

COUNTRYSIDE CONSERVATION

CENTERS & COMMUNITIES

CORRIDORS

# Briefing Book COUNTRYSIDE

*NOTE: Information is preliminary  
and subject to change*

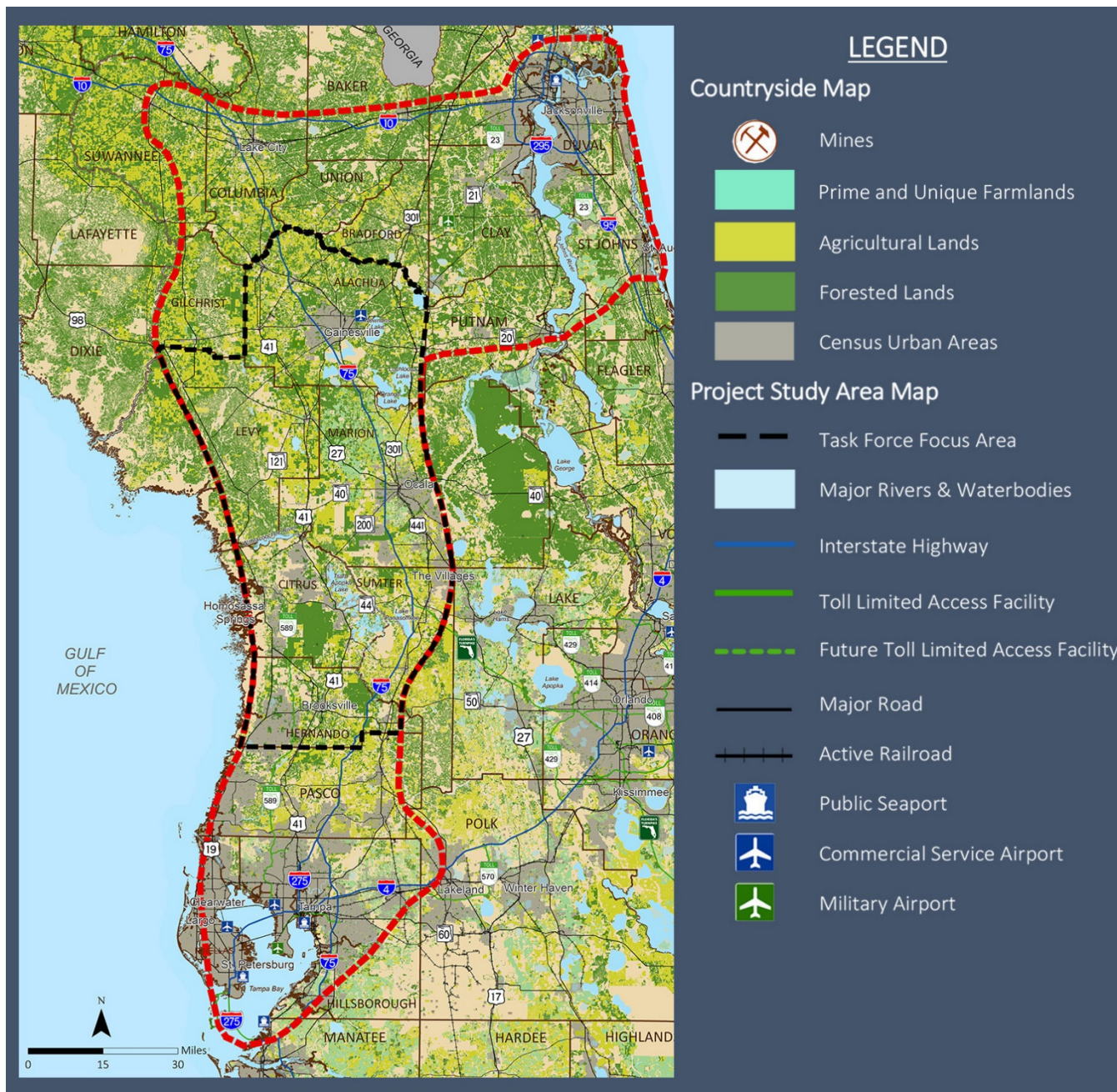


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### Countryside Lands and Resources

The I-75 Relief Task Force was initiated to evaluate the potential for enhanced and new multimodal and multiuse transportation corridors within the initial focus area between the Tampa Bay region and I-75 in North Central Florida, which includes Alachua, Citrus, Levy, Hernando, Marion, and Sumter counties. Key “Countryside” issues that may influence decisions about future transportation corridors include villages, small towns, and other rural settlements; and agriculture, forestry, mining, and other economically valuable rural lands.

Sources: Florida Geographic Data Library (FGDL)

# INTRODUCTION

## Overview of the Study

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has appointed the I-75 Relief Task Force to develop consensus recommendations on maximizing existing and developing new high-capacity transportation corridors serving the Tampa Bay, North Central Florida, and Northeast Florida regions.

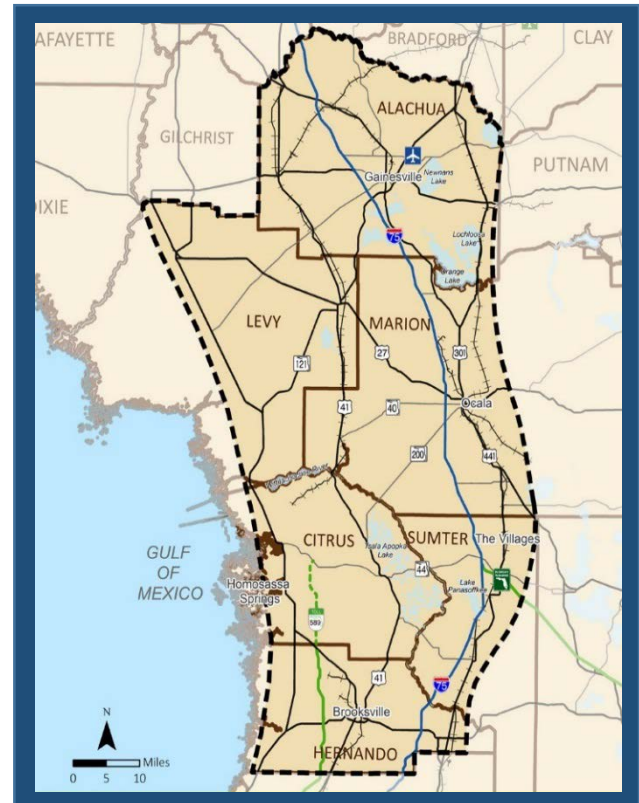
The Task Force’s **Initial Focus Area** comprises six counties to the north of Tampa Bay and along and to the west of Interstate 75 (I-75): Alachua, Citrus, Hernando, Levy, Marion and Sumter. The Task Force also is considering broader connectivity issues over 19 counties between Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida.

Among other activities, the Task Force is charged to:

- **Identify opportunities and constraints** related to environmental resources, land use and development, property rights, economic development, quality of life, and other statewide and regional issues that should be considered in planning for future transportation corridors in the Initial Focus Area;
- **Recommend the purpose and need** for high-capacity, high-speed transportation corridors in the study area with emphasis on providing relief to I-75, increasing safety, improving statewide and regional connectivity, and enhancing economic development opportunities;
- **Recommend a range of alternatives** for accomplishing the purpose and need and the approach that should be used for narrowing these alternatives;
- **Recommend corridors** to be incorporated into regional and local long-range plans and to be advanced into future stages of project development; and
- **Recommend a proposed implementation plan** for moving forward with the recommended corridors.

## The 4 Cs Framework

The I-75 Relief Task Force is modeled after the [East Central Florida Corridor Task Force \(ECFCTF\)](#), which was created by Executive Order in 2014 to develop



Initial Focus Area

recommendations for future transportation corridors in Brevard, Orange, and Osceola counties. One of the objectives is to build on the ECFCTF best practices, by following **a framework for well-planned transportation corridors to improve mobility and connectivity for people and freight, while helping to preserve Florida’s natural resources and environmentally sensitive lands, support economic development, promote high-quality development patterns aligned with local visions, and facilitate emergency evacuation and response.** The I-75 Relief Task Force also builds on the vision and goals of the recently updated [Florida Transportation Plan \(FTP\)](#), the long-range transportation plan for all of Florida.

Drawing from both of these efforts, the I-75 Relief Task Force has adopted a framework organized around four themes, known as the 4Cs:

- **Conservation** – including lands, wildlife and habitat, waters, air, and other natural resources;
- **Countryside** – including small towns, villages, and other rural settlements as well as farms, forests,

## BRIEFING BOOK – COUNTRYSIDE

mines, and other economically valuable rural lands;

- **Centers and Communities** — including population centers ranging from small towns to large cities, as well as economic activity centers; and
- **Corridors** – including roads, rail, trails, pipelines, utilities, and other ways of connecting centers and communities.

The Task Force, supported by public input, will build consensus across all four of these areas.



## Definition of Countryside

“Countryside” is a broad term used to refer to rural portions of the Initial Focus Area. Countryside includes:

- Small towns, villages, and other settlements that display rural characteristics;
- Lands used for resource-based industries such as agriculture, forestry, and mining;
- Recreational areas; and
- Other vacant land and open space.

More than 90 percent of the Initial Focus Area’s land is outside of designated urban areas and considered to be rural in character. This rural land includes lands permanently managed for conservation purposes, forested and agricultural lands, recreational areas, rural settlements and other forms of rural development, and vacant land.

## Overview of this Briefing Book

This Briefing Book is one of four in a series that provides an overview of each “C” for the I-75 Relief Task Force Initial Focus Area. The Briefing Book is intended to help identify opportunities, constraints, and alternatives to

support the Task Force’s deliberations, as well as to support the Task Force’s efforts to solicit and consider input from government agencies, property owners, agricultural interests, business and economic development organizations, environmental organizations, and residents of the Initial Focus Area.

