

APALACHEE



REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Jackson,
Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, and Wakulla Counties



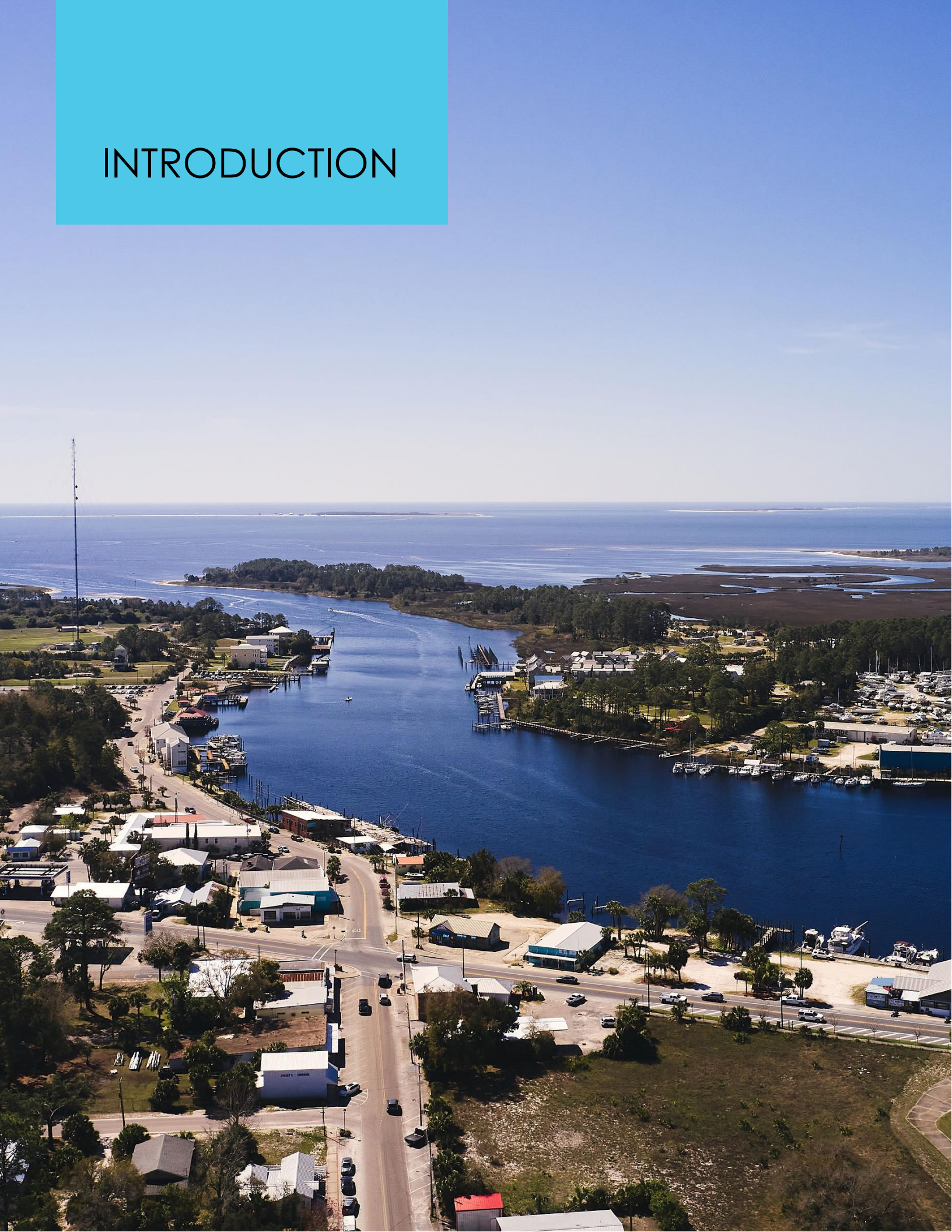
2022-2027

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INTRODUCTION



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2022-2027 Apalachee Regional Economic Development Strategy was developed in accordance with guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration (EDA). The document development process was led by the Apalachee Regional Planning Council (ARPC), which serves as the Apalachee Region’s EDA-designated Economic Development District (EDD), in collaboration with the ARPC Economic Development Committee.

The Action Plan builds off the ambitions of the 2017-2022 strategy, which held the following goals: enhance interconnectivity and collaboration; fortify and animate Apalachee strengths; bring new voices to the economic development drawing board. Momentum to implement these goals was halted by two major disasters that impacted the entire Apalachee Region—Hurricane Michael and COVID-19. Therefore, **the focus of this strategy will be to revamp, center, and intensify economic development activities through the following goals:**

1. Transformative Regional Collaboration
2. Economic Diversity, Equity, and Stability
3. Dynamic Workforce
4. Resilient Infrastructure
5. Affordable Housing
6. Enhanced Quality of Life

What is a Regional Economic Development Strategy?

The Regional Economic Development Strategy is a goal-oriented plan for regional economic development and is the result of a regionally owned planning process designed to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of a region.

It is a key component in establishing and maintaining a robust economic ecosystem by helping to build regional capacity that contributes to community success. It provides a vehicle for stakeholders to engage in a meaningful conversation and debate about what capacity building efforts would best serve economic development in the region.

STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

In order to foster a collaborative environment with shared goals across partner organizations, efforts have been made to align the 2022-2027 Apalachee Regional Economic Development Strategy with other regional and state plans, including the following:

- Florida’s Great Northwest – Northwest Florida Forward Plan (2017)
- Tallahassee-Leon County Office of Economic Vitality – Strategic Plan (2022)
- CareerSource Capital Region – Strategic and Operating Plan (2020)
- CareerSource Chipola – Local Workforce Services Plan (2020)
- Florida Department of Economic Opportunity – Strategic Plan for Broadband (2022)
- State of Florida – Strategic Plan for Economic Development (2018)

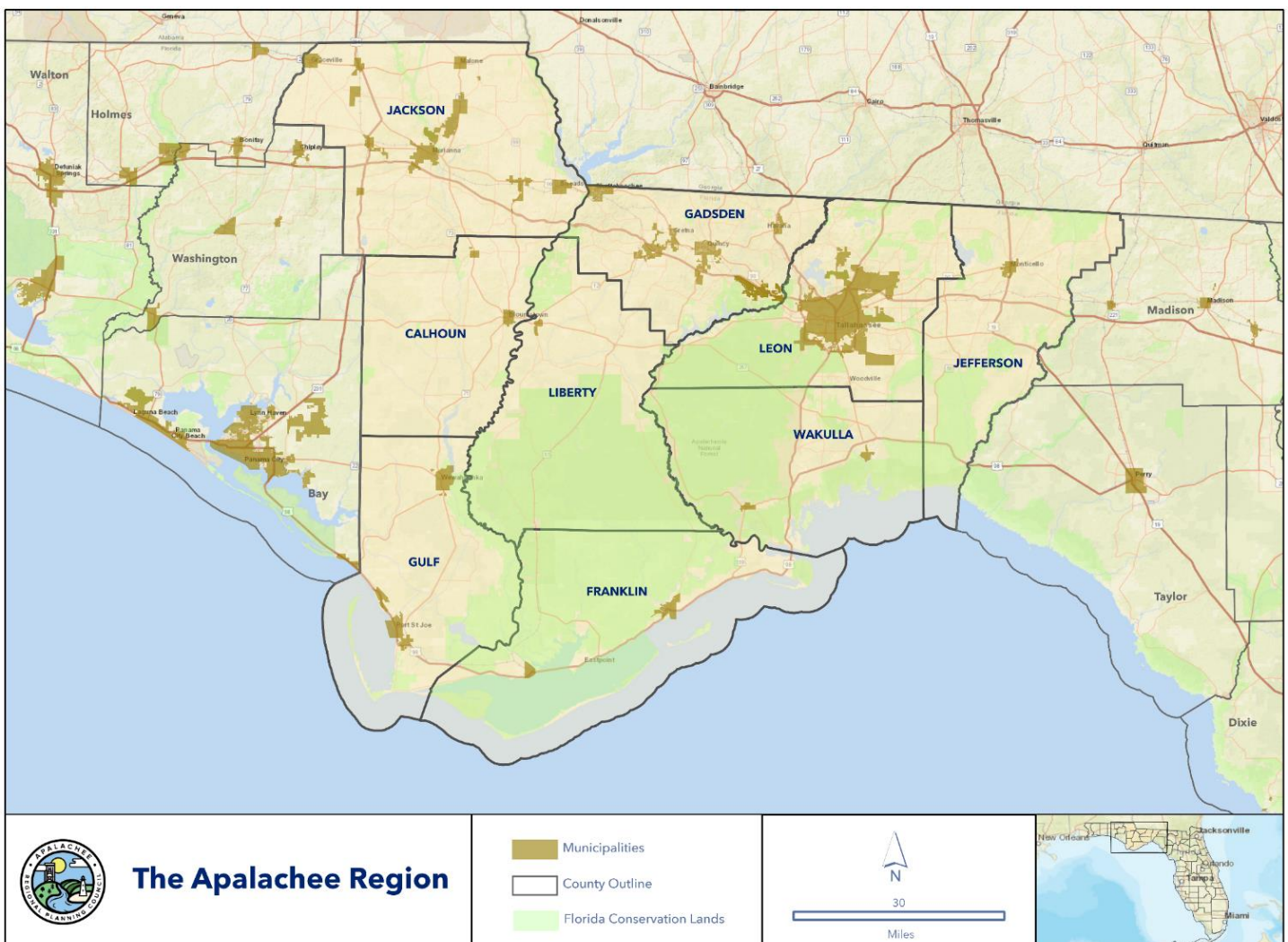
BACKGROUND



GEOGRAPHY

The Apalachee Region of Northwest Florida consists of nine counties: Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, and Wakulla counties. Eight rural counties surround the Region’s metropolitan center—Tallahassee/Leon County—in the eastern half of the Florida Panhandle. The counties stretch from the Gulf of Mexico north to the Alabama and Georgia state lines. The Apalachee Region measures approximately 120 miles from east to west. Interstate-10 and the CSX railroad cross the northernmost counties, connecting to the southwestern Port of Port St. Joe in Gulf County via the Apalachicola Northern railroad. Highway 98 is the major transportation corridor along the southern coastline. Tallahassee International Airport and several regional airports also populate the transportation system.

Franklin, Liberty, and Wakulla counties all feature significant coverage from public lands where state/national forests and wildlife refuges are located. Across the Apalachee Region, tree coverage and agricultural lands are plentiful. The Region is ecologically diverse as well as diverse at a community and needs level. By harnessing shared goals and the idea of regionalism—all counties working together to increase regional impact—the Apalachee Region can translate its geography into a more sustainable economic future.

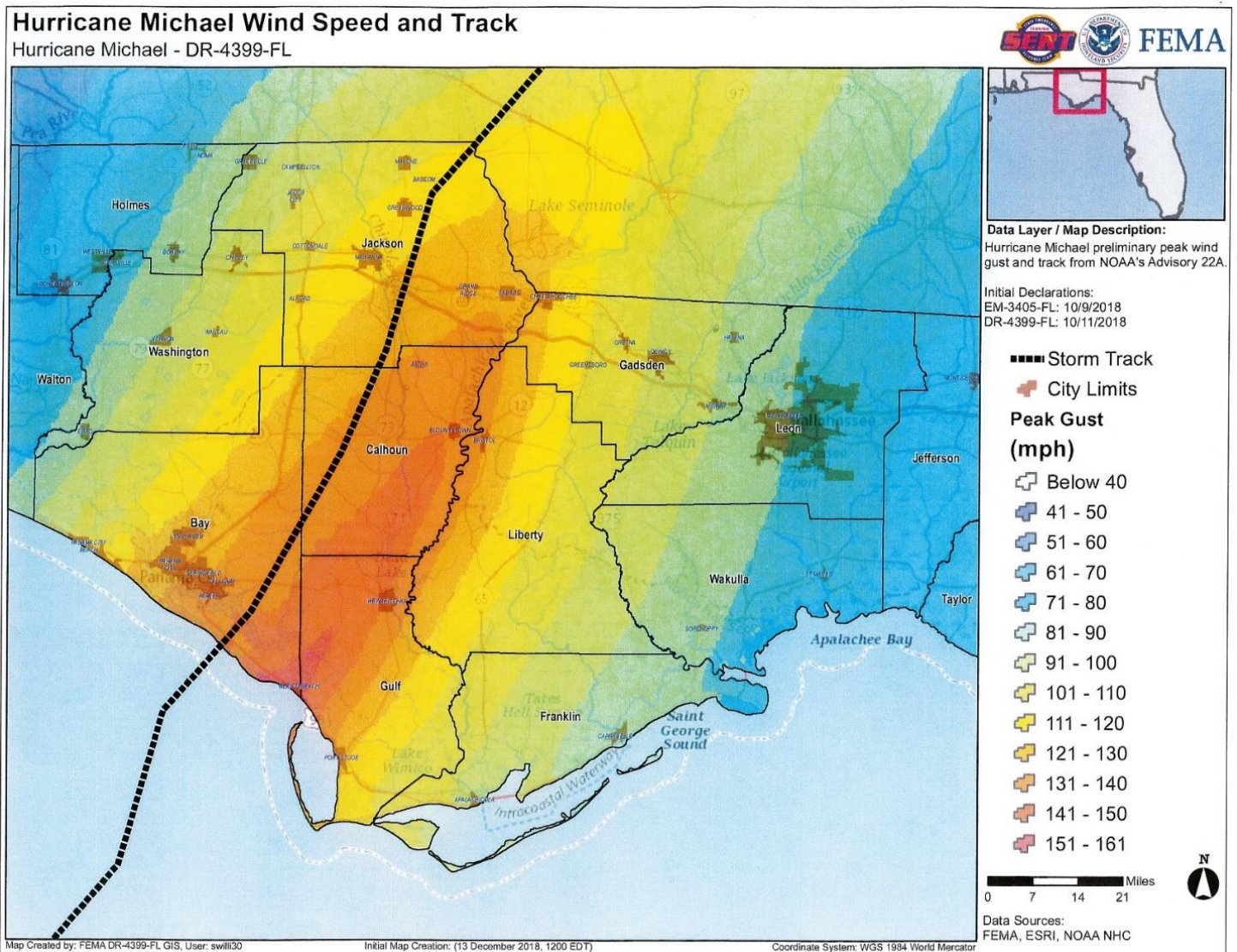


A LOOK BACK: DISASTER RECOVERY

HURRICANE MICHAEL (2018)

Hurricane Michael made landfall on the Florida Panhandle in Bay County—just beyond the Apalachee Region—on October 10, 2018, as a category 5 storm. The hurricane’s path diagonally crossed the Apalachee Region and left a level destruction that had not been experienced by the Region in over 100 years. Hurricane Michael severely impacted agriculture, transportation, and housing, and rural counties continue to work towards economic recovery.

Hurricane Michael awakened stakeholders—residents, businesses, and government—to the need for disaster preparedness and economic resiliency activities. Many of the goals and strategies contained within this Strategy have been informed by the experience of Hurricane Michael.



Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), 2018.

ESTIMATED CROP LOSSES FROM HURRICANE MICHAEL

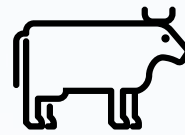
BY COMMODITY GROUP



FORESTRY
\$1.3 BILLION



COTTON
\$50M



CATTLE
\$43M



PEANUTS
\$23M



NURSERIES
\$16M



POULTRY & EGGS, \$10M



VEGETABLES
\$8.6M



OTHER FIELD CROPS, \$7.3M



DAIRY
\$6.4M



AQUACULTURE
\$5M



FRUITS
\$4.4M



TREE NUTS
\$4.4M



APIARY
\$2M

COVID-19 PANDEMIC (2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020 and forced a shift in the regional economy, impacting business health and the workforce. As a result of the pandemic, the “Great Reassessment” began, in which workers displaced by widespread layoffs and illness chose not to return to their former jobs or even to their former occupations. Instead, new business formations have increased dramatically.

