



Forrest County

Comprehensive Plan 2026 - 2050

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**A RESOLUTION ADOPTING A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FOR FORREST COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI**

A resolution adopting a comprehensive plan for Forrest County, Mississippi, and providing for the implementation thereof.

WHEREAS, Section 17-1-11 of the Mississippi Code of 1972, annotated, as amended, states that “the governing authority of each municipality and county may provide for the preparation, adoption, amendment, extension and carrying out of a comprehensive plan---;” and

WHEREAS, Section 17-1-1 of the Mississippi Code of 1972, annotated, as amended, defines the term “comprehensive plan” as “a statement of public policy for the physical development of the entire municipality or county adopted by resolution of the governing body, consisting of the following elements at a minimum: (1) goals and objectives for the long-range (twenty to twenty-five years) development of the county or municipality; (2) a land use plan; (3) a transportation plan; and (4) a community facilities plan”; and

WHEREAS, the Forrest County Board of Supervisors has given due public notice of a hearing relating to said comprehensive plan and has held a public hearing in accordance with the requirements of Section 17- 1-15 of the Mississippi Code of 1972, annotated, as amended, on December 15, 2025.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED AND ORDERED by the Forrest County Board of Supervisors, as follows:

1. The statements, matters, facts, findings, determinations, and things recited hereinabove are hereby declared to be true and correct and are adopted as official findings and facts of the Governing Authority of Forrest County and are approved and re-asserted as if fully set forth herein; and

2. That the “Forrest County, Mississippi Comprehensive Plan 2026” is hereby adopted as the comprehensive plan of Forrest County, Mississippi, and shall apply to the areas of land within the jurisdiction and boundaries of Forrest County, Mississippi, and further, the same is incorporated herein in its entirety as if fully set forth herein and that a true and correct copy of the “Forrest County, Mississippi Comprehensive Plan 2026” is on file with the Chancery Clerk of Forrest County, Mississippi, and can be obtained therefrom.

SO RESOLVED this the ____ day of _____ 20__.

APPROVED:

By: _____
Terri Bell, Board President

ATTEST:

Lance Reid, Chancery Clerk



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INTRODUCTION



A comprehensive plan is a policy document that outlines a community's vision for the future and the steps required to achieve it. It encompasses various aspects of development, including land use, housing, transportation, economic growth, public facilities, and environmental sustainability. The plan guides policymakers, stakeholders, and residents, ensuring that decisions align with the community's long-term goals.

Forrest County's comprehensive plan serves as a roadmap for addressing current challenges while seizing opportunities for growth and improvement. It reflects the community's aspirations and establishes a unified direction for future development. The plan

strikes a balance between economic, social, and environmental considerations by identifying priorities and setting actionable goals, thereby fostering a thriving and resilient county for future generations.

This comprehensive plan also serves as a tool for collaboration, encouraging partnerships among government entities, private organizations, and residents. It emphasizes the importance of public input and stakeholder engagement in shaping a shared vision for the county. The plan will be reviewed and updated periodically as a living document to ensure it remains relevant and responsive to evolving needs and circumstances.

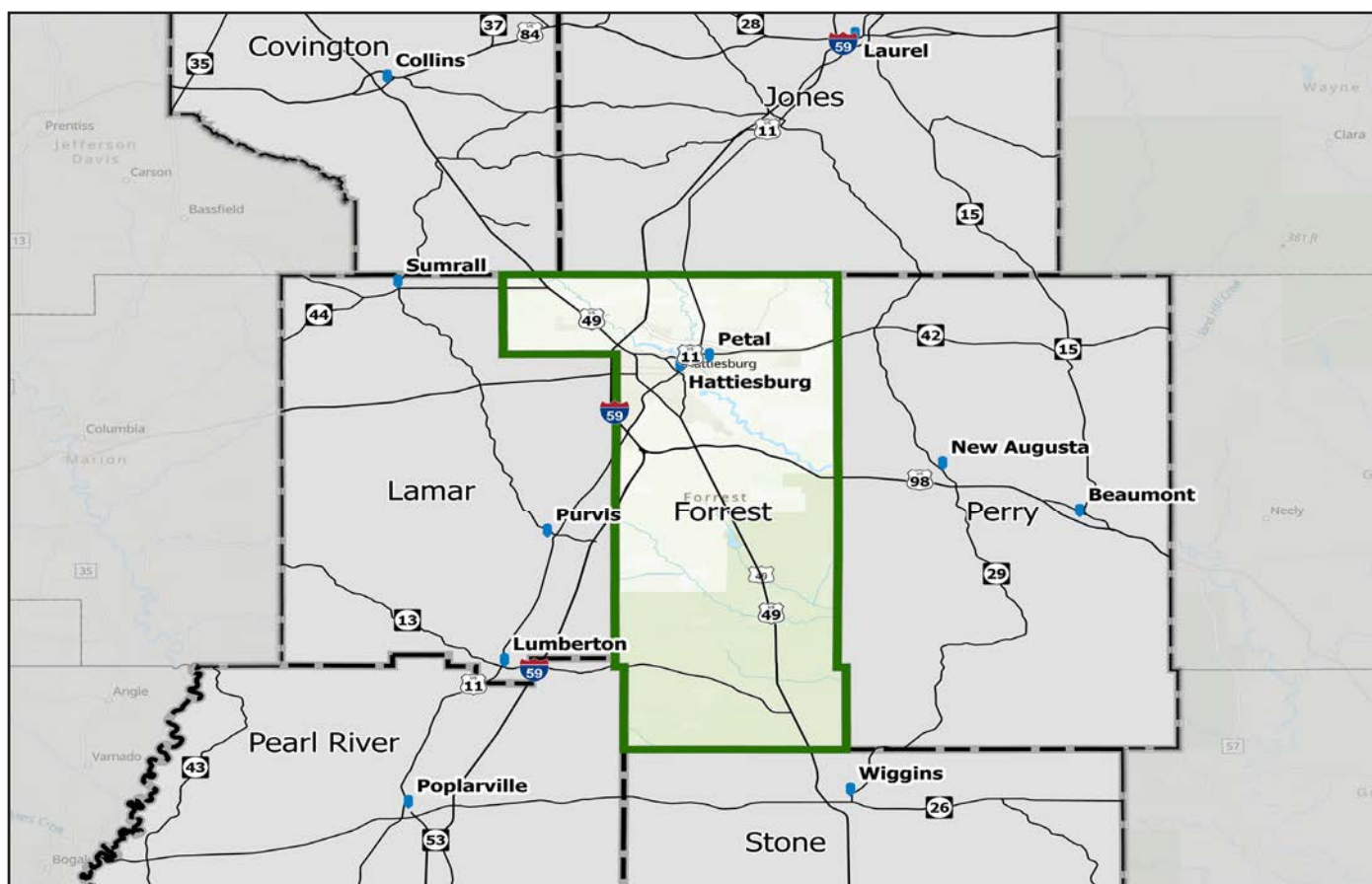
Comprehensive plans are foundational guides to a community's long-term growth and development. They provide frameworks to address current challenges and prepare for future needs, ensuring that decisions about land use, infrastructure, and public services align with a community's shared vision for the future. Comprehensive plans establish a unified approach to managing resources, encouraging economic development, and enhancing the quality of life for residents.

The comprehensive plan reflects Forrest County's commitment to proactive and engaged planning, which assists decision-makers, stakeholders, and citizens in working collaboratively toward sustainable growth and development. As such, Forrest County prioritized connections with key stakeholders, community representatives, and members of the public throughout the planning process, ensuring that the plan reflects local values, priorities, and aspirations.

Location

With a 2020 U.S. Census population of just over 78,000, Forrest County, Mississippi, is the State of Mississippi's eighth-largest county in population. Home to the Cities of Hattiesburg and Petal, as well as many unincorporated communities, Forrest County is rich in history and cultural diversity. The county has been a center of industry and commerce throughout its history. Forrest County's location as a crossroads between neighboring regions has been a consistent asset for development throughout its history. The county has long served as a regional hub of economic growth, commerce, education, and healthcare.

Forrest County was founded in 1908 when neighboring Perry County was divided to create a new county in southeast Mississippi. In its early history, the county was among the few in Mississippi with more workers engaged in industry and commerce than in agricultural labor, and more people living in urban areas than in rural ones. Key sectors, including education, healthcare, manufacturing, and retail, support the county's economy.



Home to the University of Southern Mississippi, William Carey University, and Pearl River Community College's Forrest Campus, the community boasts a vibrant academic community contributing to workforce development and innovation. The county's natural resources, including its forests and waterways, offer residents and visitors economic opportunities and recreational amenities. Connected by Interstate 59 and U.S. Highway 49, Forrest County's location is strategic for moving people and goods through southern Mississippi and across the southeastern United States.

Despite its many strengths, Forrest County faces challenges related to population growth, housing affordability, infrastructure maintenance, and land use management. The comprehensive plan addresses these issues by setting forth actionable goals and policies to foster balanced development, preserve the county's character, and enhance its appeal as a place to live, work, and visit.

Planning Study Area

The study area for this comprehensive plan includes all of Forrest County, Mississippi. The planning study area encompasses locations within municipalities where the county has facilities that provide services to all county residents and where it has partnerships that impact countywide development. For land use planning, the study area is reduced to the unincorporated areas of Forrest County. The land use planning area encompasses urbanizing regions on the fringes of the cities of Hattiesburg and Petal, as well as unincorporated communities such as Brooklyn, Carnes, Eatonville, Glendale, Maxie, McLaurin, and Rawls Springs. It includes the suburban and rural communities, agricultural lands, and natural resources that define the county's character. In this manner, the planning study area encompasses the geographic area that frames the county's unique challenges and opportunities concerning land use, community facilities, and county services.

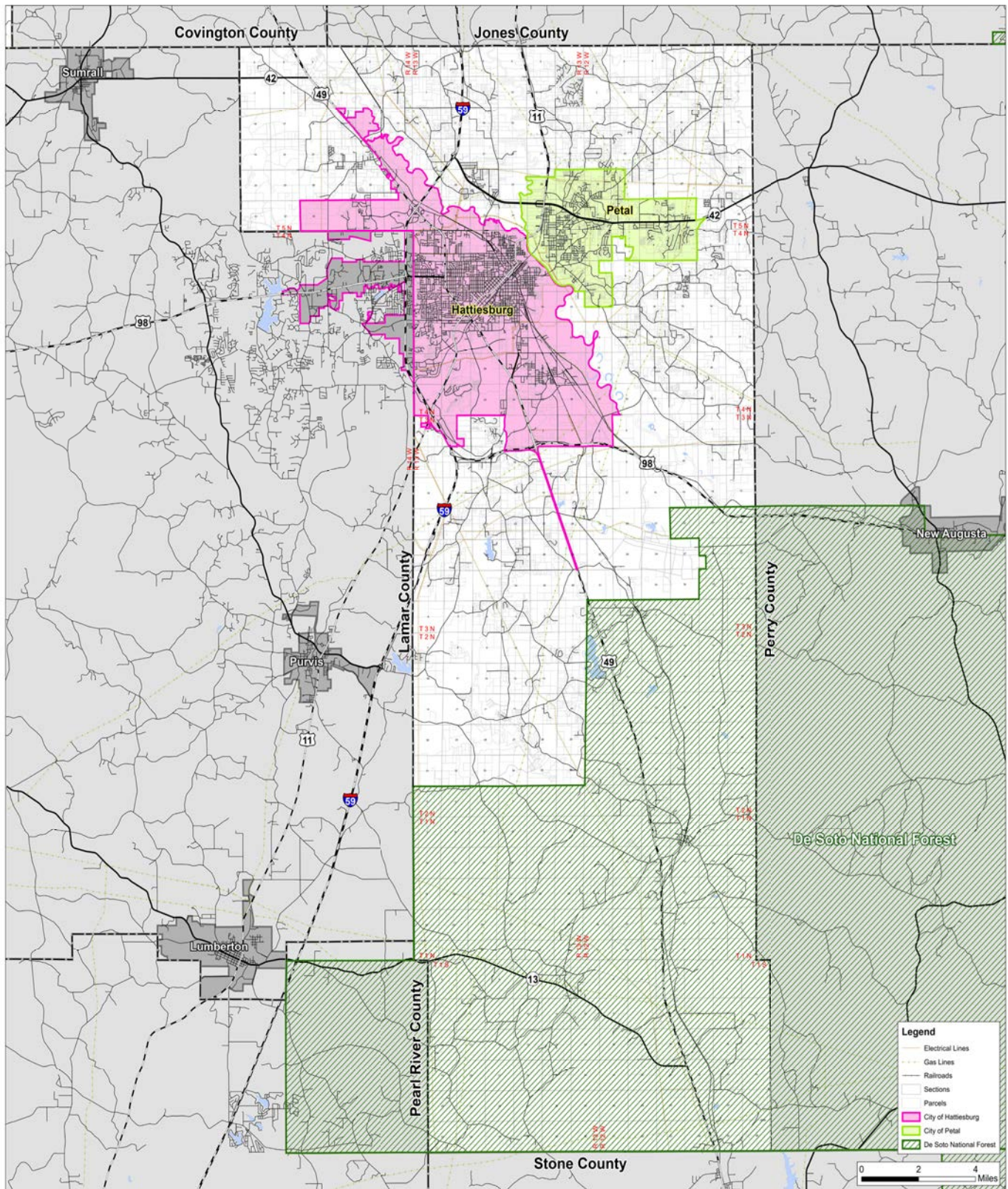
State Law Requirements

In the State of Mississippi, Section 17-1-1 of the Mississippi Code defines a comprehensive plan and requirements for its contents:

“Comprehensive plan” means a statement of public policy for the physical development of the entire municipality or county adopted by resolution of the governing body, consisting of the following elements at a minimum:

(i) GOALS AND OBJECTIVES for the long-range (20 to 25 years) development of the county or municipality. Required goals and objectives shall address, at a minimum, residential, commercial and industrial development; parks, open space and recreation; street or road improvements; public schools and community facilities.

(ii) A LAND USE PLAN, which designates in map or policy form, the proposed general distribution and extent of the uses of land for residences, commerce, industry, recreation and open space, public/quasi-public facilities, and lands. Background information shall be provided concerning the specific meaning of land use categories depicted in the plan in terms of the following: residential densities; intensity of commercial uses; industrial and public/quasi-public uses; and any other information needed to adequately define the meaning of such land use codes. Projections of population and economic growth for the area encompassed by the plan may be the basis for quantitative recommendations for each land use category.



(III) A TRANSPORTATION PLAN depicting in map form the proposed functional classifications for all existing and proposed streets, roads and highways for the area encompassed by the land use plan and for the same time period as that covered by the land use plan. Functional classifications shall consist of arterial, collector, and local streets, roads and highways, and these classifications shall be defined on the plan as to minimum right-of-way and surface width requirements; these requirements shall be based upon traffic projections. All other forms of transportation pertinent to the local jurisdiction shall be addressed as appropriate. The transportation plan shall be a basis for a capital improvements program.

(IV) A COMMUNITY FACILITY PLAN as a basis for a capital improvements program including, but not limited to, the following: housing; schools; parks and recreation; public buildings and facilities; and utilities and drainage.

Each comprehensive plan must include these required elements, and each community's characteristics, goals, and objectives for growth and development and resources will shape the comprehensive plan's content into a unique vision and strategy.

Overall, a comprehensive plan serves as a critical tool for managing growth and change in a way that reflects community values and priorities. It provides a shared vision for the community's future, guides decision-making, and ensures accountability for achieving its goals.

Comprehensive Planning Process

The Forrest County Comprehensive Plan planning process commenced when the County engaged planning consultants and key stakeholders to lay the groundwork for a countywide vision for future growth and development. This phase focused on defining the scope, gathering baseline data, and establishing an organizational structure to guide the project.

A research, mapping, and analysis phase followed, during which extensive data were collected and analyzed to understand the existing conditions in Forrest County. This analysis included mapping land use patterns, evaluating demographic trends and housing data, reviewing economic indicators, researching transportation systems, and describing community facilities. Key person interviews were conducted with local leaders, department heads, and community service providers to supplement the technical data with qualitative insights, highlighting critical issues such as service gaps in rural areas, drainage and flooding challenges, economic development opportunities, and public safety concerns.

