

STATE OF FLORIDA

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR EXECUTIVE ORDER NUMBER 25-141

(Re-designation of Rural Area of Opportunity)

WHEREAS, rural communities are stewards of the vast majority of Florida's land and natural resources, upon which the State's continued growth and prosperity depend; and

WHEREAS, successful rural communities are essential to the overall success of the State's economy and quality of life; and

WHEREAS, certain rural communities are struggling to maintain, support, or enhance job creating activity or to generate revenues for education and other critical government services, such as infrastructure, transportation, and safety; and

WHEREAS, the challenges faced by these rural communities threaten their well-being and viability; and

WHEREAS, the Governor is authorized in section 288.0656(7), Florida Statutes, to designate up to three "Rural Areas of Opportunity," formerly "rural areas of critical economic concern," under section 288.0656, Florida Statutes (2000-2013); and

WHEREAS, a Rural Area of Opportunity is a rural community, or a region composed of rural communities, designated by the Governor, that has been adversely affected by an extraordinary economic event, severe or chronic distress, or a natural disaster or that presents a unique economic development opportunity of regional impact; and

WHEREAS, the counties of Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, and Washington were designated on November 8, 1999, by Executive Order 99-275, as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern for a term of five years; and

WHEREAS, the designation expired on November 8, 2004, and the Rural Economic Development Initiative met on November 19, 2004, and agreed to recommend to the Governor to continue the designation of the counties of Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, and Washington as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern and to also add the area within the city limits of Freeport in the designation; and

WHEREAS, the counties of Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, and Washington and the area within the city limits of Freeport were designated on December 6, 2004, by Executive Order 04-250, as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern for a period of five years; and

WHEREAS, the re-designation expired on December 6, 2009, and the Rural Economic Development Initiative met on November 19, 2009, and agreed to recommend to the Governor to continue the designation of the counties of Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, Wakulla, and Washington and the area within the city limits of Freeport as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern; and

WHEREAS, the counties of Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, and Washington and the area within the city limits of Freeport were designated on January 25, 2010, by Executive Order 10-22, as a Rural Area of Opportunity for a period of five years, and Executive Order 10-22 was amended on May 5, 2011, by Executive Order 11-103 to add Wakulla County to the Northwest Rural Area of Opportunity; and

WHEREAS, the Rural Economic Development Initiative met on January 16, 2015, and agreed to recommend to the Governor to continue the designation of the counties of Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, Wakulla, and Washington and the area within the city limits of Freeport as a Rural Area of Opportunity. Executive Order 15-133 was amended by

Executive Order 17-212 to add the area in Walton County north of the Choctawhatchee Bay and the Intracoastal Waterway to the Northwest Rural Area of Opportunity with an expiration date of July 8, 2020; and

WHEREAS, the Rural Economic Development Initiative met on June 3, 2020, and recommended the Governor re-designate the counties of Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, Wakulla, and Washington and the area in Walton County north of the Choctawhatchee Bay and the Intracoastal Waterway as a Rural Area of Opportunity; and

WHEREAS, the counties of Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, Wakulla, and Washington and the area in Walton County north of the Choctawhatchee Bay and the Intracoastal Waterway were re-designated as a Rural Area of Opportunity by Executive Order 20-170 for a period of five years with an expiration date of July 8, 2025; and

WHEREAS, the Rural Economic Development Initiative met on March 28, 2025, and recommended that the Governor re-designate the counties of Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, Wakulla, and Washington and the area in Walton County north of the Choctawhatchee Bay and the Intracoastal Waterway as a Rural Area of Opportunity. The Department of Commerce further recommends extending the Northwest Rural Area of Opportunity into the adjacent areas of rural northern Bay and northeastern Okaloosa Counties.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RON DESANTIS, as Governor of Florida, by virtue of the authority vested in me by Article IV, Section 1(a), Florida Constitution, and section 288.0656(7), Florida Statutes, issue the following Executive Order, effective immediately:

Section 1. The area within the boundaries of the counties of Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, Wakulla, and Washington; the area in Walton County north of the Choctawhatchee Bay and the Intracoastal Waterway; the area in Okaloosa County that is contiguous

with Walton County, within the area east of State Road 85 and north of Interstate 10 and all unincorporated areas therein, including the City of Laurel Hill and the unincorporated areas of Auburn, Deerland, and Svea; and the area in Bay County that is contiguous with Calhoun, Jackson, and Washington Counties, within the area north of Scotts Ferry Road and east of Highway 231 and the area north of Highway 388 lying west of Highway 231 and east of Highway 79 are designated as a Rural Area of Opportunity.

Section 2. This area shall be a priority assignment for the Rural Economic Development Initiative.

Section 3. On a case-by-case basis, the criteria, requirements, or similar provisions of economic development incentives may be waived. Such incentives include, but shall not be limited to, the Quick Response Training Program under section 288.047, Florida Statutes, the Quick Response Training Program for participants in the welfare transition program under section 288.047(8), Florida Statutes, transportation projects under section 288.063, Florida Statutes, the brownfield redevelopment bonus refund under section 288.107, Florida Statutes, and the rural job tax credit program under sections 212.098 and 220.1895, Florida Statutes.

Section 4. Access to the assistance available under this designation as a Rural Area of Opportunity shall be contingent upon the execution of a Memorandum of Agreement between the Department of Commerce, the governing bodies of the counties, and the governing bodies of the municipalities included within the area. Such Memoranda of Agreement shall specify the terms and conditions of the designation, including, but not limited to, the duties and responsibilities of the counties and municipalities to take actions designed to facilitate the retention and expansion of existing businesses in the area, as well as the recruitment of new businesses to the area.

Section 5. This designation shall be in effect for five years and will expire on July 8, 2030, but shall be reviewed by the Rural Economic Development Initiative annually. The Rural Economic Development Initiative may recommend that the designation be terminated or continued based on economic development progress from current base lines or upon performance under the Memorandum of Agreement.



IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and have caused the Great Seal of the State of Florida to be affixed, at Tallahassee, this 8th day of July, 2025.



RON DESANTIS, GOVERNOR

ATTEST:



SECRETARY OF STATE

FILED
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
TALLAHASSEE, FL