THE GREAT REASSESSMENT

At the beginning of the pandemic, in April 2020, the Florida unemployment rate rose to 14% as companies struggled to stay afloat and keep employees on staff.¹ Although the unemployment rate declined to 3.5% in January 2022, the labor market is still experiencing a labor shortage in industries most impacted by the pandemic: accommodation and food services, retail trade, health care and social assistance, and transportation and warehousing.² Although job opportunities and wages have increased throughout 2021, people are not returning to work because they are rethinking their commitment to their jobs. Covid-19 exacerbated problems between consumers, employers, and employees, and because of this, the Florida and U.S. economy are experiencing a great reassessment, also known as frictional unemployment.

Frictional unemployment is a form of unemployment that involves the workforce choosing to leave their current jobs for new ones or pursuing skill sets needed for different roles. This phenomenon results from a combination of employees seeking a career change, more workforce opportunities, and the psychological impacts of Covid-19. According to the Washington Post, many workers “are reporting high levels of burnout, causing some to seek a new career path. There has also been a wave of retirements as workers over 50 quit because they do not want to return to teaching, home health care, or other front-line jobs.”³ The way employers handled the health and lives of their employees during Covid-19 has severed employers’ relationships with employees. Workers can leave their current positions and wait for other employment or learn another skill set because of increased opportunities.

UNEMPLOYMENT AFTER COVID-19

Since business closures began, Florida has experienced labor market changes. The unemployment rate in Florida declined to 4.5% by December 2021. The unemployment rate is even lower in much of the Apalachee Region and continues to stabilize.

New Florida businesses are having problems attracting staff despite using job fairs, wage increases, and offering interview incentives to motivate workers back to work. Workers have more options than in years past, including retailers that guarantee a \$15 per hour starting wage and gig economy jobs that offer more flexibility.⁴ As wages are increasing, people are not returning to work because they are rethinking their relationship with their choice of work.

¹https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LASST120000000000004?amp%253bdata_tool=XGtable&output_view=data&include_graphs=true

² <https://eig.org/news/the-startup-surge-business-formation-in-2021-on-pace-to-break-record>

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/05/07/jobs-report-labor-shortage-analysis/>

⁴ <https://www.businessinsider.com/mcdonalds-pays-50-for-job-interviews-highlighting-hiring-struggles-2021-4>

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

The development of a resilient regional economy is a priority for the Apalachee Regional Planning Council and the EDA. Possessing a resilient economy reduces the amount of time needed for the economy to recover from unexpected events like natural, biological, or economic disasters such as Hurricane Michael or the COVID-19 pandemic. Other recent disasters that have impacted the Region include the 2008 recession, BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill (2010), fires, flooding, tornados, and other hurricanes and storms.

A resilient economy can also help the Apalachee Region to persevere through economic shifts, such as the decline of an industry or closure of a major employer. Moreover, it provides the capacity to withstand future events, bouncing back quicker and in a manner that is better positioned for future unknowns. The concept of resiliency can be built into many subsets of the economy, including industry composition and diversity, workforce, income and earnings, affordability of goods and services, health, housing, and infrastructure.

As the Apalachee Region grows, it is essential that each major economic component is analyzed and addressed through a lens of equity and sustainability to ensure that the growth and development occurring across the Region serves to enhance regional economic resiliency.

Areas to Address:

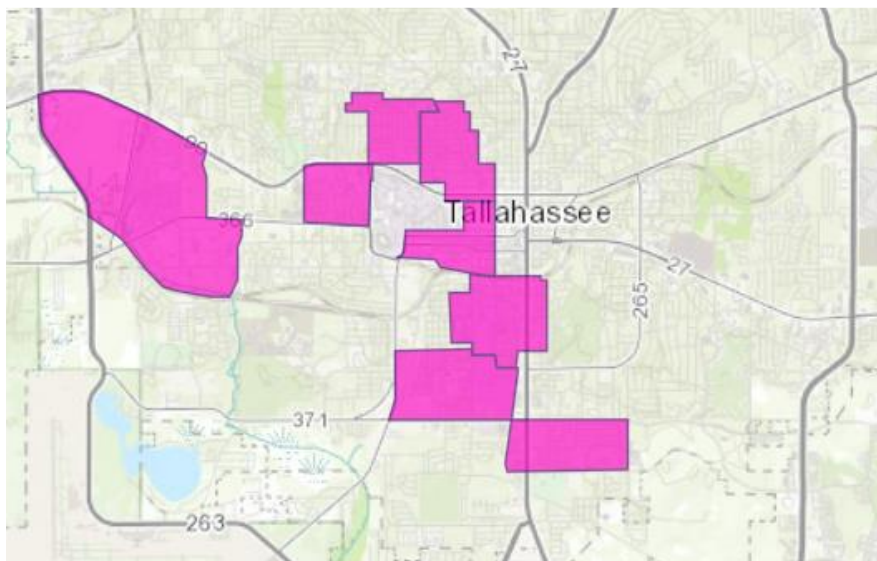
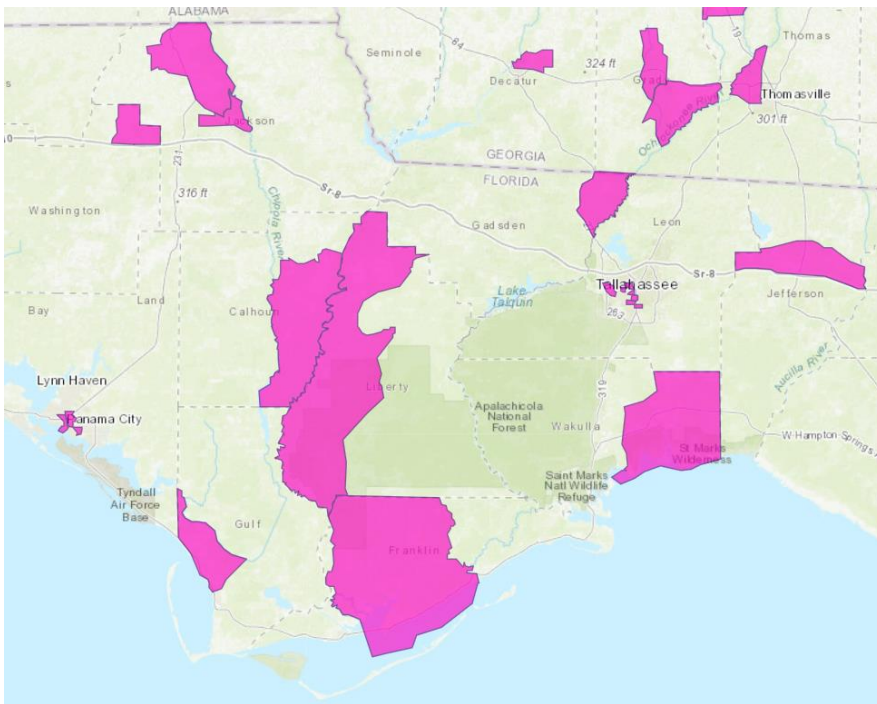
- Persistent Regional Challenges
- Industry Diversification
- Resilient Infrastructure
- Workforce Development
- Broadband Access
- Small Business Support
- Innovation and Technology
- Healthy Communities
- Pre-Disaster Planning
- Network Strengthening and Information Sharing

These targeted areas to address in order to enhance regional economic resiliency are incorporated into the Action Plan section of this Regional Economic Development Strategy.

OPPORTUNITY ZONES

The federal Opportunity Zone Program aims to foster economic development and job creation in economically distressed communities. The Program was created by the Federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 to encourage businesses, developers, and financial institutions to invest long-term capital in low-income census tract areas. These areas were designated as Qualified Opportunity Zones by the U.S. Department of Treasury in June 2018. In Florida, there is at least one Opportunity Zone in each county. In the Apalachee Region, rural counties have 1-2 designated census tracts while Tallahassee has 11 total. The maps below show each Opportunity Zone.

For the most current information on Opportunity Zones, refer to the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Opportunity Zones Community Playbook at <http://www.lisc.org/opportunity-zones/community-partners-playbook/>.



Above: Map view of Opportunity Zones in the Apalachee Region

Below: Map view of Opportunity Zones in the City of Tallahassee.

REGIONAL DATA-DIVE

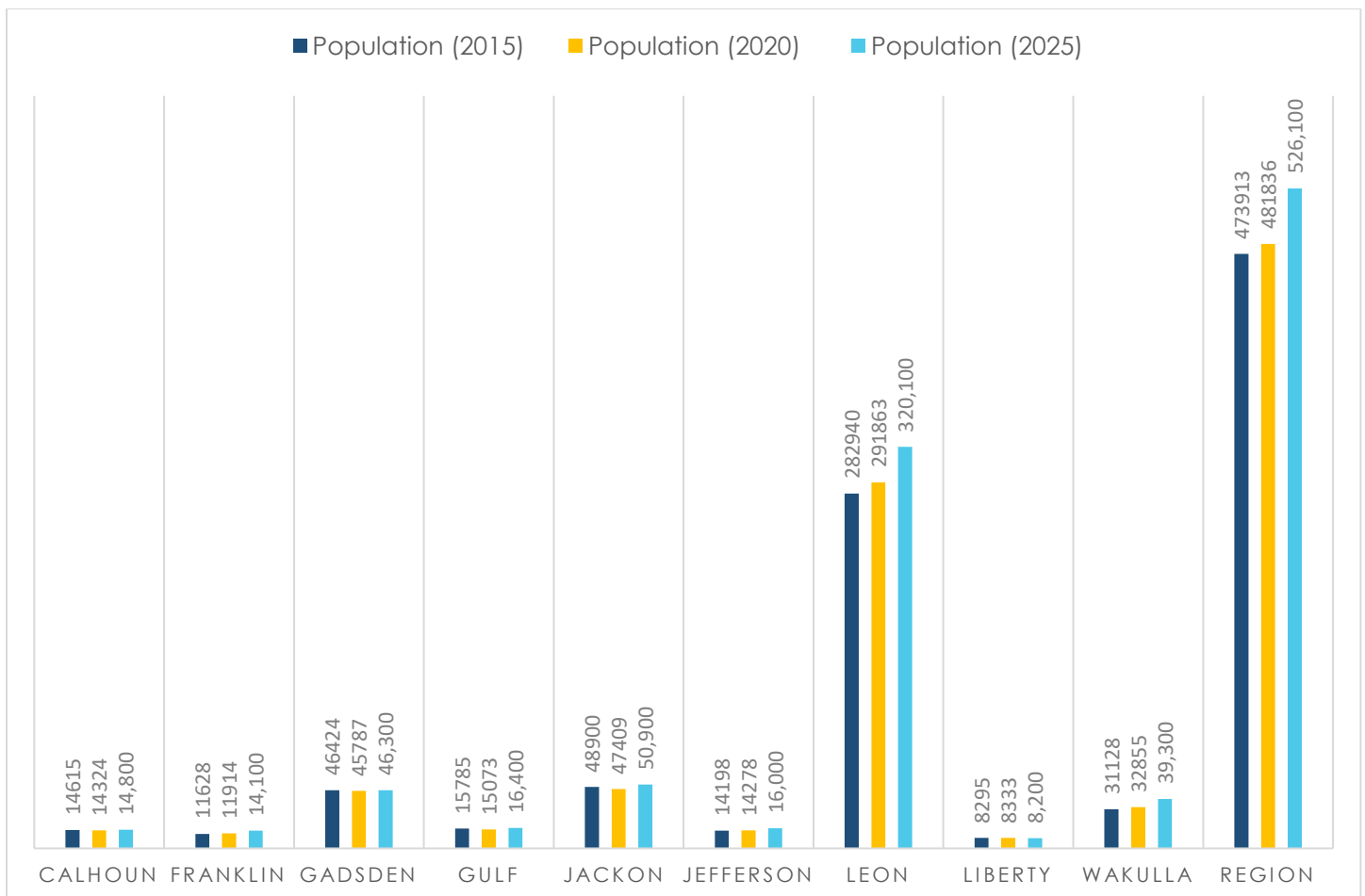
This data section serves to lay the foundation for understanding the Apalachee Region in 2022 in order to help pinpoint goals and objectives, as contained within this strategy’s Action Plan, for moving forward. Factors ranging from demographics to education to industry health help gauge the economic foundation of the Apalachee Region.

Data insights are categorized under the following headers:

- Population and Workforce
- Business and Industry
- Quality of Life

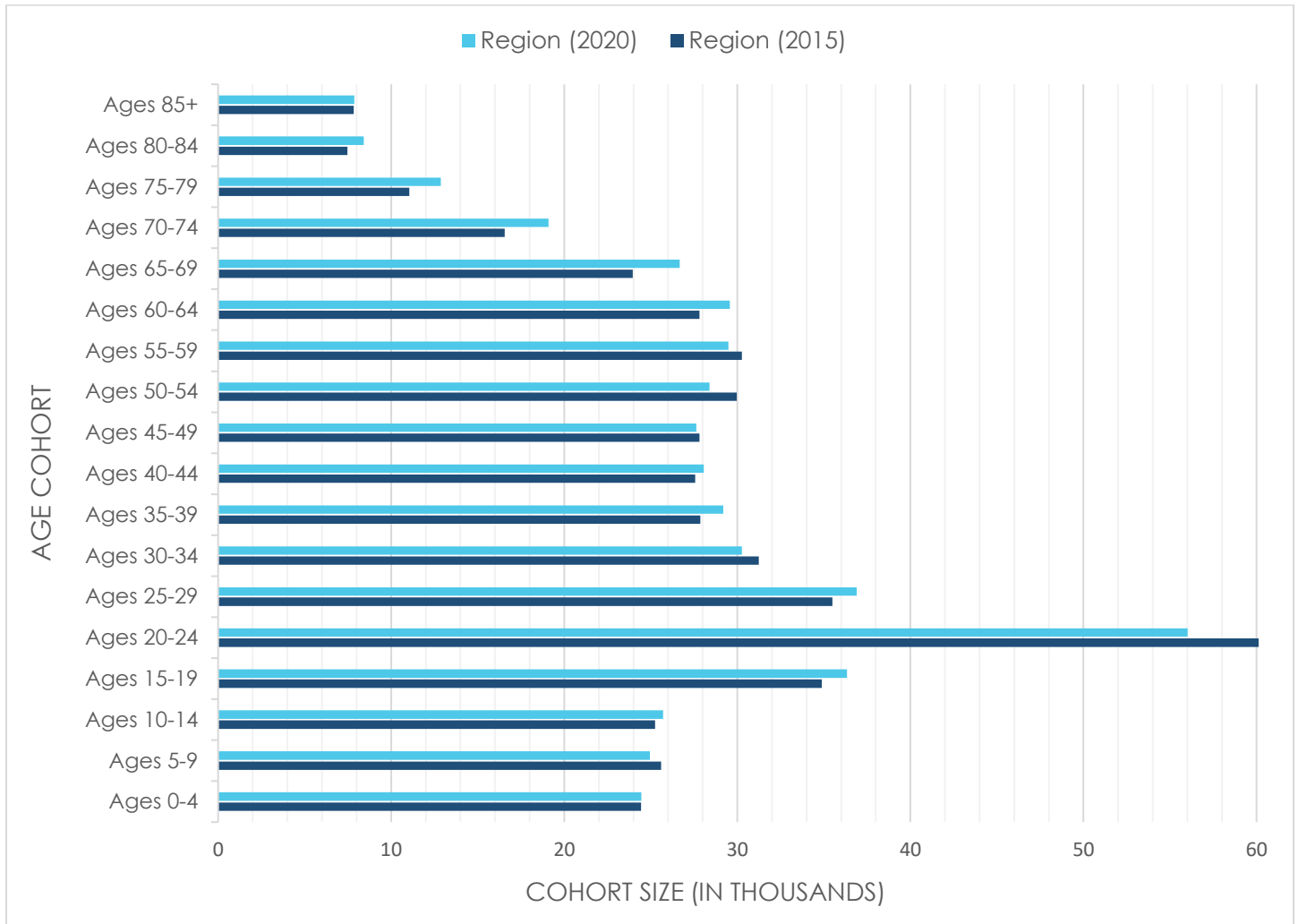
POPULATION AND WORKFORCE

POPULATION CHANGE AND PROJECTION (2015, 2020, 2025)



