



Southwest Georgia Regional Commission  
Regional Assessment  
2011





# Table of Contents

<b>Welcome to Southwest Georgia</b>	5	Introduction
<b>Nobody's Perfect</b>	9	Issues & Opportunities
<b>Watch Us Grow!</b>	21	Analysis of Regional Development Patterns
<b>Do We Measure Up?</b>	37	Quality Community Objective Analysis
<b>We've Got Proof</b>	51	Supporting Data



Welcome to our neck of the woods! Here is where everyone still waves at you when you pass by, where the sweet tea can't get any sweeter; where the gnat and mosquito population outnumber the people; where when we're not in the field growing something....we're out in the field growing something else; where the difference between being in town and out of town is only a mile; where addressing your elders as Sir or Ma'am is not optional; where there are only two seasons, planting and harvest. We invite you to come in and sit a spell; see the sights, hear the sounds and taste the flavors that make us a region all our own.

*Welcome to Southwest Georgia*



# Southwest Georgia

Welcome to

# Regional Plan

The Regional Assessment is the first part of the new Southwest Georgia Regional Plan. The Assessment is a professional evaluation of the current condition of the Region and its most significant issues and opportunities.

The Assessment will be used in the development of the next portion of the Regional Plan, the Regional Agenda. The Agenda is developed through the involvement of the general public and identified regional stakeholders. The issues and opportunities identified in the Assessment will be reviewed by the stakeholders to develop implementation strategies that will enhance the Region's strengths and bolster areas that are not as strong.

Significant Issues and Opportunities identified in the Assessment:

## Issues

- Local governments lack funding to replace or repair aging infrastructure
- Lack of communication between and within local governments, boards and authorities
- Lack of new leadership
- Low educational attainment
- High poverty levels
- Limited housing choices
- Inconsistent implementation and enforcement of land development regulations
- Need for provision of alternate modes of transportation-walking, biking, transit

## Opportunities

- Ample groundwater resources with the Floridian Aquifer
- Abundant natural resources: farmland, lakes and rivers
- Development of services focused on attracting retirees
- Increase the mix of housing sizes, types and prices in the region
- Higher density development
- Good overall access to highways and rail
- Expansion of regional transit program

These are only the highlights of the Issues and Opportunities identified in the Regional Assessment. Through the pages of the Assessment they are discussed in more detail and justified by the Data section at the end of the document.

Keep in mind that the Assessment is just a starting point for regional dialogue that will flesh out these Issues and Opportunities and identify solutions that will be pursued by the Region as a whole.

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), under the Standards and Procedures for Regional Planning, requires that each Regional Commission prepare, adopt, maintain, and implement a Regional Plan. When implemented, the Regional Plan will allow Southwest Georgia to address critical issues and opportunities while moving toward its vision for the region's future.

The purpose of the Regional Plan is to provide a guide to everyday decision-making for government officials and other regional leaders. This guide will be developed by involving all segments of the region in creating a vision for the future along with implementation strategies to achieve that vision. The process of developing the plan should generate pride and enthusiasm about the future of the region.

The Regional Plan also seeks to help advance the state's planning goals of:

- A growing and balanced economy
- Protection of environmental, natural and cultural resources
- Provision of infrastructure and services to support efficient growth and development patterns
- Access to and provision of adequate and affordable housing for all residents
- Coordination of land use planning and transportation planning to support sustainable economic development
- Coordination of local planning efforts with other local service providers and authorities, neighboring communities and state and regional plans



## Regional Assessment

The first part of the Regional Plan is called the Regional Assessment and is the foundation from which the rest of the Regional Plan is prepared. The Regional Commission staff is responsible for collecting and analyzing information about the region for inclusion in the Regional Assessment. This data will later be considered by the public and decision-makers during the development of the Regional Agenda, the main component of the Regional Plan. The Regional Assessment includes:

- A list of potential issues and opportunities the region may wish to take action to address
- An analysis of projected regional development patterns
- An evaluation of current policies, activities, and development patterns in the region for consistency with DCA's Quality Community Objectives (QCOs)
- An analysis of data and information to check the validity of the above evaluations and the potential Issues and opportunities





The Regional Assessment is a review of potential issues and opportunities within the region. These identified issues and opportunities, however, may be modified through additional analysis in the next phase of the Regional Plan, the Regional Agenda. The final list of identified concerns should form the blueprint for what needs to be addressed in the plan.

Issues & Opportunities

# Nobody's Perfect

# Housing

## Issues

- Few credit worthy applicants
- Few programs/funds for housing rehabilitation
- Few housing choices
- Poor collaboration between cities and Community Housing Development Organizations
- Weak or non-existent code enforcement
- High numbers of manufactured homes which are usually taxed as personal property

## Opportunities

- Develop a regional housing strategy
- Educate landlords, tenants and potential homebuyers about available housing programs
- Encourage employer assisted housing programs for first time homebuyers
- Provide a regional resource center to educate potential homebuyers
- Better utilization of housing programs and resources
- Increase the mix of housing sizes, types and purchase prices within the region
- Encourage the provision of inclusionary housing in zoning ordinances
- Encourage the conversion of suitable existing structures to affordable or subsidized housing
- Encourage innovative housing development techniques
- Encourage the maintenance, rehabilitation, and enhancement of existing housing

Housing needs and the adequacy of the housing stock is determined by an examination of historic and current data, the number and types of housing units, their age and condition, owner or renter occupied units, average commuting distances, and housing costs. There is a direct relationship between a sustainable economy and housing availability. It is important to maintain a jobs-to-population ratio that allows people to live close to where they work. When an imbalance exists, people will either move to areas with better employment opportunities or employers will move to areas with better workforce availability.

Activities that promote a healthy housing stock include code enforcement, homebuyer and credit education, technical assistance and training, loans or grants, and granting property tax liens or abatements. These activities and opportunities are available in some communities but not in others in the region.

Antiquated development ordinances in the region present barriers to housing progress in many communities. Homeownership may not be the goal for every citizen in the region, but everyone should have viable options whether renting or desiring to purchase a home. Other barriers to housing include high numbers of applicants who are ineligible for credit, poor communication between cities, counties, housing nonprofit agencies, and the lack of housing rehabilitation programs. Generally there are few multi-family homes throughout Southwest Georgia. A variety of housing types is essential for healthy communities.



# Transportation

## Issues

- Approved Department of Transportation projects throughout the region currently delayed
- Roadway designs discourage pedestrian and bike activity
- Inadequate public transportation
- Limited access to services, goods, economic development programs, healthcare and recreational facilities

## Opportunities

- Much of the region has convenient access to state highways and to railroads
- Continue paving dirt roads in populated areas
- Develop a regional bicycle and pedestrian plan
- Encourage a regional approach to major transportation and transit programs

Southwest Georgia's economy depends on its transportation system. State highways, local roads, railroads and airports allow people and things to get moving in Southwest Georgia. These routes are important links between communities in the region, the rest of the state and country, and are essential.

Transportation is sometimes difficult between commercial centers and rural areas. There are transportation options available, but they are often limited to people receiving aid. Because there are few options in rural areas besides automobiles, not owning a vehicle can be a hardship. Natural and cultural resources in Southwest Georgia could be better utilized with improvements to the transportation system.



# Community Facilities

## Issues

- Governments lack funds to replace or repair aging infrastructure
- Limited recreation facilities
- Inadequate public facility capacity to support significant new development
- Additional after-school programs needed
- Cost of providing public services and facilities for new development typically exceeds the revenue from these developments
- Lack of capital to fund public services (animal control, police protection, fire protection etc.)
- Potable water and sanitary sewer systems in need of repair/replacement
- Need for additional recycling centers
- Low revenue streams from the tax base and low utility fees make it difficult for governments to balance their budgets



Several issues face the Southwest Georgia region. Water and sewer infrastructure are important public services offered throughout the region, primarily in the incorporated areas. In a number of jurisdictions, this infrastructure is currently in need of significant upgrade. More times than not, grants and loans are the only means available to local governments to address these ongoing maintenance issues. Utility rates in the region are typically lower than the state average, which decreases the local governments' ability to properly maintain systems or add additional capacity.

The region's rural nature and sparse population makes it cost prohibitive for service providers to operate on a regional basis. Public infrastructure drives the location of housing, businesses, and industry throughout the region. For the benefit of the region as a whole, future infrastructure investments should be coordinated both locally and regionally in order to efficiently provide services and properly direct future growth.

Southwest Georgia is fortunate to have abundant, high quality groundwater resources. The Floridan Aquifer, which underlies most of the region, is one of the world's most productive aquifers. The region is not without water issues however; particularly the ongoing Georgia-Florida-Alabama "water war." The outcome of a federal court case in July 2011 should decide whether or not the Atlanta metro area may continue to withdraw from Lake Lanier, and will determine future water and sewer rates in the Atlanta area. An unfavorable ruling for Atlanta might make our region more attractive to industries that require abundant amounts of water. Promoting the region's abundant water resource should be incorporated into the regional discussion as it relates to future economic development.

### Opportunities

- Ample groundwater resources
- Consolidation of services and/or facilities where feasible
- Presence of regional medical centers
- Existence of senior centers and services

The region is also home to an ever-growing senior population. As a result, the availability and provision of appropriate healthcare, recreational, and residential facilities to serve this segment of the population should be a main priority.

In addition, an expanding youth population demands an increased number of after-school programs, parks and recreational opportunities and other services. The provision of recreational and social amenities and programs are key components in retaining the existing population. These components also serve as important recruiting tools in attracting perspective residents to settle in the southwest Georgia region as well.



# Community Facilities

# Intergovernmental Coordination

## Issues

- Lack of communication between local governments, boards, and authorities
- Lack of new leadership

## Opportunities

- Promote and encourage the formation of mutual and automatic aid agreements
- Continue and improve regional collaboration, coordination and communication to increase effectiveness and efficiency
- Consider the formation of a board to establish regional utilities and or services
- Form partnerships to fund large projects that may not be financially feasible for a single jurisdiction
- Consider the consolidation of some local governments

This section identifies issues and opportunities that may exist between governments and other entities and to ensure development does not have negative impacts on neighboring communities. Georgia ranks #13 nationally in the number of governmental units with 6,618. Improved coordination between governmental entities results in cost savings for public schools, transit services, housing, road maintenance, utility providers, economic development, tourism, and recreation. Coordination eliminates duplication of services, enables services to be provided in areas that they would not otherwise be offered in, and allows savings to be realized.

A review of levels of intergovernmental coordination in the region reveals a need to enhance coordination, and identify additional areas where coordination may be needed. Each community should periodically review their Comprehensive Plan and Service Delivery Strategy to ensure that there are no conflicts with their plan and neighboring jurisdictions.

Communication is the key to intergovernmental coordination. There are great examples of intergovernmental coordination throughout the region, but there are also areas that need improvement. Many agencies, groups and nonprofits share information, especially when applying for grant funds. Other groups coordinate and cooperate on an ad-hoc basis toward a specific goal. Better cooperation and communication would allow communities and groups to work more efficiently together for the good of the entire region. Stronger partnerships make it more likely that grants, loans or other aid might be awarded to promote and enhance the region.

# Economic Development

## Issues

- Low educational attainment
- High property crime rates
- Economic development efforts favor new development over redevelopment
- Business retention is not active, successful or is underfunded
- High poverty levels
- Lack of job diversification
- Few skilled workers and jobs for skilled workers
- Few amenities to attract new businesses
- Lack of Interstate highways in the region
- Too few commercial airports in the region

Economic Development strengthens a community by creating and retaining jobs. In order to determine an area's economic potential, factors such as the availability of skilled workers, educational achievement levels, availability of land, poverty rates, unemployment rates, crime rates, availability of adequate infrastructure, and access to amenities must be considered.

Southwest Georgia is mostly rural (with the exception of the Albany area), and the economy is highly dependent upon agriculture, which to some extent is dependent on federal funds. There has been a significant decline in family farming as farmers sell their farms to corporations. Declining numbers of family farms means there is also a decline in employment in this sector.

Dougherty County serves as the main employment and commercial center for the region. During the recent economic downturn the area lost several major employers over the past three years. Thomasville, Moultrie, Bainbridge, and Cairo also serve as smaller commercial centers for the region, and in the southernmost part of the region, Tallahassee, Florida also serves as a commercial center.

Southwest Georgia has several attributes that make the region attractive for businesses seeking to locate, relocate or expand. There is an abundant supply of ground water, large land parcels, access to rail and road networks, clean air and competitive utility rates. In addition, Bainbridge serves as an inland port, and several municipal airports are available to serve air transportation needs.



## Opportunities

- Utilization of business incubators and tax abatements in order to encourage growth
- Ample water resources
- Competitive utility rates
- Encourage local governments to list vacant properties in order to target them for redevelopment
- Explore nontraditional ways to expand and diversify the strong agricultural base
- Enhance training programs through the Workforce Investment Board and Technical Colleges
- Promote tourism and agriculture and related business (Farmers Markets, Sunbelt Ag Expo, etc.)
- Encourage developers to build near areas that already have infrastructure
- Coordinate utility and infrastructure expansion plans with economic initiatives, to better support and direct development

Quality of life indicators are considered by potential businesses choosing to locate to an area, so improvements in rates of literacy, decreasing poverty and crime rates, access to amenities such as parks and bike paths, good schools, community centers, etc. all enhance an area's potential to grow economically.

In order for Southwest Georgia to continue to grow and develop it is also necessary to diversify the economic base. With the nation's economy shifting away from manufacturing and agricultural jobs, it is imperative that other viable options be brought into the region. The region must work toward increasing educational levels, developing additional skilled labor and training programs, diversifying transportation options, and an expanding of agricultural related businesses.



# Economic Development

# Land Use

## Issues

- Differing opinions on the need for zoning and land-use ordinances
- Lack of a sidewalk requirement for new development and no connectivity requirement for sidewalks
- Many zoning ordinances are outdated
- Infill development should be encouraged

## Opportunities

- Higher intensity development should be focused into nodes

Land use determines where and how land is utilized within the region. Mapping current land uses creates a document that shows exactly where patterns of development are occurring, which can be used to determine where new homes, businesses or community facilities should be located.



# Natural & Cultural Resources

## Issues

- Limited public access to natural resources
- Limited public awareness of natural and cultural resources and their significance
- Farmland, rural scenery and environmentally sensitive areas are disappearing in areas of rapid development
- Inadequate protection of rivers, lakes, ponds, streams, and aquifers
- A need to restrict growth in floodplains

## Opportunities

- Protect and market natural and cultural resources
- Multiple Prime Farmland (as designated by the United States Department of Agriculture) areas in the region
- Increase support and awareness of the Georgia Department of Natural Resource's Best Management Practices (BMPs)
- Need for a regional groundwater protection program
- Designate historic properties and districts to help preserve them

Regions and communities are defined by their natural and cultural resources. Natural resources also play a key role in defining land uses. The Regionally Important Resource Plan describes the natural, historic and cultural resources that include environmentally sensitive areas, aquifers, lakes, streams, creeks, prime farmland, major parks and recreational areas. Regional natural and cultural resources are shared, managed or utilized by multiple jurisdictions.

The region is rich with natural resources, including prime farmland, forested areas, an abundance of water resources (both surface and groundwater), wetlands and rare animals and plants. There are also parks, historic and recreational areas throughout the region including Kolomoki Mounds State Park, Seminole State Park, Reed Bingham State Park, the Lapham-Patterson House, and seven wildlife management areas. It is important for the region to protect and preserve these areas that help define our region



# Population

## Issues

- Four of fourteen counties lost population from 1990 to 2000 (Dougherty, Early, Miller and Terrell)
- Increase in the population of school aged children
- Increase in the number of single parent households
- Governments having difficulty maintaining levels of service demanded by growing and special needs populations
- Brain drain – loss of human capital

## Opportunities

- Racial shifts lead to more diversity in the region
- Development targeting the aging population
- Facilities geared toward specific populations such as the youth

The population section identifies issues and opportunities based on trends in population and demographic changes. An understanding of the population forms a foundation for economic development, community facilities, housing and land use.

The Southwest Georgia Regional Commission area encompasses 14 counties (Baker, Calhoun, Colquitt, Decatur, Dougherty, Early, Grady, Lee, Miller, Mitchell, Seminole, Terrell, Thomas and Worth) and 44 cities. The region covers 5,916 square miles, and had a population of 352,820 at the 2000 Census count.

Population change is necessary to consider when planning for schools, human services, community facilities, infrastructure, housing and economic development. Demographic changes should also be understood when determining what services should be provided. Regional population and demographic trends show where migration is occurring, and enables services, housing, recreation and other services to be steered into those areas.

The population in Southwest Georgia has grown slowly over the last 40 years, generally corresponding to the relative strength of the economy. While steady, the growth has been at a slower rate than elsewhere in the state. When jobs are available people stay in the region, but once jobs move away, so do the people who held those positions. Several trends were noted from the 2000 Census including an increase in the aging population, an increase in the number of school aged children, an increase in single parent households as well as a shift in the racial makeup of the region. Population changes indicate the type, and level of services that are necessary, and population data and projections are the basis for developing a strategy to address those needs.





An analysis of regional development patterns is a necessary component of the regional plan because it helps prepare for development where it is likely to occur. Understanding and anticipating the impacts of new development helps planners determine how best to manage development given the topographical and environmental constraints of the land. It also gives local governments and other decision makers an idea of public service demand in the future. The *Analysis of Regional Development Patterns* section of the Southwest Georgia Regional Plan is based on information gathered from local comprehensive plans, development trends over the last 20 years and local regulations. This section has two subsections: Projected Development Patterns and Areas Requiring Special Attention.



Regional Development Patterns

# Watch Us Grow

# Projected Development Patterns

The projected development patterns map for Southwest Georgia illustrates the projected land use patterns in the region for the 20-year planning period in the following four categories:

**Conservation:** Areas preserved in order to protect important resources or environmentally sensitive areas. These areas correspond to the Regionally Important Resources Map for southwest Georgia. Areas on the map include Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), Land Trusts and geologic resources (mines), and the green network adapted from the Regionally Important Resource Plan.

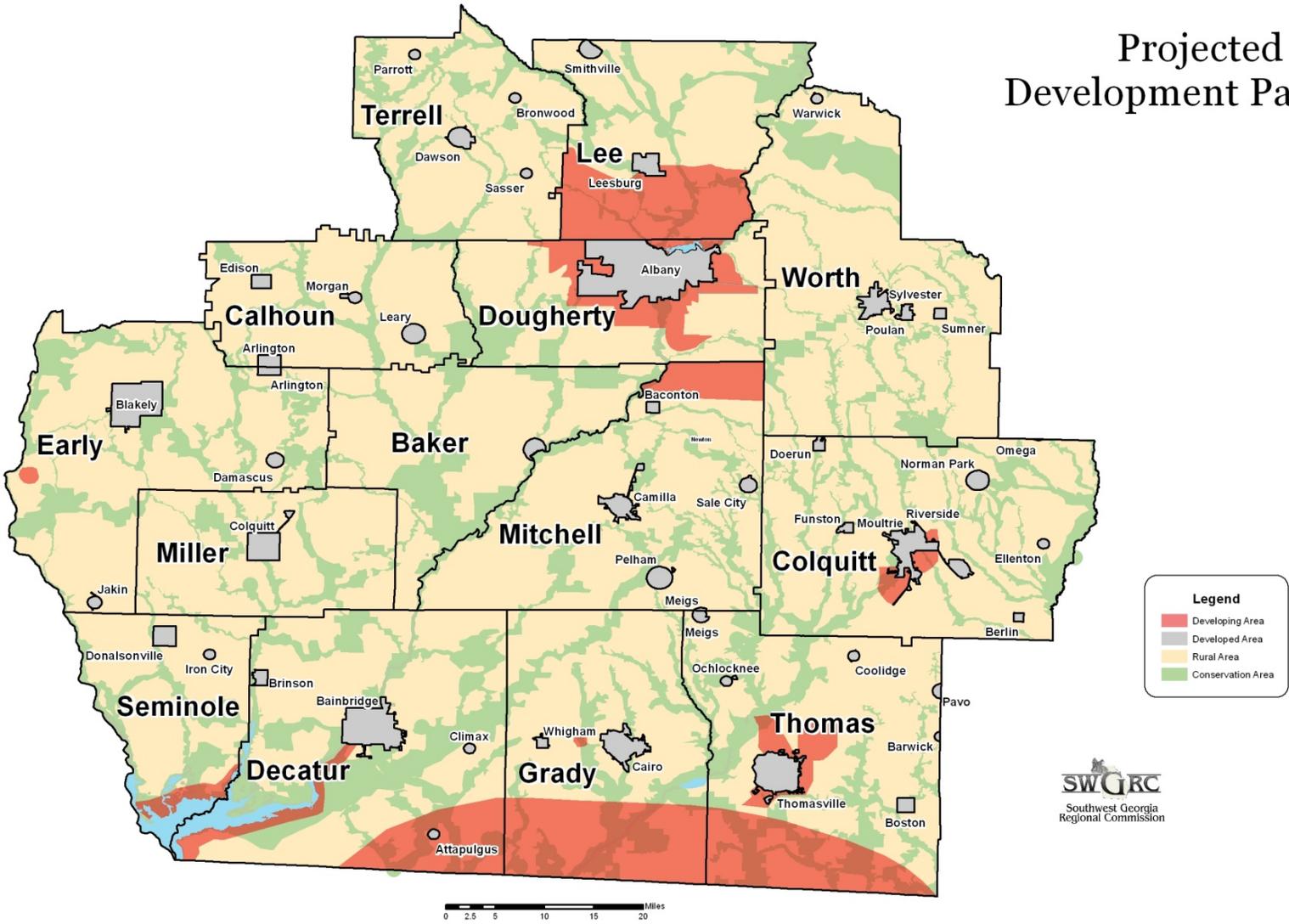
Many of the areas shown are protected by conservation easements or by public ownership. Many of the areas are in private ownership and not subject to any additional protection beyond local land use regulations. As a result, the category includes areas that should be set aside for conservation, rather than an indication that they are being conserved. For details about which areas are protected, please review both the Regionally Important Resource Plan and local comprehensive plans.

