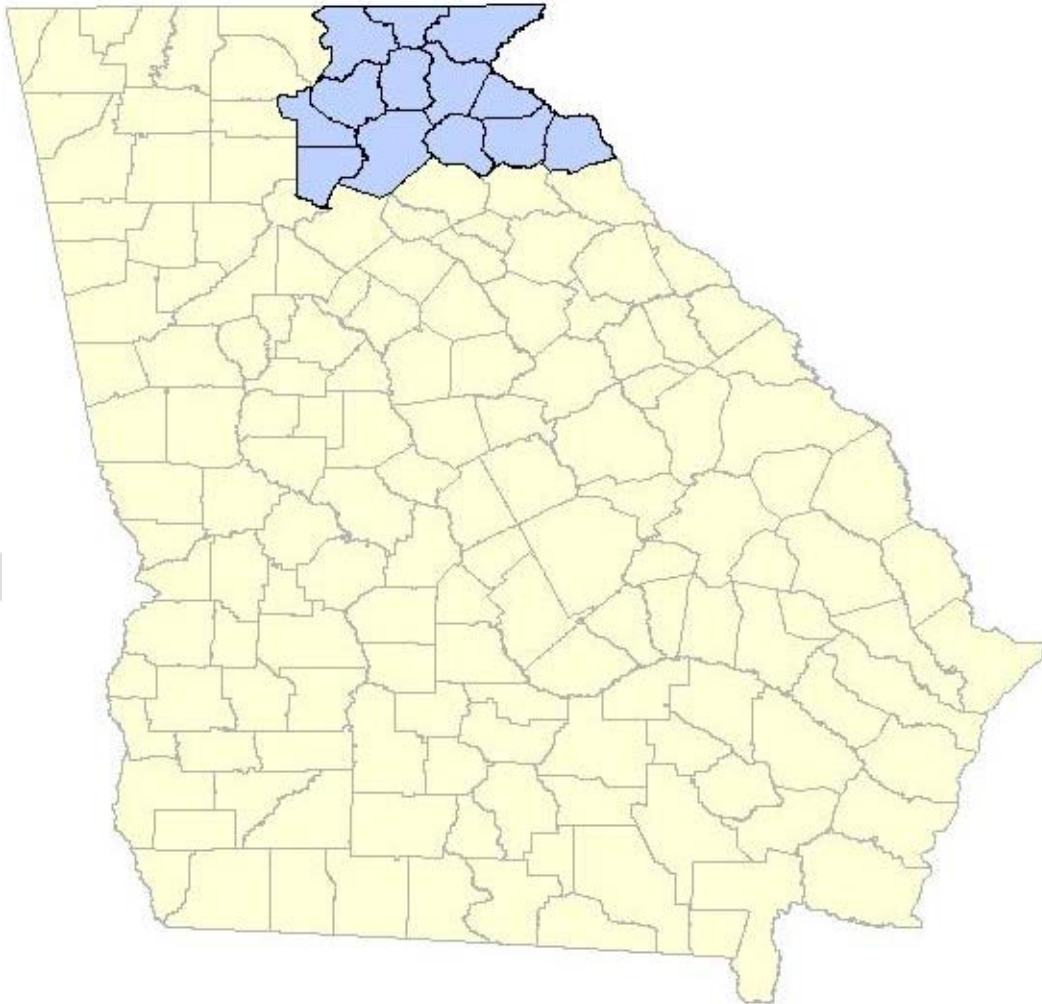
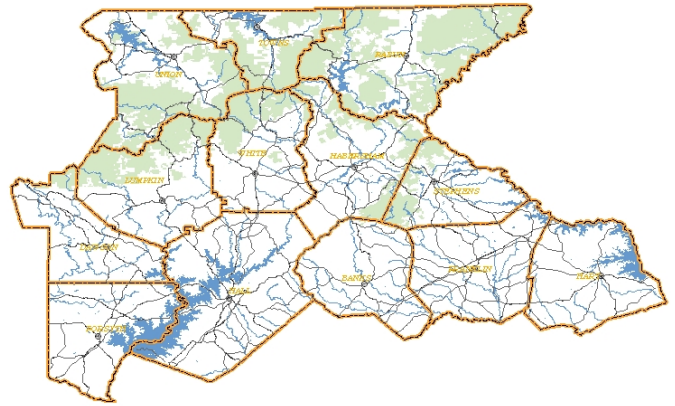
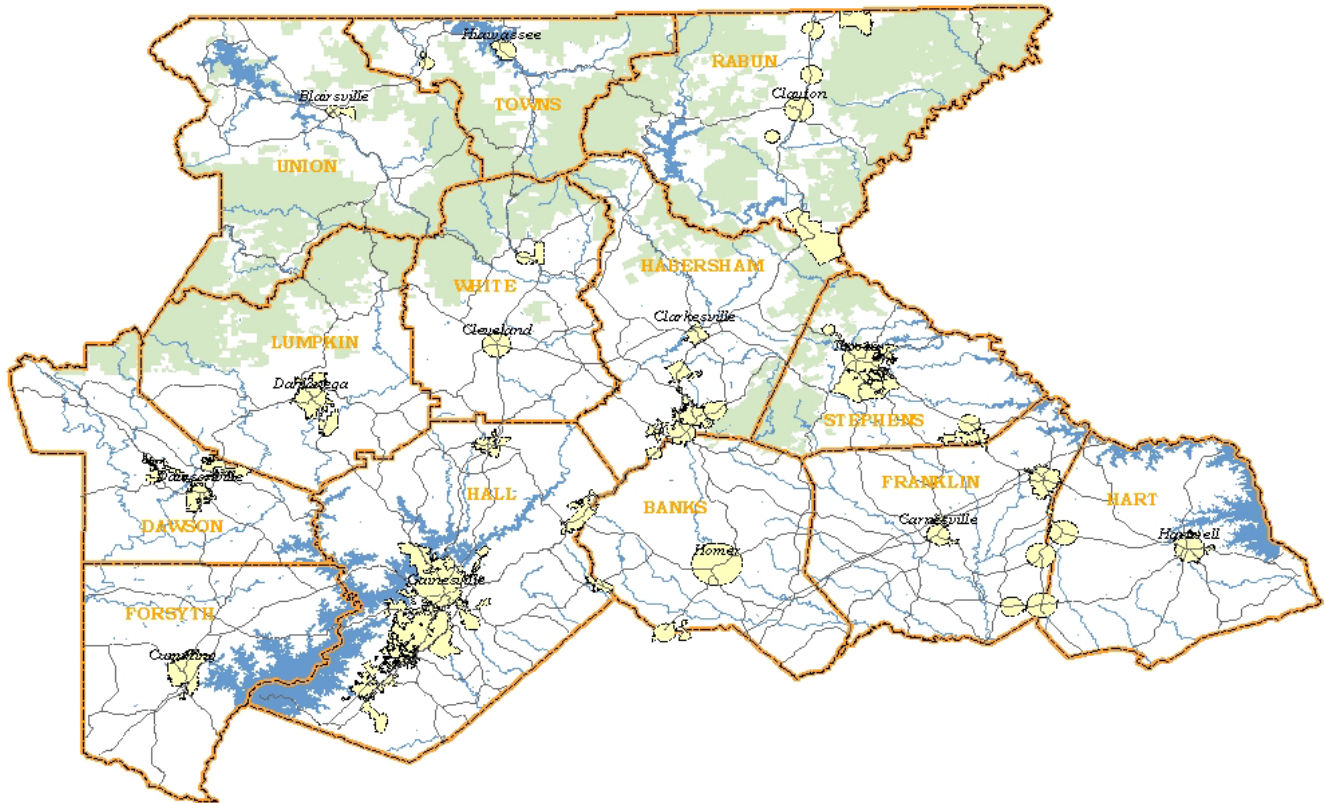


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**GEORGIA MOUNTAINS  
REGIONAL COMMISSION**





## **BANKS COUNTY**

Town of Homer\*  
City of Maysville

City of Demorest  
Town of Mt. Airy  
Town of Tallulah Falls

City of Mtn. City  
City of Sky Valley  
Town of Tiger

## **DAWSON COUNTY**

City of Dawsonville\*

## **HALL COUNTY**

City of Clermont  
City of Flowery Branch  
City of Gainesville\*  
Town of Gillsville  
City of Lula  
City of Oakwood

## **STEPHENS COUNTY**

Town of Avalon  
City of Martin  
City of Toccoa\*

## **FORSYTH COUNTY**

City of Cumming\*

## **TOWNS COUNTY**

City of Hiawassee\*  
City of Young Harris

## **FRANKLIN COUNTY**

City of Canon  
City of Carnesville\*  
City of Franklin Springs  
City of Lavonia  
City of Royston

## **HART COUNTY**

Town of Bowersville  
City of Hartwell\*

## **UNION COUNTY**

City of Blairsville\*

## **HABERSHAM COUNTY**

Town of Alto  
City of Baldwin  
City of Clarksville\*  
City of Cornelia

## **LUMPKIN COUNTY**

City of Dahlonega\*

## **WHITE COUNTY**

City of Cleveland\*  
City of Helen

## **RABUN COUNTY**

City of Clayton\*  
City of Dillard

**\*County Seat**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Georgia Mountains Region is thriving. Even in times where unemployment rates remain high, local governments are investing in their future. The region is a leader in the State of Georgia and strongly involved in transportation, water, renewable energy, broadband, and tourism development for long term economic sustainability and improved quality of life of residents.

Traditionally, economic development meant business attraction, business retention, and new business growth. Over the past decade, these three (3) areas have expanded in the Georgia Mountains Region to include other areas like workforce development, entrepreneurship, asset-based economic development, and other quality of life issues. An economic developer's toolkit must now include everything from job creation programs to workforce skill enhancement efforts.

In today's competitive global environment, economic development success requires effective public policy to attract the knowledge and innovation-based jobs that can raise the quality of life of Georgia's citizens. For business recruitment and retention, a region must be able to provide quality infrastructure and an educated and trained workforce. Business attraction efforts need to be coordinated, planned strategically, adequately supported, and sustained.

People live in the Georgia Mountains for a host of reasons other than economic ones. Quality of life tops the appeal of persons in the community and creates strong bonds to the culture and landscape. For people to stay in the region and prosper, the economy must perform at a higher level. Investments in the arts, recreation, education system, and infrastructure positively improve the quality of life and helps attract economic opportunity.

The ability to efficiently and safely move people, goods, and information is a crucial element to the economic health of the Georgia Mountains Region. As outlined in Chapter 1, the GMRC region cannot survive without a strong and reliable infrastructure network consisting of transportation, water and wastewater, communication, and energy efficient. The region needs to make sound investments in road, rail, and air transportation or maintain infrastructure in a manner that is supportive of the region's economic goals. Broadband capacity – backbone networks, redundancy, and connectivity continue to be a priority for industry recruitment and retention.

Micro businesses and entrepreneurs are very important to the regional economy, particularly in the rural mountain communities. As outlined in Chapter 2, local communities need to partner with the education system and other small business networks to improve the small business environment with business assistance services, access to capital, and market development.

Tourism has been an integral part of the Georgia Mountains economy for several decades and continues to be a significant driver of the regional economy. The tourism economy impacts nearly all geographic areas and many businesses throughout the region. As outlined in Chapter 2, there is an immediate need to improve infrastructure that supports tourism product development, particularly quality roads, hotel facilities, and certain amenities, such as road signage, restroom facilities, trailhead parking, etc. There is also a need to develop improved regional organizational capacity through the education of tourism leadership and the community at all levels.

There is a need for value-added product development opportunities encouraging people to "buy local". Lastly, there is a need to develop sustainable and natural-based tourism opportunities, which take advantage of the region's natural resources, including agri-tourism products.



Research has shown that regions with a highly educated workforce also experience economic growth in terms of business attraction and development, as well as higher income levels for people in the region. Obtaining a college degree or returning to school to receive advanced training is important to assure that skills match the needs of desired employees, and to ensure that workers don't leave the area and keep jobs in the Georgia Mountains Region. As outlined in Chapter 3, the GMRC region needs to work to raise the attainment levels of adults, increase the skill base of the workforce, and create opportunities within growth sectors of the economy.

Another priority issue for the region as outlined in Chapter 4 is the need for affordable housing for not only the workforce, but low and moderate-income residents. A regional Strategic Housing Plan will be critical to meeting the housing needs to today and in years to come.

A new requirement of the CEDS document is disaster mitigation. The Georgia Mountains Region is committed to becoming resilient with respect to disaster mitigation and preparedness. As outlined in Chapter 5, disaster resiliency can best be defined as the ability to anticipate threats, reduce the impact of these threats by taking preemptive action, respond appropriately and efficiently when these threats materialize, and have a plan in place for recovery. These threats can be natural events (weather-related) or technological threats, such as hazardous material accidents, pandemic diseases, terrorism, etc. and can greatly cause an economic disruption or collapse within a community. The Georgia Mountains Region's resilience will be determined by the magnitude and severity of such threats and the region's capacity to contend with them based on its inherent vulnerabilities and available resources.

Disasters know no boundaries and cast an immediate need for cooperation and collaboration across county borders. Moreover, resiliency is not evenly distributed across the landscape, especially across rural regions, and there has to be an integration of responses and resources to support those areas that have weak capacity.

Major economic development issues facing the Georgia Mountains Region need to be addressed at the regional level, such as, allocation of scarce financial resources, the location of critical infrastructure, and business retention and attraction efforts. The ability to collaborate and share resources will yield positive investments for the region.

This 2012 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is a collaborated, bottom up approach to community and economic development that will help the Georgia Mountains Region grow and prosper now and in the years to come.



## INTRODUCTION

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) is designated as an Economic Development District (EDD) by the United States Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration (EDA). As a requirement of this designation, the GMRC engaged various stakeholders in a strategic planning process to establish the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS document serves as the region's vision and plan for economic growth and development in advancing the region's economic prosperity.

The Georgia Mountains Region CEDS collectively sets forth a comprehensive economic development strategy for all 13 counties in the Georgia Mountains Region (Banks, Dawson, Forsyth, Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Lumpkin, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union, and White). Through a consensus building forum, the CEDS aims to establish a unified economic development roadmap for the Georgia Mountains Region. Intended to ensure the long-term economic vitality of the Georgia Mountains Region, the CEDS is the result of a strategic economic development planning process developed with broad-based and diverse public and private sector participation.

The CEDS document relied on the hard work, input, and support of a wide variety of regional partners from both the public and private sectors. Regional partners included public officials, community leaders, economic development professionals, representatives of workforce development boards and institutions of higher education, minority and labor groups, and private individuals.

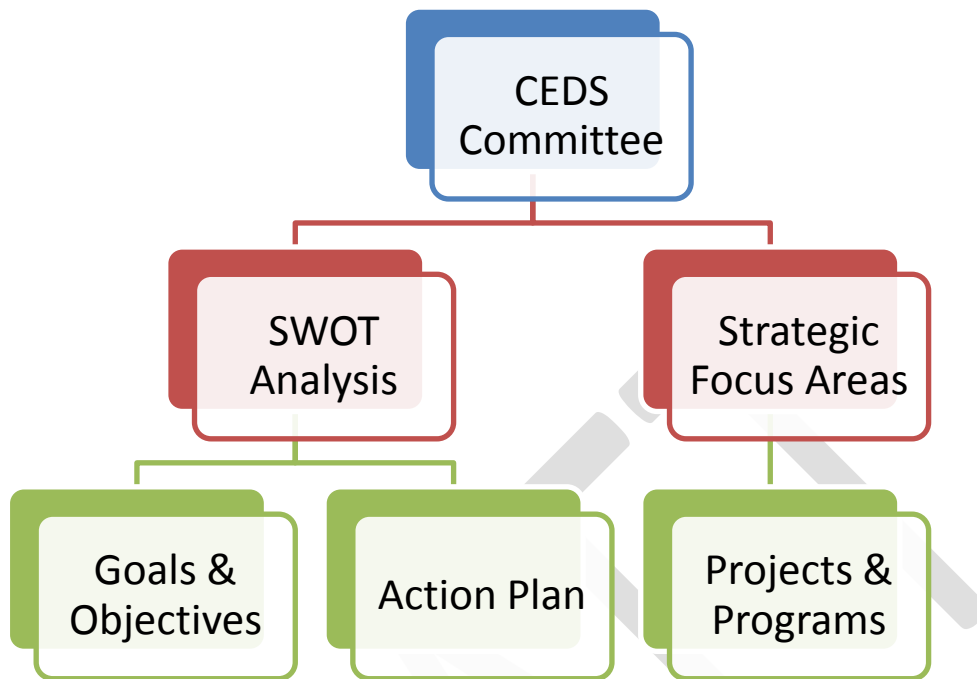
The CEDS process enabled leaders to articulate a vision and define a set of goals for sustaining economic growth, identified five (5) strategic focus areas for the region to focus its limited resources on to achieve economic health, recognized the vital projects and programs deemed critical for future growth, and established an action plan geared towards achieving the CEDS vision.

The five (5) strategic focus areas for the 2012 CEDS included the following and are further outlined in this document:

- **Infrastructure**
- **Business and Industry**
- **Education and Workforce Development**
- **Housing**
- **Pre-Disaster Mitigation**

After the strategic focus areas were identified, the planning process of the CEDS committee began with an analysis of the region and answered the questions: "Where are we now?" and "Where are we heading?" In preparing a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats), the committee addressed the following: ***What are the growth sectors? What is driving the economy and where is it heading? How is the region positioned in the global economy? Who are the important partners in the region? What resources does the region have for economic development? What is the desired vision for the future? What are the areas for building a competitive advantage? How do we get there? How can we maximize the region's strengths and opportunities and mitigate threats and weakness? What is the region's action plan? How do we measure our success?***

It is important to note that the issues addressed in this document are not an exhaustive list of the many issues and concerns regarding economic development for the region. This document, specifically its goals and objectives, should be viewed by all residents in the Georgia Mountains Region as a blueprint for and snapshot of economic development in the region.



**SWOT Analysis** – The CEDS Committee assessed the state of the regional economy and identified its external trends and forces.

**Identified Strategic Focus Areas** – As part of economic visioning, recognition was given to the top priority issues facing the region and included the following five (5) key areas: *Infrastructure, Business and Industry, Education and Workforce Development, Housing, and Pre-Disaster Mitigation*.

**Goals, Strategies, and Objectives** – Each sub-committee for the strategic focus areas identified a broad goal and working strategies and objectives to establish an action plan for the region.

**Action Plan** – Using the goals and strategies for the focus areas, an implementation plan was formulated to identify activities and to determine who will implement the projects, when the projects will be implemented, how much the projects will cost, and what are the sources of funding.

**Projects and Programs** – The CEDS Committee prioritized a list of projects and programs relevant to the strategic focus areas that would enable the region to meet its economic development goals.

**Performance Measures** – The CEDS Committee chose performance measures to track the implementation of the CEDS and benchmark regional project successes.

