

Section 2: Issues

Population: (163.3191[2][a], F.S.)

Before the paper mill went down, the population in Gulf County was fairly stable with a manageable growth rate. Table A lists the Census count from 1930 to 2000. The 1980 Census listed the Gulf County population at 10,658. In 1990 the population was 11,504 that yielded a population increase of 846 from 1980. The 2000 Census took place as the County was in its early transition period. The 2000 Census contained a population correction and was adjusted from 13,327 to 14,560. This will yield a 3,056 population increase from 1990 to 2000. Looking back through past Census records this was the second largest census increase. The biggest increase occurred from 1930 to 1940 with 3,769 and the third was 1950 to 1960 at 2,477. The 1930's was during the construction and opening of the paper mill. The 1950's was related to the expansion of production facilities. The 2000 Census reflects the prison system expansion and the inmate population being counted in the census count.

Table A: Census Counts 1930-2000

Year	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Population	3,182	6,951	7,460	9,937	10,095	10,658	11,504	14,560

Table B list the projected BEBR population estimates for the last five (5) years. The chart illustrates a moderate population increase. Caution must be used when projecting population trends with such a high inmate count included in the population total. It is interesting to note that BEBR 2006 population data for Gulf County with out inmates is estimated to be 13,336. The 2000 Census with the inmate population removed is 13,327 which would yield a five (5) year population increase of 9. This population increase reflects the over-all ownership trend to be second homes or investment property and confirms the weak employment opportunities available within the county.

Table B: County and City Population Estimates; Table 1.25 - Florida Statistical Abstract

Year	2000 Census	County*	Unincorporated*	Port St. Joe*	Wewahitchka*
2001	14,560	14,952	9,595	3,615	1,742
2002	14,560	15,202	9,829	3,678	1,695
2003	14,560	15,615	10,257	3,632	1,726
2004	14,560	16,171	10,782	3,661	1,728
2005	14,560	16,479	11,044	3,707	1,728

*BEBR April 1, 2001; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005 Estimates

Table C list the projected BEBR population estimates through 2030 but 2020 is the cutoff for the EAR planning time frame. The projections estimates are tabulated for a low, medium and high growth rate. The table list the medium projection that is the most recommend projection to use. The projections reflect a fairly uniform growth rate that should be able to maintain concurrency.

Table C: County Population Estimates; Table 1.41 – Florida Statistical Abstract

Year	2000 Census	April 1*	2010*	2015*	2020*	2025*	2030*
2001	14.6	15.1	15.9	16.3	16.8	17.3	17.7
2002	14.6	15.2	16.0	16.5	17.0	17.4	17.8
2003	14.6	15.6	16.6	17.1	17.7	18.2	18.7
2004	14.6	16.2	17.1	17.8	18.6	19.3	19.9
2005	14.6	16.5	17.4	18.1	18.8	19.4	20.0

*BEBR April 1, 2001; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005 Estimates

As previously stated, Gulf County is in transition from an industrial base to a more retirement and/or seasonal base economy. Occupancy information from the Tourist Development Council (TDC) indicates there are approximately 1,700 rental units and 120 hotel/motel type units. Their polling data also supports a higher occupancy rate for occupants arriving by automobile than the suggested 2.5 in Population Estimation and Projection Techniques/DCA 1986. To determine a realistic estimate of the tourist population the following factors will be used: Hotel/motel occupancy = 2.5 persons per room and rental units = 10 persons per unit. Permanent resident guest should be considered and that was also computed at 2.5 guests per household. Florida County Perspective for 2006 p. 32 listed Gulf County as having 5,410 households. The 5,410 households with 2.5 guest per household yields 13,525. Table D list the peak seasonal totals based on TDC information. In summary, the estimated permanent population for the Gulf County is 16.5 and the estimated peak seasonal population at 30,825. It is therefore possible for the short term or seasonal population of Gulf County to peak at 47,325. The highest probability for the population to occur is during the peak summer period or a major summer holiday.

Table D: Estimate of Seasonal Population for 2005*

Unit Type	Unit Counts	Occupancy Rate	Estimate of Population
Rental Units	1,700	10	17,000
Hotel/Motel Units	120	2.5	300
Permanent Household Guest	5,410	2.5	13,525
Estimated Seasonal Population			30,825

*Based on Population Estimation and Projection Techniques, DCA, 1986

Table E list the projections for the county, seasonal and peak populations estimates in five (5) year increments through the 2020 planning frame. The county population is derived from the 2005 projection in Table C. The seasonal population is based on Table D. The seasonal/county ratio was determined by dividing the seasonal population by the county population to get a ratio of 1.868. Based on current economic and development trends, the 1.868 ratio between the seasonal and county populations for 2005 is sufficient to use through the planning period until data can support a different determination.