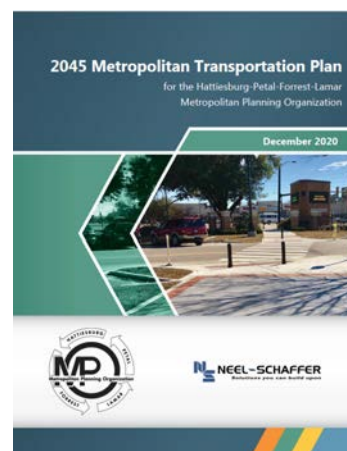
FORREST COUNTY PLANNING PROCESS



Precedent Studies

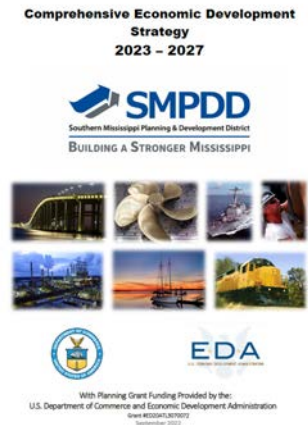
The Forrest County Comprehensive Plan is the county's first comprehensive plan. To ensure the plan is grounded in existing regional strategies and coordinated with state and local partners, it draws on a wide range of precedent studies and prior planning efforts. These documents provided valuable background on transportation, hazard mitigation, economic development, and land use conditions, and helped shape the direction of this plan. Key precedent studies include:

- **HATTIESBURG COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2008)** – Established long-range goals for growth, land use, transportation, and community facilities within Hattiesburg, a major city within Forrest County. Its vision statements and policy framework informed the countywide approach to growth management, neighborhoods, and quality of life.
- **HATTIESBURG-PETAL-FORREST-LAMAR METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLANS**
 - **2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (2020)** – Provides the region's long-term vision for multimodal transportation, addressing roadways, transit, bicycle/pedestrian networks, and freight movement.
 - **2023–2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)** – Identifies priority projects for federal and state funding, ensuring consistency with long-range transportation goals.
 - **2025–2028 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)** – Establishes the state's framework for transportation investments, coordinated with MPO and county projects.
 - **Pathways Master Plan (2015)** – A bicycle, pedestrian, and trail master plan for the MPO region, envisioning a connected active transportation network linking neighborhoods, schools, and parks.
- **MEMA DISTRICT 8 HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN (2020)** – A regional all-hazards plan covering Forrest County and six neighboring counties. It identifies vulnerabilities to floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and other risks, and sets forth mitigation strategies to reduce losses and support FEMA funding eligibility.
- **FORREST COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN (2016)** – Provides the operational framework for disaster preparedness and emergency response. Its emphasis on coordination, hazard readiness, and recovery informs resiliency and safety policies.



- **SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT (SMPDD) COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (2023–2027)** – A regional economic development strategy that highlights workforce trends, infrastructure needs, and targeted sectors, forming the economic foundation for Forrest County’s growth strategy. The strategy emphasizes regional competitiveness, resiliency, and site-readiness efforts such as the Eagle One Mega Site.

Together, these precedent studies establish a strong foundation for Forrest County’s comprehensive plan. By building on past work and aligning with existing regional strategies, the plan ensures consistency, avoids duplication, and provides a coordinated roadmap for future development and investment.



Community Engagement

To ensure the plan was community-driven and reflective of resident input, a robust public engagement process was launched. Multiple public meetings were held in key locations across the county to reach diverse populations and gather feedback. These included sessions at:

- **BARRONTOWN COMMUNITY CENTER** (January 27, 2025),
- **BROOKLYN COMMUNITY CENTER** (January 28, 2025),
- **DIXIE COMMUNITY CENTER** (March 10, 2025), and
- **RAWLS SPRINGS COMMUNITY CENTER** (March 11, 2025).

Each meeting featured an introduction to comprehensive planning concepts, presentations of existing conditions, and interactive discussions. Participants engaged in the activities to highlight community assets and places of pride and were invited to participate in visioning to imagine a transformed and thriving Forrest County. Key themes emerging from these discussions included the need for expanded rural services, proactive solutions to environmental challenges such as flooding and drainage, support for economic growth and workforce readiness, improved housing options, and the preservation of the county’s natural and cultural resources.



Community Survey

In addition to the in-person meetings, an online survey was launched in January and remained open through May 2025, providing a platform for residents to offer feedback and ideas. The survey garnered detailed responses, providing valuable insights into infrastructure priorities, environmental concerns, economic development policies, and aspirations for a vibrant and inclusive community. Key findings revealed strong support for infrastructure improvements in roads, water and sewage systems, and broadband access, as well as for environmental stewardship, workforce development, and investments in quality of life.

The survey garnered 46 responses from residents across the county, providing detailed feedback on infrastructure, housing, economic development, environmental priorities, and quality of life. Results showed strong demand for road and bridge improvements, better water and sewer systems, more diverse housing options, expanded local markets and job opportunities, and stronger environmental protections. The survey also highlighted community desires for improved recreational facilities, children's programs, and public safety services. These findings closely mirrored themes heard in the community meetings and are summarized in the sidebar table of Community Survey Highlights that accompanies this section.

Community Survey Highlights	
Topic	Key Findings
Roads & Infrastructure	• 70% prioritized roads and bridges • 52% prioritized water/sewage systems • 39% prioritized parks/recreation • 30% prioritized broadband expansion
County Services	• 48% rated public transportation Poor • 37% rated road maintenance Poor • 61% rated emergency services Good • 48% rated law enforcement Good
Housing	• 50% want more cottages/small homes • 39% want more large single-family homes • 26% want more senior housing
Economic Development	• 65% want local goods/farmers' markets • 46% want manufacturing/industry • 44% want agriculture/agribusiness • 41% want technology/innovation employers
Environment	• 78% support conserving wildlife/habitat • 76% support protecting water quality • 52% support waste management/recycling • 50% support flood hazard mitigation
Quality of Life	• 60% want better recreational facilities • 49% want stronger public safety • 47% want more children's activities • 40% want more community events

Writing, Review, and Approval

Following this comprehensive community engagement process, the planning team translated public input into draft goals and objectives, ensuring that they reflected the community's priorities and aligned with land use and transportation plans.

This process culminated in a comprehensive plan draft, incorporating feedback from public meetings, surveys, and stakeholder interviews, resulting in a document that was both technically sound and grounded in community aspirations. The draft was presented during a Community Open House December 1, 2025, providing another opportunity for public review and comment. A public hearing was advertised and held December 15, 2025. Feedback from these events, along with ongoing community input, informed the final revisions to the plan.

Throughout the process, the planning team emphasized inclusive participation, transparency, and collaboration, ensuring the plan truly reflected the values and priorities of Forrest County's residents. The project timeline spanned from January 2025 through March 2026, with each phase carefully building upon the previous one to create a comprehensive, actionable, and community-supported vision for the county's future.

The Final Plan was then presented to the Forrest County Board of Supervisors for formal adoption. The comprehensive plan will serve as the county's guiding document for managing growth, land use, transportation, economic development, and community facilities over the coming decades, built upon a robust and inclusive community engagement process.

How Should the Plan Be Used?

The comprehensive plan is a policy statement intended to inform decision-making processes and coordinate efforts across various sectors of Forrest County. By providing a clear vision, actionable goals, and objectives, the plan is a blueprint for achieving the community's long-term aspirations and addressing challenges along the way. The plan is a framework for action leading to aspirational outcomes. It is not meant to be static or read just once, but rather to become a standard reference for decisions affecting Forrest County's development. Below are the key ways the plan should be used:

- **POLICY GUIDANCE:** The plan provides a foundation for creating and updating land use, infrastructure, and public services policies. Decision-makers should reference it to ensure decisions are consistent with the county's long-term vision and priorities.
- **DEVELOPMENT REVIEW:** Planners, developers, and officials can use the plan as a benchmark for evaluating development proposals. The county can ensure sustainable and well-coordinated growth by aligning new projects with the objectives of its comprehensive plan.
- **RESOURCE ALLOCATION:** The plan identifies priority areas for investment, enabling the efficient allocation of resources. This includes guiding capital improvements, public infrastructure projects, and community development initiatives.
- **COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION:** The comprehensive plan fosters partnerships among government entities, businesses, community organizations, and residents, providing a shared roadmap that aligns efforts and maximizes the impact of collective actions.
- **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:** The plan serves as a tool for engaging residents in planning and maintaining transparency, helping to communicate the county's vision and progress while encouraging public input and accountability.
- **MONITORING AND ADAPTATION:** As a living document, the plan should be referenced frequently, reviewed periodically, and updated as needed to reflect changing conditions and emerging opportunities. Continuous use and ongoing evaluation will ensure the plan remains relevant for the county's development.

By integrating the comprehensive plan into daily operations and strategic initiatives, Forrest County can create a cohesive and resilient framework for achieving its long-term goals and enhancing the quality of life for all residents.

Who Will Implement the Plan?

The comprehensive plan's successful implementation requires collaborative efforts from multiple entities, including:

- **LOCAL GOVERNMENT:** Forrest County's Board of Supervisors plays a central role in enacting policies, updating regulations, and overseeing infrastructure investments that align with the plan.
- **COUNTY DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES:** Forrest County's Planning Department, Roads and Bridges Department, and Sheriff's Department have the most visible roles in implementing the comprehensive plan. These departments are instrumental in executing specific initiatives and projects outlined in the plan.
- **COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS:** Volunteer fire departments, community water and sewer associations, educational institutions, businesses, non-profits, and other community organizations are vital partners in advancing the plan's goals through their unique resources, expertise, and networks.
- **RESIDENTS:** Forrest County's residents are integral to the plan's success. Residents can contribute through public input, community initiatives, and investments in development that reflect the plan's vision and create a better future for Forrest County.
- **REGIONAL AND STATE AGENCIES:** Collaboration with transportation planning organizations, development districts, state agencies, and neighboring jurisdictions ensures alignment with broader initiatives and access to additional resources and funding opportunities.
- **PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERS:** Developers, investors, and businesses play a key role in realizing the plan's vision by contributing to sustainable development and economic growth.

An action plan with specific tasks, timelines, and performance indicators will guide the implementation process. Regular progress reviews and updates will ensure the plan's continued relevance and effectiveness in achieving the community's goals.

Comprehensive Plan Organization

The Forrest County Comprehensive Plan is organized into nine chapters, each building upon the last to present a cohesive and actionable vision for the county's future. The plan is structured to fulfill state requirements under Mississippi law while reflecting the specific conditions, aspirations, and priorities identified through extensive public engagement, research, and analysis. The organization of the plan follows a logical progression from background and context to future policies and implementation.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This opening chapter establishes the purpose and role of the comprehensive plan as a long-term guide for growth, development, and public investment in Forrest County. It defines the planning study area, outlines how the plan should be used, and explains who is responsible for implementing its recommendations. The chapter provides a summary of the planning process, emphasizing the importance of public input and the county's commitment to ethical and transparent planning.

Chapter 2: Guiding Principles, Goals, and Objectives

This chapter builds on community engagement and research to present guiding principles for growth and development and six overarching goals that guide all future actions: sustainable growth, environmental resilience, economic vitality, connectivity, quality of life, and inclusive governance. Each goal includes specific objectives that shape policies, investments, and programs across the county.

Chapter 3: Future Land Use and Transportation Plan

This chapter sets forth the county's vision for future development through a place-based land use framework. It introduces a set of rural and suburban place types that reflect development patterns, densities, infrastructure needs, and character. Each place type includes a narrative description, key features, and transportation characteristics. This framework supports orderly growth, resource conservation, and coordination with transportation planning.

Chapter 4: Community Facilities

This chapter provides an inventory of the county's facilities and infrastructure, including government buildings, roads, law enforcement, fire protection, emergency management, parks, utilities, and schools. It assesses current conditions, identifies capacity and service gaps, and recommends improvements to address these gaps. This chapter highlights opportunities to improve service delivery, safety, and quality of life, especially in rural and underserved areas.

Chapter 5: Implementation

The final chapter translates the plan's goals and objectives into actionable steps. It identifies lead entities, timelines, and performance measures to guide short- and long-term actions. It also establishes a framework for monitoring progress, updating the plan, and maintaining accountability. This chapter ensures the plan is not only visionary but also practical, setting the stage for coordinated, sustained progress over the coming decades.

Appendix A: Implementation Matrix

Appendix B: Background for Planning

B-1: County Profile and Demographic Conditions

B-1 presents a comprehensive profile of Forrest County, including its history, the advantages and challenges facing Forrest County via a SWOT analysis, geography, population trends, and regional development. It provides an in-depth demographic analysis, highlighting population growth, age distribution, racial and ethnic diversity, and migration patterns. This chapter sets the

foundation for understanding the county's unique character, challenges, and opportunities as these relate to its geography and population.

B-2: Economic Profile

B-2 evaluates Forrest County's economic landscape, examining income levels, employment sectors, educational attainment, workforce characteristics, commuting patterns, and industry trends. It identifies strengths in healthcare, education, and manufacturing while addressing barriers such as wage disparities and labor force gaps. The analysis informs policies to support job creation, economic resilience, and upward mobility.

B-3: Transportation and Existing Land Use

B-3 explores the connection between land use and mobility in Forrest County. It provides an inventory of the transportation system, including highways, local roads, rail, aviation, and trails, and assesses roadway classifications and traffic volumes. The chapter also documents existing land use patterns in unincorporated areas and describes how transportation corridors function within different land use contexts. This analysis informs coordinated policies for future growth and infrastructure investment.

B-4: Housing Analysis

B-4 evaluates the county's housing stock, including unit types, age, occupancy, household characteristics, and affordability. It identifies structural deficiencies, cost burdens, and gaps in housing availability, especially for renters and low-income households. The findings support recommendations for rehabilitation, new development, and housing policies to meet the needs of current and future residents.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 of the comprehensive plan establishes a foundation for the planning process by outlining its purpose, scope, and organizational structure. It defines the study area, identifies the key stakeholders responsible for implementation, and defines various roles in the planning process. By laying out a clear planning foundation and framework, Chapter 1 is a roadmap for understanding and navigating the comprehensive plan.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This chapter establishes a strategic foundation that will guide growth, investment, and public policy in Forrest County over the next several decades. Grounded in extensive community engagement, technical analysis, and collaboration among county leaders and stakeholders, it provides clear guidance on the county's intended direction and long-term objectives.

The chapter articulates a set of Guiding Principles that express the shared values of Forrest County's residents, encompassing equity, resilience, sustainability, and inclusive governance. These principles draw on multiple inputs gathered throughout the planning process, including public workshops, stakeholder interviews, data trends, and best-practice research.

Building on these principles, the chapter presents comprehensive Goals and Objectives organized around six themes critical to the county's future:

- **SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**
- **RESILIENCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP**
- **ECONOMIC VITALITY AND OPPORTUNITY**
- **CONNECTIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY**
- **COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND QUALITY OF LIFE**
- **COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE AND ENGAGEMENT**

Together, the guiding principles, goals, and objectives provide a unified roadmap for decisionmaking and resource allocation. They translate community aspirations into actionable policies, ensuring that future initiatives are evidence-based, fiscally responsible, and aligned with a shared vision for a more resilient, inclusive, and prosperous Forrest County.

Guiding Principles

The Guiding Principles of the comprehensive plan serve as the foundation for decision-making and policy development. These principles encapsulate Forrest County's values and aspirations that are shared by leaders, key stakeholders, and residents, and provide a unifying framework that informs every aspect of the planning process. By adhering to these principles, the county ensures that its growth and development are aligned with its vision for the future while addressing the needs of all residents and stakeholders. The principles reflect a commitment to sustainability, inclusiveness, innovation, and preserving Forrest County's unique character.

Forrest County's Guiding Principles

EQUITY: Ensure that every resident—whether in a city, suburb, or rural community—has fair access to quality infrastructure, essential services, and meaningful economic opportunities, so that all individuals and communities can fully participate in and benefit from growth, development, and long-term prosperity.