## 2011-2012 CEDS COMMITTEE

MEMBER	ORGANIZATION	COUNTY
Charlie Auvermann	Dawson County Dev. Authority	Dawson County
Margaret Ayers	Northeast Georgia Bank	Franklin County
Jerry Boling	Banks County Chamber of Commerce	Banks County
Erik Brinke	Blue Ridge Mountain EMC	Towns County
Suzanne Browne	GA Department of Economic Development	Region - Wide
William Chafin**	Retired	Hart County
J.R. Charles	Habersham County Industrial Development Authority	Habersham County
Doug Cheek	City of Homer	Banks County
Ray Coulombe	Development Authority of Rabun County	Rabun County
Milton Dalton	Banks County Commission	Banks County
Brad Day	Banks County Development Authority	Banks County
Doug Derrer	Forsyth County	Forsyth County
Pat Ellis****	Self-employed	Hall County
Rex Farmer	Retired	Hall County
Heather Feldman	GMRC – Economic Development	Region - Wide
Gary Fesperman	City of Lavonia	Franklin County
Steve Gooch	State Senator	Lumpkin County
Mitch Griggs	Union County Development Authority	Union County
Mark Ivester	North Georgia Technical College	Habersham County
Patrick Larson	GMRC – Economic Development	Region – Wide
Tim Martin	Stephens County Development Authority	Stephens County
Jean McCullough	Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce	Hall County
Tom O'Bryant	White County	White County
Kathy Papa	GA Department of Community Affairs	Region – Wide
Lamar Paris	Union County Sole Commissioner	Union County
John Phillips	GMRC – Workforce Development	Region - Wide
Nancy Smallwood	GMRC – Economic Development	Region - Wide
Cheryl Smith	GA Department of Economic Development – Tourism	Region – Wide
Annie Sutton	City of Cleveland	White County
Judy Taylor*	Habersham County Chamber of Commerce	Habersham County
Randall Toussaint	Cumming-Forsyth Chamber of Commerce	Forsyth County
Russell Vandiver	Lanier Technical College	Hall County
Linda Williams	Dawson County Chamber of Commerce	Dawson County
Marty Williams***	Dawson County Chamber of Commerce/CVB	Dawson County

*\*Chair*

*\*\*Vice – Chair*

*\*\*\*Immediate Past Chair*

*\*\*\*\*Secretary*



## REGION PROFILE

Encompassing approximately 3,500 square miles, the Georgia Mountains Region is located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The region is bordered by North Carolina to the north and South Carolina to the east, while other Georgia counties border the region to the south and west. At a total population of 627,333, the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) serves the following 13 counties: Banks, Dawson, Forsyth, Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Lumpkin, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union, and White and 38 municipalities within these counties.

The Georgia Mountains Region has grown tremendously over the past several decades. In fact, the Georgia Mountains Region population growth exceeded both the state and national rates, and it appears that this trend will continue in future years. Much of the growth taking place within the region is occurring in areas where transportation corridors are present. Other migration factors can be attributed to individual economic factors, retirement population, and urban sprawl and spillover from Metropolitan Atlanta.

The natural scenic beauty of the Georgia Mountains Region is one of its most important resources and is unique in its culture, heritage, and history. Topographically, over half the area is mountainous, with the remainder being rolling hills and fertile valleys. The highest mountain in the region and also the highest point in Georgia is Brasstown Bald (elevation 4,784 feet above sea level) located in Towns County. Nine of the thirteen counties have National Forest lands located within them. Approximately 492,000 acres of the Chattahoochee National Forest covers the northern section of the region.

The region is also blessed with many lakes and rivers, including the state's largest body of water, Lake Lanier, located on the Hall-Forsyth County line. The 38,500-acre lake was constructed between 1954 and 1957 by damming the Chattahoochee River in Buford, Georgia. Lake Lanier boasts over a million visitors each year and is the most visited U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lake in the United States. Another sizeable reservoir is Lake Hartwell, which was created on the Savannah River near Hartwell, Georgia in the southeastern portion of the region near South Carolina. Both lakes provide flood control, electrical power, major recreational facilities, and public water supply for a portion of the Georgia Mountains Region and a portion of metro Atlanta. In the northern part of the region, Lake Chatuge and Lake Nottely are operated by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).

The Georgia Mountains Region is also home to both the current Georgia Governor Nathan Deal and Lieutenant Governor Casey Cagle.

The Georgia Mountains Region has a diversified economic base in both domestic and international markets. There are many economic drivers in our region, including agricultural, automotive, industrial manufacturing, healthcare, and educational sectors, which provide a favorable business climate and environment. All of these factors enhance the quality of life and make the Georgia Mountains Region an ideal place to live and work.

The Georgia Mountains Region accounts for approximately one-third of the farm gate value of poultry in Georgia with a statewide economic impact through both packaging and transportation of poultry products. In fact, Hall County is referred to as the "Poultry Capital of the World".

The Georgia Mountains Region has proven to be a strategic site for advanced manufacturing. The core transportation network throughout the region, including Interstates 85, 985, and US Highway 441 transportation corridors, strategically locate and align the region for expanded business and industry in both domestic and international markets. The region is also part of a large automotive "cluster". The Interstate 85 corridor traversing the region serves as an important economic tool linking automotive plants for Mercedes in Alabama, Kia in West Point, and BMW in Spartanburg. As a



result of this core network, many automotive manufacturers and suppliers are located in the region, such as ZF Industries, IMS Gear, TI Automotive, Bosal Industries, Kautex, and Tenneco, just to name a few. All of these factors position the Georgia Mountains to expand its presence as a significant player in the global economy.

At more than 1,000,000 square feet and a total employment of 850, Kubota Tractor Corporation has recently expanded its operations in Hall County, making it the home of the company's largest manufacturing plant. Production at this facility accounts for one-third of all Kubota-branded equipment sold in the U.S.

ZF Wind Power, LLC has recently begun production at a new facility that manufactures 16-ton wind turbine gear boxes. The company aims to produce 2,000 gear boxes per year. Employing 220 people, ZF Windpower represents a \$95 million investment in Hall County. This is in addition to the 200+ persons already employed in the German company's auto transmission factory, also located in Gainesville, Georgia.

Ritz Instrument Transformers expanded its U.S. presence by opening a new facility in Hartwell and employed 52 people. The company manufactures medium and low voltage instrument transformers at the Hartwell facility, which also serves as the company's the North American corporate and sales headquarters.

In addition to the aging population, business recruitment and retention for the region are dependent upon many social and demographic characteristics, and the availability of adequate healthcare is no exception. The region is fortunate to have a healthcare anchor in the Northeast Georgia Medical Center, located in Gainesville, Georgia. At a total employment of approximately 4,000, Northeast Georgia Health Systems, Inc. has generated more than \$1.03 billion in total economic impact for the region, according to a 2010 report from the Georgia Hospital Association. For the past seven years, Northeast Georgia Medical Center has been ranked the #1 heart hospital in Georgia. The Center was also ranked first in Georgia in gastrointestinal care and ten (10) other specialties.

As the population of the region increases, additional medical services are needed to meet the demand for specialty services. The Northeast Georgia Medical Center is currently in the design stages of a South Hall Medical Campus and Hospital. Situated on a 119-acre campus, project plans include a 100-bed hospital and medical office building. At a total investment of \$200 million, 500 new jobs will be created. The campus currently already consists of an urgent care center, outpatient services, including imaging, laboratory, and physical and occupational therapy.

On July 1, 2012, Ty Cobb Healthcare System, Inc. (TCHS), a non-profit healthcare organization based in Franklin County and serving the residents of rural Northeast Georgia, opened a new state-of-the-art 144,000 square foot, 56-bed regional medical center. Named after baseball legend Ty Cobb, who hails from Franklin County, the Ty Cobb Regional Medical Center will offer patients and physicians a modern healthcare facility that will enhance the quality of care and strengthen the delivery of services. The new hospital will provide the region with specialty health services not currently offered in the region, such as cardiology, neurology, etc. At a total investment of \$70 million, TCHS retained 350 jobs and created 25 new jobs at the new hospital facility. In addition, a \$22 million Medical Office Building (MOB) was constructed and created an additional 25 jobs.

The region's workforce is considered one of its most competitive business assets. A skilled workforce is critical to economic development in the region. The Georgia Mountains Region is home to seven (7) public and private colleges and universities, and two (2) technical colleges, which also have satellite campuses. Lanier Technical College is home to the Georgia Center of Innovation for Manufacturing Excellence for technologies in automation, controls, and robotics. The newly formed University of North Georgia (a merger of Gainesville State College and North Georgia College and State University in Dahlonega, GA) will be a huge economic driver for workforce development in the region. By creating

a regional university with satellite campuses in both Gainesville and Cumming, the workforce development needs of the region will be better addressed for enhanced economic and community development.

According to a June 2011 report from the Selig Center for Economic Growth - University of Georgia's Terry College of Business, the regional economic impact from North Georgia College and State University was over \$230 million and accounted for 2,462 jobs in a six-county area. In addition, the economic impact of Gainesville State College reached \$204 million in 2010 and generated approximately 2,250 full and part-time jobs.

A reliable and robust broadband network is one of the leading infrastructure requirements from businesses and industries competing in the global economy. Global pressures, competitive challenges, reduced budgets, increased service needs, and greater expectations for quality all focus attention on the need for broadband for economic development both locally and regionally. Recently, a 501(c) 12 was established to serve an eight-county area, including Dawson, Forsyth, Habersham, Lumpkin, Rabun, Towns, Union, and White counties and is known as the North Georgia Network (NGN). The NGN is building a core fiber optic network from Atlanta through North Georgia, and construction is expected to be completed by December 2012.

Recently, the Joint Development Authority (JDA) of Franklin, Hart, and Stephens Counties, in collaboration with the JDA of Banks, Habersham, and Rabun Counties, was awarded funding to build a fiber optic backbone network, hereinafter referred to as North East Georgia Network (NEGN), which will provide broadband service throughout the six-county area for economic development and growth. The JDA has identified the core network route and the proposed project will serve to interconnect with the existing and neighboring North Georgia Network (NGN) routes, and other points of presence. The core network consists of approximately 125 miles throughout the six-county region. Of the 125 miles, the JDA identified two priority projects consisting of a total of 65 miles of new fiber optic construction or Indefeasible Rights of Use (IRU).

The potential regional impact of the proposed fiber optic ring through the Georgia Mountains is immense. Broadband serving the area will be a catalyst for improving economic development with enhanced education, healthcare, workforce development, business expansion and recruitment, helping to create and/or retain direct and indirect jobs.

## **DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGION**

### **Age of the Region**

The Georgia Mountains Region's population has increased over the past ten years. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the 2011 population estimate for the Georgia Mountains Region is 627,333. This increase can be attributed to the influx of retirees who come to live in the mountains or purchase a second home to enjoy for vacations. On average, individuals under the age of 18 comprise about 22.4% of the region's population, while individuals over the age of 65 comprise about 17.6%. Details can be found in Table 1 below.

**TABLE 1: AGE DEMOGRAPHICS- GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGION**  
(\*Population Based on 2011 Estimates)

County	Population	Under 18 (%)	65 and Over (%)
Banks	18,251	24.8	13.0
Dawson	22,459	21.9	15.1
Forsyth	181,840	29.9	9.3
Franklin	21,864	22.4	17.3
Habersham	43,279	23.7	15.9
Hall	183,052	27.8	11.5
Hart	25,305	22.1	18.3
Lumpkin	30,031	20.2	13.3
Rabun	16,274	20.7	21.8
Stephens	25,960	22.2	17.1
Towns	10,611	15.1	30.9
Union	21,134	17.5	26.9
White	27,273	22.3	18.4

*\*Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census*

## Racial Demographics

The Georgia Mountains Region's racial demographics can be found in Table 2, as noted below.

**TABLE 2: RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS- GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGION**

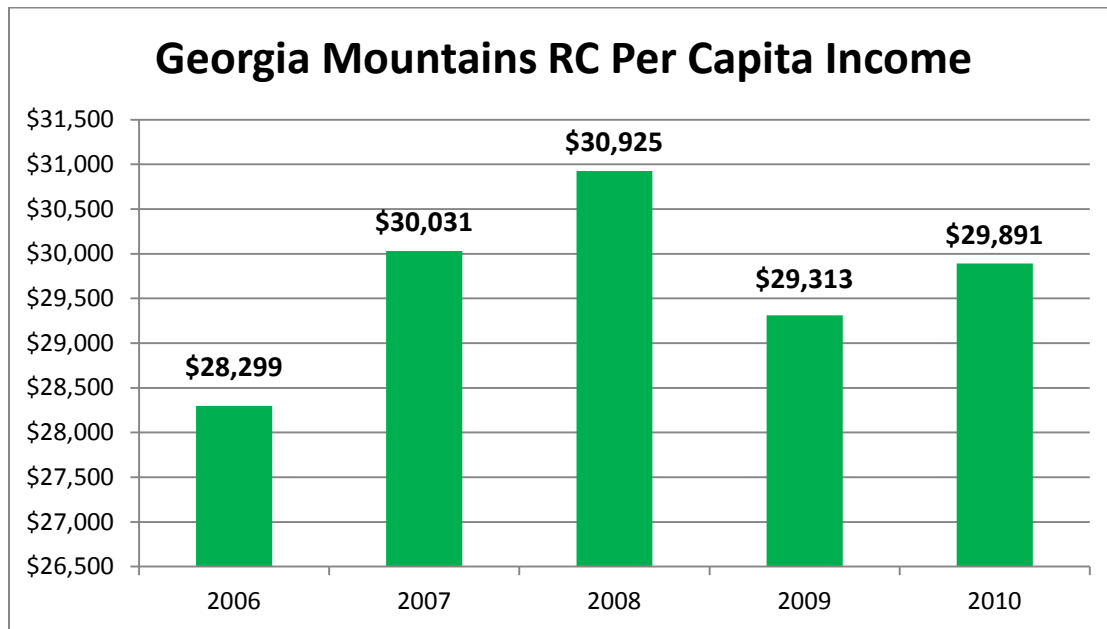
County	Population	White (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic/Latino (%)	Other (%)
Banks	18,251	94.1	3.1	6.1	1.6
Dawson	22,459	96.4	1.1	4.1	1.2
Forsyth	181,840	88.1	3.3	9.6	7.3
Franklin	21,864	88.4	9.2	4.2	0.9
Habersham	43,279	90.9	4.0	12.9	3.7
Hall	183,052	87.4	8.1	26.8	3.2
Hart	25,305	78.8	18.9	3.3	1.1
Lumpkin	30,031	95.2	1.7	4.7	1.3
Rabun	16,274	95.6	1.4	8.4	1.4
Stephens	25,960	85.6	11.4	2.6	1.3
Towns	10,611	97.7	0.8	2.1	0.8
Union	21,134	96.9	0.9	2.6	0.8
White	27,273	95.4	2.2	2.4	1.1

*\*Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census*



## Per Capita Income

The per capita income among residents in the Georgia Mountains Region has seen a series of increases and decreases since 2006. This change can be seen in the graph below.



*\*Source: Georgia Department of Labor, Area Labor Profile*

## Employment Trends

Of the total labor force in the Georgia Mountains Region, 9 of the 13 counties in the region enjoyed an increase in the number of people employed. In the 4 counties that experienced a downturn in employment, these decreases were relatively modest, with only 1 county experiencing a change higher than 1%. See Table 3 for more details.

**TABLE 3: EMPLOYMENT TRENDS- 2010-2011**

County	2010 Employment	2011 Employment	% Change
Banks	9,339	9,460	1.3
Dawson	10,182	10,352	1.7
Forsyth	82,481	83,856	1.7
Franklin	8,972	9,059	1.0
Habersham	17,603	17,528	-0.4
Hall	79,895	82,630	3.4
Hart	8,998	9,164	1.8
Lumpkin	11,227	11,479	2.2
Rabun	5,881	5,773	-1.8
Stephens	11,965	11,909	-0.5
Towns	5,219	5,191	-0.5
Union	9,844	9,923	0.8
White	11,081	11,315	2.1
GMRC	300,626	303,654	1.0

*\*Source: Georgia Department of Labor, Area Labor Profile*

The unemployment rate has seen an overall decline in the region. The number of those unemployed has decreased by approximately 6.9% from 2010 to 2011.

**TABLE 4: UNEMPLOYMENT TRENDS- 2010-2011**

County	2010 Unemployment	2011 Unemployment	% Change
Banks	787	741	-5.8
Dawson	1,116	1,006	-9.9
Forsyth	7,103	6,575	-7.4
Franklin	1,193	1,132	-5.1
Habersham	1,918	1,851	-3.5
Hall	8,084	7,330	-9.3
Hart	1,231	1,198	-2.7
Lumpkin	1,458	1,365	-6.4
Rabun	815	826	1.3
Stephens	1,412	1,335	-5.5
Towns	539	510	-5.4
Union	1,018	915	-10.1
White	1,265	1,231	-2.7
GMRC	27,939	26,015	-6.9

*\*Source: Georgia Department of Labor, Area Labor Profile*

## Jobs by Occupation Type

Occupation Type	Number of Employees	Percent
Management, Business, and Financial Workers	27,137	12.0
Science, Engineering, and Computer Professionals	6,734	3.0
Healthcare Practitioner Professionals	5,057	2.2
Other Professional Workers	19,164	8.4
Technicians	4,968	4.4
Sales Workers	26,914	11.9
Administrative Sales Workers	32,382	14.3
Construction and Extractive Craft Workers	14,913	6.6
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Craft Workers	14,033	6.2
Production Operative Workers	27,191	12.0
Transportation and Material Moving Operative Workers	9,609	4.2
Laborers and Helpers	12,654	5.6
Protective Service Workers	3,633	1.6
Service Workers, Except Protective	21,650	9.5



Unemployed, No Civilian Work Experience Since 1995	930	0.4
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*\*Source: Georgia Department of Labor, Area Labor Profile*

## **Employers**

The Georgia Mountains Region is home to a wide variety of industries that have moved all or part of their operations into the area. The poultry industry is recognized as the leading industry in the region in terms of employment and production.

### **GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION- TEN LARGEST EMPLOYERS**

Fieldale Farms Corporation

Further Processing

Mar-Jac Poultry

Northeast Georgia Medical Center, Inc.

Northside Forsyth

Pilgrim's Pride, Corp.

Publix Super Markets, Inc.

Regions Bank

Tyson Poultry, Inc.

Wal-Mart



## CHAPTER 1: INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure and services shape a community's economic vitality. The ability to efficiently and safely move people, goods, and information is a crucial element to the economic health of any region. Essential infrastructure includes:

- Transportation (air, rail, and road)
- Water Supply and Distribution
- Wastewater Treatment
- Energy
- Telecommunications
- Solid Waste Management

These facilities affect both residential and economic growth since development must have access to a network of supporting infrastructure.

Studies show that a single type of infrastructure is unlikely to induce widespread private investment without other supporting infrastructure. However, public infrastructure clearly influences land use and development patterns, as well as zoning policies, the general economic environment, labor markets, and quality of life issues. The locations and scales of proposed infrastructure investments need to be coordinated with these elements as well as with existing public capital in the region.

Research shows that firms look for assurances of sufficient future capacities from public facilities when planning local expansions. Regional differences in infrastructure appear to influence economic decisions. Economists also agree that one of the reasons that manufacturers open new plants rather than expand is because of lower transportation costs. However, land availability, labor issues, and the desire to diversify locations also play a factor in the decision.

### GOALS AND STRATEGIES

**INFRASTRUCTURE GOAL STATEMENT:** *To provide adequate infrastructure in all areas to support existing business and industry, enable expansion, and recruit new business.*

#### 1.1 – TRANSPORTATION

**TRANSPORTATION GOAL STATEMENT:** *Enhance all segments of transportation networks in the Georgia Mountains Region to promote economic development.*

The Georgia Mountains regional transportation network will require improvements to accommodate anticipated population and economic growth. The region has utilized a travel demand to identify improvements that will be required in order to provide a safe and efficient transportation network and enhance mobility in the future.

#### **Strategy 1: Utilize existing inventories of current roadways, air, and rail needs to support economic development.**

The purpose of this strategy is to review and update inventories of capital improvement projects that could possibly be developed regionally. This method will also help the region to learn how to utilize developed databases of transportation needs.