The Briefing Book is organized with these key sections:

- **Policy Framework**, documenting established federal, state, regional, and local policies that are essential to planning for the region’s countryside;
- **Rural Communities**, describing the small towns, villages, and settlements that provide a rural way of life in the Initial Focus Area;
- **Rural Economy**, describing trends and conditions in agriculture, forestry, mining, eco-tourism, and other industries predominantly based in the countryside;
- **Regional and Local Plans**, documenting policies and initiatives in local government comprehensive plans and other regional and local plans; and
- **Summary of Opportunities and Constraints.**

Throughout this document, hyperlinks to online resources are included. The hyperlinks are indicated by an underlined blue text. For example, clicking on [I-75 Relief](#) will route you to the project website.

## Content Development

This Briefing Book was developed through:

- Review of federal, state, regional, and local policies and plans;
- Research of prior studies conducted in this area;
- Coordination with staff of state, regional, and local agencies; and
- Input received from the Task Force at its initial meetings.

Information in this report may support involvement of resource agencies, public and other stakeholders in development of purpose and need and range of alternatives. This document is available to the public and is intended to serve as support documentation for collaborative planning decisions which may be adopted in future analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

# POLICY FRAMEWORK

State, regional, and local policies and plans create the framework for planning the future of the countryside.

## State

Florida's [State Comprehensive Plan](#), adopted in Section 187.291, Florida Statutes, identifies high-level policies in several areas related to the countryside, including land use, agriculture, mining, recreational areas, economic development, and transportation.

Chapter 163, Part II, Florida Statutes, commonly referred to as the [Community Planning Act](#), describes the role, processes, and powers of local governments in establishing and implementing comprehensive planning programs to guide and manage future development.

The [Florida Strategic Plan for Economic Development](#), developed by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity in collaboration with other state agencies, regional planning councils, and other partners, pursuant to Subsection 20.60 (5)(a)4, Florida Statutes, defines goals, objectives, and strategies for Florida's economic development. This plan, along with related plans and initiatives, includes strategies for economic development and job creation in rural areas.

The [Rural Economic Development Initiative](#), adopted in Section 288.0656, Florida Statutes, defines rural communities, enables the Governor to designate up to three Rural Areas of Opportunity, defines incentives, and coordinates state agency support for economic development in rural areas.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Service operates a variety of programs intended to support agriculture and related industries. Its [Long-Range Program Plan](#) establishes goals including:

- Increase production and sale of Florida's agricultural products; and
- Conserve and steward the state's agricultural and natural resources.

The FTP, developed by the Florida Department of Transportation in collaboration with state, regional, and local partners, defines the state's transportation vision and policy framework. The [FTP Policy Element](#) identifies goals related to supporting Florida's global

## Guiding Principles for Planning the Future of Florida's Transportation Corridors:

### Countryside

- Maintain and improve transportation connectivity to, from, and between working farms, forests, mines, eco-tourism attractions, and other economically valuable rural lands.
- Plan and develop transportation corridors in a manner that protects regionally significant agricultural lands and other rural lands with economic or environmental significance.
- Plan and develop transportation corridors in a manner that is compatible with areas identified in local plans to maintain their rural character as a choice for residents.

economic competitiveness and supporting quality places to live, learn, work, and play. Specific objectives include:

- Provide transportation infrastructure and services to support job growth in transportation-dependent industries and clusters;
- Increase transportation connectivity between Florida's economic centers and regions;
- Plan and develop transportation systems that reflect regional and community values, visions, and needs; and
- Provide convenient, efficient accessibility to the transportation system for Florida's residents and visitors.

## Regional and Local

In addition, countryside related decisions are guided by key regional and local plans, including:

- **Local government comprehensive plans**, which define policies and strategies to guide future growth and development.
- **Strategic regional policy plans**, which are developed by Florida's regional planning councils to serve as long-range guides for the physical, economic, and social development of a region.

- **Comprehensive economic development strategies**, which are developed by Florida’s regional planning councils in their capacity as federal economic development districts to guide the economic development of a region.

Key local policies are discussed in detail in later sections of this report.

## RURAL COMMUNITIES

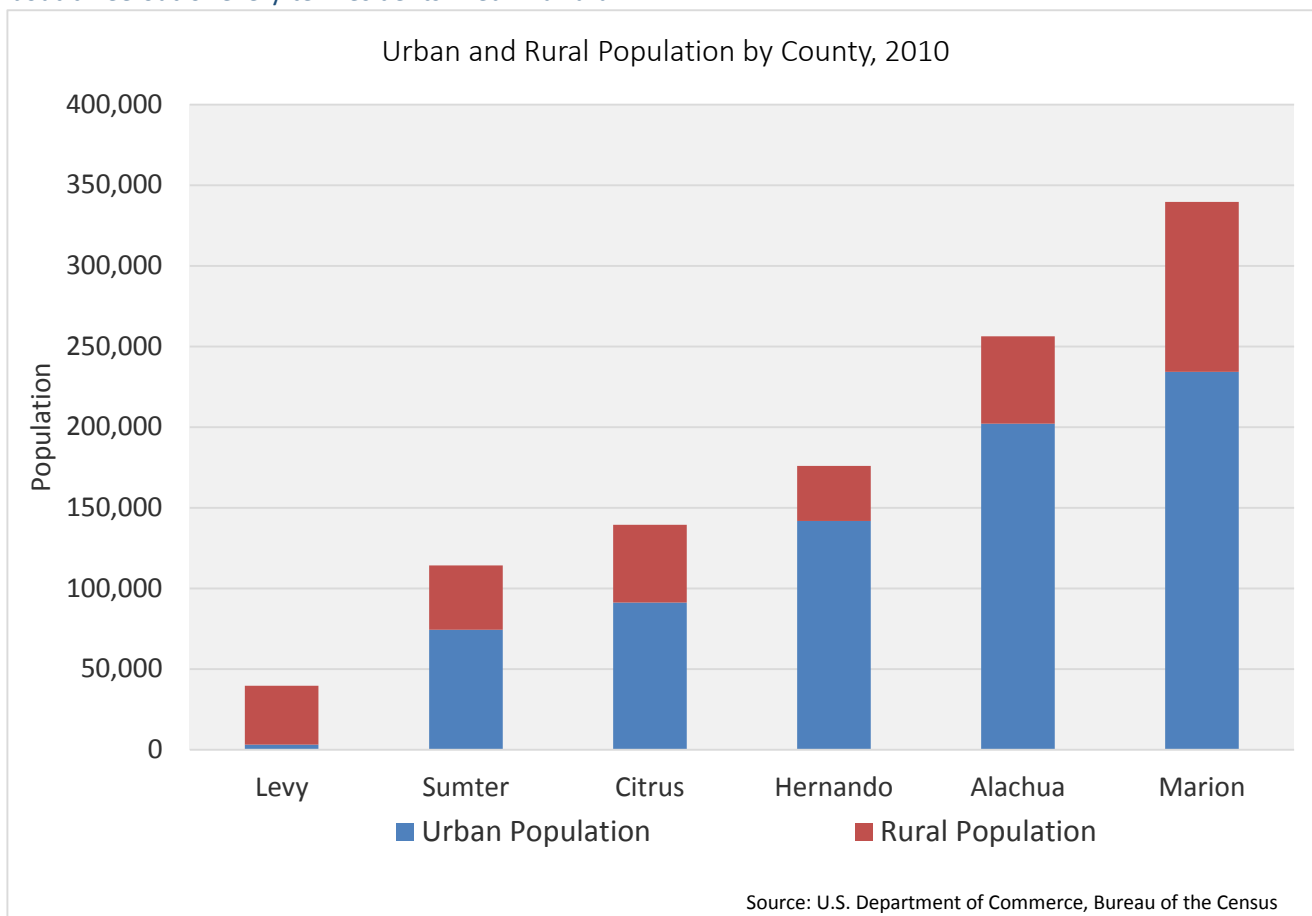
Most of the counties within the Initial Focus Area have had a predominantly rural character, with pockets of villages, towns, and cities. More than 90 percent of the land in the six counties is outside of designated urban areas.

The Initial Focus Area counties have a combined population of about 1.1 million residents in 2014.<sup>1</sup> About three out of every ten residents lived in a rural

area in 2010, compared to one out of every ten residents statewide.<sup>2</sup>

Levy County is the most rural of the six counties, with more than 92 percent of its residents living in rural areas. Marion County has the largest number of rural residents in the six counties (more than 105,000). Hernando and Alachua counties are the most urban, with 80 percent of their population living in urbanized areas.

