of Living
- ✓ Career Tech-Post Secondary Educational Opportunities
- ✓ Low Property Taxes
- ✓ Inexpensive Real Estate
- ✓ Agriculture – Poultry, Farming, Timber

O

- ✓ Vacant Buildings
- ✓ Available/Affordable Land
- ✓ Alternative Agriculture Products
- ✓ Fresh Food/Farmer’s Markets
- ✓ Career Tech Education
- ✓ Youth Job/Career Recruitment

Potentials of the Region include, agricultural land, vacant buildings, alternative agricultural products, farmer’s markets with fresh foods, and career tech education opportunities to recruit youth and keep local youth.



Agriculture and open land are important resources for the Region. Quality agriculture products including poultry, cattle, peanuts and cotton are produced in the Region. Agriculture makes up a good percentage of employment within the Region. One major growing industry is the timber industry. According to the 2016 Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) data, there is 2,104,496 timberland acres in the Region. A large amount of land for industrial expansion is also available in the Region. Some communities have set aside land as industrial sites for future development.

The development of local farmers markets is an economic development opportunity for the Region. The Region has local farmers markets in many of the communities including Dothan, Enterprise, Elba, Andalusia, Headland and Ozark. The farmers markets afford the opportunity to purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables. Farmers markets are also a great benefit to the local farmers allowing them to bypass the middle man and benefit a little more. The farmer then circulates his profits throughout the community local merchants creating a cycle that helps build the economy.

### **Weaknesses and Threats**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Aging Infrastructure</li><li>✓ Lack of Good Paying Jobs (Quality Jobs)</li><li>✓ Population Decline</li><li>✓ Emergency Services</li><li>✓ Limited Broadband/Tech Access</li></ul>	<b>W</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Lack of High Skill, High Wage Job Opportunities</li><li>✓ Lack of Federal Awareness of Rural Needs</li><li>✓ Decline in Funding Resources (local, state and federal levels)</li><li>✓ Local Leadership Development</li><li>✓ High School Graduates/Young Adults leaving the Region</li></ul>	<b>T</b>
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There are challenges to economic development in the Region. Population decline is one of the most hindering factors for economic development. Outmigration trends have sent young people and working adults out of many of the areas within the Region. Lack of job opportunities for highly trained workers and educated job seekers force those individuals to look outside of the region for jobs, which is hurting the labor force of skilled workers.

In efforts to retain businesses and industries, more incentives for local job training are needed. The Region must educate young people on the benefits of developing skills. An increased and prepared labor force can be extremely beneficial in retaining businesses and attracting new businesses. The lack of good paying, quality jobs is an issue that faces the Southeast Alabama Region.

Another threat to economic development in the Region is infrastructure. This includes municipal sewer, water, communication services and roads. Many communities are in need of improvements to current sewer and water systems, as well as, roads. This improvement can only be completed with grant dollars because of limited budgets of most of the small, rural communities in the Region. Communication services is also a need in many of the rural



communities. This includes high-speed internet, which is non-existent in much of the Region with the exception of the larger cities, such as Dothan, Enterprise, Ozark and Andalusia.

Without improvements to the above mentioned threats and weaknesses, chances for future economic development in the Region are severely limited. While the separate counties and municipalities have their own lists of problems, these threats and weaknesses represent issues that are hampering economic development in the Region, as a whole. Specific economic development goals have been developed and are addressed in the CEDS Action Plan.

### **Economic Development Goals**

- Goal 1: Provide adequate infrastructure throughout the Region that will improve the quality of life for citizens and support the expansion needs of existing and development of new industries that will provide employment opportunities and increase tax revenues.
- Goal 2: Promote a balanced regional economy with a broad business, industry, and employment mix capable of supporting quality employment opportunities, including high wage, high skill jobs.
- Goal 3: Continue to coordinate secondary, technical training and community college curriculums with needs of business and industry.
- Goal 4: Enhance public and private partnerships in determining and executing economic development policies and projects.
- Goal 5: Protect and promote the diversification of the region's agricultural economy.