## Objectives:

- 1.1 Identify and update a database of transportation needs from each entity in the region.**  
The objective of a database of transportation needs is to assemble the individual community need and priorities of each city and county and identify costs, timeliness, and duration of projects. The plan would reference Georgia Department of Transportation submitted projects from the region as well as utilize information provided by the comprehensive plans. Another objective is to identify the existing airport and rail system in the region cataloging current and future activity levels. This inventory would classify the airport or railway's functional role within the system network. This inventory will allow for the identification of the deficiencies within the system and allow for estimates of future development costs.
- 1.2 Utilize the created databases.** GMRC would utilize the database to present possible funding options for projects. GMRC will also utilize the inventory to identify regional programs.
- 1.3 Conduct a truck route inventory and develop an improvement list to provide better access to interstates and highways and encourage growth and development.** GMRC can assist with the inventorying and researching of routes and develop a series of improvements to route truck traffic away from congested areas and provide better access to the region's industrial areas. Improved or easy transportation routes for exporting products will encourage industrial growth and development.
- 1.4 Support local government and private efforts to improve and enhance air service to the region.** Airports proximity to the regional areas offers great opportunities for industries in which direct access to either air cargo or passenger flights is important. Research shows that airports facilitate commerce; they also serve as economic engines, and their direct, indirect and induced benefits accrue throughout the rest of the community as well. The region's airports should work closely with one another to meet the needs of industry and the region by promoting the benefits of the airport to residents and businesses. Another consideration should be to bring light rail to the airport.
- 1.5 Coordinate airport master plans with GDOT communities.** Airport systems are essential to the state's transportation and economic infrastructure, supporting its diversified industries such as manufacturing, distribution, tourism and agriculture. Airports connect citizens and businesses to the rest of the state and the global economy and serve as a vital transportation link. The region will assist GDOT in airport planning for economic and transportation growth.

## Strategy 2: Improve current transit, local public transportation systems, and encourage green methods of transportation.

The purpose of this strategy is to provide a method of collaboration between cities and counties in the region on public transportation issues and to explore and implement successful energy efficient modes of transportation.

## Objectives:

- 2.1 Conduct an inventory of active public transit systems in the region including communities' Dial-A-Ride Programs and those with established routes.** Working with GDOT and local governments, the GMRC will identify programs which could be developed regionally. GMRC staff can provide training, technical assistance, funding, and networking for various systems with links across the region for potential development opportunities. GMRC staff will also coordinate the region's transportation investments



with economic development opportunities so that residents and workers have enhanced transportation options for work and travel.

- 2.2 Inventory and develop plans to improve local and regional airports.** Plans will include methods for industry and small business to utilize airports for transporting their workforce and mobilizing their product. GMRC will work with communities in seeking funding through the Air Georgia Program for grant funding for improvements of regional airports.
- 2.3 Inventory of green transportation options and provide models for region.** The region will also identify actions to optimize the utilization of existing transportation infrastructure. High occupancy vehicle lanes, improving airports, railways, and bicycle and pedestrian transportation networks as potential areas to improve transportation efficiency. High occupancy vehicle lanes can potentially reduce congestion and vehicular demands on roadways by reducing single occupancy vehicle use. Commuters using multiple occupancy means of travel, from carpools and vanpools to commuter buses, are encouraged by the travel time advantages provided. The introduction of high occupancy vehicle lanes will be further examined by local public transportation systems. The region will also research the possibility of creating and utilizing park and ride lots.
- 2.4 Pedestrian and bicycle facilities serve as an integral element of a multi-modal transportation network. Improved systems for bicycle and pedestrian transportation will also be studied to provide a reduction in congestion and vehicular use on roadways.** The region will identify roadways that could potentially be converted to sign shared roadways. Sign shared roadways provide an opportunity to provide preferred routes for cyclists, with relatively little financial burden. The physical improvements to an existing road include bicycle safe drainage grates, bridge expansion joints, smooth pavements, signal timing, and detector systems that respond to bicycles, and signage to alert motorists that bicycles are likely to be sharing a travel lane.
- 2.5 Coordinate the region's transportation investments with economic development opportunities in unincorporated and redevelopment areas with the goal of addressing economic distress and providing residents with enhanced transportation options.** Work to support the reclamation and redevelopment of brownfields and hard hit industrial areas and help raise awareness of successful projects that can be duplicated elsewhere in the region.

## 1.2 – WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

**WATER GOAL STATEMENT:** *Provide adequate water supply and promote conservation.*

Accessibility to water is the number 1 priority for economic development and business recruitment and retention in the Georgia Mountains Region. Water is used for a variety of purposes both residential and industrial in the Georgia Mountains Region. Large amounts of water are also used in agriculture to irrigate fields, so as to produce maximum crop yields, especially during periods of drought. The valuable benefit of the recreational use of the region's lakes, rivers, and streams is also seen in the region. Visitors come to the area to fish, boat, camp, and sight-see. In addition, the use of hydroelectric power is present on many of the lakes in the region. Lakes, rivers, and streams must be able to accommodate treated water from wastewater discharges in the area.

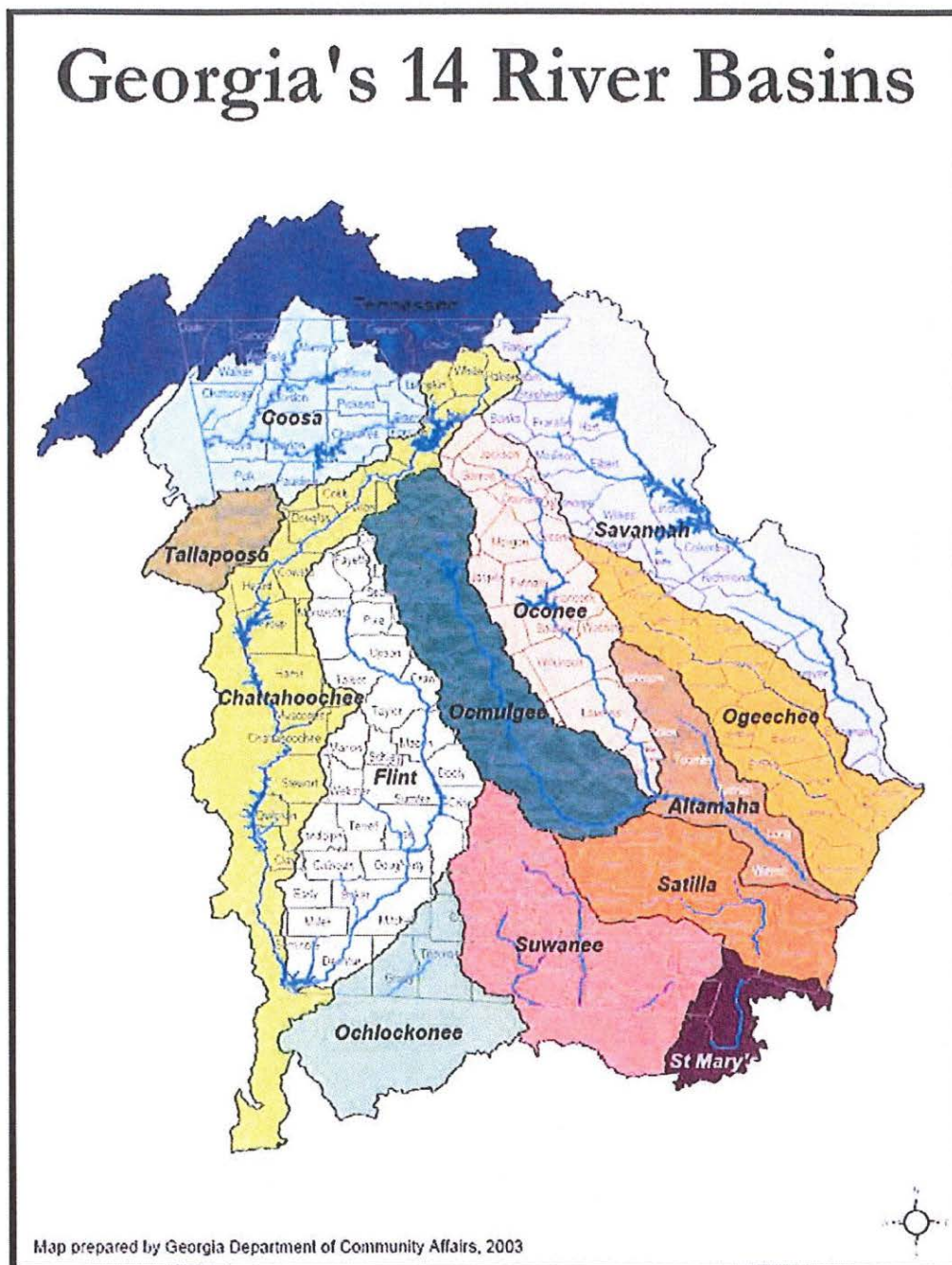


## Water Supply

The Georgia Mountains Region is subdivided into three (3) Water Planning Regions (Coosa-North, Savannah-Upper Ogeechee, and Metro North) by the Georgia Water Plan developed by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GA EPD) with oversight by the Georgia Water Council. (See Georgia's 14 River Basins Map) The Coosa-North Georgia Region includes portions of the Coosa, Conasauga, Coosawattee, Etowah and Oostanaula river basins and includes various groundwater aquifer systems, particularly the Crystalline rock and Paleozoic rock aquifer systems. The Coosa-North Georgia Region includes the municipalities and counties of Dawson, Habersham, Lumpkin, Towns, Union, and White.

The Savannah – Upper Ogeechee Water Planning Region includes three (3) major lakes; Lake Hartwell, Lake Richard B. Russell, and Lake Thurmond. The region also includes river basins of the Savannah, Ogeechee, Oconee, and Tennessee and includes various ground water aquifer systems particularly the Crystalline Rock aquifer, the Cretaceous aquifer and the Upper Floridan aquifer systems. The Savannah – Upper Ogeechee includes the municipalities and counties of Banks, Franklin, Hart, Rabun, and Stephens.

The Metro North Water Planning Region includes the municipalities and counties of Forsyth and Hall. The Metro North Water Planning Region includes the Chattahoochee, Coosa, Flint, Ocmulgee, Oconee, and Tallapoosa river basins and the lakes of Allatoona, Sidney Lanier, Hutchins, Horton, Still Branch Creek Reservoir, W.J. Hooper Reservoir, Blalock Reservoir, John Fargason Reservoir, S. Howell Gardner Reservoir, Rowland Reservoir, Towaliga River Reservoirs, Tussahaw Reservoir, Randy Poynter Lake, Cedar Creek Reservoir, Lake Fashion and Cowan Lake. Water is one of the most critical issues facing the Georgia Mountains Region.





## **Strategy 1: Support the development of water supply to ensure stable infrastructural support for businesses and residents.**

The purpose of this strategy is to ensure investment in water, which is necessary for residents' quality of life and economic growth. Investment in water infrastructure is needed to ensure affordable and reliable water supplies.

### **Objectives:**

- 1.1 Encourage development of water planning.** GMRC staff will review and utilize existing water master plans as appropriate. In addition, an evaluation of potential partnerships in meeting future water supply needs, such as reservoir planning, and potential regional or multi county water sources. Other steps will evaluate cost-benefits of various water resources. GMRC will also verify that a written emergency water supply plan exists for the region and assesses the needs for interconnections to meet reliability.
- 1.2 Expansion of existing infrastructure.** GMRC staff will review existing water planning councils or local entities and identify safe yields of current sources for the region. The need to identify where gaps between available supply and demand will occur will also be conducted. Staff will also assist in a process to permit new water supplies for region. Work with member governments to review capital improvement plans and help seek grant or loan funding for project needs.
- 1.3 Consider development of new groundwater wells.** GMRC staff will review the region's existing water plans to evaluate potential for groundwater and assist with permitting process as needed. The development of new groundwater sources where wells will supplement the existing surface water supplies will also be considered.
- 1.4 Encourage source water protection.** GMRC will utilize the region's water plans to identify existing water supply watersheds. GMRC staff will coordinate with local governments on watershed education and protection. Planning for additional water storage that will help drought-proof and extend existing sources will also be reviewed and considered.
- 1.5 Encourage good water management practices.** GMRC staff will assist with mapping water systems. Local communities will also coordinate and manage leak detection programs. The provision of an example inspection and maintenance program and staff certification programs and staff training will be coordinated.
- 1.6 Encourage indirect potable reuse.** Plans should include the returning of highly treated wastewater to water supply reservoirs and or rivers. Plans will also encourage the planning and study of inter-basin and transfer basin issues.

## **Strategy 2: Improve water quality and wastewater planning to ensure stable infrastructural support for businesses and residents.**

The purpose of this strategy is to evaluate the water needs of the region and have the planning structure in place to accommodate the needs of residents and the businesses. This strategy will urge the local governments to consider water conservation, water reuse, and public education as part of their water planning efforts.



- 2.1 Review the region's wastewater treatment plans to evaluate disposal options and treatments to meet future needs.** GMRC staff will evaluate future wastewater needs of the region by reviewing capacity needs and evaluate options to treat and dispose of wastewater. The region should consider opportunities for reuse. The region should plan for additional water storage that will help drought-proof and extend existing sources. Lastly, communities should invest in sewer improvements within county or city boundaries, industrial parks, etc. for industrial growth and expansion.
- 2.2. Develop and implement a wastewater education and public awareness program.** GMRC staff will inventory current wastewater education programs being utilized in region and develop and implement a regional public education program. GMRC staff will also coordinate within the region, public education and outreach activities.
- 2.3 Promote proper septic system management.** GMRC will inventory current education methods and develop a regional septic system business and homeowner education program and disseminate information throughout the region. The need to develop short and long term policies for transitioning non sewer areas to sewer system areas in the region will also be addressed.
- 2.4 Promote septic system inventory and mapping.** GMRC will encourage and provide assistance to local governments to implement sewer system mapping strategies. Staff will utilize mapping technologies to prioritize capital improvement and operation and maintenance, as well as emergency response.
- 2.5. Encourage pollution prevention and good practices for storm-water education.** GMRC will continue the region's implementation of existing public education programs to prevent pollutant runoff, identify illicit discharges, promote better agricultural practices and business and industry treatments and encourages site design practices that minimize environmental impacts. Staff will encourage local governments to work together to develop regional best management plans and to construct regional best management plan facilities such as storm-water ponds and greenway networks for buffer restoration and protection.

### **Strategy 3: Develop water conservation education and public awareness program to promote water conservation and reuse.**

The purpose of this strategy is to assess existing water conservation and public awareness programs to determine their effectiveness and to promote successful programs in other areas of the region.

- 3.1 Review existing education programs in the region and build on readily available examples from within Georgia to have a region-wide program.** This program can be regionally implemented and should be evaluated every year to determine effectiveness.
- 3.2 Assess and reduce water system leakage.** GMRC in coordination with local governments will develop a method to assist in leak detection and provide technical assistance. Developing a regional leak response plan with training materials on practices will also be a priority for the region.
- 3.3 Assist in development of a regional outdoor watering plan.** GMRC will assist with a plan to allow use between certain hours with defined exemptions and to develop an educational program to promote to the public. The development and promotion of better agricultural practices will also be a priority.



- 3.4 Encourage conservation rate studies.** The GMRC will review the region's existing rate structures and highlight working and acceptable rate structures for residential and industry. A region-wide survey will also be disseminated to see what would be acceptable to various counties.

## 1.3 – TELECOMMUNICATIONS

**TELECOMMUNICATION GOAL STATEMENT:** *Ensure new telecommunication networks for needed accessibility and reliability.*

Given the prior research completed by the Georgia Institute of Technology and the OneGeorgia Authority for the submittal of grant applications for the successful formation of the North Georgia Network (NGN) and the North East Georgia Network (NEGN); the region is aware that large areas of the 13-county region are classified as either not served or underserved with regard to broadband capacity and penetration. Most of these areas are rural or consist of micropolitan populations. The need for telecommunication in the region is expressed daily by various sectors such as education, healthcare, government / public safety, businesses, and utilities.

Within the initial NGN service area, portions of Union, Habersham, and White counties were so classified and some portions of Dawson and Lumpkin were also classified as such. Research identified that within an eight-county sub-region of the GMRC, NGN could potentially serve 245 strategic anchor institutions – including 146 county government facilities, 6 municipal facilities, 82 public schools, 7 colleges and university facilities, and 4 hospitals. In a broader view, these eight (8) counties included over 24,000 households, 9,200 businesses, and an additional 367 other institutions.

In early 2012, the JDA of Franklin, Hart, and Stephens Counties and the Joint Development Authority of Banks, Habersham, and Rabun Counties received funding from the OneGeorgia Authority to study and assess the feasibility of constructing, maintaining, and operating a fiber optic network through the identified six-county area. Ladd Engineering Associates designed a 125-mile high capacity broadband core network (backbone) for the six-county area. The design of this robust network provided for the interconnection with existing networks (North Georgia Network) for transporting network traffic all the way to Atlanta. When completed, NEGN will provide broadband service throughout the six-county area for economic development and growth.

Improving access to broadband capacity in rural and suburban areas of north Georgia has been the focus of the federal government, the state government, and most county and local government entities within the area. Providing broadband capacities and competitive pricing is seen as a critical competitive necessity if the region is to grow into an economically significant portion of the state and the southeastern United States. This utilization of broadband for educational purposes in addition to enterprise needs is a vital tool in reducing unemployment and improving the average weekly wage rate. Currently, the GMRC counties average \$124 a week below the state average wage rate. In fact, over half of the GMRC counties experience higher unemployment than the state average.

Expanded broadband is a pivotal infrastructural need if the GMRC member counties are to grow economically in the coming decade. In addition, research has shown that as the region's educational programs, nursing programs, Centers of Innovation, and the Georgia University system all expand, the need for additional broadband capacity will accelerate exponentially at a time when commercial and residential broadband uses will also explode.

From these facts, the CEDS infrastructure component now includes broadband as a key component of the greater economic infrastructure for the region. The goal is to expand the trunk line fiber systems within the region; develop middle and last mile connectivity through the existing service providers and through support for new private and PPP ventures; provide the citizens, entities, and enterprises of the region with affordable broadband access; develop core

and backhaul ring topology with similar networks both within the GMRC territory and those adjacent to its immediate borders and; to promote and thus market these total networking systems in an effort to drive economic development and growth into the GMRC region.

**Strategy 1: Prepare to meet industry and business telecommunication needs by assisting with fiber optic network development.**

The purpose of this strategy is to support, develop, and provide educational opportunities regarding telecommunication systems within the region.

**Objectives:**

- 1.1 Support the creation of regional broadband network.** The GMRC will provide organizational, research, and data collection along with grant writing assistance to all PPP ventures within the region that seek to expand, infill, or interconnect general trunk fiber core networks within the region.
- 1.2 Develop a usable information database for technology development.** The GMRC will develop a useable database of statistical information, enterprise contacts, and viable grant program information designed to support the counties in their efforts to understand the current broadband systems, capacities and utilizations; to provide meaningful application data and statistics for grant applications, develop baseline and incremental performance benchmarks, and to utilize in leverage of regional and local economic marketing efforts.
- 1.3 Provide incumbent support for the creation of telecommunication opportunities.** The GMRC will establish contact with all regional incumbent service providers to understand their needs, requirements, and long-range goals within the region and incorporate those findings into the Community Economic Development Strategy and any broadband regional initiatives that may be surfaced by those incumbents and/or new PPP ventures.
- 1.4 Provide support for enterprise opportunities for technology.** The GMRC will work to establish both private and not-for-profit enterprise relationships within the region where new or greater broadband capacity could result in expansion, job creation, improved market penetration, or improvements in communications for the entities involved. The GMRC will surface any and all opportunities to promote the high-tech capacities of the region through these relationships.
- 1.5 Promote broadband education.** The GMRC will promote greater education of the capabilities, utilizations, and future needs of broadband within the region. This will be accomplished through formal programs, partnering, social and educational networking, and issuance of information streams through normal and newly developed communication tools.
- 1.6 Develop and promote intra-state initiatives.** The GMRC, through its connection with other similar organizations throughout the state, including the Appalachian Regional Commission, State Commissioners, and all other interactions will seek to promote broadband capabilities within the GMRC region and look for any and all areas where mutual cooperation might benefit the region and where potential funding streams that might prove advantageous to the region might surface.