CONNECTIVITY: Recognize that the future depends on the strength of connections between people, neighborhoods, and communities. Invest in transportation, broadband, and public infrastructure to bridge divides.

RESILIENCE: Prepare for challenges posed by natural hazards, environmental risks, and economic fluctuations. Build resilience into every aspect of planning by adopting proactive policies to safeguard lives, property, and livelihoods.

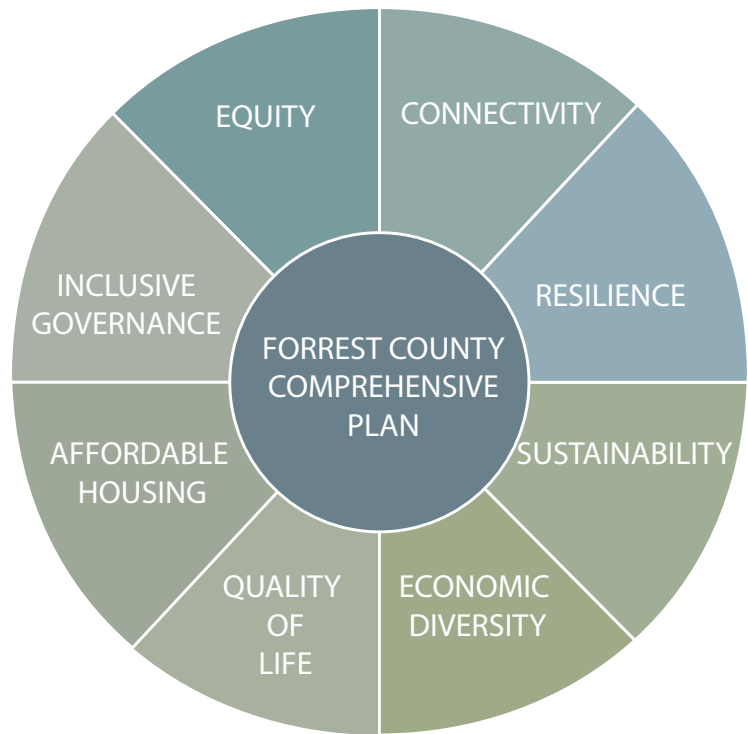
SUSTAINABILITY: Embrace responsible growth that conserves natural landscapes, protects water and air quality, and aligns development with environmental stewardship.

ECONOMIC DIVERSITY: Stimulate job creation, entrepreneurship, and expanded educational and training opportunities, building a resilient and adaptable workforce for the county's future and increasing income and earnings.

QUALITY OF LIFE: Health, happiness, and social connectedness work alongside economic progress to create true prosperity. Investments in parks, recreation, cultural resources, public safety, and health services ensure a high quality of life for all community members.

INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE: Value the voices of residents, businesses, and stakeholders in shaping a responsive and effective government. Foster transparency, encourage participation, and build trust through inclusive engagement processes.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING: Expand opportunities for safe, quality, and affordable housing in a range of types and locations to meet the needs of residents at all income levels. Housing choice and attainability are essential to community stability, workforce vitality, and long-term growth.



Goals and Objectives

The Goals and Objectives translate the guiding principles into actionable policies for the future. This section identifies and provides a roadmap for achieving the key priorities for Forrest County. By setting long-range goals and objectives, the plan guides stakeholders to work together effectively toward the county's desired future. Each goal reflects a specific aspect of the community's development, from economic growth and infrastructure improvements to environmental stewardship and quality of life enhancements. The objectives serve as benchmarks for progress and accountability, guiding decision-making and resource allocation throughout the implementation process.

Each objective includes an 'In Practice' statement, which illustrates what that objective looks like when applied in real-world settings. These descriptions are written in the present tense to demonstrate the county's vision for implementing the plan as if it were already underway, emphasizing the plan's practical guidance for future actions over abstract statements. This guidance helps answer the question, "What does this objective look like in action?" and provides a vision, aspiration, and action plan for future milestones. By previewing how objectives translate into lived results, the In Practice statements serve as a bridge to the detailed action plans described in Chapter 5: Implementation and Appendix A: Implementation Matrix, where specific tasks, timelines, lead entities, and responsibilities are assigned. In this way, the Goals and Objectives chapter establishes both the long-term vision and a preview of how implementation will occur.

Goal 1: Sustainable Growth and Development

Objective 1.1 Future Land-Use Framework. Develop a comprehensive, place-based, and flexible future land use framework that accommodates residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional needs while preserving community character and environmental integrity.

IN PRACTICE: A unified Future Land-Use (FLU) Map and "Place-Type" policy give Forrest County a visual blueprint for growth, ensuring that development intensity aligns with infrastructure capacity and rural character. Related actions establish the regulating plan, embed standards in the land development ordinance, and require periodic updates, creating a living guidance tool. Implementing the FLU will streamline development decisions, reduce infrastructure life-cycle costs, and provide investors with confidence that today's project decisions will complement tomorrow's community vision.

Objective 1.2: Planning & Development Tools. Implement and enforce land use planning and development tools, including subdivision regulations and appropriate land use controls, to guide development, support infill and redevelopment, and minimize land use conflicts.

IN PRACTICE: A land development ordinance, subdivision regulations, and building codes translates planning ideals into day-to-day decision-making rules. By referencing place types, requiring connected street networks, and adopting rural-specific codes, the County can support compact growth where services are available while protecting farm and forestland elsewhere. A plain-language user guide and updated permitting workflow foster transparency, shorten review times, and reduce costly missteps for both staff and applicants.

Objective 1.3 County Design Process. Develop a county design process to guide development in unincorporated areas while preserving rural character.

IN PRACTICE: Clear standards for review and approval, codified in the county development regulations, form the foundation for evaluating new development. Pre-application “sketch plan” meetings and an inter-departmental review team provide a coordinated input from planning, engineering, utilities, emergency services, and other relevant departments. This process establishes predictable expectations, reduces conflicts and variances, and ensures that new development reflects rural character, infrastructure capacity, and adopted county standards.

Objective 1.4 Conservation Subdivisions. Encourage conservation subdivisions as a model for rural housing that preserves open space.

IN PRACTICE: Incentivizing clustered layouts with density bonuses and expedited review allows for smaller private lots to be traded for larger shared open spaces, conserving forests, streams, and farmland. Partnering with a land trust guarantees long-term stewardship of conserved acreage, enhancing flood resilience and rural viewsheds while still accommodating market-driven housing demand.

Objective 1.5 Countywide GIS Database. Create a specialized countywide GIS database to support land use planning.

IN PRACTICE: Hiring a dedicated GIS Technician and publishing an integrated parcel, infrastructure, and place-type viewer empowers staff, citizens, and investors with real-time data. Annual software budgets and training keep the system current, supporting evidence-based decisions in land development, drainage, and capital programming, and minimizing duplicated fieldwork.

Objective 1.6 Infrastructure Investment. Invest in infrastructure (roads, water, sewer, drainage) to support both suburban and rural growth, prioritizing underserved areas.

IN PRACTICE: A five-year Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) prioritizes investments in the highest-need road, water, sewer, and drainage projects, particularly in underserved and growth areas. By aligning infrastructure expansion with development patterns and service demand, the County improves system reliability, supports economic growth, and protects long-term public investment. An online dashboard communicates the plan to the public, showing both the overall backlog of major projects and how limited funds are directed to the highest-need roads, water, sewer, and drainage improvements. Leveraging MDOT, State, and Federal grants for growth corridors multiplies local dollars, while public transparency helps illustrate stewardship of county resources, protect and enhance the tax base, and build trust that positions the County competitively for future infrastructure awards.

Objective 1.7 Proactive Road Maintenance. Continue a proactive road maintenance and upgrade program, leveraging new technology and data-driven assessments to prioritize repairs and optimize investments.

IN PRACTICE: Publishing Pavement Condition Index (PCI) ratings in publicly accessible formats, tying resurfacing schedules to objective data helps maintain good roads and stretch maintenance budgets. Producing a public map of PCI ratings highlights where the worst roads are located, where traffic counts are highest, and which segments carry priority for investment. This transparent approach shows both the challenges and benefits of an objective process, while also illustrating the cost of paving, repair, and reconstruction in the context of countywide demand. Annual “report cards” communicate these findings to elected officials and the public, demonstrating stewardship of county resources and reinforcing the importance of preserving the tax base through good planning. Complementary improvements such as shoulder widening and striping upgrades further enhance safety for all users.

Objective 1.8 Sewer Service Expansion. Coordinate with local water associations, cities, and developers to expand sewer services along major growth corridors, including Highway 98, Highway 49, and the Eagle One Mega Site access, needed to ensure capacity for anticipated development.

IN PRACTICE: Inter-local agreements, phased engineering, and pursuit of EDA/USDA funding lay the groundwork for extending sewer to growth nodes along Hwy 49/98, and Eagle One. Coordinated trunk-line construction unlocks higher-density development, reduces septic failures, and positions the County for industrial prospects that demand reliable wastewater service.

Objective 1.9 Affordable & Workforce Housing. Develop affordable and workforce housing strategies, including housing rehabilitation, infill development programs, and rental inspections, to address identified housing shortages and promote quality housing.

IN PRACTICE: A cross-sector Housing Task Force, a rehab/infill grant program, a rental inspection ordinance, and a land bank collectively address affordability, quality, and supply. Mapping multi-family opportunity sites near job hubs aligns housing choice with transportation efficiency, sustaining workforce competitiveness and social equity.

Goal 2: Resilience and Environmental Stewardship

Objective 2.1 Countywide Drainage Study. Complete and implement a countywide drainage study, incorporating green infrastructure and natural resource management strategies to mitigate flooding, especially in vulnerable areas.

IN PRACTICE: Launching a hydrologic & hydraulic study, including culvert inventory, LiDAR, and green infrastructure retrofit priorities, provides the County with a defensible capital roadmap to reduce flooding. Integrating findings into the CIP and publishing an interactive flood-risk map enables risk-informed development reviews, enhancing eligibility for FEMA mitigation funding.



Objective 2.2 Green-Infrastructure Plan. Establish a green infrastructure network plan connecting floodplains, forests, and recreation areas.

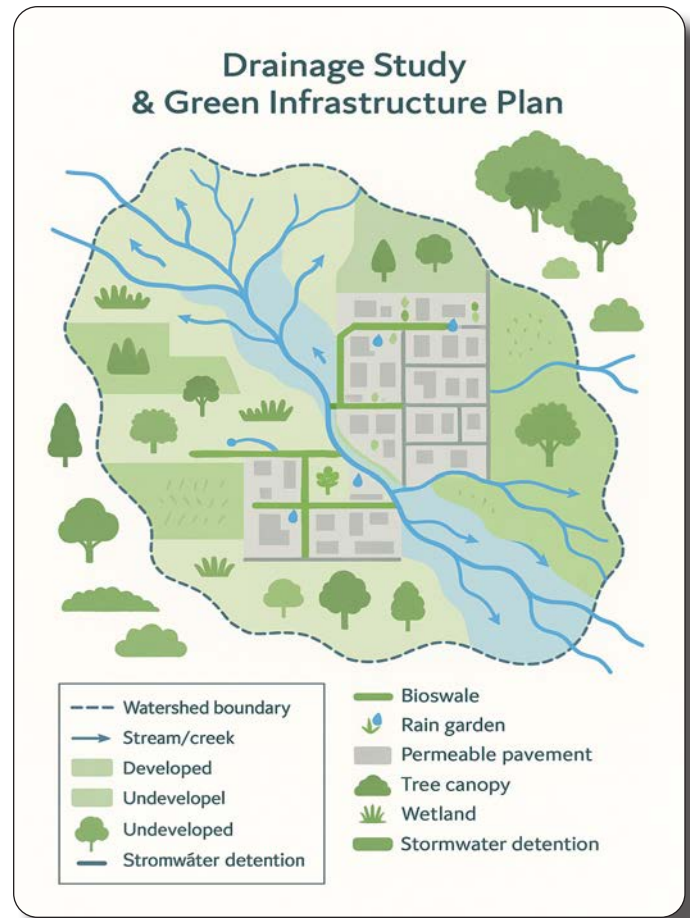
IN PRACTICE: An inter-agency working group will stitch floodplains, forests, and recreation corridors into a hub-and-link GIS layer, embedded in the FLU Map. Easements and dedicated funding streams convert this vision into riparian buffers and greenways that absorb stormwater, expand habitat, and brand Forrest County as an outdoor-recreation destination.

Objective 2.3 Septic-to-Sewer Conversion Program. Launch a septic-to-sewer conversion assistance program in environmentally sensitive areas as sewer services expand.

IN PRACTICE: The county partners with sewer providers to help with targeted mapping, loan/grant funds, and homeowner outreach to tackle failing septic systems. Phased trunk-line extensions and water-quality tracking protect public health, support higher land values, and reduce nutrient loads in downstream streams, bolstering both environmental stewardship and economic development. Forrest County helps facilitate and supplement the work of existing municipal and utility sewer districts—by coordinating planning, pursuing outside funding, and assisting with community outreach—so that these districts have greater capacity to address failing systems in priority areas.

Objective 2.4 Hazard-Resistant Codes. Adopt building codes and regulations to promote hazard-resistant development, sustainability, and environmental protection.

IN PRACTICE: Adopting the latest codes with flood- and wind-resilient amendments, paired with builders' quick guides, pre-approved housing plans, and a three-year review cycle, hardens homes and businesses against storms. Annual compliance audits mitigate disaster losses, lower insurance premiums, and position the County for lower insurance rates.



Objective 2.5 Integrate Hazard-Mitigation into Planning. Integrate hazard mitigation strategies into land use and infrastructure planning to reduce vulnerabilities to flooding, severe weather, and other risks.

IN PRACTICE: Overlaying FEMA DFIRM and drainage study layers in the GIS ensures that each development decision or subdivision includes a hazard assessment. Aligning CIP scoring with mitigation benefits and pursuing HMGP funds makes resilience a core investment criterion, safeguarding life safety and taxpayer dollars.

Objective 2.6 Emergency Preparedness Programs. Expand local emergency preparedness programs, including community education, evacuation planning, and hazard awareness campaigns.

IN PRACTICE: A “Ready Forrest” education campaign, updated shelter maps, mass-notification platform, and multi-agency drills cultivate a culture of readiness. Ongoing evaluation after events closes performance gaps and builds public confidence in county emergency services.

Goal 3: Economic Vitality and Opportunity

Objective 3.1 Leverage Eagle One Mega-Site & Industrial Assets. Leverage key economic assets, including the Eagle One Mega Site and other industrial sites, to attract targeted industries, including data centers, advanced manufacturing, logistics, and renewable energy.

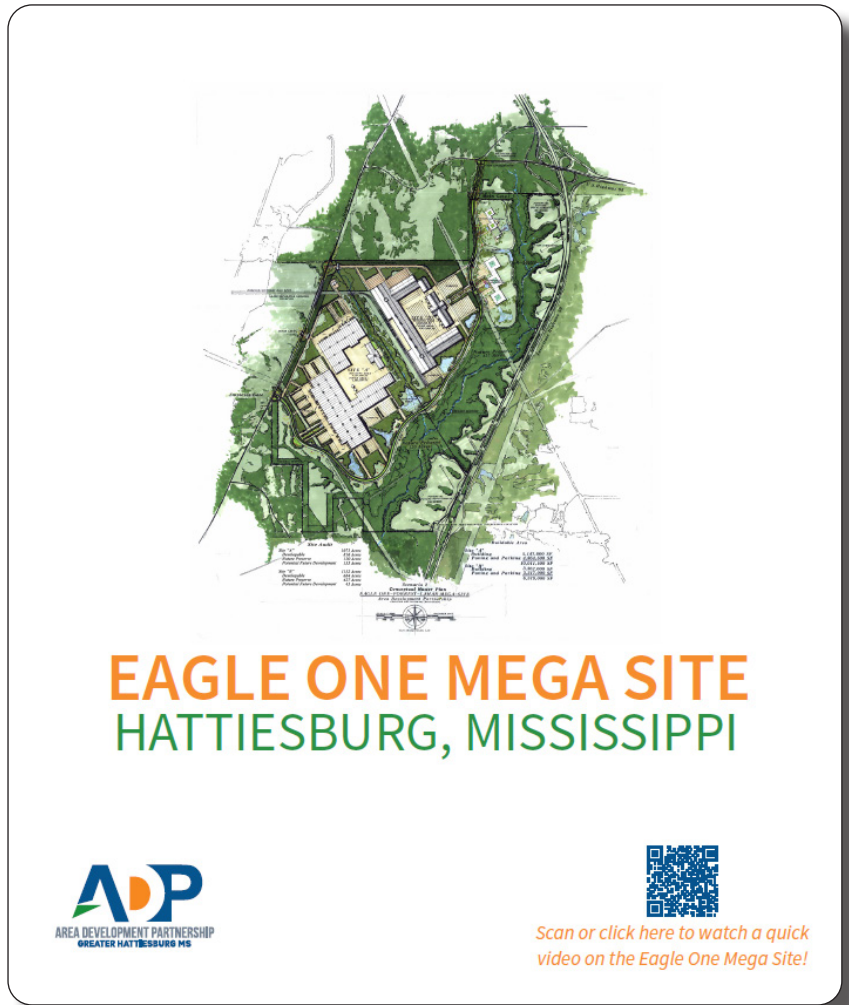
IN PRACTICE: Completing pad-ready infrastructure, streamlining the permitting process, and continuing a data-driven recruitment campaign position Eagle One as a premier location for advanced manufacturing and logistics. Performance-based incentives tied to local hiring maximize return on tax abatements, diversifying the employment base and boosting median wages.

