

Comprehensive Economic Development
Strategy & Regional Plan

DRAFT



Annual Update 2016

**GEORGIA MOUNTAINS
REGIONAL COMMISSION**

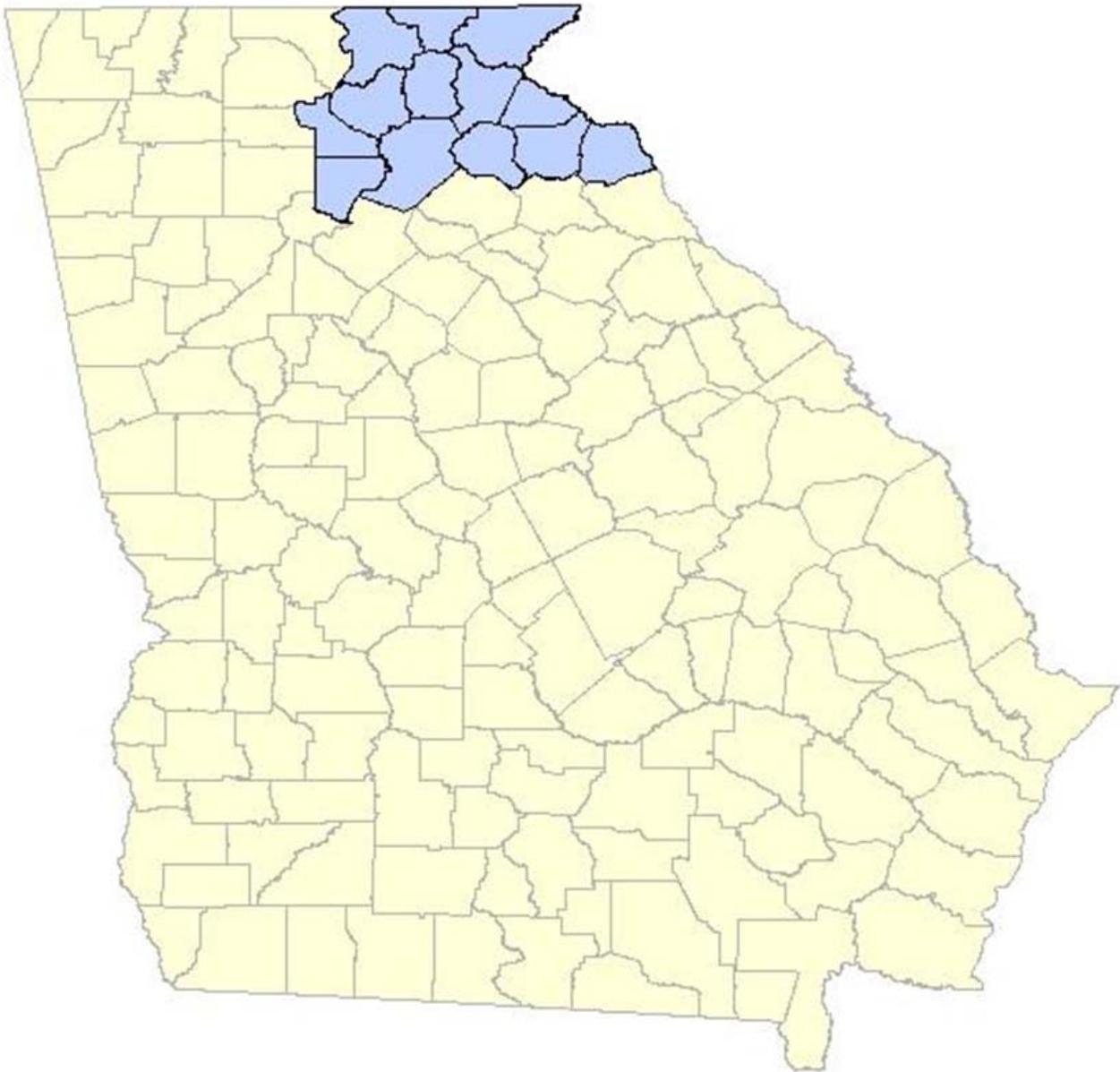
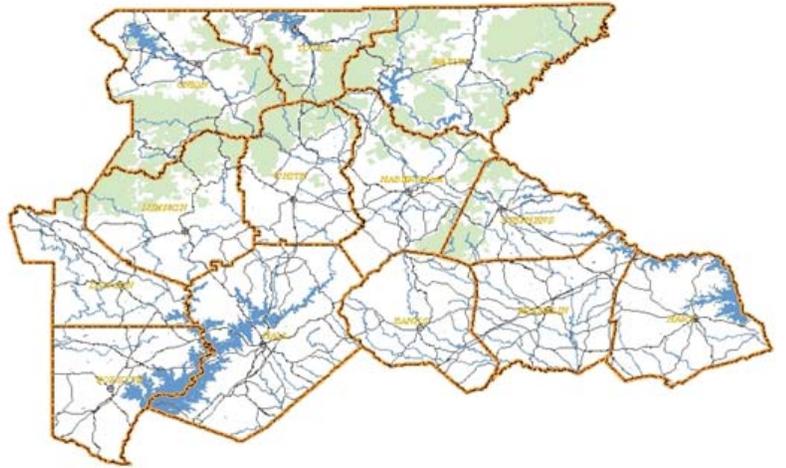


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Executive Summary

Encompassing approximately 3,500 square miles, the Georgia Mountains Region is located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The region is bordered by North Carolina to the north and South Carolina to the east, while other Georgia counties border the region to the south and west. At a total estimated population of 674,664, the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission serves the following 13 counties: Banks, Dawson, Forsyth, Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Lumpkin, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union, and White and 38 municipalities within these counties.

The Georgia Mountains Region has gradually transformed itself from an area reliant on manufacturing and agriculture, to one more diversified in health care, tourism, distribution, retail, and a variety of industrial and high-tech companies. Problems surrounding future economic and community development for the region include, but are not limited to, shortages of skilled labor, out-migration of young adults, and lack of quality neighborhood housing for new executives and business employees. The availability of key quality sites and/or buildings for new business remains a continuing challenge. The one-time reliance on major employers has lessened, but there is still some vulnerability in several counties. Thus, continued diversification along with economic growth, are seen as the primary goals for the Georgia Mountains Region.

Additionally, the entire region has a solid manufacturing base and a strong desire to maintain and expand manufacturing jobs. Most local manufacturing firms have marginal ties with other firms in the region and companies have located and expanded here due to quality labor force, low cost of doing business, historic location of companies in the area, and quality of the transportation system.

Within the durable goods manufacturing sector, automotive parts manufacturing is an extremely important employment cluster within the Georgia Mountains Region. The last year has seen another increase within this cluster. In January 2016, Linde + Wiemann, a leading manufacturer of complex structural steel systems to automotive original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) worldwide, announced their location in the Gateway II Industrial Park in Hart County, Georgia. At a total investment of \$35 million, Linde + Wiemann will create 200 jobs for area residents. Virtually every county within the Georgia Mountains Region has been significantly impacted by the development and growth of this sector over the past twenty years. As the automotive industry continues to develop in the southeastern United States, the Georgia Mountains Region is strategically positioned to attract new investment capital and new jobs within this sector.

The region's infrastructure is continuing to provide top quality support to the region's economic clusters. Important components of the public infrastructure system to support all segments of the region's economy include, but are not limited to: skilled labor force, strong workforce development facilities, advanced technological resources, and adequate physical infrastructure that includes a reliable water supply, reliable wastewater treatment capabilities, transportation, and a communications infrastructure system capable of handling the needs of today's firms.

The impact of tourism and tourism related industries has also had a profound effect on the economy of the Georgia Mountains Region. As a primary gateway to the Blue Ridge Mountains, the region annually hosts over seven million visitors to the many mountains, lakes, rivers, museums, and downtowns that make the region unique from the rest of the state. At 729 feet, Amicalola Falls is the highest waterfall in Georgia and considered one of the seven "Natural Wonders of Georgia". One of the most breathtaking canyons in the Eastern U.S., Tallulah Gorge is 2 miles long and 1,000 feet deep and is one of the most visited attractions in Georgia. Tourism generates substantial employment, payroll income, and tax revenues for the region.

Healthcare remains a thriving industry for the region. As the population of the region increases, additional medical services are needed to meet the demand for specialty services. Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC) Braselton, which only opened its doors in April 2015, has already begun construction on a new expansion to the facility to include 10 labor, delivery, recovery, and postpartum rooms, 2 C-section suites, a nursery, and reception and waiting areas. This new space is tentatively scheduled to open in January 2017.

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) Workforce Development Department provides day-to-day management of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds that are allocated to the Georgia Mountains Region through the Georgia Department of Economic Development Workforce Division. The department continues to provide oversight of training providers who provide job training and job placement to eligible persons. Examples of programs offered to the 13-county service area through the department include On-the-Job Training (OJT) to improve job and career options for Georgia's workers and Mobile Training Units (MTUs) that offer training and resume-building services for job seekers.

GMRC Workforce Development (GMWD) Adult and Dislocated Services department served 591 individuals in FY 2016. Training for individuals 18 years or older was provided by Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding. Additionally, GMWD assisted 408 youth through the Youth Program Division.

Region 2 experienced another year of significant growth and prosperity with **1,257 jobs created and \$265 million in private investment** generated.

While the overall regional economy has strengthened, there are still economic problems that need attention, and several opportunities remain to be built upon. Continued economic diversifications and strengthening the competitiveness of the region's economy are still problems that need to be addressed, as is the depth and quality of the local labor force. Economic growth that occurs from internal business growth rather than from in-migration of businesses must be addressed for business retention.

About the Update

About the Update

This document serves as the annual update for the combined Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and Regional Plan for the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC). Serving a dual purpose, this document acts as the regional planning instrument required for both federal and state directives.

As the region's Economic Development District (EDD) designated by the United States Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration (EDA), the GMRC must develop and maintain an approved CEDS. The CEDS document serves as the region's vision and plan for economic growth and development in advancing the area's economic prosperity, (merged) and collectively sets forth a coordinated economic strategy for all 13 counties in the Georgia Mountains Region.

Likewise, as the area's state designated regional planning agency, the GMRC is responsible for maintaining a Regional Plan in accordance with the rules established by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). The *Regional Plan* identifies and coordinates remediation measures for issues and opportunities that impact multiple communities within the region in areas such as environmental management, community facilities, and land use. The resulting document then provides a forward-thinking work program for the GMRC that will better coordinate support services for local governments and direct state activities for the region.

The Planning Process

In 2015, the GMRC completed the first joint update of their CEDS/Regional Plan, a document which will be partially updated annually and updated in full every 5 years.

The annual updates for this document begin in the spring with an end-of-year review process carried out by GMRC staff. This includes a review of GMRC projects and key developments from the previous year. Additionally, GMRC staff begin surveying local governments for their comments on GMRC efforts and to update their own general issues and needs. This data builds the preliminary Regional Planning material required by the state, to be completed as the GMRC updates the local government performance assessment discussed later in the document.

Later in the summer, the GMRC staff begin working with the standing CEDS committee to update the federally mandated portion of the document. This includes reviewing and assessing various elements and SWOT analyses of regional needs and priorities, culminating in any necessary amendments to key issues and strategies for the region further described in this document.

Both efforts are moving toward a more streamlined approach, with both contributing to the development of the consolidated 5-year Work Program of recommended action items for the GMRC to address key issues.

2015—2016 CEDS Committee

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission fulfilled its partnership role with the U.S. Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration through the maintenance of a continuous, comprehensive economic development planning process, support of local economic development projects, and the promotion of new and expanding projects. GMRC has worked with stakeholders in the Georgia Mountains Region to implement the goals established in the Five-Year CEDS document. The activities undertaken this year principally focused on identifying and seeking funding for priority projects, implementation of projects, and supporting the economic development initiatives of the 13 counties and the 38 municipalities that comprise the Georgia Mountains Region.

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission CEDS Committee met four times during the past year and continued to play an active role in prioritizing projects in the region and endorsing the CEDS Implementation Plan. The CEDS Committee also provided a forum for representatives of the private sector, local government elected officials, community colleges, and other economic development stakeholders to offer their views and input into the process.

The GMRC wishes to acknowledge the active participation and leadership from its economic partners and CEDS Committee in completing this document:

Lynne Anderson

Charlie Auvermann (Chairman)

Margaret Ayers

Phyllis Ayers

Erik Brinke

Tammy Caudell

Charles Cawthon

William Chafin

Ray Coulombe

Mark Crenshaw

Tim Evans

Mitch Griggs (Vice-Chair)

Carol Jackson

Robert Long

Tim Martin

Deidra Moore

George Nolan

Tom O'Bryant

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John Phillips, *Workforce Development Director*

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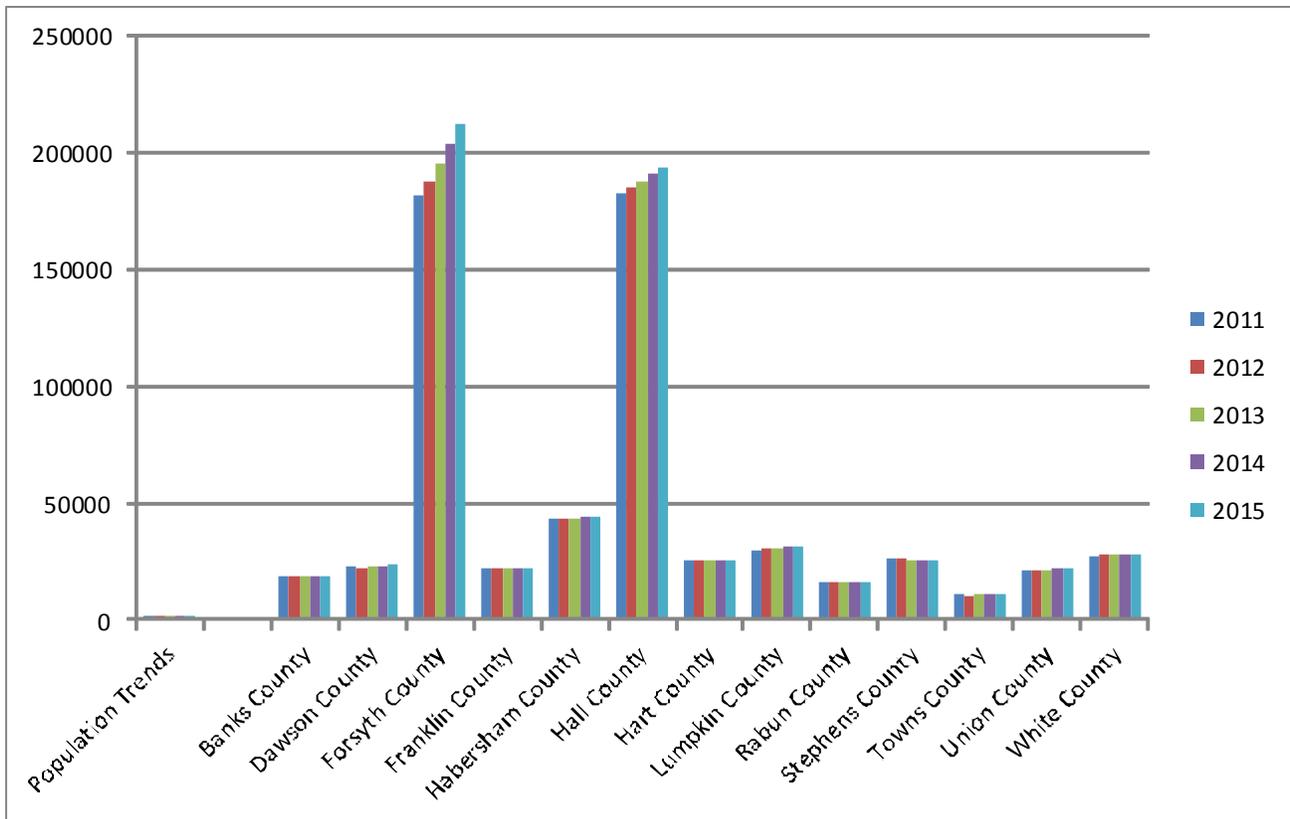
Economic Climate/Regional Economy

Efforts to predict the future economic profile of the Georgia Mountains Region can be assisted by an understanding of the historic population growth patterns of the region and the existing population profile. Improving the economic health of the region is a common goal and requires policy makers to understand how changes in the region's population will affect the opportunities for economic growth. The Georgia Mountains Region has grown over the past few years and is currently estimated at 674,664. However, there is a noticeable trend of young adults leaving the area. Economic developers in the region have expressed some concerns with the migration of the youth and the trend causing a shortage of skilled labor. Current efforts are now being implemented to educate, train and encourage the region's youth to remain in the area and contribute to the much needed workforce.

