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A New Era for the CEDS

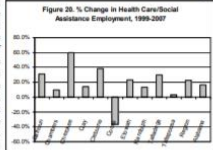
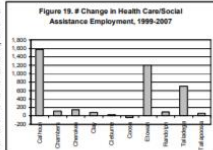
From this... ...to this!

Health Care and Social Assistance

Taking care of people's medical needs and providing them with services to help them with their daily lives have become increasingly important professions. The demand for health care and social assistance will continue to climb as the Baby Boomers move through the different stages of older age. Demand may rise more rapidly in Alabama than in other areas, as the state has become an increasingly attractive place for people to retire.

Health care and social assistance already has gained prominence in East Alabama, rising from being the third largest employment sector in 1999 to the second in 2007.³³ It may be quite some time before it overtakes manufacturing, which has at least an 11,000 job lead, however, unlike manufacturing, this sector registered gains in the number of employers and employees. East Alabama attracted 12% of the state's new practitioners in these fields—good progress for a largely rural area. Small practices with fewer than 20 employees predominate this sector. Jobs in these professions are not quite as lucrative in East Alabama as they are in other parts of the state, and pay increases in the region have not kept pace with the statewide average. In 1999, medical and social service workers earned 11% less than their counterparts throughout the state. That gap increased to 15% by 2007.

All but one of East Alabama's counties gained employment in this sector between 1999 and 2007. Calhoun and Etowah Counties vie with each other for the title of "the" regional medical and social assistance center of East Alabama. Amniston and Gadsden are the two counties' respective central cities, and both draw clients from the largely rural counties that surround them. The hospitals and social service agencies in Sylacauga (southern Talladega County) and Alexander City (northeast Tallapoosa County) draw clients from neighboring Coosa and Clay Counties, making them the region's secondary medical and social assistance centers. Interestingly, Cleburne County experienced the largest rate of increase in medical and social service practitioners. This spike may have occurred because Cleburne County now adjoins the Atlanta metropolitan area. Although Coosa County appears to have lost a significant percentage of its medical and social service providers, the reporting methodology makes this result uncertain. Coosa County had 94



more than 50 inches of precipitation a year, while those in the south receive slightly more, around 55 inches per year. Extreme heat is rare during the Summer, but temperatures in the nineties are quite common, reaching those about 64 days per year. The temperature only exceeds one hundred degrees on one or two days per year. During the winter months the temperature drops below freezing an average of 70 days. It drops to twenty or below only 7 to 9 days per year.

Geographic Features

Geographic features are major determinants of the physical potential of the area. These features determine opportunities and constraints that shape land use patterns. They may also facilitate or impose restrictions on the economic development of an area. The East Alabama Region is an area of distinct topographic contrast and is physically diverse and rich with natural resources. The northern two-thirds of the region is characterized by the mountainous terrain of the southern Appalachians, interspersed with broad, low-lying river valleys. The Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers flow southwest through this portion of the region, draining a large headwaters area in northwestern Georgia. The two rivers eventually converge in the Montgomery area to form the Alabama River. The main mountain ridges separating these two rivers possess the highest elevations in Alabama. The summits of Mount Cheaha, the State's highest point, Dugger Mountain, and Choccoloco Mountain are over 2,000 feet above mean sea level. The main mountainous ridges extending through Talladega, Calhoun, Cleburne, and Cherokee Counties constitute the heart of the Ridge and Valley geographic province. Small portions of Etowah and Cherokee Counties north and west of Lookout Mountain are located in the Cumberland Plateau geologic province. The remaining southeastern half of the region is characterized by the rolling plains of the Piedmont geologic province, which extends east into Georgia and south to the Fall Line, extending roughly from Columbus, Georgia, to Montgomery.

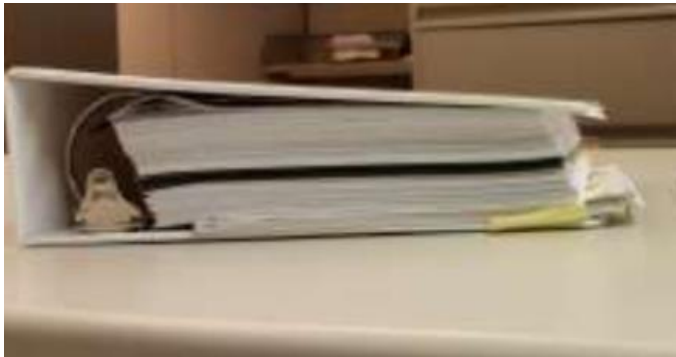
There are two major resource areas within the region. These are the Southern Appalachian Ridges and Valleys area and the Southern Piedmont area. Each of these areas is characterized by similar topography, soils and land use. These characteristics have produced a distinct, recognizable land form, which has advantages and disadvantages for land utilization.

The Southern Appalachian Ridges and Valleys land resource area, which is found in northern portions of the region, is also referred to as the Coosa Valley area. It is an area of small and medium sized farms and is covered by mixed hardwood forests. The landscape consists of wide, gently rolling valleys and steep, rough ridges, all extending in a northeast-southwesterly direction.

Elevation in the Ridges and Valleys area ranges from 507 feet to over 2,400 feet above mean sea level. Long, straight valleys and ridges influence transportation, agriculture, streams and roads. Extensive cropping and high erosion potential make the area subject to severe erosion.

The Southern Piedmont Land Resource area comprises over 50 percent of the region's land area. The area is characterized by gently rolling topography interspersed with steep hilly areas. Toward the north, the topography becomes rougher with some mountainous portions of the area having local relief of about 1,000 feet. The Piedmont area was once general farmland used primarily for cotton

³³ See Table 23 in Appendix D.



CEDS CENTRAL

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