## CHAPTER 4 CEDS STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND PLAN OF ACTION

### VISION STATEMENT FOR THE SOUTHEAST ALABAMA REGION

**The Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission envisions a regional comprehensive economic development strategy that emphasizes regional cooperation and collaboration, supports existing businesses, encourages development of new technologies, and promotes the regional workforce. This will be accomplished by strengthening local community capacity for planning and management resulting in greater opportunities for meaningful employment and improved quality of life.**

**Economic development** generally refers to the sustained, concerted actions of policymakers and communities that promote the standard of living and economic health of a specific area. Economic development can also be referred to as the quantitative and qualitative changes in the economy. Such actions can involve multiple areas including development of human capital, critical infrastructure, regional competitiveness, environmental sustainability, social inclusion, health, safety, literacy, and other initiatives.

The goals are broad in scope and address the overall economic expectations of the Region based on the SWOT analysis. Objectives are more precise than the goals and their outcomes are measurable. The action items present what specific activity will occur towards achieving the objectives and goals.

The CEDS Action Plan centers on regional priorities. The first section focuses on five regional goals, objectives and strategies that will serve as a roadmap to coordinate regional resources to achieve the greatest impact. The next section outlines the CEDS Plan of Action.

**Goal 1: Provide adequate infrastructure throughout the Region that will improve the quality of life for citizens and support the expansion needs of existing and development of new industries that will provide employment opportunities and increase tax revenues.**





## Objectives:

- Maintain and improve critical public infrastructure, such as water, sewer, highways, rails, telecommunications, and broadband to meet the needs of existing population and future growth.
- Support local government efforts in developing and maintaining adequate infrastructure to support attractive development and future employment opportunities.
- Take advantage of vacant buildings and developed industrial parks throughout the Region to locate new industries.
- Improve public highway infrastructure in smaller, rural communities throughout the Region.

## Strategies:

- Support efforts to obtain federal, state and regional funding to upgrade and maintain aging infrastructure (water, sewer, streets), while supporting the expansion of infrastructure to underserved areas.
- Work with local governments to develop and maintain Capital Facilities Plans in order to identify and prioritize capital improvement and maintenance project needs.
- Identify sources of funding to implement the capital facilities and infrastructure improvements.
- Expand availability of high speed broadband access in the Region for business, citizens, education and healthcare. Identify funding sources to implement.
- Identify and promote vacant buildings to potential businesses (new or expanding) and continue to develop industrial parks with adequate infrastructure to attract new industries.
- Promote the utilization of the Region's airports by making sure the airports are well-maintained, kept up to date, and meet public and business needs.
- Collaborate with the efforts of the Human Services Transportation Program to improve public transportation.
- Identify and pursue funding opportunities for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) throughout the region including adequate facilities and equipment and training opportunities.



**Goal 2: Promote a balanced regional economy with a broad business, industry, and employment mix capable of supporting quality employment opportunities, including high wage, high skill jobs.**

**Objectives:**

- Continue to reach out to existing businesses and industries to determine expansion plans and projected employment and training needs.
- Strengthen communication and collaboration between industrial businesses and community colleges, workforce organizations, Small Business Development Centers, chambers of commerce, economic developers, and state and federal agencies.
- Continue to market assistance programs for new and existing business.
- Promote use of local, state and federal financing tools to assist in attraction of potential employers and expansion of existing business.
- Promote entrepreneurship and small business start-up by providing technical and information resources.
- Solicit and retain young professionals by emphasizing to local governments the importance of innovation and technology in the type of businesses that are recruited.

**Strategies:**

- Assess the region's resources, advantages and limitations as a guide to determine appropriate opportunities for new and existing businesses.
- Focus recruitment, expansion and retention efforts on growing value-added industries that pay at or above the national average wage, with special attention to identified regional clusters.
- Develop and sustain strategies to promote the establishment of new target industries and quality jobs.
- Identify local, state, federal and private funding sources available for business expansion/retention programs in the Region.
- Educate and encourage local governments to actively work to attract new or expanding business that complement existing business.