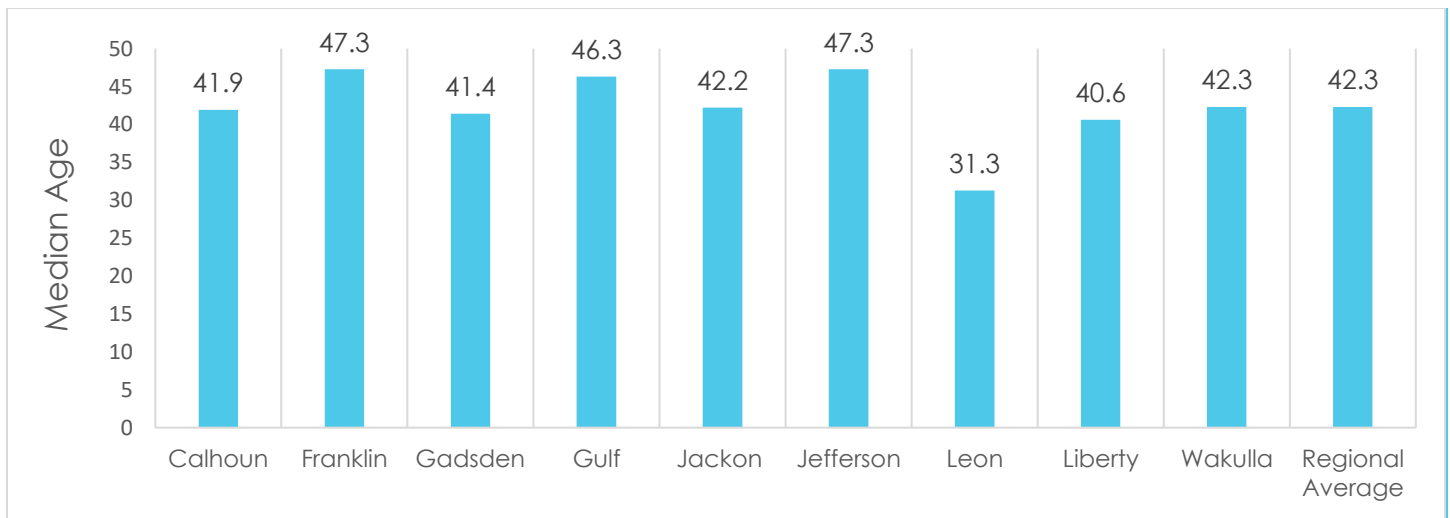
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates & BEBR Projection

REGIONAL POPULATION BY AGE-COHORT (2015, 2020)



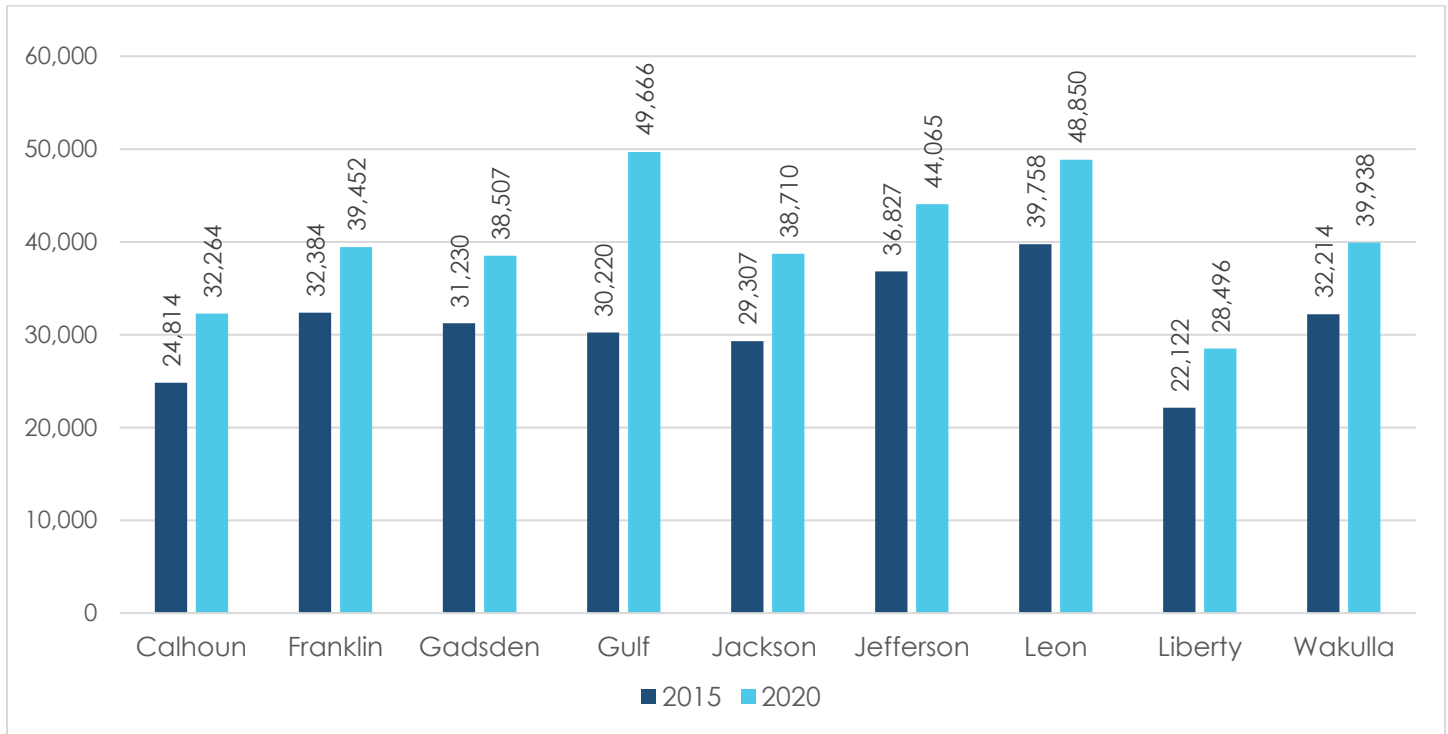
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

MEDIAN AGE (2020)



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

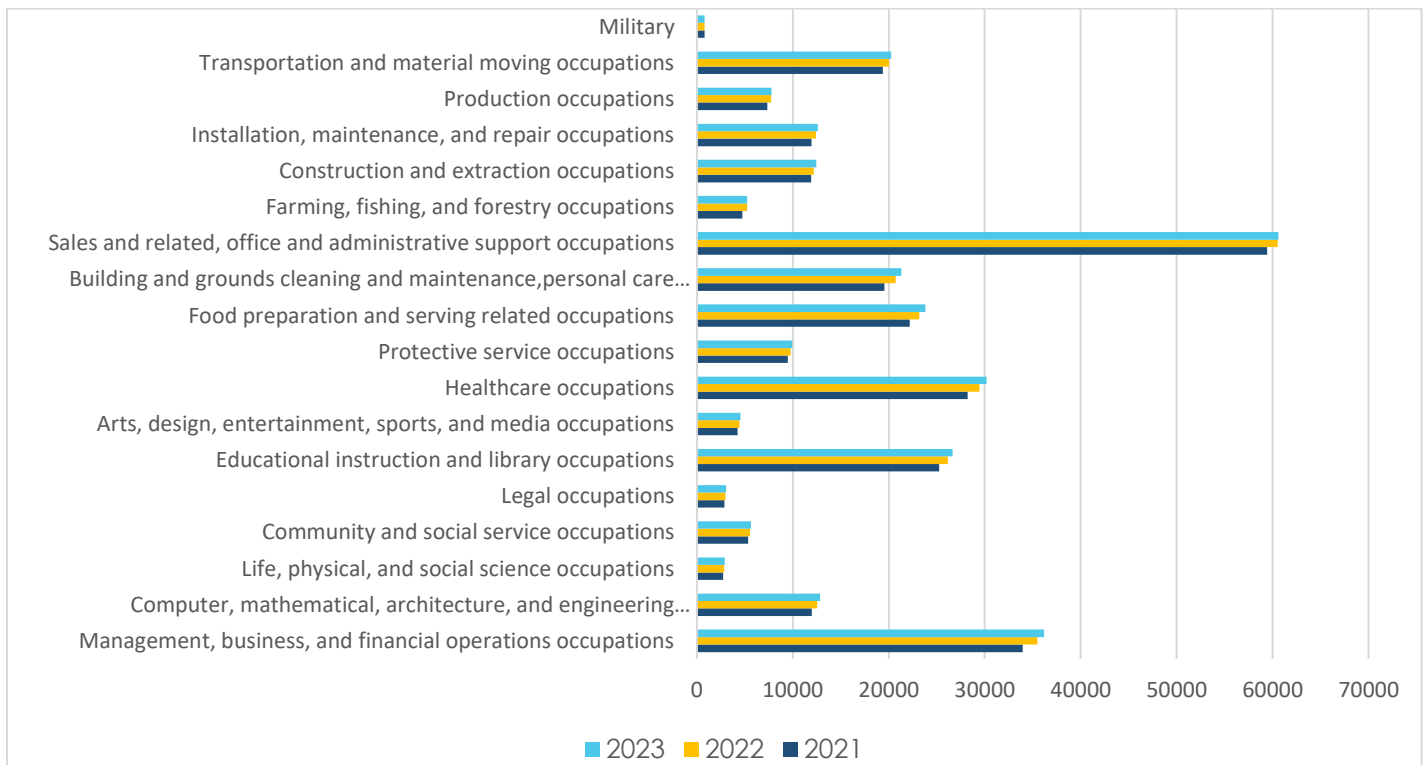
PER CAPITA INCOME (2015-2020)



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

EMPLOYMENT BY OCCUPATION, IN THOUSANDS (2021-2023)

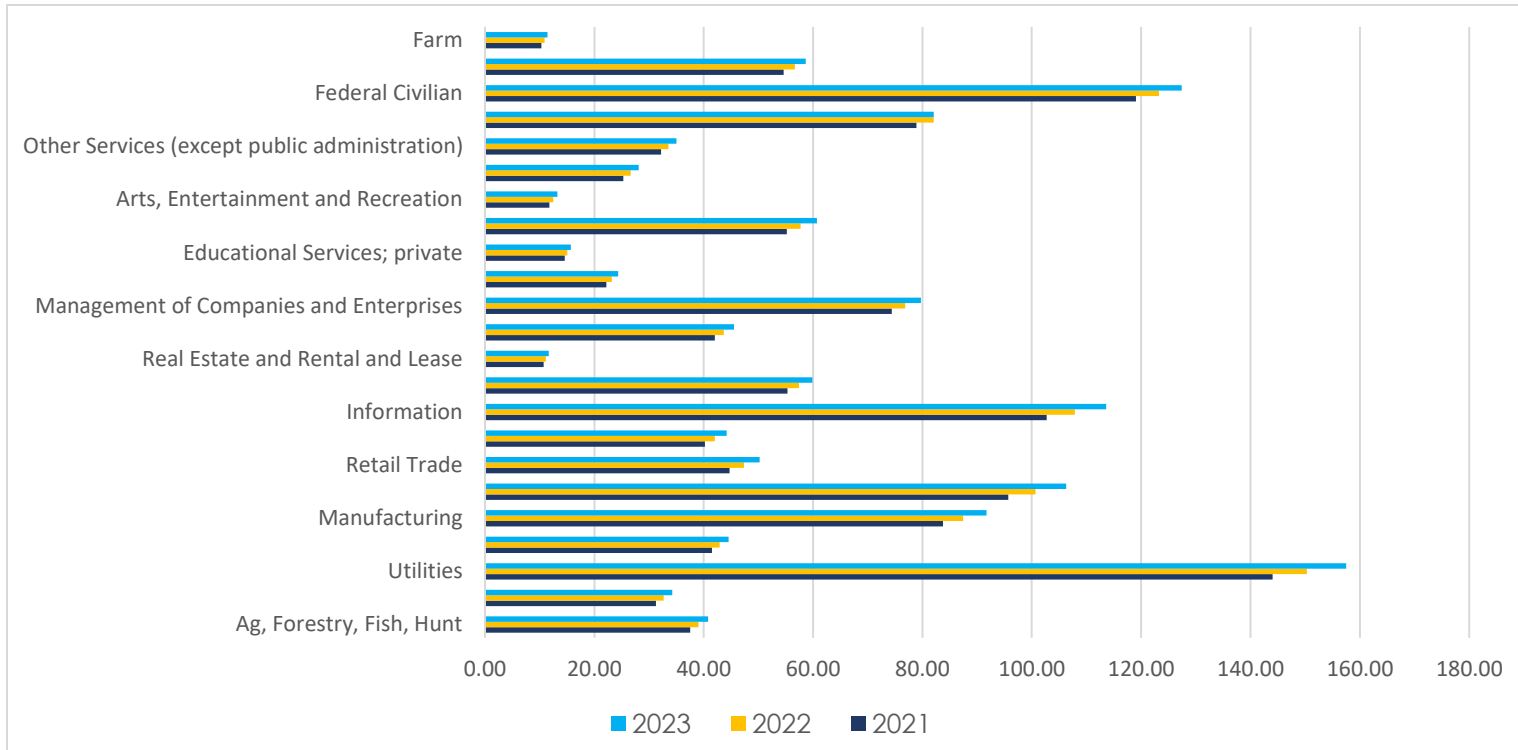
Employment opportunities across all occupations are steadily increasing throughout the ARPC region.



Source: REMI PI+

AVERAGE COMPENSATION BY INDUSTRY, IN BILLIONS (2021-2023)

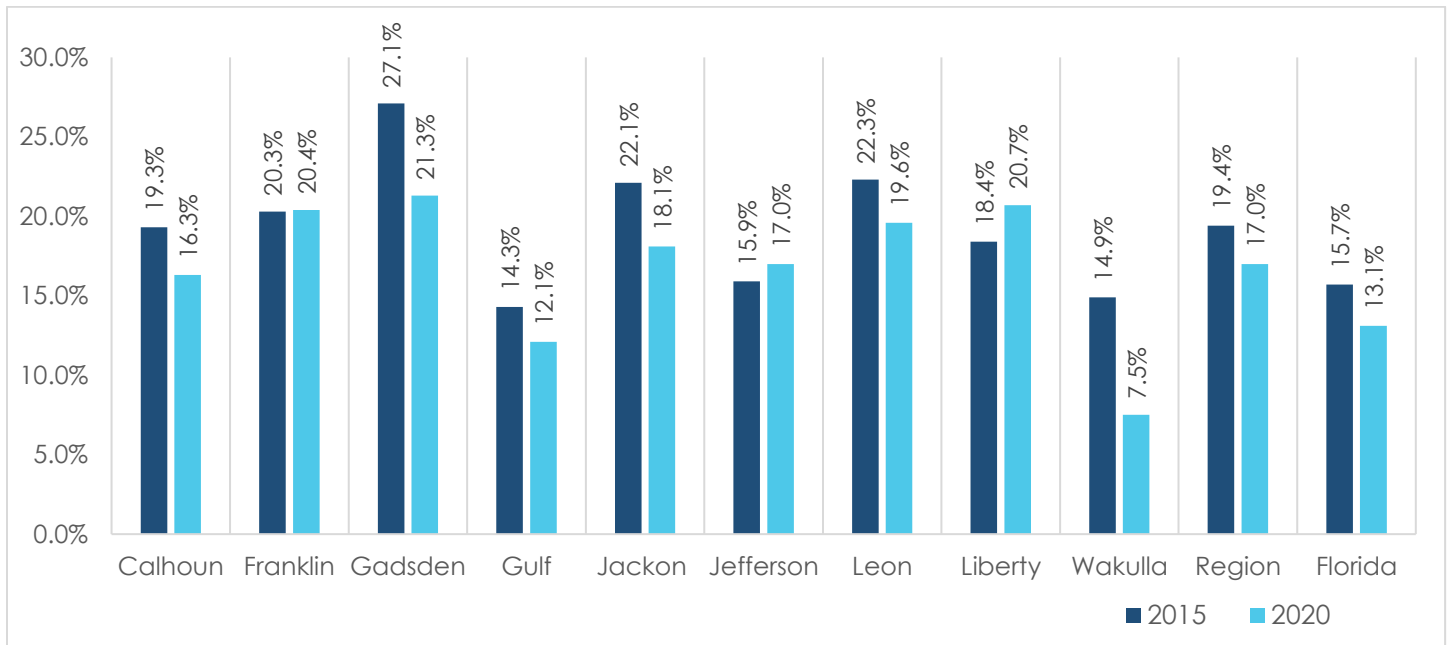
The average compensation for jobs in each industry is steadily increasing throughout the ARPC region.