## 1.4 – WASTE MANAGEMENT

**WASTE MANAGEMENT GOAL STATEMENT:** *Provide adequate waste management for domestic and industrial usage.*

**Strategy 1: Update and improve the region's waste management plans to ensure availability for current and future economic growth.**

The purpose of this strategy is to evaluate the region's ability to accommodate increasing residential and industrial demand for waste disposal and to identify possible programs for waste reduction and recycling for the region.

### **Objectives:**

- 1.1 Assist the Georgia Environmental Protection Division in maintaining an accurate list of permitted waste disposal sites in the region.** The state requires that every quarter solid waste landfills and construction debris landfills submit tonnage reports from their areas. This information can be utilized in providing data to potential businesses and industries looking to locate in the region. An inventory can also be kept for disposal costs of each area.
- 1.2 Assist the State in their update of the characterization of waste disposal within Georgia.** This effort can also assist the region in planning for existing and future needs of waste disposal.
- 1.3 Work with the counties and cities to establish waste reduction and recycling goals that utilize their area's waste characterization study.** Highlight existing public education (Keep Georgia Beautiful Programs), recycling efforts, and composting programs to determine if such programs could be utilized regionally or be presented as models for other areas.
- 1.4 Work with the state to encourage new technologies to improve waste reduction.** The region can work with the State of Georgia to emphasize the need for quality local solid waste management planning. Local governments should carefully monitor the remaining permitted disposal capacity throughout region and work with the state to encourage new and improved waste reduction and energy efficient programs.
- 1.5 Assist existing businesses and industries that have an interest in recycling and waste reduction.** Improving and promoting Georgia's recycling and organics collection and processing infrastructure is basic economic development. Local collection infrastructure fuels regional manufacturing: Georgia has the second-largest end-use markets for recyclable material in the nation. Some 40% of what enters local landfills could be purchased for use by these companies. *Georgia 2011 Solid Waste Management Annual Report.*
- 1.6 Ensure that local hazard mitigation plans include plans for industrial and residential waste disposal.** Just as recession and decreased disposal can prolong remaining capacity, economic expansion, regulatory rule changes, storms and debris-generating disasters can rapidly consume landfill space. All of these factors serve to underscore the need for sound solid waste planning. Hazard Mitigation Plans need to include steps for handling hazardous waste removal, storm debris removal, and added construction debris removal.



## 1.5 – ENERGY AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY

**ENERGY GOAL STATEMENT:** *Ensure adequate energy supplies for the region and promote environmental standards in all infrastructures.*

In 2011, Georgia was ranked the ninth largest electrical generator in the nation and the eighth largest electrical energy consumer, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. At the same time, Georgia was the 7<sup>th</sup> fastest growing population in the United States and the majority of the non-Metro Atlanta population growth was centered in the north Georgia area. Even with the economic recession, north Georgia's population is expected to grow at approximately 18% over the next 15 years, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Residential use of energy was approximately 750,000 BBTUs in 2010 and industrial use was approximately equal. Industrial energy use actually declined during the last decade (950,000 BBTUS in 2000 to 750,000 BBTUS in 2010) because of the recession and more predominately improved efficiencies.

Of that energy consumption Georgians used approximately 5.0 billion gallons of gasoline in 2010. Natural Gas usage was 475 Trillion BTUs, of which 46% was for residential heating and cooking. The general consumption of all types of energy increased over the last decade. Studies currently suggest that energy demand in Georgia will be the following: Natural Gas increase of 0.7% annually, Gasoline increase of 0.5% annually or flat, total electrical increase of 3.0% annually. Trend lines on the Georgia Mountains Region counties would suggest these same predictions to be expected.

Under the assumption that the region's population growth and the energy demands will continue, it is clear that energy use, energy efficiency, reduction of greenhouse emissions, and the transfer to more efficient fuel sources needs to be a priority in the region over the next five to ten years. Current trends are geared more toward energy efficient transportation vehicles, agriculture equipment, emergency response vehicles, and mass transportation vehicles movement toward natural gas. Researchers expect the use of alternative fuels will also increase with the acceleration of wind and solar power generation systems similar to those already appearing throughout the area.

The Georgia Mountains Region will make one of its missions to improve the overall efficiency of commercial and residential energy consumption and to improve the energy usage mix within the region. The goal is to best leverage resources and return from any specific energy utilization decisions and to make sure the area counties are at the leading edge of energy generation and consumption techniques. Improving the Return on Investment from energy utilization decisions and long-term energy conservation/efficiencies, will improve the bottom line for all economic sectors within the region.

Energy is the power behind the region's economy. Energy is used by industries and residents for transportation, utilities, and telecommunications. Energy is needed by manufacturing businesses and industry, military installations, for agriculture and agribusiness and many other services. Energy usage is a major component of economic activity, and energy-related companies make up a large segment of the region's economy.

### **Strategy 1: Support the development of low-cost energy and maintain energy reliability.**

The purpose of this strategy is to assist the region in planning for low-cost energy methods and support projects that promote energy reliability.





## Objectives:

- 1.1 Provide energy data and benchmarking.** GMRC will assist with organizational, research, and data collection to determine a total energy footprint of the region. This information on electrical, gas, gasoline, diesel, and alternative energy consumption, generation, growth and emissions profiles will provide a full detailed energy picture of the region. An inventory of renewable energy projects that are currently in place within the region will also be conducted.
- 1.2 Assist in the development of guidelines and plans for energy-efficient sites and building methodologies in the region.** Even though information about solar energy and other renewable energy sources is available, and demonstration sites and buildings have shown the potential for significant savings in energy use, these methods are still not part of mainstream design and construction. Buildings continue to be built that rely entirely on mechanical heating, lighting, and cooling systems regardless of environmental conditions. Development of plans and rules that allow and encourage energy-efficient and environmentally sensitive design of buildings will have the potential to lower energy costs and reduce the region's dependence on foreign energy sources.
- 1.3 Encourage energy support.** Work with established power providers within the region to understand their needs, requirements, and long-range goals within the region and then incorporate those findings into the CEDS. Any broadband regional initiatives that may surface by those incumbents and/or new private partnership provider ventures should also be included.
- 1.4 Promote energy education.** There are many programs aimed at reducing energy consumption, such as EnergyStar Rating Programs, energy leakage tracking programs, smart technologies, and hybrid or electric vehicles. Incentives or legislation at the local level for more efficient use of energy can greatly promote the awareness and use of these programs. Many states have public benefits programs that direct ratepayer dollars into efficiency and renewable energy incentives programs. At the federal level there are a number of programs that can benefit communities. Information about energy programs can be publicized by sponsoring programs, partnering, social and educational networking, and issuance of informational streams through normal and newly developed communication tools.
- 1.5 Promote intra-state initiatives.** The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission through its connection with other state Regional Commissions, the Appalachian Regional Commission, State Commissioners, and all other interactions will seek to promote energy programs within the region, look for any and all areas where mutual cooperation might benefit the region and where potential funding streams.

## Strategy 2: Promote environmental standards in the development of businesses and industries.

The purpose of this strategy is to encourage awareness of the region's natural resources and promote good stewardship of these resources during the construction of new businesses and industries.

- 2.1 Encourage eco-industrial development, encourage design, and construction of facilities to go beyond minimum standards for energy efficiency.** Provide education and guidance on LEED category levels and measures to obtain these levels. GMRC will assist in locating funding for projects that follow LEED designs or those that incorporate these measures into design and building guidelines.



- 2.2 Support regional planning and economic development that includes good stewardship of the area's natural resources.** GMRC will work to encourage planning and development that is aware of the region's natural resources and promotes preservation of the area's surface and ground water, air quality, and other natural resources.
- 2.3 Assist the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in providing training and leveraging support of the reclamation and redevelopment of brownfield sites.** Provide assistance with identifying, planning, and re-development of brownfield sites. Raising awareness of and assisting in the leverage support for the redevelopment of brownfield sites will enhance the region and protect the area's natural resources. Areas that are aesthetically pleasing also encourage future economic development.

DRAFT



## CHAPTER 2: BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

**GOAL STATEMENT:** *To stimulate and strengthen the regional economy through a collaborative effort embracing global trends resulting in job creation and retention, capital investments, and thereby enhancing the tax base and quality of life in the Georgia Mountains Region.*

There are many sectors of industry in the Georgia Mountains Region that will be discussed in this chapter, including: tourism, entrepreneurship and small business, agri-business, healthcare, and existing industry.

### 2.1 – TOURISM

Tourism plays an important role throughout the Georgia Mountains Region and continues to be a growing industry for the State of Georgia as well as the region. In fact, the tourism industry is a \$45 billion dollar per year industry in Georgia and is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest industry in Georgia supporting more than 391,000 jobs. A large portion of these annual revenues and jobs directly benefit the Georgia Mountains Region. According to a 2004 study completed by the Travel Industry Association (TIA), the Georgia Mountains Region is third behind both Metro Atlanta and the Georgia coast in annual travel volume by domestic visitors.

Tourism in the Georgia Mountains Region drives significant business growth and revenues for companies. With moderate climates, advanced transportation infrastructure, long travel seasons, and diversity of attractions, tourism related businesses in the Georgia Mountains Region are able to leverage attractions for both in and out-of-state visitors to increase sales and revenues. Furthermore, the close proximity of Metro Atlanta to the Georgia Mountains Region has favorable benefits through increased day trips and visitation.

Visitors to the region are attracted by the abundance of outdoor activities, numerous state parks, including Amicalola Falls and Tallulah Gorge. At 729 feet, Amicalola Falls is the highest waterfall in Georgia and considered one of the seven “Natural Wonders of Georgia”. One of the most breathtaking canyons in the Eastern U.S., Tallulah Gorge is 2 miles long and 1,000 feet deep and is one of the most visited attractions in Georgia.

The region also has a strong heritage and history as identified by the influx of museums, mountain arts and crafts, and historic sites. The City of Dahlonega was the site of the first major Gold Rush in the United States. Numerous festivals throughout the year, including OktoberFest in Helen, Gold Rush in Dahlonega, the Sorghum Festival in Blairsville, the Moonshine Festival in Dawsonville, and the Georgia Mountains Fair in Hiawassee, among others, draw thousands of visitors per year and help celebrate the history of the region.

Agri-tourism is especially popular in North Georgia. Nestled in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains is the rapidly emerging wine growing industry. The topography, elevation, and suitable soils make the Georgia Mountains Region an ideal place for growing winegrapes. The red clay soil in the region is similar to the “terra rossa,” soil of Italy’s wine country and provides good oxidation. Over 13 wineries and vineyards are located in the Georgia Mountains Region.

### GOALS AND STRATEGIES

**TOURISM GOAL STATEMENT:** *Promote awareness of the Georgia Mountains Region as a tourism destination by fostering viable and sustainable initiatives.*

**Strategy 1: Develop a master database of tourism assets in the Georgia Mountains Region.**



The purpose of this strategy is to identify, categorize, and acquire a spatial reference point all of the natural and man-made attractions within the Georgia Mountains Region to promote the tourism industry.

## Objectives:

### **1.1 Inventory of tourism assets in the Georgia Mountains Region.**

- GMRC staff, in close coordination with member governments, will assess each individual community to identify tourism assets and create a digital database. The database can then be used to promote and market these attractions either individually or collectively. The database will need to be updated and maintained on either an annual basis or semi-annual.

### **1.2 Categorize tourism resources within four (4) main categories:**

- **Agri-tourism** – Agriculture and tourism are Georgia’s two economic generators. Farms and value-added products create jobs, increase tax revenues, and attract visitors. People have become more interested in how their food is produced and farmers and producers use this interest to develop or increase traffic at their farm and recognize interest in the quality of their products. Agri-tourism assets in the region that will be identified include, but not limited to: vineyards and wineries, farmer’s markets, individual farm stands, pumpkin patches, and other locally produced commodities.
- **Natural Resources** – The Georgia Mountains Region’s tourism economy has also relied on the region’s natural resources and has attracted many visitors from all over the world. The Georgia Mountains Region is one of the most naturally diverse parts of the state with the mountains and valleys in the northern part of the region and the lakes in the eastern and southern parts of the region. The region has an abundance of natural resources, and the CEDS aims to identify all natural resources and assets in the region, not only to help generate visitation and usage, but also for natural resource conservation and management.
- **Cultural/Heritage Tourism** – The Georgia Mountains Region is rich in culture, heritage, and history and residents of the area are extremely committed to preserving this history through oral and interpretive documentation.
- **Outdoor Recreation** – Recreational opportunities are everywhere throughout the region, such as fishing, hiking, biking, etc. and all will be identified to help promote and conserve these areas.

### **1.3 Relate each tourism asset to a GPS coordinate for mapping purposes.**

- Using the data collected in the first objective, the GMRC staff will first inventory their existing databases to determine what is currently available and further determine if the data is still current. Any updates or edits to this data will initially be made. For the data that is not currently available, the GMRC will conduct field work using GPS methodology collection efforts.

- Information collected through these efforts will then be used in conjunction with other regional layers of data to create maps and other print materials to promote tourism in the Georgia Mountains Region.

## **Strategy 2: Develop promotional and educational materials for the Georgia Mountains Region.**

The purpose of this strategy is to raise visibility and awareness of the region's tourism attractions and destinations and to encourage local leaders to make strategic investments to yield private investment in the region.

### **Objectives:**

#### **2.1 Utilize the inventory database for marketing initiatives of tourism in the Georgia Mountains Region.**

- ***Print promotional materials*** – Informational brochures and rack cards will be produced and/or collected and will be placed at key visitor sites, welcome centers, chambers of commerce, and other tourist attractions to help “package” the Georgia Mountains Region in its entirety.
- ***Print advertising*** – An emphasis should be placed on working with tourism-oriented magazines such as Southern Living, Atlanta Magazine, Where, Guest Informant, and other state and regional publications. Emphasis will be placed on targeting Atlanta and other metropolitan areas of Georgia within a day's drive of the Georgia Mountains.
- ***Point of purchase promotions*** – Informational displays about the region will be produced and/or updated for retail outlets, restaurants, and other local establishments.

By cooperatively marketing the Georgia Mountains Region and packaging attractions together without “county boundaries”, it will significantly reduce costs that tourism-related businesses would spend on advertising, and will also heighten awareness and visibility of the opportunities for leisure, recreation, or vacation. The goal is to improve customer awareness and knowledge and attract additional visitors for economic impact through increased local and state revenues and the creation of jobs.

#### **2.2 Utilize emerging social media technologies to further promote the region.**

- The internet has changed communication and has the capability to serve as a marketing tool to drive investments in a community. There is a need to identify and establish emerging technologies and incorporate the use of social media into the promotion of the Georgia Mountains Region.
- Encourage local chambers of commerce, convention and visitors bureaus, and other tourism-related businesses to launch a Facebook page or Twitter feed.
- Create a regional mobile application for on-the-go access to information on events and attractions.
- Encourage a regional social media campaign as an outlet to promote regional events and official websites for member communities.
- Encourage the use of Geocaching throughout the region to promote outdoor recreational activities.



- 2.3 Expand the scope of the Camera Ready program through education and awareness.** The Georgia Department of Economic Development has identified the entertainment industry as an important potential revenue stream for the state to pursue. The Georgia Mountains Region's aesthetic beauty and scenery is an ideal setting for television and film producers looking for great shooting locations. These producers will work with the region's 13 county liaisons to acquire local expertise and support during production.

### **Strategy 3: Foster regional partnerships to create and grow tourism product(s)**

The purpose of this strategy is identify and create a forum for tourism partners to work together across country boundaries to further enhance products and places to promote the Georgia Mountains Region as a destination.

#### **Objectives:**

##### **3.1 Develop an inventory of tourism industry resources.**

- A database of resources and contacts will be established and maintained and includes, but not limited to: Convention and Visitor's Bureaus, Chambers of Commerce, Arts Councils, Better Hometowns and Main Streets, Historical Societies, Northeast Georgia Travel Association, Georgia Department of Economic Development – Tourism Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, etc.
- There is a need to develop regional organizational capacity through the education of tourism leadership, area businesses, and the community.
- Continue to educate regional leaders, state legislators, business owners about tourism and the impacts on the economy of our region.

### **Strategy 4: Improve infrastructure that supports tourism development**

The purpose of this strategy is to identify needed infrastructure improvements which will further strengthen tourism in the GMRC Region.

#### **Objectives:**

##### **4.1 Critical facilities and Infrastructure improvements.**

- The need for infrastructure improvements, particularly quality roads and a viable transportation network, broadband/wi-fi, hotel facilities, bikeways/bike paths, trail head facilities, single and multi-use trails, and other amenities, such as interpretive signage, picnic areas, restroom facilities, etc. are all critical components.
- Establish an action plan for funding of these needed improvements



## 2.2 – ENTREPRENEURSHIP & SMALL BUSINESS

According to the Georgia Department of Economic Development, small businesses comprise 97% of all Georgia companies. Regions that foster entrepreneurship and innovation grow at a faster rate. To continue to develop and attract a well-educated workforce and compete on a global scale, the region must support entrepreneurship and encourage innovation at all levels of the economy. Entrepreneurship and small business growth are significant drivers of the regional economy. A critical aspect of building sustainable economic competitiveness is linking economic performance with social cohesion. The Georgia Mountains Region is very diverse in terms of education, workforce skills, and economic performance, yet the region must strive to reduce disparities among the counties. The stimulation of entrepreneurship through the formation and development of new commercial businesses and social enterprises can play a key role in employing underutilized resources in the distressed areas of the region. In fact, all 13 Georgia Mountains counties are Entrepreneur Friendly as designated by the Georgia Department of Economic Development.

In the current economic state, entrepreneurship is responsible for a significant percentage of economic development in the United States. As manufacturing jobs continue to be lost overseas to competition, the U.S. economy will be driven even more by the success of small businesses. It is critical; therefore, to prepare today's workforce for a future where they can create their own jobs, rather than expect a job with a large employer to be waiting for them when they graduate or transition into a new career.

Entrepreneurship in the region is a primary contributor and mobilizing factor of resources to develop the economy, provide employment opportunities, and is a stabilizing factor in the regional economy. Major benefits of entrepreneurship in the Georgia Mountains Region include:

- Serve a social function by creating career opportunities and upward social mobility
- Small businesses are a source of innovation in products, services, and techniques
- Development of a pool of skilled and semi-skilled workers who serve as the base for industrial expansion
- Creation of jobs at relatively low capital cost, especially in the fast growing service sector
- Provide a productive outlet for energies of enterprising and energetic people

To grow small, new firms, the Georgia Mountains Region must leverage the following resources:

- Business training and technical assistance
- Revolving loan funds
- Business incubators
- Microenterprise

The region lacks a coordinated effort in promoting entrepreneurship and the research and development strengths of local educational institutions are not well known and underutilized. The Georgia Mountains Region needs to overcome the barriers of rural entrepreneurship to grow small business. Some of the barriers of rural entrepreneurship in the Georgia Mountains Region include:

- Declining agricultural income
- A culture not supportive of entrepreneurship
- Difficulty in obtaining sufficient capital
- Difficulty in obtaining skilled labor
- Greater distances to markets and areas of production



- Lack of an entrepreneur network
- Road infrastructure

These barriers diminish the growth prospects of potential entrepreneurial opportunities. Rural residents are perceived to seek entrepreneurship out of necessity rather than opportunity. As a result, rural entrepreneurs pursue projects with lower expected rates of return and more moderate risk levels.