- Partner with local and regional businesses to educate high school students, their parents, teachers and school counselors about the types of employment available within the region and the training or education required for the positions.
- Solicit input from the agri-business and farming sector about the needs of the agricultural community in order to maintain its importance in the local economy.
- Support and utilize the Young Professionals organizations in retaining and attracting young professionals and families.

**Goal 3: Continue to coordinate secondary, technical training and community college curriculums with needs of business and industry.**



#### **Objectives:**

- Through coordination with workforce development programs, monitor the educational resources to ensure the needs of the region's employers are met.
- Encourage effective input from employers on course and program development.
- Monitor changes and issues with educational institutions. Support and promote improvements that will benefit students and area businesses and allow for growth.

#### **Strategies:**

- Identify funding sources for secondary schools and other educational institutions that assist in providing skills training to supply new industries with qualified employees.
- Develop initiatives to raise awareness among the unemployed members of the workforce about the training opportunities that are available to them.
- Support workforce development programs and technical education programs aimed at improving the skill level of the labor pool.
- Support initiatives and programs that train, retrain and upgrade skills of the area's labor force such as School-to-Work programs and On-the-Job training programs.



- Business and industries, educational institutions as well as local and state agencies, should coordinate programs and efforts to provide a workforce with the necessary skills and training required of new and/or expanding industries in the region.
- Develop more training programs for businesses and create programs for better communication between businesses and educators to ensure that businesses' needs are met.
- Educate the public about job assistance programs and retraining opportunities for laid-off employees to regain employment, as well as, older adults that are re-entering the workforce.

**Goal 4: Enhance public and private partnerships in determining and executing economic development policies and projects.**



**Objectives:**

- Serve as an economic development resource to local elected officials and economic development professionals and organizations.
- Improve coordination and collaboration between and among all levels of government as well as the private sector, including enhancing public-private partnerships, and make strategic investments that align with future regional priorities.
- Improve regional awareness of economic development concepts and challenges.
- Foster a strong and diverse economy by nurturing the emerging industries and strengthening the existing competitive clusters in the Region.
- Educate Congressional delegation on needs of rural communities throughout the Region.

**Strategies:**

- Encourage local governments to plan for industrial and commercial development.
- Strengthen, expand, and create new partnerships between organizations and individuals traditionally involved in economic development and those that do not typically work in economic development.



- Work with local economic developers to locate funding to finance and administer job training and other forms of assistance to businesses locating in the Region.
- Encourage local elected leaders to meet with state and federal elected officials on an annual basis and provide updates on needs of communities and accomplishments.
- Assist Region communities in identifying eligible projects and prepare proposals and applications for EDA funding.



**Goal 5: Protect and promote the diversification of the region's agricultural economy.**

### Objectives:

- Promote the continued recognition of agriculture as a viable long-term and short-term land use activity.
- Encourage local officials, economic developers and citizens to recognize agribusiness as an economic asset to the Region and a major sector of the Region's economic base.
- Consider developing alternative agriculture products to diversity the Region's agricultural economy.
- As the agricultural labor force is aging, encourage educational institutions to develop curriculums for students interested in agriculture.
- Promote local farmers markets as an economic development opportunity for the Region.

### Strategies:

- Assist local farmers in taking advantage of available Conservation Reserve Programs (CRP), through which farmers can receive annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource conserving covers on eligible farmland.
- Explore the opportunities for branding local agricultural products and other marketing strategies.
- Seek opportunities for local farmers to develop value added products.
- Explore funding opportunities for educational institutions to promote agribusiness through hands-on learning, i.e. outdoor classrooms.



- Continue to support poultry processing plants and increase federal awareness of the importance of poultry to the regional economy.
- Work with communities to develop a plan for marketing the Region's farmers markets including locations, produce availability and names of local growers.



## CEDS Plan of Action

Based on community engagement and priority development, the SEARP&DC has created the following Plan of Action in order to target specific objectives pulled from the goals, objectives and strategies. The section below discusses the major work elements of the Region.