Table E: Estimate of County, Seasonal and Peak Population through 2020

Year	County Population	Seasonal /County Ratio	Seasonal Population	Peak Population
2005	16,500	1.868	30,825	47,325
2010	17,400	1.868	32,503	49,903
2015	18,100	1.868	33,810	51,910
2020	18,800	1.868	35,118	53,918

The pattern of growth is very difficult to predict accurately. There are so many variables that can influence the population trend up or down. This is especially true with the seasonal population. The national economy can take a down turn, the war on terrorism could escalate, spiraling gas prices, weather and other natural disasters are a few of the variables that can influence the seasonal population. Because the county economy is so dependent on the seasonal population, any reduction in the seasonal population will have negative impacts to the overall economic health of the county. In fact, it is so sensitive that the local business community will sound the alert before any data study would.

The distribution of population can be geographically divided by the Intracoastal Waterway Canal. The area south of the waterway or next to the canal is about 66% of the county population and 85% of the seasonal population (Map 4-3). The area north and away from the Intracoastal is about 34% of the county population and 15% of the seasonal population (Map 4-2). The growth and population trend for the two geographic areas is about equal although the unincorporated northern areas are beginning to experience an increase in development opportunities and will need to be monitored for unexpected growth trends. Map 4-4 shows the population and development potential.

Land Area Changes: (163.3191[2][a], F.S

Gulf County land area is 559 square miles which includes the City of Port St. Joe and City of Wewahitchka. In reviews of previous seven years since the last EAR, both cities have expanded their city limits.

The City of Port St. Joe has been aggressive in annexation by adding some 4.1 +/- square miles of land area. The annexations and existing land area increase their total to 7.35 square miles +/- . The annexations of the 3.7 square mile WindMark DRI project was the majority of annexation acreage. Additional annexation in the community of Highland View was heavily debated that the new densities were out of character for Highland View and affected the identity of the community. The City and County reached an approval agreement that involved concessions by the City. The driving factor behind annexation was to increase development density for the developer that the County was not able to permit and also expand the City tax base. The annexations resulted in the Board of County Commissioners suspending additional annexations in the Highland View area until a higher level of justification is given to the BOCC.

The City of Wewahitchka annexed 53.4 +/- acres or .08 +/- square miles to extend infrastructure to a subdivision. The annexation increased the city land area to 8.1 +/- square miles.

In summary the unincorporated land area for Gulf County decreased by 4.9 square miles for a balance of 543.6 +/- square miles of unincorporated land area.

Vacant Land: (163.3191[2][b], F.S.)

When discussing vacant land, the potential impacts created by the Gulf County topography can not be minimized. The interaction of vacant land with wetlands and other natural resources can seriously impact the availability of land for development. Until a site is delineated for environmental impacts, the true worth or development potential of the land is suspect. This condition makes it difficult to maximize development in Gulf County. The Gulf County Property Appraiser (PA) has vacant land listed at 15,458 acres, vacant industrial at 989.84 and vacant commercial at 56.75. Because the determinations made by the PA may not be compatible with a land use category listed in the comprehensive, plan development may be limited. If one were to use a windshield or aerial for a vacant land survey (development potential), you would discover the PA timberland acreage of 260,653.84 acres and Agricultural Land Use category make up the majority of land. This relationship is a carry over from the paper mill period when pup wood was king. When accessing vacant land in Gulf County for housing or commercial development, the potential for density and land use conflicts within the comprehensive plan is very high. This situation is hindering economic development opportunities within the county.

Development Location: (163.3191[2][d], F.S.)

New development or growth in the county can be referenced back to the 1990 vested communities. Each community had its own unique character. The communities were linked by existing arterials and collectors referenced on the Traffic Circulation Map. The coastal community's were the first to experience growth after the paper mill closed resulting in a rapid rate of land development and new housing starts. This development trend was welcomed until property evaluations and taxes escalated to a level that triggered affordability issues. The affordability issue has led developers and home owners to begin looking inland for development and housing opportunities. This development shift may have been a little faster than anticipated, but the shift was expected as coastal property values continued to climb until the market peaked and slip into a recession. The shift inland was the only venue available left that could support attainable housing.