**Rural:** Areas designated on the projected development patterns map are not expected to become urbanized or expected to require the provision of additional services during the 20-year planning period. Most of the region is categorized as “rural” because Southwest Georgia has experienced slow growth and is heavily agricultural.

**Developed:** Areas classified as “developed” exhibit urban development patterns where municipal services are already being provided. All cities in the region are classified as “developed” whether they are built out or not.

**Developing:** Areas that have experienced recent development and development pressure that will likely continue, particularly as the economy begins to improve. These areas either currently have or will require the provision of urban services during the planning period. Some of the areas indicated in this category have not significantly developed; however, they have been identified as having a high probability of becoming developed in the planning period.

# Projected Development Patterns



The following are Developing areas within Southwest Georgia:

- Areas along the Florida border that include parts of Decatur, Grady and Thomas Counties as a result of development pressure from Leon, Gadsden and Jefferson Counties in Florida centered on Tallahassee. This area is part of the “commutershed” of Tallahassee that falls within a reasonable distance people will commute to jobs in Tallahassee, while still enjoying fairly inexpensive land and low cost of living in the marked area. Within this area is the crossroads community of Beachton, located along Highway 319 in southern Grady County. This area has seen significant development over the past 10 years. This is likely to continue due to its location between the cities of Cairo, Thomasville and Tallahassee.
- Areas in Dougherty County around Albany. As the population of Albany expands these areas will continue to see development pressure.



- Lee County south of Highway 32 and Leesburg. This area has developed significantly over the past 15 years as people moved from neighboring Dougherty County to take advantage of the Lee County school system, while still having access to Albany and the amenities it has to offer.

- Areas in North Mitchell County as a result of development pressure from Dougherty County to the north. Also influencing this development is a charter school in Baconton and a nearby, newly constructed elementary school.





- Areas around the Highway 319 bypass adjacent to Moultrie in Colquitt County. These areas have experienced steady development and are situated for potential annexation.





- Areas in Thomas County on the periphery of Thomasville, particularly to the North. This area has shown significant development pressure recently it is expected to continue. The area is subject to development because people want to live close to amenities in Thomasville while still living in the country. During the housing boom of the early and mid-2000s, developers subdivided more than 2,200 lots in this area for residential development. As a result of the collapse of the housing market, most of these lots and subdivisions were never developed.





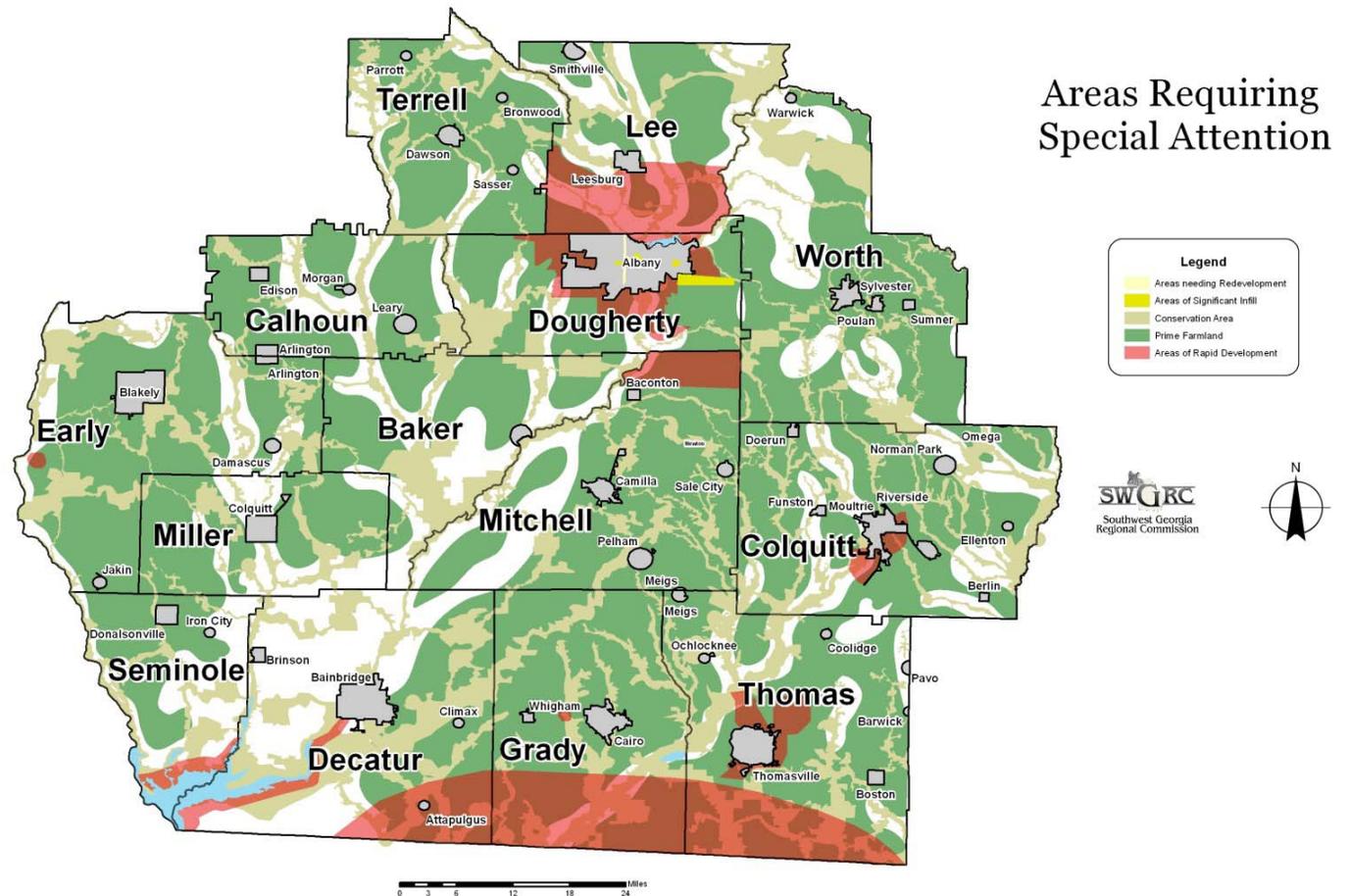
- Areas along the Flint River and Lake Seminole between Bainbridge and Florida, and areas around Lake Seminole in Seminole County. The attraction of the Flint River and Lake Seminole, and because people can still commute a fairly short distance to work in Bainbridge and Tallahassee has increased development pressure to this area.

- A strip along Highway 84 east of Bainbridge that extends to the newly constructed Decatur County High School. The city annexed the frontage along the highway and commercial development is beginning to take place.



# Areas Requiring Special Attention

The Areas Requiring Special Attention section evaluates the land use trends of the region and how they may impact sensitive areas. The sensitive areas were derived primarily from the Regionally Important Resource map. Areas requiring special attention are primarily those areas where the two maps overlap and projected development could have a significant impact on these regionally important resources. The following section will examine the categories identified as areas requiring special attention.



# Areas identified on the Regionally Important Resource map

These areas include significant natural, historic, cultural and geologic resources across the region, particularly where they intersect with projected development. Other areas identified on the map which do not specifically coincide with projected development include the “green network” from the Regionally Important Resources map and prime farmland.

## Areas where significant natural and cultural resources are likely to be impacted by development.

Areas of significant natural and cultural resources that may potentially be impacted by development include:



Land adjacent to Lake Seminole and the Flint River



The Red Hills region in Decatur, Grady and Thomas Counties



Tired Creek

Areas where rapid development or change of land uses is likely to occur, especially where the pace of development has or may outpace the availability of community facilities and services, including transportation.



The Tired Creek Reservoir project in Grady County has recently acquired the necessary state and federal permits to begin construction of the reservoir. The project is expected to be a catalyst for development in the immediate vicinity of the reservoir and will likely require utilities in some form from Cairo.

The proposed development of New Hilton in Early County. The idea of newly developed town called "New Hilton" was proposed in the Early County 2055 plan as a New Urbanist development on a future light rail network. The Early County 2055 plan was derived from an intense design charrette that took place in Early County in 2006.

Areas around Lake Seminole in Seminole and Decatur Counties are desirable places to live because of the natural beauty of the location and the proximity to both Bainbridge and Tallahassee.



Areas in Thomas County on the periphery of Thomasville, particularly to the north where hundreds of platted lots are awaiting residential development. The area is heavily marketed to seniors as a lower cost option to retiring in Florida.





The unincorporated town and area surrounding Metcalfe in Thomas County are within the commutershed of Tallahassee. Metcalf is a historic township that retains much of its original small town character. Because most of the surrounding land is in large tracts it is feasible that if these tracts go up for sale, large developments could potentially find their way to the area around Metcalfe.

Areas adjacent to Moultrie have seen development pressure in the past and development pressure is expected to resume when the economy suitably recovers. These growth areas will likely be annexed into Moultrie.



Areas in North Mitchell County have seen development pressure lately due to its proximity to jobs in Albany and Dougherty County, the Baconton Charter School and the nearby, newly built Mitchell County Elementary School.

An area of potential commercial development extending from Bainbridge east along Highway 84. Bainbridge has recently annexed the strip of highway frontage between Bainbridge and the newly constructed high school along Highway 84 east of Bainbridge.





**Areas in need of redevelopment** and/or in need of redevelopment and/or significant improvements to aesthetics or attractiveness (including strip commercial corridors)

Slappey Boulevard in Albany was once a thriving strip commercial area, but has slipped into disinvestment. While the area is still commercially viable, it is in need of economic and aesthetic improvement. Albany has recognized this and has taken steps improve the attractiveness of the strip.

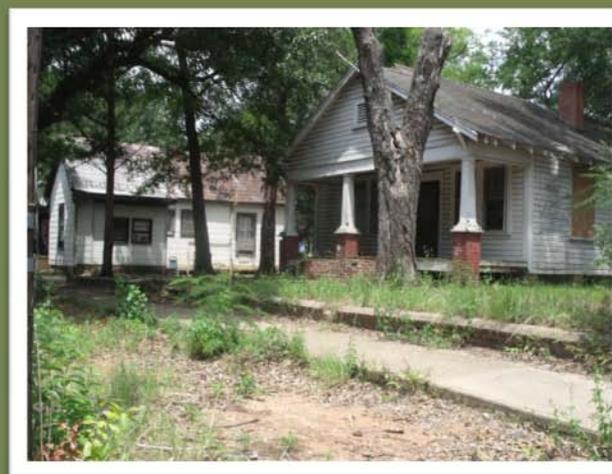
# Areas with significant infill development opportunities, including scattered vacant sites, large abandoned structures, or sites that may be environmentally contaminated

Downtown Albany is the largest downtown in the Southwest Georgia Region and was once a vibrant commercial area and regional center. Downtown Albany declined steadily over the past 20 or more years, stores have either gone out of business or relocated to other areas of town and now downtown has many vacant buildings. The Albany Downtown Inner City Authority (ADICA) is taking a comprehensive approach to examine the problem and potential efforts to revitalize downtown Albany.



The Marine Corps Logistics Base in Dougherty County has the potential to increase in capacity. Expansion would mean an increase in the number of employees and facilities and a corresponding increase in the need for goods and services throughout the area.

For decades East Albany has been characterized by high crime and substantial disinvestment, but will see investment in the area where there is an abundance of inexpensive land.



Areas of significant poverty, disinvestment and high rates of unemployment generally correspond to vacant sites and areas with significant infill opportunities. Those areas are found throughout the region, and are not concentrated in any particular place. Aside from Lee County, which generally compares more favorably than other counties in the region, the counties are fairly consistent to one another in terms of poverty levels and areas of disinvestment. All counties in the region aside from Lee County are areas of "persistent poverty," where at least 20% of the population has been below the poverty threshold for three decades, as measured by the last four consecutive decennial Censuses.

**Areas of significant disinvestment, levels of poverty, and/or unemployment substantially higher than average levels for the region as a whole.**







To help determine how consistent Southwest Georgia's development is with the Department's Quality Community Objectives (QCOs), 58 governments in the region were asked to evaluate themselves with the help of the Quality Growth Assessment Tool. The Quality Community Objectives consider the development patterns and options that will help Georgia preserve its unique cultural, natural and historic resources and provide an overall view of a community's policies. Combined with the insights of Regional Commission staff, this section will assess how well Southwest Georgia is developing sustainable and livable communities.

# Do We Measure Up?

Quality Community Objectives Analysis



## Traditional Neighborhoods

*Traditional neighborhood development patterns should be encouraged, including the use of more human scale development, compact development mixing of uses within easy walking distance of one another, and facilitating pedestrian activity.*

Older neighborhoods with tree-lined streets and pedestrian access are hallmarks of desirable traditional neighborhood design. Many of these places developed organically and were a reflection of the values, styles and means available at the time and are sometimes difficult to replicate today.

In order to achieve similar design and function today, a community must require that traditional neighborhood elements are included in new construction. Most Southwest Georgia communities have subdivision regulations, and 39 of 57 (68%) of communities have a zoning ordinance that separates uses in each district. However, with only one exception, their codes do not incorporate neo-traditional development concepts and design elements. As a result, subdivision development is almost exclusively results in homes of similar design and price range that lack the diversity of design, cost and residents found in traditional neighborhoods.

While many communities in Southwest Georgia make an effort to maintain public spaces by ensuring vegetation is pruned and street trash is collected, most do not make investments in street beautification. Only a handful of communities have a tree ordinance that requires developers to plant trees in new subdivisions and even fewer have an organized tree-planting initiative in their community.

Neighborhoods with a school typically have sidewalks that allow young children to walk to and from school. However, in many of the rural communities in this region, there often is not a neighborhood school, and sidewalks are often found only around historic commercial areas and pre-World War II neighborhoods. Many schools are located on highways where it would be dangerous for children to walk. Most school districts bus children between home and school and any children who do not ride the bus are typically driven to school by parents. Few children walk or bike to school even in the larger cities within the region.

Since sidewalks are typically found only in downtowns, older neighborhoods, or along heavily traveled urban transportation arteries, running errands on foot is not only difficult and time consuming it can be treacherous. Many areas that people would typically travel to such as grocery stores, shopping centers, schools or libraries, often have limited or no pedestrian and bicycle access.



Most communities have neighborhoods that were built when small lots were the standard prior to the larger lot sizes prevalent today. As existing housing stock in older neighborhoods ages and in some cases is allowed to become deteriorated or abandoned, areas become ripe for redevelopment and infill development.

Some zoning codes in the region require developers to obtain a variance in order to allow development on lots that would be considered substandard by today's development standards. Encouraging and allowing infill development maintains the existing character of neighborhoods, maximizes the use of existing infrastructure, and helps provide housing choices for those who don't have the desire or means to live in a large home.

Brownfield redevelopment does not occur frequently in the region, due to the remediation expense associated with brownfield sites and the abundance of vacant lands that are not contaminated. Without incentives, the cost of site clean-up on a brownfield site can outweigh any savings to a developer. 61% of the local governments have an inventory of vacant sites available for redevelopment, based on information from utility usage, delinquent tax properties and code enforcement efforts.



*Traditional downtown areas should be maintained as the focal point of the community or, for newer areas where this is not possible, the development of activity centers that serve as community focal points should be encouraged. These community focal points should be attractive, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly places where people choose to gather for shopping, dining, socializing, and entertainment.*

Though Southwest Georgia remains heavily rural and agricultural products continue to make up its main exports, communities are doing very little in regards to ensure that farmland is protected from development. Thirty-nine communities admitted to not having a plan (outside of their local comprehensive plans) that specifically addressed the protection of farmland. Many may be relying on large landowners keeping their property within their families and therefore reducing development threats.

For many rural communities that desire new development, any type of development is considered good, and local governments are as accommodating as possible. Most do not have a design guidebook, or design standards to encourage developers to be sensitive to the region and existing architectural styles.

Unfortunately, many governments do not have the resources to develop such a guidebook, and it may be viewed as unnecessary for communities who may go years between new developments. There is also a fear of discouraging developers with additional requirements. Over half of the regions communities express the desire of maintaining or creating a distinct character that would define them from other similar sized communities in the area, but do not have adequate regulations in place to help them achieve that goal.



## Transportation Alternatives

*Alternatives to transportation by automobile, including mass transit, bicycle routes, and pedestrian facilities, should be made available in each community. Greater use of alternate transportation should be encouraged.*

Living in a rural area often involves a high degree of car dependence and existing development patterns reflect a general acceptance of having to drive to get things and go places.

Sidewalks are non-existent in most areas, because of low population densities and pedestrian volumes that cannot justify the considerable expense of sidewalk construction. Fewer than 20% of Southwest Georgia communities require that sidewalks be provided in new development, or that new sidewalks connect to anything within the community.

Bicycles still offer a means of transportation, particularly for the health conscious, environmentally aware, and economically disadvantaged. Unfortunately, there are few bicycle lanes to be found in the region and planning for bicycle routes is minimal. It is not uncommon to find a lone bicyclist traveling down the same highway alongside a tractor trailer.

There are few options for those without a car. Only the City of Albany has a public bus route.

Public transportation in the traditional sense is limited outside of Albany. A public transit system operates throughout the region that functions on a demand response basis, rather than along fixed routes. There are also social-service based ride programs operating within the region that are participant based. While this is an option for some, priority is given to program participants before the general public. Public trips can be arranged through transit providers but scheduling pick-up and drop-off times is subject to availability and can be at inconvenient times. Therefore, many still rely on transportation from friends and family in order to get around.



*Each region should promote and preserve a regional "identity," or regional sense of place, defined in terms of traditional architecture, common economic linkages that bind the region together, or other shared characteristics.*

*The traditional character of the community should be maintained through preserving and revitalizing historic areas of the community, encouraging new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community, and protecting other scenic or natural features that are important to defining the community's character.*

Southwest Georgia has elements that bind it together as a region as well as link it with the rest of rural Georgia. Whether it's agricultural production or the traditional architectural styles distinctive to the region, Southwest Georgia has a unique agricultural character.

This agricultural character is not merely being rural or having an abundance of open space. Only in Southwest Georgia can one quickly pass from city to farm. From downtown towards the outskirts of town, development in Southwest Georgia transitions abruptly from low density housing to agricultural land. Land that is being actively farmed extends only feet from most county roadways and some tracts straddle between City and County lines. It is not uncommon to travel miles of Southwest Georgia roads and encounter nothing but one farm after another. Most cities even have agriculturally zoned and utilized land.

The agricultural character leads to collaboration beyond fields and farms. Southwest Georgia is a "Small Town" Region in that despite jurisdictional boundaries, residents form a regional family where everyone knows everyone else. Whether through familial ties, farming co-ops, or other business interactions, being connected in multiple counties across the region is common for residents of Southwest Georgia.

Many areas promote tourism based on what is unique to their community. Whether it's the Grits Festival in Warwick, the Rattlesnake Round-Up in Whigham, Swine Time in Climax or Swamp Gravy in Colquitt, communities across Southwest Georgia celebrate what makes them different from any other community in Georgia.

Most towns and cities were developed in the mid to late 1800s and early part of the twentieth century along railroad lines, and centered on a downtown commercial center. Buildings are generally modest designs that feature brick commercial structures of one or two stories, and wood framed, gable roofed residences that commonly feature front porches. Ranch-style homes frequently dominate the residential landscape, but traditional farmhouses and shot-gun style homes are reminders of the region's agricultural heritage.

While many communities identified areas that are important parts of their history and heritage, preservation of these places is limited. 24 communities claimed to have designated historic districts in their community, and 20 stated they have an active historic preservation commission, but not all of them actually regulate development in historic districts. Many communities have districts listed on the National Register, but a listing offers little or no protection of historic resources. In some cases local governments think their resources are protected when they are not. Without local regulations, many older historic structures are vulnerable.





### Open Space Preservation & Environmental Protection

*New development should be designed to minimize the amount of land consumed, and open space should be set aside from development for use as public parks or as greenbelts/wildlife corridors. Compact development ordinances are one way of encouraging this type of open space preservation. Environmentally sensitive areas should be protected from negative impacts of development, particularly when they are important for maintaining traditional character or quality of life of the community or region. Whenever possible, the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation of an area should be preserved.*

Due to the widespread presence of flood prone areas in Southwest Georgia, most communities are concerned with storm water management best practices, because of the potential risk of loss of property and life during rainy seasons.

Most of the communities have adopted Part V Environmental ordinances while other communities have some form of environmental protection measures in place. However, without a widely accepted and regionally applied set of standards, each community may adopt (or not adopt) their own, ultimately undermining the region's efforts.

There is limited greenspace preservation planning taking place in the region. Most communities don't have a greenspace plan, a tree planting or a tree preservation ordinance.

Few communities are using tools such as the purchase/ transfer of development rights or conservation easements. While all of the communities have a subdivision ordinance, most of the ordinances do not help to protect openspace.



## Growth Preparedness

*Each community should identify and put in place the prerequisites for the type of growth it seeks to achieve. These might include infrastructure (roads, water, sewer) to support new growth, appropriate training of the workforce, ordinances and regulations to manage growth as desired, or leadership capable of responding to growth opportunities and managing new growth when it occurs.*

Many communities are not able to make infrastructure related decisions based on population projections because such data is not readily available for less populated cities. While almost  $\frac{3}{4}$ 's of the regions local governments feel their elected officials are knowledgeable regarding the development process, few communities are taking an active and coordinated approach to Citizen Education beyond what they are legally required to do under procedural necessity of a development or zoning review process.