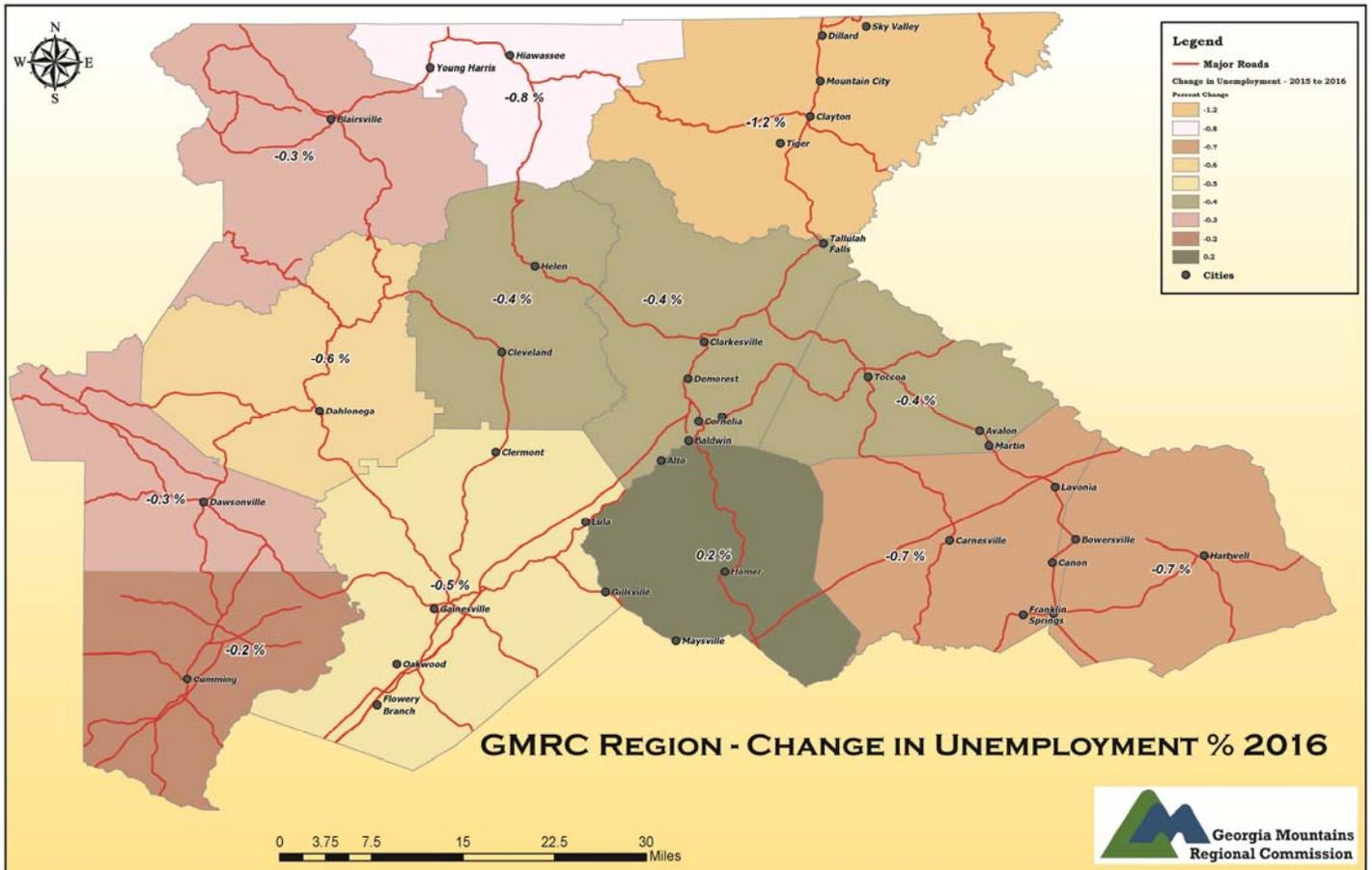
According to the Georgia Department of Labor, it is projected that the region's population in 2025 will reach 1,004,395 persons, reflecting a 62.6% increase. Therefore, the goals identified in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy—Regional Plan are more important than ever in maintaining the balance between growth and the rural character of the region.

Low taxes and tax credits are attracting new industries and supporting the expansion of existing business in the region. The Georgia Mountains Region saw 33 projects, \$265 million and 1,257 jobs created in 2016, according to the Georgia Department of Economic Development. Georgia's leading industries are food processing, logistics, information technology, aerospace, automotive and manufacturing.

Georgia Mountains Region—Population



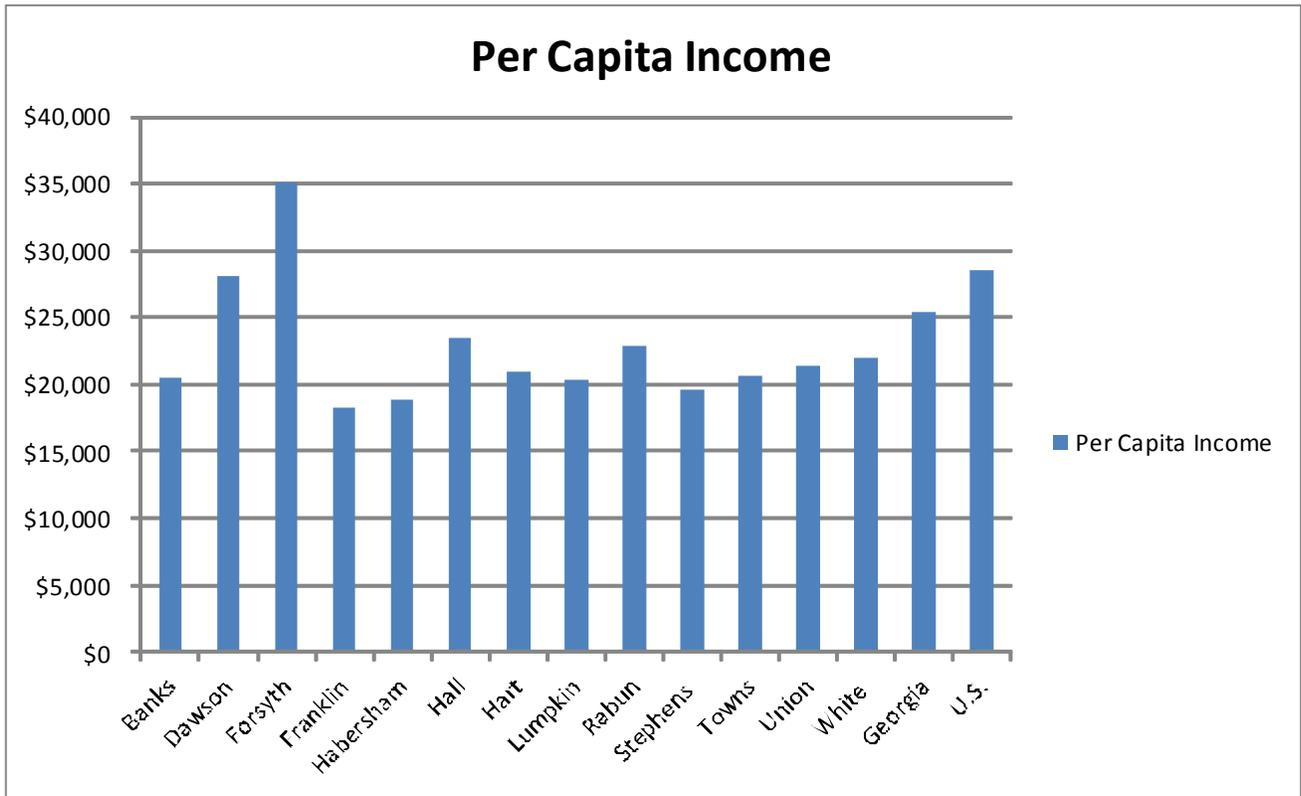
Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Unemployment in the Georgia Mountains Region has seen a tremendous decline over the past year with an average current unemployment rate for the region of 5.4% (June 2016) and is higher than the state at 5.1%, but higher than the U.S. rate of 4.9%. However, it is the lowest rate for regions in the state.

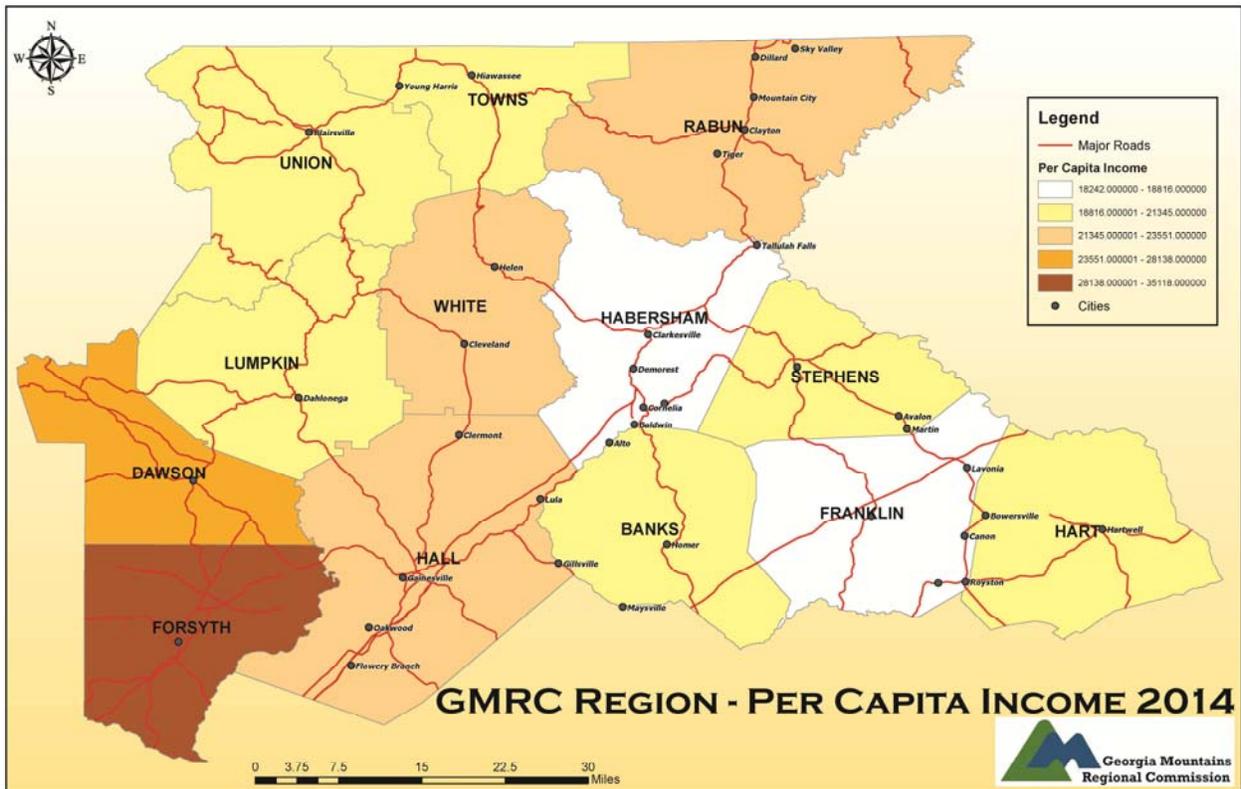
COUNTY	2014 UNEMPLOYMENT	2015 UNEMPLOYMENT	CHANGE
Banks	538	444	-17.47%
Dawson	661	542	-18.00%
Forsyth	5,171	4,501	-12.96%
Franklin	764	579	-24.21%
Habersham	1,318	1,059	-19.65%
Hall	5,338	4,383	-17.89%
Hart	801	630	-21.35%
Lumpkin	997	810	-18.76%
Rabun	548	433	-20.99%
Stephens	856	695	-18.81%
Towns	363	304	-16.25%
Union	613	508	-17.13%
White	874	698	-20.14%

Source: Georgia Department of Labor, Area Labor Profile

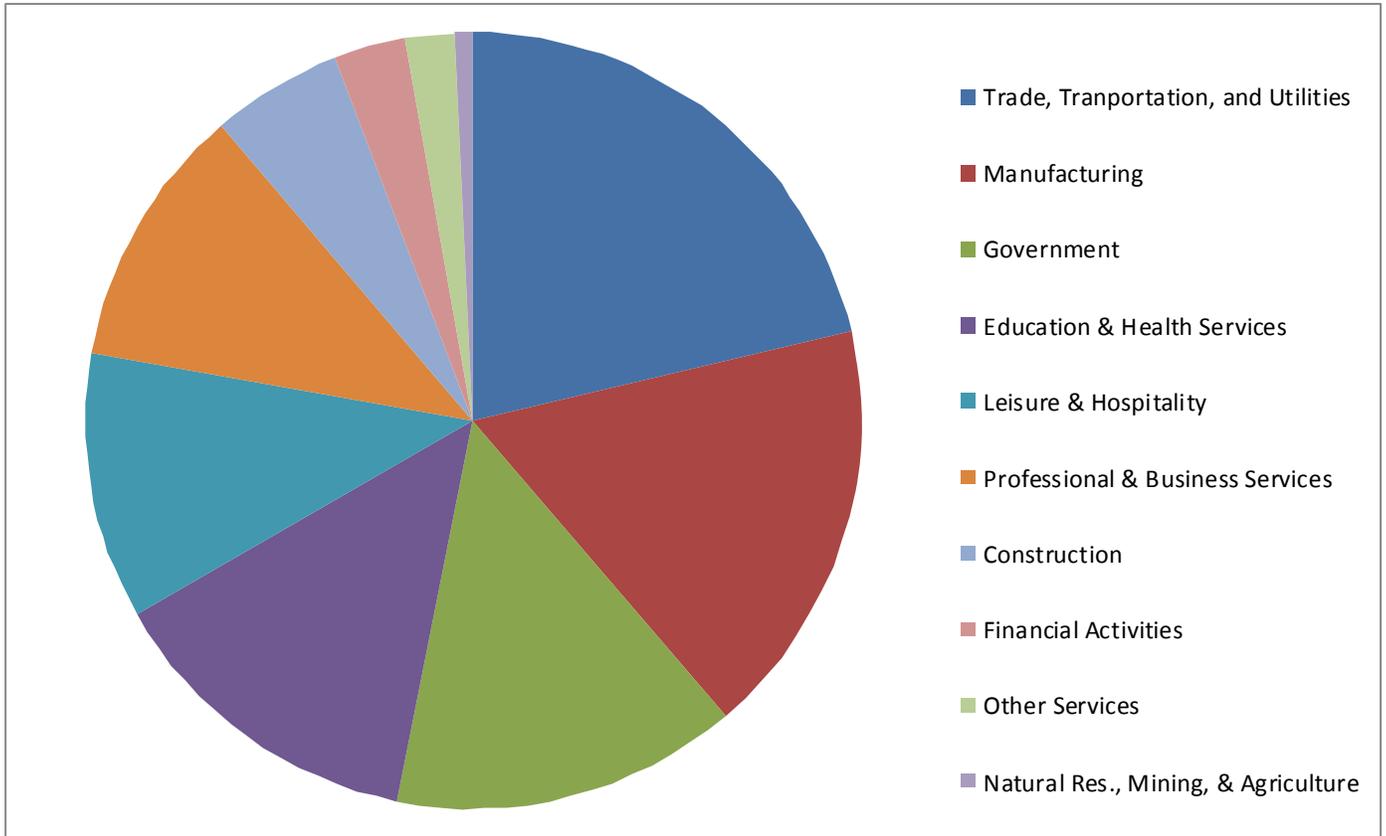


Source: U.S. Census Bureau and Georgia Department of Labor

Even with low unemployment rates in the Georgia Mountains region, per capita income throughout the region is lower than state and national averages. The average per capita income in the Georgia Mountains Region is \$22,459 compared to the state average of \$25,427 and the U.S. average of \$28,555.