Objective 3.2 Grow Agri-Entrepreneurship & Agri-Tourism. Support agricultural entrepreneurship through a local food network and agri-tourism strategy.

IN PRACTICE: A Local Food Council, branded farm markets, and an agri-tourism summit connect producers to consumers and visitors. Wayfinding signage and small-grant programs transform family farms into experiential destinations, broadening revenue streams and preserving farmland.

Objective 3.3 Expand Workforce-Development Partnerships. Expand workforce development partnerships with educational institutions and employers to train residents for high-demand sectors.

IN PRACTICE: A workforce partnership with strong roots in the private sector realigns training opportunities with employer demand, layers in WIOA-funded cohorts, and hosts rotating career fairs and career pathways explorations. Veterans-to-industry pipelines and paid apprenticeships bridge talent gaps, ensuring businesses can expand without relocating. Expanded public-private partnerships build on the strengths of exiting workforce developers, ensuring a complementary, county-focused approach that ramps up employer engagement and positions Forrest County for long-term growth.



Objective 3.4 Create Small-Business Incubators in Community Centers. Create small business incubators in community centers or libraries.

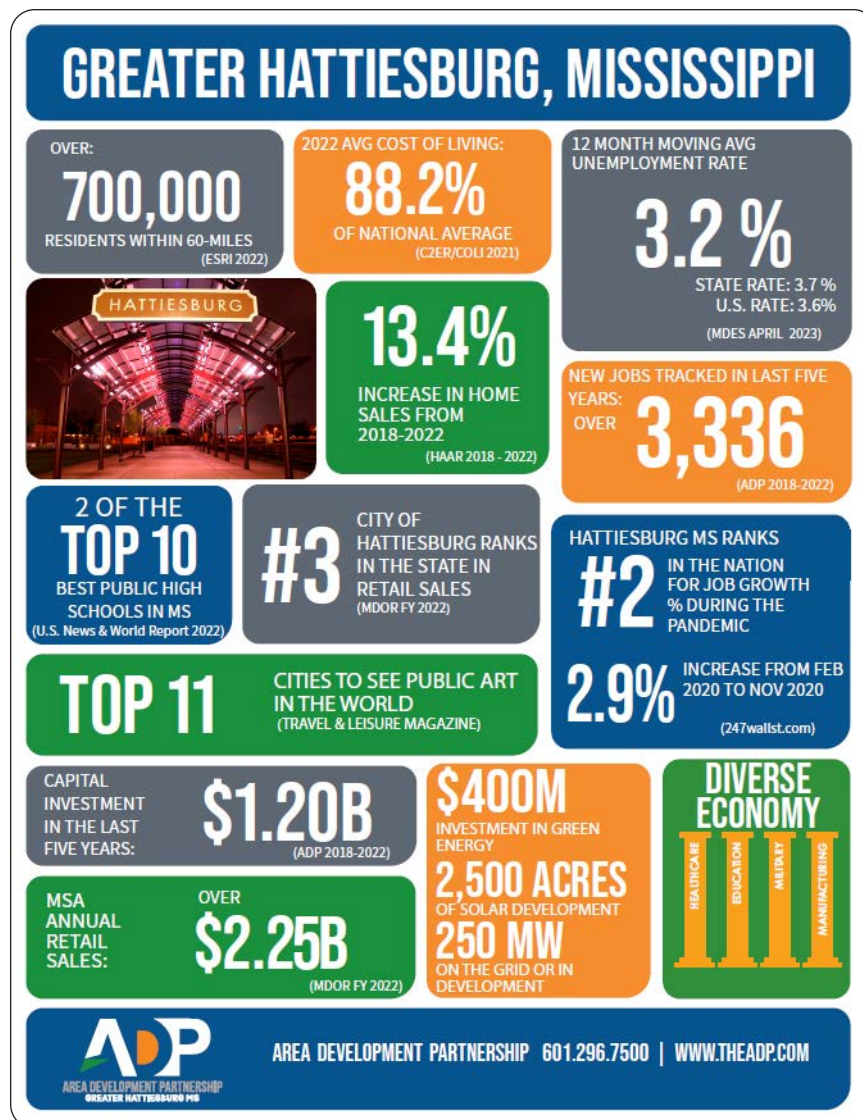
IN PRACTICE: Retrofitted broadband-equipped hubs, micro-loan pools, and mentor networks democratize entrepreneurship in rural communities. Pitch nights and survival-rate tracking foster a supportive ecosystem, fueling job creation where traditional capital is scarce.

Objective 3.5 Enhance Marketing, Branding & Tourism. Enhance marketing, branding, and tourism efforts, incorporating heritage tourism and local cultural assets to promote Forrest County’s identity and quality of life.

IN PRACTICE: A unified “Discover Forrest County” brand, heritage tourism map, media familiarization tours, and digital kiosks weave disparate attractions into a cohesive visitor experience. Increased dwell time and spending bolster local businesses and reinforce civic pride.

Objective 3.6 Support Small-Business Growth in Underserved Communities. Support small business development and entrepreneurship in underserved communities to reduce economic disparities.

IN PRACTICE: A Mobile Business Resource Van, micro-loan fund, and quarterly skills clinics bring SBDC expertise directly to rural entrepreneurs. Aligning broadband buildouts with commercial clusters removes a critical barrier to e-commerce, shrinking the rural-urban prosperity gap.



Objective 3.7 Promote Placemaking & Cultural Events. Promote placemaking initiatives and cultural events that celebrate Forrest County’s heritage and foster community pride.

IN PRACTICE: Heritage festivals, façade mini-grants, community-led murals, and tactical-urbanism kits activate main streets and crossroads. These low-cost interventions jump-start private reinvestment, attract visitors, and celebrate the County’s unique history.

Goal 4: Connectivity and Accessibility

Objective 4.1 Integrated Transportation Network. Develop and maintain an integrated transportation network that includes complete streets, greenways, transit, and pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, ensuring connectivity between neighborhoods, jobs, and amenities.

IN PRACTICE: A place-type-based roadway design policy, shoulder widening, and Safe Routes improvements synchronize mobility upgrades with land-use goals. Updating subdivision standards for connectivity can reduce emergency response times and support healthier, more walkable communities.

Objective 4.2 Rural Mobility Plan. Work with the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) to develop a long-range rural mobility plan, including on-demand transit options, focusing on connecting rural areas to employment centers and services.

IN PRACTICE: Forrest County collaborates with the MPO, the Mississippi Department of Transportation, the City of Hattiesburg, the City of Petal, and other partners through a Rural Mobility Task Force to ensure that the mobility needs of unincorporated communities and Petal are clearly documented and included in regional and statewide plans. Pilot programs such as micro-transit services, flexible flag-stop routes, and demand-response transit can demonstrate cost-effective solutions while offering immediate access to jobs, schools, and services for residents with limited car access. County leadership also positions Forrest County to pursue Federal Transit Administration and state transit funding directly, ensuring that rural transit is not overlooked. Over time, this coordinated approach allows the rural mobility plan to be fully integrated into the MPO’s long-range transportation and transit planning cycles, providing continuity, funding eligibility, and alignment across jurisdictions.

Objective 4.3 Trail Connectivity Master Plan. Develop a trail connectivity master plan to link Longleaf Trace with other greenways and town centers.

IN PRACTICE: Closing trail gaps between Longleaf Trace, community centers, and rural communities spurs active tourism and safer commuter options. Trail-town gateways and phased construction leverage grant dollars, multiplying local health and economic benefits.

Objective 4.4 Broadband Expansion & Digital Equity. Expand broadband access in underserved areas to support growth and digital equity.

IN PRACTICE: A Broadband Task Force, a countywide coverage map, and digital inclusion programs align network build-out with local needs. Public-private partnerships and federal funds deliver gig-speed service, leveling the playing field for remote work, tele-health, and online learning.

Objective 4.5 I-59 Interchange at Eagle One. Provide a new interstate interchange to connect Eagle One with regional markets and surrounding development opportunities.

IN PRACTICE: A coordinated partnership between the County, MDOT, and private industry delivers planning, design, and funding for a full interchange on I-59. The interchange provides direct access to the Eagle One megasite, connects industrial property on the west side, and opens a new gateway to eastern Forrest County. This connection secures the County's investment, unlocks adjacent development potential, and establishes Eagle One as a competitive location for major employers.

Goal 5: Community Facilities and Quality of Life

Objective 5.1 Parks, Recreation & Community Facilities. Invest in parks, recreation, trails, and community facilities, ensuring access across all neighborhoods and particularly in underserved areas.

IN PRACTICE: Targeted land acquisition fills recreation gaps in rural hubs, while upgraded community center amenities and trail links expand active living opportunities. A 10-year maintenance schedule protects these investments,



supporting the physical and mental health of county residents.

Objective 5.2 Parks & Recreation Master Plan. Develop a countywide parks and recreation master plan to enhance programming and facility utilization.

IN PRACTICE: A countywide Parks & Recreation Master Plan translates community preferences into a data-driven blueprint that balances land acquisition, facility upgrades, and programming over the next decade. Through consultant-led surveys and charrettes, the plan establishes level-of-service (LOS) standards, a five-year capital schedule, and metrics for trails, acreage, and recreation programs. By aligning investments with resident demand and grant criteria, the County stretches limited dollars, avoids redundant facilities, and ensures every household enjoys equitable access to safe, high-quality recreation.

Objective 5.3 County Parks Department / Interlocal Partnership. Create a countywide parks and recreation department or formal interlocal partnership to share programming.

IN PRACTICE: A county parks division or formal interlocal partnership is established to coordinate maintenance, programming, equipment, and staffing across municipal and county facilities. Shared services improve efficiency, expand programming opportunities, and create a unified system that serves residents throughout the county.



Objective 5.4 Health & Public-Safety Services Access. Expand access to health, dental, and mental health services, and enhance public safety through improved fire protection and law enforcement facilities.

IN PRACTICE: Rural residents often travel long distances for primary care and preventive screenings. A rotating mobile health clinic, co-located dental/behavioral suites in new public-safety buildings, and bi-annual “Health + Safety Fairs” close this gap by bringing services directly to community centers. These actions lower barriers to care, catch chronic conditions earlier, and foster stronger relationships between health providers, first responders, and residents.

Objective 5.5 Healthy-Living Initiatives. Support initiatives for healthy living, including safe housing, quality education, and wellness programs.

IN PRACTICE: Housing hazards, limited nutrition education, and scarce access to fresh food outlets undermine public health outcomes. A Healthy Homes rehabilitation program, school-based fitness/nutrition classes, and community gardens at rural centers create a holistic initiative that reduces childhood obesity, asthma triggers, and home safety risks. Together, they cultivate lifelong healthy habits and reduce long-term healthcare costs.

Objective 5.6 Southern Service Satellite Facilities. Develop or redevelop existing facilities to support satellite sheriff stations and sites for other county services in the southern, rural areas of Forrest County.

IN PRACTICE: Rural development in southern Forrest County no longer strains centralized services. Renovating a Brooklyn-area facility into a sheriff sub-station, tax/tag office, and tele-health kiosk decentralizes government functions, trims response times, and provides residents a single stop for safety and basic services. Fiber connectivity will secure real-time data flows to core county systems and future-proof the site for expanded e-government offerings.

Objective 5.7 Fire-Protection Staffing Capacity. Expand capacity and staffing for fire protection and emergency services, particularly in underserved rural areas.

IN PRACTICE: Volunteer shortages and rising call volumes necessitate a phased transition to a more career-oriented firefighter workforce. Hiring six full-time (or full-time equivalent) staff over three years to achieve 24/7 protection countywide, offering tuition stipends to volunteers, and hosting quarterly in-county Fire Academy training bolster readiness without abandoning the volunteer tradition. Reliable staffing safeguards fire ratings, lowers homeowner premiums, and ensures a timely response to structure fires and medical calls.

Objective 5.8 County-wide Fire-Protection System. Establish a countywide fire protection system with standardized equipment replacement schedules, centralized training facilities, and staffing enhancements to improve response times and service consistency.

IN PRACTICE: Disparate equipment standards, overlapping coverage, and siloed budgets no longer contribute to inflated fire-service costs. A chief's working group crafts a consolidation roadmap and a joint purchasing policy, including a countywide apparatus replacement schedule and plans for a central training campus. Standardization enhances mutual-aid compatibility, lowers procurement costs, and enhances grant competitiveness.

Objective 5.9 New Fire Stations (Growth Areas). Build new fire stations in the rapidly developing areas, particularly near the Eagle One Mega Site, and a dedicated training facility to improve operational readiness.

IN PRACTICE: Planned growth corridors in Rawls Springs, Evelyn Gandy Parkway, and Eagle One do not burden existing fire protection or increase fire hazards. Securing sites and constructing three ladder-capable stations, paired with hydrant extensions, closes critical coverage gaps, enhances property protection ratings, and attracts commercial and residential investment by demonstrating proactive public-safety planning.

Objective 5.10 Centralized 911 Dispatch. Establish a centralized 911 dispatch center to streamline emergency response and improve communication across agencies, supported by a modernized communication infrastructure.

IN PRACTICE: Multiple dispatch centers no longer fragment the information flow during major incidents. Integrating radio systems, renovating the EOC wing for a unified public-safety answering point, and cross-training telecommunicators create a seamless environment that speeds call triage and resource deployment. Citizens benefit from shorter response times and clearer situational awareness among law enforcement, fire, and EMS.

Objective 5.11 Sheriff's Facilities Upgrade. Improve facilities for the Sheriff's Department to meet administrative, investigative, and detention needs.

IN PRACTICE: Outgrown administrative space, outdated evidence storage, and fragmented investigative units do not hinder policing. A space needs study and phased expansion of a justice complex near US 49 will centralize offices, climate-controlled vaults, and interview rooms. Modernized facilities support accreditation, safeguard critical evidence, and enhance staff recruitment and retention in a competitive labor market.

Objective 5.12 Law-Enforcement Staffing & Equipment Review. Evaluate and adjust staffing levels, training, and equipment resources to maintain effective law enforcement across the county.

IN PRACTICE: Routine workload analysis, a step-pay plan, and tuition reimbursement institutionalize data-driven staffing and career development. Coupled with scheduled vehicle and radio replacements, these measures maintain optimal patrol coverage, reduce overtime, and reinforce a professional culture that boosts morale and community trust.

Objective 5.13 Inter-agency Coordination Protocols. Develop protocols and agreements to improve coordination between the Sheriff's Department and other emergency service providers.

IN PRACTICE: An Emergency Operations Protocol, monthly command roundtables, and an annual full-scale drill will integrate Sheriff, Fire, EMS, and EMA into a unified incident command structure. Upgraded technology and shared tactical assets (drones, ballistic shields) elevates operational efficiency and responder safety during routine calls and large-scale disasters alike.