Until Gulf County is able to improve and identify employment opportunities, the location of development will be market driven by sales instead of need and therefore unpredictable. Once employment opportunities are identified, then development locations can be anticipated by need. An example is the location of Sacred Heart Hospital has been identified and is scheduled to open in 2008 that will create about 180 jobs. Developers have already targeted the need for attainable housing for construction crews and hospital staff that is easily accessible to the hospital site. On the market side, developers have been concentrating on the retirement and rural living markets (larger tracks) that are less than coastal properties but higher than affordable.

When discussing development location it is the same as vacant land, the potential impacts created by the Gulf County topography can not be minimized. The interaction of uplands and wetlands and other natural resources can cause development cost to escalate from the loss of uplands, mitigation projects and etc. These cost are passed on to the consumer and making it more difficult to provide attainable housing.

School Facilities: Key Issue (163.3191[2][k], F.S.)

Gulf County completed and adopted the State mandated SB 360 revision to the School Interlocal Agreement in December of 2006. In drafting the agreement, no major concurrency school facility issues were found. The 2006 FISH Capacity was 3,365 and the CO-FTE was 2,174 and the Projected 2010-11 CO-FTE was 2,078 or utilization 62%. The next requirement under SB 360 is for the local governments to add a School Facilities Element to the Comprehensive Plan. The School Board has an established service area for both the Port St. Joe and Wewahitchka schools (Map 4-5). Gulf County is working with the School Board and the two cities to develop a single School Facilities Element, which is proposed in Section 3 (page 3-10) for adoption into their respective comprehensive plans. The proposed element and supporting data were found sufficient to complete the final deliverable of the contract with DCA to develop a School Facilities Element. The County has received ORC comments from DOE to revise the proposed element before the adoption into the respective Comprehensive Plans.

Review of BEBR population data shows that the population of Gulf County as of April 1, 2005 was estimated at 16,479. Of the 16,479, 3,032 were listed under the 0-17 age group and 3,771 were listed in the 18-34 age group which supports the low student enrollment projection in the 2006 Department of Education FISH report. If the cost of coastal living continues to escalate, it could trigger an unbalance with the Northern District at or slightly over capacity while the Southern District could have excess capacity. This makes it extremely difficult to meet concurrency for both student capacities; financial feasibility; and operational feasibility. Regardless of the change, the School Board does not anticipate any new schools before 2020 (Map 4-6).

Water Supply Planning: (163.3191[2][l], F.S.)

Gulf County and Franklin County makes up Region V of the seven regional water planning districts within the Northwest Florida Water Management District. The Water Supply Plan for Region V identifies the region has adequate water resources to meet the anticipated water demand through 2025. The plan also identified the area as an Area of Special Concern (ASC) listing saltwater intrusion as the greatest threat to the regions water supply. The threat is confined to the Region V coastal areas and upper portion of the Florida Aquifer. No other resource protection was identified in the January 2007 Regional Water Supply Plan.

The southern unincorporated areas of the county depend on two municipalities and one private utility service for potable water. The City of Port St. Joe provides service to St. Joe Beach, Highland View and White City. A joint county and city effort under the WindMark annexation agreement is expanding the St. Joe Beach service to Beacon Hill and Overstreet. The City of Mexico Beach presently has a service agreement for water service with Gulf Aire and Sea Shores Subdivision area. A few select areas of Beacon Hill also have water service with Mexico Beach. The Mexico Beach service will eventually be purchased and be under the Port St. Joe service area. Lighthouse Utilities is the sole source provider for the area south of Port St. Joe including Jones Homestead, Simmons Bayou, Cape San Blas, Money Bayou, Indian Pass and CR 30A to the Franklin County line.

Both the City of Port St. Joe and Lighthouse Utilities are expanding their water plant capacities. Both Lighthouse Utilities and the City of Port St. Joe depend on deep wells as their water source. The NFWMD has encouraged and supported the City of Port St. Joe effort to switch from well water to surface water as an alternative water source. The City would draw from the previously permitted 28 Mgal/d paper mill fresh water supply canal. By converting this surface water resource as an alternative potable water source will reduce the flow demand from the aquifer and help reduce the migration of saltwater into the aquifer. The City of Port St. Joe and Lighthouse Utilities are exploring opportunities for the utility company to purchase additional water capacity from Port St. Joe and further reduce well impacts to the aquifer. The City of Port St. Joe is also looking into water conservation by using treated wastewater from its wastewater plant in spray field applications.