Industry Employment Distribution



Source: Georgia Department of Labor

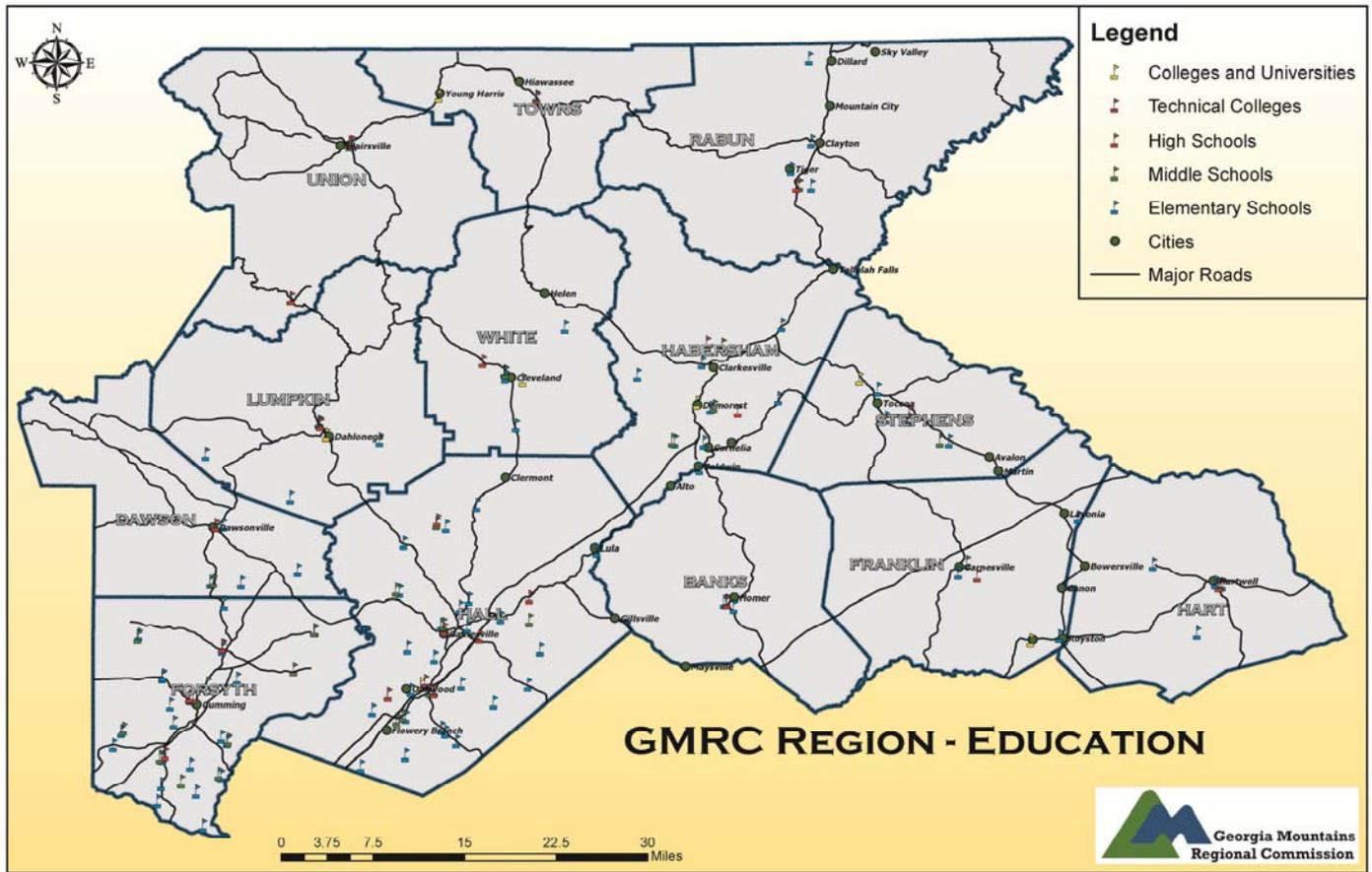
According to the Georgia Department of Labor, the ten largest employers in the region in 2015 were Fieldale Further Processing, Ingles Markets, Northeast Georgia Medical Center, Northside Hospital, PCS, Pilgrim’s Pride Corporation, Publix Supermarkets, University of North Georgia, Victory Processing, LLC., and Walmart.

Education of the Labor Force

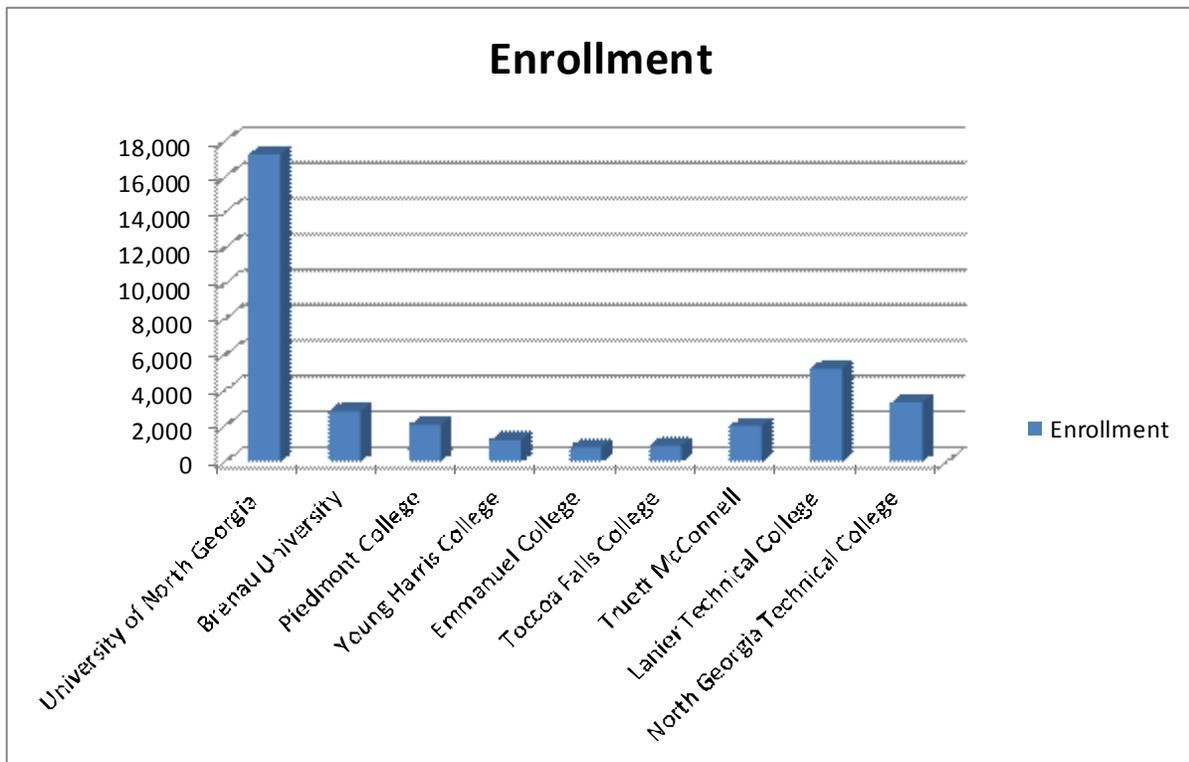
PERCENT DISTRIBUTION BY AGE

	<u>18-24</u>	<u>25-34</u>	<u>35-44</u>	<u>45-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
Elementary	4.9%	9.2%	6.4%	5.3%	13.6%
Some High School	19.5%	11.9%	9.2%	9.4%	14.8%
High School Grad/GED	34.9%	29.7%	27.3%	31.7%	31.2%
Some College	33.7%	20.4%	18.4%	20.2%	16.6%
College 2 Year	3.0%	6.3%	7.2%	7.1%	3.6%
College 4 Year	3.7%	16.0%	22.3%	17.0%	12.2%
Post Graduate Studies	.4%	6.5%	9.2%	9.3%	8.0%

Source: Georgia Department of Labor



The economic development programs provided through the colleges and technical colleges provide customized training and other services for business and industry to help existing companies remain in the area and succeed and to stimulate new business start-ups. Quick Start training and services are provided to attract new companies to the area, to assist companies to expand, and to help existing companies to implement new technologies.



Tourism plays an important role throughout the Georgia Mountains Region driving significant business growth and revenue for companies. With moderate climates, advanced transportation infrastructure, long travel seasons, and diversity of attractions, tourism related businesses in the Georgia Mountains Region are able to leverage attractions for both in and out-of-state visitors to increase sales and revenues. According to the Georgia Department of Economic Development, tourism is a \$58.9 billion industry in the State of Georgia. The Georgia Mountains Region is third in annual travel volume by domestic visitors behind only Metro Atlanta and the Georgia Coast. Visitors to the region are attracted by the abundance of outdoor activities, numerous state parks and historic sites, museums, wineries, and mountain arts and crafts just to name a few.

The rowing and kayaking site of the 1996 Olympics is located at 3105 Clarks Bridge Road on Lake Lanier in Gainesville, Hall County, Georgia. In May 2016, the venue hosted the Pan American Championships and the U.S. Canoe/Kayak National Team Trials. The Lake Lanier Olympic Venue has shown an economic impact of just under \$7 million in 2015 and with new events added for 2016 is expected to be around \$10 million.

At an economic impact of \$6 billion in 2015, the film industry in Georgia continues to flourish, especially in the Georgia Mountains. All 13 counties within the Georgia Mountains Region are certified as "Camera Ready". The mountains, lakes, and small towns make the Georgia Mountains an ideal location and as a result, several movies and television shows have been filmed in the Georgia Mountains Region in the last year.

2014 IMPACT OF DOMESTIC TOURISM EXPENDITURES NORTHEAST GEORGIA MOUNTAINS

Source: Excerpted from Study Prepared for GDEcD by the U.S. Travel Association, Washington, DC

Counties	Expenditures (\$ Millions)	Payroll (\$ Millions)	Employment (Thousands)	State Tax Receipts (\$ Millions)	Local Tax Receipts (\$ Millions)
Banks	14.77	3.35	0.15	0.59	0.44
Dawson	44.73	10.21	0.44	1.85	1.24
Forsyth	154.25	28.25	1.64	6.27	4.45
Franklin	36.25	5.29	0.27	1.18	1.03
Habersham	47.93	9.31	0.45	1.82	1.28
Hall	279.54	58.12	2.57	10.23	8.24
Hart	22.55	5.24	0.24	0.91	0.63
Lumpkin	38.76	7.26	0.32	1.42	1.11
Rabun	50.76	11.93	0.51	2.01	1.47
Stephens	31.83	5.74	0.30	1.12	0.89
Towns	43.11	9.55	0.41	1.78	1.21
Union	24.52	4.76	0.24	0.90	0.69
White	59.82	12.76	0.55	2.23	1.68
Georgia	23,706.57	7526.10	228.45	1,059.17	671.93

Prepared by Cheryl Smith, Regional Tourism Representative, Georgia Department of Economic Development

2016 Assessment

This chapter summarizes the updated analysis of conditions, needs and objectives within each of the required elements. It builds upon the material developed in the last 5-year CEDS full rewrite, evaluating the performance and impact of applied actions and outlining any recommended changes and additions to the region's plan.

Each element's assessment includes the following sections:

Goals and Strategies

Each element within the CEDS includes a specific, overarching *Goal* that represents the ideal for which the GMRC and its partners are striving. This is designed to complement the goals for each individual community within the region as well as the related goals and initiatives being sought by the State of Georgia. Originally conceived during the 5-year CEDS full rewrite in 2012, these *Goals* serve as the primary barometer by which each action will be measured for its appropriateness and impact for the Georgia Mountains Region.

In addition, *Goals* may be accompanied by one or more regional *Strategies*. These are more specific guidelines that the GMRC will use in shaping policy and action measures to achieve the related goal. These have been established to help clarify areas where an element may require more detailed discussion and/or to help illustrate the key values and objectives inherit within the *Goal*.

Assessment

This section provides a brief overview of the updated conditions and issues pertaining to the particular element. It is a summary of the evaluations, surveys and discussions held with stakeholders during the annual update process. These assessments provide the groundwork for updating the list of *Issues and Mitigation Measures* for each element.

Regional Issues and Opportunities

The planning process asks regions to assess the information to identify issues and opportunities that should be considered when trying to plan for the future. In doing so, the regions can more effectively define their objectives and actions so as to better achieve the desired vision.

Natural and Cultural Resources

GOAL: *To conserve, protect and promote the environmental, natural and cultural resources of the region.*

Strategy NR1: *Promote conservation design ideas and other best management practices for new development.*

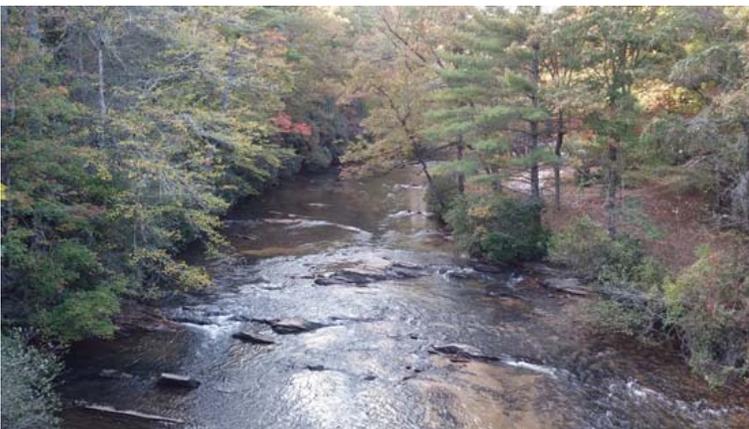
Strategy NR2: *Improve and promote the knowledge of existing historic resources and preservation programs.*

Strategy NR3: *Support efforts to implement the State's River Basin Management Plans.*

Strategy NR4: *Promote tighter coordination between land use planning and water supply management.*

ASSESSMENT

The prominent environmental issue within the region remains the management of water resources. The GMRC continues to work with the Northwest Georgia RC and the North Georgia Watershed Partnership in implementing the Coosa-North Georgia Watershed Plan. The GMRC also provides a similar support role for the 5 eastern counties within the Savannah – Upper Ogeechee River Basin. On both fronts, the GMRC assists with the updates of their respective State Water Plan elements and with implementation projects as listed below.



The GMRC also works with the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D and other partners in promoting the wise management of natural resources, with an emphasis on the preservation of natural landscapes and open spaces. This involves the education in, and the implementation of, specific regulations and policies that ensure best practices of undeveloped land within the region.