The education process should begin by instructing the workforce that starting a business can happen in any field. Often entrepreneurship is thought of as an activity only engaged in by people in the high tech industry field. All of the region's target industries – from manufacturing to healthcare to tourism offer opportunities for local residents to start a company.

## GOALS AND STRATEGIES

**ENTREPRENEURSHIP GOAL STATEMENT:** *To focus on creating new small, high-growth companies in the Georgia Mountains Region.*

**Strategy 1: Provide the Georgia Mountains Region's residents with innovative educational resources to help them learn about entrepreneurship and start a new business.**

The purpose of this strategy is to integrate the education system with the business sector to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship in the Georgia Mountains Region.

### **Objectives:**

#### **1.1 Think entrepreneurially in K-12 school programming.**

- **Start a school mentor program or Junior Achievement program in every junior high and high school in the region.** This program will invite and encourage local business owners to talk to students about why they started their own business, what they enjoyed about it, and the steps they took to accomplish this. It is important to raise students' awareness of self-employment as a career option.
- **Develop an entrepreneurship training program for teachers.** Working together with local technical or community colleges and private businesses, junior high and high schools, the development of a training program for use in classrooms by incorporating entrepreneurship in its curriculum to further educate students on the benefits of entrepreneurship. By fostering a strong small business and entrepreneurial environment, the region will attract and retain young workers and provide opportunities to others who have been displaced.
- **Career Days.** The region should encourage schools to host "Career Days" from elementary school through secondary schools and focus on both traditional and non-traditional careers. This will help to promote entrepreneurial education in schools and support learning opportunities in successful local businesses.



- **Technical Colleges.** Link elementary and secondary schools with the local Technical Colleges throughout the region to showcase successful programs, such as culinary, information services, etc. that has resulted from assistance of technical college curriculum.

## **Strategy 2: Better connect venture capital, investors, and entrepreneurs within the Georgia Mountains Region.**

The purpose of this strategy is to improve collaboration between business investors and entrepreneurs.

### **Objectives:**

- 2.1 Identify and create a database of available resources from each entity in the region.** Several groups within the Georgia Mountains Region provide services for small businesses and entrepreneurship with programs ranging from training, technical assistance, funding, and networking. The GMRC will work in close coordination with the local governments to identify each entity within the Georgia Mountains Region to obtain information to understand their respective services, primary sources revenue, and primary target clients and catalog this information into a streamlined document for distribution. (Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFI), Universities and Technical Colleges, Georgia Department of Economic Development, Chambers of Commerce, and the GMRC Workforce Investment Board)
- 2.2 Creation of an entrepreneurial network.** The objective of an entrepreneurial network is to provide a forum in which business executives and people who seek to become executives of their own companies can share ideas, do business together, and build relationships. The action item for this objective will be to develop a survey of small business owners, entrepreneurs, and investors to identify their perspectives on the effectiveness of current programs and services that support small business and entrepreneurs.
- 2.3 A need exists for targeted market research to identify innovation opportunities that correspond to the assets of the Georgia Mountains Region.** The creation of quality new business opportunities in the region will be based upon the existing needs and development of a customer base that can be sustained. Focus groups will be assembled and surveys conducted to determine the market needs of the region. The survey developed will be targeted to economic developers, elected officials, technical colleges, and business leaders. Identifying these markets will ensure that new start-ups and small businesses can create innovative projects needed for the region and become self-sustaining.
- 2.4 Seek outside forms of equity financing and possible venture capital opportunities.** Using the information collected from Objective 2.1, local government leaders will encourage small businesses and potential start-up companies to seek funding through an RLF program, bank financing, Community Development Finance Institution or another financing entity.
- 2.5 Building and expanding of incubator facilities.** Work with local governments and development authorities in setting up small business incubators throughout the region to allow companies to share resources and space and enable tools, training, and infrastructure to create financially stable companies.

## **Strategy 3: Improve access to capital for startup and small businesses.**

The purpose of this strategy is to increase access to capital and technical assistance to entrepreneurs from the early stages of conceptualization to product development for positive success and economic growth.



## Objectives:

- 3.1 Identify and market existing regional loan programs and other resources that are available to start-up businesses and small businesses.** Promote state and federal programs that offer resources to new or expanding companies through marketing initiatives, workshops, seminars, etc. Access to Capital for Entrepreneurs is a regional Community Development Finance Institution (CDFI) that can help new start-ups with new credit programs. Work to promote the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission's RLF program.
- 3.2 Provide local banks with resources that educate them on the best way to support small and start-up companies.** Host informational workshops or seminars promoting state programs, such as the State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI) that will help align banks with funding to lend small businesses and new start-ups.
- 3.3 Link in to regional venture capital and angel investor networks.**

## Strategy 4: Promote successful entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial practices in the region.

The purpose of this strategy is to identify successful entrepreneurs and small business owners and assist them with development services.

## Objectives:

- 4.1 Encourage and support growth of small business development centers and smaller micro-enterprise organizations.** Conduct regional quarterly or semi-annual meetings with resource networks to discuss plans for enhancing entrepreneurship in the region. A component of this objective will also encourage the development of management teams that can assist start-ups and middle stage entrepreneurs in succeeding.
- 4.2 Encourage policy initiatives that support business growth and the enhancement of the Georgia Mountains Region as a viable location to doing and/or growing business.** Entrepreneurial policy for the Georgia Mountains Region will include the development of small business, tax relief for small business owners, access to debt and equity capital, access to venture capital, business training, technical assistance, and strategic planning.
- 4.3 Host a one-day entrepreneurial education workshop in conjunction with the SBDC and Universities.** Using an extensive network of resources, such as the universities, financing institutions, business leaders, SBDC, etc., a regional informational seminar will be conducted with topics such as how to write a business plan, small business finance, and marketing. Participants in the workshop will also hear from individuals who have started their business and methods used for achieving their goals.
- 4.4 Develop and distribute educational and/or promotional materials.** The key to entrepreneur success in the region is to make all information about starting or expanding a small business centralized. The region should develop a regional electronic newsletter for those involved in education, economic development, small business development, and entrepreneurship. The newsletter should announce networking events, training programs offered throughout the region, business plan competitions, and highlight recent small business and entrepreneur successes throughout the Georgia Mountains Region.



## 2.3 – AGRI-BUSINESS

Agriculture is the state's largest economic sector and has the largest economic impact in the Georgia Mountains Region. According to the Georgia Sustainable Agriculture consortium, the majority of Georgia's agriculture production is concentrated on large-scale production with vegetables and meats going into wholesale markets throughout the nation and the world. There is a growing, but much needed, smaller scale model where produce and meats are directly sold to the consumer. Local and regional food hubs can aggregate, distribute, and sometimes process local and regional foods, and have the potential to improve rural economies and quality of life through job creation and increased viability of small to midscale farms. This can also encourage a new generation of farmers. The vision for sustainable agriculture in the Georgia Mountains is an intertwining network of farms integrated into a local/regional food system to provide a healthy rural environment, economy, and community.

Current trends impacting the region, as well as the nation, are high fuel and food prices. As real incomes go down due to higher percentages spent on food and fuel, food insecurity worsens and more people are edged into poverty. Due to a strong global market for agricultural products, this situation can be devastating to a local economy. As a result, there is now more opportunity for small farmers to increase production of local products to meet local needs. Projects resulting from this focus area will help foster the growth of small to midscale agriculture in Georgia, improve the sustainability of existing and new farms, and promote cooperation to build a more secure economic and environmental future for the Georgia Mountains Region.

People are very interested in knowing where their food came from, how their food was handled and prepared and this leads to more consumer demand for locally grown products. Recently, the Georgia Department of Agriculture promoted the new "Georgia Grown" plan for farmers of Georgia produced commodities from fruits and vegetables to grass and trees.

There is quite an interest in local food from consumers across the state. This interest is reflected in the renewed interest in the Georgia Grown campaign to restaurants featuring food from specific farms to an emphasis on providing more fresh local fruits and vegetables in school lunches. Many of the region's small to mid-size farms have problems in accessing markets such as restaurants or schools. They do not have enough or a consistent supply of a particular crop. In many places across the US, entrepreneurs, non-profits or farmer cooperatives are developing "food hubs" to help these growers reach new markets. Food hubs can take many different forms but are ways to aggregate, distribute and sometimes further process products from many different small to mid-size farms to buying clubs, restaurants, institutions, and grocery chains. Their distinguishing features are a commitment to work with smaller farms, to create a greater return for the farmer, and the products are source identified.

**GOAL STATEMENT:** *To foster the development of sustainable agriculture by creating and/or retaining jobs and private investment within the agricultural sector and by adding value and developing new products and niche markets.*

**Strategy 1: Encourage and support the development of community supported agricultural cooperatives to sustain small and mid-sized producers.**

The purpose of this strategy is to create regional support to advance agricultural growers and specialty food producers and products.

## Objectives:

- 1.1 Creation of a regional food hub.** A food hub is a new model that looks to provide a physical place where produce or meat products can be brought together in quantities that are useful for institutional and/or wholesale markets, so small and midscale farmers can access new markets. USDA defines a food hub as “a centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products”. The first step is to assess potential barriers to food hub development and to evaluate the infrastructure needed to support these hubs. The next step will be to identify partners and producers.
- 1.2 Increase partnerships.** In an effort to generate revenue for the region, the need for partnerships on both local and regional levels should be supported. Based on increased interest in agricultural production of local commodities, farmers should seek partnerships with local government officials, local County Extension Agents, United States Department of Agriculture, Georgia Department of Agriculture, and local technical colleges and public universities.
- 1.3 Establish a local food guide through local food assessments.** The need to have a comprehensive list of the needs of farmers and producers is critical to expanding product or in development of a food hub. A survey tool will be created to establish the needs and deficiencies facing each producer in the region. It should also be noted that the completed assessment will help local farmers work together to support a regional food network capable of sustaining outside forces and threats.

## Strategy 2: Expand opportunities for production based on the byproducts of value-added processing.

The purpose of the strategy is to support the need for value-added product development opportunities and encouraging people in the region to “buy local”.

## Objectives:

- 2.1 Assist agricultural producers enter into value-added activities.** GMRC, in partnership with local government leaders will provide technical assistance to producers in generating new products, create new or expanding marketing opportunities, and increase producer income for economic development. Priority will be aimed at assisting new farmers or socially-disadvantaged farmers.
- 2.2 Promote and expand farmer’s markets and canneries.** Efforts will be aimed at assisting local communities to set up either a canning operation or local farmer’s market. Access to fresh, local food is also a key to meet gaps in food security throughout the region and improve the health of low income families in the region. Relationships with local farms can open the door for access to additional sources of low-cost produce.
- 2.3 Enhance educational training opportunities for both the producer and consumer.** Priority will be given to enhancing the knowledge of existing food processing techniques and food safety expertise of the region. Working in partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), local County Extension Agents, the University System of Georgia, and local businesses and schools; classes in preserving food, food safety, and food preparation should be supported on both a local and regional level. This measure will also provide support for developing regional food hubs. Other training possibilities could include farming techniques, crop management, nutrition, and produce management.





## **Strategy 3: Expand and upgrade infrastructure to support farms.**

The purpose of this strategy is to provide water, sewer, road, or broadband infrastructure to grow agri-business in the region.

### **Objectives:**

- 3.1 Invest in physical infrastructure to support growth and development.** Based on findings from the local food assessment data outlined above, infrastructure needs for producers and farmers should be supported. Georgia has faced many drought conditions over the years, which is critical to the livelihood of farmers; therefore, water quality and supply investments will be given priority. Transportation infrastructure is critical to moving products and goods for wholesale distribution and packaging, and efforts aimed at improving rail, road, and air modes of transportation will be supported.
- 3.2 Expand and support technology-based infrastructure.** Utilizing the data from the local food assessment, investments in technology-based software for marketing and promotion of goods and services should be supported. Broadband infrastructure and other telecommunication related technology will also serve an important role in moving goods and services, as well as marketing efforts.
- 3.3 Support new “green” infrastructure practices.** As a means of good environmental stewardship, local communities should support and adopt new “green” methods of agriculture production.

## **Strategy 4: Support efforts to expand agri-tourism in the region.**

The purpose of this strategy is to support and promote agri-tourism assets in the region.

### **Objectives:**

- 4.1 Inventory and map agri-tourism assets of the region.** The identification of assets will include, but not be limited to: vineyards and wineries, distilleries, corn mazes, farmer’s markets, individual farm stands, pumpkin patches, and other locally produced commodities. After identification of the assets, a comprehensive database of these findings will be produced and a GPS coordinate will be obtained from marketing, mapping, and packaging of attractions.
- 4.2 Support of the grape growing/wine industry.** The Georgia Mountains Region is earning international acclaim for the wines produced by its vineyards. Cities and counties in the region will identify and pursue marketing opportunities to promote these award-winning vineyards. GMRC will provide assistance at the request of the region’s member governments (city and county) with grant opportunities and planning needs.
- 4.3 Support new distilleries.** The Georgia Mountains Region is generating a reputation for distilleries that produce high-quality liquor sold in other parts of Georgia and around the United States. Cities and counties housing these distilleries will identify and pursue marketing opportunities promoting these products. GMRC will provide assistance at the request of these member governments with potential grant opportunities and planning needs.



## 2.4 – HEALTHCARE

Most of the Georgia Mountains Region is rural; therefore, doctors and health care facilities may be more than 30 minutes from patients. Also, much of the Georgia Mountain Region population is elderly, so critical facilities that meet specialized needs is of paramount importance. Several hospital facilities are located in the Georgia Mountain Region and include: Northeast Georgia Medical Center, Lanier Park Hospital, Ty Cobb Regional Medical Center, Lakeview Hospital, Habersham Medical Center, Rabun Memorial Hospital, Ridgecrest Medical Center, Stephens County Hospital, Towns County Hospital, Union General Hospital, and over 30 nursing homes, treatment centers, and assisted living facilities. As the population increases in the region the need for healthcare facilities and services will also rise. This is especially true for those counties where retirement communities are being established.

The increasing age of residents will have a growing impact on the health care and human services requirements in coming years. Approximately 1/4 of the total region population is currently on disability and the number of residents with an age greater than 55 is expected to double within 20 years. Due to these trends, the region will continue to experience increased health care and human services' needs. It is vital that the Georgia Mountains Region meet the needs of their residents through the provision of services such as quality medical care and affordable housing. Access to quality medical facilities, are needed today to provide routine medical evaluations, as well as provide short-term and long-term care to elderly citizens.

Access to comprehensive, affordable health care is vital to the social and economic growth in the Georgia Mountains Region and serves as a vital component in the region's overall economy. Investing in the health related service industry serves to be an economic engine for the Georgia Mountains Region. The accessibility of adequate healthcare is a major factor for industry recruitment and retention. Medical facilities and ancillary services help position the Georgia Mountains Region to compete globally for businesses and industries to locate in the region by supporting and having access to these critical community services.

The Health and Human Services recently identified the adoption and meaningful use of health information technology nationwide as a top priority for changing health care and for making health care more accessible, affordable, and safe for all Americans. As part of an overall plan to modernize health care, the use of telecommunications and data sharing and transfer can improve health care quality, reduce unnecessary health care costs, decrease paperwork, and expand access to affordable care.

**GOAL STATEMENT:** *To foster community-based wellness initiatives and increase the availability of affordable high-quality health care services.*

### **Strategy 1: Encourage and support multi-jurisdictional approaches to provide health services for economic development purposes.**

The purpose of this strategy is to encourage regional partnerships in promoting preventative and wellness measures which support economic growth in the region.

#### **Objectives:**

- 1.1 Utilize public forums to demonstrate the potential economic development impact of a healthy and well-educated workforce.** Local governments in cooperation with public health officials, medical providers, etc. shall promote the benefits of healthy lifestyles throughout the region by radio advertisements, newsletters, public bulletins, etc. Having a healthy community will yield private



investments from both existing industries and those with expanded opportunities. Healthy kids tend to be better students, thus leading to a better and skilled workforce.

- 1.2 Work regionally when opportunities exist for overcoming identifiable deficiencies in service delivery.** Communities should work across county boundaries to promote and extend health related services to residents, especially elderly. Targeted services included mental health and substance abuse centers, senior care, health transport, disease and obesity prevention, local clinics, pharmacies, etc.
- 1.3 Promote the development of safety, well-being, and resilience on a regional level.** Strengthen the capability of hospitals and health care systems to plan for, respond to, and recover from natural and man-made emergency events through public forums, newsletters, and trainings. All of these efforts will help the region be prepared for an emergency. Counties and cities should also work toward completing a regional plan for disaster mitigation that erases county boundaries.
- 1.4 Expand and support infrastructure to regional hospital and facilities.** As evidenced by the growing population and elderly population and the increased need for medical services, local governments should adapt plans and policies for the future growth of medical campuses to ensure that the infrastructure needs are in place or planned to be in place for future growth in the health service industry. The GMRC can provide member governments technical assistance in design guidelines, grant application development, and community workshops.

## **Strategy 2: Support efforts to improve community-based prevention and wellness.**

The purpose of this strategy is to provide the region with preventive resources for an active, healthy, and resilient community.

### **Objectives:**

- 2.1 Expansion of specialty medical services.** While hospitals and other medical office buildings continue to flourish throughout the region, special attention should be given to the health service industry. With the new opening of the Ty Cobb Regional Medical Center in Franklin County and the proposed new South Hall Campus of Northeast Georgia Medical Center, ancillary medical and specialty services will ultimately result that will lead to private investment and job creation. Local governments should work toward making investments for new services. In addition, specialty services in the region will keep residents in the area and reduce travel times for patient services. A region that can offer specialty services for its residents will see a healthier and sustainable community.
- 2.2 Creation of wellness parks.** Community health is as strong of a priority for many local governments. Strong individuals, strong families, and communities are the building blocks for a stable region. Wellness parks and trails offer residents a stress free environment and help to promote healthy life styles for families and children.
- 2.3 Increase the emphasis of Community Health Centers on providing preventive services and linking in with Public Health Services.** Community Health Centers play an important role in both health care delivery and improved neighborhood economic activity, especially in rural and medically underserved areas. As a result of the commitment to provide care for all, community health centers also serve a disproportionately high percentage of poor and uninsured patients. Working with local health



departments, communities should consider Community Health Centers as a means of generating economic activity in the region and delivering consistent and comprehensive health care.

### **Strategy 3: Promote and support the use of health information technology (IT)**

The purpose of this strategy is to encourage local partnerships between health providers and local leaders in using telecommunications and other information technology to improve care to patients and lower health costs.

#### **Objectives:**

- 3.1 Encourage innovation, promotion, and adoption of tele-health.** Support and develop pilot projects that demonstrate health IT reform that will enable the appropriate reuse of information to support quality public health and research. Further efforts should be aimed at endorsement and support of active participation of consumers in accessing and engaging with their health information.
- 3.2 Provide access to modern technology.** Efforts should be aimed at promoting and supporting modern technology practices and health care specialty resources for rural areas. The need for rapid sharing and transfer of medical data is critical and often times, a matter of life and death.
- 3.3 Public awareness campaign.** Enhance communication and support a public awareness campaign about the value of health information technology for outreach to all health care stakeholders, including providers, payers, and consumers of care. Develop and implement a public awareness campaign about the basics, benefits, and privacy implications of health information technology for multiple audiences, including health care providers, other business professionals, and families.
- 3.4 Technical assistance.** Local leaders should encourage widespread adoption and use of health IT through incentives, grants, and other technical assistance. Efforts should also be aimed at working with health practitioners to establish a baseline needs assessment.