Objective 5.14 Enhance and Expand the Forrest County Multipurpose Center. Enhance the capacity, functionality, and year-round utilization of the Forrest County Multipurpose Center to support economic development, tourism, community events, and regional development.

IN PRACTICE: Modern event venues compete on flexibility, convenience, and visitor amenities. Strategic investments may include arena and conference facility modernization, expanded seating, improved livestock and show infrastructure, upgraded technology and sound systems, enhanced parking and traffic circulation, and RV park or lake-area improvements.

Objective 5.15 Modernize Community Centers. Continue to modernize community centers with improved technology and security.

IN PRACTICE: Community centers are central to rural life, but they often lag behind in digital infrastructure. Extending gig-speed fiber, Wi-Fi, and security cameras, then partnering with USM/PRCC for evening coding clubs and adult-education classes, transforms these spaces into 21st-century learning labs. Enhanced programming raises digital literacy, supports workforce reskilling, and promotes social cohesion.

Objective 5.16 Road Department Facilities & Fleet Support. Provide modern, technology-ready operational bases for county road maintenance by expanding or relocating the undersized Central Shop and upgrading all district barns with broadband, secure equipment storage, and a scheduled fleet-refresh program.

IN PRACTICE: An undersized Central Shop and outdated district barns no longer slow equipment turnaround and inflate downtime costs. Expanding or relocating the shop, wiring barns for broadband, and adopting an equipment refresh schedule will improve preventive maintenance, extend fleet life, and ensure timely storm response capability countywide.

Objective 5.17 Juvenile Detention & Mental Health Facilities. Expand public-safety and behavioral-health capacity by planning, financing, and constructing a modern juvenile detention center and a regional mental-health facility.

IN PRACTICE: Current juvenile detention and behavioral health options are limited and distant. Planning a new detention center and exploring a regional mental health campus (e.g., Purvis Armory) will keep youth closer to their families and integrate mental health services into the justice continuum. These investments will improve rehabilitation outcomes and reduce recidivism, aligning with state mental health reform goals.

5.18 Administration and Court Facilities. Deliver accessible, secure, ADA-compliant, and technology-enabled spaces for county administration and courts through a multi-year evaluation program that includes space-needs studies and life-cycle maintenance planning.

IN PRACTICE: A structured, multi-year program will assess space requirements, modernize records management through expanded e-records and digital access, and prioritize security and ADA improvements. Regular space-needs analyses and life-cycle maintenance planning will help the County anticipate growth, manage capital costs, and ensure that administrative and judicial services remain efficient, accessible, and responsive to the public.

Goal 6: Plan Governance and Engagement

Objective 6.1 Planning and Development Capacity. Expand Planning Department: to ensure staffing appropriate to support comprehensive plan implementation, including positions for GIS, inspections, enforcement, grants, and other development functions.

IN PRACTICE: A unified development code and subdivision ordinance codifies the Future Land-Use Map, integrates rural design standards, and streamlines code enforcement. Workshops and a five-year review cycle keep the regulations user-friendly, reducing variance requests and legal exposure.

Objective 6.2 Online Public Documents Portal. Expand public access to county information by scanning legacy records and launching a centralized digital portal that provides searchable public documents, open data, e-notifications, and meeting livestreams to improve transparency, compliance, and public trust.

IN PRACTICE: Scanning legacy records and launching a “Docs & Data” portal enables the public to access searchable, open-data resources. E-notifications and meeting livestreams enhance transparency, fulfill statutory requirements, and foster civic trust.

Objective 6.3 Annual “State of the Plan” Report. Prepare and publish an annual “State of the Plan” report that tracks progress toward the comprehensive plan’s goals, objectives, and implementation actions.

IN PRACTICE: Publishing performance metrics and an illustrated annual report turns the comprehensive plan into a living accountability and performance tool. The report summarizes completed actions, current project status, key indicators, and priorities for the coming year. Public presentations and online access invite feedback, maintain momentum, and support course corrections to ensure the plan’s goals are translated into measurable results.

Objective 6.4 Human Resources Capacity and Workforce Development. Establish a dedicated human resources function within County government to manage payroll, benefits, personnel policies, and workforce planning to support countywide administrative and departmental needs.

IN PRACTICE: The County Administrator, in partnership with the Board of Supervisors, creates a Human Resources Office to serve as a centralized personnel and policy hub. The office develops standardized employee handbooks, maintains personnel records, and ensures equitable pay, benefits, and advancement opportunities. Workforce analysis tools and employee development programs strengthen recruitment and retention across departments. By institutionalizing HR management, the County fosters a professional, efficient, and transparent work environment that supports sustained population and service growth.

Conclusion

The guiding principles, goals, and objectives presented in this chapter provide Forrest County with a clear and actionable framework for the next two decades. Together, they balance sustainable growth, environmental stewardship, economic vitality, connectivity, community well-being, and collaborative governance. By translating community values into concrete priorities, this framework equips county leaders, partners, and residents with a shared roadmap for decision-making, investment, and policy alignment.

These goals and objectives are not ends in themselves but form the foundation for every subsequent element of the comprehensive plan—from future land use and transportation, to housing, economic development, and community facilities. They ensure that each recommendation, project, and regulation is tied back to the community’s long-term vision. In doing so, they foster accountability and provide a consistent lens for evaluating opportunities and challenges as conditions change.

As Forrest County continues to grow and adapt, these goals and objectives will remain the touchstone for action. Their implementation will require persistence, partnership, and periodic reassessment, but by following this framework, the county can move confidently toward a future that reflects its shared values and aspirations.

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FUTURE LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION

Forrest County's Future Land Use and Transportation Plan charts a path for accommodating growth while safeguarding the county's rural heritage, natural resources, and economic vitality. Building on extensive public input and technical analysis, this chapter introduces a place-based framework that links desired development patterns, or Place Types, with a complementary network of road Corridor Types. Together, these two lenses guide the location and development of new homes, businesses, and industries, as well as the necessary infrastructure investments to serve them safely and efficiently.

At the broadest scale, six Place Types describe the character and function of land across Forrest County:

- Rural and LowDensity / Rural Residential areas preserve working forests and farmland, support largelot homesteads, and protect the scenic landscapes that define the county's identity.
- Suburban Residential neighborhoods on the edges of Hattiesburg and Petal offer conventional single-family living with emerging opportunities to retrofit streets for walking and cycling.
- Rural Communities provide small clusters of everyday services like general stores, churches, and fire stations at strategic crossroads that anchor the surrounding countryside.
- Industrial places capitalize on highways, rail, and airport access to attract manufacturing, logistics, and other job-creating enterprises while separating high-intensity uses from nearby neighborhoods.
- Commercial Centers at crossroads and highway corridors provide gas stations, convenience stores, restaurants, and other small-scale services. Primarily auto-oriented, they offer essential goods for residents and travelers and should be designed to remain compatible with nearby rural and residential areas.

Corridor classifications further refine this relationship by pairing each Place Type with characteristic transportation improvements ranging from rural local roads to high-capacity freight corridors, ensuring that roadway designs are tailored to the specific context. Rural roads emphasize lower traffic volumes, safety, and preservation of viewsheds. Rural collectors strike a balance between growing traffic and preserving the area's rural character. Suburban collectors and subdivision streets often convey higher traffic volumes, which may require connectivity retrofits and safer crossings. Arterial corridors focus on heavy-truck efficiency and goods movement. In Rural Town Centers, short mainstreet segments can add placemaking features that invite pedestrian activity and support local commerce.

Using these frameworks, this chapter distills key decision factors into maps and policies that reflect decisions anchored in existing and planned future development, transportation access, infrastructure capacity, compatibility, environmental stewardship, and community needs. These factors inform the context-sensitive placement of commercial, light industrial, and other potentially incompatible uses across a rural and suburban landscape in Forrest County. By weaving these criteria into land use and capital investment decisions, Forrest County can direct growth to appropriate locations, protect its existing residents and emerging growth opportunities, preserve nationally significant forestlands, and promote sustainable economic development. The plans that follow translate this framework into maps and policies, forming a comprehensive blueprint for coordinating land use and transportation over the next several decades.

Place Types Framework for Future Land Use Planning

Place types are a way of organizing and describing the physical form, intended uses, and infrastructure characteristics of different areas within the county. They provide a consistent framework for identifying where and how development should occur, preserving valued community features, and guiding investment in infrastructure and services.

Each place type in this framework includes a narrative description of its purpose and character, followed by key features, typical development typologies, transportation features, secondary uses, and any unique design guidelines. While the details vary from place type to place type, the overall format ensures that all share the same structure, allowing planners, officials, and the public to easily compare and understand them.

The following sections present the design elements used for each place type. These elements remain constant across all categories so that they can be applied to both current and future place types.

1. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Each place type begins with a description of its role within the county's land use pattern, its typical location, and the kinds of activities or developments it supports. This section also identifies any special geographic or regulatory considerations, such as environmental protections, proximity to major employment centers, or inclusion in special planning districts.

2. KEY FEATURES

This is a concise list of the physical and functional traits that define the place type, such as lot size ranges, common building types, levels of public infrastructure, and the overall look and feel of the area.

3. DEVELOPMENT TYPOLOGY

A simple classification indicating the general development pattern—e.g., Rural, Suburban, Urban Neighborhood, Town Center, Employment District.

4. DENSITY

An indication of the typical residential or employment intensity in the area, described qualitatively (e.g., very low, low, moderate, high) or quantitatively (e.g., dwelling units per acre).

5. TRANSPORTATION FEATURES

A description of the typical transportation infrastructure and travel modes within the place type, including roadway hierarchy, transit availability, bicycle and pedestrian amenities, and access to regional corridors.

6. SECONDARY USES

A list of additional uses that are compatible with the primary function of the place type if certain performance standards are met. These standards address visual character, traffic impacts, environmental protection, and infrastructure limitations.

7. DESIGN AND COMPATIBILITY GUIDELINES

Any specific criteria to ensure new development or redevelopment aligns with the intended character of the place type, addresses infrastructure constraints, and protects surrounding land uses.

Using Place Types to Plan Future Land Use

Place types are a practical tool for translating a county's long-range vision into clear, location-specific guidance for where and how development should occur. They work by linking land use goals, development patterns, and infrastructure decisions into one consistent framework.

1. CLARIFYING THE VISION FOR DIFFERENT AREAS

A comprehensive plan may include broad goals—such as preserving rural landscapes, encouraging mixed-use town centers, or expanding industrial capacity—but place types make those goals tangible. Each place type describes the physical form, density, and functions expected in an area, along with compatible uses and the infrastructure needed to support them. This clarity helps elected officials, staff, developers, and residents understand what “appropriate development” means in specific locations.

2. GUIDING LAND USE AND POLICY DECISIONS

Place types provide a bridge between the policy-level vision in the comprehensive plan and the regulatory detail in land development ordinances, subdivision regulations, and other local codes. When a development proposal comes forward, decision-makers can compare it against the intended place type for that location to determine if it aligns with the county's long-term goals. This reduces uncertainty for both the applicant and the community.

3. DIRECTING INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

Because each place type specifies the transportation, water, sewer, drainage, and public service expectations for that area, the county can use them to guide capital improvement planning. For example, higher-density place types may be prioritized for public sewer extensions, while rural place types rely on wells and septic systems. This helps align public spending with areas designated for growth, avoiding overinvestment in locations where development is not intended.

4. PROTECTING COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND NATURAL RESOURCES

By defining desired building forms, lot sizes, and compatible uses, place types help maintain the look and feel of existing communities and protect environmental features. Rural and conservation-oriented place types, for instance, reinforce large-lot or agricultural uses while discouraging suburban-scale development in sensitive areas.

5. SUPPORTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Place types can target areas for specific economic functions—such as employment centers, industrial parks, or tourism districts—by identifying the infrastructure, transportation access, and design considerations needed to make those uses successful. This allows the county to attract and accommodate growth in a way that strengthens the tax base and provides jobs without creating land use conflicts.

6. BUILDING A PREDICTABLE, TRANSPARENT SYSTEM

Perhaps most importantly, place types make the county's approach to growth predictable. Residents can see what is planned for their community, and developers can anticipate what will be supported. This transparency builds trust and reduces conflicts over land use changes.

When used consistently, place types become part of the county's decision-making system—integrated into planning, development, capital budgeting, and even day-to-day permit review. Over time, they help the county grow in a deliberate way, ensuring that infrastructure, services, and land use patterns work together to meet both current needs and future opportunities.

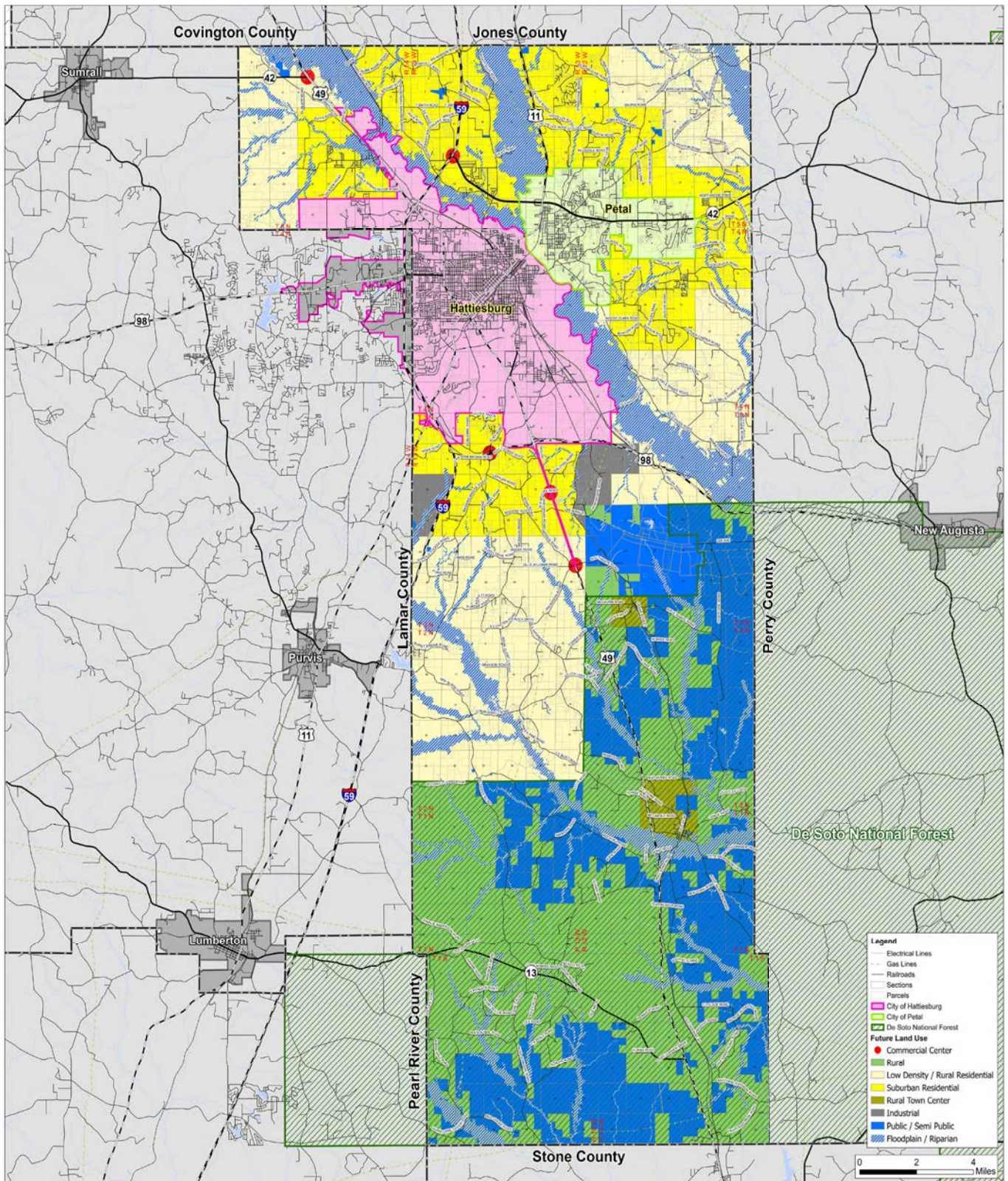
Forrest County Future Land Use Place Types

Rural Place

The **Rural** place type, often aligned with agricultural uses, represents the county's most undeveloped areas, where expansive landscapes, forests, and farmland define the setting. These areas support traditional uses, including large forestry tracts, some crop production, and livestock. Structures in Rural areas are sparse and typically include farmhouses, barns, equipment sheds, and some seasonal roadside businesses, such as produce stands. Residential development is generally limited and often found on large parcels (larger than 5 acres), which reinforces the open, rural character. These areas are typically located along rural roads or older highways and may include scenic or conservation lands that help protect Forrest County's forestry heritage and ecological integrity. Large areas of the Rural place type in Forrest County are also within the boundaries of the DeSoto National Forest and Camp Shelby property, which generally removes them from the reserve of developable land in the county.