Projects completed or nearing completion include:

- 5 development reviews under the Metropolitan River Protection Act
- 12 development reviews for potential environmental impacts under the federal Section 106 or State DRI processes
- Completion of a Watershed Management Plan for the upper Chestatee River in Lumpkin and White Counties
- Projects that began in 2016 include support for 3 different watershed assessments within White and Habersham Counties, and development of template material to include Firewise Community evaluations within local comprehensive plans

Issue	Mitigation Strategy
Some local communities lack regulations that meet State minimum standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new template for local water planning • Education re: environmental impacts of various materials and products placed in landfills
Lack of awareness about conservation design and best management practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new template for local water planning • Education re: environmental impacts of various materials and products placed in landfills • Inventory of septic system management programs • Update Regional Source Water Assessment Plan • Assessment of septic system inventory • Update NHRGIS, survey of regional historic resources
Lack of education about all types of environmentally sensitive areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new template for local water planning • Inventory of septic system management programs • Update Regional Source Water Assessment Plan • Assessment of septic system inventory
Lack of local greenspace plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Template for greenspace planning to be incorporated into local comprehensive plans during respective dates
Decreasing funds for State parks and wildlife management areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy: Continue to support sustained or increased funding at DNR for operation of state parks and wildlife management areas
General habitat degradation caused by growth and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new template for local water planning • Education re: environmental impacts of various materials and products placed in landfills • Develop regional development build-out scenario
Need to coordinate implementation of the three Water Planning District management plans developed for the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Plan update in 2017 will include guide to coordinate state water planning activities in the region • Template for watershed planning to be incorporated into local comp plans during updates

Land Use

GOAL: *To promote and coordinate land use planning and management that supports the other goals and ambitions for the region.*

Strategy LU1: *Promote development that maximizes existing utilities and infrastructure.*

Strategy LU2: *Support preservation and expansion of historic town centers.*

Strategy LU3: *Promote coordinated land use management along critical arterials, supporting both local needs and the demands of through traffic critical for tourism and industry.*

Strategy LU4: *Promote neighborhood scale planning.*

Strategy LU5: *Support efforts that preserve rural and agricultural uses where desired.*

Strategy LU6: *Support advanced development practices within the metropolitan areas.*

ASSESSMENT

There are no notable changes or land use issues cited for the 2016 CEDS/Regional Plan. The region continues to recover from the recession and has seen housing development slowly pick up, particularly in Hall and Forsyth Counties. The appeal of the mountains and lakes has returned and several communities across the region are seeing new construction again.

- Parks are becoming a key item going forward, with more counties and cities pursuing both passive use areas and land for active athletic fields. At least 3 trail projects and 2 community parks were initiated in 2016, with 3 more planned for the coming year.
- The bulk of new commercial activity is occurring within the Ga. 400 corridor, spurred on by road improvement projects and an increase in residential development that demands new retail and dining options.
- Banks County is pursuing a gateway corridor scheme for US 441 at the Banks Crossing interchange with I-85, to enhance the appeal for new business. This will include a new industrial park, improved design and sign regulations and various safety measures for traffic management.
- The GMRC has completed four urban redevelopment plans as part of an ongoing effort to support communities with historic town centers. These tools will help guide and spur infill development and capital improvement projects as these cities seek to revitalize older commercial cores.

Issue	Mitigation Strategy
<p>The rapid transition of land use from farms and forest to residential and commercial</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop regional development build-out scenario • Develop updated concept for, and inventory of, primary agricultural areas • Develop template for comprehensive neighborhood plans and standards • Review regional Future Development Strategy; Amend as needed
<p>The lack of adequate and innovative land use planning tools and lack of enforcement of existing land use regulations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create growth management programs that provide developer incentives and guidelines as well as methods of increased responsibility and accountability to the local community. • Review regional Future Development Strategy; Amend as needed
<p>Insufficient infrastructure for the demands of changing land uses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review regional Future Development Strategy • Develop regional development build-out scenario • Develop in-house service for calculating cost-benefit analyses for new development & utility improvements
<p>Lack of/limited capacity for identification and protection of sensitive areas (environmentally and historically) as the population grows</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review regional Future Development Strategy; Amend as needed
<p>Land use conflicts (i.e. Poultry and livestock operations vs. residential development, or high density development occurring in sensitive areas.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop template for comprehensive neighborhood plans and standards • Create growth management programs that provide developer incentives and guidelines as well as methods of increased responsibility • Review regional Future Development Strategy; Amend as needed • Education re: environmental impacts of various materials and products placed in landfills
<p>Insufficient land use regulations (do not consider impacts and consistency beyond jurisdictional boundaries)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop template for comprehensive neighborhood plans and standards • Create growth management programs

<p>The deterioration of downtown areas, buildings and infrastructure, and loss of economic activity as suburbanization occurs in the region</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review regional Future Development Strategy; Amend as needed • Initiate GMRC Downtown Association • Develop a region wide downtown economic data-base that includes historic resources • Develop single map redevelopment plans for historic downtowns • Create model design standards and incentive programs for downtown areas
<p>The eroding downtown tax base of the cities throughout the region resulting from suburbanization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review regional Future Development Strategy; Amend as needed • Initiate GMRC Downtown Association • Develop a region wide downtown economic data-base that includes historic resources • Develop single map redevelopment plans for historic downtowns • Create model design standards and incentive programs for downtown areas
<p>Impact of population growth for impact on rural character</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory and map agri-tourism assets of the region. • Develop regional growth and tourism strategy specifically for historic downtowns • Develop promotional material for area farmer's markets and canneries • Develop updated concept for, and inventory of, primary agricultural areas



Areas Requiring Special Attention

As part of the planning process, the GMRC is tasked to provide an assessment of select issues and concerns to recognize specific locations in need of special attention through physical investment or change of policy. This section provides an update of the Areas Requiring Special Attention identified within the current 2013 Regional Agenda, where there has been no change to the geographic allocation of these areas but some changes to note regarding the scope of the issues.

Areas where significant Regionally Important Resources (RIRs) (Natural and Cultural) are likely to be impacted by development

No significant change in scope or concerns since 2013. Most communities are making/enabling improvements regarding water quality concerns, and no major development activity within proximity to RIR's has been identified. Hall County saw the establishment of a new Greenspace Committee through the local chamber of commerce, while Forsyth County and other cities within the reach of metro Atlanta have made strides in acquiring new park space. Furthermore, all communities have thus far reported compliant with their respective regional Water Management Plans as mandated by the Department of Natural Resources.

Areas where rapid development or change of land uses may outpace the availability of community facilities and services, including transportation

As the arterial between large and growing metropolitan centers, the I-85 Corridor remains on track to receive increased growth and demand for utilities, possibly beyond local capacity. Banks County is making headway to address development policies and utility planning in the area, while Lavonia and Franklin County are pursuing infrastructure and utility improvements to support growth in their portion of the corridor. **(Map ID – I-85 Corridor)**

Additional arterial roadways that serve multiple purposes are at risk of over-congestion. Highways 129 and 17 in particular provide critical access for local and through traffic, particularly for tourists traveling into the Georgia Mountains Region. Congestion levels and development pressures can increase as these roads are explored for commercial and industrial growth, while communities relying on such growth are also looking to preserve the free-flow of traffic and the scenic appeal of these rural arteries. Habersham County has done an assessment of Highway 365 and enacted beginning land use policies along the corridor, while White County and Forsyth County are pursuing road improvements to upgrade capacity and conditions. **(Map ID – North-South Arterials)**

Areas in need of redevelopment and/or significant improvement

There are no large areas with regional-scale concentrations of land in need of redevelopment, though there are several communities with industrial size properties that remain/will be vacant or underutilized. Some older town centers and neighborhoods should be improved through redevelopment programs, and the GMRC is supporting multiple efforts to revitalize these historic downtowns through planning efforts, grant applications, and pursuit of opportunity zone designations. **(Map ID – Town Centers)**

Areas with significant infill development opportunities

The many historic town centers referenced above would benefit through proper infill development that compliments community character and form while also injecting new economic activity. Concentrating urbanized development within and around existing urban centers is an efficient way to maximize resources while preserving rural lands elsewhere.

Several counties in the region are strategizing how to absorb new growth as they transition from their historic agricultural base. Improved management measures may be needed to handle in-migration without incurring land use conflicts or adversely impacting natural resources. As a collective, these communities have not only the land but access to water, utilities and sound infrastructure. **(Map ID – Agricultural Transition)**

Areas of significant disinvestment, poverty, and/or unemployment

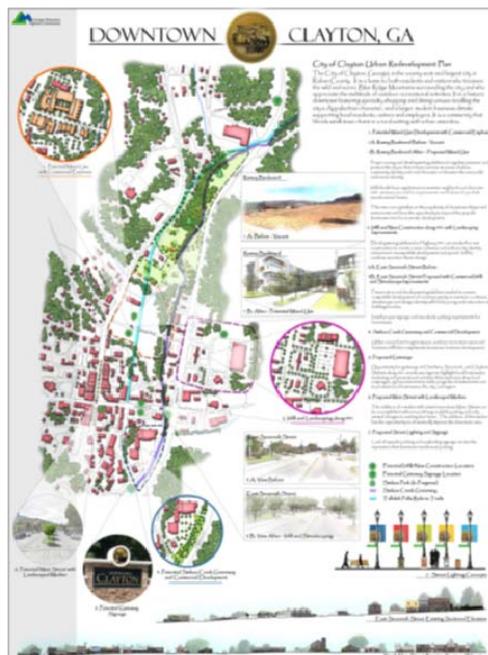
Coming out of the recession there are no regionally significant areas with concentrations of poverty or disinvestment that are not already being addressed through local programs. Pockets of Hall County feature the largest concentrations of poorer households, but this is not a regional condition and local programs are actively addressing issues such as housing, infrastructure, and job skills training. Additional current programs and projects such as the North Georgia Network (fiber-optic infrastructure) and expansions with area technical colleges are helping to mitigate this issue.

Staff Assessment Regarding Areas Requiring Special Attention

At the early stage no new actions are necessary to address concerns within these areas. Within the past three years there have been either local, state or regional actions to address at least some aspect of the issues cited. On some efforts there will be much attention paid to early results of measures regarding the corridors and agricultural areas as more communities explore forms of land use management measures, so these will be of keen focus during the Regional Plan’s 5 year update.

Similarly, there have been no calls for new ARSAs at this time. Possible nominations were raised but nothing was found to be of regional or multi-jurisdictional concern that wasn’t already addressed through existing measures.

(NOTE: The map outlining the Areas Requiring Special Attention can be found at the end of this document.)



Community Facilities and Services

GOAL: *To provide adequate facilities and infrastructure in all areas to support existing business and industry, enable expansion, and recruit new business, and to support efficient growth and development patterns that will protect and enhance the region's quality of life.*

ASSESSMENT

Transportation

Goal: *Enhance all segments of transportation networks in the region to promote economic development and personal safety.*

Strategy CFS1: *Utilize existing inventories of current roadways, air, and rail needs to support economic development.*

Strategy CFS2: *Improve current transit, local public transportation systems, and encourage green methods of transportation.*

Highways and state routes within the Georgia Mountains Region provide a connection to the rest of the United States, linking cities and counties, providing a transportation route for exporting goods, bringing in tourist dollars and assisting commuters on their routes to and from work.

Recognizing the need of improving roadways and understanding the importance of transportation to the region's economy, the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) continues to work with local governments to assist with transportation needs and track improvements and new routes added to the area's transportation system. Georgia legislators introduced and passed House Bill 170 on Jan. 29, 2015 to improve transportation funding throughout the state. Some of the projects utilizing this funding are:

- State road and bridge maintenance needs
- Increasing the state's Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant (LMIG)
- Pavement preservation projects on state roads
- Bridge replacement

In Forsyth County, voters approved a new method of funding transportation within their county and are generating up to \$200 million with a general obligation bond program to finance a variety of transportation projects. Projects include widening of SR400, SR371, SR369 and several county roads, installation of sidewalks, improvement of intersections, resurfacing, and traffic safety improvements.

SR 400 project will benefit the entire Georgia Mountains Region by providing an easier access to metro Atlanta for transporting goods, visitors to the mountains and working commuters. The timeline for the SR 400 project at the time of publication was ahead of schedule. The timeline is as follows:

- McFarland Parkway to SR141 NB—Sept. 2016
- SR141 to Bald Ridge Marina Exit NB—March 2017
- All of NB complete including OS shoulder—June 2017
- McFarland Parkway to SR 20 SB—April 2018
- All of SB complete including OS shoulder—Oct. 2019

To obtain more detailed information regarding the area’s transportation projects, the GMRC requested information from GMRC member governments to complete an infrastructure survey requesting details on infrastructure projects for the area.

City or County	Road Improvements
Banks County	Resurfacing 17 miles, signage & striping 58 miles, gravel 18 miles, bridge improvements and repair 16
Forsyth County	Widening of Ga. 400 from McFarland to Hwy. 369, 201 county roads and 57 miles resurfaced, 14 sidewalk projects, 22 intersection improvements underway and 9 traffic safety improvements .
Franklin County	Various resurfacing (7.24 miles) and one culvert replacement
Hall County	Voters approved SPOLST VII to invest a projected \$158 million for road improvements, water and sewer and other municipal projects.
City of Hartwell	Road resurfacing projects being completed.
Lumpkin County	Resurfaced county airport runway, resurfaced 13 miles of county roads
Mt. Airy	Regular road maintenance
Sky Valley	Regular road maintenance
White County	Cleveland By Pass (Appalachian Parkway) Phase 1 under construction, Phase 2 initiated by Georgia DOT. 9 miles of County Road resurfaced, 1.5 miles of new paving. ¾ mile of bike trail at recreation department.

Residents of the region continue to request the addition of walking and multi-use trails. Several communities received trail grants and others locally funded these improvements.

- City of Dawsonville—Nature Trails at new Main Street Park.
- White County—Yonah Preserve Multi-Use Trails.
- Banks County—1.5 miles of trail at Windmill Park Sports Complex.
- Forsyth County—2.8 miles Big Creek Greenway Phase 4 to be completed.
- Hall County—Cherokee Bluffs Park first of three phases complete that include trails.
- City of Oakwood—Intergovernmental agreement with Hall Co. and University of North Georgia (UNG) for constructing a sidewalk on Landrum Ed. Dr. to connect Exit 17 park and ride lot with UNG campus.

Water & wastewater

Goal: *Provide adequate water supply and promote conservation.*

Strategy CFS3: *Support the development of water supply to ensure stable infrastructural support for businesses and residents.*

Strategy CFS4: *Improve water quality and wastewater planning to ensure stable infrastructural support for businesses and residents.*

Currently, several of the region's municipalities depend on federal, state and local monies for the construction or improvement of water and wastewater infrastructure through programs like the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA). The below table outlines major projects funded by GEFA in FY 2015.

Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) - provides up to \$25 million for wastewater infrastructure.

Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) - provides up to \$25 million for infrastructure projects that deliver safe, affordable drinking water.

The Georgia Fund— a state funded program administered by GEFA, provides communities with low-interest loans for water, wastewater, water conservation and solid waste infrastructure projects. Low interest loans are available up to \$3 million.

Date	Community	Amount	Fund	Project
Nov. 2015	City of Baldwin	\$540,000	DWSRF	Instillation of automatic water meters
Nov. 2015	City of Cleveland	\$478,055	CWSRF	4,200 LF of 8" sewer line
Nov. 2015	City of Dawsonville	\$445,500	CWSRF	800,000 gal. aeration pond
Nov. 2015	City of Hartwell	\$1,000,000	CWSRF	Update filter system at wastewater treatment plant
Nov. 2015	Lumpkin Co. Water & Sewerage Auth.	\$750,000	DWSRF	12,600 LF of 12" water line
May 2016	City of Cornelia	\$975,000	CWSRF	Construct new sewer mains
May 2016	City of Hartwell	\$3,863,000	DWSRF	Rehabilitation of water treatment plant

Georgia Environmental Finance Authority

Telecommunications

Goal: *Ensure new telecommunication networks for needed accessibility and reliability.*

Strategy CFS6: *Prepare to meet industry and business telecommunication needs by assisting with fiber optic network development.*

The development of telecommunications is critical to the future economic viability of the Georgia Mountains Region. Funding for telecommunication related projects is a constant need by cities and counties in the region. Many regional businesses and industries desire data capacity for video applications of data sharing between company locations, distance learning, telemedicine and surveillance. Uploading capabilities are a factor with the GMRC's businesses with several needing to utilize more data. Suppliers are saying within the next four years internet traffic will triple due to internet access in cars and vehicles, entertainment and internet control of utilities and appliances. The projected long term technology will be 5G and this will also be available to a mobile device. There is a trend of broadband converting to cell towers instead of in the ground. However, there continues to be a digital divide between metro areas and rural areas in regards to accessibility and reliability to support the growth of the mountain region.