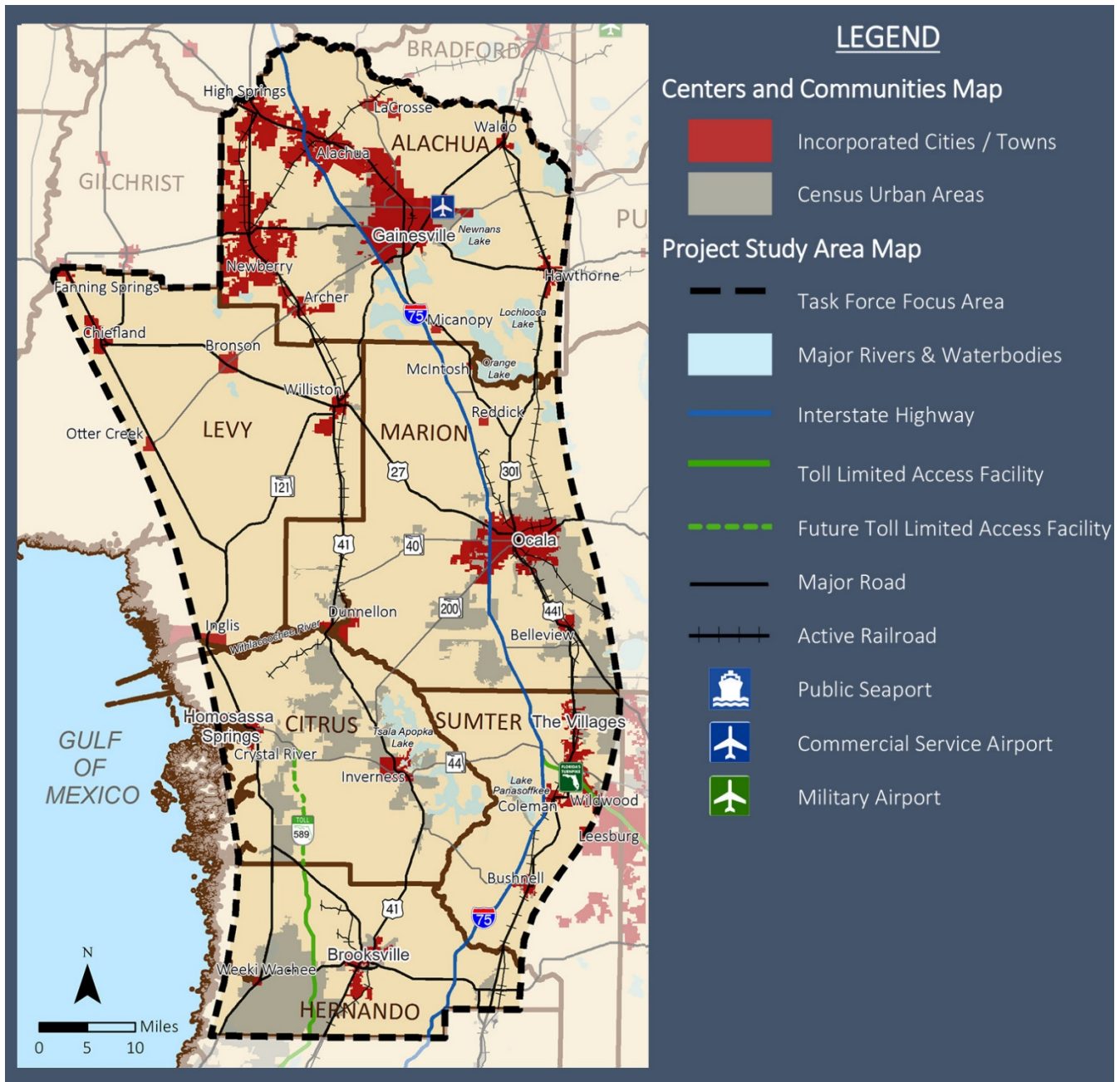
The six counties include a total of 31 incorporated municipal governments of which 26 are within the Initial Focus Area boundary. The incorporated municipal governments range from villages and small towns to cities. The majority of these are located outside of the urbanized areas or urban clusters. In addition, each county includes significant population in unincorporated areas.



<sup>1</sup> University of Florida, Bureau of Economic and Business Research, 2014 population estimates.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.





### Existing Communities

The Initial Focus Area counties include 31 incorporated cities and towns, many of which are located outside of designated urban areas. Approximately three out of every ten residents live in a rural area, compared to about one out of ten residents statewide.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

# RURAL ECONOMY

The countryside is a key driver of the Initial Focus Area’s economy, including resources-based industries such as agriculture, forestry, mining, and eco-tourism, as well as other types of businesses located in rural commercial or industrial centers.

## Agriculture

The Initial Focus Area counties include more than 9,300 farms comprising more than 962,000 acres of farmland<sup>3</sup> as mapped on the next page. The total number of farms operating in the six counties increased more than 15 percent between 2007 and 2012, and more than 40 percent since 1997 - reflecting a trend toward smaller farms focusing on specialty products and farm-to-table markets.

Farmland accounts for 29 percent of the land area in the six counties. The total amount of land in farming is up 10 percent since 2007, with gains in all counties except Levy. Marion County accounts for about one

third of all farmland in the Initial Focus Area counties, followed by Alachua and Sumter, where more than half of each county’s land area is farmland. Most farmland is crop land, with less pastureland and ranchland.

These farms produced \$454 million in products for sale in 2012, up 8 percent since 2007. Crops accounted for more than half of agricultural sales in all counties except Marion, where livestock accounted for more than three-quarters of all sales.

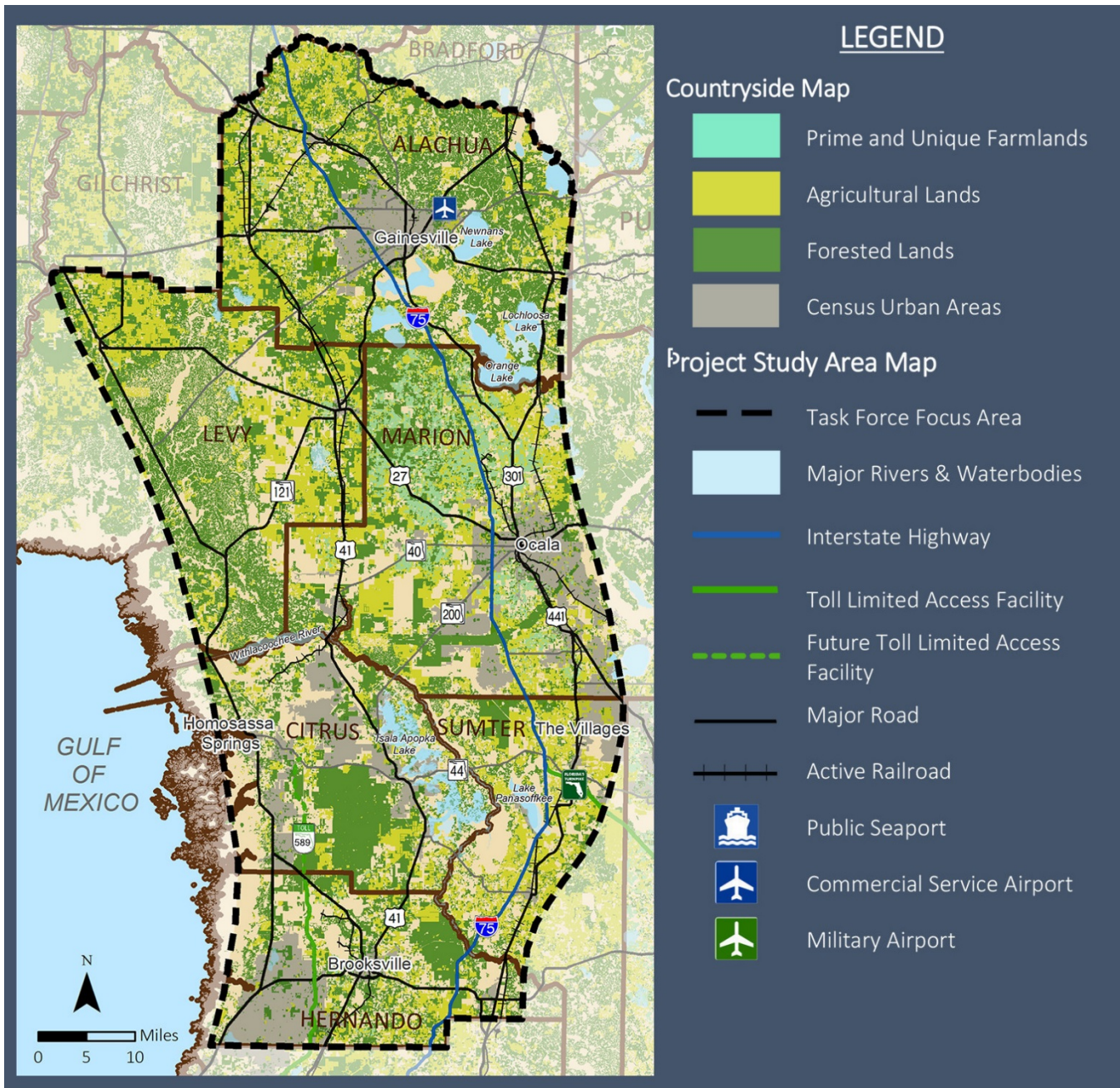
The US Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service policy identifies the concern for decreasing the production capacity of domestic agriculture, particularly for food and fiber crops. An inventory of farmland classified as prime, unique, or with statewide or local importance is required as part of the Farmland Policy Protection Act. The objective is to determine the location and size of such areas and to ensure impact for Federal actions are necessary. The objective is not to restrict land use on private property. The prime and unique farmlands are shown on the map on page 7 with the full definitions of prime farmlands and unique farmland from the Farmland Policy Protection Act.

### Agricultural Indicators

County	Farmland 2012 (acres)	Percent Change 2007-2012	Number of Farms 2012	Percent Change 2007-2012	Market Value of Agricultural Goods Sold, \$M (2012)	Percent Change 2007-2012
Alachua	187,985	8.8	1,662	8.4	\$101.2	9.9
Citrus	40,541	1.3	559	36.0	14.1	(2.1)
Hernando	61,942	10.1	799	4.0	28.4	(20.4)
Levy	167,359	(3.9)	1,053	3.4	80.4	6.2
Marion	321,474	20.6	3,870	10.7	188.2	8.3
Sumter	183,246	14.7	1,367	63.3	42.1	43.2
<b>Initial Focus Area</b>	<b>962,547</b>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>9,310</b>	<b>15.5</b>	<b>454.2</b>	<b>7.9</b>

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistical Service, 2012 Census of Agriculture. These land area totals differ from land area estimates reported by water management districts and from commercial agricultural uses recognized by county tax collectors.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture, 2012.