Source: REMI PI+

POVERTY RATE (2015, 2020)

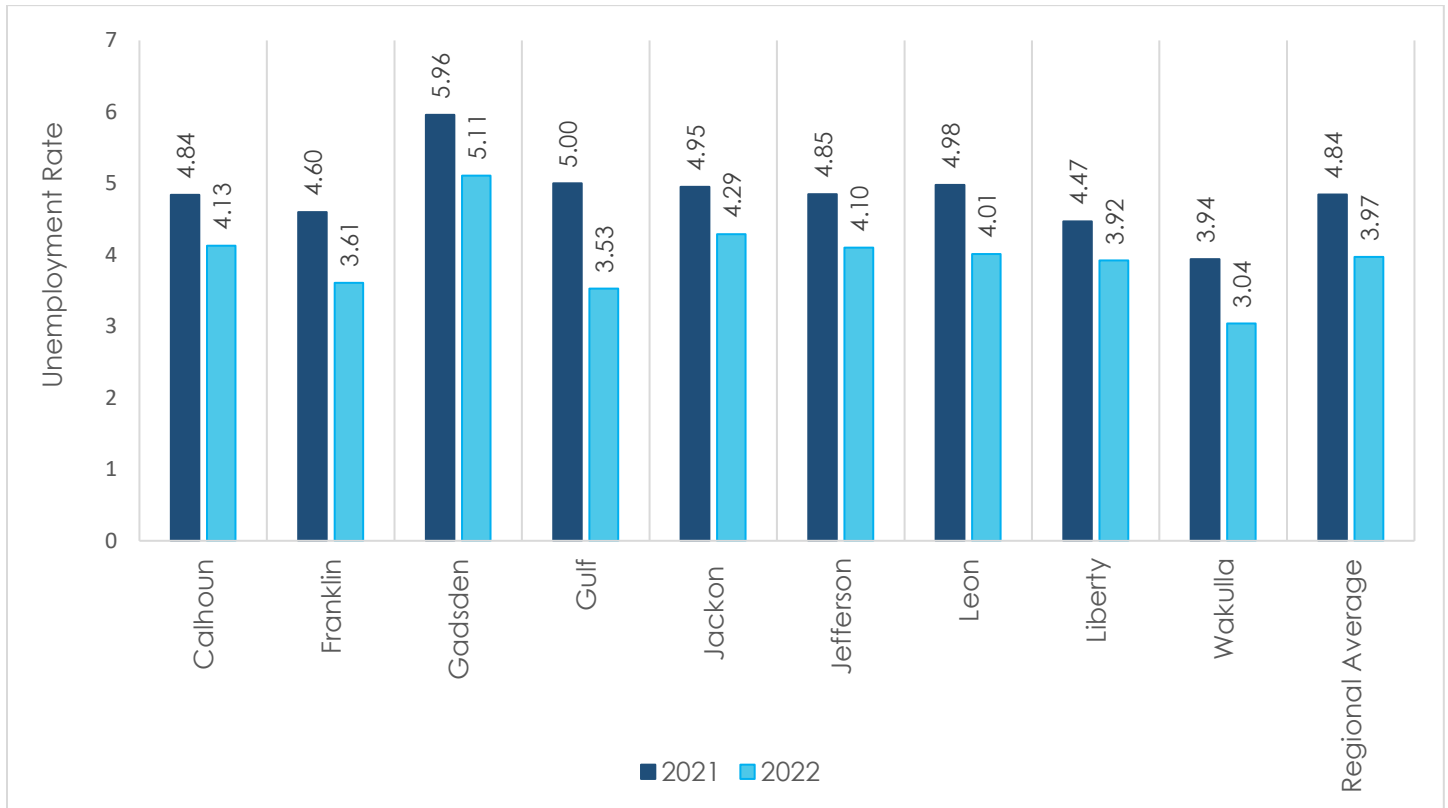
Poverty rates have generally been stable or dropping across the Apalachee Region, although all counties except for Wakulla and Gulf still have poverty rates higher than the state average.



Source: American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

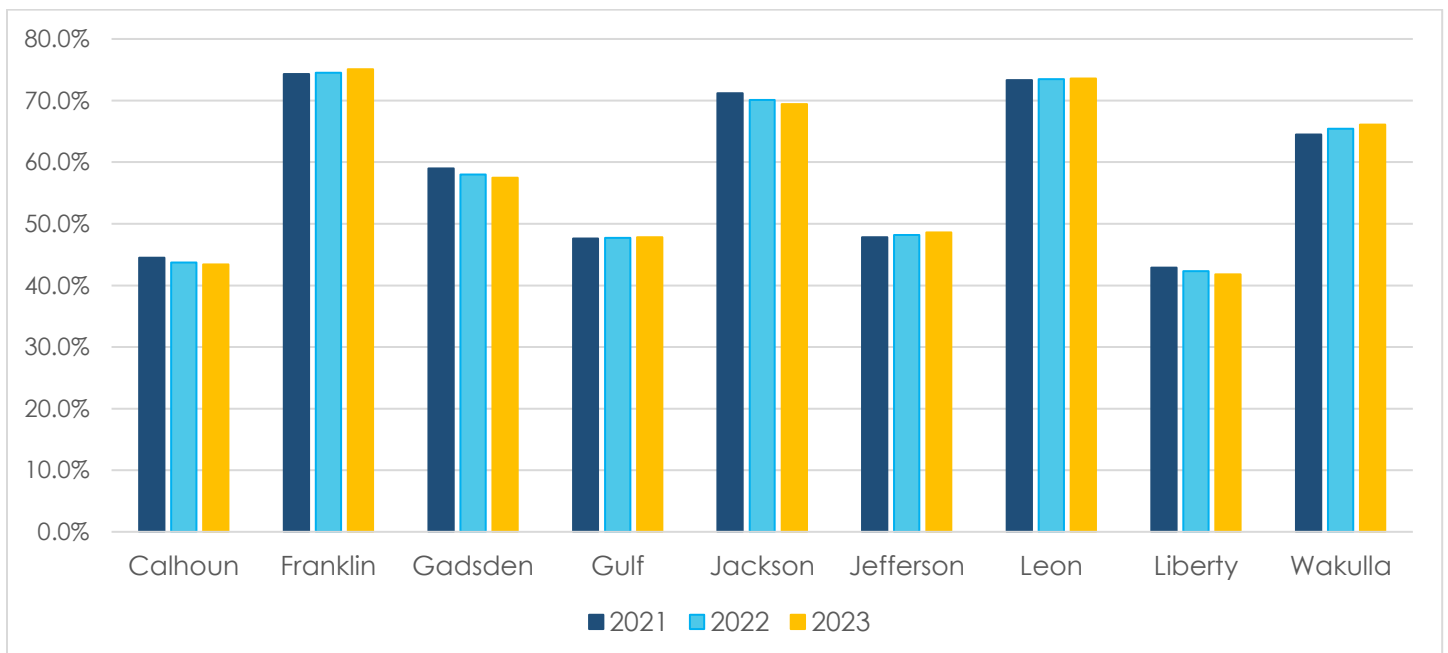
ANNUAL AVERAGE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (2021-2022)

Unemployment rates continue to drop across the State of Florida, including in the Apalachee Region, despite the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.



Source: StatsAmerica - Measuring Distress (<https://www.statsamerica.org/distress/dist.aspx>)

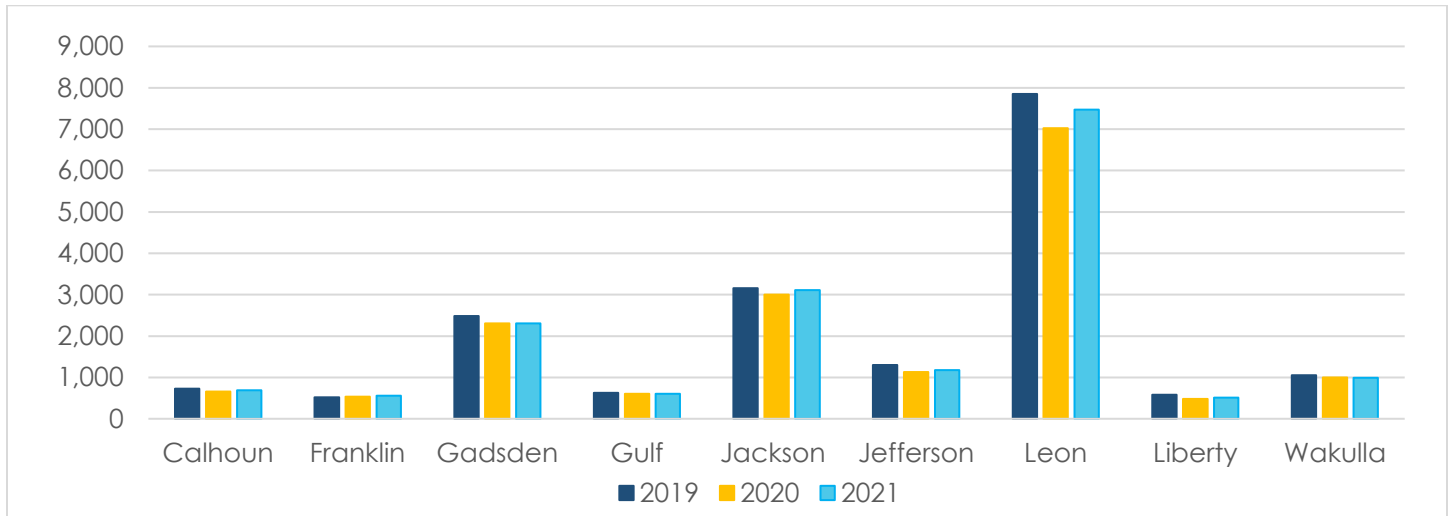
RELATIVE HOUSING PRICE (2021-2023)



Source: REMI PI+

DAILY VEHICLE MILES TRAVELLED (2021)

Daily vehicle miles travelled data can serve as an indicator of commuting patterns and help identify bedroom communities—communities where most of the workforce resides in one community but works in another—or counties with economic activity more or less centered around transportation.

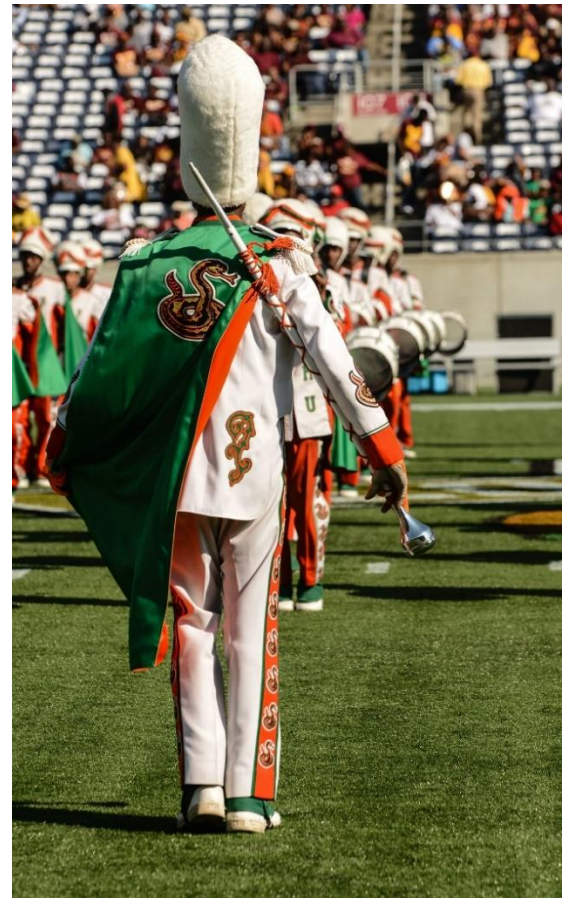


Source: Florida Department of Transportation

SCHOOL DISTRICT GRADES (2022, 2019)

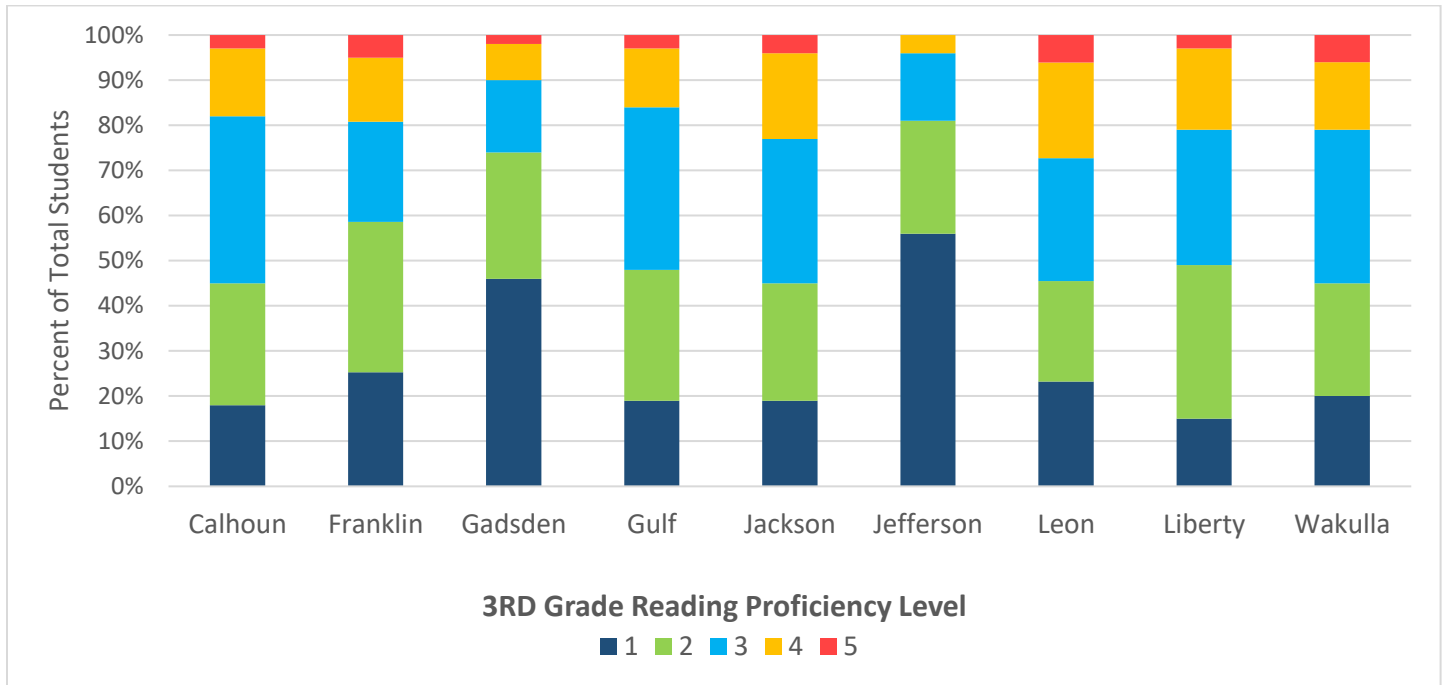
	DISTRICT GRADE (2022)	DISTRICT GRADE (2019)
CALHOUN	B	B
FRANKLIN	C	C
GADSDEN	C	C
GULF	B	C
JACKSON	B	B
JEFFERSON	C	C
LEON	B	B
LIBERTY	A	A
WAKULLA	B	A