## **2.5 – EXISTING BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY**

**GOAL STATEMENT:** *Increase expansion and retention of the region's existing businesses and industries.*

A good mix of business and industry allows the Georgia Mountains Region to be competitive. Diversity is the key to a thriving economic climate. The Georgia Mountains Region is in the middle of economic transition, and it is important to invest in strengthening the core of the communities and economic base of the region, including existing business and industry, leadership, and downtown revitalization.

The region's existing businesses and industries, including downtown areas are the livelihood of jobs in the Georgia Mountains Region and provide a stable environment and serves to improve the quality of life for area residents.

### **Strategy 1: Promote regional leadership and collaboration.**

The purpose of this strategy is to promote cooperation among leadership in the region for a thriving economic base.



## Objectives:

- 1.1 Commitment.** Local leaders must strongly commit to economic development both in policy making and resource allocation to support existing business. Chambers of Commerce are strong supporters of the existing industry base and do a great job in promoting existing business and industry.
- 1.2 Regional Collaboration.** Major economic development issues facing the Georgia Mountains Region need to be addressed at the regional level, such as, allocation of scarce financial resources, the location of critical infrastructure, and business retention and expansion efforts. The ability to collaborate and share resources will yield positive investments for the region.
- 1.3 Funding.** With diminishing federal and state budgets, the need to work together on regional projects allows for priority on grant and loan funding.

## Strategy 2: Invest in the beautification and revitalization of downtowns.

The purpose of this strategy is to promote and assist in public facilities and infrastructure to support a thriving downtown.

## Objectives:

- 2.1 Incentivize business growth in the region's downtowns.** Active downtowns are essential to the economic and social well – being of communities. Incentives come in many forms from financial inducements to developing soft infrastructure, such as educational resources and business incubators. Local governments should utilize state incentive programs like Opportunity Zones, Enterprise Zones, Tax Allocation Districts, and Capital Improvement District resources to assist local business owners.
- 2.2 Design Standards.** The region should create design standards for downtown areas and offer incentives for businesses to comply with standards.

## Strategy 3: Support new efforts for existing business and industry.

The purpose of this strategy is to provide resources and infrastructure to keep existing businesses in the region and create meaningful jobs and investments.

## Objectives:

- 3.1 Create a regional industry roundtable.** While many counties and Chambers of Commerce host an Industry Roundtable within their respective county, priority should be made to bring together large, medium, and small business and industries within the region on an annual or semi-annual basis. Issues facing all businesses today like energy efficiency, taxes, telecommunications, etc. can be discussed and share resources.
- 3.2 Support Infrastructure.** Working with local counties, the GMRC will assist member governments in pursuing funding for infrastructure, machinery & equipment, and other business needs , which will allow the industry to expand and create jobs.



## CHAPTER 3: EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Research has shown that regions with a highly educated workforce also experience economic growth in terms of business attraction and development, as well as higher income levels for residents in the region. Obtaining a college degree or returning to school to receive advanced education and training is important to assure that skills match the needs of desired employers. To ensure that workers don't leave the region, it is imperative that there are jobs to support a well-educated and highly skilled workforce.

Priority issues for the Education and Workforce Development Sub-Committee included the following:

- Despite increased opportunity for educators to partner with businesses in workforce training and development, there remains a disconnection between education provided and employment opportunities.
- The need for increased computer skills among the adult, entry-level workforce in order to compete.
- To retain highly qualified employees, the region needs to attract or create business opportunities in various growth sectors of the economy.
- To attract quality employers that can help transform the economy, the region must raise education attainment levels of adults, as well as increase the overall skill base of the workforce.

**GOAL STATEMENT:** *To attract and retain business and industry by promoting education and workforce development.*

### **Strategy 1: Lower the high school dropout rate.**

The purpose of this strategy is to support region-wide efforts to encourage students to stay in school and finish high school.

#### **Objectives:**

- 1.1 The WIB and its Youth Council have authorized that ten (10) required program elements will be provided through the GMRC/WIB program office. The WIB provides services to local youth through program staff including a Youth Program Supervisor and Youth Services Case Manager. Additionally, WIB/GMRC contracts with individuals in different communities who work with WIB to provide services such as tutoring and administration of local programming. WIB youth program and contractor staffs provide the following services in-house:**

- Application & eligibility determination
- Case management
- Summer & year-round work experiences
- Tutoring and study skills development
- Supportive services
- Job search placement assistance
- Leadership development opportunities
- Assessments





- Adult mentoring
- Job shadowing
- Workshops in work readiness development
- Follow-up services for 12-months after exit

**1.4 To ensure that WIA funds are used as a gap filler rather than a sole funding source, WIB youth program staff adhere to the following process when a service is needed to meet a participant's Youth Individual Service Strategy:**

- Service providers in the local community are surveyed to determine if the service is already being provided and if WIB can refer youth to the service. If the service is available, WIB youth program staff refer to the youth program and maintain contact with youth and service provider as a facilitator
- Youth programs will include an objective assessment of each youth's skill levels and service needs
- If the service is not available, WIB program staff will develop programming to meet the need and then either carry out the programming in-house or contract for the service to be offered locally
  - Tutoring, study skills training, and instruction leading to secondary school completion, including dropout prevention strategies;
  - Alternative secondary school offerings;
    - WIB coordinates services with alternative schools in the local area. WIB may assist with tuition at Lanier Career Academy and Mountain Education Centers and may provide supportive services for youth participating in these programs.
    - Incentives are given for each credit earned for Credit Recovery.
  - Summer employment opportunities directly linked to academic and occupational learning
    - Other work experiences, including year-round work experiences, are offered for in-school and out-of-school youth. These work experiences are closely tied to academic goals such as increasing GPA, regular attendance and progress toward a GED or other goals.
  - Occupational Skill Training
  - Leadership development opportunities, which include community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social behaviors;
  - Supportive services
  - Adult mentoring for duration of at least twelve (12) months, that may occur both during and after program participation;

This service is provided in two ways:

- WIB coordinates services with local groups who assign volunteer mentors to work with youth.
- WIB staff and contractors serve as mentors to youth participants. Each youth participant has regular contact with a WIB youth program case manager who provides mentoring and other services. Additionally, youth participating in the summer work experience are mentored by summer counselors and worksite supervisors. Tutors and other contract staff also mentor youth with whom they work.



- Follow-up services
  - Follow-up services are coordinated by WIB youth program staff. Follow-up services include regular contact, job search services including resume preparation, interview practice and opening search assistance, workshops on various topics, access to WIB events such as campus visits and leadership/volunteer activities

## **Strategy 2: Retain graduates and the educated workforce within the region.**

The purpose of this strategy is to retain a well-qualified and educated workforce in Georgia Mountains Region.

### **Objectives:**

#### **2.1 Basic Services.**

- Researching companies thoroughly, contacting them and noting their workforce needs;
- Networking locally and regionally to identify and target high-growth employers;
- Educating employers about how OJT training works

#### **2.2 Business services offered through the WIA system include:**

- Recruitment of job applicants
- Screening of job applicants
- Job Postings/Orders
- Job/Employee matching
- Skills Assessments
- Workshops
- Available space for employer interviews
- Labor Market Information
- Census Data
- Unemployment Insurance Information
- Job Fairs
- On-The-Job Training (under development)

## **Strategy 3: Partner with local schools, businesses/industries, and civic organizations to promote the importance of an educated workforce.**

The purpose of this strategy proposes to keep an open dialogue with educators, businesses, and civic organizations so that a modernized skilled workforce is ever present in the Georgia Mountains Region.

### **Objectives:**

The Youth Council is appointed by the Workforce Investment Board so that members represent the special interest of youth or expertise in youth policy. The council also includes representatives of youth service agencies, parents/guardians of eligible youth who may be approved for assistance under Title I of the Workforce Investment Act, individuals who have been involved in youth activities including former participants, worksite supervisors, and



representatives from organizations who work directly with youth and beneficial members of the WIB. Members of the Youth Council are voting members of the Youth Council, and may not be members of the WIB.

### **3.1 Members of the Youth Council and the WIB include representatives from:**

- Board of Education
- Job Corps
- Ninth District Opportunity
- YMCA
- Junior Achievement
- Housing Authority
- DFCS
- Council of Juvenile Judges
- 4-H
- Youth Employers
- Technical Colleges

### **3.2 Encourage youth and students opportunities for paid and unpaid work experiences, including internships and job shadowing.**

- Job Shadowing experiences are offered (1) through a partnership with employers, schools and partner agencies during the school year and (2) through special events offered as part of the summer work experience.
- The WIB offers opportunities for youth to participate in volunteer activities at local Humane Societies and other organizations. Additionally, all youth are encouraged to participate in clubs, groups and activities offered through local schools.

### **3.3 Coordinate efforts with the following agencies to ensure that all ten (10) services are available and to maximize use of limited funds:**

- Lanier Career Academy
- DFCS Regional and County Offices
- Family Connections
- Mountain Education Centers
- Alternative Schools
- The Technical College System of Georgia
- County Housing Authorities
- County Boards of Education
- Lanier Technical College
- North Georgia Technical College
- Junior Achievement
- Juvenile Justice
- Hall County Boys and Girls Club
- Library Systems
- County Chambers of Commerce
- School-to-Work
- District 2 Public Health
- University of Georgia
- Rehabilitation Services
- The West Avenue Home
- 9<sup>th</sup> District Opportunity
- Local Economic Development Organizations
- Jobs for Georgia Graduates – Dawsonville
- Communities-in-Schools (Toccoa and Hartwell)
- Gainesville, Toccoa, and Habersham Career Centers
- Healthy Families – Northeast Georgia Medical Center



In addition to service agencies, WIB is committed to developing relationships with private businesses that assist in providing supervision and training to youth through work experiences. Several local businesses including J&J Foods in Gainesville and Metro Insurance Agency in Toccoa have participated in WIB youth programming as speakers and as mentors for youth participants. Developing strong relationships with local employers will remain a high priority for the WIB youth program.

**3.4 All training must allow the customer to become self-sufficient. The following occupations have been determined to be growth and demand occupations for the area as of May 31, 2012:**

Accountant & Bookkeeper	Electrician	Medical Office Worker
Administrative Assistant	Emergency Medical Technician	Medical Records Tech.
Automotive Mechanic	English as a Second Language Instructor	Medical Secretary
Automotive Structural Repairer	General Office Clerk	Motorcycle Repair Tech.
Bill & Account Collector	Hand Packers & Packagers	Occupational Therapist
Brick Mason	Heating/AC Technician	Paralegal
CAD Operator	Home Health Aide	Pharmacy Technician
Carpenter	Hotel/Motel Management	Phlebotomist
Cashier/Sales Clerk	Human Service Worker	Physical Therapist
Child Development Assistant	Industrial Machinery Mechanic	Plumber & Pipefitter
Certified Nursing Assistant	Industrial Truck & Tractor Operator	Quality Assurance Tech.
CNC Machine Operators	Laborer (Warehouse)	Radiological/X-Ray Tech.
Construction Laborer	Large Truck & Tractor Trailer Driver	Registered Nurse (RN)
Correction Officer	Law Enforcement Officer	Respiratory Therapist
Cosmetology	Legal Secretary	Robotics
Culinary	Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)	Special Education Teacher
Customer Service Representative	Maintenance Mechanic	Surgical Technician
Data Entry Technician	Management Trainee	Surveyor
Delivery & Route Truck Driver	Manufacturing Machine Operator	Teacher
Dental Asst. & Dental Hygienist	Mechanic & Repairer	Truck Driver, Heavy
Dental Laboratory Technician	Medical & Lab Technician	Vocational Ed. Teacher
Drafter	Medical Assistant	Welder & Cutter

**3.5 Continue to distribute information about Occupational Skills Training for Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth throughout the Georgia Mountains Region.**

- Sessions are conducted weekly in the Gainesville area and bi-annually in each of the other counties.
- Present information at local Technical Colleges on New Student Registration Day to inform new students about GMWD.
- Information sent to partners in the Georgia Mountains Region: 9<sup>th</sup> District, The Housing Authority, DFACS, Legacy Link, etc. about Occupational Skills Training opportunities.

**3.6 GMWD will develop an On the Job Training program.**

- GMWD will work with businesses to train new employees to meet their skills requirement.

**3.7 The GMWIB has approved a GED pilot program to work in conjunction with the Hall and Dawson County Courts.**



- GMWD will assist five (5) participants from each county that have been court ordered to pursue their GED.

## **Strategy 4: Increase basic and technical skills.**

The purpose of this strategy is to form a more prepared workforce in the Georgia Mountains Region.

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission has access to data to provide area demographics, needed labor market information, etc. for the Georgia Mountains Region. The WIB is holding public meetings in each county and with each Georgia Department of Labor Career Center Employer Committee in the Georgia Mountains Region. The purpose of the meetings is to gauge employment and training needs from employers, community members, and partner agencies in the Georgia Mountains Region.

### **Objectives:**

#### **4.1 Basic Skills**

- For youth and adults who do not have a high school diploma or GED, WIB encourages attainment of a GED by either offering supportive services such as daycare, transportation, and meal support for regular attendance in a GED class or by enrolling the youth in a year-round work experience whose continuation is contingent upon regular attendance in the GED course.
- For youth and adults with a high school diploma or GED, WIB encourages attainment of diploma, degree or certificate that directly leads to employment in a high growth and demand occupation. Supportive services, and for assistance with tuition books may be offered. Additionally, youth may be offered a year-round work experience in the field they are studying to increase demand for the youth in the job market as a result of documented work experience.
- Work with Georgia Cyber Academy and GVTC as online support.

#### **4.2 Technical Skills**

- To better link employment with academic and occupational learning, WIB has developed an orientation to the summer work experience which includes 8 hours of work-readiness training, as well as informal assessment of the youth and individualized goal setting for occupational skills. Through workbook activities and regular meetings with summer counselors, the youth are assisted in making the linkage between academic learning and employment throughout the summer.
- Occupational Skills Training is available through local technical colleges and other providers.
- WIB participants attending technical colleges in high growth and demand occupations may be eligible for supportive services. These services are also offered to youth in GED programs. Need and level of supportive services are determined on a case-by-case basis.
- For other youth, WIB coordinates with Job Corps to assist in education and employment programming.



## **Strategy 5: Help alleviate unemployment and underemployment in the Georgia Mountain Region.**

The purpose of this strategy is to generate a better living standard for the citizens of the Georgia Mountains Region.

The GMWD can provide core services through the one-stop system, as well as provide intensive training services for program participants. Core services include: job search and placement assistance, including career counseling; labor market information identifying job vacancies, skills necessary for occupations in demand, and relevant employment trends in the local, regional and national economies.

Priority for training services will be given to residents of the Georgia Mountains Region for adult, youth, and dislocated worker applicants. Services for dislocated workers will also be given to employees of companies whose place of employment is/was within the Georgia Mountains service area. Informational and core services will be available to all applicants, as applicable, regardless of residence. Residents of other service areas desiring training services, unless they are dislocated workers, will be referred to the WIB in their area. Exceptions to this policy may be approved on a case-by-case basis.

### **Objectives:**

#### **5.1 Dislocated Workers**

Each Department of Labor - Career Center employs a dislocated worker specialist who participates in the on-site dislocation activities in the region. These specialists, when possible, work with management, labor representatives, and the Rapid Response team to coordinate efforts to inform and bring workers the services they will need to either receive training and/or return to work at a similar or higher wage than they are currently earning. Most dislocated worker funds will be utilized to provide training opportunities and supportive services. Due to the high drop-out rate in the Georgia Mountains region, many of the dislocations occur among individuals who have low basic skills who will require additional, often extensive, education and training to find a position with an acceptable replacement wage. Georgia Mountains Workforce Development works with the local career centers in the coordination of activities of Rapid Response.

#### **5.2 Veterans**

The Georgia Department of Labor - Career Centers employ Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Staff as well as Local Veteran Employer Representatives. All veterans will be identified upon entering or accessing the Career Centers and provided services at the core level. The needs-based approach will be used to identify veterans with special needs, i.e. disabled veterans, newly separated veterans, etc. and they will be subsequently referred to the DVOP or LVER for the appropriate services. All veterans who are pursuing employment will be registered in the State's Management Information System known as the Georgia Workforce System. Veterans with barriers to employment will be provided with the necessary initial assessment and the required documented intensive case management services. The workforce needs of veterans will be provided in the following order of priority:

- Special disabled veterans
- Disabled veterans
- Other eligible veterans
- Certain spouses and other eligible persons





***Eligible veterans will also receive priority in all Georgia Department of Labor employment and training programs operating in the Career Centers.***

Other examples of priority services will include the following:

- Referral of qualified veterans to new job openings, especially Federal Contractor job orders, prior to all non-veteran job referral activities
- Job skills workshops for veterans
- Job fairs for veterans
- DOL websites promoting services to veterans
- Job referrals via email

Staff will monitor job order notification and referral processes for any activity that would prevent veterans the maximum exposure to employment and career opportunities. Staff members will also attend the annual Veterans Conference to promote the importance of being compliant in these areas.

## **Strategy 6: Address lack of family support.**

The purpose of this strategy is to assist youth in preparing educational objectives for their future employment.

For in-school youth, WIB coordinates counseling services through school counselors and social workers. For out-of-school youth, WIB coordinates services for counseling with agencies such as Healthy Families, DFCS and Region 2 District Health. Adult mentoring for youth has a duration of at least twelve (12) months, which may occur both during and after program participation:

- WIB coordinates services with local groups who assign volunteer mentors to work with youth
- WIB staff and contractors serve as mentors to youth participants. Each youth participant has regular contact with a WIB youth program case manager who provides mentoring and other services. Additionally, youth participating in the summer work experience are mentored by summer counselors and worksite supervisors. Tutors and other contract staff also mentor youth with whom they work.
- Drug and alcohol abuse referrals to counseling, as appropriate, to the needs of the individual youth

## CHAPTER 4: HOUSING

Housing plays a large role in a community's economic development. Businesses researching prospective communities to locate their facilities expect a certain housing standard suitable for their families and those of their workforce. Substandard housing could lead a community to be ruled out of consideration, despite possessing other attractive qualities. The Georgia Mountains Region is committed to providing quality and affordable housing of all types to residents who live and work here.

### 4.1 – HOUSING TYPES

There are three (3) primary housing types that exist in the region. They are single-family, multi-family, and manufactured housing. **(NOTE: The following descriptions were taken from the 2011 GMRC Regional Assessment)**

- **Single-family** units are defined as free-standing houses, or as units that are attached, but completely separated by a dividing wall. Associated with the “American Dream,” single-family housing by a variety of different stakeholders for different reasons: to residents for the ownership rights and symbolism of achievement, to governments for the tax revenue and community investment, and to developers for the potential return value.
- **Multi-family** housing consists of structures containing two or more units, including large, multi-unit homes, apartment complexes, and condominiums. Compared to single-family housing, multi-family units are more cost effective to produce and are associated with a more temporary-type residential status, factors which have spurred the growth of this market in a national society achieving new levels of mobility.
- **Manufactured housing** is currently defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as all forms of pre-fabricated housing, with a special Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition for units produced before June 10, 1976. This category is generally the least expensive means of housing production and ownership, but is also often associated with weaker economic conditions because of how local communities continue to evolve in their approach to taxing such structures, treating modern units the same as their mobile-home predecessors. However, the difference between modern manufacture housing and conventional housing is growing smaller and smaller, with much of the remaining difference being stylistic and less in terms of functionality or impacts on public services. The issue of how manufactured units fits into overall housing plans will remain prevalent until the real and taxable values of manufactured housing can be clearly defined in relation to conventional units.