**1. Expand availability of high speed broadband access in the Region for businesses, citizens, education and healthcare. Identify funding sources to implement.**

- Collaborate on a region-wide analysis focusing on broadband access.
- Survey counties and cities on needs and current services.
- Identify funding sources.

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**2. Support efforts to obtain federal, state and regional funding to upgrade and maintain aging infrastructure (water, sewer, streets), while supporting the expansion of infrastructure to underserved areas.**

- Support and assist with funding applications that best serve the needs of the Region.
- Work with local governments to develop and maintain Capital Facilities Plans in order to identify and prioritize capital improvement and maintenance project needs.
- Identify sources of funding to implement the capital facilities and infrastructure improvements.

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**3. Support workforce development programs and technical education programs aimed at improving the skill level of the labor pool.**

- Support the expansion of training and educational opportunities offered by educational and vocational institutions throughout the Region.
- Support workplace and soft skills development.
- Support initiatives and programs that train, retrain and upgrade skills of the area's labor force such as School-to-Work programs and On-the-Job training programs.

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**4. Encourage local officials, economic developers and citizens to recognize agribusiness as an economic asset to the region and a major sector of the region's economic base.**



- Work with communities to develop a plan for marketing the Region’s farmers markets including locations, produce availability and names of local growers.
- Increase awareness of career opportunities in agribusiness with elementary and middle school students by exploring funding opportunities for educational institutions to promote agribusiness through hands-on learning, i.e. outdoor classrooms.
- Support local farmers in efforts to develop value added products.

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**5. Continue to serve as an economic development resource to local elected officials and economic development professionals and organizations.**

- Encourage local governments to plan for industrial and commercial development.
- Assist Region communities in identifying eligible projects and prepare proposals and applications for EDA, State of Alabama and/or USDA Rural Development funding.
- Collaborate on business expansion and retention efforts.
- Support regional and local analyses to determine gaps and opportunities in diversification.

The Region will work in partnership with communities, organizations, private sector, state and federal agencies to actively pursue implementation of the identified goals, objectives, strategies and action plan. State, federal and private funding sources will be sought after to assist in providing the funds needed to implement them.



## CHAPTER 5 IMPLEMENTATION AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

### **Southeast Alabama Regional Planning & Development Commission COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDs)**

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs) is mandated to contain a performance measures component and should be an element of an ongoing planning process. The evaluation should answer the questions of “*How are we doing?*” and “*What can we do better?*” Performance measures are to be an integral part of the evaluation process so that the progress of development activities can be identified in achieving the vision and goals of the CEDs.

The Southeast Alabama Regional Planning & Development Commission CEDs Committee and the Economic Development Staff (Economic Development Director and Economic Development Specialist) will be responsible for periodically evaluating the CEDs to ensure that regional economic development goals and objectives are being accomplished. The CEDs evaluation will be completed on an annual basis and any recommendations from the CEDs Committee will be incorporated into the annual CEDs update submitted to the Economic Development Administration (EDA). It is important to include broad and diverse regional participation into the CEDs evaluation process through the membership of the CEDs Committee.

This evaluation method will measure the performance and effectiveness of the CEDs and will include the following measurement criteria:

- ❑ Number and amount of state and/or federally funded investments which improved or provided infrastructure/facilities in the Southeast Alabama Region (approved projects);
- ❑ Number and amount of state and/or federally funded investments which will improve or provide infrastructure/facilities in the Southeast Alabama Region (submitted projects);
- ❑ Number and amount of state and/or federally funded investments which provided technical assistance and/or planning assistance in the Southeast Alabama Region;
- ❑ Estimated number of new jobs created/retained in the Southeast Alabama Region as a result of project(s);
- ❑ Estimated amount of private sector investment generated by project(s) in the Southeast Alabama Region;
- ❑ Estimated amount of public sector investment generated by project(s) in the Southeast Alabama Region; and
- ❑ Changes in the economic environment of the Southeast Alabama Region.