KEY FEATURES:

- Large, widely spaced parcels
- Agricultural operations (timber and forestry, crops, and grazing)
- Limited residential development (farmsteads or estate lots)
- Few commercial uses, mostly agricultural and forestry-related
- Minimal sewer infrastructure; wells and septic systems are typical
- Limited number of fire hydrants; alternate water required for fire protection
- No sidewalks, transit, or street lighting
- Large areas in the control and management of the national forest and government



DEVELOPMENT TYPOLOGY: Rural

DENSITY: Very low

TRANSPORTATION FEATURES: The areas designated under this place type are primarily served by a network of state highways, rural arterials, and county-maintained local roads. These routes offer access to residential properties, farms, and natural areas, with limited traffic and infrequent intersections. Personal vehicles are the dominant mode of transportation, as public transit service is not available. In some locations, scenic rural roads offer opportunities for trails and greenways that can support future recreational use by cyclists, equestrians, or pedestrians, helping to connect rural destinations while

preserving the area's natural character.

SECONDARY USES: These and similar activities are compatible in Rural places if they meet key performance standards, such as maintaining rural character (deep setbacks, low lighting, subdued signage), protecting farmland and forest habitat, keeping traffic and noise modest, and relying on on-site wells/septic unless public service is already planned.



- Accessory dwelling unit (ADU)
- Home occupation / professional office
- Bedandbreakfast / short-term rental
- Church or community hall
- Event barn/agritourism venue
- Small farm stand / U-pick
- Neighborhood park/trailhead
- Country/farm store
- Small rural workshop / light manufacturing
- Solar power generation (utility-scale)
- Utility monopole tower
- Sand, gravel, or log yard

Specific guidelines for compatibility should be developed to ensure the rural place type functions efficiently for its intended purposes.

Low Density / Rural Residential

The **Low Density / Rural Residential** place type includes single-family homes situated on large lots in rural or semi-rural settings. These areas may be older farmsteads or newer subdivisions designed to preserve rural character through low density, large setbacks, and natural buffers. Residential structures may include accessory buildings, such as workshops, barns, or guest cottages. This place type allows for residential growth while preserving the open space and wooded character that defines rural Forrest County. Homes are generally on septic systems, and public services may be limited.

KEY FEATURES:

- Single-family homes on large lots (1–5 acres)
- Rural street network, often winding and informal
- No sidewalks or transit; limited lighting and infrastructure
- Woodlands, streams, and scenic landscapes are prominent
- May include limited event venues, home-based businesses, or agritourism
- Minimal sewer infrastructure; wells and septic systems are typical
- Limited number of fire hydrants; alternate water required for fire protection

DEVELOPMENT TYPOLOGY: Rural

DENSITY: Low

TRANSPORTATION FEATURES: The areas designated under this place type are primarily served by a network of state highways, rural arterials, and county-maintained local roads. These routes offer access to residential properties, farms, and natural areas, with limited traffic and infrequent intersections. Personal vehicles are the dominant mode of transportation, as public transit service is not available. In some locations, scenic rural roads offer opportunities for trails and greenways that can support future recreational use by cyclists, equestrians, or pedestrians, helping to connect rural destinations while preserving the area's natural character.



SECONDARY USES: These and similar activities are compatible in Low Density/Rural Residential areas when they respect the neighborhood's quiet, open-space character, that is, low lighting and signage, traffic suited to rural roads, generous setbacks, and on-site wells/septic systems unless a planned utility extension exists.

- Accessory dwelling unit (ADU)
- Home occupation/professional office
- Bedandbreakfast/short-term rental
- Neighborhood church or community hall
- Event barn/agritourism venue
- Country/farm store
- Small farm stand / U-pick
- Private stables
- Daycare or preschool in residence
- Small rural workshop / light manufacturing
- Solar power generation (utility-scale)
- Private stables
- Neighborhood park/trailhead

Specific guidelines for compatibility should be developed to ensure the Low-Density/Rural Residential place type functions efficiently for its intended purposes.

Suburban Residential

The **Suburban Residential** place type reflects low- to moderate-density residential areas located on the outskirts of urban centers or adjacent to incorporated municipalities, such as Hattiesburg or Petal. These areas include newer subdivisions with single-family homes, as well as occasional townhomes or small-lot housing. Streets are often curvilinear, with cul-de-sacs and limited connectivity. While sidewalks may be present in newer developments, most areas are auto-oriented. Open space is typically private (e.g., backyards), though some neighborhoods offer community parks or shared green space.

KEY FEATURES:

- Primarily single-family subdivisions, sometimes with townhomes
- One or two entrances per subdivision, with limited street connections
- Large setbacks and private yards
- Subdivisions may include community lots, sidewalks, and schools
- Driveway access and garages dominate front façades
- May adjoin or surround commercial corridors
- Include a mix of sewer-served and septic tanks for wastewater treatment
- Fire hydrants may be present, but should be provided to improve fire protection

DEVELOPMENT TYPOLOGY: Suburban

DENSITY: Low to moderate

TRANSPORTATION FEATURES: The areas designated under this place type are primarily served by a network of state highways, rural arterials, and county-maintained local roads. These routes provide access to residential properties and adjacent commercial hubs, characterized by higher traffic and more frequent intersections. Personal vehicles are the dominant mode of transportation, as public transit service is not available. In some locations, roads provide opportunities for trails and greenways that can support future recreational and transportation needs for cyclists and pedestrians, helping to connect rural areas to nearby urban destinations.



SECONDARY USES: These and similar activities are compatible in Suburban Residential areas when they complement the neighborhood's quiet, primarily single-family character, modest scale, low traffic, and design that blends with surrounding homes.

- Accessory dwelling unit (ADU)
- Home occupation / small professional office
- Neighborhood church or community center
- Elementary school or daycare
- Pocket park/playground/trailhead
- Community clubhouse/pool
- Small group home or assisted living residence
- Neighborhood solar array (rooftop or community garden)
- Neighborhood commercial at key intersections

Specific guidelines for compatibility should be developed to ensure the Suburban Residential place type functions efficiently for its intended purposes.

Rural Town Center

The **Rural Town Center** represents small clusters of residential, commercial, and civic activity that serve rural residents. Typically located at the intersection of two highways or collector roads, these centers include general stores, gas stations, small restaurants, post offices, churches, and sometimes fire stations or community centers. They are smaller than municipalities in both area and population. Surrounding development is sparse, and residential areas tend to be low-density. These places offer daily essentials for surrounding rural areas and may evolve into more robust centers as infrastructure improves.

KEY FEATURES:

- Residential development surrounding and mixed with small clusters of businesses at key intersections:
 - Low-to-moderate density residential uses
 - Small grocery/convenience store
 - Gas station with limited pumps
 - Restaurant or café
 - Post office or parcel pick-up point
 - Fire or EMS substation
 - Community hall or meeting center
 - Elementary school or daycare
 - Farmers' market pavilion
 - Bedandbreakfast or small inn/short-term rental
 - Accessory dwelling unit (ADU)
 - Livework units or second-floor apartments
 - Home occupation/professional office
 - Cottage repair shop/makerspace
 - Church or community hall
- Limited walkability; vehicle access is dominant
- May include civic uses like churches, schools, or fire stations
- Often considered gateways to rural neighborhoods



DEVELOPMENT TYPOLOGY: Rural

DENSITY: Very low to low

TRANSPORTATION FEATURES: The areas designated under this place type are primarily served by a network of state highways, rural arterials, and county-maintained local roads. These routes offer access to residential properties, farms, and natural areas, with low traffic and a moderate density of road intersections. Personal vehicles are the dominant mode of transportation, as public transit service is not available. Located at the junction of scenic rural roads, the area offers opportunities for trailheads and parks that can support future recreational use by cyclists, equestrians, or pedestrians, helping to create greater recreational and economic opportunity.

SECONDARY USES: These and similar activities are compatible in Rural Community areas when they reinforce the village-scale service role, characterized by small footprints, modest signage and lighting, and traffic volumes suited to rural roads.

- Light manufacturing

Specific guidelines for compatibility should be developed to ensure the Rural Community place type functions efficiently for its intended purposes.

Commercial Center

The **Commercial Center** place type captures small clusters of retail and service activity that develop at key crossroads, highway interchanges, or along arterial corridors within Forrest County. These areas provide essential goods and services to both the traveling public and nearby residents who might otherwise face long trips for basic needs. Typical activities include gas stations, convenience stores, quick-service restaurants, automotive services, and small-scale retailers. While primarily auto-oriented, commercial centers serve as important service anchors for surrounding rural and suburban areas.

Commercial Centers are not intended to replicate large shopping centers or urban main streets. Instead, they concentrate a limited mix of service-oriented businesses at highly visible, high-traffic locations. Without design standards, these areas can appear visually cluttered and may conflict with nearby rural or residential character. Proper planning can ensure that commercial places remain functional, accessible, and visually compatible with their surroundings.

KEY FEATURES:

- Clusters of auto-oriented retail and service uses
- Small-scale anchor tenants (grocer, hardware, or general merchandise under 20,000 sq. ft.)
- Outparcels for gas stations, banks, restaurants, or convenience services
- Surface parking located between the street and building entrances
- Monument signage and high-visibility access points along arterials
- Shared stormwater, circulation, and landscape buffers encouraged

DEVELOPMENT TYPOLOGY: Suburban / Special District

DENSITY: Low (non-residential; small clusters of retail and service activity)

TRANSPORTATION FEATURES:

Commercial Centers are typically served by major arterials, highways, and high-traffic county roads. Access points may include multiple driveways and



dedicated turn lanes, though consolidation is encouraged to improve safety. Internal circulation is often limited, and walkability is low, but pedestrian and bicycle facilities can be incorporated to improve local accessibility. Transit stops, park-and-ride lots, or sidewalk/greenway retrofits may be appropriate in higher-demand corridors.

SECONDARY USES: Compatible uses include:

- Vehicle repair and service stations
- Outdoor equipment rental or sales
- Shared parking or detention facilities
- Grocery pickup or distribution centers
- Small-scale offices or professional services

Specific guidelines for compatibility should be developed to ensure the Commercial Centers place type functions efficiently for its intended purposes.

Industrial

The **Industrial** place type supports a wide range of manufacturing, logistics, and heavy industrial activities within Forrest County. These areas are typically located along major highway corridors or near key infrastructure assets such as rail lines, interstates, or regional airports. They include operations involving distribution centers, large-scale fabrication and processing, construction yards, and warehousing. Industrial areas are generally not compatible with residential development and are best situated in locations with limited conflicts from nearby uses.

Industrial place types can accommodate both non-noxious (light manufacturing, assembly) and noxious (heavy industrial) operations, depending on proximity to other development. Industrial uses often require larger sites, high-capacity utility infrastructure, and access for heavy vehicles.

KEY FEATURES:

- Large parcels with wide driveways and truck access
- Proximity to interstates, major arterials, or rail lines
- Intensive water and wastewater requirements guided by industrial processes
- Facilities for fabrication, assembly, warehousing, or distribution
- Limited pedestrian or residential interface
- Heavy utility and infrastructure demands
- May include buffers or screening to minimize visual and environmental impacts

DEVELOPMENT TYPOLOGY: Suburban/Employment

DENSITY: Low (large site footprints; no residential development)

TRANSPORTATION FEATURES: Served by a regional network of major arterials, highways, and industrial collectors, including access to Interstate 59 and the Eagle One Mega Site corridor. Rail access is available in select areas, and proximity to general aviation facilities supports logistics and freight operations.

Personal vehicles and heavy trucks are the primary modes of transportation for commuters. Multimodal access for employees (e.g., sidewalks, trails) is limited but may be expanded through site planning. Emphasis is placed on connectivity to freight corridors and efficiency for goods movement.

SECONDARY USES: These and similar activities are compatible in Industrial areas when they complement core manufacturing and logistics functions, maintain adequate buffers, control heavy vehicle traffic, and meet environmental performance standards.

- Corporate office or headquarters linked to industrial operations
- Research and development laboratory
- Data center
- Truck service or fueling station
- Equipment sales and rental yard
- Construction or contractor yard
- Materials recycling or transfer facility
- Utility substation or energy generation facility
- Technical training center
- Wholesale warehouse showroom

Specific guidelines for compatibility should be developed to ensure the Industrial place type functions efficiently for its intended purposes.

Floodplain / Riparian Corridor

The **Floodplain/Riparian** Corridor place type identifies land adjacent to rivers, creeks, wetlands, and drainageways that is prone to periodic flooding or protected to preserve water quality and ecosystem services. These corridors are essential to stormwater management, ground water recharge, and biodiversity, and they may also support passive recreation or greenway trail systems. While not always publicly owned, these lands are typically regulated through environmental overlays or conservation easements that limit development intensity and encourage preservation.

KEY FEATURES:

- Land subject to regular or occasional flooding
- Natural or restored vegetative buffers
- Water quality, wildlife habitat, and flood storage functions
- Limited infrastructure, typically trails or flood-compatible uses

DEVELOPMENT TIER: Natural

DENSITY: None to Very Low

TRANSPORTATION FEATURES: May support greenway trails or levee-top paths. Vehicular access is minimal and typically limited to maintenance or emergency use.

SECONDARY USES:

Compatible uses include;

- Trail corridors and footbridges
- Flood-resilient recreation spaces
- Low-impact agriculture or forestry
- Interpretive signage and water access points

GUIDANCE: No new structures should be permitted within the floodplain except where required for public safety, environmental management, or as necessary to avoid unfairly taking away property rights. Where compatible recreation or agriculture activities occur, practices must preserve the corridor's hydrological and ecological functions. Future development should incorporate adequate setbacks, elevation, and vegetation retention to mitigate flood risk and maintain habitat continuity. If building homes in flood-prone areas cannot be avoided, development should be allowed only if it causes as little impact to the floodplain as possible. Homes should be built well outside the floodplains whenever possible, at elevations required by law, and without filling in natural floodplains.

Public

The **Public** place type encompasses lands owned and managed for public purposes, including recreation, conservation, military training, and civic facilities. In Forrest County, this place type is especially significant due to the extensive holdings of Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center, the DeSoto National Forest, and Paul B. Johnson State Park. Collectively, these areas represent some of the largest single land uses in the county and form a backbone for conservation, natural resource management, and outdoor recreation. The Future Land Use Map highlights these lands as critical long-term anchors that shape growth patterns, provide ecological services, and sustain the region's identity.

Public place types accommodate a wide range of uses such as civic and governmental facilities, parks, open space, conservation lands, and educational or institutional campuses. They may also include utility infrastructure or regional facilities that serve the broader population. Because of their scale and purpose, these lands are generally protected from conversion to private development and instead serve as long-term community assets.

KEY FEATURES:

- Large, contiguous tracts of land reserved for recreation, conservation, or military training
- Significant natural resource assets including forests, waterways, and wildlife habitats
- Regional destinations such as state parks, national forests, and military training facilities
- Civic buildings, schools, libraries, and government service centers
- Limited residential or commercial development, except where directly supportive of the public purpose (e.g., park concessions, educational housing)
- Infrastructure improvements focused on access, stewardship, and public service delivery
- Protected landscapes that buffer and shape private development around them

DEVELOPMENT TYPOLOGY: Rural/Conservation/Civic

DENSITY: None; limited to institutional, civic, or recreation-supporting uses

TRANSPORTATION FEATURES: Primarily served by state highways, county roads, and local access drives. Regional corridors such as U.S. Highway 49 provide access to Paul B. Johnson State Park and DeSoto National Forest. Camp Shelby is directly accessed via state and federal routes that accommodate both civilian and military traffic. Trails, internal circulation roads, and limited public transit connections support access within designated public areas.