The northern unincorporated areas of the county are predominately on individual wells except for a few areas serviced by the City of Wewahitchka. The City of Wewahitchka is in the process of expanding the capacity of their water system. A few new developments are either installing water package systems and/or exploring joint ventures with the City Wewahitchka to expand their capacity.

The City of Port St. Joe, City of Wewahitchka and Lighthouse Utilities provide water service to an estimated 77% of the Gulf County population based on the 2005 population estimate. This percentage will increase when the Overstreet service is on line. The remaining 23% is dependent upon domestic wells as their water source. As the areas on domestic wells continued to develop, the customer base should increase making it more cost effective and feasible to expand water service into these areas. It is important that the NFWMD, local governments, utilities and developments work together to protect the areas water resources and provide a quality supply of potable water.

Concurrency: Transportation; Water & Sewer; Solid Waste; Key Issue (163.3191[2][c], F.S.)

Even considering the development boom that took place between 2000 and 2005, Gulf County has no concurrency shortfalls. However, the impacts from development have decreased the concurrency surplus that did exist. Gulf County has actively worked to update and improve its concurrency management system by revising the Five Year Capital Improvements Schedule format to reflect the reporting requirements mandated by the 2005 Growth Management Revisions to the State Statues and is continuing to modify and improve its concurrency management system.

Transportation:

Of the concurrency issues, transportation is the most pressing and most difficult to control. Due to the large amount of wetlands, new collectors and arterials will be difficult to permit and the environmental mitigation cost will be cost prohibited. The same can be said for widening the existing collectors and arterials. The most promising and important transportation concurrency project is the Gulf to Bay Highway. This project offers Gulf County the most effective way to relieve the future concurrency impacts to SR 71 and US 98. Another concurrency issue is SR's 30A and 30E. The ARPC/DOT Traffic Analysis for Gulf County has these roads at a LOS of B. This level of service is certainly valid for the eight (8) to nine (9) off-season months. The three

(3) to four (4) in-season months could have a different impact on the LOS. If the population in Table E were to reach the 50,000 plus, it is common sense to assume a two lane road will become congested. This congestion could present a LOS dilemma as highlighted in yellow as a caution area in the Transportation LOS Summary in the appendix. Even though the seasonal population is a critical portion of our economy, the short term impacts to the LOS may not justify the long term expense needed to correct the LOS issues. The LOS issue is further complicated due to the uncertainties that can influence a seasonal population base. FDOT has already taken steps to improve SR 30E. The road was repaved and driving surfaced widened and a separate bike path was added running parallel with the road. If the new construction did not improve the SR 30E LOS, it certainly made the road safer for both motorist and pedestrians. SR 30A improvements are being considered by FDOT. FDOT has approved a request from the County to change SR 30E from Rural Undeveloped to Rural Developed. This action should increase the ADDT threshold and will be reflected in the next ARPC/DOT Traffic Analysis for Gulf County.

Gulf County local collectors have no LOS issues at this time and should be good through the next planning period. Even though we do not have actual traffic counts, we do have local knowledge of the local roads. These collectors are to be reviewed every year as part of the new CIE and CIP requirements. Gulf County shares concurrency issues with its two municipalities of Wewahitchka and Port St. Joe. The majority of the shared concurrency is centered on State Road 71 for both cities; State Road 22 is limited to the City of Wewahitchka and US Hwy 98 is limited to the City of Port St. Joe. The ARPC/DOT Traffic Analysis for both cities is within LOS threshold. Concurrency issues involving these and other intergovernmental issues can be accomplished through the School Interlocal Council and the council members are from the local government's staff. The two cities and the county recognized the need to jointly work together on transportation concurrency when they adopted the same Transportation Proportionate Fair Share Ordinance. FDOT staff met with the local government staffs (council) and offered suggestions and their continued technical assistance to develop a methodology for measuring concurrency. The DOT staff was very appreciative of the local government's effort towards intergovernmental coordination. This is the same intergovernmental organization established to monitor development impacts to school concurrency.

In reviewing the Traffic Circulation Element goals and objectives, the County has met the intent to provide safe and convenient roadways, maintain LOS, cooperation with agencies, and protecting transportation corridors. To further advance these objectives, Chapter 4 is amended with the proposed new Policies 1.2.4, 1.2.5, 1.4.3, and 1.4.4, and are referenced in Section 3 (page 3-4).