Healthcare

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

Strategy CFS7: *Encourage and support multi-jurisdictional approaches to provide health services for economic development purposes.*

Strategy CFS8: *Support efforts to improve community-based prevention and wellness.*

Strategy CFS9: *Promote and support the use of health information technology (IT).*

Healthcare organizations continue to grow in the region. Hospitals and physicians are expanding and enhancing services to keep up with the growing needs of the area. Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC) Braselton, is scheduled to open a new expansion to the facility which includes 10 labor, delivery, recovery, and postpartum rooms, 2 C-section suites, a nursery, and reception and waiting areas. Northside Hospital— Forsyth is set to complete three additional floors to the hospital in October 2016 bringing their inpatient bed count to 247 and total number of beds to 330. Northside Hospital— Forsyth's new surgical care center is scheduled to open May 2017. The center will have two dedicated, women-only GYN and breast care operating rooms. AnMed Health will begin construction on a new medical campus in the new Oakview Crossing development in Hart County. The project will include physicians' offices as well as a diagnostic center and will create 20 new jobs and \$9 million in private investment.



Northeast Georgia Medical Center



Northside Hospital— Forsyth

Waste Management

Goal: *Provide adequate waste management for domestic and industrial usage.*

Strategy CFS10: *Update and improve the region's waste management plans to ensure availability for current and future economic growth.*

Georgia counties are required to submit a Solid Waste Management Plan to meet the existing solid waste management needs and future demands, implement waste reduction strategies to meet the state's per capita waste reduction goal and assure that a 10 year solid waste disposal capacity exists. Businesses searching for site facilities need assurances from the municipalities that capacity is available for their waste and recycling needs. In order to preserve waste capacity, waste conservation and reduction is an essential method of waste management.

Promoting responsible stewardship and updating waste disposal plans, encouraging waste reduction, and recycling continues to be a priority for the Georgia Mountains Region. Staff at the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission support planning and economic development that promotes revitalization and good stewardship of the region's natural resources.

Many of the counties in the Georgia Mountains Region support the waste reduction and education efforts of Keep Georgia Beautiful. Hall, Dawson, Forsyth and Hart counties have individual programs and Union, Lumpkin and Banks counties belong to a regional organizational effort called, Keep Our Mountains Beautiful.

Energy

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

Strategy CFS11: *Support the development of low-cost energy and maintain energy reliability.*

Strategy CFS12: *Promote environmental standards in the development of businesses and industries.*

The region recognizes the efforts of the local businesses and industries to include the use of renewable energy resources in their production such as wind and solar. Energy efficiency rebate and education programs are some of the methods energy providers in the Georgia Mountains region perform to promote efficiency. The region receives its energy from Sawnee EMC, Georgia Power, Habersham EMC, Blue Ridge EMC, Jackson EMC, and Hart EMC.

By the end of 2016, it is expected that Georgia will have more than 1 gigawatt of installed solar energy capacity. Sixty-one new electric vehicle charging stations have been installed across the state.

Issue	Mitigation Strategy
<p>Growing demand for water supply sources, from both within and outside the region</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new template for local water planning • Develop regional development build-out scenario • Update Regional Source Water Assessment Plan • Develop in-house service for calculating cost-benefit analyses for new development & utility improvements • Develop a metro-area growth strategy to support urbanizing communities • Develop regional water infrastructure map • Inventory and assessment of local water service rates
<p>Growing demand and environmental need for public sewer services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop regional development build-out scenario • Develop in-house service for calculating cost-benefit analyses for new development & utility improvements • Develop regional water infrastructure map • Inventory of septic system management programs. • Assessment of septic system inventory
<p>Strong need for, and great potential with, health care services and facilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement a public awareness campaign about health information technology
<p>Impact of growth and changing demographics on transportation needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update Regional Bike/Pedestrian Strategy and related work program • Develop comprehensive road improvement plan combining local and State goals • Develop Commuter Traffic Study • Develop a freight/ truck route transportation plan • Develop long-range management plans for targeted corridors in conjunction with GDOT and local stakeholders • Develop an I-85 corridor access and multi-modal study

<p>Several State arterials struggle to sustain efficiency in serving both local and through traffic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop comprehensive road improvement plan combining local and State goals • Develop Commuter Traffic Study • Develop a freight/ truck route transportation plan • Develop long-range management plans for targeted corridors in conjunction with GDOT and local stakeholders • Develop Highway 441 Tourism Study
<p>Growing need for bike trails and on-road bike lanes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GMRC to update regional bicycle and pedestrian plan • GMRC to support new bicycle safety and planning committee
<p>Lingering potential for 2nd commercial passenger service airport to support Metro Atlanta</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory and develop plans to improve local and regional airports
<p>Potential support for revenues through the Transportation Investment Act of 2010</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop Commuter Traffic Study
<p>Demand for improvements to I-85 and intersection arterials</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an I-85 corridor access and multi-modal study. • Develop long-range management plans for targeted corridors in conjunction with GDOT and local stakeholders • Develop a metro-area growth strategy to support urbanizing communities
<p>Impact of changing demographics, specifically the growing volume of retirement age residents and growing numbers of households with Hispanic/Latino ethnicity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop Regional Rural Transit Plan • Explore potential for increased rural transit services within the region • Inventory local housing programs, leaders and policies in each community • Produce survey and distribute to local housing leaders • Develop a regional strategic housing plan

Economic Development, Business and Industry

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

ASSESSMENT

Tourism

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

Strategy ED1: *Develop a master database of tourism assets in the Georgia Mountains Region.*

Strategy ED2: *Develop promotional and educational materials for the Georgia Mountains Region.*

Strategy ED3: *Foster regional partnerships to create and grow tourism product(s).*

Strategy ED4: *Improve infrastructure that supports tourism development.*

Tourism plays an important role throughout the Georgia Mountains Region driving significant business growth and revenue for companies. With moderate climates, advanced transportation infrastructure, long travel seasons, and diversity of attractions, tourism related businesses in the Georgia Mountains Region are able to leverage attractions for both in and out-of-state visitors to increase sales and revenues. According to the Georgia Department of Economic Development, tourism is a \$58.9 billion industry in the State of Georgia. The Georgia Mountains Region is third in annual travel volume by domestic visitors behind only Metro Atlanta and the Georgia Coast. Visitors to the region are attracted by the abundance of outdoor activities, numerous state parks and historic sites, museums, wineries, and mountain arts and crafts just to name a few.

- The Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center in Mountain City is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2016. The site has exhibits showcasing the homes, tools, trades, crafts, and the lifestyle of the pioneer culture of the Southern Appalachian Mountains in the 1800s.
- The City of Helen in White County continues to be one of Georgia's most popular tourism destinations. In 2015-2016, the city's hotel/motel tax collections topped \$1 million for the first time in its history. A portion of these collections will be used to promote Helen and White County to other prospective visitors.



Entrepreneurship

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

Strategy ED5: *Provide the Georgia Mountains Region's residents with innovative educational resources to help them learn about entrepreneurship and start a new business.*

Strategy ED6: *Better connect venture capital, investors, and entrepreneurs within the Georgia Mountains Region.*

Strategy ED7: *Improve access to capital for startup and small businesses.*

Strategy ED8: *Promote successful entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial practices in the region.*

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission Revolving Loan Fund (GMRC-RLF) was very active in FY 2016. The program works in partnership with the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and allows GMRC to assist Region 2 in creating and retaining jobs. As a local economic development initiative, the RLF Program helps expand the region's economy through business development and expansion.

The Revolving Loan Fund is available to businesses of all sizes and varieties. Borrowers are eligible for financing only when credit is not otherwise available. Since inception, the program has loaned out a total of \$5 million to 54 businesses throughout the Georgia Mountains Region. Those investments have translated to just over 552 jobs being retained or created.

In FY 2016, the GMRC received numerous inquiries into the RLF Program. Of those inquiries, five applications were submitted and reviewed by the staff. One of the five applications was analyzed and approved by the RLF committee. The GMRLF Program was able to support a small business expansion. In FY 2016, the GMRC RLF Program loaned \$150,000 to a business in the GMRC Region.



The Lanier Technical College Business Incubator is a public/private partnership housed at Featherbone Community. Twenty-nine businesses have been launched from the program, and 13 more start-ups are in development. Nineteen patents, 11 copyrights, and 21 trademarks have been developed. The Business Incubator provides entrepreneurs affordable space, access to professional services and educational and technical assistance. Small businesses launched in the Business Incubator have been responsible for the creation of more than 900 jobs since the organization opened eight years ago.

Agri-Business

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

Strategy ED9: *Encourage and support the development of community supported agricultural cooperatives to sustain small and mid-sized producers.*

Strategy ED10: *Expand opportunities for production based on the byproducts of value-added processing.*

Strategy ED11: *Expand and upgrade infrastructure to support farms.*

Strategy ED12: *Support efforts to expand agri-tourism in the region.*

Farmer's Markets continue to flourish throughout the region in many downtown areas, bringing people and the community together. The potential economic impacts of public markets and farmers markets include direct benefits (ex: profits to business owners in the market, job creation, sales and real estate tax revenues, etc.) and indirect benefits (ex: stimulating development downtown, enhancing the park and waterfront as a place, farmland preservation, etc.).



- Hall County's Food and Agribusiness sector has by a wide margin, the largest county economic impact in Georgia with over \$5 billion in economic output and 17,642 direct jobs
- The Georgia Poultry Laboratory Network opened a new science laboratory and headquarters in the Gateway Industrial Centre to fulfill an important food-safety role for Georgia's Poultry industry.
- At a total investment of approximately \$35 million, Fieldale Farms Corporation will expand its plant in Cornelia (Habersham County) by 199,000 square feet within 24 months, creating 200 new jobs for area residents.
- As follow up to a 2014 Local Foods Assessment for Georgia Mountains, the GMRC updated inventories of local farmer's markets, public farms, and other agri-business assets throughout the region. The GMRC is working with counties in the region to develop promotional brochures about publicly accessible local growers based on a template used elsewhere in Georgia. For FY 2017, GMRC will continue efforts to work with counties in the region to increase communication between local growers and consumers.

Existing Business and Industry

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

Strategy ED13: *Promote regional leadership and collaboration.*

Strategy ED14: *Invest in the beautification and revitalization of downtowns.*

Region 2 experienced a year of significant growth and prosperity with **1,257 jobs created** and **\$265 million in private investment** generated. The below list are a few of the highlights from the last year.

- Kubota is continuing the development of its new 180-acre campus on Highway 365 in the Gateway Industrial Centre in Hall County with a \$220 million investment and 580 jobs. The company recently celebrated their "One-Millionth" tractor produced since opening its Gainesville facility in 1988.
- Linde + Wiemann, a leading manufacturer of complex structural steel systems to automotive Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) worldwide, will locate a new facility in the Gateway II Industrial Park in Hart County. At a total investment of \$35 million, the project will create 200 jobs for area residents.
- Southeast Metals and Recycling is expanding its facility in Stephens County which will result in a \$3.5 million investment and 34 new jobs for area residents.



- The Dawson County Marketplace project represents \$90 million in private investment and is expected to create approximately 350 jobs, 202 of which will be created by Kroger which will anchor the new development.
- The Dawson Crossroads project in Dawson County is under construction and is expected to create approximately 175 jobs and \$35 million in private investment.

- The Nitta Corporation in Forsyth County announced a project to expand its current facility by 40,000 square feet. This project will result in the creation of 20 new jobs and approximately \$8 million in private investment.

Economic Resiliency

Goal: *Ensure that every community has a strategy and resources in place that specifically directs how to respond in economic recessions and/or when major employment centers are lost.*

In response to the recent global economic recession of 2008-2012, governments and communities are exploring ways of future-proofing their economic development processes. Specifically, while communities know they can't fully immunize themselves from economic downturns, they are strategizing for how best to project potential cycles and prepare and react when downturns occur so that they can more swiftly and more effectively restore their own economies.

Strategy ED15: *Ensure all communities have access to, and are aware of, resources providing economic forecasts for their region, county and, where possible, municipality.*

Strategy ED16: *Establish a proper chain of communication regarding economic concerns.*

Strategy ED17: *Develop, and routinely update, a report assessing the complete arrangement of resources, providers and services for implementing economic crisis response actions.*

Strategy ED18: *Conduct a forum or concentrated assessment of the economic health and needs of the region's most prominent industries.*

Rapid Response encompasses the strategies and activities necessary to plan for and respond as quickly as possible following an announcement of closure or layoff. Rapid response delivers services to enable dislocated workers to transition to new employment as quickly as possible. The purpose of Rapid Response is to promote economic recovery and vitality by developing an ongoing, comprehensive approach to identifying, planning for and responding to layoffs and dislocations, and preventing or minimizing their impacts on workers, business and communities. The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission Workforce Development Rapid Response area 2 has provided services to approximately 701 dislocated workers since July of 2013.

The University of Georgia—Carl Vinson Institute of Government is also a resource and partnership program that is available to assist local governments in their efforts. The Archway Partnership's purpose is to enhance connectivity between the university and local governments to address the state's critical economic development needs. Archway Partnership works closely with Habersham County and Hart County to address critical, self-identified community and economic development needs.

The photo to the right was a job fair that Georgia Mountains Regional Commission—Workforce Development's Rapid Response performed for dislocated workers from the Caterpillar Plant in Stephens County that recently closed.



Issue	Mitigation Strategy
Comparably limited support for agribusiness, especially agri-tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a regional food hub • Develop promotional material for area farmer's markets and canneries • Establish a local food guide based on local assessments • Develop an inventory of tourism industry resources
Potential for continued growth within tourism sub-markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an inventory of tourism resources • Develop Highway 441 Tourism Study • Initiate GMRC Downtown Association • Assist local governments and business in the development of multi-county tourism task force focusing on Lake Hartwell
Lack of diversity within economic base; too much reliance on a few large industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a region wide downtown economic database that includes historic resources • Develop a hi-tech strategy for the region • Host a one-day entrepreneurial education workshop in conjunction with the SBDC and Universities
Demand for expansion of goods-production industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host a one-day entrepreneurial education workshop in conjunction with the SBDC/colleges
Potential within existing cities to nurture small business and entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and distribute educational materials for entrepreneur programs • Initiate GMRC Downtown Association • Assist local governments and business in the development of multi-county tourism task force focusing on Lake Hartwell • Host a one-day entrepreneurial education workshop • Develop an entrepreneurship training program for teachers • Identify and create a database of entrepreneur support resources in the region

<p>Strong potential in health service industries, particularly around existing/ proposed hospitals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement a public awareness campaign about health information technology
<p>Competition from South Carolina and North Carolina – border region</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop 1-page fact sheet with state tax incentive information and distribute to local chambers, economic development professionals, and city and counties. • Actively market existing industrial parks
<p>Need for coordinated informational and directional signage along entrance corridors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GMRC to develop new Urban Revitalization Plans for area town centers and historic urban centers • GMRC to develop/collect and distribute guidance material for wayfinding in small cities and towns • Annually—host state tourism representatives tour 1-2 cities in the region to advise on wayfinding strategies

Workforce Development

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

Strategy WD1: *Lower the high school dropout rate.*

Strategy WD2: *Retain graduates and the educated workforce within the region.*

Strategy WD3: *Partner with local schools, businesses/industries, and civic organizations to promote the importance of an educated workforce.*

Strategy WD4: *Increase basic and technical skills.*

Strategy WD5: *Help alleviate unemployment and underemployment in the Georgia Mountain Region.*

Strategy WD6: *Address lack of family support.*

ASSESSMENT

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) Workforce Development Department provides day-to-day management of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds that are allocated to the Georgia Mountains Region through the Georgia Department of Economic Development Workforce Division. The department continues to provide oversight of training providers who provide job training and job placement to eligible persons. This department provides assistance to adults, youth, and dislocated workers who meet program criteria. ***The Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) went into effect July 1, 2015 thus abolishing the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. There are many changes in Adult, Dislocated, and Youth Services within the new WIOA regulations. Regulations were introduced in June 2016.***

Adult and Dislocated Worker

GMRC Workforce Development (GMWD) Adult and Dislocated Services department served 591 individuals in FY 2016. Training for individuals 18 years or older was provided by Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding. WIOA funding allowed these individuals to attend a technical school or college for up to 24 months to receive specialized training to enter today's competitive job force in a Growth and Demand field in the Georgia Mountains.