### 4.2 – HOUSING PROGRAMS

The Georgia Mountains Region is committed to educating residents on grant and loan programs and other housing services that are available that help them to secure quality and affordable housing. GMRC works in conjunction with state agencies to acquire information on these programs. Most of these programs are geared toward providing financial assistance for people who are unable to afford the cost of buying or leasing a home or apartment unit. The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) is the state agency that administers most of these programs. The different types of programs are listed in the following categories:

- Local Government and Community Programs
- Homeownership
- Rental Housing
- Nonprofit Housing Development
- Emergency and Special Needs Housing



The grant/loan programs and services in the aforementioned categories are as follows (**NOTE: Descriptions (with the exception of Family Promise and Habitat for Humanity) are taken from DCA's comprehensive guide to housing programs and resources for the state of Georgia entitled *Georgia's Housing Source*:**

## Local Government and Community Programs

- The **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program** provides Federal funds for improvements to housing, community facilities, and local public utility infrastructure. Previously funded projects have ranged from the construction of early childhood education centers and healthcare facilities to water and sewer line improvements. Projects funded in this program must largely benefit low- and moderate-income persons. All grants are awarded annually through a competitive process. Local matching funds may also be required based on the funding amount requested.
- The **Community HOME Investment Program (CHIP)** makes Federal HOME funds available to local governments, nonprofit organizations, and public housing authorities for housing activities designed to benefit low- and moderate-income persons. Funds may be used for down payment assistance or homeowner rehabilitation of housing. Affiliates of Habitat for Humanity may also apply for funding to assist eligible households with first and second mortgage financing. CHIP funds are awarded through a competitive process one time each year.
- The **Georgia Initiative for Community Housing** is a three-year program focused on helping communities create and launch locally-based plans to meet their housing needs. Through facilitated retreats, training and technical assistance, participating communities (1) create a community housing team, (2) develop new ideas about meeting local housing needs, (3) learn about approaches and available resources to meet housing needs, (4) produce a community housing plan, and (5) begin implementation of the plan. Five (5) communities are selected to participate each year through a competitive process, with applications available in June and accepted by September each year.

## Homeownership

- **Home Buyer Education/Foreclosure Prevention** is a series of services offered by DCA. For Home Buyer Education, they offer individual housing counseling services through a statewide network of nonprofit housing counseling agencies. Funded in part through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the counseling is intended to enable potential home buyers to assess their own financial and personal situations in order to make informed decisions about purchasing a home and to keep their homes once the purchase is complete. Additionally, in Foreclosure Prevention, DCA offers counseling to homeowners at risk of foreclosure through the same network of agencies. Funded by a short-term grant from Neighbor Works Inc., the free service allows homeowners to review their options with a housing counselor.
- **Georgia Dream Homeownership Program** provides affordable mortgage financing to low and moderate-income home buyers. There are two (2) programs within this program:
  - The **Georgia Dream First Mortgage Program** offers low-interest rate mortgage financing for borrowers with moderate incomes and modest assets. Loans are available to first-time home buyers and qualified households purchasing homes within targeted rural counties and specified urban census tracts. These first mortgage loans are 30-year fixed-rate mortgages originated under conventional, FHA, VA, or USDA/Rural Development guidelines. Homes purchased under the program cannot exceed maximum sales price limits and must be occupied as the borrower's primary residence.



- The **Georgia Dream Down Payment Loan Program** provides interest-free financing for eligible home buyers. The funds can help cover the costs associated with purchasing a home, such as down payment, closing, and prepaid item expenditures. Available in conjunction with the Georgia Dream First Mortgage Program, the loans are structured as subordinate mortgage loans and range from \$5,000 to \$7,500 with delayed repayment terms.

## **Rental Housing**

- In the **Bond Allocation Program**, limited tax-exempt bonds are available for certain types of nongovernmental (private) activities each year, including some housing programs. DCA administers the Georgia Allocation System, which authorizes eligible authorities to issue the bonds. Bonds used for multifamily rental housing must set aside a portion of units for low to moderate-income families. Rental developments financed with these bonds may also be eligible for state and federal housing credits without having to compete in the annual tax credit application cycle. Bonds used for homeownership must create cost-effective mortgages for first-time and moderate-income home buyers. In addition to funding housing, bonds may be used in the general categories of student loans, manufacturing, and exempt facilities.
- The **HOME Rental Housing Program** provides loans for the development of affordable rental housing. The program lowers loan payments and makes reduced rents feasible by offering very low-interest rate, construction-to-permanent loans. Owners agree to keep the property in good condition and rent the units to low-income residents. Loan funds may be used for rehabilitation, new construction, or adaptive reuse of existing buildings for rental housing and must be used in conjunction with an allocation of Housing Tax Credits.
- The **Housing Tax Credit Program** attracts private investment for the development of affordable rental housing through a 10-year federal and state tax incentive. The money raised by the sale of housing tax credits reduces the size of the mortgage needed for the development, making reduced rents feasible. Eligible activities include new construction, acquisition, and/or substantial rehabilitation of existing rental housing. Owners agree to keep the property in good condition and rent a portion or all of the units to low-income residents for at least 15 years.
- The **Housing Choice Voucher Program** helps low and very low-income individuals and families rent safe, decent, and sanitary dwelling units in the private rental housing market. Participating families pay a percentage of their monthly income as their portion of the rent and utilities, and DCA pays the remainder of the rent directly to the landlord.
- The **GeorgiaHousingSearch.org** website matches individuals and families seeking affordable rental housing options with units available for rent in the marketplace. At no cost, landlords and owners of rental properties can advertise the availability of units and highlight important features about their properties, including rent ranges, bedrooms, accessibility features, access to public transportation, and other amenities. Families seeking housing can search the free database according to their family needs, preview each property, and directly contact the property manager/owner through a convenient email link.

## **Nonprofit Housing Development**

- The **CHDO Operating Assistance Program (COAP)** provides qualified state-designated Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs) with up to \$40,000 annually to maintain operations and to develop capacity to implement HOME funded CHDO activities. COAP grants may be used for expenses such as salaries, wages, benefits, and other employee compensation; employee education, training, and travel; rent and utilities;

communication costs; and equipment, materials, and supplies. All activities funded under this grant must be linked to deficiencies identified in the organization's completed Capacity Assessment Tool.

- The **CHDO Predevelopment Loan Program** provides interest-free loans for up to 24 months to nonprofit organizations that have been designated by DCA as Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs). This HOME-funded program was created for CHDOs that plan to develop new or rehabilitated rental housing for low- and very low-income through DCA's HOME Rental Housing Loan or Permanent Supportive Housing programs. Up to \$30,000 in costs in funds may be used for costs associated with market studies, title searches, environmental review appraisals, and other predevelopment activities.

## **Emergency and Special Needs Housing**

- The **Emergency Solutions Grant Program** provides funds to nonprofit organizations and local governments for services to homeless persons and persons in danger of becoming homeless. Funds must be used for outreach, shelter, services, homelessness prevention, or rapid re-housing. General funding limits are set for each of the authorized activities, and applicants typically are expected to provide 50 percent of the cost of each activity.
- The **Housing Opportunities for Persons with Aids (HOPWA)** provides housing and supportive services to low-income persons living with HIV/AIDS. Funds may be used for rental assistance, housing operating subsidies, and housing development activities, including acquisition, new construction, and/or rehabilitation.
- The **Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program** provides assistance to households who would otherwise become homeless- mainly due to the current economic crisis- and works to rapidly re-house persons who are homeless. Qualifying households may receive rental assistance (including utility payments), deposits for rental units and utilities, moving costs, and hotel/motel vouchers necessary to meet emergency needs.
- The **Permanent Supportive Housing Program** helps for-profit and nonprofit organizations provide quality affordable rental housing with supportive services to individuals who have a disability and are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The program provides construction-to-permanent loans which may be used to create supportive housing through acquisition, rehabilitation, new construction, or adaptive reuse of existing buildings.
- The **Shelter Plus Care (S+C) Program** provides affordable permanent housing with supportive services for individuals experiencing homelessness and their eligible family members. Generally, the persons served by this program have disabilities associated with serious mental illness, addiction disorders, and/or HIV/AIDS. The program offers stable housing where individuals can address their problems, increase their skills, and become better equipped to make urban decisions that positively affect their lives.

## **Other Housing Programs and Organizations**

- The **HomeSafe Georgia Program** is one of the newest housing programs administered by DCA and is receiving a strong promotional push around the state. The purpose of the program is help Georgia homeowners who have experienced a substantial decrease in income due to job loss or underemployment by providing a mortgage payment bridge while they seek new or better employment. The goal of the program is to provide assistance to over 18,000 homeowners to prevent foreclosures. There are two (2) types of mortgage assistance available in the program:



- Under **Mortgage Payment Assistance**, the homeowner's monthly mortgage payments are paid to the lender for up to 18 months for first and second mortgages. Up to 6 months of delinquent payments and fees will be reinstated upfront, with the balance of the 18 months provided in monthly assistance. If payment is not needed for the full 18 months, the remaining loan proceeds may be used to pay any additional mortgage delinquencies in a backend reinstatement.
- **Reinstatement Assistance** is for homeowners whose hardship has since ended, but need help catching up payments that became delinquent during the hardship. A one-time payment is paid to the lender comprised of up to 6 months of missed mortgage payments, forbearance differentials, and lender fees in arrears, not to exceed the equivalent of 18 payments. This program was created in response to the economic downturn. To apply, applicants must be currently unemployed, substantially underemployed, or able to make their mortgage payment, but got behind while they were unemployed or underemployed.
- **Family Promise** is a faith-based organization with a mission to help homeless and low-income families achieve sustainable independence. The organization provides food, shelter, and support for services for homeless families and advice and advocacy for at-risk families to prevent their becoming homeless. Each affiliate contains an Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN) that marshals existing local resources (e.g. congregational spaces, donated goods and volunteers) for homeless families as they work to get back on their feet. The organization's vision is "...a nation in which every family has a home, a livelihood, and the chance to build a better future together."
- **Habitat for Humanity** is a nonprofit, ecumenical Christian ministry founded on a conviction that every man, woman, and child should have a decent, safe, and affordable place to live. Houses are built or renovated for families who do not have access to acceptable housing. This ministry has established an important presence in the Georgia Mountains Region and Northeast Georgia over the past 26 years, building over 60 homes in that time.

Although local governments are not eligible to apply directly for all of these programs or do not have all of these organization in their communities, it is important for them to have knowledge of these and organizations. It is clear that help is available for the region's residents in a wide array of challenging situations.

## 4.3 – GOALS AND STRATEGIES

**GOAL STATEMENT:** *Facilitate the availability and accessibility of affordable workforce housing and facilitate coordination of housing development with planning for infrastructure and overall community development for long-term sustainability.*

### **Strategy 1: Establish an inventory of current housing supply in the region to identify present and future needs.**

The purpose of this strategy is to accumulate the housing inventory for all thirteen counties in the region, analyze the data, and determine the housing needs (if any) for each community. This type of information can be gathered by prominent real estate agencies in the region (e.g. Norton, Coldwell Banker, etc.).

#### **Objectives:**





## 1.1 Identify local housing leaders in each community.

- **Housing Authority Directors** - These individuals oversee public housing for cities and counties.
- **Planning Staffs** - These individuals will help determine if housing is needed in a community and where it should be located.
- **Realtors** – These individuals market homes for prospective buyers, thus creating an economic impact on a community.
- **Housing Developers** – These individuals redevelop and rehabilitate existing buildings and sell land parcels to prospective homeowners looking to build a house.
- **Local Governments** – These entities work with state and federal agencies to make sure their housing is meeting a good standard and provide lower-cost housing options for those who can't afford to rent or purchase a house outright.

## 1.2 Distribute survey to local housing leaders.

- **Paper Surveys** – Send paper copies to designated representatives to fill out and send back to GMRC.
- **Online Surveys** – A survey will be created on the internet via a survey generator (e.g. SurveyMonkey) and e-mailed to local governments. The survey will be completed online and GMRC will receive instant feedback.
- The survey will contain a series of questions designed to learn about the housing needs of each community.

## Strategy 2: To inform local leaders and citizens on available housing programs and services.

The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that local leaders and their residents are aware of all programs and services offered through federal and state programs that are available to them in the Georgia Mountains Region.

### Objectives:

#### 2.1 Provide educational seminars and workshops.

- The seminars and workshops will be provided in central locations across the region to allow for reasonable travel times to and from the events and will give all local governments in the region access to all programs and services available for housing needs
- The events will be sponsored by GMRC and conducted by representatives from state agencies (e.g. Georgia Department of Community Affairs).

#### 2.2 Encourage local leaders to partner with public/private housing or historic preservation organizations.



- In tough economic times, many local governments will find it very challenging to undertake many new housing programs/initiatives without partnerships from other entities.
- Partnerships with public/private housing organizations will provide further investment and hopefully further housing opportunities for citizens in the Georgia Mountains Region, ensuring no one in the region is left homeless or with the threat of homelessness.

## **2.3 Utilize state and federal housing programs to leverage resources available to housing providers.**

- Local governments will consult with state agencies (e.g. Georgia Department of Community Affairs) and federal agencies (e.g. Department of Housing and Urban Development) to learn about available programs to help their residents.
- At the state level, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has a publication available entitled *Georgia's Housing Source*, which is a comprehensive guide for all of the housing programs and resources offered by DCA for the State of Georgia. The housing programs listed in section 4.2 were taken from this resource.
- Additionally, local governments can access housing programs and services by visiting official agency websites.

## **2.4 To provide an inventory of grants and other financial programs which support housing development.**

- GMRC will compile a list of available grants and financial programs for residents in the Georgia Mountains Region, disseminate it to local governments, and update it as needed.
- Local governments will be responsible for distributing this information to their residents and recognizing when help is needed.

### **Strategy 3: Develop a regional strategic housing plan.**

The purpose of this strategy is to get all local governments in the Georgia Mountains Region to meet, identify common housing needs, and create an action plan to put these needs in place with the goal of eliminating homelessness in the region.

#### **Objectives:**

### **3.1 Create regional “task force” or advisory committee to support development and implementation of the plan at the local level.**

- The committee will ideally be comprised of a local leader or representative from all 13 counties in the Georgia Mountains Region.
- This committee will be responsible for supporting local entities who are putting this plan into action by answering questions that local entities are unable to answer themselves.

## **3.2 Utilize inventory to create a digital map database.**

- GMRC will utilize housing inventory provided by the most prominent real estate agencies in the Georgia Mountains Region and create a map database where housing is available.
- Local governments will be responsible for sharing this information with their residents.

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## CHAPTER 5: PRE-DISASTER MITIGATION

### 5.1 - DISASTER RESILIENCY

The Georgia Mountains Region is committed to becoming resilient with respect to disaster mitigation and preparedness. Disaster resiliency can best be defined as the ability to anticipate threats, reduce the impact of these threats by taking preemptive action, respond appropriately and efficiently when these threats materialize, and have a plan in place for recovery. These threats can be natural events (weather-related) or technological threats, such as hazardous material accidents, pandemic diseases, terrorism, etc. and can greatly cause an economic disruption or collapse within a community. The Georgia Mountains Region's resilience will be determined by the magnitude and severity of such threats and the region's capacity to contend with them based on its inherent vulnerabilities and available resources.

Disasters know no boundaries and cast an immediate need for cooperation and collaboration across county borders. Moreover, resiliency is not evenly distributed across the landscape, especially across rural regions, and there has to be an integration of responses and resources to support those areas that have weak capacity.

Regions everywhere are increasingly faced with multiple and sometimes cascading hazards and the Georgia Mountains Region is no exception. Some communities, like the Georgia Mountains Region are more vulnerable than others to natural disasters by virtue of their location or past development decisions, while others are at risk because of their socio-economic characteristics.

One aspect of regional resiliency that should be emphasized is the increasingly interconnectedness and interdependence across a broad array of critical infrastructures, notably in energy, telecommunications, transportation, water and wastewater treatments systems, emergency services, government services, healthcare and hospitals, agriculture and food, commercial facilities, etc.

A disaster resilient community should adhere to the following:

1. The region should be able to anticipate that there may be multiple hazards or threats to their citizens and their property and/or landscape. These hazards might be non-routine episodic events such as tornadoes, floods, pandemics, or terrorist attacks. Cumulative events such as drought are also susceptible in the region.
2. The region should understand its physical, economic, and social vulnerabilities to these hazards and takes mitigating action to reduce their impact.
3. The region should be able to respond to events as they happen, mobilize resources and coordinate relief efforts.
4. The region should be able to organize itself through the stages of emergency response, restoration, reconstruction, and community betterment.

A more resilient region; one that has anticipated threats and mitigated some of them, developed a vision for the future, organized itself around key resiliency priorities, and planned for recovery, can more quickly restart its community services and chart a path to post-disaster functionality. The outcome of resiliency will position the region to efficiently and effectively organize the region's approach to preparation, emergency response, and rebuilding.

Taking a resiliency approach requires extending beyond emergency responsiveness to planning and organizing in advance to address these vulnerabilities and to enable rebuilding afterwards in ways that offer healthier, sustainable communities, and more robust regional economies.

## 5.2 – MITIGATION PLANNING

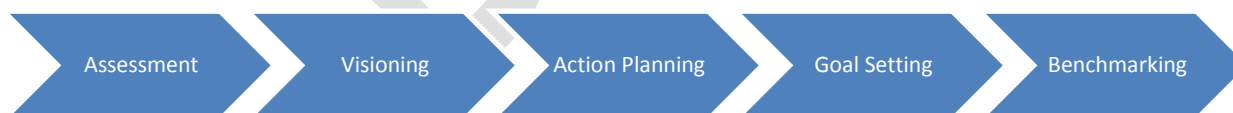
Throughout its history, the Georgia Mountains Region has experienced many hazardous events. Most of these hazards resulted in fairly localized damage. Wildfires, flooding, ice storms, drought conditions, and severe thunderstorms including tornados are statistically the greatest potential threat to the region. Currently, the potential for a hazardous materials spill poses the greatest technological threat to the region's population.

As these disasters continue to assail our communities, there is now a window of opportunity to recast old planning efforts to help communities in the Georgia Mountains Region, see a better future, with or without disaster. Pre-disaster mitigation is about prevention – preventing loss of life, preventing property damage, preventing damage to critical infrastructure, and preventing economic loss. Mitigation is a proactive measure that local, regional, state, and even national entities should adopt.

The importance of comprehensive, multi-hazard planning at the regional level to address both natural and man-made disasters is the necessity of effective coordination between the state and local entities in promoting an integrated comprehensive approach to mitigation planning.

The intent and design of mitigation planning is to assist local government officials, residents of the counties and cities in the Georgia Mountains Region, and public and private sector organizations in planning to address the risks associated within each jurisdiction of inevitable natural and technological hazards, thereby minimizing human, economic, and structural losses.

Communities can create a vision for their future and establish actions necessary to improve their overall resilience so that they can prepare for and recover from any challenge. The process for completing the plan will be overseen by a Technical Advisory Committee (a group of committed leaders whose role will be to guide the process and to ensure that others in the community, including citizens, business leaders, and political leaders). This will encourage coordination and collaboration to be part of and support the resilience building process. The process for achieving this will be: assessment, visioning, action planning, goal setting, and benchmarking.



In preparing the Regional Mitigation Plan, the following requirements will be addressed:

- All natural and man-made hazards will be analyzed for risk

- All interested persons within the region will get a chance for input into the planning process
- All potential mitigation projects will be listed within the plan and prioritized
- All facts of the plan be approved by the city/county officials and EMA Directors
- All aspects of the plan will be required to be updated on a regular basis

After completion of analysis, input, and drafting of the plan, the most useful and important part will be drafting the list of mitigation projects by county/city for emergency preparedness. An exhaustive list will ultimately cover all counties and cities within the region and will prioritize each project as to the importance of the preventive measures it will provide. This will help enable counties in the region to apply for both Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds for either mitigation purposes or post-disaster recovery should a disaster occur. Region-wide priority projects are outlined in Section 5.4 of this report.