Water & Sewer:

The next most important concurrency issue is water and sewer. Unincorporated Gulf County has to purchase water and sewer services from the two cities or a private provider. This arrangement puts the County dependent upon the respective provider to determine if LOS is available for project or permit. The County has and will continue to require conformation from the provider that LOS is available before a project or permit is approved. The goal is to develop a concurrency management system that can be used during budget planning that will provide the Commissioners with the data they need to develop a budget and Five Year Capital Improvement Schedule that is financially feasible. To maintain concurrency objectives, Chapter 4 Policy 1.2.1

is updated to match the LOS adopted by the City of Port St. Joe in 2007 and is referenced in the Section 3 proposed amendments for Chapter 4:, Policy 1.2.1 on page 3-6.

Solid Waste:

Gulf County is currently within concurrency with its solid waste and is in the process of working to increase its land fill capacity. Concurrency is based on 8.62 pounds per day per capita as stated in Chapter 4: Policy 1.2.1 of the Comprehensive Plan and as a proposed amendment in Section 3. This concurrency planning could be in jeopardy if the new proposed DEP solid waste rules are adopted. Gulf County has very little land that is suitable for land fills and is already expensive to maintain and monitor. The new requirement for cell liners will make solid waste facilities very expensive for Gulf County and other counties to operate. Gulf County is currently providing solid waste services to residential owners at no additional charge. The new solid waste rules along with the property tax reforms will require the County to change its solid waste operations and begin to charge residential fees or establish a municipal taxing unit. If the County is not successful in its long range solid waste planning, it is a possibility that Gulf County would have to go outside the county for solid waste disposal. This could get more expensive and complicated when considering many counties do not want to have an outsider bring solid waste into their county and those who do may have to curtail their agreements with other local governments. This could force alternatives such as incinerators that may be beyond the financial capabilities of a small county. The State should be very cautious with new unfunded mandates that will increase financial impacts crippling an already fragile economy for employment and economic development. This will also impact quality of life services and the potential to eliminate attainable housing by escalating the cost of solid waste disposal. It is the county's objective is to maintain concurrency and financial feasibility through some type of alternate funding and not depend on property tax revenues. The objectives are maintained with the Section 3 (page 3-7 & 3-9) proposed amendment Policy 1.2.2, Policy 1.2.3 for Chapter 4 and Policy 1.3.4 for Chapter 8.

Base Encroachment: Key Issue (163.3191[2][n], F.S.)

Gulf County has been identified as a county required to comply with base encroachment requirements under 163.3192, F.S. The Gulf County site is presently home to a telemetry tracking facility assigned to Eglin Air force Base. The site was in continuous use by Coast Guard for many years beginning with Cape San Blas Lighthouse and progressing to the LORAN radio navigation system. In late 1950's or early 1960's the Air Force presence was added to the site and the site was jointly managed by the Coast Guard and Air force until the LORAN navigation unit and Cape San Blas Lighthouse were phase out of service ending the Coast Guard tenure. The site is located at Cape San Blas and is bordered by residential development on two fronts and by the Gulf of Mexico, St. Joseph Bay and State lands on the remaining fronts. The area bordering the Gulf of Mexico is subject to the same high rate of erosion that is impacting the majority of the Cape San Blas Peninsula.

Gulf County has been actively working with Eglin Air Force to identify encroachment issues that could affect the mission capabilities of the site. The three major issues identified are building heights, safety zone and frequency encroachment. Gulf County presently has a three habitable floor building limitation and when supported by pilings it would equate to a four story building.

Eglin has stated that a structure that is 50' or less will not negatively affect the mission assignment of the facility. Because Eglin has used the facility to launch test missiles, they need a 6,000 foot safety zone around the site. The required 6,000 foot safety zone is inclusive to public lands and the safety zone can be met if the present site were to remain where it is or very near the present site. The facility is identified in the Comprehensive Plan supporting its use as a "spaceport" to launch research rockets. The next item of concern was interference from unauthorized frequencies such as wireless networks and will need to adopt policy that alerts developers that certain frequencies can not be used. The county is also encouraged to maintain the existing densities at low density. Based on the Air Force comments, Gulf County needs to maintain its present policies and propose policies that will address the issues presently not covered. The County proposes to amend its Land Use Element (Chapter 1) by adding Objective 1.10 and Policies 1.10.1-1.10.4, as shown in Section 3 (page 3-3), to address the base encroachment issues that were requested by Eglin Air Force Base.