In an effort to keep local taxes low, many communities do not charge enough for services to cover future infrastructure repair or expansion. As a result of this deferred maintenance, many local governments are put in the position of being reactive rather than proactive when it comes to growth preparedness.

## Regional Solutions

*Regional solutions to needs shared by more than one local jurisdiction are preferable to separate local approaches, particularly where this will result in greater efficiency and less cost to the taxpayer.*

Many of the smaller cities have working relationships with their counties, and partner with them to provide services they would otherwise be unable to support or address on their own such as code enforcement, fire and police protection, development review, and road and drainage maintenance. Local governments stay abreast of regionally important issues by attending seminars, informational meetings and training sessions provided by the Regional Commission. Local Chambers of Commerce throughout the region may provide additional opportunities for networking and discussion of how communities facing similar issues can work together.



### **Educational Opportunities**

*Educational and training opportunities should be readily available in each community – to permit community residents to improve their job skills, adapt to technological advances, or to pursue entrepreneurial ambitions.*

Economic development organizations across the region strive to recruit businesses that are compatible to Southwest Georgia’s natural and human resources. The industries that have been attracted to the area often provide a strong boost in the creation of unskilled labor positions, but leave few opportunities for skilled labor and managerial positions. 59% of the region’s communities recognize that there is room for improvement when it comes to promoting entrepreneurship as well as diversifying the job base. Many communities are reliant upon one or two major companies for employment. Hence, the sudden exit of these companies from the regional job market would deal a major blow to its economy that would take years to rebound from. Globalization of manufacturing has hurt employment in the region significantly as many jobs are now being filled overseas.



### **Appropriate Businesses Employment Options**

*The businesses and industries encouraged to develop or expand in a community should be suitable for the community in terms of job skills required, long-term sustainability, linkages to other economic activities in the region, impact on the resources of the area, and future prospects for expansion and creation of higher skill job opportunities. A range of job types should be provided in each community to meet the diverse needs of the local workforce.*

Southwest Georgia has a number of options for higher education, including Albany State University and Darton College in Albany, Bainbridge College, Thomas University in Thomasville and multiple technical colleges and satellite branches in the region. LaGrange College and Troy State University have satellite campuses in Albany that offering B.S. and graduate degrees. Unfortunately, jobs in some of the higher skilled fields that students may graduate from are either not in this area or are in short supply, causing some graduates to leave the region if they want to pursue a career in their field of study.

There are few communities in the region that have a housing strategy or plan, so solutions to housing problems are often knee-jerk or haphazard with little regard to long-term needs. In a great majority of the communities, the housing choices are few. Many communities lack enough affordable housing, particularly for those with low to moderate incomes and those that have special needs. Available homeownership opportunities are often missed due to the poor credit of potential buyers. The number of manufactured housing in the region confirms the lack of affordability in the housing market. Families report choosing manufactured housing because of its affordability and flexible financing options.

Most communities need more multifamily and rental housing that meets the needs of “newcomers” and young families, but community opposition to multifamily housing often poses a significant obstacle to this type of development. New residents to the region sometimes must settle in a neighboring county from their place of employment because of limited housing choices.

Several communities have far too much substandard housing. Unfortunately, there are very few housing programs to help communities with issues such as rehabilitation or demolition, so the situation continues to worsen. Solutions are often expensive and are often not implemented due to many governments’ limited budgets and reluctance to increase revenues.



Deteriorating housing is often concentrated in older traditional neighborhoods with smaller lot sizes, and many communities who want to promote redevelopment in these older areas need to revise ordinances to allow developers and nonprofits an easier and more streamlined process to allow for redevelopment. The few nonprofits and other community development corporations in the region often work autonomously without partnering or working with the local government. This highlights the opportunity for more local governments to partner with these groups.









The following data were used to check the validity of the potential issues and opportunities and projected development patterns map in the areas of Population, Economic Development, Housing, Community Facilities and Services, Transportation and Intergovernmental Coordination.

Supporting Data and Analysis

# We've Got Proof

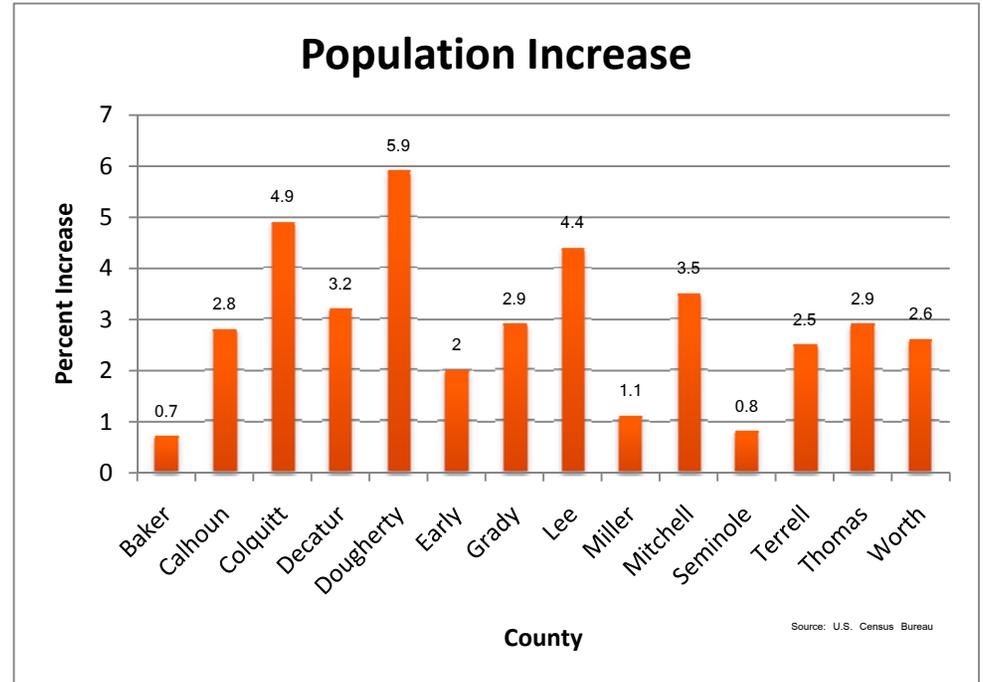
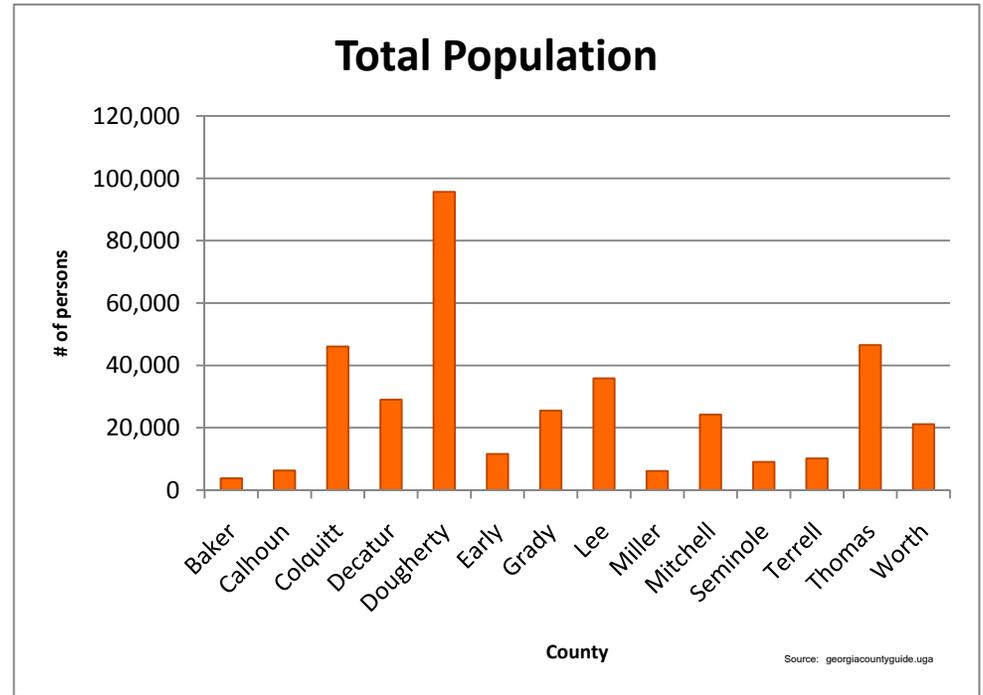
# Total Population

According to University of Georgia estimates, the region has seen an average increase of 4.1% from 2000 to 2008. The population increased by 15,328 people to 370,810 during that time. In that same time period, the population increase of the state of Georgia increased from about 8.2 million to 9.7 million-an 18% increase of about 1.5 million people.

Georgia saw significant growth in the 2000s, about twice as high as the national rate of growth, and was the fourth fastest growing state in that time period. That growth, however, did not occur evenly across the state. Growth rates in Southwest Georgia were about half the national average in a state growing at twice the national average. The area is projected to grow to at least 408,000 by the end of 2030, based on current growth rates.

The trend between the last two Census counts showed that the United States had grown less rural. In 2000, 17.3% of the nation's population lived in rural counties, decreasing to 16.4% just nine years later. Meanwhile, nationally, the country grew increasingly urban.

The population in the region is not evenly distributed across the region, as seen in the graph above. Over one-quarter of the region's population lives in Dougherty County; which has a population of 95,655. In 2000, the region's population was 435,227, and represented 5.3 % of Georgia's population.



# Age Distribution

About 12% of southwest Georgia's population was 65 years old or older at the last Census count, which was a slight increase of about .3% from the 1990 count. All counties except for three had an increase in the proportion of seniors, and only two showed a decrease in the actual number of seniors. The region's elderly population is likely to continue to grow. The region's school aged (5-19) population shows an increase and the overall numbers will most likely continue to increase. The combined growth of the school-age and the elderly segments of the population will increase the demand for schools and health care services.

AGE DISTRIBUTION 1990				
County	Under 5	Ages 5-19	18 +	65+
Baker	269	933	2,535	476
Calhoun	360	1,262	3,557	852
Colquitt	2,681	8,861	26,268	5,173
Decatur	1,925	3,332	17,911	3,300
Dougherty	8,131	25,088	66,994	9,834
Early	907	3,002	8,290	1,881
Grady	1,472	4,880	14,553	2,946
Lee	1,220	4,505	11,034	1,057
Miller	428	1,478	4,550	1,046
Mitchell	1,582	5,566	13,847	2,663
Seminole	609	2,071	6,645	1,334
Terrell	838	2,607	7,489	1,601
Thomas	2,971	9,334	27,827	5,437
Worth	1,617	5,016	13,755	2,294
<b>Regional</b>	<b>25010</b>	<b>77935</b>	<b>225255</b>	<b>39894</b>

Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

AGE DISTRIBUTION 2000				
County	Under 5	Ages 5-19	18+	65+
Baker	294	642	2961	557
Calhoun	381	1,193	4,925	794
Colquitt	3,193	9,694	30,510	5,405
Decatur	2,164	6,700	20,178	3,743
Dougherty	7,336	22,991	69,489	11,208
Early	876	3,007	8,813	1,945
Grady	1,663	5,456	17,206	3,128
Lee	1,807	6,501	17,168	1,570
Miller	382	1,455	4,705	1,092
Mitchell	1,723	5,543	17,392	2,810
Seminole	676	2,040	6,919	1,477
Terrell	850	2,626	7,856	1,425
Thomas	2,880	9,849	31,136	5,870
Worth	1,529	5,374	15,683	2,629
<b>Regional</b>	<b>25,754</b>	<b>83,071</b>	<b>254,941</b>	<b>43,653</b>

Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

# Race and Ethnicity

Between 1990 and 2000, Latino population grew by 299.6%, while Georgia's total population grew by 26.4%. During the same time period, the Latino population in Southwest Georgia increased from 4,712 to 10,717, representing an increase of 227%. All the counties in the region, with the exception of one, had an increase in the number of Latinos. Approximately 62 counties in Georgia experienced a Latino population increase greater than 299.6%. Both the state and the region far surpassed the national increase in Latinos of 58% in the last Census count. During the 1990s, North Carolina was the only state that experienced a higher rate of Hispanic population growth than Georgia.

By 2009, three out of every four Americans lived in an urban county. Whites' share of the population decreased across the board between 2000 and 2009. The largest decrease in white population took place in urban counties, but rural counties had declines in the proportion of their white populations, too. In Southwest Georgia, two counties showed an increase in the share of whites as the total population. All other counties showed a decrease.

County	White	Black or African American	American Indian and Alaska Native	Asian or Pacific Islander	Other Race	Hispanic or Latino
Baker	1,747	1,861	1	2	4	21
Calhoun	2,047	2,953	12	1	0	8
Colquitt	27,047	8,861	75	42	620	1588
Decatur	15,228	10,070	66	41	106	472
Dougherty	47,034	48,387	250	452	188	816
Early	6,579	5,226	31	16	2	45
Grady	13,664	6,395	77	22	121	289
Lee	13,007	3,135	31	46	31	112
Miller	4,542	1,726	6	4	2	20
Mitchell	10,414	9,647	53	16	145	260
Seminole	6,031	2,943	22	10	4	530
Terrell	4,251	6,377	8	15	2	40
Thomas	23,971	17,759	100	65	91	289
Worth	13,540	6,051	55	37	62	222
<b>Regional</b>	<b>189,102</b>	<b>131,391</b>	<b>787</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>1,378</b>	<b>4,712</b>
Georgia	4,600,148	1,746,565	13,348	75,781	42,374	108,922
United States	199,686,070	29,986,060	1,959,234	7,273,662	9,804,847	22,354,059

Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

County	One Race	White	Black or African American	American Indian and Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Other Race	Two or more Races	Hispanic or Latino
Baker	4,049	1,932	2,053	9	0	1	54	25	111
Calhoun	6,289	2,418	3,930	9	4	0	28	31	189
Colquitt	41,582	28,503	9,869	124	105	15	2,966	471	4,554
Decatur	28,031	16,126	11,270	68	92	11	464	209	905
Dougherty	95,354	36,315	57,762	225	552	30	470	711	1,292
Early	12,258	6,212	5,942	25	23	7	44	96	152
Grady	23,467	15,285	7,133	217	72	2	758	192	1,222
Lee	24,589	20,361	3,838	60	208	3	119	18	300
Miller	6,362	4,485	1,845	11	3	5	13	21	44
Mitchell	23,764	11,864	11,455	48	65	12	320	168	491
Seminole	9,327	5,785	3,247	17	17	0	261	42	347
Terrell	10,894	4,163	6,658	22	38	3	10	76	136
Thomas	42,372	25,207	16,607	126	176	24	232	365	734
Worth	21,846	15,090	6,495	78	48	2	133	121	240
<b>Regional</b>	<b>350,184</b>	<b>193,746</b>	<b>148,104</b>	<b>1,039</b>	<b>1,403</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>5,872</b>	<b>2,546</b>	<b>10,717</b>
Georgia	8,072,265	5,327,281	2,349,542	21,737	173,170	4,246	196,289	114,188	435,227
United States	274,595,678	211,460,626	34,658,190	2,475,956	10,242,998	398,835	15,359,073	6,829,228	35,305,818

Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

# Income

The region's average per capita income is \$15,226 which is approximately 28% lower than both Georgia and the US average. Regional income levels have historically lagged behind the state and national averages, with only one county (Lee), showing any gains. With this one possible exception, it appears unlikely that the region will catch up to the state or national averages in the foreseeable future.

All counties in the region saw a decrease in the percentage of households in the lowest category (income less than \$9,999 annually), and with the exception of two counties (Seminole and Miller) all counties saw a decrease in the number of households making less than \$19,999 per year. Many households appear to have shifted up into the higher income categories. Much of the apparent increase is due to inflation and the corresponding increases of the minimum wage that occurred in the 1990s. The value of the dollar eroded roughly 31% during the 1990s, but the minimum wage increased 35% over the same time frame, perhaps resulting in a marginally improved relative income for the lowest earners. Generally, increases to the middle income earners (from \$20,000 to \$99,999) were about what would be expected from cost of living increases given to employees to offset inflation. Households in the top tiers (over \$100,000) did much better than other income groups. There was greater growth across the region in the top income categories than in the middle income categories.

All of the counties except for Lee are considered areas of persistent poverty. This designation signifies that more than 20% of a county's population lives below the poverty threshold and has for the past three decades. Three counties (Colquitt, Thomas and Worth) appear to be below the 20% mark based on projections. The 2010 Census will officially determine if these remain with the designation of persistent poverty. Slow progress has been made in most counties, with three counties (Decatur, Grady and Miller) just above the 20% level.

ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS										
County	In Labor Force	%	Mean travel time to work in minutes	Median Household Income	Median Family Income	Per Capita Income	Families below poverty level	%	Individuals below poverty level	%
Baker	1,742	56.5	28.3	30,338	36,438	16,969	217	19.9	951	23.4
Calhoun	2,234	43.9	26.4	24,588	31,019	11,839	314	23.2	1,328	26.5
Colquitt	19,396	60.8	22.5	28,539	34,792	14,457	1,797	16.1	8,205	19.8
Decatur	12,143	57.6	22.5	28,820	32,635	15,063	1,466	19.2	6,240	22.7
Dougherty	43,126	59.4	18.7	30,934	36,655	16,645	4,779	19.6	22,974	24.8
Early	5,279	57.4	22.8	25,629	31,215	14,936	732	22.2	3,094	25.7
Grady	10,898	60.6	24.4	28,656	34,253	14,278	1,092	16.7	4,982	21.3
Lee	12,480	68.8	21.4	48,600	53,132	19,897	447	6.5	1,958	8.2
Miller	2,983	60.4	21.9	27,335	31,866	15,435	298	16.9	1,322	21.2
Mitchell	9,493	52.5	26.5	26,581	31,262	13,042	1,329	22.3	5,793	26.4
Seminole	4,010	55.7	24.6	27,094	33,221	14,635	412	15.8	2,141	23.2
Terrell	4,573	55.9	23.0	26,969	31,693	13,894	657	22.7	3,069	28.6
Thomas	19,286	59.4	19.1	31,115	39,239	16,211	1,562	13.6	7,231	17.4
Worth	10,095	61.4	24.8	32,384	38,887	15,856	908	14.7	4,050	18.5
<b>Regional</b>	<b>157,738</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>23.35</b>	<b>29,827</b>	<b>35,451</b>	<b>15,226</b>	<b>16,010</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>73,338</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Georgia</b>	<b>4,129,666</b>	<b>66.1</b>	<b>27.7</b>	<b>42,433</b>	<b>49,280</b>	<b>21,154</b>	<b>210,138</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>1,033,793</b>	<b>14.5</b>
<b>United States</b>	<b>138,820,935</b>	<b>63.9</b>	<b>25.5</b>	<b>41,994</b>	<b>50,046</b>	<b>21,587</b>	<b>6,620,945</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>33,899,812</b>	<b>12.4</b>

Source: 2000 U.S.

# Economic Base

Each year the Department of Community Affairs ranks each of the state's counties based on certain economic factors, and ranks them in terms of how economically developed the counties are. In 2010 eight of the counties (57%) in the Southwest Georgia region were in the least developed category (Tier 1), four counties (29%) were considered Tier 2 (14%), and two counties were in Tier 3. No counties were ranked Tier 1.

Several regional clusters were identified during the last update to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), including Agriculture and Food Production, Medical and Tourism.

Top 5 Employment Sectors					
	Management	Sales	Production	Manufacturing	Government
Baker	26.5		25.1		21.5
Calhoun	22.6	21.4	26.6	20.4	24.6
Colquitt	23.9	21.9	23.1	20.6	16.3
Decatur	26.3	22.2	22.0	21.3	19.4
Dougherty	29.7	25.9	17.1	14.2	21.8
Early	23.2	22.0	27.6	22.3	18.3
Grady	24.1	22.1	21.9	17.5	17.8
Lee	29.5	32.6	13.8	13.9	20.5
Miller	26.3	22.0	24.0	18.3	20.7
Mitchell	24.2	21.4	23.2	18.5	20.9
Seminole	22.0	24.6	24.2	22.6	16.1
Terrell	23.6	20.3	28.4	24.2	19.9
Thomas	32.0	23.9	17.7	18.1	19.3
Worth	22.8	24.8	22.9	19.1	20.9

Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

## Agriculture and Food Production

The region is largely agricultural based with over 80 companies involved in agribusiness, to include jobs such as farming, chemical and fertilizer production and manufacture, vegetable, nut and animal processing, agriculture machine equipment manufacturing and repair, cotton ginning, and irrigation systems.

## Medical

Twelve of fourteen counties have their own hospital and they are major employers in each of the counties.