## CHAPTER 6 ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

According to the US Economic Development Administration (EDA), Economic Resilience is the ability to recover quickly from a shock, the ability to withstand a shock, and the ability to avoid a shock altogether. In this section, we have prepared a framework for Economic Resilience that provides an approach for becoming better prepared for future disasters, including economic, manmade and natural, recovering from disasters, and then transitioning back to steady-state.

The four (4) phases of disaster are: 1) preparedness; 2) response; 3) recovery; and 4) mitigation. Each phase has particular needs, requires distinct tools, strategies, and resources and faces different challenges. Each of the phases are further described in the following narrative.

### **4 Phases of Disaster**

- Preparedness
- Response
- Recovery
- Mitigation



### **Preparedness**

Preparedness focuses on understanding how a disaster might impact the community and how education, outreach and training can build capacity to respond to and recover from a disaster. Various economic shock factors have varying levels of severity and devastation, including natural disasters; manmade disasters; economic fluctuations; closure of a military base; exit of a major employer; and availability of funds for grants, as examples. Preparation steps are taken to ensure that key local employers and supporting resources are ready to jump into action quickly



and that local businesses and governments understand their roles and responsibilities in preparing for and responding to disasters.

Several major actions that the Region should work towards completing for Preparedness include:

- Encourage local governments to develop a plan that identifies economic vulnerabilities as well as the resources to harness in the event of a disaster. Action strategies and steps should be established to indicate who leads what strategy/step and resources needed to complete the effort.
- Develop a contact list of key stakeholders throughout the region and state. This list will be used to coordinate information-gathering and economic analysis in the event of a disaster.
- Develop a communication strategy utilizing telecommunications and broadband networks and social media with the key stakeholders including all groups that serve local businesses to ensure that the broadest possible range of businesses can be reached in a post-disaster situation. Possibly designating one group to take the lead in coordinating communications in a post-disaster situation.
- Identify potential funding sources for disaster recovery and redevelopment, including federal, state and local sources.
- Provide workshops to aide businesses in preparing for disaster situations, including having sessions led by experts in law, finance and disaster preparation for local businesses.
- Encourage local economic developers and officials to employ safe development practices in business districts and surrounding communities, including locating outside of floodplains, preserving natural lands that act as buffers from storms and protecting business developments from the impacts of extreme weather.

### Response

Response addresses immediate threats presented by the disaster, including saving lives, meeting humanitarian needs (food, shelter, clothing, public health and safety), cleanup, damage assessment and the start of resource distribution. During this time the immediate actions are to save lives and protect property. As the response period progresses, focus shifts to repairs, restoring utilities, and finishing the cleanup process.

Several major actions that the Region should work towards completing for Response include:

- During the Response period, it is vital to have social media sites operational to provide current information and resources. Develop and promote the site to businesses as the place to turn for key information post-disaster. This could also be a place where displaced businesses can provide updated contact information.
- Develop a plan to set up a Business Recovery Center to centralize small business recovery resources, local bank officers, technical assistance providers and other critical assistance for maintaining business continuity and get businesses up and running.
- SEARP&DC staff should begin to meet with businesses and communities as soon as possible to conduct one-on-one damage assessments that will help gauge the impact on



business operations, commerce, and the local economy. Data will help in developing recovery programs and can later assist with grant writing.

## Recovery

Recovery involves the development, coordination and implementation of operations, services, infrastructure, facilities, and programs. The recovery phase of disaster can typically be broken into two periods. The short-term typically lasts from six-months to at least one year and involves delivering immediate services to citizens and businesses. The long-term phase, which can range up to decades, requires thoughtful strategic planning and action to address more serious or permanent impacts of a disaster.

Community recovery after a disaster includes maintaining a healthy economy and reestablishing a strong, vibrant economy that is equal to or better than before the disaster. Furthermore, the recovery process can offer a series of unique and valuable opportunities to improve on the status quo. Capitalizing on these opportunities can advance the long-term health, resilience, and sustainability of communities and better preparing them for future challenges.