Land Use: Key Issue (163.3191[2][e], F.S.)

Just as the Gulf County economy is in transition, the land area is also in transition. The existing land use was formulated when the area was dominated by the paper mill and little change was expected. Much of the land use was chosen due to the fear of taxation rather than future development. Unfortunately, what was deemed sound in the beginning is a hindrance today for development and creating jobs. Map 4-1 represents the County Future Land Use Map (FLUM) which when compared to the 1990 FLUM; there is very little change except for areas of annexation and ownership. Several changes are a result of the State purchasing land that could be classified as conservation or public lands. With the differential between coastal and inland land values, the trend for development to migrate inland where land values are more affordable. Many inland lands that were Agricultural and homesteaded have been faced with selling off some of their property as a means to keep what holdings they could. This may or may not be good planning depending on one's school of thought, but property rights are a high priority when dealing with the local economy and family financial investments.

Agricultural: The paper mill dominated the economy and the land use until its closing in 1998. While the paper mill was in operation, the majority of Agricultural Land Use was dedicated to tree farming for pulp wood. With the closing of several paper mills in the tri-state area, the demand for pulpwood decreased and timber was no longer a viable cash crop and owners began to seek the best economic value for their land and the same applied to the two large farming operations that ceased operations. For many owners, the 2000 to 2005 real estate boom was a means to maximize their land. Many subdivided within the agricultural residential component at lower densities and some chose the amendment process for higher density. Agricultural is still accounts for 75% of the total land use area.

Residential and the Residential component of Mixed Commercial/Residential: Larger tracts of residential were also a target of transition. With the real estate boom came higher property assessments and therefore higher property taxes. Add in the loss of higher paying jobs with limited employment opportunities and you have a volatile property ownership situation. This led many owners to subdivide their properties as density allowed to get tax and/or economic relief. This was a common practice in high value coastal areas of Cape San Blas and Indian Pass as owners struggled to maximize their investments. Even though this area was in the Coastal High

Hazard Area (CHHA), property right issues were protected by allowing subdividing when density limits were maintained.

Commercial component of Mixed Commercial/Residential: As previously stated, Gulf County has a precarious economic situation. Residential land use does not support or allow non-residential development. The existing Mixed Commercial/Residential (MCR) land use is dominated by residential development and commercial development opportunities are very limited due to existing plats. This situation generates conflicts as established residential areas may oppose commercial development making it harder to generate commercial development. The majority of MCR is on arterials or collectors which is the preferred type of roadway for commercial development. Gulf County has to develop policy that will support commercial investments that will generate jobs and stimulate the local economy.

Industrial: Gulf County is also losing industrial opportunities. As existing industries are lost, their lands are being considered for non-industrial development. With the County in economic transition, it is difficult or precarious to dictate to a land owner that they can not develop their property as they deem the most profitable. The loss of industrial land and the lack of commercial opportunities is an unhealthy situation for the local economy.

Conservation: Conservation land has increased due to conservation easements and lands purchased by the State. Also many of the other land use areas have wetlands and possible habitat areas that will need protection or mitigation as they are identified and are placed in conservation during the development process.

Public: The only issue with Public Land Use is the military sector and that is addressed in the Base Encroachment Issue.

Recreational and Open Space: Gulf County has adequate recreation facilities with no concurrency issues through 2010 as projected in the table in Section 8. The present population of 16.5 requires 82.5 acres and the county has a total of 212.76 acres. The projected population in 2010 is 17.4 which will require 87 acres for concurrency. The only pressing need is public beach access for certain areas. The availability of land for beach access is limited and would be very expensive to purchase.

Municipal: Annexation by the Cities of Port St. Joe and Wewahitchka has increased as each expands their water and sewer services. Developers are using this avenue to increase density over what the County could allow and the cities are increasing their tax base. The flip side is that property owners inherit additional taxes.

Land Use Element Assessment:

With the existing comprehensive plan amendment process so arduous, investors will seek more readily accessible sites in other counties or out of state sites. It is critical that Agricultural lands be amended to allow non-residential development by county ordinance. The County is also limited by the large amount of wetlands that with State mandated buffers can seriously limit the amount of uplands available for development which puts more emphasis on land use reform. The County has to amend the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulations to support investment opportunities for job creation and a diversified economy. To meet this

economic objective, the County has proposed amending Land Use Element Policy 1.37 by revising the Agricultural category and adding a Commercial and Resort Condominium category. This can be found in Section 3 page 3-1 and 3-2.