Source: Florida Department of Education



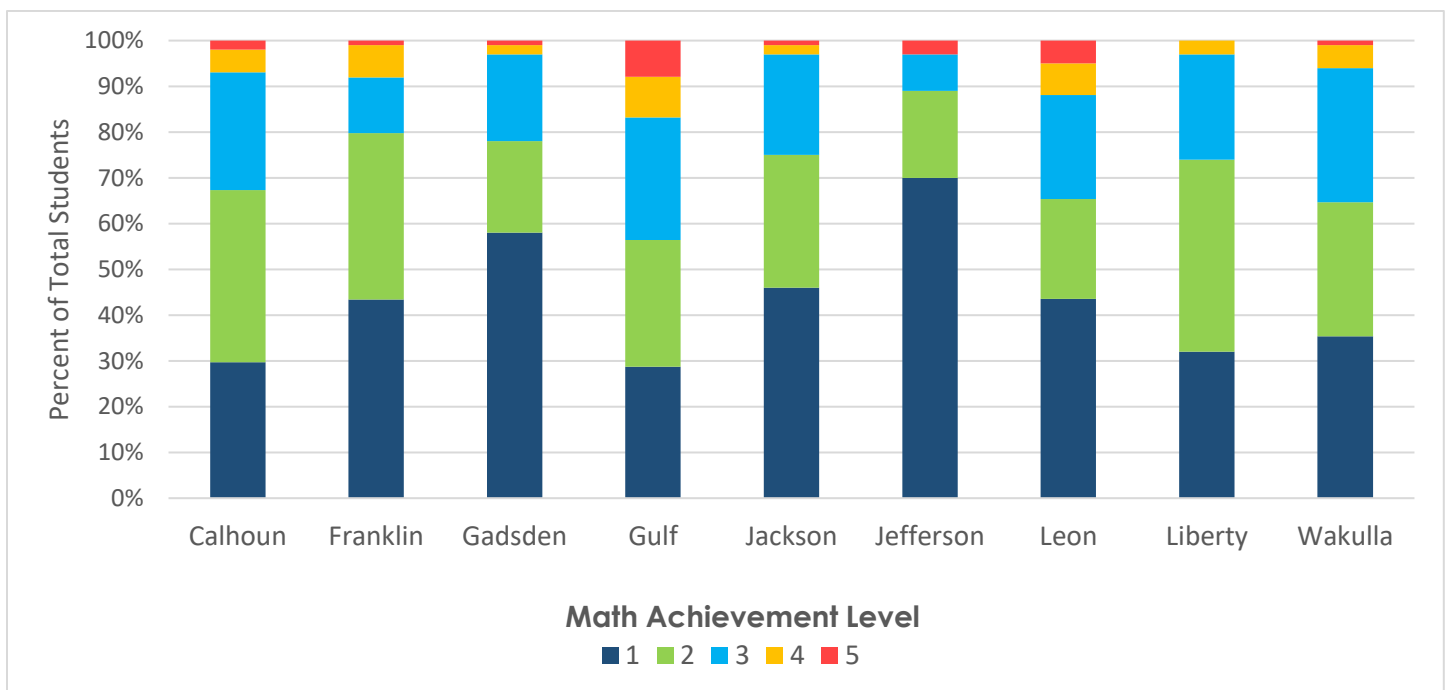
3RD GRADE READING SCORES (2022) – PERCENT OF STUDENTS AT EACH ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL

Generally, third grade is the point at which students stop learning how to read and start reading for comprehension. Therefore, when students fall behind in reading scores by the time they arrive at third grade, the negative outcomes of lower reading levels compound in subsequent schooling years and can be a factor in workforce readiness and later life outcomes.



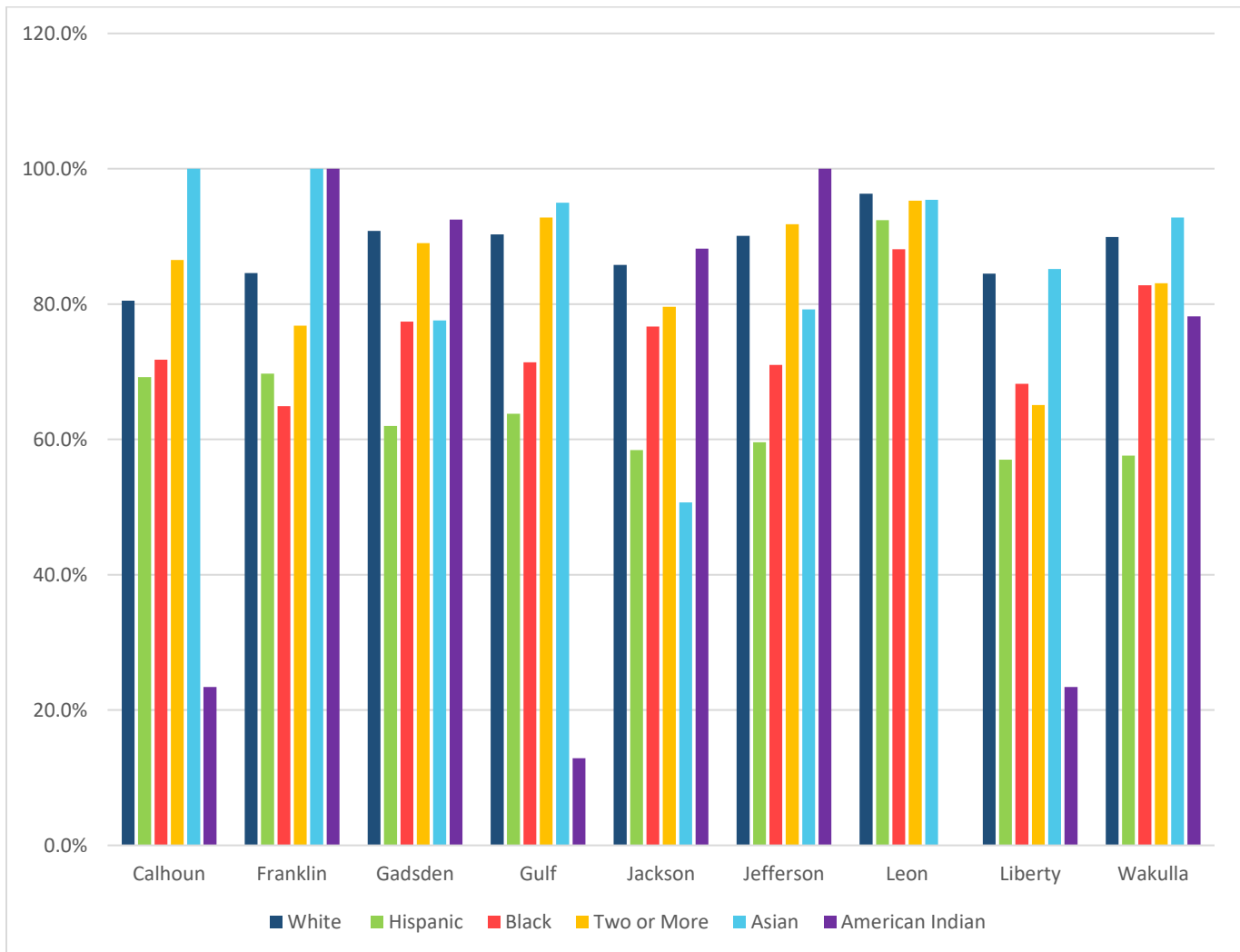
Source: Florida Department of Education

8TH GRADE MATH SCORES (2022) – PERCENT OF STUDENTS AT EACH ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL



Source: Florida Department of Education

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES BY ETHNICITY (2020)



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

HIGHER EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTERS

- Chipola College
- Florida A&M University (FAMU)
- Florida State University (FSU)
- Gadsden Technical College
- Gulf Coast State College – Gulf/Franklin Campus
- Keiser University
- Lively Technical College
- Tallahassee Community College (TCC)
- TCC Gadsden Center
- TCC Wakulla Center
- Wakulla Environmental Institute (WEI)

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

REGIONAL DOMESTIC PRODUCT (2019-2022)

Regional domestic product, also referred to as *gross domestic product*, is a measure of the Region’s exports to other U.S. regions or abroad. The most significant percentage gains have occurred in Calhoun and Wakulla counties, while only Franklin County experienced a decrease in regional domestic product.

	CALHOUN	FRANKLIN	GADSDEN	GULF	JACKSON	JEFFERSON	LEON	LIBERTY	WAKULLA
2019	\$211 Million	\$409 Million	\$1.144 Billion	\$446 Million	\$1.117 Billion	\$235 Million	\$14.589 Billion	\$166 Million	\$503 Million
2020	\$214 Million	\$415 Million	\$1.162 Billion	\$452 Million	\$1.134 Billion	\$238 Million	\$14.862 Billion	\$168 Million	\$510 Million
2021	\$302 Million	\$368 Million	\$1.377 Billion	\$469 Million	\$1.486 Billion	\$292 Million	\$15.486 Billion	\$169 Million	\$793 Million
2022	\$312 Million	\$381 Million	\$1.421 Billion	\$491 Million	\$1.532 Billion	\$306 Million	\$16.075 Billion	\$182 Million	\$832 Million
Percent Change (2019-2022)	48%	-7%	24%	10%	37%	30%	10%	10%	65%

Source: REMI PI+

REGIONAL PURCHASE COEFFICIENT (2021-2023)

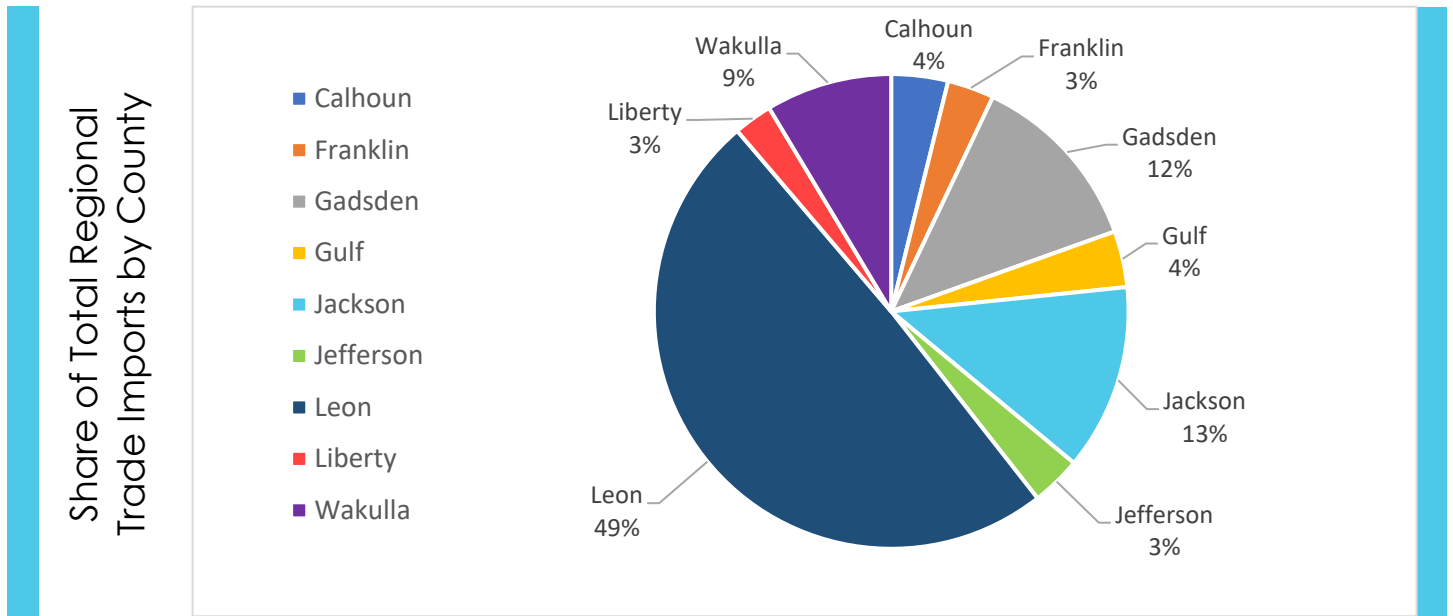
The regional purchase coefficient is a ratio between 0 and 1, where 0 indicates that a county is entirely reliant on goods from outside that county and 1 indicates that a county is entirely self-sufficient and able to produce all of the goods that it consumes. Counties with higher regional purchase coefficients, like Gulf and Leon counties, generally have a healthier level of economic diversification and activity that can better support local business and community needs.

	CALHOUN	FRANKLIN	GADSDEN	GULF	JACKSON	JEFFERSON	LEON	LIBERTY	WAKULLA
2021	0.289	0.378	0.366	0.403	0.394	0.274	0.627	0.197	0.319
2022	0.289	0.378	0.360	0.402	0.392	0.272	0.627	0.196	0.317
2023	0.290	0.378	0.360	0.402	0.392	0.272	0.626	0.196	0.319

Source: REMI PI+

TRADE IMPORTS (2022)

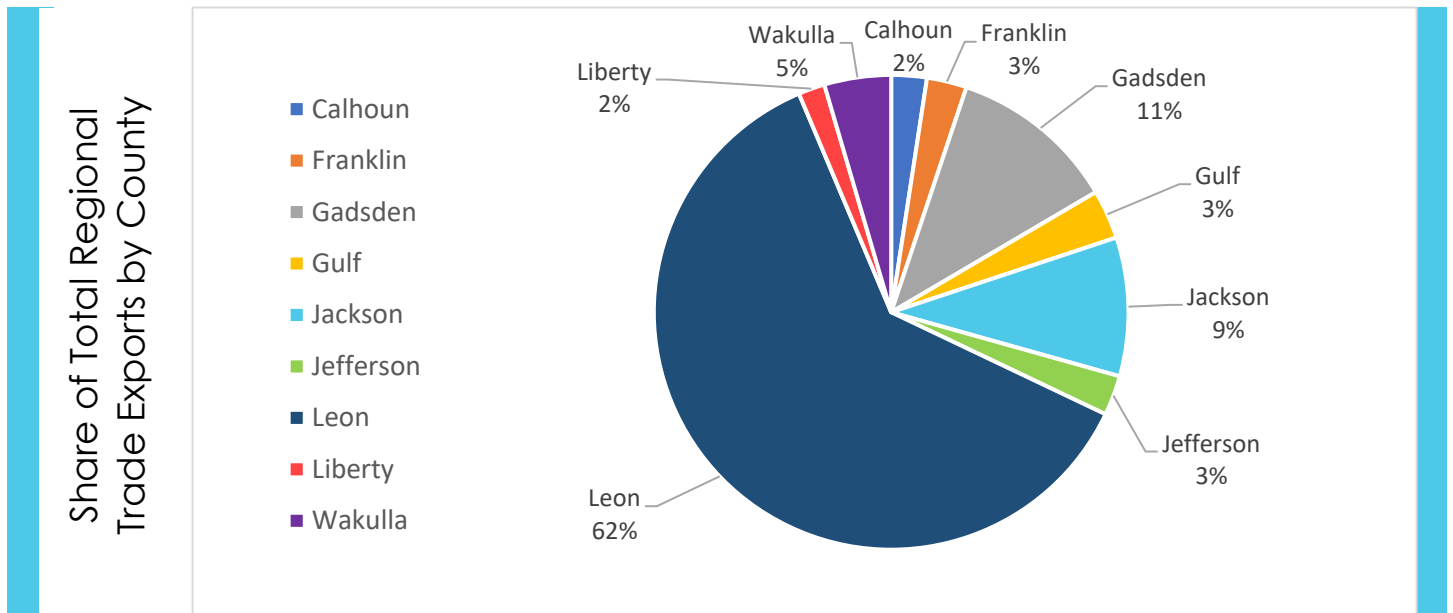
The Apalachee Region’s estimated total in trade imports is \$11.079 billion, roughly half of which stems from Leon County (\$5.466 billion) with the next largest amounts of trade imports belonging to Jackson, Gadsden, and Wakulla counties. The chart below shows each county’s percentage share of total regional trade imports.