County	Name of Hospital(s)
Baker County	No Hospital
Calhoun County	Calhoun Memorial Hospital
Colquitt County	Colquitt Regional Medical Center
Decatur County	Memorial Hospital and Manor
	Archbold John D. Memorial Hospital
Dougherty County	Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital
	Palmyra Medical Centers
Early County	Early Memorial Hospital

County	Name of Hospital
Grady County	Grady General Hospital
Lee County	No Hospital
Miller County	Miller County Hospital
Mitchell County	Mitchell County Hospital
Seminole County	Donalsonville Hospital
Terrell County	Terrell Community Hospital
Thomas County	Archbold Memorial Hospital
Worth County	Phoebe Worth Medical Center

## Tourism

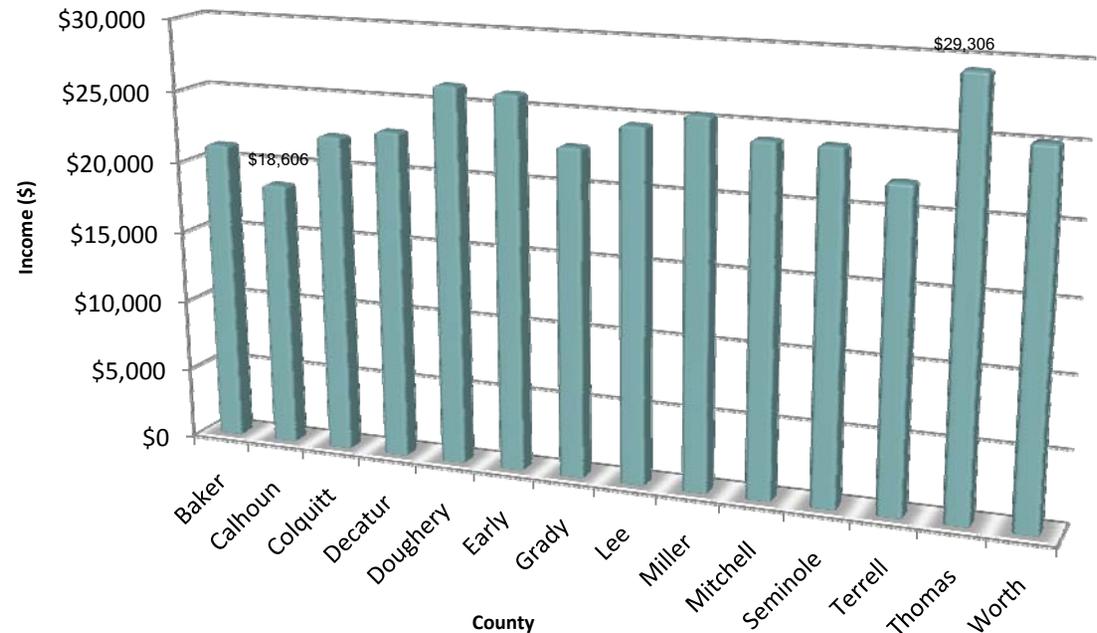
The region offers many tourism opportunities during local festivals, state and historic parks, wildlife management areas, and numerous plantations that attract tourists throughout the year.

# Labor Force

The region's labor force numbered 168,163 workers who were employed or seeking employment in 2009. The average unemployment rate in the region during 2009 was 9.6%, which was slightly higher than the state rate of 9.3% and significantly higher than the national rate of 7.4%.

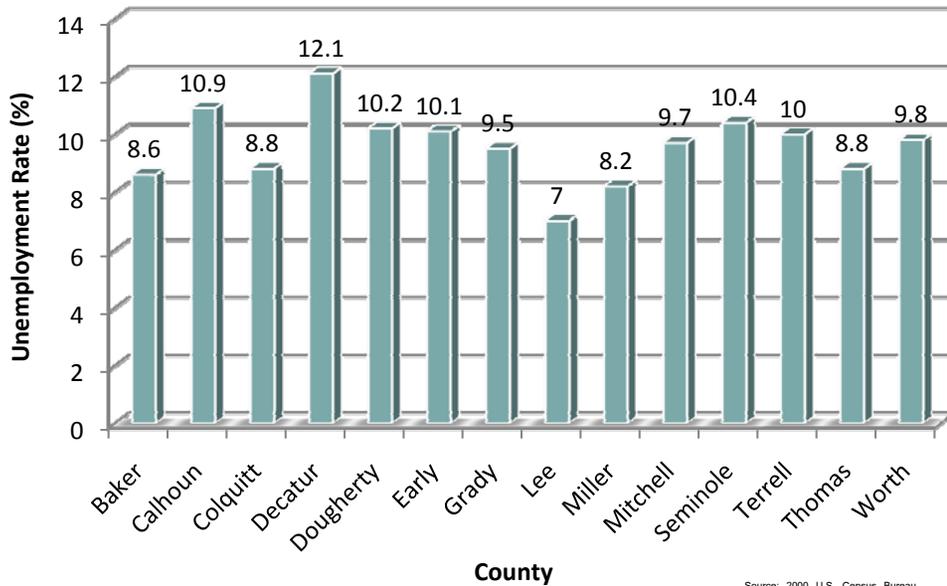
The average income per county in the region in 2006, as seen in the adjacent graph, ranged from a low of \$18,606 per-capita average per year, to a high of \$26,349. The average in the region was \$23,928 compared to the state average of \$32,928 and a national average of \$36,714.

## Average Income



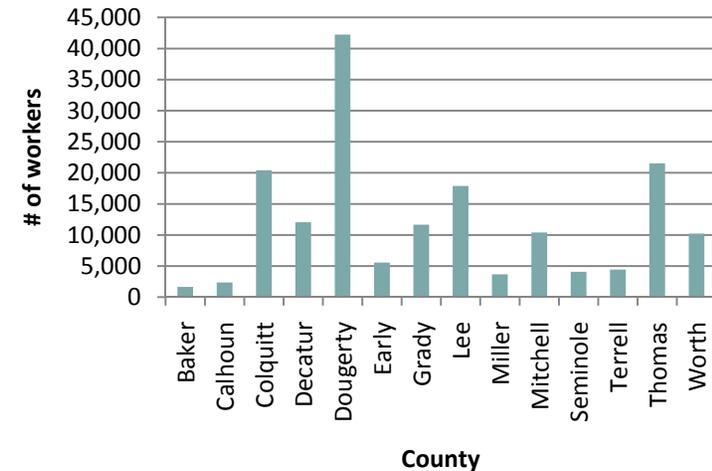
Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

## Unemployment Rate



Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

## Labor Force



Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

# Economic Trends

The recession was particularly severe in Georgia, especially in the Atlanta region. Southwest Georgia held up somewhat better, because the boom was not felt as strongly in the region outside of Lee County, however high unemployment and defaults on home mortgages have weakened the regional economy. Manufacturing jobs have been lost, but agriculture remains strong.

# Economic Resources

A number of programs and activities are supported by the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority including low interest loans for water and sewer projects, grants, and programs to help local governments work more efficiently and with less impact to the environment.

The Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) and the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), and the Georgia Department of Economic Development and One Georgia Authority also have various educational and assistance programs.

The Department of Community Affairs offers a number of programs, strategies and publications. The Georgia Department of Labor and the Georgia Academy for Economic Development also offer assistance programs.

# Housing Types & Mix

An assessment of the region's housing trends yielded new information and ideas to help move the region forward. As of 2000 the total number of housing units grew significantly over the previous 40 years, as housing needs changed throughout Southwest Georgia in that time period. The percentage of single family housing has gone from 78% of the housing stock in 1980 to 60% in 2000. There has been significant growth in manufactured housing throughout the region and that sector currently accounts for 22% of the housing stock whereas 40 years ago it was only 10%. Multi-family housing doubled since the 1980s providing a greater variety of housing choices for citizens. Modular housing is an increasingly popular housing choice for many consumers as they are comparable to, but somewhat less costly than stick-built homes.

Number and Types of Housing Units in Southwest Georgia - 1980

County	Total Units	Single Family		Multi-Family		Manufactured Housing	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Baker	1,264	1,013	80	62	5	189	15
Calhoun	1,942	1,662	86	124	6	156	8
Colquitt	12,936	10,221	79	1,223	9	1,492	12
Decatur	9,046	7,311	81	676	7	1,059	12
Dougherty	34,705	24,898	72	7,867	23	1,940	6
Early	4,667	3,838	82	310	7	519	11
Grady	7,089	5,889	83	338	5	862	12
Lee	3,870	2,764	71	242	6	864	22
Miller	2,561	2,192	86	120	5	249	10
Mitchell	7,026	5,763	82	543	8	720	10
Seminole	3,806	2,992	79	194	5	620	16
Terrell	4,138	3,449	83	408	10	281	7
Thomas	13,774	10,923	79	1,378	10	1,473	11
Worth	6,353	4,897	77	401	6	1,055	17
<b>Regional Totals</b>	<b>113,177</b>	<b>87,812</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>13,886</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11,309</b>	<b>10</b>

Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

Number and Types of Housing Units in Southwest Georgia - 1990

County	Total Units	Single Family		Multi-Family		Manufactured Housing	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Baker	1,499	988	66	23	2	488	33
Calhoun	2,061	1,555	75	86	4	420	20
Colquitt	14,350	9,601	67	1,623	11	3,126	22
Decatur	10,120	6,908	68	1,025	10	2,187	22
Dougherty	37,373	23,137	62	11,215	30	3,021	8
Early	4,717	3,401	72	294	6	1,019	22
Grady	8,129	5,595	69	522	6	2,012	25
Lee	5,537	3,537	64	445	8	1,555	28
Miller	2,602	1,910	73	169	6	523	20
Mitchell	7,443	5,020	67	782	11	1,641	22
Seminole	3,962	2,804	71	87	2	1,071	27
Terrell	4,069	3,065	75	395	10	609	15
Thomas	15,936	10,919	69	1,797	11	3,220	20
Worth	7,597	4,559	60	445	6	2,593	34
<b>Regional Totals</b>	<b>125,392</b>	<b>82,999</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>18,908</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>23,485</b>	<b>19</b>

Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

Number and Types of Housing Units in Southwest Georgia - 2000

County	Total Units	Single Family		Multi-Family		Manufactured Housing	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Baker	1,740	972	55.9	50	2.8	718	41.3
Calhoun	2,305	1,417	61.5	212	9.2	676	29.3
Colquitt	18,349	10,015	54.6	2,519	13.7	5,815	31.7
Decatur	13,391	8,161	60.9	1,661	12.4	3,569	26.7
Dougherty	41,599	24,259	58.3	15,021	36.1	2,319	5.6
Early	5,338	3,182	59.6	389	7.3	1,767	33.1
Grady	10,529	6,416	60.9	639	6.1	3,474	33
Lee	11,669	7,944	68.1	1,575	13.5	2,150	18.4
Miller	2,770	1,891	68.3	201	7.2	678	24.5
Mitchell	9,313	5,530	59.4	1,192	12.8	2,591	27.8
Seminole	4,742	2,947	62.1	142	3	1,653	34.9
Terrell	4,460	3,041	68.2	582	13	837	18.8
Thomas	20,010	13,461	67.3	2,853	14.2	3,696	18.5
Worth	9,448	5,238	55.4	718	7.6	3,492	37
<b>Regional Totals</b>	<b>155,663</b>	<b>94,474</b>	<b>60.7</b>	<b>27,754</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>33,435</b>	<b>21.5</b>

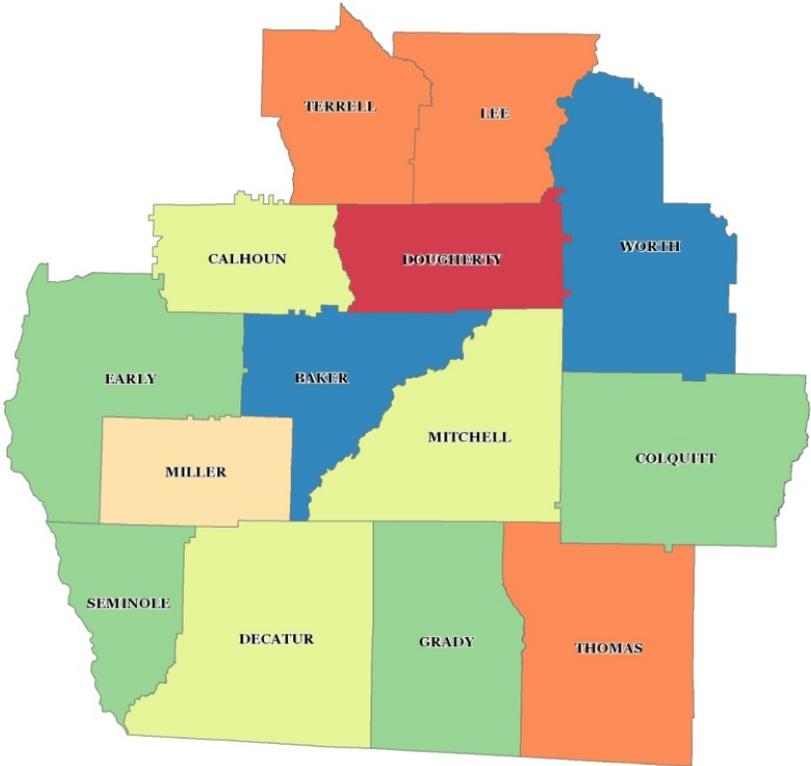
Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

# Percent of Housing Units that are Manufactured

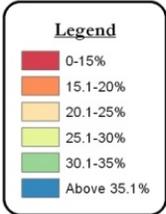
By County

Baker and Seminole Counties showed the greatest growth in manufactured housing over the last ten years. Baker County's manufactured housing accounts for 41% of the total housing stock. Worth County also has a very high number of manufactured housing accounting for 37% of its total housing units. Depreciating values on manufactured homes and the reduced amount of taxes collected on manufactured housing all contribute to declining budgets for many of Southwest Georgia's counties. Nine out of fourteen counties (64%) have over 25% manufactured housing units as a portion of their overall housing stock. While there are several factors associated with the high percentage of manufactured homes in the region, high poverty rates and low incomes play a significant role in the growing numbers.

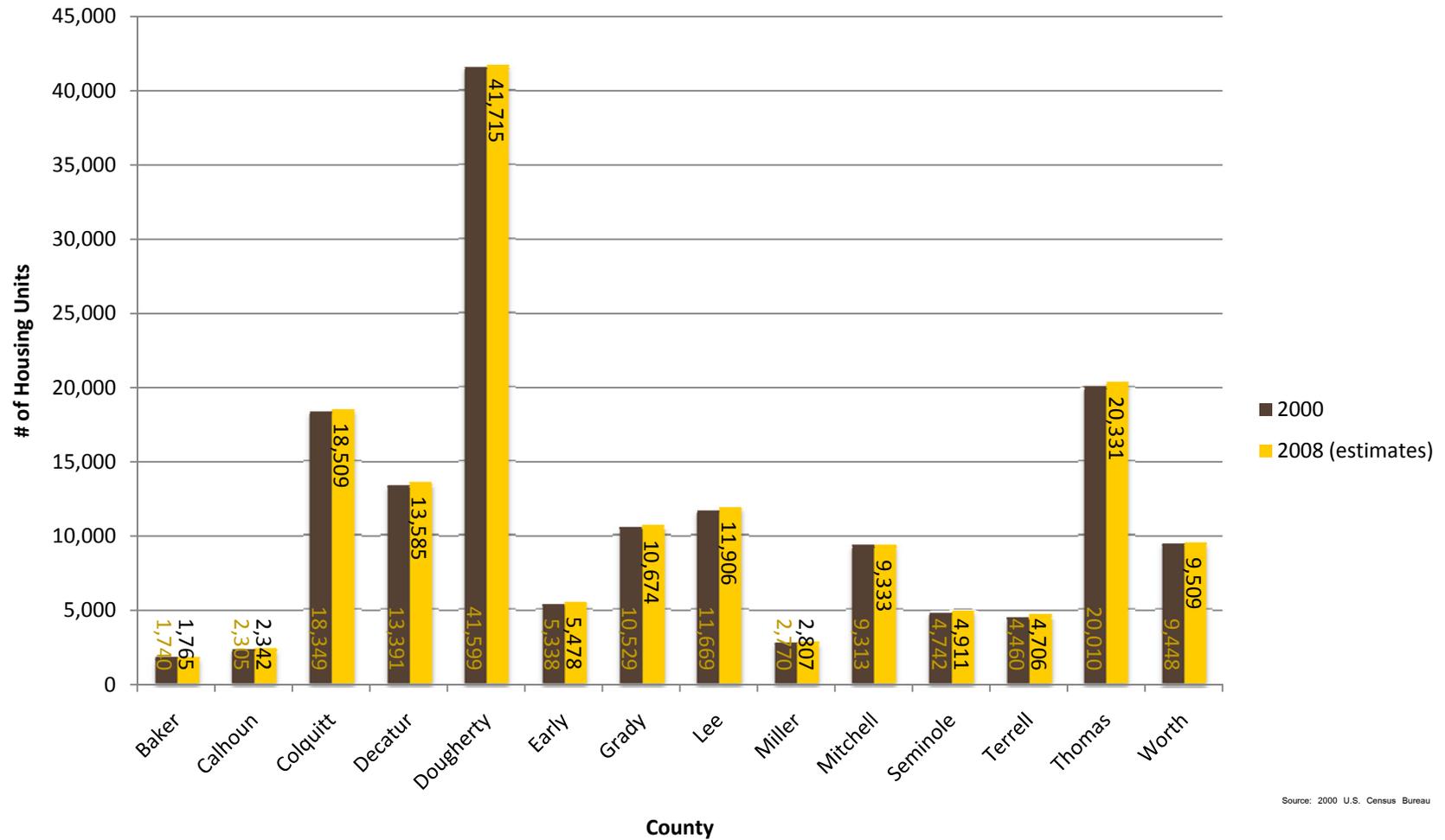
The growth of the manufactured housing industry along with the need for affordable housing choices all contribute to the growing numbers of manufactured houses. The proliferation of manufactured homes throughout the region continues to be a cause for concern for local governments. Many clusters of manufactured homes form without the benefit of long term planning or subdivision regulations, leading to poorly arranged, cluttered and unsightly areas. In addition, abandoned manufactured homes are costly for local governments to demolish. As manufactured homes continue to replace older housing stock, communities face the consequence of having short-term affordable homes, but at a usually much lower tax base. Manufactured housing will continue to be an important part of the affordable housing equation in Georgia.



Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau



## Total Housing Units



Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

# Condition and Occupancy

According to 2000 Census data, about half (52%) of the region's housing stock was built between 1980 and 1998. When you consider the large proportion of manufactured housing in the region and the fact that much of the youngest segment of the housing stock is nearly 30 years old, there appears to be significant potential for rehabilitation and revitalization in the region. 61% of the housing in Southwest Georgia is owner occupied, and the remaining percentage is rented.

Number of Homes by Age & County															
	Baker	Calhoun	Colquitt	Decatur	Dougherty	Early	Grady	Lee	Miller	Mitchell	Seminole	Terrell	Thomas	Worth	% of Region
Built 2005 or later	-	-	199	190	1,260	-	414	97	-	74	-	-	533	134	1.9%
1999 to March 2000	61	43	1,691	943	2,975	73	634	1,069	76	782	103	111	2,549	1,018	7.8%
1995 to 1998	204	198	3,326	3,055	5,142	656	2,615	4,648	206	2,106	447	455	3,849	2,198	18.7%
1990 to 1994	166	203	3,234	2,399	5,808	385	1,744	2,420	206	1,417	382	413	2,914	1,735	15.0%
1980 to 1989	354	348	3,300	2,281	8,957	1,070	1,615	1,954	390	1,632	881	579	2,860	1,577	17.9%
1970 to 1979	305	499	1,870	1,647	7,279	1,096	997	734	709	953	1,163	794	2,427	871	13.7%
1960 to 1969	260	388	2,123	1,201	6,239	769	1,280	321	451	861	892	545	1,857	905	11.6%
1940 to 1959	280	348	1,009	755	2,596	762	446	180	460	501	547	802	949	264	6.4%
1939 or earlier	110	278	1,597	920	1,343	527	784	246	272	987	327	761	2,072	746	7.0%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

Vacancy rates for owner occupancy is low (under 3.6%) and is comparable to state (3.5%) and national (2.5%) rates. The national and state vacancy rates for renter occupied units are 7.8% and 10.6% respectively. The regional range is 2.8%-11.5%. The least populous counties within the region have the highest vacancy rate among renters. The main cause is due to a lack of quality rental property in these areas which forces potential renters to seek housing opportunities in neighboring counties.

Vacancy Rates by Type and County																
	U.S.	Georgia	Baker	Calhoun	Colquitt	Decatur	Dougherty	Early	Grady	Lee	Miller	Mitchell	Seminole	Terrell	Thomas	Worth
Owner (%)	2.5	3.5	1.3	2.2	0.9	3.6	3.1	1.0	0.0	1.7	1.3	0.0	2.0	1.9	2.0	2.1
Renter (%)	7.8	10.6	11.5	8.6	4.6	7.1	6.6	6.9	2.8	8.5	9.4	7.4	10.2	8.5	6.0	7.3

Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

# Cost of Housing

The average value of homes in Southwest Georgia is substantially lower than both the state and national medians. Nationally, the median value for a home is \$192,400 whereas the state median value is \$163,500. 53.1% of the homes in Southwest Georgia are valued between less than \$50,000 and \$99,999. While the cost of a home is cheaper, renting a home is not. Georgia rents are higher than national rates. In Georgia, 30.4% of renters pay \$750-\$999 for rent per month. However, that is not the case with Southwest Georgia rents. 26% of renters in the U.S. pay \$500-\$749 per month rent and while Southwest Georgians are paying the same amount of rent there is a higher proportion (35.5%) of them who fall into this category.