CHHA: (163.3191[2][m], F.S.)

Development in the Coastal High Hazard Area (CHHA) is limited to Low Density with a maximum 3 units per acre on the Gulf side and 2 units per acre on the Bay and Lagoon sides. The CHHA area encompasses the Bay, Lagoon and Gulf side of SR 30E, CR 30B, SR 30A, CR 30A and Gulf side of US 98 except for a portion of WindMark. There is also a three habitable floor limit for both residential and commercial buildings and when built on pilings it equates to a four story structure. The majority of housing within the CHHA is dedicated to seasonal use and evacuation is the major concern during hurricane season because the only evacuation route for Cape San Blas is SR 30E and SR 30A. SR 30A also evacuates the area from the Franklin County line, Indian Pass and Money Bayou along CR 30A to the US 98 intersection. Because SR 30A has a limited right-of-way, expanding the number of lanes is not economically feasible as the population impact exist for three to four months and the remaining months are well below LOS capacity. To compensate for any traffic induced evacuation problems, Gulf County Emergency Management encourages the real estate offices to stress early voluntary evacuations and hold new reservations until the treat is over.

With the private expansion of sewer into the CHHA it has opened up development inquires about condo resorts that the present comprehensive plan does not support. This type of development will allow “residential type” units to be permitted under commercial intensity have to be made available for rent so many weeks during the year. To accommodate development of this nature, the county is proposing a new land use category that will mandate this type of development as commercial and prohibiting any residential use.

Although the expansion of sewer benefited the environmental by reducing the number of septic tanks systems on the Cape, it could pose a potential negative impact. The 2 and 3 unit density limits were mandated by the State in 1992 to protect the environment from septic leaching. With sewer available, this threat is reduce and may induce property right challenges for higher density because of sewer and the installation cost. The County is hopeful that the density issue can be negated and present densities preserved by allowing less stringent LOS concurrency for the affected roadways as a compromise to allow development to continue under the existing densities and development regulations. With this solution, less transportation infrastructure in a CHHA, density in the CHHA is not increased and property rights are protected under present development regulation by not adding additional development impact cost. The greatest property rights threat is from State and Federal regulations.

With the recent proposed action by the State to move the Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL) and the Erosion Control Line (ECL) the potential impact to property owners is estimated to be greater than \$75,000,000.00 in property loses. Many of these owners have retirement and family savings invested in these coastal properties and face tremendous economic loss if the proposed action is set in place. This action would be devastating to the county economy and private finances.

The 2006 the CHHA definition changed from Category 1 Evacuations Zones to Category 1 Surge Zones (Map 4-7). This will have a major impacted in Gulf County. For example, Cape San Blas and Indian Pass were totally in the CHHA until the rule changed. With the rule change, the majority of the area between the dune line and MHW became the CHHA while the remaining coast line was removed from the CHHA. This could have impacts on evacuating the area as non-native visitors may be lulled into a false security. It also had an opposite effect on the mainline coastline as it took in areas formally out of the CHHA. Another CHHA consideration is the new Federal/State initiative to update the hurricane surge zones. The update is keyed upon using LiDAR technology to create a more accurate elevation contour. The new elevation data will be entered into the surge models to develop new surge maps to be used for evacuations and risk assessment. It would be prudent to limit any CHHA policy changes to immediate coastline until the new data and maps can be reviewed.

LMS & CEMP: Key Issue (163.3191[2][e], F.S.)

According to the document Integrating Hazard Mitigation into Comprehensive Planning, DCA, 2005, a profile of Gulf County revealed many strengths regarding hazard mitigation in both the Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS) and the Comprehensive Plan. The LMS identified the following natural hazards as posing the highest risk: erosion, flooding, storm surge, and wildfire.