Source: REMI PI+

TRADE EXPORTS (2022)

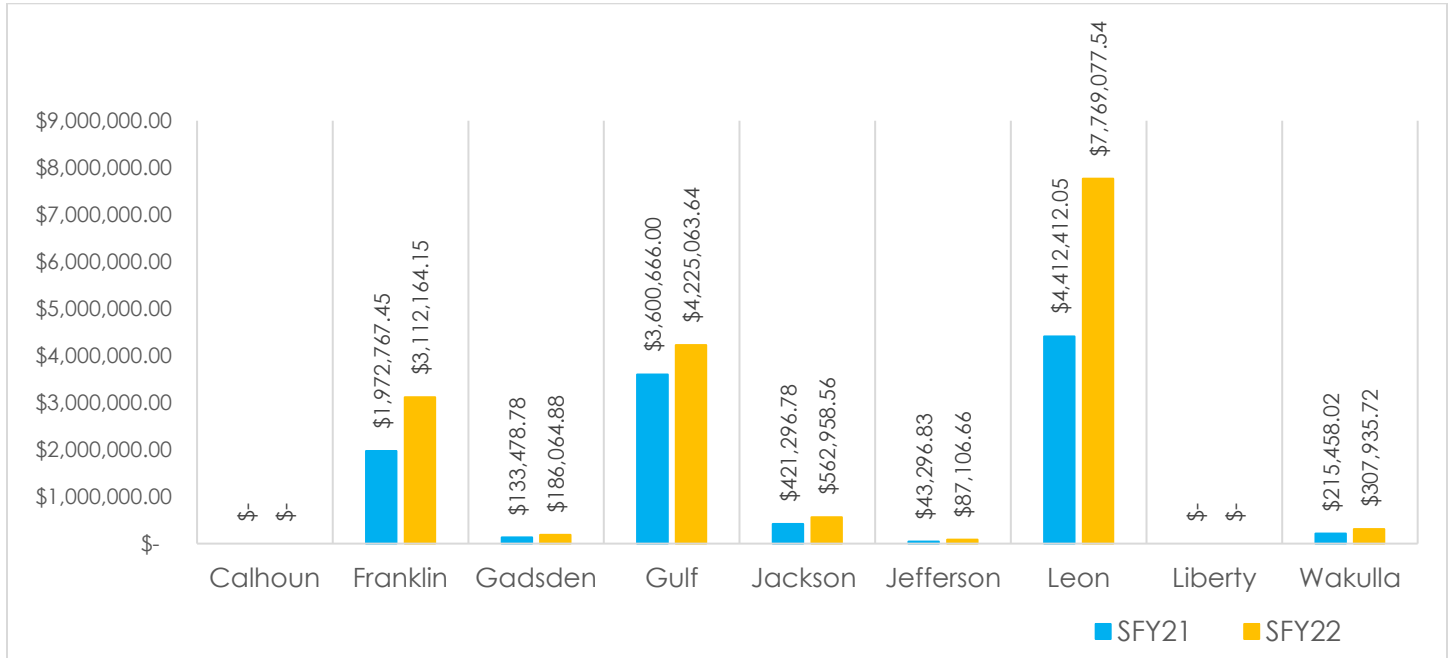
The chart below shows each county’s percent share of total regional trade exports, which amounts to an estimated \$4.593 billion. Regional trade exports currently total less than half of total regional trade imports, which may indicate an overreliance on imported goods or that exports are less valuable than imports.



Source: REMI PI+

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT TAX (2021-2022)

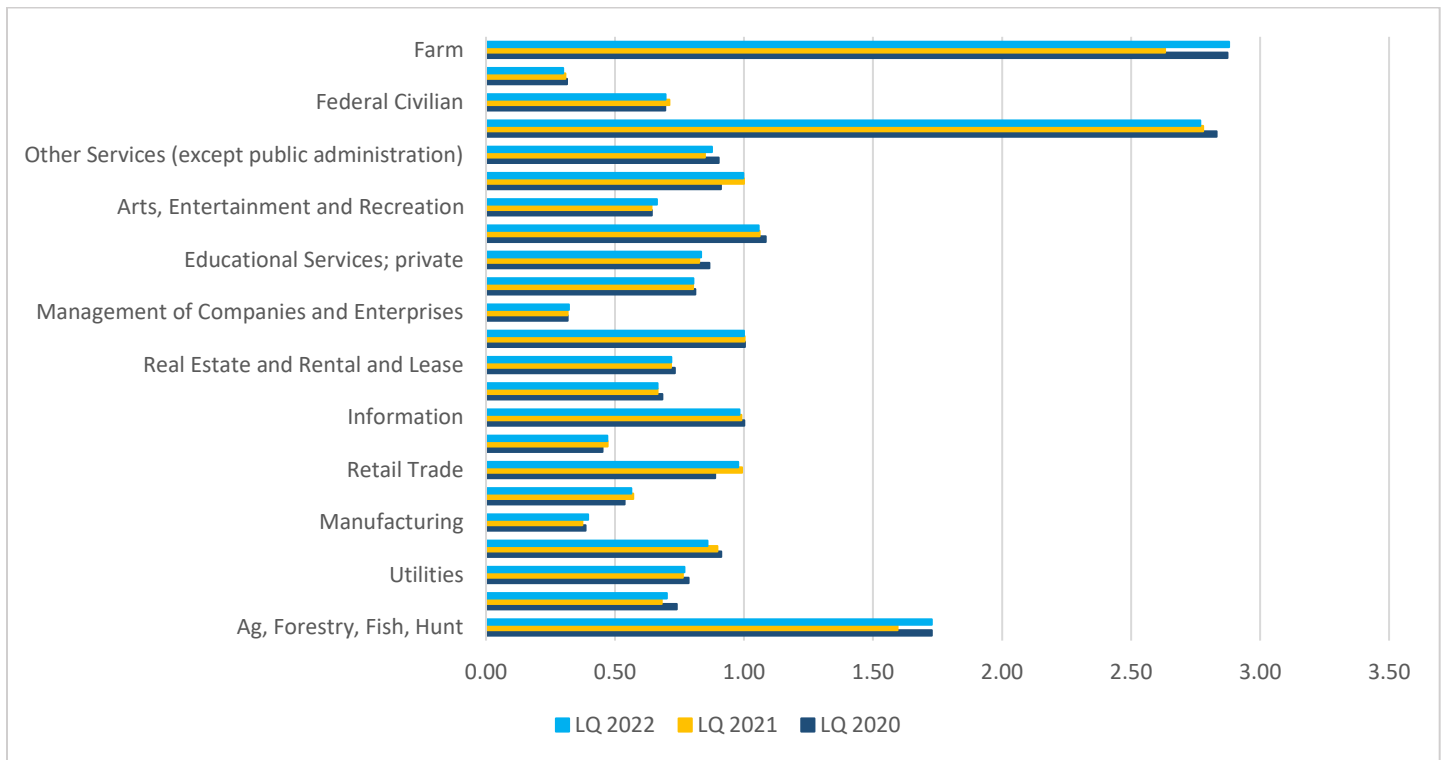
The tourism development tax is managed at the county level and is a method of shifting the tax burden from locals to tourists to support infrastructure development or other activities that support the tourism industry as well as year-around quality of life. It can be a useful, passive tool to support economic development.



Source: Florida Department of Revenue

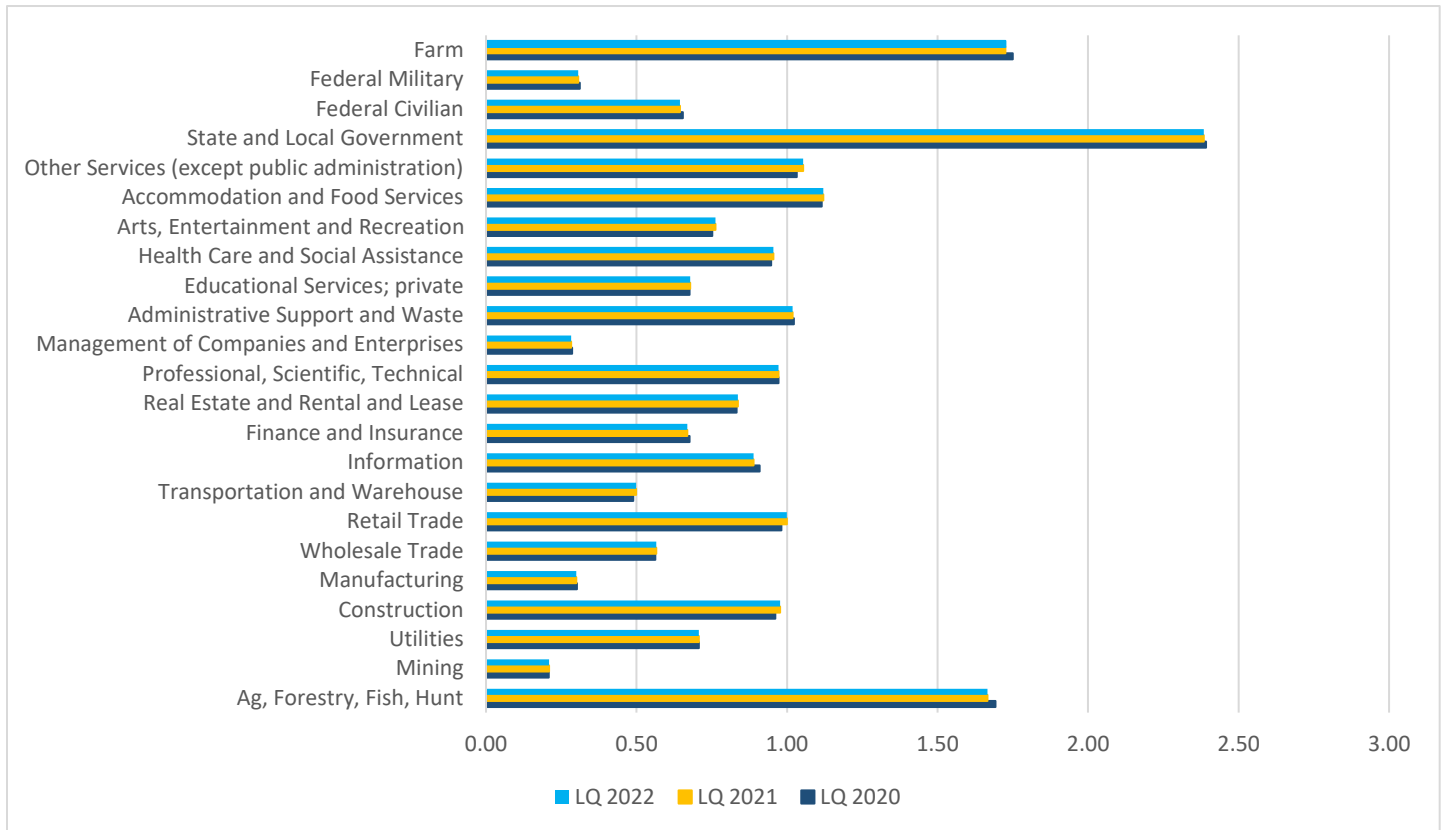


LOCATION QUOTIENT (LQ), APALACHEE REGION (COMPARED TO FLORIDA 2021-2023)



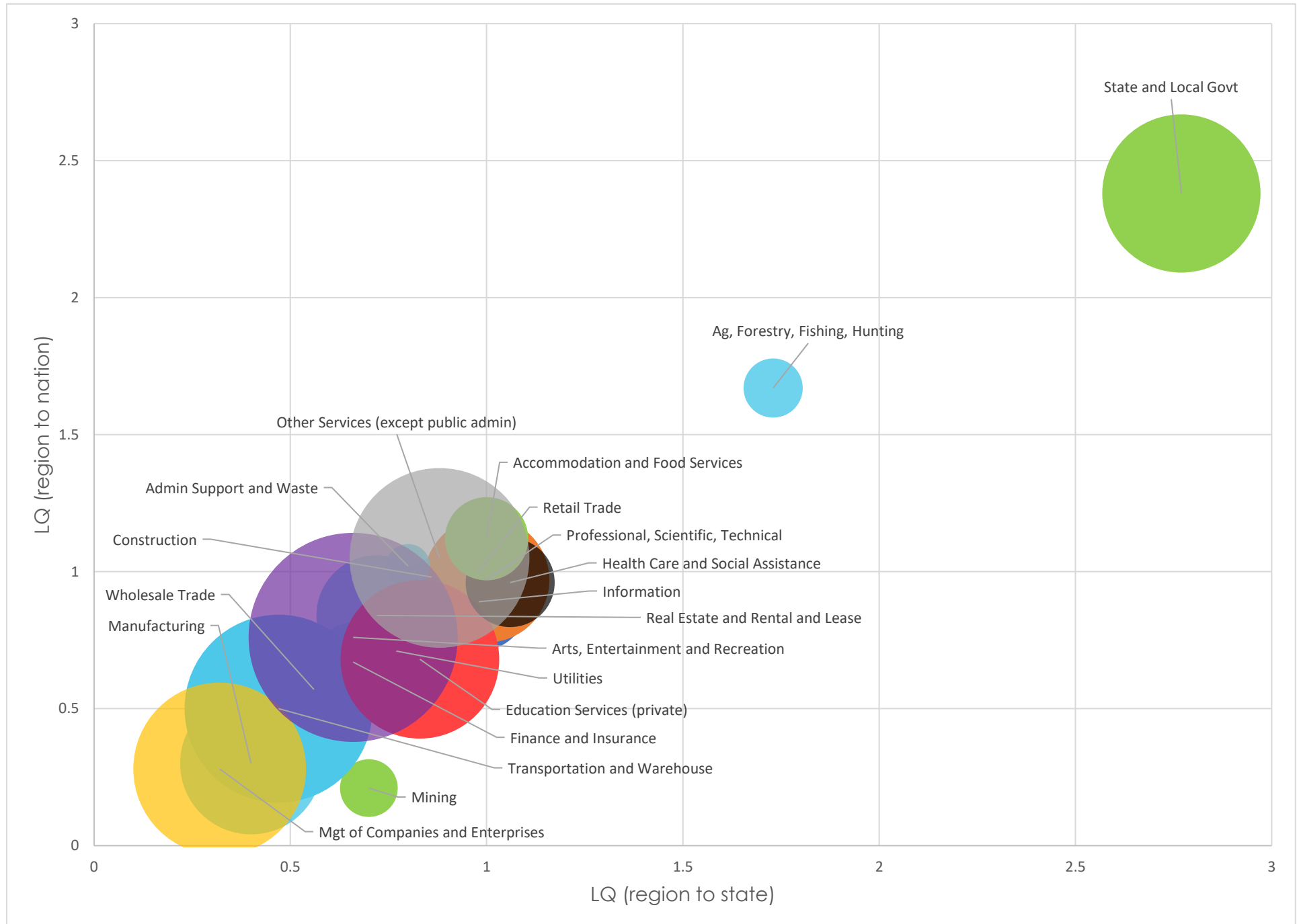
Source: REMI PI+

LOCATION QUOTIENT (LQ), APALACHEE REGION (COMPARED TO THE NATION 2021-2023)



Source: REMI PI+

APALACHEE INDUSTRY CONCENTRATIONS BY EMPLOYMENT SIZE RELATIVE TO FLORIDA AND U.S. (2022)



SHIFT SHARE ANALYSIS, APALACHEE REGION (2020-2022)

INDUSTRY	2020-2021			2021-2022		
	NATION SHARE	INDUSTRY MIX	REGIONAL SHIFT	NATION SHARE	INDUSTRY MIX	REGIONAL SHIFT
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting	0.072	-0.028	-0.003	0.097	0.145	0.025
Mining	0.009	-0.017	0.005	0.012	0.006	0.003
Utilities	0.019	-0.021	0.009	0.025	-0.003	-0.004
Construction	0.482	-0.569	0.446	0.648	-0.342	-0.039
Manufacturing	0.179	0.031	0.038	0.245	0.256	-0.072
Wholesale Trade	0.161	0.108	0.103	0.227	-0.153	-0.044
Retail Trade	0.813	0.987	0.869	1.183	-1.559	-0.133
Transportation and Warehouse	0.205	0.165	0.227	0.294	0.045	-0.046
Information	0.136	0.015	-0.037	0.184	-0.016	-0.073
Finance and Insurance	0.329	-0.239	0.027	0.436	-0.087	0.004
Real Estate and Rental and Lease	0.343	-0.221	0.205	0.464	0.039	-0.017
Professional, Scientific, Technical	0.643	0.057	0.286	0.886	0.143	-0.085
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0.035	0.013	0.002	0.048	0.002	-0.002
Administrative Support and Waste	0.554	-0.059	0.171	0.756	0.066	-0.083
Educational Services (private)	0.144	-0.121	0.076	0.193	0.091	0.011
Health Care and Social Assistance	0.982	-0.725	0.694	1.330	0.227	-0.172
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	0.124	0.202	0.118	0.182	0.314	-0.042
Accommodation and Food Services	0.627	1.993	0.412	0.953	0.125	0.002
Other Services (except public administration)	0.501	-0.437	0.544	0.684	0.680	0.114
State and Local Government	2.124	-1.956	0.731	2.827	-1.124	0.181

Source: REMI PI+

National Share (NS) = $i_{local}(t-1) * US(t) / US(t-1)$

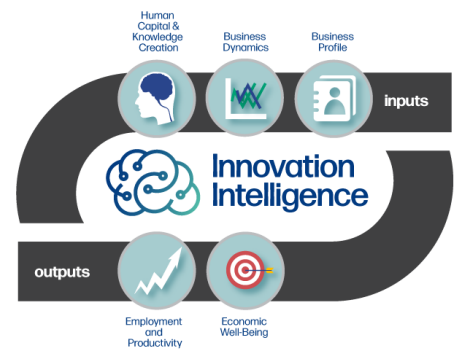
Industry Mix (IM) = $(i_{local}(t-1) * (i_{US}(t) / i_{US}(t-1))) - NS$

Regional Shift (RS) = $i_{local}(t-1) * ((i_{local}(t) / i_{local}(t-1)) - (i_{US}(t) / i_{US}(t-1)))$

QUALITY OF LIFE

INNOVATION INDEX RANKING (2022)

StatsAmerica’s “Innovation Intelligence” Innovation Index is a way to broadly judge the health and potential of a local economy. Essentially, each county’s ranking is determined by existing economic inputs and outputs that are then combined into a singular, at-a-glance number. Currently, the highest scores are boasted by Leon and Wakulla counties.