Value of Owner-Occupied Units															
	Baker	Calhoun	Colquitt	Decatur	Dougherty	Early	Grady	Lee	Miller	Mitchell	Seminole	Terrell	Thomas	Worth	% Of Region
Less than \$50,000	190	434	2,888	1,677	2,333	740	1,395	1,119	448	1,498	779	708	1,513	1,577	21.9%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	218	309	2,754	2,102	6,563	845	1,926	1,264	452	2,153	744	797	2,566	1,975	31.2%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	61	50	1,532	1,708	3,882	143	827	2,400	108	585	186	181	1,700	798	17.9%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	18	20	785	1,082	2,205	95	793	1,359	64	703	97	55	1,997	530	12.4%
\$200,000 to \$299,999	12	18	629	569	2,085	46	731	1,202	31	364	24	16	1,725	248	9.7%
\$300,000 to \$499,999	0	0	459	321	764	0	233	383	5	232	8	0	1,207	247	4.9%
\$500,000 to \$999,999	0	0	124	101	274	0	127	94	0	88	0	5	340	70	1.5%
\$1,000,000 or more	0	0	16	0	100	0	98	0	0	13	0	8	165	19	0.5%

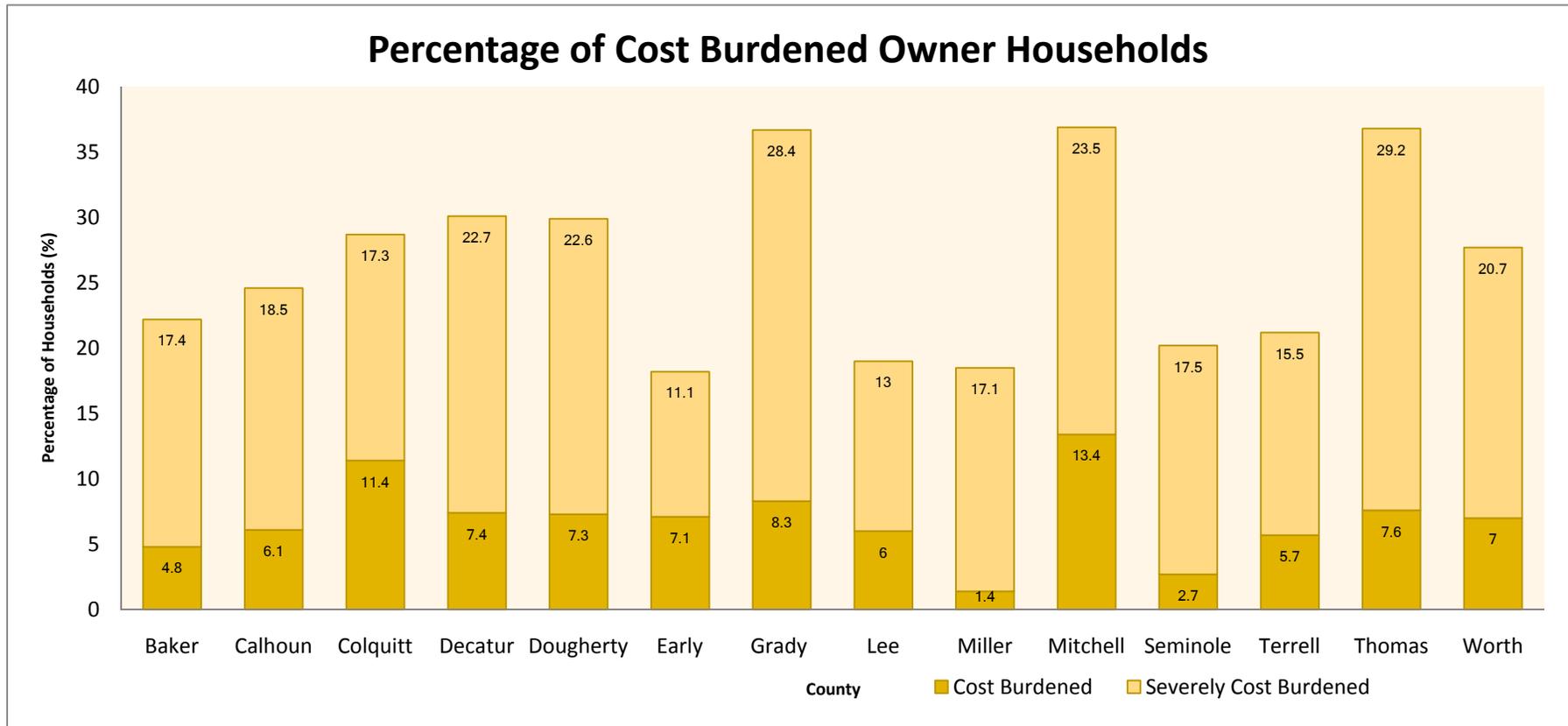
Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

Occupied Units Paying Rent																
	Baker	Calhoun	Colquitt	Decatur	Dougherty	Early	Grady	Lee	Miller	Mitchell	Seminole	Terrell	Thomas	Worth	Total	% of Region
Less than \$200	31	108	55	305	210	183	122	0	82	139	29	225	448	149	2,086	4.4%
\$200 to \$299	45	107	218	205	953	357	49	0	99	271	116	295	469	240	3,424	7.3%
\$300 to \$499	69	154	2,123	1,143	4,480	334	828	0	149	409	264	459	824	765	12,001	25.5%
\$500 to \$749	12	36	2,477	1,363	7,800	101	1,521	0	52	1,083	73	99	1,780	785	17,182	36.5%
\$750 to \$999	4	0	710	323	3,746	35	300	0	5	414	5	35	1,034	116	6,727	14.3%
\$1,000 to \$1,499	2	4	121	280	474	0	80	0	5	60	0	7	496	42	1,571	3.3%
\$1,500 +	0	2	11	54	77	11	14	0	0	12	3	0	93	0	277	0.6%
No Cash Rent	117	123	813	263	911	230	495	0	144	425	170	179	0	0	3,870	8.2%
Median Dollars	311	291	538	516	599	292	553	679	317	571	362	314	627	477	\$ 460.50	1.0%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

# Cost-Burdened Households

Cost burdened households devote too much of their budget to housing, rather than to other necessities, like food or health care. The chart above shows that most counties in Southwest Georgia are lower than state and national averages however; there are three counties (Grady, Mitchell, and Thomas) that have higher than average households that are severely cost burdened. In addition, Colquitt and Mitchell Counties have higher than state and national averages in regards to households that are cost burdened.

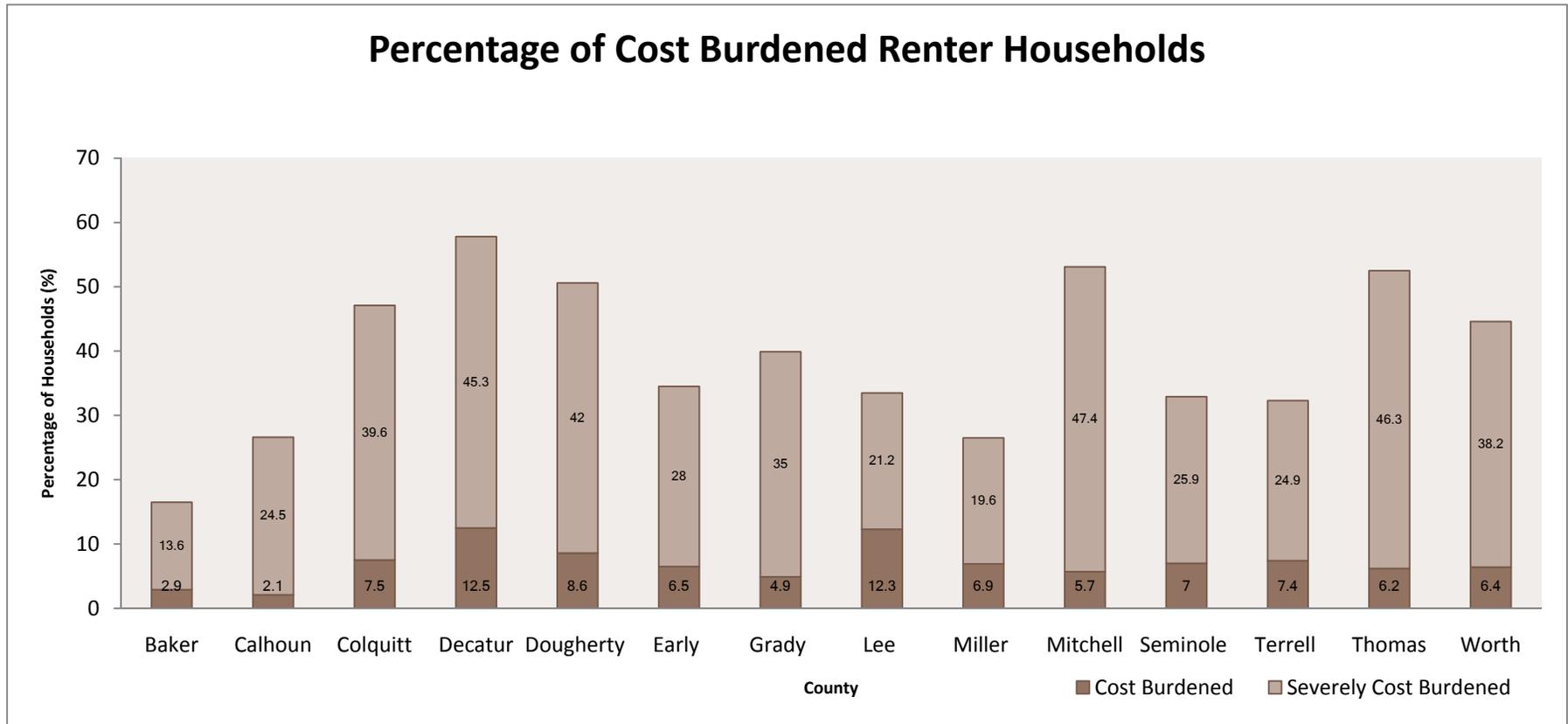


Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

The average median income in the region is \$29,827. Based on the 30% of the average income households that spend over \$745 a month in mortgage/rent are cost burdened. Keeping the average regional income in mind and the fact that over half of the homes in the region are valued at less than \$100,000, homeownership based strictly on the numbers appears to be affordable. What the numbers fail to consider are the household size, location of housing, credit scores, taxes, insurance and other liabilities that households may incur. Other factors that impact homeownership include maintenance, necessary upgrades or repairs and additional debt.

If a household is cost burdened, it affects more than just affordability. It also determines how much income is left over to meet other needs, how stable a household's living situation is, what school and employment options are available and what must be sacrificed in order to obtain it. For households currently paying a mortgage, an average of 7.1% are cost

burdened while 19.6% are severely cost burdened in Southwest Georgia. Nearly one-fourth of Southwest Georgians are living in a cost burdened home. Renters here do not fare well either. On average renters have 6.9% chances of being cost burdened and a 32.3% chance of being severely cost burdened.



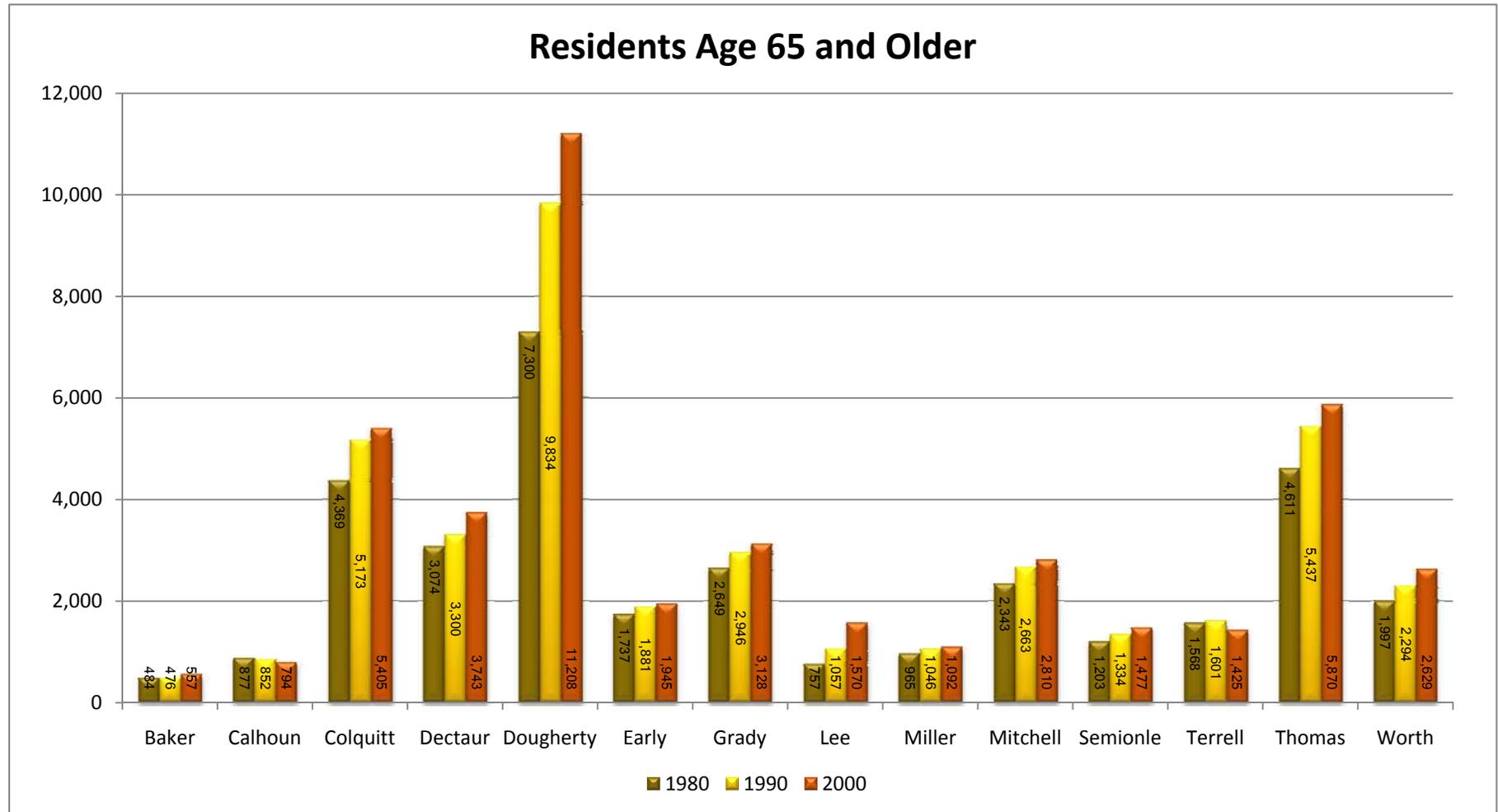
Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

The number of cost burdened households increased in recent years, despite stable rental prices and falling interest rates offsetting rising house prices. These figures do not include households that live affordably but are in overcrowded conditions. 60% of cost-burdened households are in the lower fourth of the income distribution, earning up to two times the full-time equivalent of the federal minimum wage, or around \$22,000 annually. 84% of all severely cost-burdened households are in this income group. While the number of low-income households continues to grow, the housing stock that is affordable to them is decreasing.

Cost burdened homes also have a correlation with other socioeconomic factors including income, income from social security or public assistance, employment status, occupations, household type, age of householder, household size, race and unit type. All these factors play into the likelihood of a home becoming cost burdened. With recent employment losses, cost burdened households will become even more prevalent.

# Special Needs Housing

The senior housing industry has grown significantly nationwide since the 1990s with an increase in senior housing and continuing care communities. There is a great need for this type of housing, particularly with the “graying” of the population in Southwest Georgia. A study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration of Aging released a 2002 report that stated that by the year 2030 the older populations of the United States (defined as 65 years or older) will more than double to 70 million. Many communities in the region are aware of this change and some are preparing for it.



Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

Regional statistics supports the national trends and also future trends. The population regionally is getting older. All counties excluding Baker, Calhoun and Terrell County have had consistent gains in population over the past three census reporting periods. Lee County in the last reporting period had a significant increase (48.5%), which should signal to local officials that housing must be built to accommodate this age group as well as those who are disabled and those who will

become disabled as they grow older. Sidewalks and walk able neighborhoods within communities should be encouraged as they connect residents with downtown and other areas that positively impact their quality of life.

Dougherty, Thomas and Mitchell have specialized housing for seniors and those with disabilities. A few communities are improving their sidewalks downtown but few are working to improve the safety, accessibility and appearance of sidewalks within neighborhoods. . Unfortunately, most communities do not have housing for all income levels especially the elderly and those persons with disabilities and other special needs. These groups tend to have fixed incomes and are adversely affected by tax increases. Many elderly residents are moving into apartments to combat the high cost of homeownership.

There are only four shelters in the region for victims of domestic violence and they are located in Thomas, Dougherty and Colquitt counties. More shelters are needed as well as more transitional housing that promotes permanent residency. These shelters lack adequate capacity, so some residents must seek assistance from neighboring counties. According to facility case managers the available shelters cannot accommodate the need. Many residents must find shelter outside of their county and region to find safety.

Many communities in the region have not been hospitable to special needs populations and low-income family housing. The more populated counties such as Dougherty and Thomas also have the largest number of homeless persons. The recent economic downturn has given rise to foreclosures which has substantially increased the number of people experiencing housing crisis. Many people in Southwest Georgia are living in overcrowded situations with family members and are on the brink of homelessness. Nationally, many elderly are facing homelessness in increasing numbers. In addition to the elderly who are facing housing crisis for the first time, there are also chronically homeless adults who are aging on the streets. Many are often diagnosed with a host of medical problems, and may suffer from a range of complex health, mental health, and substance abuse issues. These individuals require intensive case management services which are an integral part of the transition into permanent housing. Mental health staff in the region often finds it difficult to finding transitional/temporary housing and other resources for this group, particularly with current economic budget cuts and furloughs.

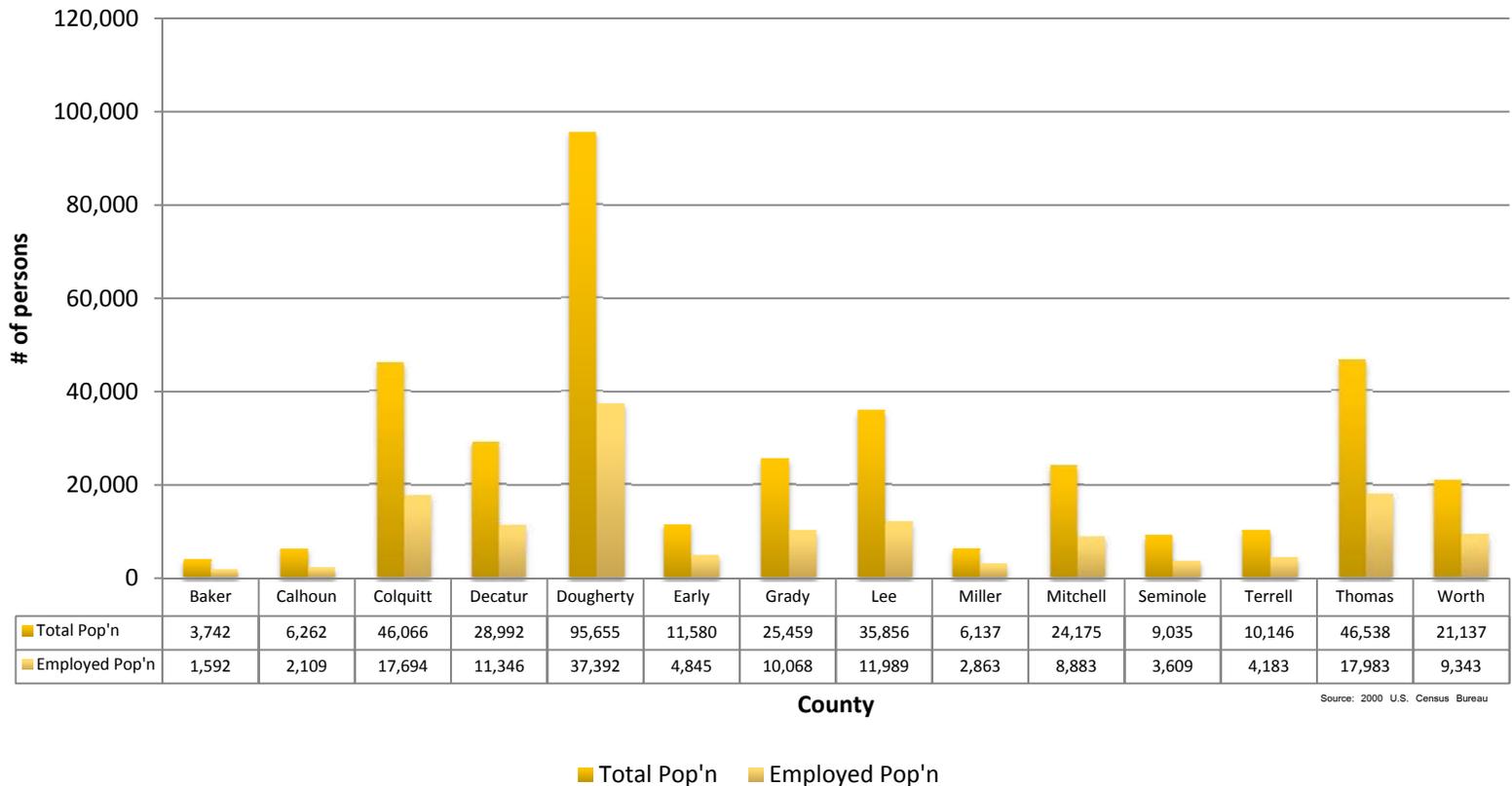
To facilitate the development of special needs housing, many communities will need to revise their zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations so that higher densities are permitted and that community residences, retirement living facilities and family day-care facilities are permitted uses within all residential zoning use districts. A few counties in our region (Thomas, Mitchell, Dougherty) are moving in that direction.