- Worked with State and Local Offender Transition Centers to train returning inmates to enter the workforce.

- Incumbent Training is available for assistance to qualifying employers to assist with expenses associated with new or upgraded skills training for full-time, permanent employees.



- WIOA offers an opportunity to improve job and career options for Georgia’s workers and companies to fill positions thru the On-the-Job Training (OJT) Program. By promoting OJT, Georgia has the great opportunity to increase its economic health and improve economic competitiveness. We have been working to implement the changes for WIOA as it applies to job seekers and employers in our region.
- Georgia Mountains Workforce Development’s OJT Program assists employers with training costs while putting Georgians back to work. OJT provides employers with the opportunity to train new employees and receive up to 75% reimbursement for their salary during the OJT training period. It also helps employers fill the gap between a potential employees current skills and what is required to fully perform the job.

Mobile Training Units

- From July 31st 2013 to present approximately 7,678 people have visited the Mobile Training Vehicles for individualized services. Over 13,200 different actions have been tracked on board the Mobile Units. This includes 3,491 on-line job searches, 1,985 online job applications placed, 2,282 resumes developed/critiqued, 99 Unemployment Claims, 38 individuals assisted with GED and skills testing, 1,078 career assessment surveys, and 3,028 people receiving information on the WIOA program and the services provided by Georgia Mountains Workforce Development.



Youth Activities

The GMWD served 408 youth in FY 2016 in the following youth programs:

- Beginning in late 2015, an Apprenticeship Program was created with the goal of working with business and industry in coordination with Georgia Department of Economic Development Workforce Development, U.S. Department of Labor, local Technical Colleges, and business and Industry within the Georgia Mountains Region.

Housing

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

Strategy H1: *Establish an inventory of current housing supply in the region to identify present and future needs.*

Strategy H2: *To inform local leaders and citizens on available housing programs and services.*

Strategy H3: *Develop a regional strategic housing plan.*

ASSESSMENT

Communities review and assess housing information as an indicator of the relative economic and social health of local residents. As the principal expense and investment for most households, key facets of housing market data provide a sense of stability, growth or recession based on the extent households are investing in the community, especially when paired with general economic indicators. For the FY16 update, the housing subcommittee reviewed 2 key datasets for gauging any changes and trends with regards to home values and sales, plus the committee examined the progress with a relatively new State program designed to support struggling households with homeownership.

Average Active Sales Price of a Home- April-June 2015 vs. April-June 2016			
County	Sales Price- April-June 2015	Sales Price- April-June 2016	% Change
White*	\$297,000	\$398,000	34.0%
Union*	\$436,000	\$577,000	32.3%
Habersham*	\$342,000	\$450,000	31.6%
Rabun*	\$905,000	\$1,105,000	22.1%
Lumpkin*	\$360,000	\$395,000	9.7%
Hall*	\$430,000	\$468,000	8.8%
Dawson*	\$434,000	\$463,000	6.7%
Forsyth*	\$454,000	\$478,000	5.3%
Stephens*	\$462,000	\$447,000	-3.2%
Towns*	\$497,000	\$321,000	-35.4%
Banks**	\$222,379	Data Not Available	Data Not Available
Franklin**	\$176,767	Data Not Available	Data Not Available
Hart**	\$276,730	Data Not Available	Data Not Available

*Source: FMLS and GMLS Data Provided by The Norton Agency

**Source: GMLS Data Provided by Coldwell Banker- Fort Realty

Average home values are regularly measured through sales price data. Communities generally seek higher prices as an indication of properties worth owning and investment, but at price points that are affordable for average wage levels for local residents and employees. Based on trends, sales prices can appreciate, depreciate, or remain neutral.

The table on the previous page provides a barometer of the trends of each county's real estate market. Of the 10 counties for which comparable data was acquired, 3 counties have average sales prices that are appreciating, 3 counties have sales prices that are depreciating, and 4 counties have sales prices that are neutral.

Number of Homes for Sale- April-June 2015 vs. April-June 2016			
County	# of Homes- April-June 2015	# of Homes- April-June 2016	% Change
Habersham*	84	120	42.9%
Union*	55	73	32.7%
Stephens*	69	90	30.4%
White*	222	244	9.9%
Forsyth*	3,943	4,285	8.7%
Rabun*	55	51	-7.3%
Lumpkin*	621	569	-8.4%
Hall*	2,974	2,555	-14.1%
Dawson*	1,040	863	-17.0%
Towns*	53	35	-34.0%
Banks**	48	Data Not Available	Data Not Available
Franklin**	89	Data Not Available	Data Not Available
Hart**	159	Data Not Available	Data Not Available

**Source: FMLS and GMLS Data Provided by The Norton Agency*

***Source: GMLS Data Provided by Coldwell Banker- Fort Realty*

*NOTE: The data provided in the above is supplied by Fair Market Listing Service (FMLS) and Georgia Multiple Listing Services (GMLS). FMLS and GMLS Data Provided by The Norton Agency unless otherwise indicated by *, where those counties' data was provided by Coldwell Banker - Fort Realty. The data provided in the following tables is limited and may not reflect all real estate activities in each county's market.*

While housing prices provide an indication of property values and local economies, their value is weighted against the volume of sales activity supporting those rates. The sales volume data for the Georgia Mountains Region shows that the housing market is still active with 5 of 10 counties either having as many or more homes for sale in April-June 2016 as the same quarter in 2015. The three counties closest to metro Atlanta (Dawson, Forsyth, and Hall) featured the most sales with Lumpkin County (also on GA 400 corridor), White County, and Hart County (along Lake Hartwell) the only others with significant sales volume. As the regional market continues to grow, the GMRC will monitor to see if the other rural counties begin to show changes in construction and sales.

HomeSafe Georgia Update

The table below shows the number of homeowners that benefitted from the HomeSafe Georgia Program, which helps Georgia homeowners who have experienced a substantial decrease in income due to job loss or underemployment by providing a mortgage payment bridge while they seek new or better employment. Of the total allocations since the program's inception in 2011, over 49.9% of Region 2's funds were disbursed to residents from Forsyth County. Another 23.6% of the allocations were disbursed to residents from Hall County. This means that approximately 73.2% of the allocations went to only 2 of the 13 counties in the Georgia Mountains Region. This could possibly be attributed to a large segment of the region's population being concentrated in these same two counties.

HomeSafe Georgia Data- April 2011-June 2016		
County	# Served	\$ Allocated
Banks	8	\$185,199
Dawson	17	\$393,273
Forsyth	124	\$3,338,105
Franklin	7	\$140,187
Habersham	10	\$166,690
Hall	68	\$1,582,119
Hart	8	\$78,441
Lumpkin	8	\$167,426
Rabun	6	\$102,106
Stephens	5	\$111,877
Towns	3	\$76,725
Union	9	\$213,021
White	5	\$129,871
Total	278	\$6,685,040

Source: Georgia Department of Community Affairs

This table also shows that a total of 278 residents have received temporary mortgage payment assistance from the HomeSafe Georgia program since April 1, 2011. Over 49% of these homeowners are from Forsyth County, likely indicative of that community's high number of homeowners rendered unemployed during the recession and in the years following. Similarly, the other leading counties for homeowners assisted are Hall County and Dawson County, showing that the majority of assistance is being provided to homeowners that live in counties closest to Metro Atlanta. The Subcommittee sees a continued opportunity to market this program to the region's smaller, more rural counties. The lack of marketing of this program to non-metro Atlanta counties could explain the large disparity in numbers of recipients.

Affordable Workforce Housing: An Issue for the Georgia Mountains Region

One of the most serious issues facing the Georgia Mountains Region today is the crisis caused by the rapidly diminishing stock of affordable housing. According to a forecast prepared by the Norton Group for its annual Native Intelligence™ Report, the absence of affordable, livable, personal homes would create further disparity between the “haves” and the “have nots” (i.e. the wealth gap so widely discussed in America). Home ownership is coupled with wealth accumulation and family unit stability.

Multiple price point housing is necessary for a community to provide for a diversity of jobs, expand, balance its tax base, and effect strong consumer confidence. The trend line is a cause for concern. The Norton Native Intelligence™ Report estimates that North Georgia’s affordable and habitable stick built homes that are priced under \$175,000 could evaporate by 2020 and that multi-family townhomes in that price range for purchase will evaporate by 2023.

This course of events could result in an increase of urban apartments in which Georgia Mountains Region residents could become more subsidy dependent and aging upward. In the private sector, jobs dependent on hourly employees will search for other markets which can provide labor-based housing or will shift more and more production off-shore to cheaper supply and la-

2016-17: Georgia Mountains Region Housing Looking Forward

The CEDS Housing Subcommittee will continue its work through 2016 and into 2017 on establishing a more comprehensive housing inventory for the Georgia Mountains Region. Strategy #2, informing local leaders and citizens throughout the Georgia Mountains Region about new and available housing programs, will remain a priority in trying to distribute information to communities (especially small towns). Finally, the Subcommittee will continue discussions with local governments to develop a regional strategic housing plan with the goal of eliminating homelessness in the region.

All of this work will require communities to be engaged in developing partnerships with one another and EDA. With the recession continuing to dissipate and industries expanding and creating new jobs, the Subcommittee will be interested in observing the effect this will have on the inventory and affordability of workforce housing. The Subcommittee will also continue to analyze the rebounding economy’s impact on the secondary/seasonal home market, especially in northernmost counties in the region. Finally, the Subcommittee will continue to analyze the affordability of workforce housing and the need for more workforce and senior housing around the region.

Issue	Mitigation Strategy
Shortage of specialty housing to accommodate retirement age population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory of local housing programs, leaders and policies in each community • Produce survey and distribute to local housing leaders • Develop a regional strategic housing plan • Provide educational seminars and workshops on housing programs and services • Develop summary report on housing survey findings
Need to ensure sustainable quality of workforce housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory local housing programs, leaders and policies in each community • Produce survey and distribute to local housing leaders • Develop a regional strategic housing plan • Provide educational seminars and workshops on housing programs and services • Develop summary report on housing survey findings • Develop a metro-area growth strategy to support urbanizing communities
Slow/limited responsiveness to issues of the housing and development industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce survey and distribute to local housing leaders • Develop a regional strategic housing plan • Provide educational seminars and workshops on housing programs and services • Develop summary report on housing survey findings
Need to monitor long-term impacts and sustainability of the second-home market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory local housing programs, leaders and policies in each community • Produce survey and distribute to local housing leaders • Develop a regional strategic housing plan • Provide educational seminars and workshops on housing programs and services

Pre-Disaster Mitigation

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

Strategy DM1: Creation of a Regional Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan.

Strategy DM2: Create public awareness of plan/community outreach.

Strategy DM3: Establish a regional post-disaster response framework.

ASSESSMENT

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

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



In an effort for the GMRC to achieve and sustain disaster resiliency, the region should adhere to the following:

- Anticipate that there may be multiple hazards or threats to their citizens and their property;
- Understand its physical, economic, and social vulnerabilities to these hazards and take mitigating action;
- Respond to events as they happen, mobilize resources, and coordinate relief efforts; and
- Organize itself through stages of emergency response, restoration, and reconstruction

Implementation & Performance Metrics

This section concerns the actual measures and efforts made to achieve the objectives outlined throughout the CEDS/Regional Plan. After reviewing the assessments for each element and defining any needed changes to the issues and strategies identified for the region, the recommended actions are incorporated into the action plan in this section. Furthermore, tracking the progress with past projects and their relative impact on the issues will help monitor the CEDS/Regional Plan for the overall performance in meeting the stated goals over time.

MONITORING ACTIVITIES AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES

Progress with the Regional Work Program as a whole is reviewed as part of the annual update process with the GMRC Council. However, monitoring and evaluation of progress with the Regional Work Program is performed regularly throughout the year. This involves several layers of status reports and meetings and involved input from various committees, local government officials, and other stakeholder groups.

Staff Project Reports – The progress of GMRC projects is reported to the Executive Director and the full Council in monthly Staff Project Reports (SPRs). The SPRs identify the status of each project and is displayed by jurisdiction. The SPRs also provide primary staff contact for each work item and a brief description of progress as needed. Copies of these are found with the minutes of each Council meeting packet.

End of Year Review – The update process for the Regional Work Program features an additional overview and evaluation of the status of each project and feasibility of remaining work items. The results provide the first indication of how priorities may need adjusting going forward. This becomes the basis of the draft update and is circulated to local governments for review and comment, providing the first opportunity for nominating new projects for the coming year.

Correlating RC Programs - Additional review of progress with the Regional Plan includes cross-over work with other regional reporting efforts and projects, including the Federally mandated GMRC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and all GMRC products for the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT).

Local Government Interaction – Copies of the Regional Work Program were also distributed to local communities for review and input on the identified objectives and work items. No new regional projects were added as a result of this effort.

RESULTS OF THE 2016 MONITORING AND EVALUATION PROCESS

The following is a summary of progress made on several primary GMRC initiatives from 2015:

- The GMRC is no longer supporting implementation of the Department of Human Services (DHS) Coordinated Transit program due to conflicts over DHS contract language and concerns regarding liability coverage. The GMRC will continue to update individual transit plans for counties as part of our contractual services with GDOT.
- In response to findings from the Department of Audits and Accounts (DOAA), GMRC planning staff are updating the formality and records for local plan implementation meetings. These now include agendas, sign-in sheets and copies of minutes as needed. Coordinating local plan submittals and adoptions also remains an issue and the GMRC is undergoing a year-long effort to get every government into full compliance with QLG status and mindful of approaching deadlines.
- The GMRC is in the middle of assisting two counties and three cities with local plan updates and at least 4 more scheduled for the next fiscal year. The concept of the GMRC using DCA funds to develop these documents is well received, but collection of the data to assist in some efforts has shown mixed results. Local officials appreciate the smaller, more streamlined formats, but there is disagreement concerning the optimal approach to developing future development strategies.
- The City of Lula's PlanFirst application was successful for 2015 and more communities have considered nominations for 2016 and beyond. The communities of Oakwood, Stephens County and Forsyth County have expressed their intentions.
- Habersham and Banks County continue to move forward with the introduction of new land use management policies, requiring the GMRC to monitor their development for coordination with adjoining communities and impacts on regional trends.
- There has been no substantial increase in the volume of Developments of Regional Impact (DRI) activity. However, there have been several small review requests for properties within the Metropolitan River Protection Act (MRPA) corridor. As these shift to established properties seeking reviews for expansions or redevelopment, some of the requests are testing the boundaries of information covered under the active Corridor Plan for both the GMRC and the Atlanta Regional Commission. A revisit of these rules and standards may be required within the coming years.
- Progress with the Teens in the Driver Seat program administered by GDOT has been slow, with most area schools struggling to secure student participation. The GMRC is working with GDOT in revising the strategy for outreach and implementation, which may require contract amendments.
- Coordination with our various partners in water resource management continues, with both the Coosa-North Georgia and Savannah-Upper Ogeechee Water Councils updating their management plans beginning in FY16. The GMRC remains involved on both fronts, including the administration of one SEED grant project within Habersham County to assess nutrient pollution within the Soque River watershed.

CEDS Performance Metrics

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

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

The following lists the Performance Metrics for each strategic CEDS focus area:

Community Facilities and Services

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

Economic Development, Business and Industry

- Number of new start-up businesses or business expansions
- Job creation and retention
- Increase in capital investment
- Number of new tourism venues
- Increase visitation, overnight stays, and capital expenditures spent on tourism in the region
- Value added production in niche agriculture markets

Workforce Development

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

Housing

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

Pre-Disaster Mitigation

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

Coordinated Performance Standards

As part of the State's regional planning standards, the GMRC must establish two achievement thresholds for local governments. These standards, rated as Minimum and Excellence Standards, identify specific ordinances, programs, or requirements that may be implemented by local governments in order to realize the Regional Vision and/or address the Regional Issues and Opportunities. The Regional Commission may choose to establish multiple tiers for both standards in order to accommodate the varying size and capacity of local governments in the region, or it may choose to establish a schedule for local governments to comply with these measures during the 3-year timeframe.