Principles for the plan will include being community-based, broad stakeholder participation, analytical problem-solving to address complexity and uncertainty, consideration of all hazards and threats, flexibility to address different levels of threats, clearly stated goals and strategies, and identification of procedures for implementation. Although each hazard presents unique challenges, the processes of preparedness and planning are broadly consistent and should encourage general consensus.

The use of public and private input to identify actions, which may, over time, reduce the exposure of people and property to identifiable hazards, helps to allow this component of CEDS to set the stage for long-term disaster resiliency in the Georgia Mountains Region. The plan will provide an overview of the hazards most likely to threaten the region, as well as, safeguards the counties have in place or may choose to implement in the future to mitigate these hazards or their potential effects.

The trajectory of a community after an event, and hence the ultimate outcome, is determined by the extent to which the community's capacities match the magnitude and severity of the event; therefore a Regional Post-Disaster Response Framework, in coordination with local efforts, will be addressed and further outlined in Section 5.3, Strategy 3.

## 5.3 – GOALS AND STRATEGIES

**GOAL STATEMENT:** *Encourage disaster resiliency, extending beyond emergency responsiveness to planning and organizing in advance to address these vulnerabilities, and to enable rebuilding and recovery afterwards in ways that offer healthier, sustainable communities, and more robust regional economies.*

### **Strategy 1: Creation of a Regional Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan.**

The purpose of this strategy is to assist local government officials, residents of the counties and cities in the Georgia Mountains Region, and public and private sector organizations in pre-disaster mitigation planning to address the risks associated within each jurisdiction of inevitable natural and technological hazards, thereby minimizing human, economic, and structural losses.

#### **Objectives:**

##### **1.1 Identification of key stakeholders. (A collaboration of both public and private)**

Key stakeholders for this plan include, but not limited to, the following:





- **Elected Officials:** county commissioners, city council members, school board officials, and state representatives
- **State, Regional, and Local Government:** Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA), Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GA DNR), Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC), county EMS offices, local Sheriff's Office
- **Federal Agencies:** Forest Service, Farm Bureau, USDA
- **Schools:** K -12, Technical Colleges, and Public and Private Universities
- **Business and Development:** Chambers of Commerce, economic development authorities, planning committees, hospitals and healthcare centers, local businesses, etc.
- **Neighborhood and Nonprofit Groups:** watershed groups, environmental groups, conservation districts, churches, civic organizations, and interested citizens

## 1.2 Assess risks and threats in the region. *(Both natural and technological)*

- Establish an inventory and historical database of past disaster related events
- Identify the region's vulnerabilities to disasters
- Collect and analyze post-disaster responsiveness by local communities
- Identify and map businesses located throughout the region where the potential for hazardous material disasters can occur

## 1.3 Conduct a baseline assessment and gap analysis of assets, systems, and networks.

- **Inventory of Critical Facilities.** Critical facilities may be described as those facilities which provide essential products and services to the public, and which would cause limitations to resident's safety and welfare after a disaster occurs. Critical infrastructure includes, but not limited to, agriculture and food sources, energy, healthcare and public health, communications, and general purpose government facilities. Other governmental facilities which are typically classified as critical include water treatment, waste water treatment, water distribution facilities, public works, public schools, administrative services, and other government buildings. Private buildings should also be identified and included in this classification. Examples would include chemical factories and propane distribution facilities to name a few.
- **Inventory and update of geographic databases.** It is imperative that critical geographic databases be kept up to date for improved efficiency and response time post-disaster. These include: up-to-date aerial photography and topographical models, E-911 addresses, roads and other transportation networks, water and wastewater utilities, natural gas utilities, power lines, communication networks, and critical community facilities, such as hospitals, government buildings, churches, and community shelters.
- **Inventory of service provider.:** Utility and other service providers will be interviewed to examine external linkages that affect their operational and business continuity and to collaborate to share information and understand and address regional vulnerabilities and consequences.

## 1.4 Identification of priority mitigation projects.



- The purpose of this objective is to guide construction of mitigation projects that will protect life and property. Special emphasis will be placed on projects targeted toward critical infrastructure improvements, such as bridges, roads, water, and wastewater facilities.
- The intent and design of the plan will assist both public and private sector organizations in identifying key mitigation techniques and projects to improve their resilience, so that they may prepare for and recover from any challenge.
- Prioritization of projects will be a must and will be based upon the importance of the preventive measures proposed as well as the number of persons and/or facilities served.

## 1.5 Creation of a regional Technical Advisory Committee. (TAC)

- The mission of the Technical Advisory Council will be to oversee the drafting of the plan and develop projects that minimize the risk to life and property.

### Strategy 2: Create public awareness of plan/community outreach.

The purpose of this strategy is to provide the public frequent information that is clear, consistent, and appropriate on available assistance, where to go in case of emergency and a designated local point of contact, and any other measures needed to achieve mitigation or recovery.

#### Objectives:

## 2.1 Develop and conduct local and regional workshops.

- **Community Preparedness** – Informational seminars will be conducted throughout the region to educate citizens on preventive measures as well as post-disaster recovery efforts.
- **Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan** – Community input will be an integral part of preparing the plan and public hearings will be conducted through the region to obtain comments and suggestions.
- **Governmental Efficiency** – A series of public hearings will be conducted to obtain community input on how local governments can better address resident's concerns and needs for preparedness and post-disaster recovery efforts.
- **Community Wellness** – A series of community informational wellness workshops on preparedness items (bottled water, first aid kits, designated evacuation routes, etc.) that every home and business should have in place in case of emergency will be conducted.
- **Alert Systems** – Local governments will also host public meetings to encourage residents to sign up for mass alert system notifications and other emergency notification services.

## 2.2 Develop and distribute print material regarding preparedness and post-disaster recovery efforts.



- Establish an emergency preparedness and post-disaster recovery brochure (what items to have on hand, designated points of contacts, designated routes and assembly points, etc.).
- Distribution of materials to citizens, via direct mail from cities and counties to residents, placement of brochures at city/county offices, chambers of commerce, local businesses, etc.
- Brochures specific to census blocks for residents to have a designated route to an emergency assembly point or shelter.

## **2.3 Encourage partnerships with large employers (100 +) and schools for disaster planning.**

- Educate larger employers in the region to develop plans, programs, and procedures for steps in achieving mitigation measures and what to do post-disaster for their employees.
- Work with employers to take part in the planning stages of the Regional Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan and Post-Disaster Framework.
- Local governments should work with public schools to develop action plans for preparedness and post-disaster recovery efforts.
- Educate businesses and schools (including public and private universities) about protocols to have in place if a disaster should strike during business hours.

## **Strategy 3: Establish a regional post-disaster response framework.**

The purpose of this strategy is to provide the template for the management of incidents regardless of size, scope, or cause so that emergency management officials and response personnel have a flexible, but standardized system in which a variety of agencies can work together in a cohesive manner.

### **3.1 Identify key local support. (*Road crews, local citizens, churches, and shelters*)**

- All community members will have equal opportunity to participate in recovery efforts in a meaningful way and ensure that people are not excluded from the process. Community members will recognize that a successful recovery is about the ability of individuals and businesses to rebound from their losses in a manner that sustains their physical, emotional, social, and economic well-being.
- It is critical to identify and establish Citizen Emergency Response Teams (CERT) who can serve as first responders on the ground. Residents who have direct communication with emergency personnel will serve to keep a state of order during post-disaster.

### **3.2 Establish communication protocol measures.**

- Establish common operating procedures based on interoperability, reliability, scalability, and portability, as well as resiliency and redundancy.



- The need for effective and redundant communications both informal and formal, must be inclusive and reach all segments of the population.
- Readiness to act swiftly and effectively based on risk assessment and clear and focused communication.
- Work with businesses and schools to establish protocols for employees in cases of disaster

### **3.3 Encourage and promote quarterly or semi-annual practice drills and exercises.**

- Regional and local levels of government should conduct preparedness activities – planning, training, exercising, and organizing to build, sustain, and improve operational capabilities.
- Local EMA officials should also perform periodic testing of notification (warning) systems and updating local CERT teams of changes to contacts, points of assembly.
- Local governments and EMA officials should also encourage residents including the CERT teams to participate in preparedness drills.

### **3.4 Promote specialty training opportunities for first responders.**

- ***Preparedness training*** – training and exercise, personnel qualifications and licensure, equipment certification, and evaluation.
- ***Adaptability*** – As incidents change in size, scope, and complexity, the response must be adapted to meet expanding requirements. Therefore, a cross-sector or specialty training should be encouraged.
- ***Local Citizens as responders*** – Designated citizens or points of contact for the community should also work with local government officials or EMA personnel for preparedness training.

### **3.5 Coordinate a common and comprehensive approach to post-disaster recovery at all levels of government.**

- The focus of agencies responding directly to disasters as they unfold by dealing with the myriad of medical, safety, infrastructure, and public order challenges remains of paramount importance.
- There is strong emphasis on the need for seamless coordination of federal, state, and local efforts to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. This policy, reinforced by processes and structures for planning, coordination, training, and exercises and certification, has also generated two (2) very important collaborations across the private, public, academic, and nonprofit sectors. One is primarily focused on the security of critical infrastructure, and the other on building the capacity of local communities and regions to drive preparedness, response, and recovery efforts in line with their own vision for the future.



- A broadened focus places a premium on what might be called “soft infrastructure” of regions, such as community engagement, leadership, communication and coordination, ongoing preparation and training, flexibility, and sequencing.
- There is a clear tension between the need to act quickly and decisively in times of emergency based on clear chains of command and responsibilities, while maximizing opportunities for local control and allocation of resources. To assure resilience, there has to be in place core-management structures that can bridge barriers, create trust, and strengthen communication. This need is often reinforced by the fact that governmental and other functional boundaries are often a poor fit particularly in situations where resources have to be mobilized quickly in adverse conditions. Issues over turf and jurisdiction can arise even in the middle of disaster.
- All 13 counties within the GMRC have coordinated Local Emergency Response Plans (LERP). Working with GEMA, many communities in the Georgia Mountains Region also have in place Hazard Mitigation Plans (HMP) to ensure funding from GEMA and FEMA should disaster strike. While communities will rely on existing plans, the consolidation of the LERP and HMP plans should also be incorporated into the Regional Mitigation Plan.
- The premium placed on collaboration, partnership, flexibility, and clear lines of authority and responsibilities demand the engagement of a multitude of agencies, organizations, companies, and individuals. This in turn requires the development of a wide range of mechanisms and tools to translate the doctrines and principles into practical guidance.

## 5.4 REGIONAL PRIORITY PROJECTS

Through extensive collaboration and coordination, mitigation projects identified in the planning process will be prioritized on the *Regional Priority List*. The purpose of this section is to guide construction of projects that will protect life and property, especially critical infrastructure, such as bridges, roads, and water and wastewater facilities.

An exhaustive list will ultimately cover all counties and cities within the region and will prioritize each project as to the importance of the preventive measures it will provide. This will help enable counties in the region to apply for both Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds for either mitigation purposes or post-disaster recovery should a disaster occur.

Mitigation projects can be broken down into several categories, such as flood mitigation, wildfire mitigation, wind mitigation and technological mitigation.

During group sessions, examples of flood mitigation projects that were mentioned include: Riprap around riverbanks, retaining walls, erosion and sediment control, sewer backup protection, flood-proofing buildings. Another form of flood mitigation is the enactment of regulations to prevent development in floodplain areas. Examples of regulations might include: Updated changes to planning and zoning, thereby restricting development in floodplain areas, open space recreation through the purchase of easements or acquisition of land in floodplain areas, storm-water management, and drainage system maintenance.

Examples of wildfire mitigation projects might include: Removal of vegetation around buildings, provide fire breaks in the timber, designate and provide fire roads to aid in firefighting, and replace roofing with fire-resistant materials.



Examples of wind mitigation projects might include: provision of higher grade utility poles, provision of emergency back-up generators to critical facilities, clearance of trees from utility poles, and thin trees to reduce wind damage.

Other types of mitigation projects include mass notification systems, warning sirens, and weather advisory signs to name a few. Another project that was mentioned included the distribution of weather radios as a warning tool in locations where there may be concentrated populations, or in locations where personnel may serve to help distribute warnings to the public. Examples include schools, day care centers, factories and large employers, etc.

Other regional projects:

- Updates to each County Local Emergency Response/Operation Plan (LERP) and integration into the Regional Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan
- Development of Citizen Emergency Response Teams (CERT) for each county and/or city
- Mass Notification/Alert Systems
- Specialty equipment (hazmat, etc.)
- Public Awareness Campaign
- Specialized trainings, certifications, etc.
- Updates to facility accommodations to keep with current and updated standards
- Inventory and designation of shelters, equipment
- Transition – people need to know who to contact and where to go
- Work with local large sized businesses

Upon completion of the Regional Mitigation Plan, a comprehensive list of projects specific to each county and city will be identified.





## CHAPTER 6: PERFORMANCE METRICS

An important component of the implementation of the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission's CEDS is a monitoring system to track regional performance in the future as a result of this Strategic Plan. Several data sets have been identified that local governments can showcase good measures of economic performance. This will serve to be a good indicator of the overall economic health of the region's communities and citizens.

Many regional economic development organizations already use performance metrics, known as "benchmarks" and should make this process very easy for local communities to adapt to. The metrics provided in this plan provides an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the positive results of the CEDS efforts and policies and help build confidence among citizens that the economy is headed in the right direction for the Georgia Mountains Region.

The following includes a list of the Performance Metrics for each strategic focus area of the plan:

### **Infrastructure**

- Existence and creation of business parks and sites
- Available developable acreage with utility services
- Expansion and improvement of regional roadways and total miles constructed
- Development of a regional public transportation system with established routes across the region
- Accessible water infrastructure throughout the region
- Implemented plan for water management and water protection for the region
- Suitable wastewater capacity to meet future growth of region
- Available broadband access across the region
- Adequate waste disposal and recycling abilities in the region

### **Business and Industry**

- # of new start-up businesses or business expansions
- Job creation and retention
- Increase in capital investment
- # of new tourism venues
- Increase in visitation, overnight stays, and capital expenditures spent on tourism industry in the region
- Access to affordable healthcare and other health related services
- Value added production in niche agriculture markets

### **Workforce Development**

- Job Growth in non-manufacturing industries
- Average wage growth
- Unemployment Rate
- SAT scores
- Educational Attainment
- Drop-out rates



## **Housing**

- Regional housing sales in 2012 vs. regional housing in sales in 2017
- Total amount of grant awards to member governments from housing programs
- Homelessness Rate in 2012 vs. Homelessness Rate in 2017
- Creation of regional housing Advisory Committee

## **Pre-Disaster Mitigation**

- Governmental efficiency and response time
- # of mitigation projects put in place and funded
- # of local plan updates

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## CHAPTER 7: PRIORITY PROJECT LIST

The list of issues and projects outlined below is comprehensive, but by no means exhaustive. The list reflects the participant's ideas, concerns, and efforts and is expected to be continually updated as new projects emerge and existing projects are completed. The CEDS is meant to be a dynamic and emergent process. The GMRC sees CEDS as a major component of its strategic plan, and through partnerships, expect to achieve many of the key goals and projects.

GOVERNMENT	PROJECT	FUNDING SOURCE(S)	AMOUNT
<b>Banks County</b>			
	Wastewater Treatment	GEFA/USDA/Local	\$5,000,000
	Water System Upgrades	CDBG	\$500,000
	Martin Bridge Sewer Imp.	ARC/EDA/USDA/OneGA	\$3,000,000
	Fiber Infrastructure	ARC/OneGA	\$5,000,000
	I-85 Frontage Road	DOT	\$1,000,000
<b>Town of Homer</b>			
	Wastewater Treatment	EDA/ARC/CDBG/EIP	\$1,500,000
<b>City of Maysville</b>			
	Park & Trail Development	DOT-TE	\$500,000
	Renovation of City Hall	USDA/Local	\$1,500,000
<b>Dawson County</b>			
	Infrastructure Expansion	ARC/Local	\$300,000
	DADC – VITE	ARC/PDG	\$235,000
<b>City of Dawsonville</b>			
	Sewer Expansion	ARC/Local	\$1,000,000
	Sewer System Improvements	ARC/Local	\$600,000
<b>Franklin County</b>			
	Road Improvements	CDBG-EIP, OneGA	\$1,000,000
	Industrial Park Development	ARC/EDA/OneGA	\$2,000,000
<b>City of Franklin Springs</b>			
	Sewer System Improvements	ARC/Local	\$700,000
<b>City of Lavonia</b>			
	Raw Water Pump Station	ARC/Local	\$800,000
<b>City of Royston</b>			
	Depot Renovations	ARC/Local	\$1,000,000
	Rural Transit	DOT/Local	\$500,000
	Tornado Siren/Mass Notification	GEMA/Local	\$45,000
<b>Habersham County</b>			
	Infrastructure – Industrial Park	ARC/Local	\$620,000
<b>City of Clarkesville</b>			
	Greenway Development	LWCF	\$400,000
	Streetscape	DOT-TE	\$750,000
	Downtown Parking Lot	USDA – RBEG	\$99,000
	Water Improvements	CDBG-EIP	\$250,000
<b>City of Cornelia</b>			

	Phase III – Water Improvements	CDBG/Local	\$840,000
<b>City of Demorest</b>			
	Sewer System Improvements	ARC/Local	\$600,000
<b>Hall County</b>			
	Transitional Housing	CDBG/Local/Private	\$800,000
	IMS Gear Expansion	OneGA	\$200,000
	Energy Grant	ARC/Local	\$110,000
<b>Hart County</b>			
	Land Purchase	USDA REDLG	\$3,024,750
	Water Expansion	ARC/Local	\$300,000
<b>City of Hartwell</b>			
	Wastewater Treatment	CDBG-EIP/ARC/USDA	\$1,000,000
	Sewer Expansion	CDBG-EIP/Local	\$500,000
<b>Lumpkin County</b>			
	Water Improvements	CDBG/Local	\$550,000
	Water & Sewer Improvements	ARC/Local	\$350,000
	Historic Cemetery	DNR	\$100,000
<b>Rabun County</b>			
	Business Park Improvements	ARC/OneGA/EDA	\$2,000,000
	NEGA Food Bank – Food Hub	ARC/OneGA	\$2,500,000
<b>City of Mountain City</b>			
	Drainage Improvements	CDBG	\$500,000
<b>Stephens County</b>			
	Wastewater Treatment Plant	CDBG-EIP/OneGA	\$2,500,000
	High School Road Project	OneGA/Local	\$1,000,000
	Lake Hartwell Bruce Creek	DNR	\$600,000
<b>City of Toccoa</b>			
	Infrastructure Upgrade	CDBG-EIP/ARC	\$2,000,000
	Wastewater Treatment	CDBG-EIP/ARC/OneGA	\$2,000,000
	Gas line extension	ARC	\$100,000
<b>Towns County</b>			
	Sewer Improvements	Local/Private	\$4,000,000
<b>City of Hiawassee</b>			
	Water & Sewer Improvements	EDA/ARC/OneGA	\$500,000
<b>City of Young Harris</b>			
	Sewer Improvements	ARC	\$600,000
<b>Union County</b>			
	US 129 Expansion	DOT	\$10,000,000
	Airport Connector Road	DOT	\$750,000
	BHR – Amphitheater	OneGA	\$1,000,000
	Senior Center	CDBG/Local	\$325,000
	Infrastructure Improvements	CDBG-EIP/OneGA	\$500,000
<b>White County</b>			
	Water Line Extension	CDBG/Local	\$125,000
	Water & Sewer Expansion	EDA/ARC/OneGA, EIP	\$2,000,000

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