County	Score	Median	Rank of 3110
Calhoun	101.2	111	2746
Franklin	110.0	111	1964
Gadsden	104.9	111	2417
Gulf	112.2	111	1641
Jackson	107.3	111	2165
Jefferson	106.0	111	2306
Leon	128.1	111	462
Liberty	106.5	111	2262
Wakulla	125.3	111	591
Apalachee Region	113.1		

Source: StatsAmerica

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING INDEX RANKING (2022)

The Economic Well-Being Index is a subset of the Innovation Index, which focuses on aspects of a local economy that are tied to quality of life and sustainability. The best scores in the Apalachee Region currently belong to Wakulla County and Gulf County.

County	Score	Median	Rank of 3110
Calhoun	122.2	132	2108
Franklin	132.4	132	1474
Gadsden	108.2	132	2802
Gulf	151.6	132	376
Jackson	118.2	132	2323
Jefferson	132.8	132	1448
Leon	139.1	132	1054
Liberty	124.7	132	1966
Wakulla	153.8	132	286
Apalachee Region	110.1		

Source: StatsAmerica

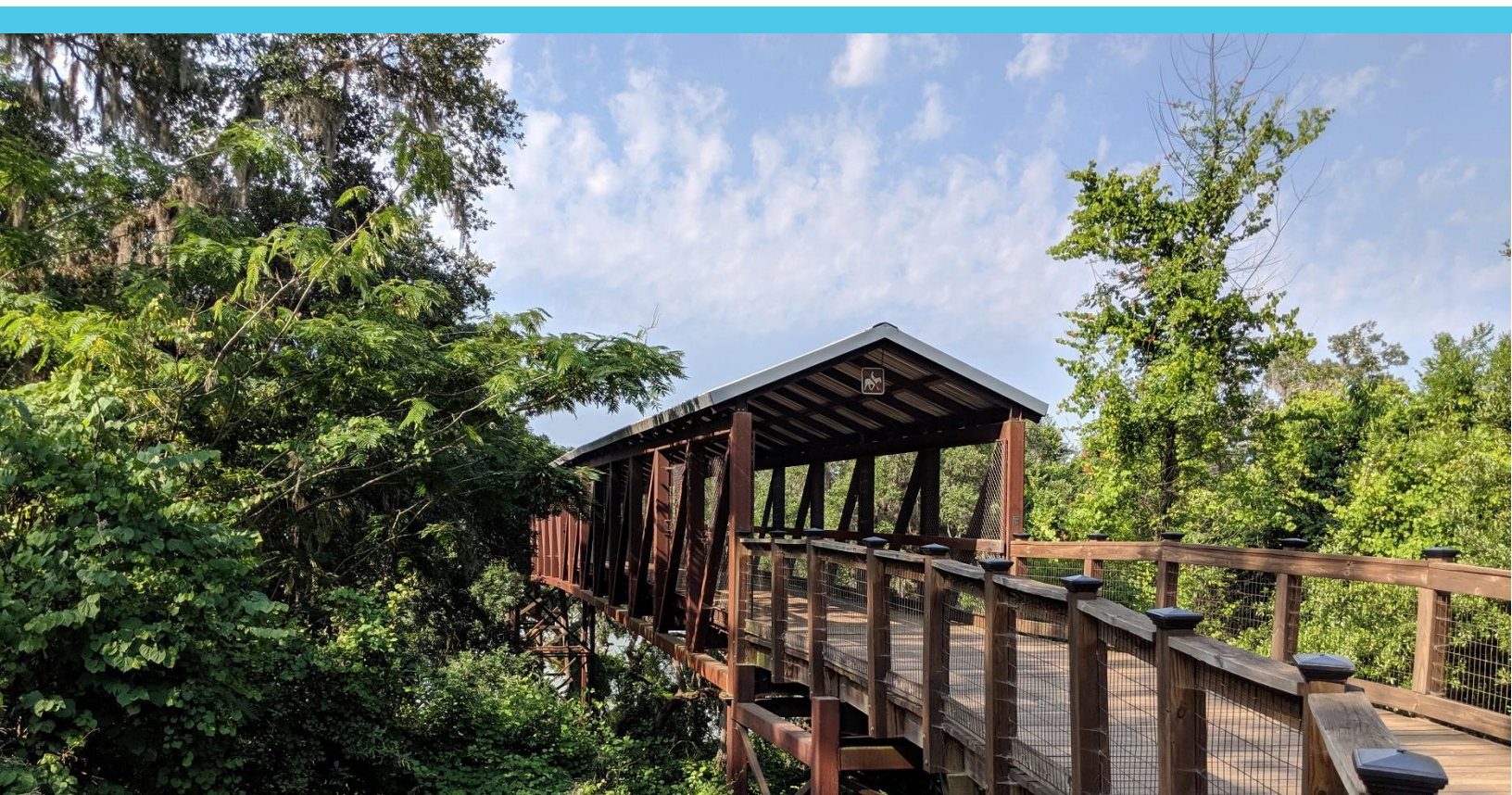
INCOME INEQUALITY (2015)

According to the Economic Policy Institute, the State of Florida has the second highest level of income inequality in the U.S. Several Apalachee counties have notably high levels of income inequality, including Franklin County that ranks with the 16th highest level of income inequality of all U.S. counties. Gulf and Leon counties also have relatively high levels of income inequality.

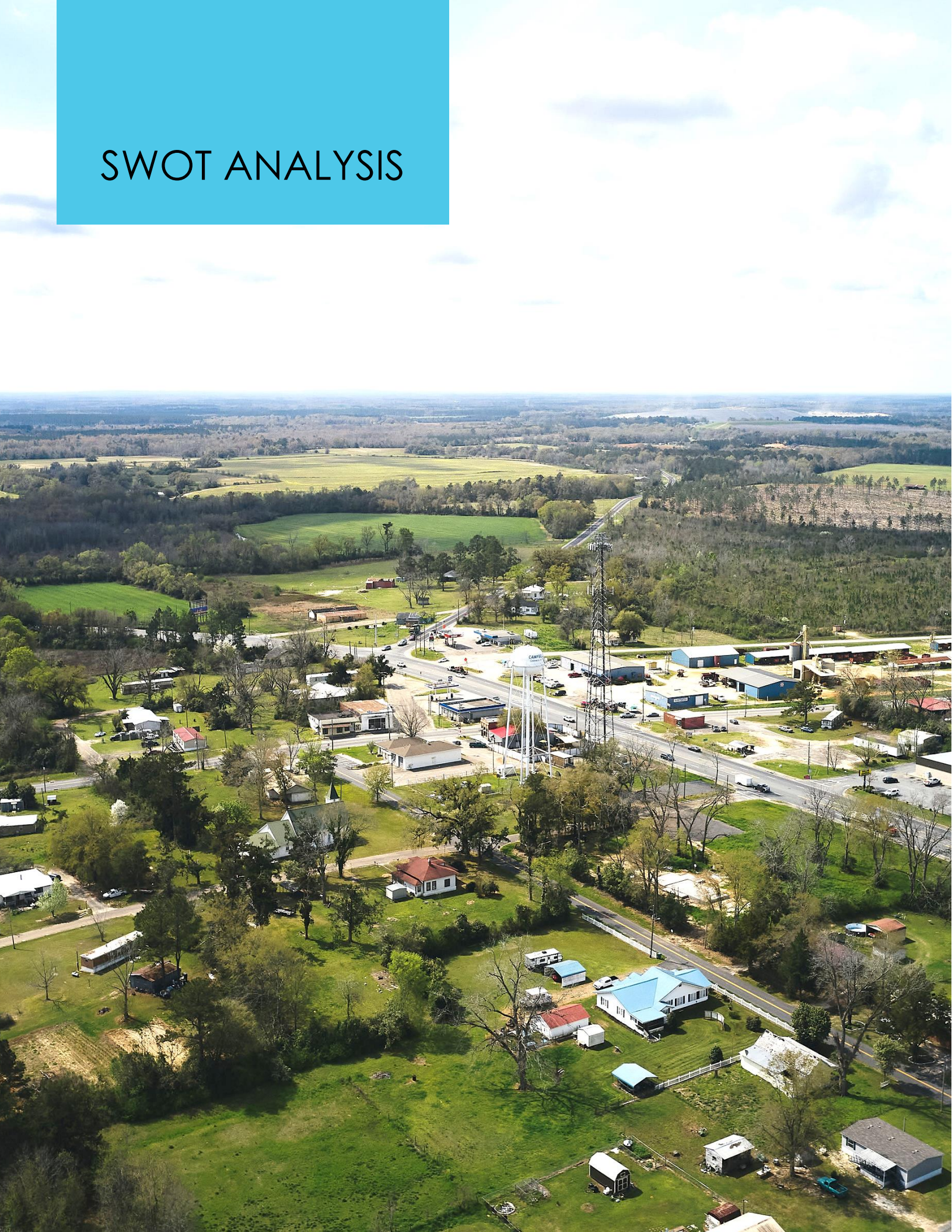
Apalachee counties with the lowest levels of income inequality—compared to both Florida and U.S.—are Liberty and Wakulla counties. While this data indicator can be useful, it is easier to skew the data in a rural county with a smaller population, since just one high-earning household can cause a major shift in the ratio.

Ratio of Top 1% Income to Bottom 99% Income (2015)				
County	Average Income of Top 1%	Average Income of Bottom 99%	Top-to-Bottom Ratio	National Rank by Top-to-Bottom Ratio (of 3061)
Calhoun	\$325,175	\$23,317	13.9	1278
Franklin	\$1,456,120	\$26,956	54	16
Gadsden	\$358,755	\$24,576	14.6	1134
Gulf	\$700,023	\$27,856	25.1	175
Jackson	\$347,856	\$25,866	13.4	1428
Jefferson	\$520,111	\$28,013	18.6	536
Leon	\$773,030	\$34,376	22.5	250
Liberty	\$267,497	\$25,445	10.5	2387
Wakulla	\$343,815	\$33,973	10.1	2514

Source: Economic Policy Institute (<https://www.epi.org/>)



SWOT ANALYSIS



SWOT ANALYSIS

The mapping of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) is a tried-and-true technique for assessing the capacity and greater context of an economy. SWOT is defined as:

- **STRENGTH** or **WEAKNESS** is *internal* to the Apalachee Region and can be an asset, limitation, or information about a characteristic of the region.
- **OPPORTUNITY** or **THREAT** is *external* to the Apalachee Region, understood as a trend, law, or other large phenomenon, which can affect the future performance of regional assets and characteristics.

STRENGTHS

Collaboration

- Growing commitment to strong regional collaboration and project partnerships across governments, economic/ community development organizations, education centers, and non-profits.

Education and Workforce

- High quality degree-seeking and vocational training institutions
- Low unemployment rate

Business and Industry

- Emerging ecosystem of entrepreneurial programs, assets, and networks
- New and growing industry sectors
- Rural sites available for development

Infrastructure

- Access to Interstate-10, deep water seaport, and railroads
- Water resources

Quality of Life

- Coastline and Gulf of Mexico
- Rivers, springs, lakes, etc.
- State and national parks
- Growing system of paved, non-motorized trails and bike/pedestrian infrastructure

WEAKNESSES

Collaboration

- Gaps in engaged stakeholder groups, especially in rural counties, with space to increase level of engagement for current and future collaborators

Education and Workforce

- Socio-economic disparities
- High poverty rates
- Low high school graduation rates in certain areas
- Declining rural population and labor force

Business and Industry

- Site readiness, especially in rural areas
- Disconnect between businesses and capital
- Lack of vibrant industry clusters with supply chain alignment
- Difficult to attract/retain skilled talent
- Regional wages not competitive with U.S.

Infrastructure

- Half of Region not covered by a regional transportation planning organization
- Improvements needed to rail, deep water port, and airports
- Large amount of unpaved roads
- Limited/antiquated wastewater infrastructure

Quality of Life

- Lack of affordable/workforce housing
- Limited amenities to attract young professionals
- Generational poverty

OPPORTUNITIES

Collaboration

- Partnerships with other regions and states to improve the strength and connectivity of the regional economy
- Expanded entrepreneurship network
- Information sharing
- Strengthen “cradle to career” education pathway
- Collaborative, cross-platform regional marketing and awareness campaigns

Business and Industry

- Expansion of shared Business, Retention, and Expansion (BRE) activities
- Investments in public infrastructure

Funding

- Federal and state funding/grants
- Triumph Gulf Coast grant funding for coastal counties (from BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill settlement)
- Leverage public and private investment

Disasters

- Disaster resiliency, preparedness, response, and recovery initiatives

THREATS

Collaboration

- Loss of collaborative partners

Business and Industry

- Inflation
- Major shifts in industry

Social and Political Environment

- Decline in population
- Political instability
- Decision-making
- Regulations and legislation

Funding

- Reduced statewide and federal grants or incentives for economic development
- Legislative reallocation of economic development dollars away from Region

Disasters

- Hurricanes and other storms
- Flooding and sea-level rise
- Public health emergencies
- Environmental degradation
- Economic downturn or recession

ACTION PLAN: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

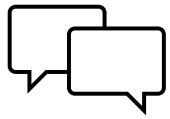


The Action Plan translates regional priorities into well-defined goals and objectives to guide economic development activities throughout the Apalachee Region. The goals and objectives contained within this Action Plan are influenced by previous Regional Economic Development Strategies, stakeholder meetings, and public comment.

VISION

The Apalachee Region seeks to enhance partnerships, catalyzing existing assets, and explore innovative opportunities for growth in order to shape a resilient, vibrant economy that bridges rural and urban systems and respects the needs of the Region's diverse communities to achieve a more equitable, robust regional economy.