In establishing these standards for the GMRC, the approach was to create a framework that works with the current level of planning requirements expected of local governments, then encouraging each community to pursue their own higher standards for community development. In this regard the Minimum Standard is something every local government can readily achieve by simply maintaining their existing level of obligations, and for which the GMRC is available to assist. To achieve the Excellence Standard, communities must then employ/adopt a certain volume of policies and practices from the list included here. Communities achieving the Excellence Standard will be eligible for extra assistance from the GMRC and DCA.

Going forward these performance measures will be used to help a) evaluate the effectiveness of the GMRC's Regional Plan implementation efforts, and b) to help identify the various levels of planning and community development desired by the local communities. When the Plan is updated in 5 years, these measures will be reviewed, assessed, and amended as necessary.

Minimum Standard

Items included here are considered essential activities for local governments to undertake for achieving their own planning ambitions and for consistency with the regional plan. The intent is to ensure a consistent and predictable basic level of local requirements across the region. All local governments in the region will be expected to attain the Minimum Standard within three years of adoption of the regional plan, or risk losing Qualified Local Government status.

- Maintain a local Comprehensive Plan, approved by DCA and adopted by the local government
- Maintain and be compliant with all necessary Service Delivery Strategies
- Maintain and participate in a local Hazard Mitigation Strategy
- Maintain and participate in a Local Emergency Operations/Response Plan
- Maintain compliance with State requirements for solid waste management and reporting
- Adopt the necessary minimum rules established by the DNR Part V Environmental Planning Criteria

Excellence Standard

Items within the Excellence Standard are considered desirable activities for local governments to undertake for achieving their own planning aspirations and for consistency with the regional plan. The intent is to lay out a menu of recommended best practices for local governments to select for implementation. Each recommended best practice a local government implements will count toward achieving the Excellence Standard threshold established by DCA.

The Excellence Standard will be awarded to any community employing any 20 of the standards listed below and practicing at least one standard in each element. The GMRC will annually survey local governments regarding these practices, inviting demonstration/evidence of the standards applied. Any local government that attains this threshold will then be eligible for the Regional Steward Incentives Package identified and publicized by DCA.

2016 Performance Evaluation

GOVERNMENT	STANDARD		COMMENT
	MIN.	EXC.	
Banks County	X		
Town of Homer	X		
City of Maysville	X		
Dawson County	X	X	
City of Dawsonville	X		
Forsyth County	X	X	
City of Cumming	X	X	
Franklin County	X		
City of Canon	X		
City of Carnesville			Needs Comp Plan update
City of Franklin Springs	X		
City of Lavonia	X		
City of Royston	X		
Habersham County	X		
City of Clarkesville	X		
City of Cornelia	X		
City of Demorest			Needs Comp Plan update
Town of Mt. Airy	X		
Town of Alto	X		
City of Tallulah Falls			Needs Comp Plan update
Hall County	X	X	
City of Clermont			Needs Comp Plan update
City of Flowery Branch	X	X	
City of Gainesville	X	X	
City of Oakwood	X	X	
City of Lula	X	X	
City of Gillsville			Needs Comp Plan update
Hart County	X		
City of Hartwell	X		
Town of Bowersville	X		

2016 Performance Evaluation (Continued)

GOVERNMENT	STANDARD		COMMENT
	MIN.	EXC.	
Lumpkin County	X		
City of Dahlonega	X	X	
Rabun County			Needs SDA update
City of Clayton			Needs SDA update
City of Dillard			Needs SDA update
City of Mountain City			Needs SDA update
City of Sky Valley			Needs SDA update
Town of Tiger			Needs SDA update
Stephens County	X		
City of Toccoa	X	X	
Town of Avalon			Needs Comp Plan update
City of Martin			Needs Comp Plan update
Towns County	X		
City of Hiwassee	X		
City of Young Harris	X		
Union County	X		
City of Blairsville	X		
White County	X		
City of Cleveland	X		
City of Helen	X	X	

Results of Performance Evaluation

This was the first full assessment of local government activity using the Regional Plan performance measures, and several issues/questions were raised as part of the evaluation. In general, the scoring for minimum standards was lower than anticipated but that standard remains in relatively easy reach of all local governments. *(Discussed Further Below)* The excellence standards, however, were not as clear as originally conceived and will likely need refinement in the near future. There are also some items that were inadvertently duplicated across themes, essentially allowing for those actions/policies to count twice. These issues will be addressed when the Regional Plan is due for its full update in 3 years.

General Observations

- Every community met at least one *Excellence* standard in every element. Only 2 communities (small towns) met less than 10 *Excellence* standards.

- 20 communities are within 5 actions/policies of attaining the Excellence level, and the GMRC will work to assist those communities with options for reaching this benchmark within the next 3 years.
- Several communities are in need of comprehensive plan updates, but all of these should be resolved within the coming year. The cities of Carnesville, Demorest, and Tallulah Falls have all done recent updates, but they all need to follow through with renewed submittal, review, and approval procedures. Clermont is undergoing a full update process right now with plans for submittal to DCA in June 2016. The small municipalities of Avalon and Martin are working on updates that can be incorporated into the upcoming Stephens County Joint Plan update. Gillsville will update their plan in the fall of 2016. The GMRC will assist all of these governments with an eye toward having all projects completed and approved in 2016.
- Rabun County recently completed an update to their Service Delivery Strategy (SDA) with the exception of water and sewer service, where the City of Clayton and Rabun County remain at odds over territory and other issues. This matter is scheduled for mediation or possible court redress in 2016, though both parties are sustaining negotiations when possible. All parties involved are aware of the impact of this delay on their QLG status.
- There's some concern that the *Excellence* standards provided are skewed toward cities and/or urban settings, enabling them to score more points more easily than counties. Much of this stems from standards for things such as sidewalks and infill development policies. The GMRC will review the standards this year to make sure that there is ample opportunity for rural communities to comfortably achieve an *Excellence* designation.
- Every community will gain additional points as the update of the State's various Regional Water Plans is completed next year, as this process will involve surveys for local compliance with the State measures.
- There will need to be some clarity on some standards, such as what constitutes a management plan for sidewalks or utilities. Some communities have short-term budgets and work schedules that they consider improvement plans for those elements, whereas others feature more detailed, long-term analyses.
- It's been suggested the GMRC conduct an educational forum discussing these standards, how local communities can meet them, and what each suggested policy/action would mean for the community. At the least the GMRC will begin incorporating deeper discussions about these standards into the Local Plan Implementation meetings, and will explore options for other forums to ensure all key local stakeholders are familiar with the standards.

GMRC Regional Work Program— Report of Accomplishments

Work Item	Status	Comment
Develop a region wide downtown economic database that includes historic resources; Place on the web	In Progress	
Develop redevelopment plans for historic downtowns	Complete	
Develop in-house service for calculating cost-benefit analyses for new development & utility improvements	Complete	
Develop Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan	In Progress	
Develop regional development build-out scenario	In Progress	
Develop regional water infrastructure map	In Progress	
Establish a local food guide and local assessments	In Progress	
Inventory and map agri-tourism assets of the region	In Progress	
Develop Highway 441 Tourism Study	Postponed	Deferred as local gvts. and GDOT adjust to new revenues
Develop Commuter Traffic Study	Postponed	Deferred as local gvts. and GDOT adjust to new revenues
Initiate GMRC Downtown Association	In Progress	
Inventory and assessment of local water service rates	Postponed	To be done w/Water Council Plan updates
Develop a hi-tech strategy for the region	Complete	
Develop an inventory of tourism industry resources	Complete	
Develop promotional material for area farmer's markets and canneries	In Progress	
Develop comprehensive road improvement plan combining local and State goals	In Progress	
Develop a freight/truck route transportation plan	In Progress	
Develop new template for local water planning	Complete	
Inventory and assessment of local water service conservation strategies	Complete	Response rates to surveys poor; Will be redone at future date
Develop inventory of energy data and benchmarking	Cancelled	Removed as need among local gvts.
Establish an action plan for funding critical facilities and Infrastructure improvements	Complete	
Develop an entrepreneurship training program for teachers	Cancelled	Service provided through other organizations
Create model design standards and incentive programs for downtown areas	In Progress	
Develop Fire Protection Services; Assessments for 2 more counties	Complete	
Develop and distribute preparedness and post-disaster recovery material	Postponed	Reduced as priority; To be addressed in 2019
Inventory local housing programs, leaders and policies in each community	In Progress	
Inventory of septic system management programs; Assessment of septic system inventory	Complete	Response rates to surveys poor; Will be redone at future date
Develop long-range management plans for targeted corridors in conjunction with GDOT and local stakeholders	Postponed	Deferred as local gvts. and GDOT adjust to new revenues
Develop and implement a public awareness campaign about health information technology	Postponed	Reduced as priority; To be addressed in 2018

Regional Project Priority List

The CEDS Priority Project List represents a major component of the overall CEDS effort. These projects are funded by multiple funding sources and each one addresses a specific goal or goals within the CEDS. All of the listed projects are important to the local communities and have been included because they help move the Georgia Mountains Region closer to its vision. A limited number of projects are eligible for EDA funding and will be reported when initiated or completed. The list of issues and projects outlined below is comprehensive, but by no means exhaustive. The list reflects the participant's ideas, concerns, and efforts and is expected to be continually updated as new projects emerge and existing projects are completed.

GOVERNMENT	PROJECT	FUNDING SOURCE(S)	AMOUNT
BANKS COUNTY	Wastewater Treatment	GEFA/USDA/Local	\$5,000,000
	Water System Upgrades	CDBG/Local	\$500,000
	Martin Bridge Sewer	ARC/EDA/USDA	\$3,000,000
	Banks Crossing 109 Infra-structure	OneGeorgia/ARC	\$500,000
Town of Homer	Water Upgrades	ARC/EIP/CDBG	\$1,500,000
City of Maysville	Ridgeway Waterline	USDA/Local/CDBG	\$1,500,000
DAWSON COUNTY	Etowah River Road Im- provements	DOT/Local	\$500,000
	Bridge Repair	DOT/Local	\$700,000
	Road Improvement Project	DOT/Local	\$1,500,000
	Blanchard Development	ARC/EDA/EIP/1GA	\$4,500,000
	Shiery Development	ARC/EDA/EIP/1GA	\$2,500,000
City of Dawsonville	Sewer Expansion	ARC/Local	\$600,000
	Sewer Expansion – Company Expansion	ARC/GEFA	\$600,000
FORSYTH COUNTY	Business Expansion	CDBG-EIP Loan	\$500,000
	Wastewater Expansion	EDA/Local	\$10,000,000
	McGinnis Ferry Interchange	DOT/EDA/FHA/Local	\$36,000,000
	Water Expansion/Water Plant	EDA/Local	\$2,000,000
	Major Road Widening	EDA/Local/SPLOST	\$45,950,000
	Traffic Safety Improve- ments	Local/SPLOST/DOT	\$2,500,000
	Intersection Improvements	EDA/Local/SPLOST	\$4,600,000

FRANKLIN COUNTY	Central Franklin Industrial Park	ARC/EDA/SPLOST	\$6,374,000
City of Franklin Springs	Sewer System Improvements	ARC/Local	\$700,000
City of Lavonia	Raw Water Intake	ARC/Local	\$991,000
	Northern Sewer Trunk Line	EDA/ARC/Local	\$1,400,000
	Lake Hartwell Increased Allocation	GEFA/ARC	\$1,000,000
City of Royston	Infrastructure Improvements	CDBG/Local	\$300,000
	Lift Station Improvements	ARC/OneGeorgia	\$285,000
	Storm Drainage	CDBG/Local	\$200,000
	Waterline Installation	ITAD/Local	\$200,000
	Sewer Treatment Plant Upgrades	GEFA/Local	\$2,000,000
HABERSHAM COUNTY	Airport Industrial Park Project	ARC/Local	\$2,000,000
	Infrastructure Improvements	ARC/OneGA/CDBG/Local	\$500,000
City of Clarkesville	Sewer Improvements	ARC/Local	\$600,000
	Downtown Development	USDA/Local	\$750,000
City of Cornelia	Sewer Improvements	CDBG/Local	\$700,000
	Road Improvements	ARC/Local	\$350,000
	Water & Sewer – Fieldale	ARC/EDA	\$2,000,000
City of Demorest	Sewer System Improvements	ARC/Local	\$600,000
Town of Tallulah Falls	Terrora Building - Solar	ARC/Local	\$500,000
	Water/Sewer Infrastructure	ARC/Local/GEFA	\$3,000,000
	Water Improvements	GEFA/ARC/EDA	\$1,000,000
HALL COUNTY	Road Improvements	Local/ARC/GDOT	\$5,000,000
	Highlands to Islands Trail	Local/ARC	\$800,000
	Sewer Improvements	Local/GEFA	\$3,000,000
	Lake Lanier Olympic Venue	ARC/OneGeorgia/Local	\$1,700,000
	Healan's Mill Project	ARC/Local	\$5,000,000

City of Lula	Road Improvements	DOT/ARC/Local	\$600,000
City of Oakwood	Sewer Improvements	CDBG-ITAD	\$225,000
	Road Improvements	EDA/ARC/EIP	\$2,000,000
	Industry Way Extension	ARC/Local	\$400,000
City of Gainesville	Airport Terminal Renovations	ARC/Local	\$1,000,000
	Midtown Greenway – Phase 4	Local, TE, DNR	\$1,000,000
	Stormwater Planning	Local	\$200,000
	Wireless Hot Zone Project	ARC/Local	\$60,000
HART COUNTY	Sewer Expansion	GEFA	\$400,000
	Infrastructure Expansion	ARC/EDA/EIP	\$2,500,000
	I-85 Northern Sewer Trunk Line	EDA/ARC	\$1,700,000
	Haring Training Center Equipment Project	ARC/Local	\$500,000
	Hart CCA Equipment Project	ARC/Local	\$686,112
City of Hartwell	Sewer Expansion	ARC/EIP/Local	\$500,000
	Railroad Street	CDBG-RDF/ARC/Local	\$1,200,000
Town of Bowersville	Water Improvements	OneGeorgia/Local	\$200,000
LUMPKIN COUNTY	Water Improvements	CDBG	\$558,000
	Water & Sewer Improvements	ARC/Local	\$600,000
	Broadband Expansion	CDBG-EIP	\$160,000
City of Dahlonega	Sewer Plant Upgrade	ARC/GEFA/Local	\$4,000,000
RABUN COUNTY	Water Improvements	CDBG-ITAD	\$150,000
	Business Park Improvements	CDBG-EIP/ARC/Local	\$2,000,000
	NEGA Food Hub	EDA/ARC/Private	\$2,500,000
	US441 Widening	DOT/Local	\$10,000,000
	Potable Water Plant – Business Park	ARC/EIP/GEFA	\$3,000,000

	Sewer Line- Sky Valley to Dillard	ARC/GEFA/USDA	\$1,000,000
	Water Line Distribution System	GEFA/ARC/Local	\$2,500,000
	Foxfire Mobile Application Project	ARC/Local	\$29,990
City of Clayton	Downtown Infrastructure	ARC/Local	\$428,300
City of Mountain City	Drainage Improvements	CDBG/Local	\$500,000
City of Sky Valley	Sewer Infrastructure	ARC/Local	\$600,000
	Road and Drainage Improvements	CDBG/ARC/Local	\$500,000
STEPHENS COUNTY	WWTF	CDBG-EIP/ARC/OneGA	\$2,500,000
	Memorial Drive Upgrades	DOT/Local	\$500,000
	Road Improvements	DOT/Local	\$10,000,000
	Water Supply & Distribution	ARC/GEFA	\$1,500,000
	Wastewater Collection Treatment	ARC/EDA/GEFA/USDA	\$5,000,000
	Broadband	OneGeorgia/Local	\$6,000,000
City of Toccoa	Veterans Parkway/Big A Infrastructure Improvements	ARC/EDA/GEFA/OneGeorgia	\$4,000,000
	Natural Gas Extension	Local	\$100,000
	Historic Ritz Theatre Complex	ARC/Local/Private	\$300,000
	Lake Toccoa Pavilion & Pier	LWCF/DNR/Local	\$165,000
	Lake Toccoa Trails	DNR/RTP/Local	\$250,000
	Additional Trails in Municipal Parks	DNR/RTP/Local	\$250,000
	Whitman Street/Emory Johnson Park Improvements	CDBG	\$750,000
	Alewine Park Improvements	DNR/LWCF/Local	\$300,000
	Sewer Relocation, Drainage, & Street Improvements	CDBG	\$750,000