### Existing Lands in Agriculture & Forestry

Agricultural lands and forests are significant elements of the Initial Focus Area. For the Farmland Policy Protection Act, farmlands include:

- Prime Farmland is “land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and that is available for these uses.”
- Unique Farmland is land other than prime farmland that is used for the production of specific high-value food and fiber crops.” Examples are citrus, tree nuts, olives, cranberries, fruit, and vegetables.

*Source: Water Management Districts, Natural Resource Conservation Commission*

Regardless of the federal classification, the Initial Focus Area counties produce a diverse range of agricultural products and are national or state leaders in several areas. The counties rank among the top 20 statewide for the value of goods sold in the following areas:

- **Alachua County** – tobacco (1); other animal and animal products (2); and grains, oilseeds, and dry beans (4).
- **Citrus County** – other animals and animal products (12).
- **Hernando County** – horses, ponies, mules, burros, and donkeys (8); and hogs and pigs (17).
- **Levy County** – aquaculture (2); horses, ponies, mules, burros, and donkeys (3); and other crops and hay (7).
- **Marion County** – horses, ponies, mules, burros, and donkeys (1); other animals and animal products (1); sheep, goats, wool, mohair, and milk (5); and hogs and pigs (5).
- **Sumter County** – poultry and eggs (15); milk from cows (16); and cotton and cottonseed (16).<sup>4</sup>

The equestrian industry is an example of where the Initial Focus Area plays a national role. Marion County has more horses and ponies than any other county in the nation. Florida is home to about 600 thoroughbred farms and training centers, with more than 75 percent of these located in the Marion County area.<sup>5</sup>



Many of these products are sold to other regions, states, and nations, creating a need to ship both raw materials and finished products to market. Many of these shipments must use state and local roads to connect to processors or markets via I-75 or other

<sup>4</sup> Food and Resource Economics Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, *Economic Contributions of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Food Industries in Florida in 2013*

<sup>5</sup> Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs, *The Florida Horse Industry*.

major corridors. During harvest, the surge in truck traffic can be significant in smaller communities and rural areas. The growth in production of specialty fruits and vegetables and farm-to-table products appears to be resulting in a more complex web of small shipments using the regional and local road network.

## Forest Products and Services

Forests cover approximately 15 percent of the Initial Focus Area's land cover, according to land cover data maintained by the water management districts. Forest-related industries include forest management; logging; lumber, veneer, and panel manufacturing; pulp and paper products manufacturing; and secondary products manufacturing. Statewide, forest-related activities accounted for \$16.3 billion in output and nearly 81,000 jobs in 2013 – below the pre-recession peak in 2006 but above the 2008 lows.<sup>6</sup> Export markets have been a key driver of recent growth.

The six counties produced about 36 million tons of hardwood and softwood in 2009 (most recent data available). This was a 40 percent decline since 1999, greater than the state average.<sup>7</sup> This decrease appears to reflect a combination of the decline in construction during the national recession as well as a shift in the size of the forest products industry in the region. The study area also is the site of sawmills and mills producing animal bedding and mulch.<sup>8</sup>

## Mining

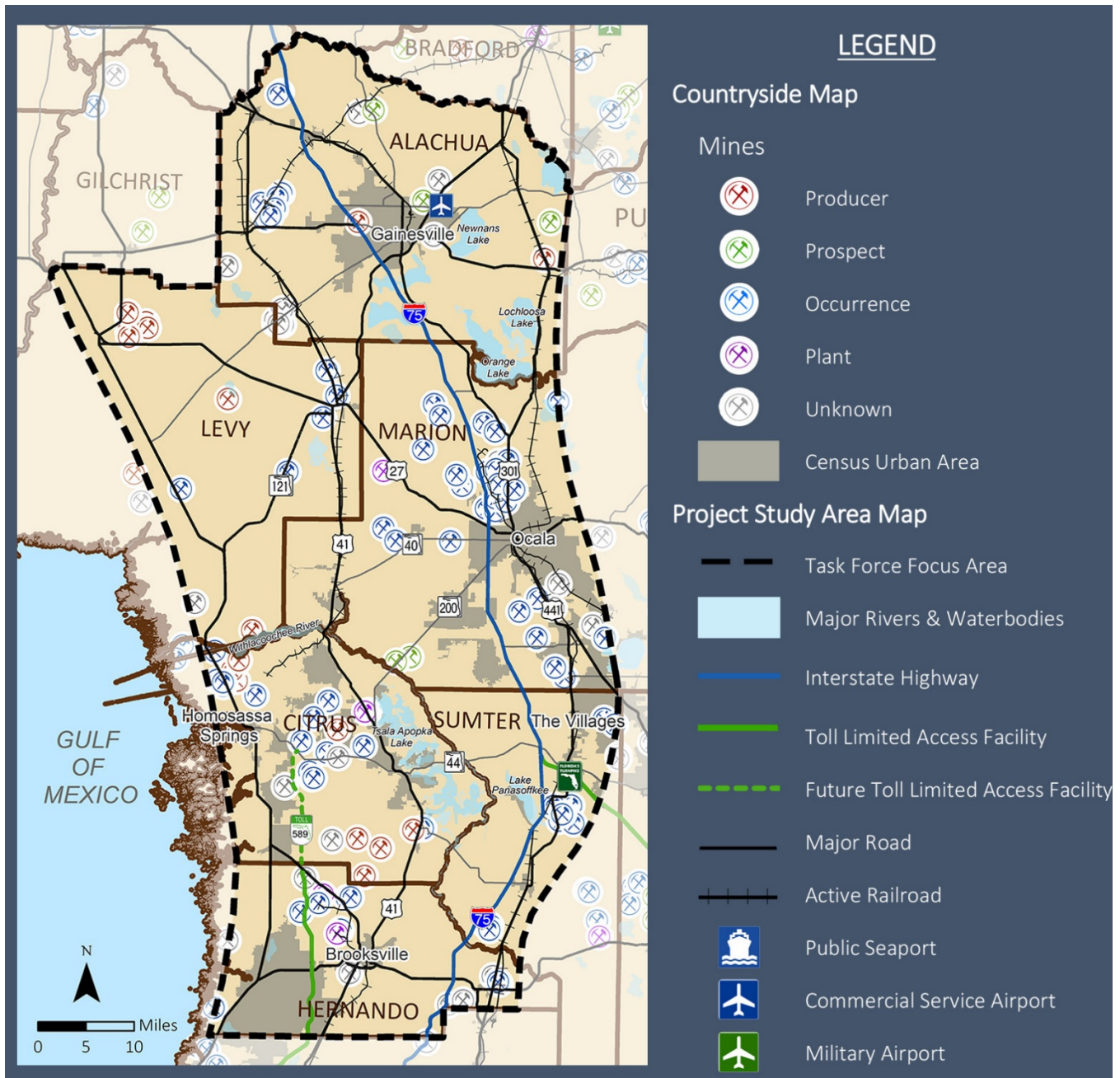
The Initial Focus Area counties were the location of 97 active mines in 2011. These active mines included intermittent producers that operate on-demand or seasonally with variable lengths of inactivity. The six counties also included 42 former producing mines that are now closed; 20 occurrences of mineral deposits that could become future mine locations; six prospects of mineral deposits where initial work has begun that might lead to a future producing mine; and six mineral processing plants.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Forest Service, *2013 Florida Forestry Economic Highlights*.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Southern Research Station.

<sup>8</sup> Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Forest Service, *2013 Florida Forestry Economic Highlights*.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Geological Survey, Mineral Resources Data System, 2011.



## Mines

The Initial Focus Area counties included 97 active mines in 2011, primarily producing limestone, sand, and other aggregate materials. These mines primarily serve regional customers within a 100 mile radius. They produce significant freight flows, primarily using trucks operating on state and local roads.

Source: U.S. Geological Survey

Regionally significant mines in these counties provide customers within a radius of up to 100 miles with crushed stone materials that include aggregates, base rock, lime rock, high-quality sand, and shell rock. These mines were sited and developed in areas with geological deposits that provide consistently certifiable commercial grade materials. These materials are used in transportation and other construction projects, demand for which is anticipated to increase as the economy grows.

Mining companies use trucks to haul limestone rock or other earth-based resources from mines. Larger operations may require from 900 to 1,000 trucks per day.<sup>10</sup> Increased safety risks and added costs of maintenance on the roads most frequently used by these trucks are concerns for local communities.

Many of these active mines are located adjacent to residential or other development that could preclude future expansion to develop reserves after the permitted mine is exhausted. Some of the exhausted mines have been identified or are under consideration for future residential, commercial, or industrial development.

## Tourism

Tourism and recreation are an important industries in the countryside. The Initial Focus Area’s coast, rivers, lakes, forests, and other recreational areas; small towns and historic resources; and equestrian industry are attractions for visitors. Examples include Silver Springs, Rainbow Springs, Cedar Key, and Crystal River. Visitor spending supports direct jobs at these attractions as well as related jobs in hotels, restaurants, and retail stores.

Many of the region’s counties are promoting their attractions to visitors, including Hernando County’s Adventure Coast; the Nature’s Coast Coalition spanning from Pasco to Wakulla Counties; and Visit Natural North Florida, a 12-county initiative including Alachua and Levy counties. Visit Florida, the state’s tourism development organization, has set a goal of diversifying the destinations serving Florida’s visitors to help continue to expand the state’s overall visitor industry. The eco-, agri-, and heritage-based attractions in the

<sup>10</sup> Strategic Aggregate Study: Sources, Constraints, and Economic Value of Limestone and Sand in Florida, prepared by Lampl Herbert Consultants for the Florida Department of Transportation, 2007.

Initial Focus Area could serve more visitors, but transportation connectivity may be a constraint on future growth.