# Jobs-Housing Balance

A carefully planned community has a relatively even ratio of jobs-to-housing. Ideally, such a balance allows people to go to work without having to commute long distances. The cost of housing ranges from a low about \$50,000 to a high of almost \$140,000. In comparison, the average worker makes about \$10 per hour which makes purchasing a house difficult. Every county in the region struggles to bring "high paying" jobs to their community, and with the recent economic downturn, it is even more important for communities to support and encourage small business growth and development. Looking at the actual numbers, Colquitt, Dougherty, Grady, Lee, Miller and Worth counties offer the most employment for neighboring counties and had the highest increases in labor force participation over the past ten years. Most of the employment has been in the areas of management, sales, production, manufacturing and government. In order for the incomes of most households to increase more high paying jobs will be required.

The new information/high tech based economy encourages businesses to travel and these companies are less anchored than traditional businesses. Also the widespread use of new telecommunication technology has reduced the need for employees to travel to centralized work centers sites; they can work from home or at satellite work sites just as efficiently. This reinforces the natural inclination of new job growth to locate in communities like Dougherty and Lee where housing is in plentiful supply and continues to force many individuals to work in one county and live in another.

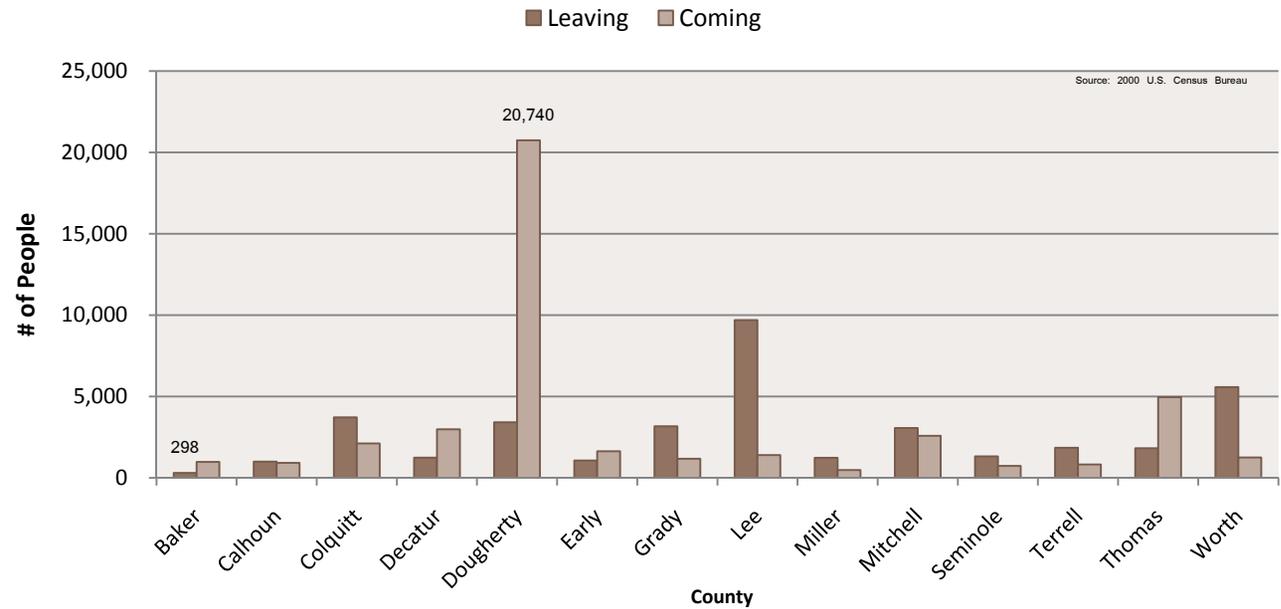
## Employed Population Comparison



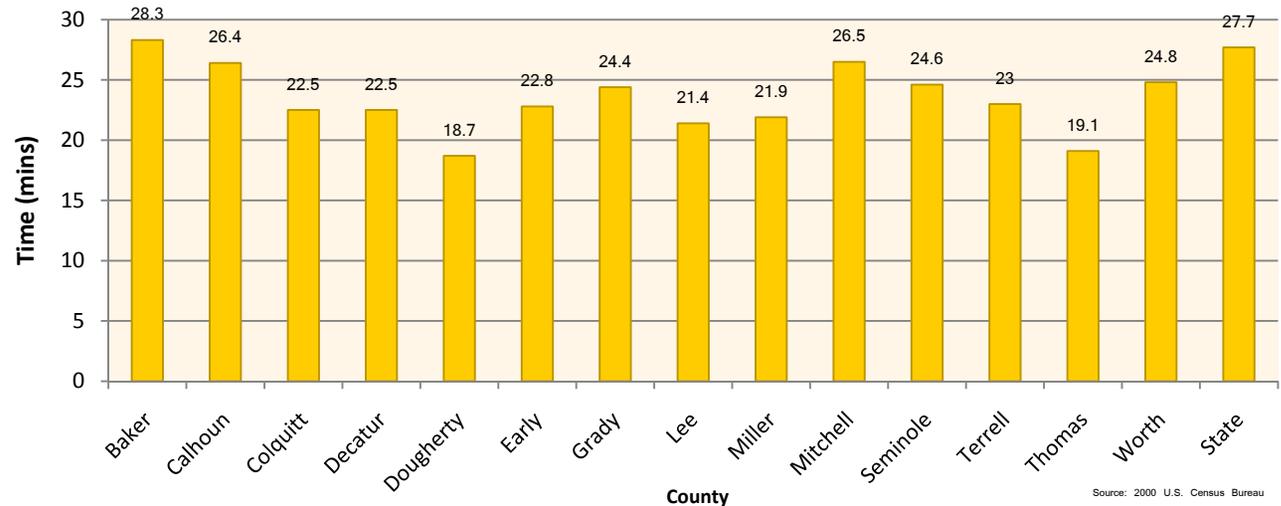
For the majority of Americans, a half hour or longer commute is average. A person living in southwest Georgia commutes an average of 23 miles per day to work. For counties where workers are employed in one county (such as Lee and Worth) but carry their paychecks home to another county, it signifies a poor jobs-to-housing ratio. Baker County cannot compete with Dougherty, Thomas and Decatur Counties, who are able to draw a diversity of workers and jobs. For the most part, individuals move to be closer to where they work (American Housing Survey).

Before owner occupied housing can increase in the region, the number of rental housing units must also increase, because new residents often prefer to rent for a while before buying. Housing opportunities for new workers are also important because without adequate housing, workers are forced to live outside of the community in which they live which dilutes the overall economic impact of new local developments. Until communities can offer more job opportunities, more residents will continue to commute or move to where the jobs are located. With cross county commuting to neighboring counties, particularly Dougherty, Thomas, Mitchell and Decatur, development of a regional economic development strategy that links transportation corridors is vital.

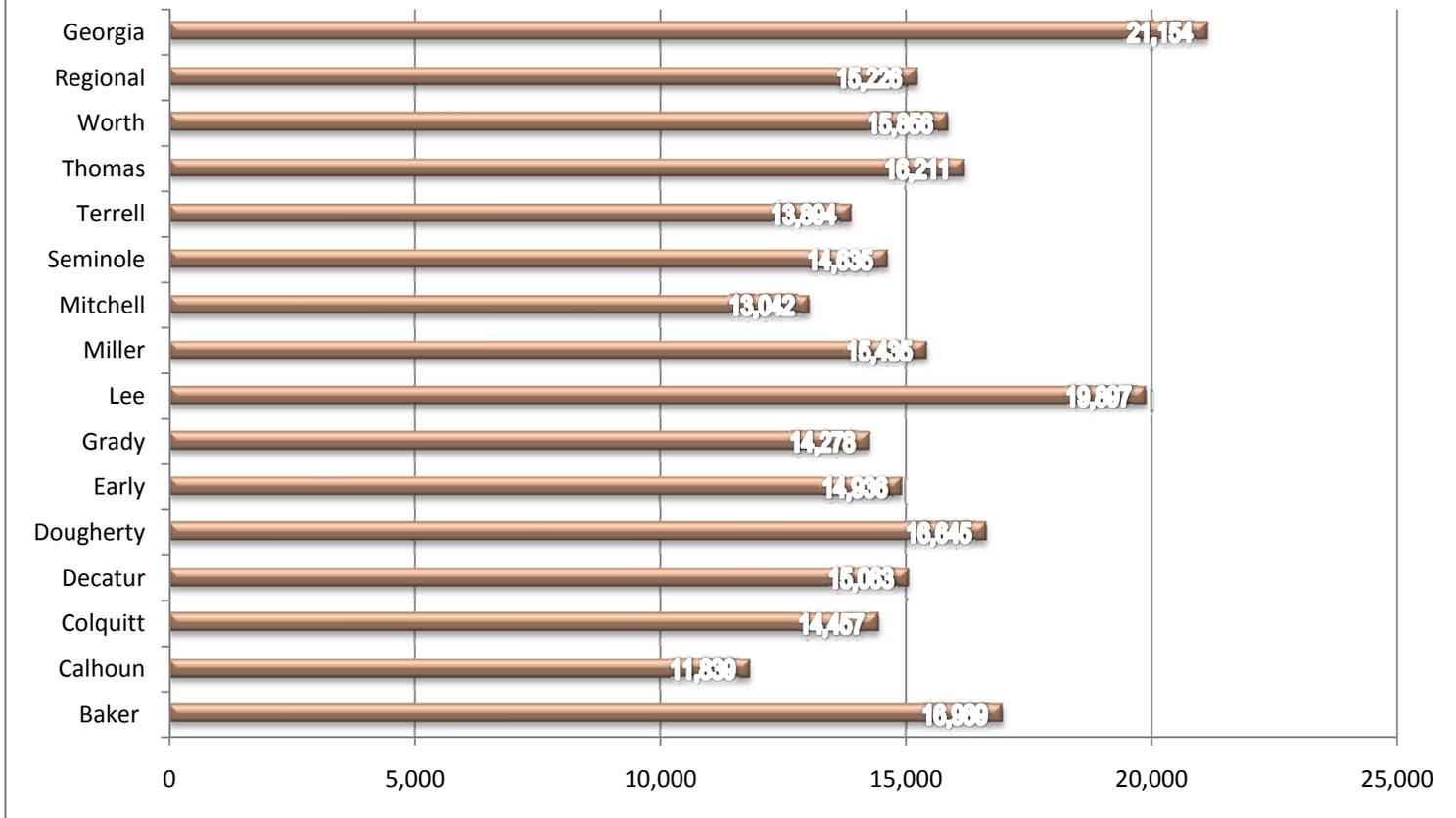
## Number of Residents Commuting



## Commute Length



## Per Capita Income (dollars)



Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

Per capita income is influenced by a variety of factors, namely education, which is also a general quality of life indicator. Low incomes severely limit the type and size of housing residents can afford.

In our region, the housing market doesn't provide affordable housing at the level most workers need. Lee, Thomas, Dougherty and Worth Counties have the highest per capita incomes, which range from \$15,000 to about \$20,000, still below the state average of almost \$22,000. The low incomes in the region are a barrier to affordable housing when the working class is unable to purchase the housing that is being built.

Most jobs that residents prefer are not next door. Most are in the next county which in most cases is at least 30 miles away. To allow people to live closer to their place of employment, planners and developers are tasked with achieving an adequate jobs-to-housing ratio. For the jobs to housing balance to work in a community other things have to work: education, job skills, and jobs-household structure balance. In the United States more than 50 percent of the households have more than one worker and on the average 30-40 percent of the households in region have at least one person employed.

The jobs in the region have not kept pace with the housing and most counties lack enough housing for the people who live there. In addition, because of our low educational attainments, communities cannot attract high tech/high paying jobs required to increase household salaries and incomes. In order for households to be able to afford a house they must have a job that pays at least enough to pay the mortgage. In addition, per capital income in the region ranges from 12,000 to 20,000 and the homes in Southwest Georgia are valued between \$50,000 and \$99,999, it is doubtful if a balance will ever be reached.

# Community Facilities and Services

## *Water Supply and Treatment.*

Southwest Georgia has an abundant supply of ground water which is the source of all municipal and individual potable water supplies in the Region. The Region overlays one of the world's largest ground water systems and is of excellent quality. Groundwater is utilized for municipal, commercial, industrial and agricultural use within the Region. All the cities have municipal water supply and distribution systems. The unincorporated areas, aside from urban fringe areas and industrial parks are not served by water distribution systems. Forty-three cities in Southwest Georgia provide public water service. There are some public suppliers of water in Southwest Georgia that provide service outside of their jurisdictional boundaries including Albany/Dougherty, Camilla, Moultrie, Pelham, Thomasville, Poulan, Sylvester and Warwick. For the most part, these cities offer limited service to residential and commercial developments adjacent to city limits. Moultrie provides water to the City of Riverside. In the year 2009, 20 percent of the region's population was served by a public water supply.

WATER RATES			
City/County	Services Provided (Water=W Sewer = S Both=B)	Number of Water Connections	Average Water Rate (Based on 5,000 gal per month)
Albany	B	33,476	\$13.19
Arlington	B	750	\$19.50
Attapulgus	W	300	\$7.88
Baconton	B	375	\$19.27
Bainbridge	B	6,200	\$12.50
Berlin	W	229	\$16.25
Blakely	B	2,634	\$22.73
Brinson	W	126	\$25.15
Bronwood	W	234	\$25.00
Cairo	W	3,902	\$15.25
Camilla	B	2,715	\$15.55
Climax	W	177	\$12.00
Colquitt	B	944	\$24.85
Coolidge	B	285	\$15.40
Damascus	W	110	\$35.00
Dawson	B	2,163	\$15.50
Doerun	B	346	\$19.10
Donalsonville	B	1,200	\$14.00

Source: Georgia Environmental Finance Authority

WATER RATES			
City/County	Services Provided (Water=W Sewer = S Both=B)	Number of Water Connections	Average Water Rate (Based on 5,000 gal per month)
Edison	B	603	\$13.05
Funston	W	163	\$11.50
Iron City	W	134	\$9.00
Leary	B	234	\$22.85
Lee County	B	4,541	\$29.25
Leesburg	B	1,317	\$18.25
Morgan	W	185	\$9.90
Moultrie	B	6,825	\$21.00
Newton	W	305	\$14.00
Norman Park	B	412	\$19.25
Ochlocknee	B	315	\$13.00
Parrott	W	139	\$21.50
Pelham	B	1,635	\$20.00
Smithville	B	315	\$17.10
Sumner	W	169	\$25.49
Sylvester	B	2,875	\$19.75
Thomasville	B	9,770	\$19.31
Warwick	W	214	\$20.00
Whigham	W	380	\$22.98

Source: Georgia Environmental Finance Authority

Many local water systems need major improvements. Many systems are relatively old and are in need of repair infrastructure. Many municipalities depend solely on CDBG funding to make upgrades to improve lines which is a very competitive process that is not guaranteed. Due to very low water and sewer rates in Southwest Georgia many municipalities cannot afford the large capital improvement that is necessary to upgrade and repair the systems. Loans are often overlooked due to the necessity of raising water rates to an already impoverished region. The majority of homes and businesses within the unincorporated portions of the Region are served by private wells and water systems.

Forecasts of increases in municipal and industrial demand for the Region are relatively insignificant due to the modest population growth projected in Southwest Georgia. Municipal water demand in Southwest Georgia is projected to be adequately met through the planning period given any future allocation scenario since municipal water supply is the State of Georgia's first priority. However, lowering of the ground water tables in the Region from other uses could potentially impact the supply of water at wells providing municipal water supply.

	Baker	Calhoun	Colquitt	Decatur	Dougherty	Early	Grady
Water Plant Capacity (gal/day)	1,080,000	1,584,000	11,000,000	7,700,000	36,000,000	3,750,000	5,500,000
Consumption (gal/day)	200,000-250,000	264,000 -379,000	3,000,000 – 4,500,000	2,200,000 – 4,000,000	18,000,000	1,000,000	2,000,000
Elevated Storage Capacity (gal)	60,000	235,000	-	1,500,000	6,800,000	-	1,100,000
Ground Storage Capacity (gal)	-	-	1,675,000	-	-	1,250,000	750,000
Source	1 deep well	2 deep wells	5 deep wells	3 deep wells	30 deep wells	3 deep wells	6 deep wells
Pumping Capacity (gal/min)	750	1,100		5,500	51,000	2,050	4,000
Population Served by Public Supply (2005)*	850	5,170	24,260	14,390	91,172	6,100	12,970

Source: <http://georgiafacts.net/net/location/statefacts.aspx?s=3014.0.5.3013>

\* Source: Georgia County Guide

Most of the Southwest Georgia Region is located within a Significant Groundwater Recharge Area and most of that area is considered to have a High Pollution Susceptibility. Given the breadth of this sensitive environmental area, the future prevalence and concentration septic tanks serving individual residential developments within the region must be considered as an important regional issue.

	Lee	Miller	Mitchell	Seminole	Terrell	Thomas	Worth
Water Plant Capacity (gal/day)	1,152,000	700,000	4,250,000	3,500,000	2,500,000	13,000,000	2,736,000
Consumption (gal/day)	265,000 -500,000	330,000 - 600,000	2,600,000 - 4,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000 - 1,300,000		800,000 - 1,000,000
Elevated Storage Capacity (gal)	180,000	315,000	1,400,000	2,500,000	1,000,000	1,300,000	670,000
Ground Storage Capacity (gal)	-	-	-	-	-	1,500,000	-
Source	3 deep wells	3 deep wells	4 deep wells	2 deep wells	3 deep wells	6 deep wells	3 deep wells
Pumping Capacity (gal/min)	800	2,000	2,800	2,500	3,000	11,900	2,000
Population Served by Public Supply (2005)*	15,250	2,450	12,880	3,970	7,550	32,420	10,090

Source: <http://georgiafacts.net/net/location/statefacts.aspx?s=3014.0.5.3013>

\* Source: Georgia County Guide

The State of Georgia has been involved in a tri-state water debate recently which remains unresolved. The implications of the outcome of these water issues leave the use and utilization of water in Georgia hard to define. Many of the issues related to future water use and allocation in the Region are related to the dynamics between the surface water flows and the groundwater in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint river basins and the surface water flow across the State line into the Apalachicola River and Bay in Florida. Significant increases in the demand for agricultural water have been recorded within the past ten years and its importance to the economy of the Southwest Georgia has become vital.

## Sewerage System and Wastewater Treatment

The unincorporated areas, aside from urban fringe areas and industrial parks are not served by sanitary sewer systems. Septic systems are used in areas not served by sanitary sewer systems. Although septic systems can cause groundwater pollution problems they are generally not an issue in the region due to the lack of population density where the systems are utilized.

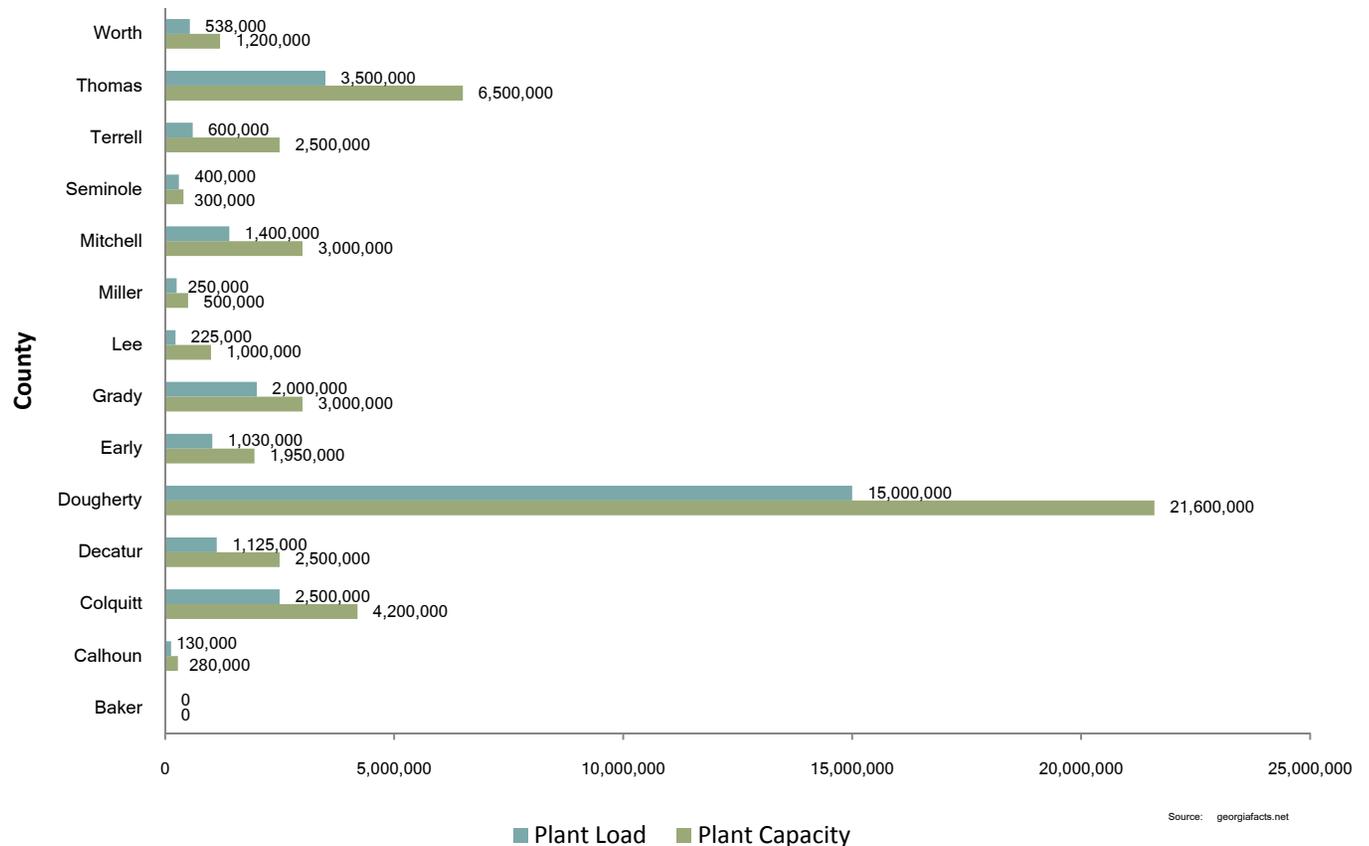
Sewage treatment is provided by the cities of Arlington, Leesburg, Leary, Edison, Moultrie, Cairo, Colquitt, Baconton, Camilla, Pelham, Donaldsonville, Dawson, Thomasville, Boston, Coolidge, Ochlocknee, Meigs, Sylvester, Albany-Dougherty County and Lee County. The majority of the city systems have ample reserve capacity. The cities of Sylvester and Thomasville also extend service into selected unincorporated areas. In the Region's unincorporated areas, the septic tank provides the solution to waste disposal. Planned sewage system improvements will meet the needs of the community over the planning period.