TOWNS COUNTY	Sewer Improvements	Local/ARC/EDA	\$4,000,000
	Industrial Training Lab	ARC/EDA/Local	\$1,282,238
City of Hiawasse	Water & Sewer Improvements	ARC/GEFA/OneGA	\$500,000
	Increase Wastewater Treatment Capacity	USDA/GEFA/Local	\$1,000,000
	Hiawasse Mayor's Park	DNR/TVA/Local	\$400,000
	Pump Replacement at Hiawasse Water Plant	GEFA/Local	\$100,000
	Bell Creek Water Tank Installation for Increased Storage	GEFA/Local	\$300,000
	Water Treatment Plant Improvements	GEFA/Local	\$1,300,000
	Downtown Development (Hiawasse Square)	ARC/DOT/Local	\$50,000
	Rehab Digester at Water Plant	Local	\$50,000
	Sewage Infiltration and Inflow Improvements	USDA/GEFA/Local	\$300,000
	Water Meter Replacement	GEFA/Local	\$500,000
	Sewer Lift Station Rehabilitation	USDA/GEFA/Local	\$250,000
	Sewer Plant Influent Screen Installation	GEFA/Local	\$200,000
	Comprehensive Sidewalk Replacement	GA Tollway Authority/Local	\$400,000
	Strategic Plan	ARC/Local	\$30,000
City of Young Harris	Sewer Improvements	ARC/Local	\$300,000
UNION COUNTY	US129 Connector	DOT/Local	\$10,000,000
	BHR- Amphitheater	OneGA/Local	\$500,000
	Water Authority System Improvements	ARC/Local	\$300,000
	Manufacturing Training Center	ARC/EDA/Local	\$1,280,000
	Special Manufacturing/Industrial Building	OneGA/ARC/TVA/Local	\$1,500,000
	Wayfinding Signage	OneGA/Local	\$100,000
	Industrial Park Improvements	OneGA/ARC/EDA/Local	\$1,000,000

	Brasstown Bald	ARC	\$91,000
	Industrial Training Lab	ARC/EDA/Local	\$1,282,238
City of Blairsville	Infrastructure Improvements	CDBG-EIP/ARC/Local	\$600,000
	Water & Sewer Upgrades	ARC/Local	\$1,100,000
	Airport Terminal Facility	OneGA/DOT/FAA/Local	\$1,200,000
	Sewer System Expansion	EDA/ARC/GEFA/USDA/ Local	\$8,000,000
	Parking Facility	OneGA/ARC/Local	\$300,000
	Downtown Streetscape	DOT/Local	\$500,000
WHITE COUNTY	Road/Fiber	CDBG-EIP	\$500,000
	Infrastructure– Bypass Technology Park	ARC/EDA/CDBG-EIP	\$1,500,000
	Sautee Nacoochee– Heritage District	ARC/Local	\$300,000
City of Cleveland	129 N Gravity Sewer Project	GEFA/Local	\$900,000
	Water Tank and Well	USDA	\$1,500,000
	Sewer Plant Upgrades	TBD	TBD
City of Helen	Water Line Extension & Development of Additional Water Source	ARC/Local	\$400,000
	Replacement of Main Sewer Lift Station	Grants/Loans	\$850,000

GMRC REGIONAL WORK PROGRAM – 2016

Action	I/O	Goal	Responsibility	Costs	Funding Sources
2016					
Develop a region wide downtown economic database that includes historic resources; Place on the web	8, 11, 43		GMRC	\$15,000	GMRC
Develop single map redevelopment plans for historic downtowns	43, 44		GMRC, HPD, DCA	\$15,000	GMRC, DCA, ARC
Develop Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan		DM1.1	GMRC	\$50,000	FMEA, GEMA
Develop regional development build-out scenario	22-24, 36, 38, 42		GMRC, DCA, DED, EPD	\$20,000	DCA, GMRC
Develop regional water infrastructure map	23, 24	CFS3.2	GMRC, Local Govts.	\$10,000	EPD, GEFA
Establish a local food guide and local assessments	8, 14	ED9.3	GMRC, EDA, DED	\$10,000	EDA, DCA
Inventory and map agri-tourism assets of the region	2	ED12.1	GMRC, EDA, DED	\$5,000	EDA, DCA
Initiate GMRC Downtown Association	9, 10, 14, 43, 44	LU2.3	GMRC, EDA, DED	NA	
Develop promotional material for area farmer's markets and canneries	2, 8	ED10.2	GMRC, DED	\$5,000	EDA, DED
Develop comprehensive road improvement plan combining local and State goals	1, 27, 28	CFS1.1	GMRC, Local Govts., DOT	\$15,000	DOT
Develop a freight/ truck route transportation plan	27, 28	CFS1.3	GMRC, Local Govts., DOT	\$15,000	DOT
Create model design standards and incentive programs for downtown areas	43, 44	ED14.2	GMRC, DED	\$5,000	EDA, DED
Develop Fire Protection Services Assessments for counties		DM	GMRC, Local Govts.	\$10,000	DCA, GEMA
Inventory local housing programs, leaders and policies in each community	3, 4, 5, 6, 7	H1.1	GMRC, DCA, Local Govts.	\$5,000	DCA

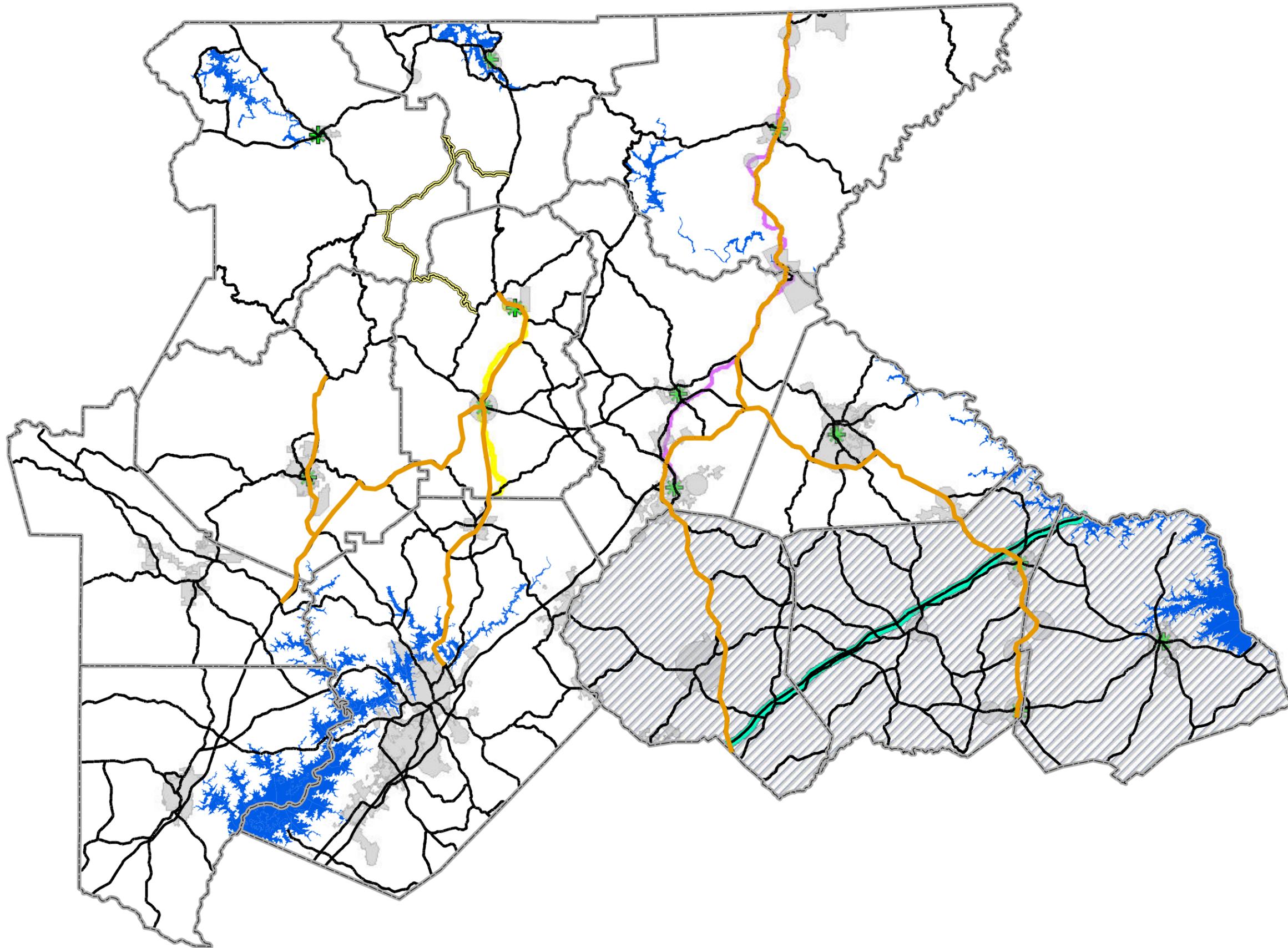
Action	I/O	Goal	Responsibility	Costs	Funding Sources
2016					
Update Regional Source Water Assessment Plan	1, 16, 17, 23		GMRC, EPD	\$50,000	EPD
Explore potential for increased rural transit services within the region	1, 3		GMRC, GDOT	\$10,000	GDOT
Develop template for comprehensive neighborhood plans and standards	36, 40, 41	LU4.1	GMRC, DCA	\$5,000	DCA
Develop updated concept for, and inventory of, primary agricultural areas	2, 36	LU5.2	GMRC, DNR, DCA	\$10,000	DNR
Creation of a regional food hub	8	ED9.1	GMRC, EDA	\$15,000	EDA
Develop an I-85 corridor access and multi-modal study	27, 32		GMRC	\$150,000	GA DOT, GA DCA, Local Govt., GMRC
Assist local governments and business in the development of multi-county tourism task force focusing on Lake Hartwell	9, 14		GMRC, Local Govts, Local Chambers	\$5,000	GMRC
Start a school mentor / Junior Achievement program in every junior high and high school in the region	26	ED5.1	GMRC, DED	TBD	EDA, DED
Develop and distribute educational materials for entrepreneur programs	14	ED8.4	GMRC, DED	TBD	EDA, DED
Program promoting Career Days in primary and secondary schools	26	ED5.3	GMRC, DED	TBD	EDA, DED
Develop program linking local schools with area Technical Colleges	26	ED5.4	GMRC, DED	\$5,000	EDA, DED
Host a one-day entrepreneurial education workshop in conjunction with the SBDC and Universities	11, 12, 14	ED8.3	GMRC, DED	TBD	EDA, DED
Regional assessment of emergency services			GMRC, GEMA	\$10,000	GEMA, FEMA
Develop Regional Rural Transit Plan	3		GMRC	\$20,000	GDOT, GMRC
Develop regional growth and tourism strategy specifically for historic downtowns	2	LU2.1	GMRC, DCA, DED	TBD	GMRC, DCA
Develop a metro-area growth strategy to support urbanizing communities	5, 23, 32	LU6.2	GMRC, Local Govts.	TBD	DCA

Action	I/O	Goal	Responsibility	Costs	Funding Sources
2017					
Review regional Future Development Strategy; Amend as needed	36-44		GMRC	\$10,000	DCA
Update NHRGIS, survey of regional historic resources	16		GMRC, HPD	\$30,000	HPD, DCA
Inventory and develop plans to improve local and regional airports	30	CFS2.2	GMRC, DOT	\$10,000	DOT
Develop inter-regional/state telecommunications strategy	1	CFS6.6	GMRC, EDA, DED	TBD	EDA, DED
Targeted market research study to identify innovation opportunities that correspond to the assets of the region		ED6.3	GMRC, EDA, DED	\$10,000	EDA, DED
Inventory outside forms of equity financing and possible venture capital opportunities		ED6.4	GMRC, EDA, DED	TBD	EDA, DED
Create growth management programs that provide developer incentives and guidelines as well as methods of increased responsibility and accountability to the local community	37, 41		GMRC, Local Govts, Dev. Authorities	\$25,000	Local Govt., Dev. Authorities, DCA, DNR, Private Development
Education re: environmental impacts of various materials and products placed in landfills	15, 16, 22, 40		GMRC, Local Govt., Regional Authorities	\$1,000/yr	GMRC, Local Govt., DCA, DNR
Produce survey and distribute to local housing leaders	3, 4, 5, 6, 7	H1.2	GMRC	\$2,500	DCA
Provide educational seminars and workshops on housing programs and services	4, 5, 6, 7	H2.1	GMRC, DCA	\$2,500	DCA
Inventory and assessment of local water service rates	23	CFS5.4	GMRC, Local Govts	\$5,000	DCA, DNR, GMRC

Action	I/O	Goal	Responsibility	Costs	Funding Sources
2018					
Develop a regional strategic housing plan	3, 4, 5, 6, 7	H3.1	GMRC, DCA	\$15,000	DCA
Develop Regional Post-Disaster Response Framework		DM3.1	GMRC, GEMA	\$15,000	GEMA
Update Regional Bike/Ped Strategy & related work program	29		GMRC, GDOT	\$15,000	GDOT
Develop Regional Plan update			GMRC, DCA	\$50,000	DCA
Develop summary report on housing survey findings	4, 5, 6, 7	H1.3	GMRC	\$2,000	DCA
Develop Highway 441 Tourism Study	9, 28		GMRC, GDOT, GED	\$20,000	GMRC
Develop Commuter Traffic Study	27, 28, 31		GMRC, GDOT	\$10,000	GDOT, GMRC
Develop long-range management plans for targeted corridors in conjunction with GDOT and local stakeholders	27, 28, 32	LU3.1	GMRC, Local Govts., GDOT	\$10,000	DCA, DNR, GMRC
Develop and implement a public awareness campaign about health information technology	13, 25	CFS9.3	GMRC, DED	\$5,000	EDA, DED

Action	I/O	Goal	Responsibility	Costs	Funding Sources
2019					
Conduct local and regional disaster preparedness workshops		DM2.1	GMRC, GEMA	\$5,000	GEMA
Assessment of energy efficiency standards in local codes			GMRC, DCA, MEAG, Ga Power	\$10,000	EDA
Explore downtown tourism networking with NC and SC			GMRC, EDA, DED	\$5,000	EDA
Develop and distribute preparedness and post-disaster recovery material		DM2.2	GMRC, GEMA	\$5,000	GEMA
2020					
Develop inventory of guidelines and plans for energy efficient sites and building methodologies in the region		CFS11.2	GMRC, EDA, DED	\$10,000	EDA, DED
Identify and create a database of entrepreneur support resources in the region	14, 26	ED6.1	GMRC, EDA, DED	\$5,000	EDA, DED
Creation of an entrepreneurial network	14, 26	ED6.2	GMRC, EDA, DED	TBD	EDA, DED
2021					
Interim update – Local compliance with Regional Performance Standards			GMRC	TBD	GMRC

**Georgia Mountains
Regional Commission
Regional Plan 2011
Areas Requiring
Special Attention**



Legend

- North South Arterials
- Richard Russell Scenic Highway
- Major Roads
- Major Lakes
- Municipalities
- Town Centers
- I-85 Corridor
- Tallulah Falls Trail and Greenway
- Gainesville Northwestern Route
- Agricultural Transition

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