## Economic Impact

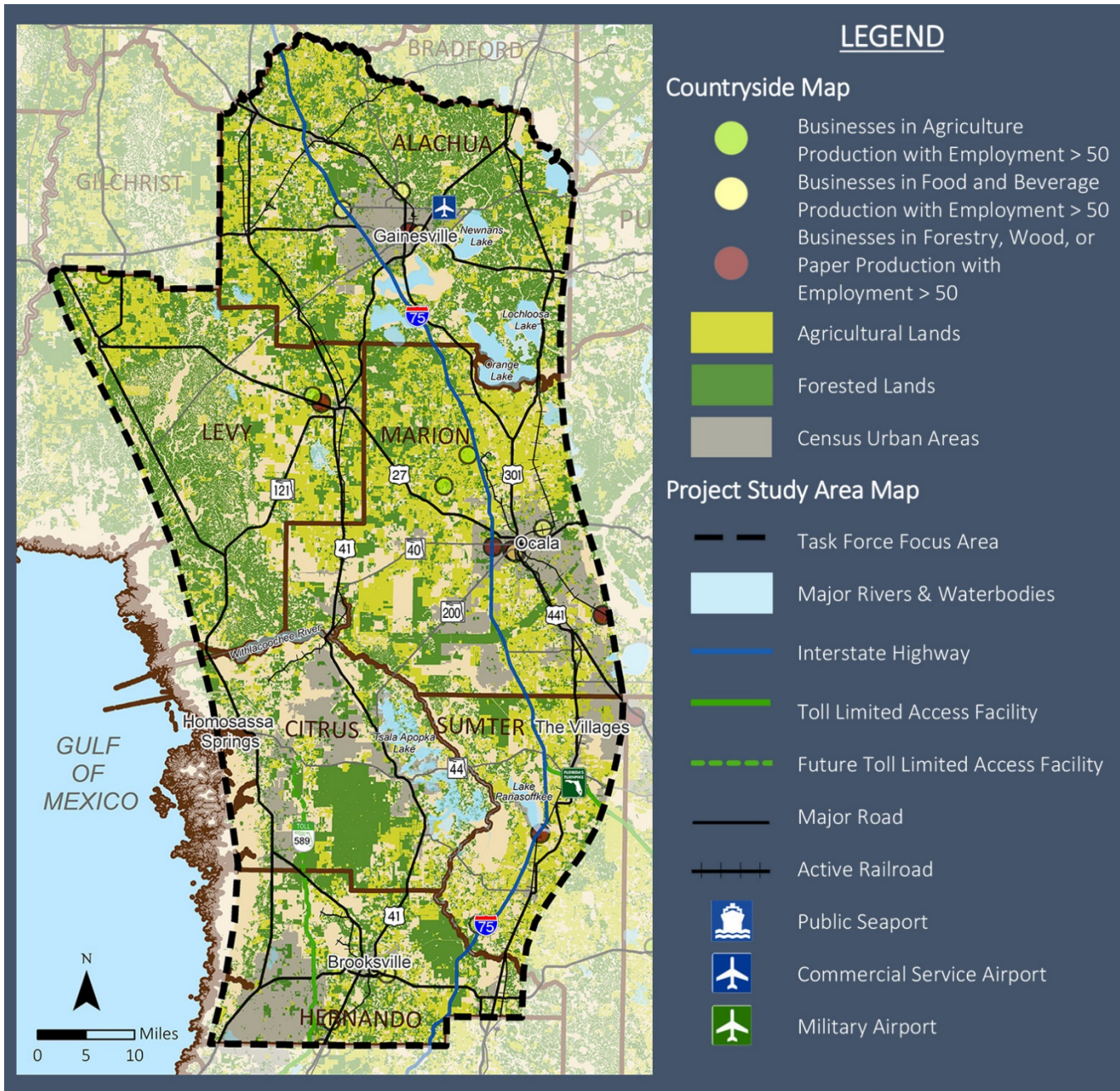
Countryside industries were estimated to account for more than 90,000 jobs in 2013, nearly three out of every ten jobs in the Initial Focus Area counties.<sup>11</sup> These include direct jobs in crop, livestock, forestry, and fisheries production; agricultural inputs and services; mining; and nature-based recreation as well as supporting jobs in food products manufacturing and distribution and forest products manufacturing. These activities accounted for \$3.5 billion in value added in 2013.

### Economic Contributions of Agriculture and Related Industries, 2013

County	Employment Impacts	Value Added (\$ Million)
Alachua	27,484	737
Citrus	8,393	338
Hernando	12,475	512
Levy	4,319	219
Marion	28,362	1,280
Sumter	9,057	411
<b>Initial Focus Area</b>	<b>90,090</b>	<b>\$3,497</b>

Source: Food and Resource Economics Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, *Economic Contributions of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Food Industries in Florida in 2013*

<sup>11</sup> Food and Resource Economics Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, *Economic Contributions of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Food Industries in Florida in 2013*.



## Agriculture, Food & Forestry Businesses

Agriculture, food processing and distribution, forest products processing, and related industries accounted for more than 90,000 jobs in the Initial Focus Area. Related manufacturing and distribution businesses are located both within and outside of the six counties, creating demand for moving agricultural and forest products to meet customer needs.

Source: InfoGroup, 2014

## LOCAL POLICIES AND PLANS

All six counties have designated areas that are intended to maintain their rural character in their local government comprehensive plans, including their Future Land Use Maps (FLUM). These plans also identify policies to support quality of life in rural communities; support agriculture, forestry, and other countryside industries; and promote appropriate rural development.

### Alachua County

In Alachua County, the rural areas are located in the north, east and south portions of the county. The City of Gainesville is located in the center of the county and urban development extends along the US 441 corridor as well as smaller incorporated communities such as Archer, Newberry, and High Springs along the US 27 corridor.

Most of the rural land in the county is designated as Rural/Agriculture on the 2030 FLUM. To protect rural and agricultural uses (as well as sensitive environmental areas), the FLUM defines an Urban Cluster that sets a boundary for urban growth in the unincorporated area.

The Rural/Agriculture category is intended for forestry and other agricultural uses, such as cattle grazing, field crops, vegetable crops, and dairies. Uses supporting agriculture also are allowed, such as farm equipment and supplies, farmers' markets, agri-tourism activities, limited agricultural processing, and agricultural products distribution. Other allowed uses include heritage tourism, eco-tourism, and resource- and outdoor-based recreation. In these areas, the County establishes a maximum density of one dwelling unit per 5 acres.

The Comprehensive Plan designates 13 rural clusters, which are historic rural settlements outside of the urban cluster. These rural clusters generally lack public services and facilities necessary for more intense urban development. The policies and development regulations for Rural Clusters are intended to preserve their existing rural character, ensure compatibility with the surrounding Rural/ Agricultural areas, and protect the unique historic and natural resources in these communities. The designated Rural Clusters are:

- Campville;
- Cross Creek;
- Earleton;
- Evinston;
- Grove Park;
- Hague;
- Island Grove;
- Lochloosa;
- Melrose;
- Orange Heights;
- Rochelle;
- Santa Fe; and
- Windsor.

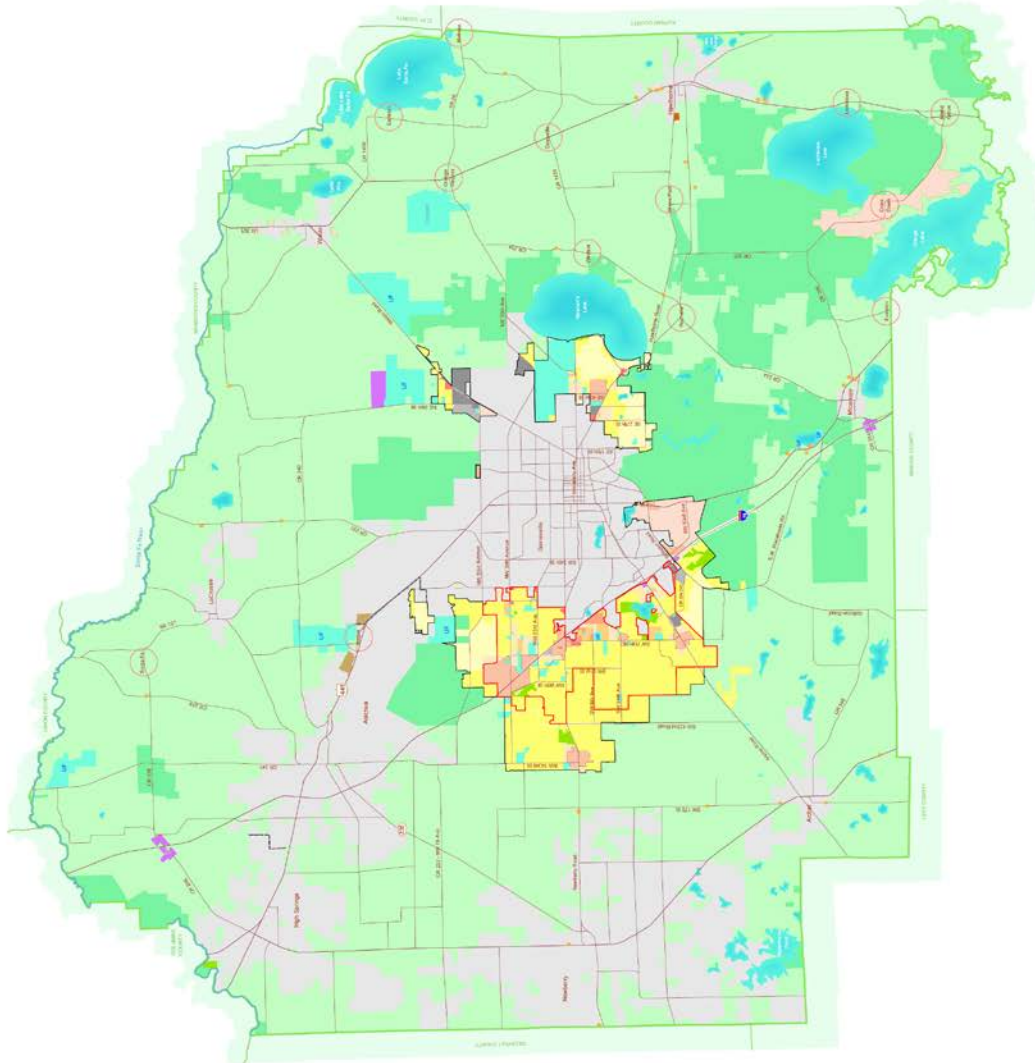
The FLUM also designates specific sites near key roads as Rural Employment Centers or Rural Community Employment Centers. These centers provide rural residents with nearby access to goods and services.