The provisions of service in the larger cities are basically adequate to meet the growth projected. Development of sewage treatment facilities in smaller cities is often financially prohibitive as a result of customer base. However, the provision of sewer treatment would be beneficial in terms of attracting commercial and industrial development.

The use of individual septic tanks is proliferating throughout the region, particularly in response to residential development in the unincorporated areas. There are several concentrated areas of residential development in Decatur, Grady, Seminole, Thomas and Worth Counties, that could become an environmentally sensitive issue over the planning period.

The current level of municipal service provided within each community is generally adequate, although there are certainly areas where extensions and improvements to local systems are warranted. For the most part, however, individual systems will grow with their populations. If greater emphasis is placed on promoting growth in urban centers, the need for improved and extended systems will follow annexations and or updated service delivery strategies. Nearly every industrial park in the Region has adequate water and sewer capacity to keep up with the demand for growth.

### Treatment System Capacities (gal/da)



## Other Facilities and Services

### Fire Protection

The International Standard for Standardization (ISO) collects information on municipal fire-protection efforts in communities throughout the United States, analyzes the data, and assigns a Public Protection Classification from 1 to 10. Class 1 represents superior property fire protection, and Class 10 indicates that the area's fire-suppression program doesn't meet ISO's minimum criteria. These criteria include but are not limited to fire station service areas, station staffing, the availability of public water, pumping and storage capacity among others. The class in which a community is placed plays a major role in determining individual fire insurance rates. According to the ISO, a fire station should have an efficient service area of five miles in any direction from the station. The ISO recommends that each non-reserve piece of equipment should be staffed with six firefighters.

Fire protection is one of the greatest concerns when developing land use regulations. In the long run, land use regulations can improve the efficiency of the fire protection service and reduce the impact of a fire when one occurs. For the Southwest Georgia Region, the larger cities typically have paid professional fire departments and for the most part, the smaller unincorporated areas have volunteer fire departments. The majority of the fire departments (both professional and volunteer) have informal mutual agreements for back up protection services.

Fire Insurance Classification	County	# of Full-Time employees	# of Volunteer employees	Additional Information
1	-	-	-	
2	-	-	-	
3	Colquitt (outside City)	42 (City)	100 (County)	Protection outside city limits
	Thomas	55	-	Protection outside city limits
4	Decatur	42	-	Protection outside city limits
	Grady	17	15	Protection outside city limits
5	Early (inside City)	12	12	
	Seminole (inside City)	8	-	
	Terrell	13	-	4 County Fire Trucks. Protection outside city limits
	Worth (inside City)	11	-	

Source: georgiafacts.net

Fire Insurance Classification	County	# of Full-Time employees	# of Volunteer employees	Additional Information
6	Mitchell (inside City)	10	-	
7	Baker	2	18	
	Calhoun	7		
	Colquitt (inside City)	-	-	
	Miller (inside City)	1 (Fire Chief)	-	
8	Lee	10		
9	Early (outside City)	-	77	Protection outside city limits
	Lee	-	50	
	Miller (outside City)	-	34	3 fully-equipped fire stations and 2 EMT's.
	Mitchell (outside City)	-	15	
	Seminole (outside city)	-	11	
	Worth (outside City)	-	-	Protection outside city limits
10	-	-	-	

Source: georgiafacts.net

## Public Safety

Generally police functions are handled by municipal police departments in the incorporated areas, and county sheriff's departments in unincorporated areas. In several of the smaller cities there are no police departments and the cities depend on the sheriff's department.

## Law Enforcement

The Georgia constitution allows for each county to maintain certain services. In the area of law enforcement, the Sheriff and their deputies are primarily responsible to the court system and to operate and maintain the county jail facilities. Additional duties include providing security at the courthouse and serving judicial warrants. The local Sheriff's Departments and jail facilities are considered to be of regional significance in that they serve all of the unincorporated areas within the County. As the trends in crimes continue to rise, opportunities exist for the public safety entities to study the potential for cross-training of their public safety personnel.

County	Safety Department	Communities Served
Baker	Baker County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area
	Newton Police Dept.	City of Newton
Calhoun	Calhoun County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area City of Morgan
	Arlington Police Dept.	City of Arlington
	Edison Police Dept.	City of Edison
	Leary Police Dept.	City of Leary
	Colquitt County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area City of Ellenton City of Funston City of Riverside
Colquitt	Doerun Police Dept.	City of Doerun
	Moultrie Police Dept.	City of Moultrie
	Norman Park Police Dept.	City of Norman Park
	Berlin Police Dept.	City of Berlin
	Decatur	Decatur County Sheriff's Dept.
Bainbridge Public Safety		City of Bainbridge
Climax Police Dept.		City of Climax
Attapulqus Police Dept.		City of Attapulqus
Dougherty	Dougherty County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area
	Albany Police Dpt.	City of Albany
Early	Early County Sherriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area City of Jakin
	Blakely Police Dept.	City of Blakely
	Damascus Police Dept.	City of Damascus
	Grady	Grady County Sheriff's Dept.
Cairo Police Dept.		City of Cairo
Whigham Police Dept.		City of Whigham

County	Safety Department	Communities Served	
Lee	Lee County Sheriff's Dpt.	Unincorporated Area	
	Leesburg Police Dept.	City of Leesburg	
	Smithville Police Dept.	City of Smithville	
Miller	Miller County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area	
	Colquitt Police Dept.	City of Colquitt	
Mitchell	Mitchell County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area City of Baconton	
	Camilla Police Dpt.	City of Camilla	
	Pelham Police Dept.	City of Pelham	
	Sale City Police Dept.	City of Sale City	
Seminole	Seminole County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area City of Iron City	
	Donalsonville Police Dept.	City of Donalsonville	
Terrell	Terrell County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area City of Bronwood City of Parrott City of Sasser	
	Dawson Police Dept.	City of Dawson	
	Thomas	Thomas County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area City of Ochlocknee
		Boston Police Dept.	City of Boston
Coolidge Police Dept.		City of Coolidge	
Meigs Police Dept.		City of Meigs	
Thomasville Police Dept.		City of Thomasville	
Worth	Worth County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area City of Sumner	
	Sylvester Police Dept.	City of Sylvester	
	Poulan Police Dept.	City of Poulan	
	Warwick Police Dept.	City of Warwick	

Police Departments are not of regional significance; however, they do contribute to the overall public safety and welfare of the local communities. The Georgia Bureau of Investigations (GBI) and the Georgia State Patrol Offices serve as resources for the local law enforcement agencies. Often the GBI and the Georgia State Patrol Officers offer technical assistance and back up support to the smaller jurisdictions that need assistance in investigating crimes, assessing crime scenes, and

drug enforcement. There are several smaller jurisdictions that do not have police departments and depend on Sheriff, other local municipalities or the state for assistance.

#### Emergency Medical Services

Emergency Medical Service (EMS) is an important component of public safety as well. These services are a fundamental part of public safety and should be considered along with fire and police protection. EMS provides pre-hospital care and transportation to hospitals. EMS also serves the community by providing first aid and CPR training sessions to the general public, and by offering free blood pressure screenings. All of the counties in the Southwest Georgia Region have Emergency Medical Services and participate with E-911.

## Parks and Recreation

All cities contain at least one municipal park, ranging from small sub-acre parks with picnic tables and barbecue grills to larger parks with amenities such as swimming pools, tennis courts, and full-time staff depending on the size and budget of the city. The smallest cities often depend on county funds for park maintenance.

Generally recreational facilities that involve playing fields and team participation such as baseball, soccer, basketball, tennis and facilities for active recreation are found within cities. Recreation without fields, more generally trail- based hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, wildlife viewing, picnicking, etc. is found within the unincorporated areas. The region has an abundance of wildlife management areas and conservation areas, three state parks, water resources suitable for recreation such as boating and fishing such as the Flint River and Lake Seminole, in addition to numerous hunting plantations.

### **Seminole State Park**

Seminole State Park, consisting of 37,500 acres, is located in the “Y” at the intersection of the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers at the southern tip of both Seminole County and the Southwest Georgia Region. Lake Seminole is an excellent source of freshwater fishing, and is known for its lunker largemouth, hybrid, striped and white bass fishing. Seminole State Park also has several boat landings, fishing piers, a swimming area, cabins, recreational vehicle camping, tent camping, and a marina. Lake Seminole is the site of many annual fishing tournaments which contribute to the local economies of Bainbridge, Donalsonville, and rural Seminole County. Seminole State Park is owned and operated by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The site is protected by the state’s ownership and is not threatened by inappropriate land uses.

### **Reed Bingham State Park**

Reed Bingham State Park, located in Colquitt County, consists of 1,620 acres of land used for nature trails, bicycle trails, miniature golf, fishing, swimming, and passive recreation. Programs offered include activities such as campfire chats, movies, and scavenger hunts. Reed Bingham State Park is owned and operated by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The site is protected by the state’s ownership and is not threatened by inappropriate land uses.

### **Kolomoki Mounds Historic Park**

This historically significant park is the oldest and largest Woodland Indian site in the southeastern U.S., occupied by American Indians from 350 to 750 A.D. Georgia’s oldest great temple mound, standing 57 feet high, dominates two smaller burial mounds and several ceremonial mounds. The park’s museum is built around an excavated mound, providing an unusual setting for learning who these people were and how they lived. Inside, visitors will find numerous artifacts and a film. Outdoor activities include camping, fishing, picnicking and boating. Hikers can choose from two scenic trails. The Spruce Pine Trail offers views of lakes Yahola and Kolomoki, while the Trillium Trail meanders through hardwoods and pines.

## Wildlife Management Areas

The Southwest Georgia Region has seven Wildlife Management Areas and two nature areas, which contribute to tourism and economic development in the area. These areas contain habitat favorable to many plants and animals and therefore draw many visitors each year.

### **Albany Nursery Wildlife Management Area**

Albany Nursery WMA is a 300 acre area that provides for hunting, interpretive trail, bird watching, field trail access, canoe access, and horseback riding. The site is located 10 miles west of Albany.

### **Chickasawhatchee Wildlife Management Area**

The Chickasawhatchee Wildlife Management Area covers 22,000 acres of mixed hardwoods interspersed with low-lying swamp areas in Baker, Calhoun, and Dougherty Counties. The habitat

Southwest Georgia Wildlife Management Areas and Natural Areas		
<i>Name</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Acreage</i>
Albany Nursery WMA	Dougherty	300
Chickasawhatchee WMA	Baker, Calhoun, Dougherty	19,700
Doerun Pitcherplant Bog NA	Colquitt	600
Elmodel WMA	Baker	1,600
Lake Seminole WMA	Seminole	16,900
Mayhaw WMA	Miller	4,700
Silver Lake WMA	Seminole	8,400
Wolf Creek Preserve NA	Grady	140
River Creek WMA	Thomas	2,437

Source:

is favorable for deer, gray squirrels and rabbits among many other animal species. The area is owned by St. Joe Paper Company and leased to the state for wildlife management and recreation. The Chickasawhatchee Wildlife Management Area is operated and protected by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

#### **Doerun Pitcher Plant Bog Natural Area**

Pitcher plants are carnivorous plants whose prey-trapping mechanism features a deep cavity filled with liquid known as a pitfall trap. The Doerun Pitcher Plant Bog covers over 600 acres. Hunting and bird watching are amenities that are available in the Bog area. The site is located 10 miles northwest of Moultrie.

#### **Elmodel Wildlife Management Area**

Elmodel Wildlife Management Area is 1,600 acres of land located 8 miles North of Newton. Canoe access and hunting are permitted.

#### **Lake Seminole Water Fowl Wildlife Management Area**

The Lake Seminole Water Fowl Wildlife Management Area consists of 16,895 acres in Decatur and Seminole Counties. The Lake Seminole Water Fowl Wildlife Management Area is operated and protected by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

#### **Mayhaw Wildlife Management Area**

The Mayhaw Wildlife Management Area is utilized primarily as a game preserve and plays an important role in hunting based tourism. It consists of 5,430 acres of land in Miller County. However, a small portion of the Mayhaw Wildlife Management area is located in eastern Early County along the Miller County border. The Mayhaw Wildlife Management Area is operated and protected by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

#### **Silver Lake Wildlife Management Area**

Silver Lake WMA is a remnant tract of predominately longleaf pine forest in Decatur County. The some 8,400 acres is known as the Silver Lake tract. This tract was part of a 16,000-acre forest known as the Southlands Experimental Forest, which was established in 1948 for forestry research because it represented habitats characteristic of many of the pine habitats within the Southeast, including areas supporting all four of the major southern pines -- longleaf, loblolly, slash and shortleaf. The property is along the shore of Lake Seminole near Bainbridge.

Silver Lake was also designated as a mitigation site for red-cockaded woodpeckers found on other tracts owned by International Paper, with plans of eventually supporting up to 30 red-cockaded woodpecker family groups.

#### **Wolf Creek Preserve Natural Area**

Wolf Creek Preserve is located in Grady County. The 140 acre site is home to the greatest expanse of trout lilies known to exist. The preserve is also home to several other species of orchids, trilliums, violets, oak, pine, beech, magnolia and hickory.

#### **Rolf and Alexandra Kauka Wildlife Management Area (also known as: River Creek Wildlife Management Area)**

River Creek WMA is a 2,437 acre site located in Thomas County. The Wildlife Management Area is home to the red-cockaded woodpecker. Located in Thomas County, River Creek, the Rolf and Alexandra Kauka Wildlife Management Area (WMA) protect 4.2 miles of frontage along the scenic Ochlockonee River, with bottomland pine-hardwood forests as well as upland longleaf pine forest and four miles along Barnett's Creek.

## Stormwater management

There are only three local issuing authorities in Southwest Georgia: Albany, Dougherty County and Lee County receive phase II NPDES coverage under a general permit.

## Solid Waste Management Facilities

Most counties have facilities that accept yard wastes for county residents. Most are the old county landfills that no longer accept municipal solid waste. Some old landfills (pre-Title 8) also allow residents to dump construction and demolition materials in addition to yard waste. There are four active Title 8 landfills in the region accepting municipal solid waste and three transfer stations. Much of the region's waste is disposed of outside the region.

Southwest Georgia Disposal and Capacity									
County	Facility Name	Total Tons Disposed FY 2003	Domain	Facility Type	Remaining Capacity (CY)	Average Daily Tons	Rate of Fill (CYD)	Estimated Fill Date	Remaining Permitted Capacity (years)
<b>C&amp;D</b>									
Dougherty	Dougherty Co. – Fleming/Gaissert Road	150,985	Public	MSWL	425,419	122	160	3/13/12	10.2
Thomas	Thomasville/Sunset Drive	21,187	Public	C&D	538,541	77	147	11/29/16	14.1
<b>MSW</b>									
Decatur	Decatur Co – S.R 309 Bainbridge	28,225	Public	Unlined MSWL	185,042	90	181	9/14/10	3.9
Dougherty	Dougherty Co.- Fleming/Gaissert Rd.	128,497	Public	MSWL	4,557,838	317	733	10/26/23	23.9
Grady	Cairo – Sixth Ave	22,924	Public	Unlined MSWL	425,923	92	184	8/6/12	8.9
Thomas	Thomasville/Sunset Dr	94,367	Public	MSWL	3,143,115	343	591	11/29/22	20.5
All Information pertaining to annual tonnage, remaining landfill capacity and estimated closure dates was supplied by EPD. Both (C&D) and (L) designations include construction and demolition landfills, while (MSWL) and (SL) designate municipal solid waste landfills. Estimated fill rates by region are cumulative, using average daily fill rates based on 260 operating days per year and remaining capacity reported to EPD.									

## Schools

Southwest Georgia has a comprehensive education system that serves 67,984 students. The School Systems employ over 4,455 teachers and are an economic engine for many of the communities they serve. The education system has 98 Public Schools and 23 Private schools to serve the needs of a growing population. The Post-secondary education is also available throughout Southwest Georgia with three technical schools and several satellite locations being within 20 miles of most locations in Southwest Georgia. Two year schools are also available throughout the region with Darton, Brewton Parker and Bainbridge College fulfilling that need as well as operating several satellite training opportunities throughout the region. Several 4-year schools offer Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Art degrees. While the chart below shows colleges that are within the region several communities may take advantage of additional colleges and universities that are within a close proximity to them including Valdosta State University, Florida State University, University of Florida, Georgia Southwestern State University to name a few.

Southwest Georgia K-12 Schools					
County	# of Public Schools	# of Private/ Charter Schools	Number of Teachers	Number of Students	Number of High School Graduates in 2008
Baker	1		37	440	24
Calhoun	3	1 Charter	49	722	25
Colquitt	13	1 Private	572	7,975	313
Decatur	9	1 Private	393	5,837	258
Dougherty	26	11 Private	1,091	18,834	646
Early	3	1 Private	182	2,934	140
Grady	7		316	4,248	196
Lee	6		338	5,373	268
Miller	3	1 Private	84	1,095	62
Mitchell	5 County; 3 City	2 Private	306	4,592	151
Seminole	2		121	1,675	92
Terrell	3	1 Private	125	1,793	51
Thomas	5 County; 5 City	5 Private	564	8,523	383
Worth	5		277	3,943	171

Southwest Georgia Colleges		
Technical College	2 Year College	4 Year College
Albany Technical College (Albany Georgia) 3,000 students	Darton College (Albany, Georgia) 3,400 students	Albany State University (Albany, Georgia) 3,456 students
Moultrie Technical College (Moultrie, Georgia) 1,700 students	Brewton Parker (Moultrie, Georgia)	ABAC on the Square (Moultrie, Georgia)
Albany Technical College (Early County)	Bainbridge College (Bainbridge, Georgia) 2,124 students	LaGrange College (Albany, Georgia)
Southwest Georgia Technical College (Thomasville, Georgia) 2,795 students		Troy State University (Albany, Georgia)
Southwest Georgia Technical College (Cairo Campus)		Thomas University (Thomasville, Georgia) 671 students

# Intergovernmental Coordination

Certain issues in the region are best dealt with in a coordinated manner, rather than by individual governments or authorities acting on their own. In many some cases, local governments work together, either on an informal basis or through jointly-controlled agencies. State or federal regulations provide standards, which may be voluntary or mandatory.

## **Economic Development**

Cooperation is important to promote economic development. Local governments often lack resources to promote their economic potential without cooperation. The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a broad-based, continuous planning process developed by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) that addresses the economic opportunities of the region. There are also a number of joint development authorities, Chambers of Commerce and Industrial Parks that include multiple governments.

## **Service Delivery Strategy**

The service delivery strategy is a document that specifies how certain services and related facilities are provided within counties. Services include water, sewer, solid waste, road maintenance, jails, police, fire, E-911, EMS, economic development, animal control, etc. The service delivery strategy is where intergovernmental coordination and cooperation is outlined.

## **Flint River Basin Regional Water Plan**

The Flint River Regional Water Development and Conservation Plan is a comprehensive review of water development, conservation, and sustainable use. It promotes the conservation and reuse of water, guards against a shortage of water, and promote efficient use of the water resources over much of the region.

## **Lower Flint Regional Water Plan**

The State Water Plan requires the development of regional water plans. The Lower Flint Regional Water Plan, to be developed by the Lower Flint Regional Water Plan Councils will determine the preferred water management practices to meet the region's future water resources needs. The recommended regional water plan, which must be submitted to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division by June 30, 2011, will identify a range of expected future water needs for the region.