Gulf County is presently experiencing serious coastal erosion and isolated areas of riverine erosion. The coastal erosion is not unique to Gulf County as it is a national and world wide problem. The effects of coastal erosion has serious economic consequences and even some environmental impacts such as loss of sandy beach that sea turtles use to lay their eggs. The rate of coastal erosion is the highest or one of the highest in Florida. Our coastal erosion is an ongoing natural occurrence and is not dependent on weather events which enhances or accelerates the rate of erosion. The impacts are not limited to land or property as the access road (SR 30E) in the area known as the “Stump Hole” is protected from the Gulf of Mexico waters by a rock wall installed by FDOT. If the shoreline is left unchecked, the economic loss would be so devastating to the gulf side home owners that they have united as group to self imposed a MSTU to help assist in financing a \$22,000,000 beach restoration project in an effort to protect their investments. The same impacts can be related to riverine erosion as property and roadways are threatened, but not at the same rate or magnitude. Large scale and localized flood events are related to major weather events that release an excessive amount of rain in the river watershed or drainage area. The large scale events will primarily impact the Dead Lakes, Chipola and Apalachicola River basins. Except as mentioned above, localized flooding will be limited to a small area and can cause major damage in the area impacted. Elevation is the best protection and is accomplished by enforcing FEMA structure elevations and keeping above historic flood levels.

Gulf County coastal properties are vulnerable to storm surge. Tropical Storm and Category 1 Hurricane surge levels will affect the immediate coast while Category 2 or higher storms surges will impact the inland properties progressively with intensity. Storm surge is one of the greatest risks to Gulf County for both property damage and life safety. Rising seas in advance of storms can flood roadways cutting off the escape routes for the coastal population before the damaging winds arrive. Opal and Dennis are classic examples of surge with out high winds. Elevation, distance and timely evacuations are the best course of action. This is accomplished by enforcing

FEMA structure elevations, building setbacks and encouraging voluntary evacuations. In 2006, the State mandated a definition change from the Category 1 Regional Evacuation Zone Study to the Category 1 surge zone based on the SLOSH model (Map 4-7). This removed many portions of our barrier islands from the CHHA and placed some inland portions newly into the CHHA. Unfortunately this action separated the Category 1 evacuation zone from the CHHA which because of its geographic and demographic make up had been a good definition for Gulf County.

Gulf County has been fortunate that wildfire events have evaded residential properties. As the growth pattern shifts inland away from the coast, the risk of wildfire residential risk will continue to increase with time. With the high cost of coastal properties and the reduced need for pulpwood, affordable or attainable housing is taking over land once used for pulpwood timber and is increasing the potential for wildfire structural damage. Developers are also targeting the rural living or back to nature housing market which is not necessarily affordable. Gulf County is a prime candidate for this type of development. To offset the potential impacts, the county can encourage Firewise best management practices by developers and owners.

The County will have to be very sensitive and cautious of property rights before enforcing any new restrictive LMS and Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) mandates into the Comprehensive Plan. Encouraging and educating will be simpler to accomplish than mandating new rules that fail offset other cost. For example, the new Florida Building Code required more hurricane resistant construction that increased construction cost by several thousand dollars. The new codes were to suppose to reduce damage claims and lower the insurance companies risk for damage claims. The intent was for structures built to the new code to receive a lower insurance premium than those not built to code. This failed to materialize as insurance is more expensive than ever and insurance policies are hard to get and keep plus construction cost are still increasing. On top of this, most of the coastal construction on Indian Pass and all of it on Cape San Blas is not eligible for Federal Flood Insurance but has to build to Federal standards. The FDEP CCCL also adds several thousand dollars to construction cost plus structural approval. Recent proposals for realignment of the CCCL and Erosion Control Line could virtually condemn the affected coastal properties and seriously impact or destroy the investments of many families. Then add the self-imposed MSTU tax the Gulf side owners pay to finance a major portion of the beach restoration project designed to mitigate the loss of beach front due to storms and natural erosion. Most coastal property owners understand and accept the high cost and risk of coastal living. The situation has the property owners trying to understand why the State and Federal government is so against them because every time they work within the system to improve their situation, a new rule is there to push them backward. The situation is at the point that our coastal properties can not endure much more financial and regulatory hammering without exposing the property owners to economic disaster leading to potential court and property rights challenges.

Upon reviewing the respective objectives of the Comprehensive Plan, the objectives are adequate in supporting the LMS and CEMP issues. Gulf County has maintained low density development in the CHHA, enforced flood elevations, maintained evacuation times and coordinated with the respective federal and state agencies having jurisdictional duties. This assessment is supported by the 2005 DCA hazard mitigation assessment document. The county has proposed new Policies 1.7.5 and 1.7.6 to promote Firewise best management practices and preventing dead end streets within developments, as indicated in Section 3 (page 3-3). The proposed revision to Chapter 5 Policy 2.1.1 is to meet the new CHHA 9J-5 definition.