Alachua County's Comprehensive Plan includes policies intended to minimize the conversion of land from rural to urban uses. These policies include a Planned Development-Transfer of Development Rights program and incentive bonuses for clustering of rural residential subdivisions.



Alachua County Comprehensive Plan, Future Land Use Element  
 Adopted April 2011, last amended October 2013

FUTURE LAND USE MAP 2030 - ALACHUA COUNTY, FLORIDA

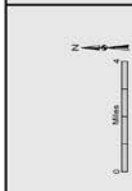


**LEGEND**

- Urban Services Area
- Urban Cluster Line
- Rural Cluster
- Municipality Separator
- Commercial Enclaves
- Rural Commercial - Agriculture
- Water Bodies
- Municipalities
- Special Area Studies
- Activity Centers
- Recreation
- Preservation
- Commercial
- Tourism/Entertainment
- Institutional
- County Solid Waste Management Facility
- University Master Plan
- Light Industrial
- Heavy Industrial
- Estate Residential
- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Rural/Agriculture
- Rural Employment Center
- Rural Community Employment Center

**Notes:**  
 The Future Land Use designations shown on this map are defined in the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan and are to be implemented in conjunction with the local, state and federal laws. This map is part of the Future Land Use Map. Adopted April 9, 2011. Effective July 22, 2011. Updated as of December 8, 2013.  
 UF Campus Master Plan projects are those identified in the UF Campus Master Plan 2005-2016, Figure 14-2, adopted 2/11/06. Poster Size: 36" x 36". Date of Production: 10/06/2013. File on Disk: UF\_Planetalk\_FLU\_2030.mxd

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# Citrus County

Citrus County identifies large portions of the eastern, western, and southern county as Conservation on the County’s Comprehensive Plan FLUM. Agriculture and Rural Residential uses are located primarily in the central portion of Citrus County, known as the Central Ridge. In the southeast central area, the Agricultural land use category applies to large, contiguous sites. In the other portions of the Central Ridge, Rural Residential are interspersed with Agricultural areas.

The Central Ridge area and road spine network are where more developed areas are located. A Planned Service Area runs from Crystal River to Inverness and is intended to focus future urban growth.

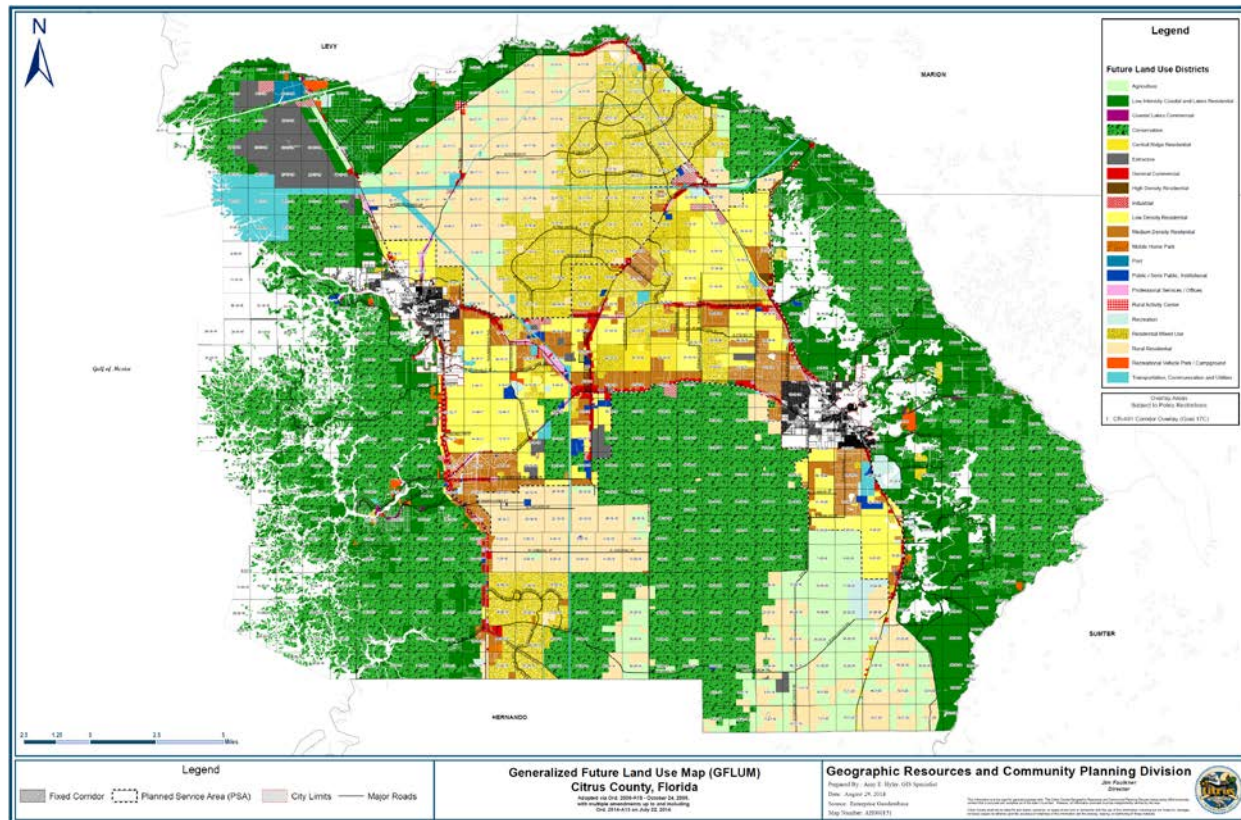
The Agriculture land use includes cropland, improved pasture land, orchards, vineyards, nurseries, and groves. This category also includes residential units developed on agricultural land.

The Rural Residential land use designation allows one dwelling unit per acre. Many of these areas have been platted with development rights but are not yet developed.

The Comprehensive Plan identifies policies to protect rural and agricultural areas, including:

- Identify prime agricultural soils on a map and protect these lands in the development code.
- Route highways around active agricultural areas; when highways must traverse such lands, include as part of the highway project the cost of erecting and maintaining fencing and highway crossings necessary for continued agricultural operations.
- Identify agricultural preserve districts.
- Require new developments permitted adjacent to agricultural uses to provide buffers between the uses.
- Refrain from pressure to pass local nuisance ordinances that would restrict farming practices.

Citrus County Comprehensive Plan, Future Land Use Element  
Adopted July 2006, last amended May 2012



# Hernando County

Like Citrus County, Hernando County’s central section is where rural uses can be found, including mining operations. The City of Brooksville is in the center of the county, and residential land surrounds it and lies to the southwest.

The majority of land is designated as Rural on the County’s 2040 FLUM. The Rural land use category allows farms, ranches, associated commercial/ industrial uses, farm worker housing, residential uses, neighborhood commercial uses, recreation, and public and semi-public uses.

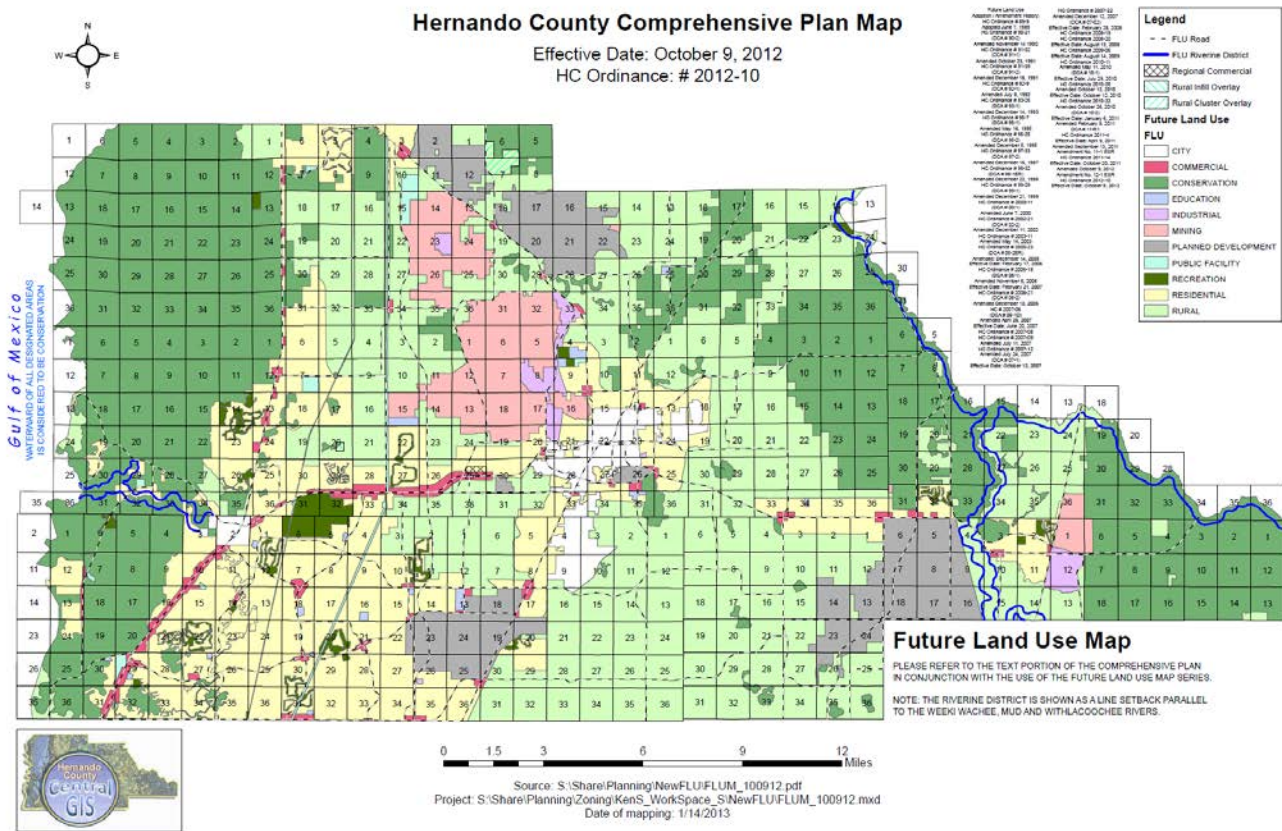
The Rural designation allows up to one unit per 10 acres. Density of one unit per 5 acres is permitted with a minimum parcel size of 40 acres, and with development treated as a Planned Development project to achieve the minimum requirements of clustering, open space, and buffering.