## **Regionally Important Resource Plan**

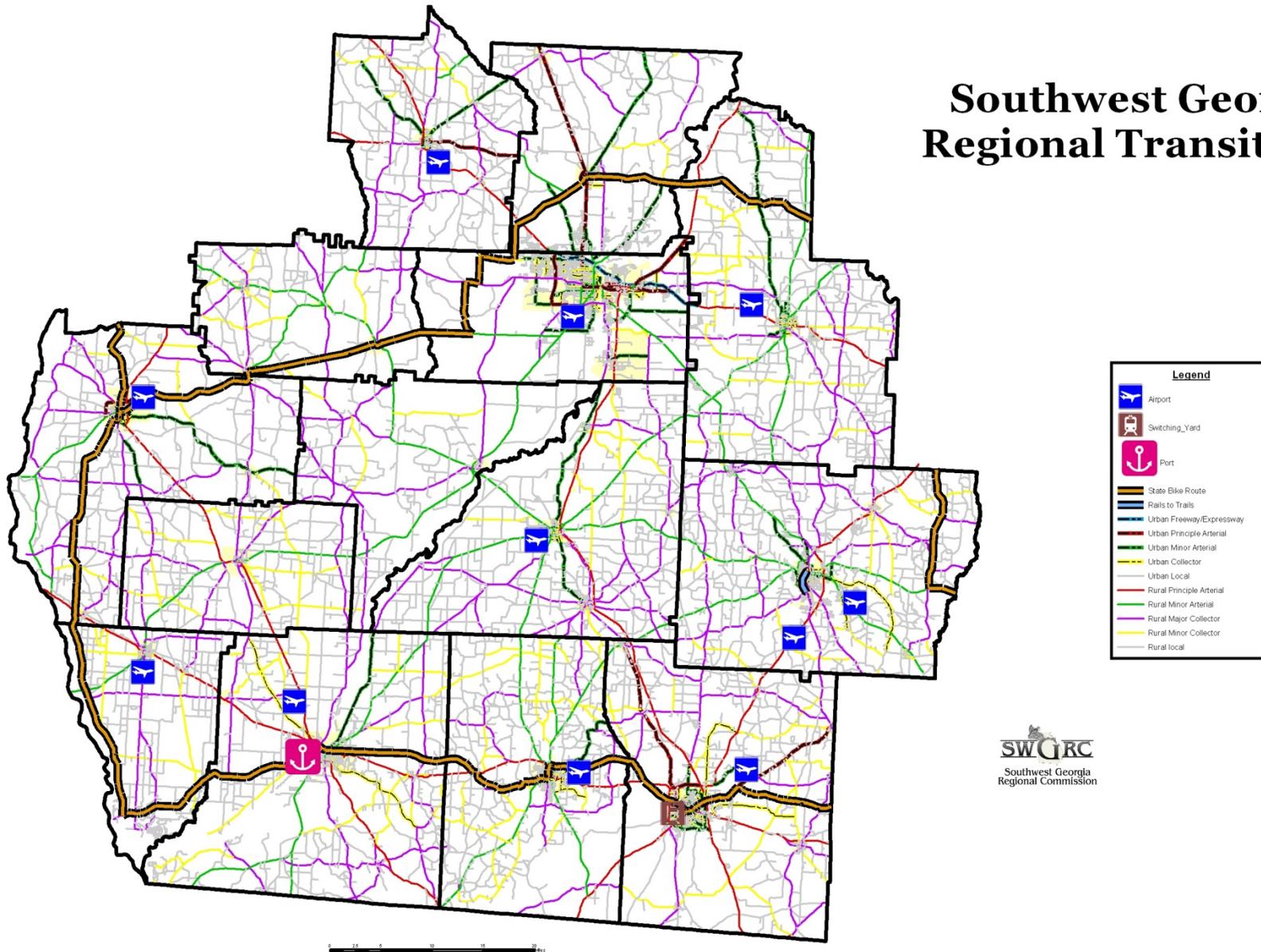
The intent of the plan is to provide an enhanced focus on protection and management of important natural and cultural resources throughout the region, careful consideration of, and planning for, impacts of new development on these important resources, and improved local, and regional coordination for the protection and management of these important resources.

## **Regional Transit**

The SWGRC works closely with the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR) to promote the efficient use of available transportation resources as a broker for the Southwest DHR region. The system is now operating more than 75 vehicles providing transit services to the public and the Division of Aging Services, Department of Family and Children Services, Mental Health, Development Disabilities and Addictive Disease, and Public Health and Rehabilitation Services. This program currently provides approximately 400,000 trips annually. In addition, our regional rural public transit service provides nearly 175,000 trips per year to work, businesses for shopping, and other activities.

# Transportation System

## Southwest Georgia Regional Transit Map



# Road Network

The regional road network is generally adequate to serve the transportation needs of the area. There are several significant highways that connect the area including U.S. Highways 84, 19, 319 and 82. Each of these is predominately a divided four-lane facility with speed limits up to 65 miles per hour. These arterials connect the larger population centers to each other and surrounding regions. U.S. Highway 27, runs north-south through the southwestern section of the region into Tallahassee, Florida. Over the past several years, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) has been widening the road into a four-lane divided highway and developing by-passes around most towns. Construction is complete within the region, but remains unfinished just to the north. The intent is in part to provide an alternative north-south route to Interstate 75. In addition, it is seen as providing additional commercial opportunities to the region and has been supported mostly for this reason.

U.S. Highways 19 and 319 also run north-south through the southwest region into Florida as well. In addition, Highway 133, which connects Albany and Valdosta, is in the process of being four-laned to provide greater access to markets for commercial development, particularly by its connection to Interstate 75. The highway project has received strong local support.

A new North-South Interstate highway facility was conceptually discussed recently that would have followed the general location of Highway 19. As of this writing, the project is no longer being considered. While it did receive some area support, many communities were opposed to the idea. The plan, as presented, would have required local governments to pay for the construction of interchanges to connect them to the Interstate. Most could not afford this expense, but did not want to be cut off from the new highway. In addition, environmental concerns existed with the project, particularly in the Red Hills area within the southern portion of the region. Nonetheless, the following table below provides a listing of the existing highways and bridges located within the 14 counties that comprise the region:

COUNTY	FACILITY TYPE	FACILITY NAME	ROUTE	LOCATION
Baker	Bridge	James Henderson Hall, Sr. Bridge	SR 37	Flint River
	Road	Peter Zack Greer Highway	SR 91	Section of SR 91 from South Albany City Limits to the Herman Talmadge Bridge South of Donaldsonville
	Road	Charles F. Hatcher Highway	SR 37	Portion of SR 37 in Baker County Between Newton and EL Model
Calhoun	Road	Gil Barrett Highway	SR 234	SR 234 from N. Slappey Dr. in Albany to SR 55 in Calhoun County
	Road	Harvey Jordan Memorial Highway SR 37	SR 37	From Leary to Morgan
	Road	Calvin W. Schramm Highway	SR 216	From Intersection with SR 37 in Edison to Randolph County Line
	Road	Charles and Mary Cowart Bypass	SR 45 Alternate, SR 45, SR 62, SR 216	Portion of SR 45 Alternate in Calhoun County from the Intersection of SR 45, SR 62, SR 216, and Cedar Street to the Junction of SR 45 Alternate with SR 45
Colquitt	Road	Scotterville Highway	SR 256	From Sylvester City Limits to Norman Park City Limits
	Road	Sunbelt Highway	SR 133	From Albany to Moultrie
	Road	Billy Langdale Parkway	SR 133	From Radium Springs Road in Albany to West Hill Ave. in Valdosta
	Road	Veterans Parkway	US 319	US Highway 319 East Bypass from the Intersection of State Route 33 to the Intersection of State Highway 35 in Colquitt County
	Road	Edward Sidney "Dick" Chambers Memorial Highway	SR 37	Portion of SR 27 within the Funston City Limits

COUNTY	FACILITY TYPE	FACILITY NAME	ROUTE	LOCATION
Decatur	Bridge	Emmett Culbreth/Myrvin Culbreth Bridges	SR 1	Flint River in Bainbridge
	Road	Wiregrass Georgia Parkway	US 84	From Alabama Line Eastward to Clinch/Ware County Line
	Road	Walter E. Cox Parkway	SR 1, US 27	From Miller County Line to Florida Line
	Road	Lt. Col. Doyce Ariail Highway	SR 38	Portion of SR 38 Passing through the City of Climax
	Road	Jack Wingate Highway	SR 97	SR 97 in Decatur County from the US 84 Bypass
	Road	Bobby Walden Highway	US 84, SR 38	Portion of U.S. Highway 84 in Decatur County from Grady County line west to the traffic light at Whigham Dairy Road within the limits of the Wiregrass Ga. Parkway
Dougherty	Road	John B. Gordon Highway	SR 3	Through Georgia from Tennessee to Florida Line
	Road	Georgia-Florida Parkway	SR 300	From I-75 South of Cordele through Albany, Camilla, and Thomasville to Florida line
	Road	Sunbelt Parkway	SR 133	From Albany to Moultrie
	Road	Billy Langdale Parkway	SR 133	From Radium Springs Road in Albany to West Hill Ave. in Valdosta
	Road	Peter Zack Geer Highway	SR 91	Section of SR 91 from south Albany City Limits to Herman Talmadge Bridge south of Donalsonville
	Road	Gil Barrett Highway	SR 234	SR 234 from N. Slappey Drive in Albany to SR 5 in Calhoun County
Early	Road	Chattahoochee Valley Trail Scenic Highway	SR 39	Omaha to Lake Seminole
	Road	Wiregrass Georgia Parkway	US 84	Alabama line to Clinch/Ware County Line
	Road	S.G. Maddox Memorial	SR 1, US 27	From Clay County line south to Miller County line
	Road	Joe Bryan Highway	SR 45	From Miller County line and ending at the Calhoun County line
Grady	Road	Plantation Parkway	US 319	From south City Limits of Thomasville to Florida line
	Road	Wiregrass Georgia Parkway	US 84	From Alabama line to Clinch/Ware County line
	Road	Jackie Robinson Memorial Parkway	SR 93	From US 319 to US 84
	Road	Julien B. Roddenbery, Sr. Memorial	SR 38	1 <sup>st</sup> Avenue N.E.
Lee	Road	John B. Gordon Highway	SR 3	Through Georgia from Tennessee to Florida Line
	Road	Kermit Blaney Parkway	SR 520	From Cusseta City Limits to Albany City limits
	Bridge	E.L. Massey Jr. Bridge	SR 118	Bridge over Kinchafoonee Creek
	Road	James M. Cannon, Sr. Memorial Bypass	US 19	U.S. Highway 19 Bypass
	Road	Chambers Crossing	US 19	U.S. Route 19 with Century Road
Miller	Road	Chattahoochee Valley Trail Scenic Highway	SR 39	Omaha to Lake Seminole
	Road	Peter Zack Geer Highway	SR 91	From south Albany City Limits to the Herman Talmadge Bridge South of Donalsonville

COUNTY	FACILITY TYPE	FACILITY NAME	ROUTE	LOCATION
Mitchell	Road	John B. Gordon Highway	SR 3	From Mitchell County to Florida line
	Road	Georgia-Florida Parkway	SR 300	From I-75 South of Cordele through Albany, Camilla, and Thomasville to Florida line
	Road	George T. Smith Highway	SR 97	From Camilla City Limits to SR 262
Seminole	Road	Chattahoochee Valley Trail Scenic Highway	SR 39	Omaha to Lake Seminole
	Road	Wiregrass Georgia Parkway	US 84	From Alabama line to Clinch/ Ware County line
	Road	Bartow Gibson Highway	SR 285	From SR 39 to US 84
	Road	Peter Zack Greer Highway	SR 91	From Albany City Limits to the Herman Talmadge Bridge south of Donalsonville
	Road	Lee Drake, Sr. Intersection	SR 39	SR 39 with CR 253
Terrell	Road	Kermit Blaney Parkway	SR 520	From Cusseta City Limits to Albany City Limits
	Bridge	E.L. Massey, Jr. Bridge	SR 118	Bridge over Kinchafoonee Creek
	Bridge	Kennedy Bridge	SR 45	Bridge over Bear Creek
	Bridge	Wayne T. Goode Bridge	SR 49	Bridge over Kinchafoonee Creek at Terrell/Sumter County Line
	Bridge	Sara Collier Bridge	SR 520	Bridge over Chickawahatchee Creek
Thomas	Road	John B. Gordon Highway	SR 3	
	Road	Georgia-Florida Parkway	SR 300	From Thomas County to Florida line
	Road	Plantation Parkway	US 319	From south Thomasville City Limits to Florida line
	Road	Wiregrass Georgia Parkway	US 84	From Alabama line to Clinch/ Ware County line
	Road	Will Watt Parkway	US 319, SR 35	From W. Jackson St. to SR 38 (Thomasville Bypass)
	Road	Marguerite Neel Williams Memorial Highway	SR 3, SR 300, US 19	From Lower Boston Road (CR 8) to Florida Line
	Road	Henry P. Russell, Jr. Parkway	SR 38	From eastern boundary of Thomas County to Intersection with US 19
Worth	Road	Georgia-Florida Parkway	SR 300	From I-75, south of Cordele, through Albany, Camilla, and Thomasville to the Florida line
	Road	Scotterville Highway	SR 256	From Sylvester City Limits to Norman Park City Limits
	Road	Sunbelt Parkway	SR 133	From Albany to Moultrie

# Alternative Modes

There is little provision of transportation alternatives within the region. While some towns and cities within the region have sidewalks, they primarily located in the vicinity of downtowns and historic districts. For the most part, sidewalk infrastructure is minimal to non-existent in most residential areas. The lack of sidewalk infrastructure makes it difficult to walk safely to shopping, entertainment or schools. Only a few jurisdictions require sidewalks in new development and none are making a concerted effort to install sidewalks in the rights-of-way.

Public transportation exists within certain local governments within the region. The city of Albany has a fixed-route bus system, while the remainder of the region is served by an on-demand transit system. The southwest Georgia region is one of the few rural areas in the nation to be comprehensively served by public transit. Although accessing the on-demand system can be trying to the public at times, it is currently the only system available to cost-effectively serve a sparse population.

Two state bicycle routes traverse the region; however, they are not heavily utilized, as they often follow busy roadways that lack adequate shoulders, or have shoulders with wide rumble strips that force cyclists into travel lanes. The cities of Albany and Moultrie both have multi-use, paved trails that are heavily utilized by bicyclists and pedestrians. Both cities intend to expand these facilities as funding is available. In addition, the city of Thomasville is in the initial planning stages of a multi-purpose trail that would link neighborhoods and parks with downtown.

In general, the region is sparsely populated and has lower incomes than other parts of the state. Because of these disparaging economic and demographic factors, it is difficult to provide cost effective transportation alternatives. Often times, local governments do not have the capital needed to invest in pedestrian or transit infrastructure. The previously referenced public transportation program was only made possible by the involvement of the SWGRC. The Commission implemented the program regionally and provided the necessary required local funding on the many of the local governments' behalf. The program, however, does not include Thomas County, which operates its own system.

# Railroads, Trucking, Port Facilities and Airports

There are no passenger rail services within the region. Significant north-south as well as east-west rail lines traverse the region which are used exclusively for the movement of freight. The principal lines through the region follow roughly along U.S. Highway 19 and Highway 84, with only Albany and Thomasville having railroad switch yards.

The city of Bainbridge is considered an inland port due to its location on the Flint River and proximity to the Apalachicola River, which can accommodate barge travel to the Gulf of Mexico through a system of locks. The terminal covers 107 acres and includes 107,553 square feet of warehouse space. A barge terminal is operated by the Georgia Ports Authority which handles both bulk and liquid cargo.

Most of the cities with populations over 5,000 have a municipal airport. The only commercial flight service is out of the Southwest Georgia Regional Airport located in Albany. Other nearby commercial airports include the Tallahassee Regional Airport, the Dothan Regional Airport, and the Columbus Airport.

The following data represents a break-down of the transportation facilities within the region by county, along with the distance (miles) to each facility:

## **Baker County**

Commercial airport: Albany Airport (22 miles)  
General aviation airport: Albany Airport (22 miles)  
Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (67 miles); CSX rail - Camilla (9 miles); Norfolk Southern Rail - Camilla (9 miles)Camilla Airport (9 miles)  
Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (35 miles)  
Seaport: Port St. Joe Seaport (90 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet

## **Calhoun County**

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (32 miles)  
General Aviation Airport: Albany Airport (32 miles)  
Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (70 miles); CSX rail - Arlington (local); Norfolk Southern Rail - Arlington (local)  
Navigable River: Chattahoochee River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Columbia (40 miles)  
Seaport: Panama City Seaport (151 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet

## **Colquitt County**

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (38 miles), Valdosta Airport (40 miles) service by ASA  
General Aviation Airport: Moultrie Municipal Airport (38 miles) (*Spence Field in Moultrie has 10,000 ft bituminous runway*)  
Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (55 miles); CSX rail - Moultrie (local); Norfolk Southern rail - Moultrie (local)  
Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (52 miles)  
Seaport: Brunswick Seaport (148 miles) with maintained channel depth of 32 feet

## **Decatur County**

Commercial Airport: Tallahassee Airport (40 miles)  
General Aviation Airport: Bainbridge Airport (local)  
Rail: CSX rail - Bainbridge (local). Georgia Southwestern short-line rail service (county)  
Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge  
Seaport: Port St. Joe Seaport (128 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet

## **Dougherty County**

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (local)  
General Aviation Airport: Albany Airport (local)  
Rail: Norfolk Southern piggyback - Albany (local); Norfolk Southern Rail - Albany (local). Atlantic and Georgia Great Southern (local)  
Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (60 miles)  
Seaport: Brunswick Seaport (172 miles) with maintained channel depth of 32 feet

## **Early County**

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (52 miles)  
General Aviation Airport: Blakely Airport (local)  
Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (80 miles); CSX rail - Blakely (local); Norfolk Southern piggyback - Macon (160 miles); Norfolk Southern Rail - Blakely (local). CIRR shortline rail service at Blakely (local)  
Navigable River: Chattahoochee River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Columbia (14 miles).  
Seaport: Panama City Seaport (115 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet.

**Grady County**

Commercial Airport: Tallahassee Airport (35 miles)  
General Aviation Airport: Cairo Airport (local) with a 4,000 feet bituminous runway, aircraft tie-down, airframe & power plant repair, hangar, lighted runway  
Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (85 miles); CSX rail - Cairo (local)  
Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (20 miles)  
Seaport: St. Mary's Seaport (158 miles) with maintained channel depth of 32 feet

**Lee County**

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (10 miles)  
General Aviation Airport: Albany Airport (10 miles)  
Rail: CSX rail - Lee County (local); Norfolk Southern Rail - Leesburg (local)  
Navigable River: Chattahoochee River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Columbus (62 miles)  
Seaport: Brunswick Seaport (189 miles) with maintained channel depth of 32 feet

**Miller County**

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (10 miles)  
General Aviation Airport: Albany Airport (10 miles)  
Rail: CSX rail - Lee County (local); Norfolk Southern Rail - Leesburg (local)  
Navigable River: Chattahoochee River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Columbus (62 miles)  
Seaport: Brunswick Seaport (189 miles) with maintained channel depth of 32 feet

**Mitchell County**

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (25 miles)  
General Aviation Airport: Albany Airport (25 miles), Camilla Airport (local)  
Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (67 miles); CSX rail - Camilla (local); Norfolk Southern Rail - Camilla (local)  
Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (36 miles)  
Seaport: Panama City Seaport (181 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet; Port St. Joe Seaport (173 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet

**Seminole County**

Commercial Airport: Dothan Airport (35 miles)  
General aviation Airport: Donalsonville Airport (local)  
Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (100 miles); CSX rail - Donalsonville (local)  
Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (18 miles)  
Seaport: Panama City Seaport (100 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet

**Terrell County**

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (22 miles)  
General Aviation Airport: Albany Airport (22 miles)  
Dawson Airport (local) Navigable River: Chattahoochee River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Columbus (64 miles)  
Seaport: Brunswick Seaport (193 miles) with maintained channel depth of 32 feet

**Thomas County**

Commercial Airport: Tallahassee Airport (35 miles)  
Valdosta Airport (43 miles)  
General Aviation Airport : Thomasville Airport (local)  
Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (85 miles); CSX rail - Thomasville (local)  
Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (35 miles)  
Seaport: Port St. Joe Seaport (150 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet

**Worth County**

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (21 miles)  
General Aviation Airport: Albany Airport (21 miles)  
Sylvester Airport (4 miles)  
Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (31 miles). Atlantic & Gulf (local)  
Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (56 miles)  
Seaport: Brunswick Seaport (148 miles) with maintained channel depth of 32 feet

# Transportation and Land Use Connection

For the most part, southwest Georgia has adequate transportation facilities that operate below full capacity. The state highways that traverse the region are in good condition and have room for additional daily traffic without causing any significant congestion. The county roads are experiencing the same situation. The only area of potential concern is the stretch of Highway 19 south of Albany to the Dougherty County line. This area has seen significant growth of commercial enterprises along the highway as well as nearby residential areas.

For some time now, there has been an increased recognition of the importance of integrating transportation and land use planning in rural areas. Transportation investments can have a major impact on development patterns in rural areas. With that being said, the link between transportation and land use is an important relationship as it relates to the future of the southwest Georgia area. If coordinated properly, the connection between the two has the potential to result in more clearly defined and planned future growth areas, which lead to more diverse local economies within the region, lessening the area's over-reliance on agriculture related industries.

As previously evidenced, the major highway facilities that serve the area and link the region's major business districts have the capacity and potential to accommodate even more vehicle trips. Currently, due to the lack of employment (white-collar) opportunities available in the region, roadway systems such as U.S. Highway 27 and U.S. Highway 319 operating in Decatur, Grady, and Thomas Counties, for the most part, act as daily commuter routes for residents of the region employed in Tallahassee (Florida).

The region, however, has recently experienced some signs of improved coordination between transportation and land use. This is clearly evidenced by the transformation of the U.S. Highway 19 corridor, near the intersection of U.S. 84 in Thomasville. For years, the majority of the property bordering the highway was either vacant/wooded or utilized for agricultural purposes. Within the past few years, the landscape alongside the roadway facility has been converted to commercial uses ranging from big-box retail to sit down restaurants and hotels. In addition, Southwest Georgia Technical College has acquired acreage along U.S. Highway 19, expanding its already thriving campus. Other counties have also gotten into the act of land use conversion to take advantage of its road facilities. A former vacant arena/warehouse site near the junction of U.S. Highway 319 S and Highway 93 S, two miles north of the Georgia-Florida line in Grady County has been converted into the new home of high-end furniture store based out of Atlanta.

Through more effective coordination between transportation and land use planning, as depicted in the above examples, local governments comprising the southwest Georgia region have the potential to take advantage of the strengths of the existing roadway facilities, which include under-utilized adjacent lands and excess road capacity. Better coordination can also assist local governments in directing projected future growth into targeted areas.