SECONDARY USES: Public lands may host secondary or accessory activities where consistent with their mission and long-term management goals. Examples include:

- Visitor centers and interpretive facilities
- Public utilities and infrastructure installations
- Compatible recreational concessions (e.g., camping, boating, outfitter services)
- Educational or research facilities tied to natural resources or military training
- Civic support services (e.g., maintenance yards, storage)

Specific guidelines for compatibility should be established to ensure public lands remain protected for their intended purposes while allowing for reasonable supportive development.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR LIGHT INDUSTRY, COMMERCE, AND OTHER LAND USES ACROSS ALL PLACE TYPES:

Across all place types, decisions regarding the location of light industrial, commercial, and other generally compatible but potentially detrimental land uses, such as commercial development, light industry, storage yards, contractor lots, and event venues, should be made using a context-sensitive approach.

Key factors include:

- **TRANSPORTATION ACCESS:** Uses that generate higher volumes of truck traffic or depend on regional access should be located near major arterials, highways, or rail corridors. Light industry and warehousing are most appropriate along corridors such as U.S. 49 and U.S. 11.
- **INFRASTRUCTURE AVAILABILITY:** Sewer service, broadband, and adequate water supply are critical for many commercial and light industrial uses. Rural and low-density areas lacking these services may not be suitable unless infrastructure can be extended or on-site systems can be permitted without environmental risk.
- **COMPATIBILITY WITH ADJOINING LAND USES:** Proximity to residential uses should be carefully considered. Commercial or light industrial activities should avoid adjacency to single-family neighborhoods unless they are buffered by landscaping, distance, or transitional development. Uses should be scaled to the surrounding context, e.g., neighborhood-scale services in Rural Communities versus logistics and warehousing in Industrial areas.
- **ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS:** Uses that generate noise, light, or emissions should avoid areas near residences or commercial development, as well as avoid conservation lands, scenic

roads, or headwater streams. Areas within or near the De Soto National Forest or known flood-prone lands should be avoided for development purposes due to their high flood risk.

- **COMMUNITY ACCESS AND NEED:** Commercial uses may be appropriate in low-density areas if they serve local needs, reduce long travel times, or enhance economic development. These may include farm supply outlets, repair shops, or rural general stores.

By consistently applying these decision factors, Forrest County can ensure that development aligns with its vision for preserving rural character, protecting environmental assets, and promoting sustainable economic growth.

Corridor Types in Forrest County's Rural and Suburban Place Types

Rural Place Type Corridors

Corridors in Rural areas are typically rural arterials and local roads. These roads are two-lane, often unstriped, and may be winding or unpaved in places. Some are scenic routes that traverse forestland, farmland, or federally managed lands such as DeSoto National Forest. Roads such as these serve low volumes of traffic and prioritize access to properties over through movement. Corridor enhancements in these areas often emphasize preservation of views, safe curves, and opportunities for recreational access (e.g., trailheads or scenic pull-offs).

Low Density / Rural Residential Place Type Corridors

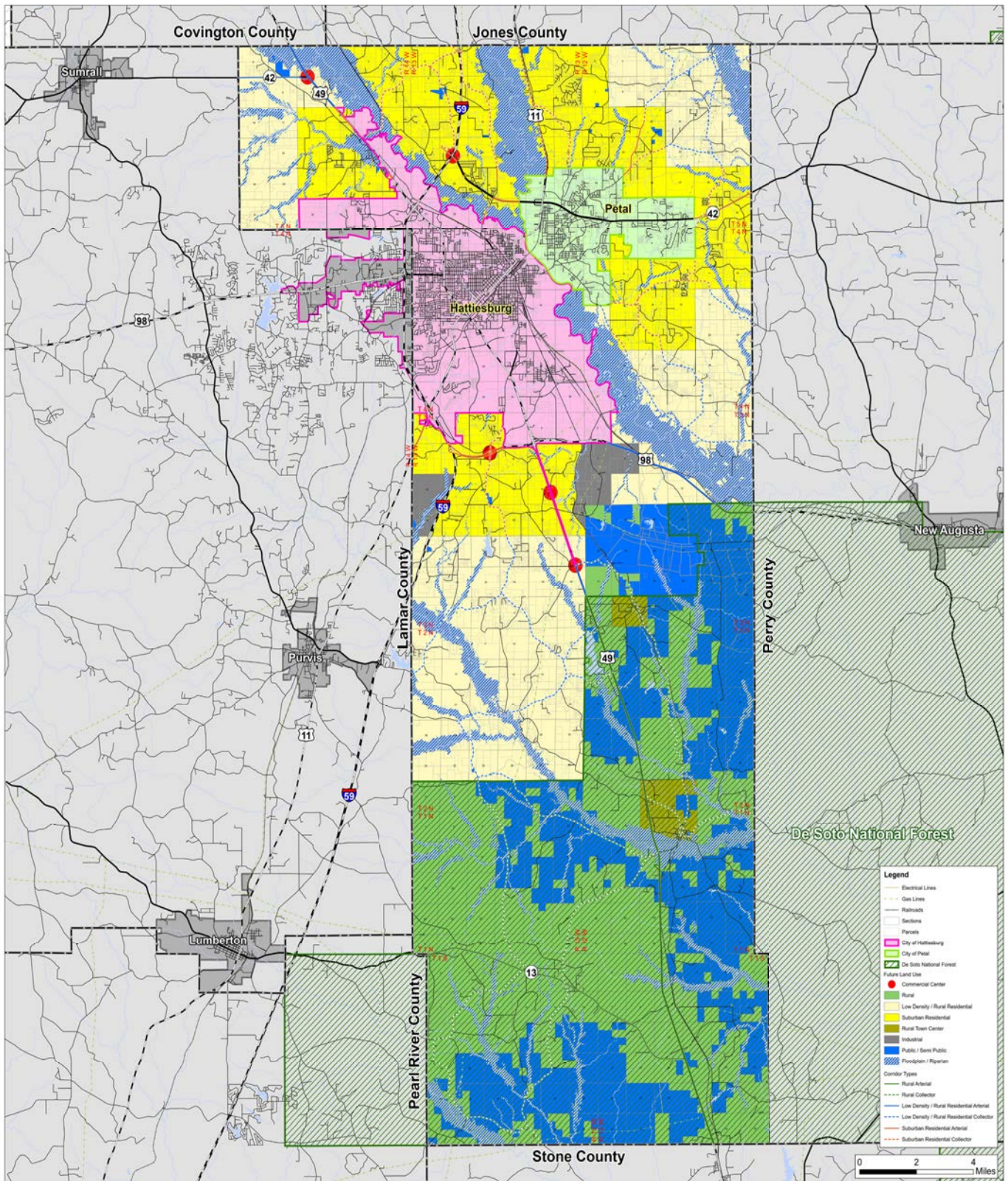
These areas are served by a mix of **rural collectors** and **suburbanizing local roads**. These corridors provide local access but often feed into higher-capacity rural arterials. Roads may have deep ditches and minimal shoulders. While traffic volumes are still relatively low, development pressures may lead to increased traffic and the creation of new subdivision entrances. These corridors may benefit from access management policies, scenic buffer preservation, and identification of future trail alignments.

Suburban Residential Place Type Corridors

Corridors in Suburban Residential areas include **rural and suburban arterials** (such as major highways or state routes) and **local subdivision streets**. Arterials in these areas are increasingly lined with commercial uses or are being converted into suburban corridors. These routes have higher speeds and traffic volumes and may experience congestion due to limited access points. Internal neighborhood roads are typically curvilinear and often cul-de-sac oriented. Pedestrian and bicycle connectivity may be lacking and is a key opportunity area for suburban corridor retrofits.

Rural Town Center Place Type Corridors

Rural Town Centers are located at the junctions of **rural arterials and rural collectors**. These corridors may serve as the only regional through routes and are critical for freight, emergency access, and economic activity. They may also include a short segment of denser, **main-street-style corridor**, where buildings are closer to the road, and traffic-calming features could support pedestrian activity. These intersections present opportunities for placemaking improvements, including signage, crosswalks, and small-scale corridor enhancements, that support safe and multimodal use.



Minimum Recommended Standards for Corridor Types

Below are the recommended minimum corridor dimensions for Forrest County. Right-of-way (ROW) is the total width between property lines; “surface width” is the paved or graded traveled way measured from edge of pavement to edge of pavement (not including unpaved shoulders or ditches).

Corridor type	Minimum ROW	Minimum surface width	Notes & source highlights
Rural Local Road	50 ft	18 – 20 ft (two 9–10 ft lanes)	Provides room for 4–6 ft ditches/ shoulders inside the ROW, with 18–24 ft traveled way
Rural Collector	60 ft	22 – 24 ft (two 11–12 ft lanes)	Shoulder or ditch fits inside a 10–12 ft clear area on each side; 22–24 ft minimum traveled way
Rural Arterial	80 ft	28 – 30 ft (two 12 ft lanes + 2–3 ft paved shoulders)	Allows for future widening, multi-use path, and drainage
Suburban Local Road	50 ft	20 – 24 ft (two 10–12 ft lanes)	20–24 ft paved width for neighborhood streets
Suburban Collector Road	60 ft	24 – 26 ft (two 11 ft lanes + curb/gutter or 2 ft stabilized shoulders)	Space in ROW reserved for future sidewalks or multi-use path on one side.
Suburban Arterial	120 ft	48 – 56 ft (four 12 ft lanes with center two-way left turn lane or median)	The width supports turn lanes, a landscaped median, and sidepath trails.
Rural Town Center Main Street	80 ft	34 ft (two 12 ft travel lanes + two 5–7 ft parallel parking lanes)	Curbandgutter section with 8 ft sidewalks, street trees, and on-street parking to calm traffic and support commerce.

- **USE THE MINIMUMS AS BASELINES.** Traffic forecasts, turn lanes, broadband/utility corridors, or multimodal needs may warrant wider right-of-way or pavement.
- **COORDINATE WITH MDOT DESIGN CRITERIA.** Where state highways fall within county place-types, MDOT standards prevail and may exceed these minimums.
- **PRESERVE EXTRA RIGHT-OF-WAY DURING PLATTING.** Even if a road begins as a narrow two-lane section, securing the right-of-way now avoids costly takings when lanes, shoulders, or side paths must be added later.
- **ADJUST FOR CONTEXT-SENSITIVE DESIGN.** Through historic areas, ecological corridors, or constrained terrain, narrower pavement or reduced shoulders may be acceptable, particularly when design speeds are lower and safety countermeasures are implemented.

Planned Transportation Improvements

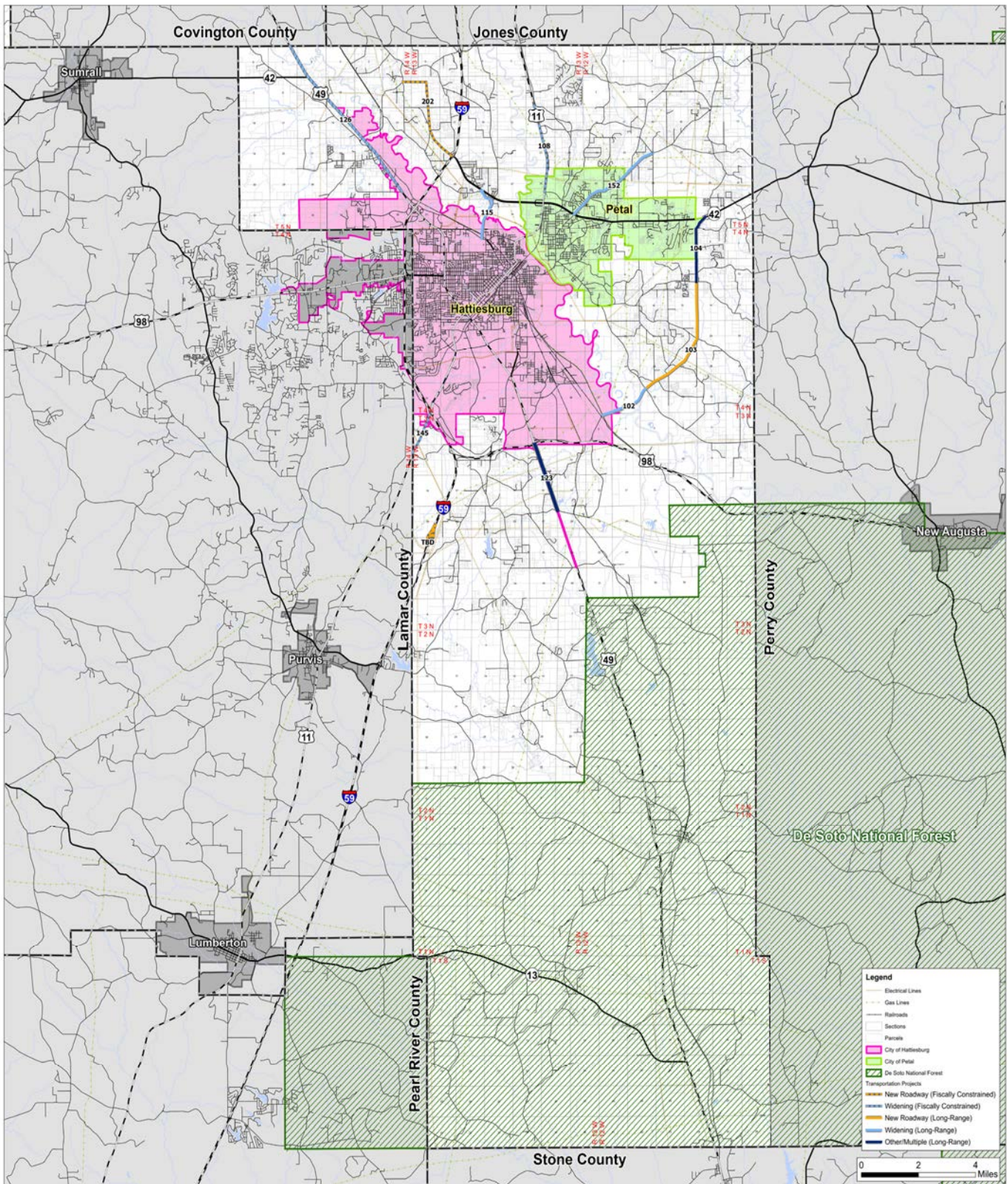
Forrest County's future mobility depends on the integration of state, regional, and local transportation priorities. The Hattiesburg-Petal-Forrest-Lamar Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) provide long-range and short-term investment frameworks that guide highway, transit, rail, aviation, bicycle, and pedestrian improvements across the region. These coordinated plans ensure that federal and state resources are aligned with Forrest County's growth, safety, and economic development needs.

Building on this foundation, the County identifies its own critical local priorities. Chief among them is the construction of a new interchange on Interstate 59 to directly serve the Eagle One Mega Site, connect industrial property to the west, and open a new gateway to eastern Forrest County. Without this project, the County risks limiting the growth potential of its most significant economic development investment. By linking regional markets with local development opportunities, the I-59 interchange will not only secure access to Eagle One but also unlock adjacent development areas, expand freight mobility, and reinforce Forrest County's role as a strategic hub in the Gulf South.

Together, these planned improvements—federally programmed through the MPO, prioritized by MDOT, and championed locally—form a comprehensive strategy to enhance connectivity, support economic competitiveness, and improve quality of life for residents across Forrest County.