GOALS



Transformative Regional Collaboration



Economic Diversity, Equity, and Growth



Dynamic Workforce



Resilient Infrastructure



Affordable Housing



Enhanced Quality of Life

OBJECTIVES

Goal 1. Transformative Regional Collaboration

- Objective 1.1.** Increase employee and business resilience through research, partnerships, workshops, other technical assistance, and innovative projects.
- Objective 1.2.** Develop regional entrepreneurial hubs and connect them with industry clusters, assets, services, networks, facilities, tools, funding, and expertise.
- Objective 1.3.** Work to create a strong pipeline between universities, colleges, other educational assets, Innovation Park, Domi Station, and other stakeholders to harness opportunities to commercialize technology, assist entrepreneurs, assist with business expansion, attract new businesses to the area, and share information.
- Objective 1.4.** Create a regional transportation planning organization that can advocate for the diverse transportation needs of underrepresented counties and undertake planning and implementation activities.
- Objective 1.5.** Continue alignment between Economic Development Elements, Disaster Recovery Plans, Community Redevelopment Area Plans, Economic Development Strategic Plans, Workforce Development Plans, and other plans.
- Objective 1.6.** Collaborate across regional organizations to develop Triumph Gulf Coast, DEO Job Growth Grant Fund, DEO Rural Infrastructure Fund, and other project applications that can be leveraged with EDA funding to support resilient rural economies.
- Objective 1.7.** Promote the Apalachee Region as a multi-faceted tourism destination through research, partnerships, workshops, other technical assistance, and innovative projects.
- Objective 1.8.** Support and enhance Primary Education/Post-Secondary Adult Vocational/College/University-to-employer/economic development organization/chamber/other entity connections and project development in the areas of workforce, entrepreneurship, business recruitment, and business expansion.

Goal 2. Economic Diversity, Equity, and Growth

- Objective 2.1.** Explore economic resilience planning and implementation that renders local and regional economies more fit to recover from macro-economic downturns and natural disasters.

- Objective 2.2.** Support the development, retention, and expansion of Minority- and Women-Owned Small Business Enterprises (MWSBEs).
- Objective 2.3.** Connect revolving loan funds, micro-lending programs, angel investors, and other financing opportunities with entrepreneurs and existing businesses to support economic growth.
- Objective 2.4.** Strengthen the regional economy through targeted recruitment of new businesses and supporting existing business expansions under a Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) framework.
- Objective 2.5.** Support the growth of the region's key industry clusters as well as industry diversification to ensure a sustainable business climate.
- Objective 2.6.** Explore opportunities to grow advanced manufacturing, agricultural technology, and logistics industry clusters as well as new frontiers in crop diversification, value-added agriculture, industrial hemp, other innovative crops, and eco-tourism.

Goal 3. Dynamic Workforce

- Objective 3.1.** Support and promote alignment with the CareerSource Boards in the Apalachee Region.
- Objective 3.2.** Bolster collaborative workforce alignment and development initiatives that leverage existing assets, respond to local demand, and lead to the attraction, development, and retention of top talent to meet the workforce needs of employers in the Apalachee Region.
- Objective 3.3.** Connect job seekers and employers in a manner that allows both to improve their current economic status while also improving their long-term economic position by working across economic development and education partners.
- Objective 3.4.** Support aviation, logistics, and other transportation-related education and training initiatives to address state and national workforce gaps.
- Objective 3.5.** Increase employability skills training programs to reduce employment barriers for all students and adults, with a particular focus on underserved, minority, and at-risk populations, in order to close regional workforce skills gaps and improve life outcomes.
- Objective 3.6.** Increase income generating, work-based learning, career exploration, and talent acquisition opportunities for youth through externships, work-study, apprenticeships, internships, and other innovative programs to prepare youth for becoming successful workers, entrepreneurs, and leaders.
- Objective 3.7.** Increase and retain the number of students and professionals in high-demand fields, including science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM), health, aviation, transportation, and others to meet demand.

Objective 3.8. Encourage improved labor force participation rates by increasing childcare and public transportation options.

Goal 4. Resilient Infrastructure

Objective 4.1. Develop connectivity and resiliency in Northwest Florida’s economic infrastructure.

Objective 4.2. Develop local, regional, state, and federal partnerships to meet broadband Internet goals and coordinate with partners to meet the needs of unserved and underserved areas.

Objective 4.3. Work towards paving the existing, extensive network of dirt roads to enhance regional transportation, logistics, and business development.

Objective 4.4. Transition towards regional storm water mitigation ponds instead of individual site ponds to enhance regional resilience and to reduce vulnerability to flooding and other disasters.

Objective 4.5. Support the development of infrastructure and utilities (including broadband) at the Port of Port St. Joe, Intermodal Logistics Center in Gadsden County, Tallahassee International Airport, regional/local airports, and associated Freight and Logistics Zone and I-10 Logistics and Manufacturing Corridor projects to incentivize private investment and job creation.

Objective 4.6. Support the development of Interstate-10 interchanges, Apalachee airports, Port of Port St. Joe, railroads, and other strategic sites through planning, infrastructure, interlocal agreements, marketing, and other technical assistance in order to accommodate business recruitment and expansion.

Objective 4.7. Ensure the future supply of water, cutting-edge telecommunications, and effective energy sources to meet Florida’s economic and quality of life goals.

Objective 4.8. Promote site readiness programs for industrial and commercial buildings in rural areas.

Goal 5. Affordable Housing

Objective 5.1. Support urban and rural workforce housing initiatives.

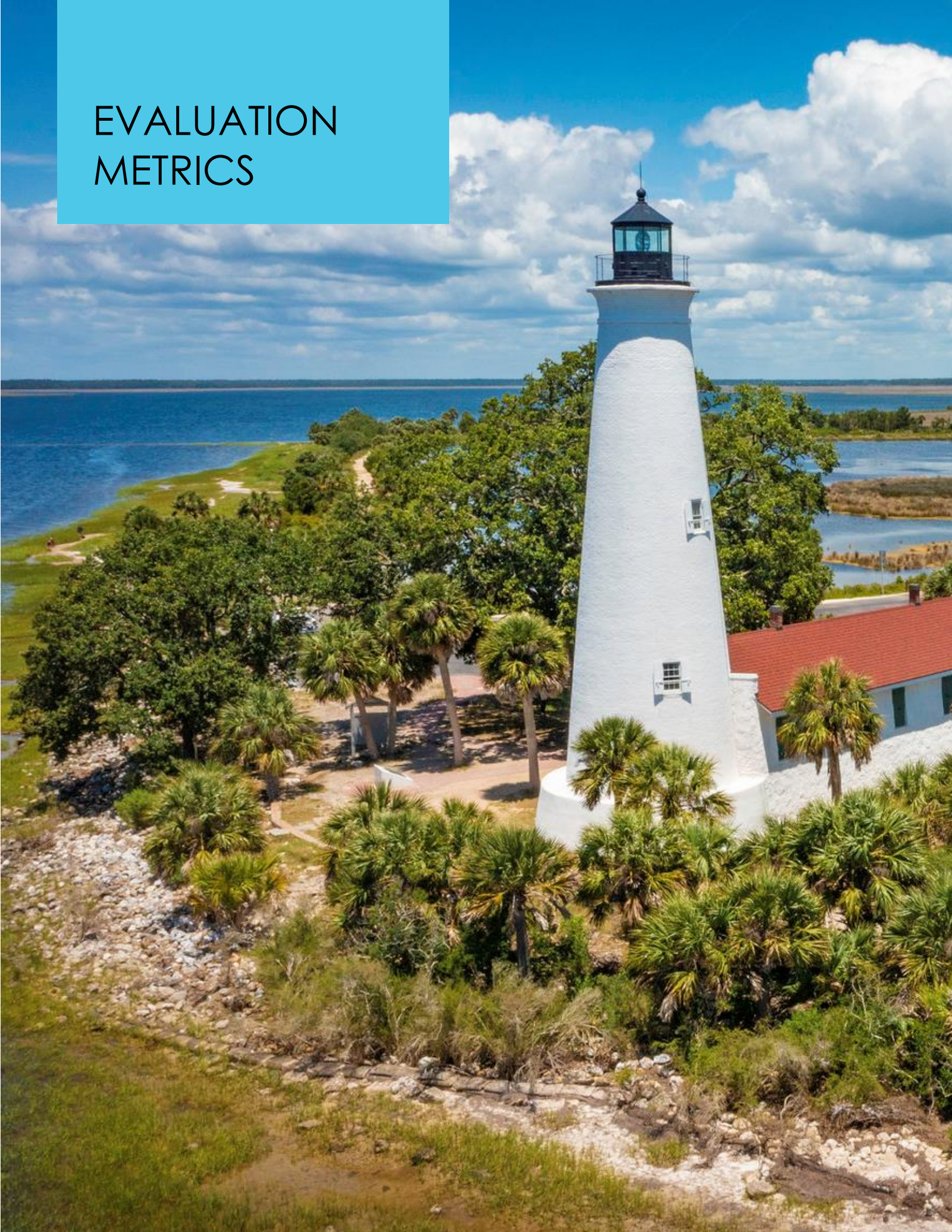
Objective 5.2. Support the Big Bend Continuum of Care, Community Actions Agencies, and other relevant organizations to address the needs of unhoused and housing-insecure populations through collaborative planning and projects.

- Objective 5.3.** Encourage community planning that enhances residential and commercial resiliency to flooding, hurricanes, and other disasters and promotes the long-term economic viability of disaster-prone areas.
- Objective 5.4.** Undertake collaborative activities that advance diversity, equity, and inclusion across communities in the Apalachee Region.
- Objective 5.5.** Increase availability of and access to workforce certifications, internships, and apprenticeships for building trades, from the high school to technical school levels, to support the workforce pipeline needed to build and maintain affordable and workforce housing.

Goal 6. Enhanced Quality of Life

- Objective 6.1.** Support activities that serve to make Northwest Florida a place appealing to existing residents and visitors as well as to a new generation of talented and creative individuals and companies, including improvements to amenities, redevelopment of blighted areas, the local food movement, and other local or national trends.
- Objective 6.2.** Attract retail businesses, amenities, medical facilities, and other developments to rural areas to retain and support growing families as well as aging-in-place for the 65+ population.
- Objective 6.3.** Ensure the promotion, protection, and preservation of the Region's natural resources, environment, and historic sites.
- Objective 6.4.** Enhance comprehensive planning, zoning, and other growth management-based economic development via research, partnerships, and innovative projects to promote smart growth, vibrant downtowns, and multi-modal, mixed-use districts.

EVALUATION METRICS



Evaluation Metrics

This section provides information about metrics tracked to gauge the success of the work in this Strategy. Metrics reflect the level of regional economic health through each of the goal areas. Each of these will be measured over time and across different geographies to understand changes.



Transformative Regional Collaboration

- Number of partners on ARPC listserv of regional stakeholders.
- Number of ARPC Economic Development Committee meetings.
- Increase in funding for collaborative economic development activities.
- Number of networking events and number of attendees.
- Increase in communication between organizations, businesses, counties, and states.
- Increase in representation by underrepresented populations in regional organizations.



Economic Diversity, Equity, and Growth

- Increase in per capita income.
- Net increase in average annual wage.
- Change in employment size for each industry sector.
- Change in number of firms in each industry sector.
- Increase in number of entrepreneurs/business owners receiving business counseling services.
- Volume of small business lending through ARPC Revolving Loan Fund.



Dynamic Workforce

- Increase in percent of students achieving high (level 3 or higher) third grade reading scores.
- Increase in percent of students achieving high (level 3 or higher) eighth grade math scores.
- Increase in high school graduation rate.
- Increase in the number of vocational trainings or career-based programs.
- Change in the labor force participation rate.
- Reduction in the unemployment rate.



Resilient Infrastructure

- Increase in investments in public or public-private infrastructure projects, including transportation, sewer/wastewater, broadband, and green infrastructure projects.
- Estimated economic impact of infrastructure investments.
- Traffic counts for major transportation corridors.
- Change in daily vehicle miles travelled.
- Increase in population with access to high-speed internet.



Affordable Housing

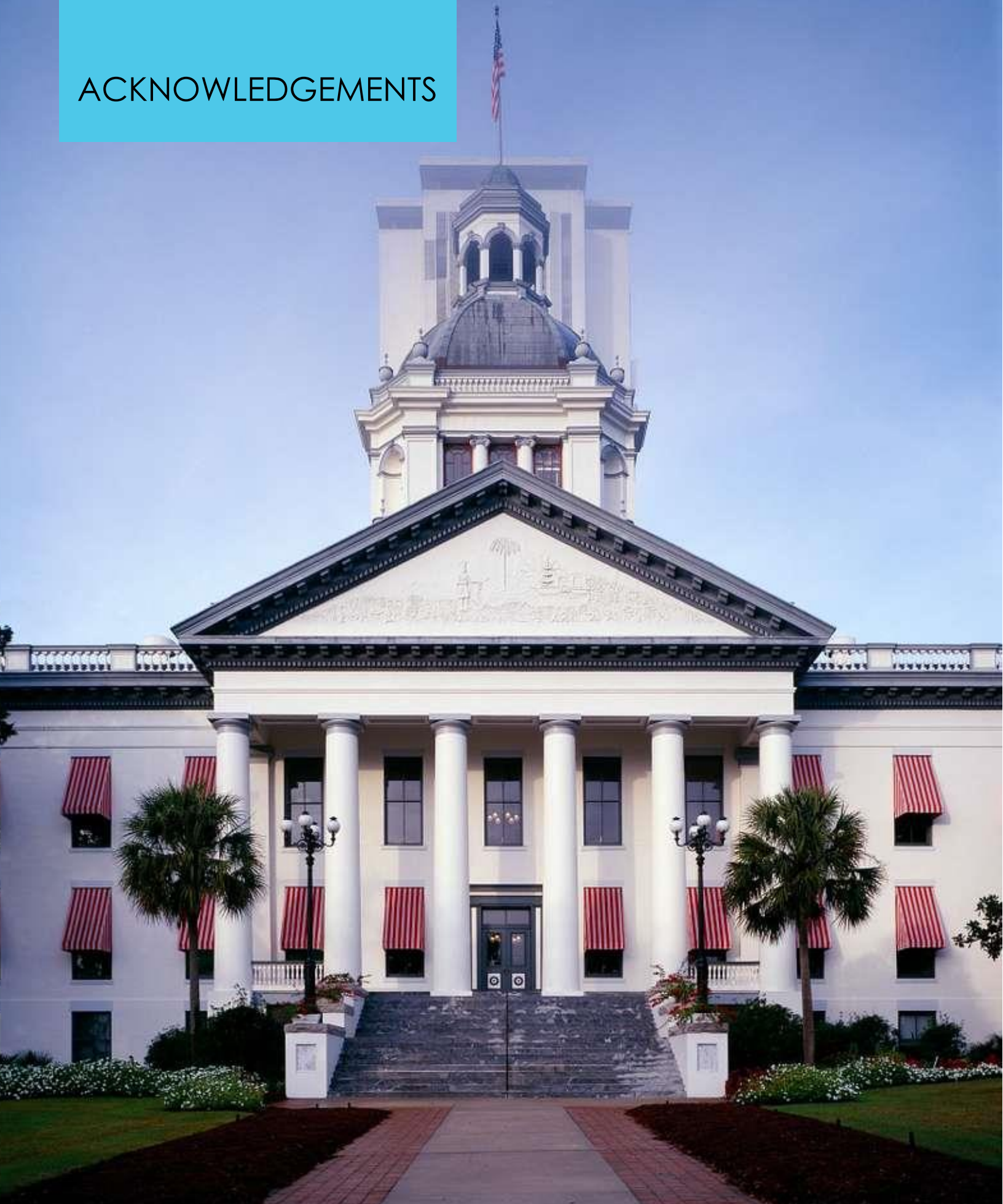
- Change in relative housing price.
- Increase in funding for Statewide Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) Program, Hurricane Housing Recovery Program (HHRP), or other housing programs.
- Number of local ordinances that have been updated in support of attainable, affordable, and/or workforce housing.



Enhanced Quality of Life

- Change in income inequality ratios.

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