The County has not designated an urban growth boundary and supports the continuation of rural uses in other ways. The Comprehensive Plan:

- Requires approval of residential development to acknowledge the preservation of agricultural lands as one of the primary functions of the Rural Land Use category;
- Ensures that agricultural structures and practices are not unduly restricted in agricultural areas; and
- Promotes agriculture and encourage local consumption of local agricultural products.

The County provides for the orderly transition of mining areas to other land uses. A Quarry Preserve Planned Development District is established in the northern portion of the county. Mining operations in this area are anticipated to cease by 2022, after which this area will be redeveloped as a mixed use community.

Hernando County Comprehensive Plan, Future Land Use Element  
Adopted December 2005, last amended November 2013



# Levy County

Levy County is primarily rural in character, with large sections designated for forestry and agriculture. Cities and towns are located at highway crossroads.

The 2025 FLUM has four rural designations:

- Forestry/rural residential land is predominantly used for commercial forestry and related uses, recreational uses, conservation uses, and very low density rural development that is spatially separated from forestry uses. These uses are in the west and central portion of the County.
- Agricultural/rural residential land is predominantly used for agriculture and related uses, recreation, conservation, and very low density rural development. These uses are located in the east and northwestern portions of the County.

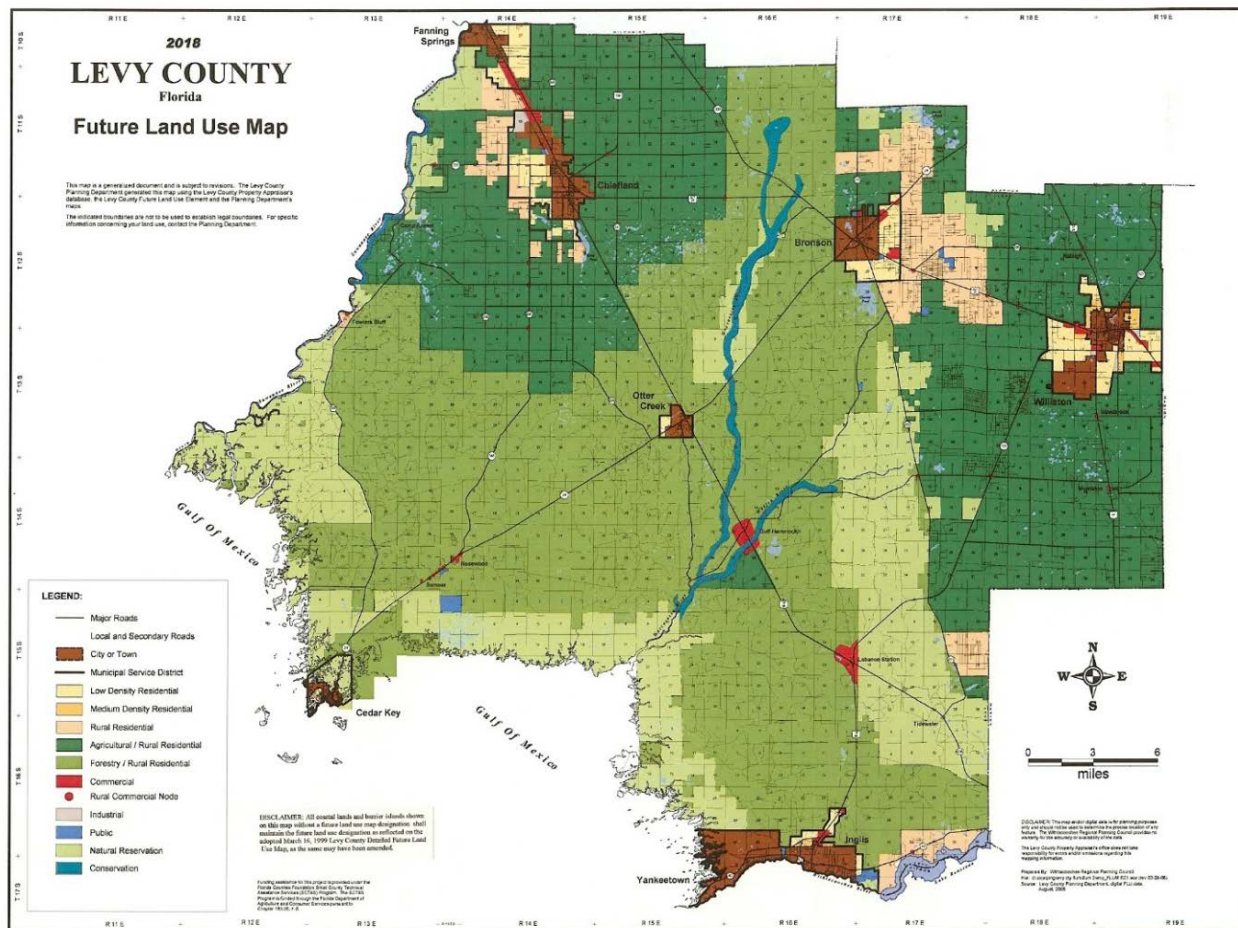
- Rural residential land is used for low density single family residential use, supportive uses to rural residential development, and limited agricultural uses. The maximum residential density within rural residential land is one dwelling unit per 3 acres. These areas are generally adjacent to cities and towns.

- Rural commercial node is used for mixed use development, including limited neighborhood commercial, residential, and agriculturally related industrial uses to support established communities in the rural areas in the County.

The County offers density bonuses to conserve land for forestry and agriculture, and for planned unit development or cluster developments.

The County also addresses the protection of rural areas by designating seven Municipal Service Districts (MSD) as areas for urban expansion.

Levy County Comprehensive Plan, Future Land Use Element Goals, Objectives & Policies  
Adopted August 1999, last amended May 2015



# Marion County

Marion County’s rural areas are located mainly in the north and west sections of the County – north and west of Ocala. The County’s 2035 FLUM designates these lands as Rural Land. Approximately half of this area (located northwest) is designated as a Farmland Preservation Area. Some rural land south of Ocala is split by residential developments near I-75 and US 27.

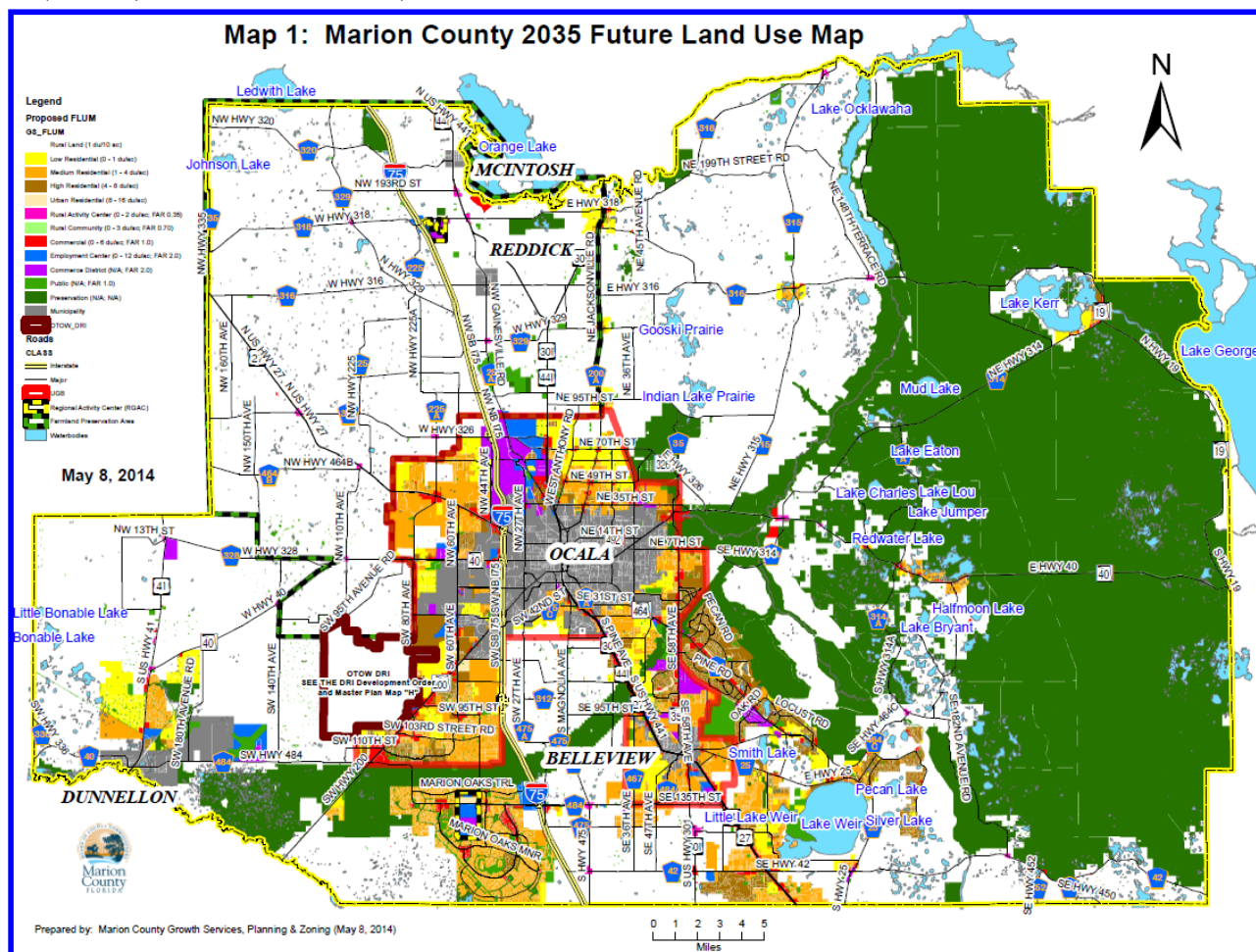
The Rural Land designation is intended to be used primarily for agricultural uses and protects the rural and equestrian/agricultural character of the county. The County preserves the economic viability of agricultural lands and prevents the premature conversion of these lands to other uses through

sustainable smart growth principles and joint planning activities.