Several major actions that the Region should work towards completing for Recovery include:

- Protecting critical infrastructure is a key component of recovery. Repairing and reconstructing water, sewer, utilities, transportation and cyber systems should be a priority.
- Development of a pre-and post-disaster housing recovery plan for communities recovering from disaster.
- Continue to utilize communication systems that were set up during the Preparation phase to ensure business owners are able to access their property.
- Connect with local, state and federal partners to tap into new funding sources.
- Inform businesses about the availability of recovery loan resources that may be made available through the SBA Disaster Division.
- Encourage business to re-evaluate their business plan and redefine themselves and their markets. Recovery steps can present opportunities to change or grow.

The bigger the disaster, the more important it is for a community to have a common vision of what successful recovery will look like. Future economic strength will depend on how well the vision and opportunities for recovery assistance are communicated and pursued. Local governments, economic developers, chambers of commerce and business leaders must maintain communications over the entire course of recovery, however long it may last.

## Mitigation

Mitigation is the effort to reduce the loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters. The purpose of Mitigation is to find better ways of doing things; enhance environmental and social benefits; avoid, minimize or remedy adverse impacts; and ensure that residual impacts are within acceptable levels. Effective mitigation requires that we all understand local risks, address the hard choices, and invest in long-term community well-being. The actions can be as simple as



elevating a water heater and appliances in a garage that sometimes flood. Mitigation actions can take a much larger approach such as pursuing a FEMA buyout program or updating land use ordinances and building codes.



**CEDS STRATEGIC COMMITTEE**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>COUNTY</b>	<b>OCCUPATION</b>	<b>RACE</b>
<b>BARBOUR</b>			
Jack Tibbs, Jr.		Mayor	W-M
Rebecca Beasley		Mayor	W-F
Thomas E. Crossley		Businessman	B-M
Earl Gilmore		Chairman, Co Commission	W-M
Roy Crow		Businessman	W-M
Henry Franklin		Commissioner	B-M
<b>COFFEE</b>			
Rod Morgan		Businessman	W-M
Gladys Yelverton		Attorney	B-F
Mickey Murdock		Mayor	W-M
Dean Smith		Commissioner	W-M
AL Britt		Commissioner	W-M
Rolanda Jones		City Councilwoman	B-F
<b>COVINGTON</b>			
Ralph C. Wells		City Councilman	W-M
Arlin Davis		City Councilman	W-M
Sammy Glover		Businessman	B-M
Bernard Stewart		Businessman	W-M
Kenneth Mount		City Councilman	W-M
Greg White		Chairman, Co Commission	W-M
<b>DALE</b>			
Steve McKinnon		Commissioner	W-M
Wess Etheredge		Businessman	W-M
Claudia Wigglesworth		Businesswoman	W-F
Charles Gary		Commissioner	W-M
Bob Bunting		Mayor	W-M
Diane Flournoy		Educator - Early Child Ed	B-F
<b>GENEVA</b>			
William Birdsong		Agriculture	W-M
Fred Hamic		Chairman, Co Comm	W-M
Rob Hinson		Attorney - Mayor	W-M
JoAnn Lindsey		City Councilwoman	W-F
Gail Hayes		Educator	W-F
Todd Brannon		Commissioner	W-M
Joe Paul		Attorney (ex-officio)	W-M
<b>HENRY</b>			
Henry Grimsley		Commissioner	B-M
David Money		Judge of Probate, Chairman	W-M
Sandra Abney		Businesswoman	B-F
Gregory Reynolds		Commissioner	B-M
Roxanne Cook		Education	NA-F
John Glover		Education	B-M
<b>HOUSTON</b>			
Kevin Dorsey		City Commissioner	B-M
Lori Wilcoxon		Businesswoman	W-F
Matt Parker		Chamber President	W-M
Mark Culver		Chairman, Co Comm	W-M
Addie Buze		Councilwoman	B-F
Adam Hartzog		Businessman	W-M