The Rural Land designation allows low density residential units on large lots or family divisions and associated housing related to farms or other agricultural-related commercial and industrial uses. The base density is one dwelling unit per 10 gross acres. Family divisions and hamlets are allowed to have increased density through cluster bonuses.

The Transfer of Vested Rights (TVR) program encourages antiquated subdivisions to be set aside as preservation areas, used for agricultural activities, redeveloped as large lot residential uses consistent with the Rural Land, or developed at the platted densities at a time when public facilities and services are made available to subdivisions.

Marion County Comprehensive Plan, Future Land Use Element  
 Adopted May 2014, last amended May 2015



# Sumter County

Sumter County’s rural areas are primarily in the central and western parts of the County. Urban areas are in the east and along major roads.

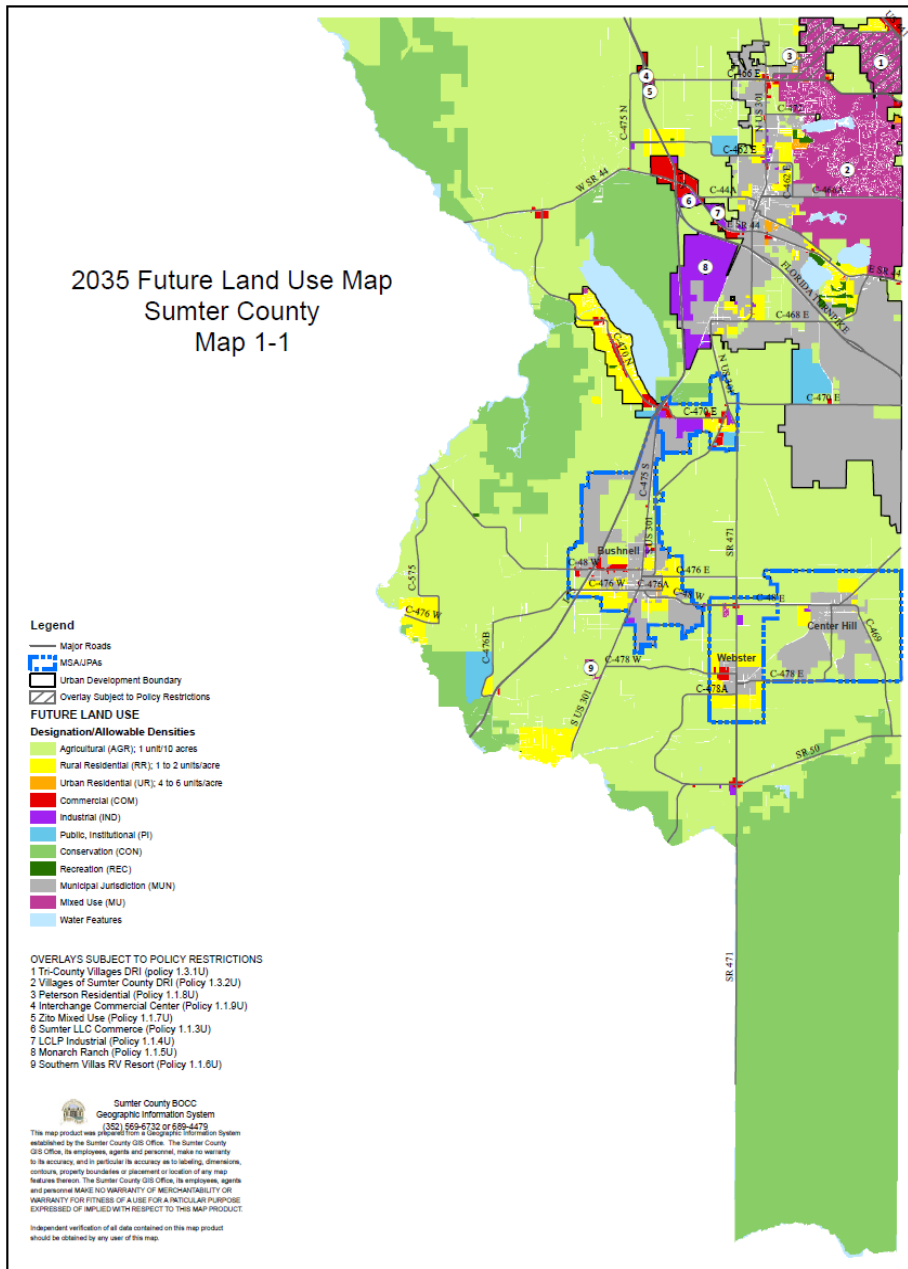
The Comprehensive Plan establishes an Urban Development Boundary (UDA) with an Urban Development Boundary that is depicted on the FLUM. The UDA encompasses those lands that are or expected to become urban through 2035. Rural and Agricultural lands generally are located outside of the UDA. Municipal Service Areas (MSA) are approved between the County and the cities of Bushnell, Center Hill, Webster, and Wildwood.

Agriculture designated land makes up the bulk of the rural area. These uses include aquaculture, horticulture, floriculture, viticulture, dairy, livestock, poultry, bees, and any and all forms of farm products and farm production. The land in this category is suited for livestock and the cultivation of crops, and includes cropland, pasture land, orchards, vineyards; nurseries; ornamental horticulture areas; groves, confined feeding operations, specialty farms and silviculture activities. Other uses include small-scale, neighborhood-serving commercial uses and community facilities.

The maximum gross residential density in Rural or Agricultural areas is one dwelling unit per 10 acres with a minimum parcel size of 10 acres. The County’s Agricultural Density Bonus System allows development proposed in the Agriculture area to use a density bonus option of one dwelling unit per 5 acres if the development is located within the MSA and within 1000 feet from a paved road dedicated to the public.

## Unified Comprehensive Plan for Sumter County/Center Hill/Webster, Future Land Use Element, Goals, Objectives, and Policies

*Adopted October 2012, last amended January 2015*



The plan intends to protect rural and agricultural areas from premature urbanization and to encourage a vibrant rural economy. The plan states that areas should be provided where agriculture and rural land uses can coexist and flourish without mandating the preservation of agriculture through government regulations.

# SUMMARY OF OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

The Initial Focus Area’s countryside is a critical foundation of its quality of life and economy. Investments in enhanced or new transportation corridors could support key **opportunities** for the region’s countryside, including:

- Improving access to markets for the region’s agricultural, forestry, and mining resources;
- Supporting the transition of depleted mines or less productive agricultural or forest areas to other economic activities, where consistent with regional and local plans;
- Facilitating access to the region’s natural, recreational, historic, and cultural resources to visitors from other parts of Florida and other state and nations;
- Improving access to jobs for residents living in rural areas but working in regional employment centers such as Gainesville or Ocala; and
- Supporting economic diversification opportunities in rural areas by enhancing access to workers, customers, and raw materials and supplies.

At the same time, planning for enhanced or new transportation corridors must consider the following **constraints**:

- Preserving existing rural communities and areas identified in local government plans to maintain rural character;
- Preserving regionally significant agricultural lands, forests, and mines, and not creating additional pressure for development of these lands for urban purposes;
- Preserving the function that farms, forests, and other rural lands play in providing habitat and supporting water storage and treatment; and
- Maintaining the connectivity of the local road network that is important to the health of small towns and agricultural areas.

# REFERENCES

## State Policies and Plans

[State Comprehensive Plan](#), Section 187.291, Florida Statutes

[Community Planning Act](#), Chapter 163, Part II, Florida Statutes

[Florida Strategic Plan for Economic Development](#), Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, 2012

[Rural Economic Development Initiative](#), Section 288.0656, Florida Statutes

[Long-Range Program Plan](#), Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 2015

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## Regional Plans

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North Central Florida Regional Planning Council, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, adopted September 2012

North Central Florida Regional Planning Council, Strategic Regional Policy Plan, adopted October 2011

Withlacoochee Regional Planning Council, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, adopted September 2012

Withlacoochee Regional Planning Council, Strategic Regional Policy Plan, adopted August 1997

## Local Plans

Alachua County Comprehensive Plan, adopted April 2011, last amended October 2013

Citrus County Comprehensive Plan, adopted July 2006, last amended May 2012

Hernando County Comprehensive Plan, adopted December 2005, last amended November 2013

Levy County Comprehensive Plan, adopted August 1999, last amended May 2015

BRIEFING BOOK – COUNTRYSIDE

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## Additional Data Sources

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