Major Programmed Projects

Project ID	Route	Location	Improvement	Cost
115	Glendale Ave	Old MS 42 to Evelyn Gandy Pkwy (MS 42)	Widen to 4 Lanes	\$5,040,000
152	Old Richton Rd	Evelyn Gandy Rd to Herrington Rd	Widen to 4 Lanes	\$12,425,000
102	Sims Rd	James St/Old US 49 to Old River Rd	Widen to 4 Lanes	\$6,335,000
103	Sims Rd Ext.	Old River Rd to Indian Springs Rd	New 4 Lane Roadway	\$47,880,000
104	Sunrise Rd	Indian Springs Rd to MS 42	Widen to 4 Lanes, Realign Intersections	\$7,875,000
123	US 49	South Study Area Boundary to US 98 Bypass	Upgrade to Expressway	\$21,582,000
145	US 11	1.1 miles South of I-59 to I-59	Widen to 4 Lanes	\$4,269,960
126	US 49	Rawls Springs Loop to North Study Area Boundary	Widen to 6 Lanes	\$18,533,875
108	US 11	Chapel Hill Rd to Leeville Rd	Widen to 4 Lanes	\$10,957,133
202	Western Bypass Phase III	JC Bryant Rd. to I-59	New 4 Lane Roadway	\$52,534,306
TBD	I-59 Interchange	I-59 at Mile Marker 56	New Interchange	N/A



Conclusion

The Land Use and Transportation Plan provides a framework for guiding how Forrest County grows and connects in the years ahead. Together, the place types and corridor strategies establish a clear vision for where new development should occur, how rural and suburban landscapes should be preserved, and how infrastructure investments can best support community needs. By linking land use with transportation, the plan emphasizes balanced growth—ensuring that residential, commercial, and employment areas are well served by safe and efficient mobility options.

The chapter highlights the importance of protecting rural character and farmland, strengthening neighborhoods, and creating compatible nodes of commercial and industrial activity. At the same time, it recognizes that mobility is more than roadways: safe local streets, functional highways, and multi-modal connections all play a role in the county's economic vitality and quality of life. The integration of place-based planning with corridor design ensures that growth occurs in a way that is coordinated, context-sensitive, and fiscally responsible.

Looking ahead, successful implementation will depend on collaboration among county leaders, municipalities, regional partners, and residents. Aligning land use planning, infrastructure, and capital investments with this plan will provide a strong foundation for achieving the county's vision of sustainable growth, improved accessibility, and a resilient transportation network that supports both daily life and long-term prosperity.

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04 COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Community facilities are the backbone of public service delivery in Forrest County. They include the buildings and infrastructure that support the daily functioning of government, ensure public safety, promote health and well-being, and enhance quality of life for all residents. From administrative and sheriff's offices to fire stations, community centers, health clinics, and emergency shelters, these facilities form the essential infrastructure through which the County fulfills its responsibilities.

This chapter assesses the condition, capacity, and geographic distribution of existing public facilities, identifying priority needs for modernization and expansion. It places a special emphasis on ensuring that community services are equitably accessible, particularly in rural and underserved areas such as southern Forrest County, and that facilities are equipped to accommodate anticipated growth, economic development, and evolving service demands.

Public safety facilities are a central focus, with recommendations for improving fire protection, upgrading emergency communications, and expanding law enforcement infrastructure. Equally important are investments in public buildings, community centers, and recreational assets that provide space for civic life, educational programming, and disaster response.

Guided by the principles of equity, resilience, and service efficiency, this chapter provides a framework for long-term facility planning. It supports a coordinated approach to infrastructure investment that aligns with the county's broader land-use strategy, strengthening both suburban and rural communities.

Administrative and General Government Facilities

Forrest County's administrative and legal functions are housed in multiple facilities, including the Chancery Building, Court Administration Building, and the Tax Services Building. While some offices, such as those of the Tax Collector and Chancery Clerk, have adequate space, others are underutilized. Modernization of administrative buildings and systems is essential to support future growth and operational efficiency. Technology upgrades, including updated software systems and a mobile home audit, will ensure accurate tax assessments and service delivery. Each facility should have a space analysis prepared periodically to assess current occupancy, potential for growth, and maintenance needs.

Human Resources and Personnel Management

As Forrest County continues to grow, its administrative functions need to expand to include a robust human resources (HR) capacity. The County currently manages payroll, benefits, and personnel administration effectively; however, a centralized HR function is increasingly needed to ensure efficiency, compliance, and consistency across departments.

Establishing a dedicated Human Resources and Personnel Management division or position under the County Administrator's Office will strengthen workforce planning, benefits management, and employee relations. This function would oversee:

- Payroll processing and benefits administration
- Personnel policy revision, maintenance, and compliance
- Recruitment, onboarding, and performance evaluation systems
- Employee development, training, and retention strategies
- Coordination with departmental leadership to plan and manage staffing expansion as service demands grow

Over time, a formal HR function will improve accountability, enhance service delivery, and ensure that Forrest County's workforce can adapt to the demands of modern governance and future population growth.



Facility Name	Address	Departments / Offices
Paul B. Johnson, Jr. Chancery Building	641 Main Street	Board of Supervisors, Chancery Court, County Administrator's Office, County Attorney's Office, County Planning, Road Manager, Accounting and Accounts Payable, Information Technology
Forrest County Court Administration Building	200 West Pine Street	Court Administration
Jesse L. Brown Forrest County Tax Services	126 Pine Street	Tax Collector's Office, Tax Assessor's Office
Circuit Court Building	630 Main Street	Circuit Clerk's Office, District Attorney, 12th Circuit Court of Mississippi
Justice Court Building	700 Main Street	Justice Court
Forrest County Health Department	5008 Old Highway 42	Health Department
Carpenter Building	400 Forrest Street	Forrest Co. School District Administrative Offices of the Superintendent
Old Jail (formerly Eugene Walters Law Enforcement Complex)	316 Forrest Street	Drug Court, Veteran's Court, Public Defenders, Mississippi Department of Corrections – Probation Office (leased space)

Road Department

The Road Department is a cornerstone of Forrest County's infrastructure, maintaining approximately 680 miles of paved roads and 27 miles of gravel roads, the latter primarily located in the southern part of the county. Facilities include a central shop and barns in each of the five road districts. While the central barn is new, several other barns are aging and need minor repairs and equipment upgrades.

The department utilizes modern tools, including mobile tablets for tracking maintenance and repairs, as well as a grading system to prioritize road paving within a rolling four-year plan. However, the central shop is notably undersized and should be expanded or relocated to support countywide operations more effectively. Deferred maintenance and aging equipment are challenges, and improved connectivity, such as routing internet access to each barn, will enhance operational efficiency.

Recommendations include prioritizing the upgrade of the central shop, improving access to equipment and technology at all barns, increasing recycling initiatives, and ensuring continued road maintenance through dedicated funding. Additional support for road maintenance will enable a better response to growth areas, including the potential addition of roads accessing the Eagle One site.

Sheriff's Department

The Forrest County Sheriff's Department ensures public safety and the administration of justice throughout the county. The department is responsible for law enforcement, court security, adult and juvenile detention, and investigative services. It also supports community safety through coordinated programs and emergency response functions. The Sheriff's Department operates from the Billy McGee Law Enforcement Complex, which was opened in the fall of 2012. The complex houses inmates, administrative offices, and dispatchers.

A central priority for the department is investing in personnel. This includes expanding staff to meet service demands, enhancing wellness and safety programs, and supporting retention through competitive pay and benefits. Continued focus on training, including in-service programs, certifications, and state-required accreditation standards, is essential to professional development and agency effectiveness. A Career Development Plan (CDP), tied to merit-based pay, would provide a structured path for advancement.

The department's facilities are in varying states of adequacy and require targeted investments. A new Juvenile Detention Facility is a top need, though



interim renovations will be required if construction is delayed. Upgrades to the existing Adult Detention Center, including the installation of a Chiller Tower and replacement of the security camera system, are necessary to maintain safe and compliant operations. Renovations to the Evaluation Center are needed, along with efforts to achieve state certification through the Mississippi Department of Mental Health.

The department's Criminal Investigations Division (CID) currently lacks dedicated office space. Securing appropriate facilities for this unit will improve operational efficiency. Additional technology upgrades, including the acquisition of camera systems, the development of a cybercrime strategy, and the expansion of digital evidence sharing capabilities, will enhance the department's investigative capacity.

Challenges in equipment and support infrastructure remain. Although the current vehicle fleet is adequate, future staffing increases could strain existing resources. Medical care at the annex needs to be stabilized through improvements in staffing or scheduling. Other equipment needs include additional radios and tasers for detention officers, specialized crime scene tools, and expanded patrol resources such as cold-weather gear, drones, and tactical vehicles.

Longer-term priorities include expanding service and storage facilities, developing community service initiatives, and exploring university partnerships to offer tuition-free coursework for personnel.

Establishing a Cold Case Coalition with surrounding jurisdictions and enhancing the firing range are also identified as future improvements. A mental health facility, potentially located at the Purvis National Guard Armory, has also been identified as a critical need.

To meet growing demands and maintain high standards of service, the department requires sustained investment across facilities, personnel, and technology. These improvements will ensure that the Sheriff's Department continues to uphold public trust and deliver effective law enforcement throughout Forrest County.

Fire Protection Services

Forrest County's fire protection services are provided through a combination system of full-time, part-time, and volunteer firefighters operating across eight fire districts and fourteen stations. While the department structure reflects a tradition of local control, it also poses challenges for coordination, resource allocation, and long-term sustainability. Each district manages its own staffing, leadership, and equipment purchases, creating fragmentation in planning and service delivery.

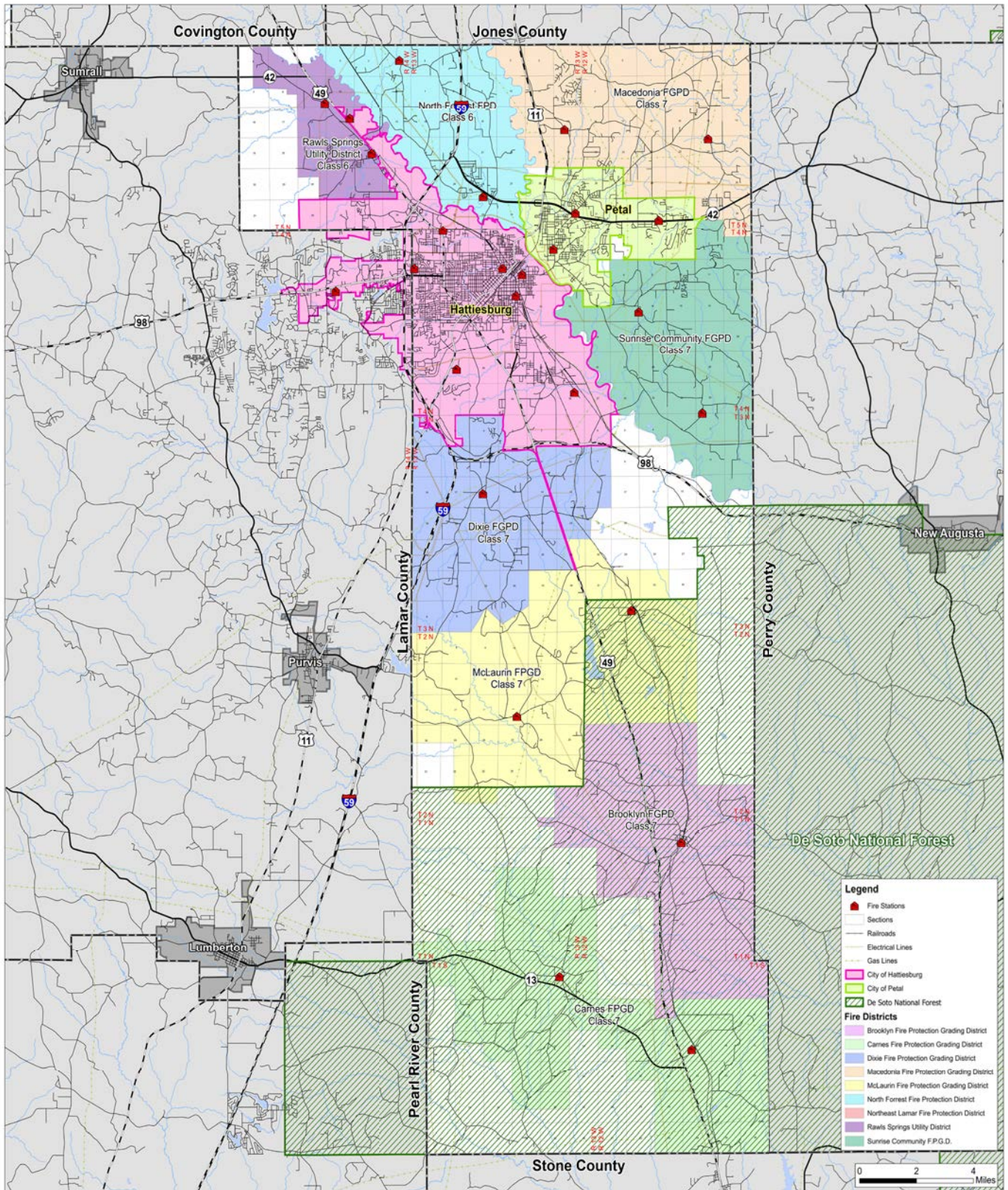
Fire services operate 14 stations across eight districts with a combination of full-time and volunteer staff. Equipment is generally in fair condition but aging. Two new Class A pumpers and a ladder truck are needed, especially in growth areas such as Gandy Parkway and the Eagle One site. Training, particularly for medical responses, is also necessary as the majority of calls involve health-related emergencies. Implementing a countywide fire and building code and planning for a training facility will improve fire readiness. Additional challenges include insufficient hydrant coverage in some areas and the need to replace rescue and brush trucks nearing the end of their lifespan. Current staffing includes three part-time and five full-time paid firefighters, with a long-term goal of reaching nine full-time personnel operating on 24-hour shifts, and 170 volunteers. However, the volunteer firefighter pool is shrinking, limiting flexibility and reliability especially during peak daytime hours. Typical response times are 6–7 minutes during weekdays, but staffing gaps may impact response in rural or lower-coverage areas.

Equipment across districts is generally adequate, with fire trucks replaced on a rotating basis. Fire trucks have a useful life of 20 to 25 years, but replacement costs are rising, and many trucks across districts are approaching the end of their service life. Each district operates at least one rescue truck and brush truck, which also require near-term replacement. Two new trucks per year, along with a minimum of two Class A pumpers per district, are necessary to maintain reliable operations. Gear and air pack replacements are proceeding on schedule, but are increasingly costly.

Several critical facility and service needs have been identified:

- The Rawls Springs area requires a new fire station.
- The Evelyn Gandy Parkway corridor is experiencing rapid growth and will need a new fire station in a better location, including a ladder truck to accommodate larger structures.
- A new station will be needed to serve the Eagle One mega site, a high-priority economic development location.
- The County lacks a dedicated training facility, limiting preparedness for fire and especially medical calls, which make up 90% of current call volume.





Infrastructure and system-wide upgrades are also needed. Hydrant coverage is insufficient in many areas, particularly in growing corridors, though hydrants are managed by individual water departments. Communication systems need upgrading, and countywide fire and building codes do not currently exist, leaving gaps in safety enforcement and response capacity.

To address these systemic issues, a countywide fire protection strategy is recommended. In the short term, this includes revisiting district boundary lines to ensure efficient coverage. In the long term, the County should consider consolidating fire services into a single countywide department, as has been done in other fast-growing counties, to provide more coordinated, efficient, and resilient fire protection.

Emergency Management and Public Safety

Forrest County's Emergency Management and Public Safety services provide essential disaster response and emergency preparedness. The county maintains FEMA 361-rated shelters in Hattiesburg, Petal, and near the Stone County line. These shelters play a vital role during hurricane evacuations from the Gulf Coast and neighboring states. The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is currently sufficient but may need expansion in the next decade to accommodate growth.

A significant challenge is the county's fragmented 911 dispatch system, with five separate centers supporting police, fire, and ambulance services. A centralized dispatch would improve coordination and response times. Furthermore, the county's communication tower lease in Lamar County expires in 2028; relocating this infrastructure to Forrest County is a critical priority.



Parks, Recreation, and Multipurpose Facilities

Forrest County's recreational facilities are vital for community well-being and serve as gathering places during both everyday activities and emergencies. Forrest County has a Multipurpose Center in Hattiesburg and community centers at 14 locations across the county, each offering a different variety of recreational opportunities.

Multipurpose Center

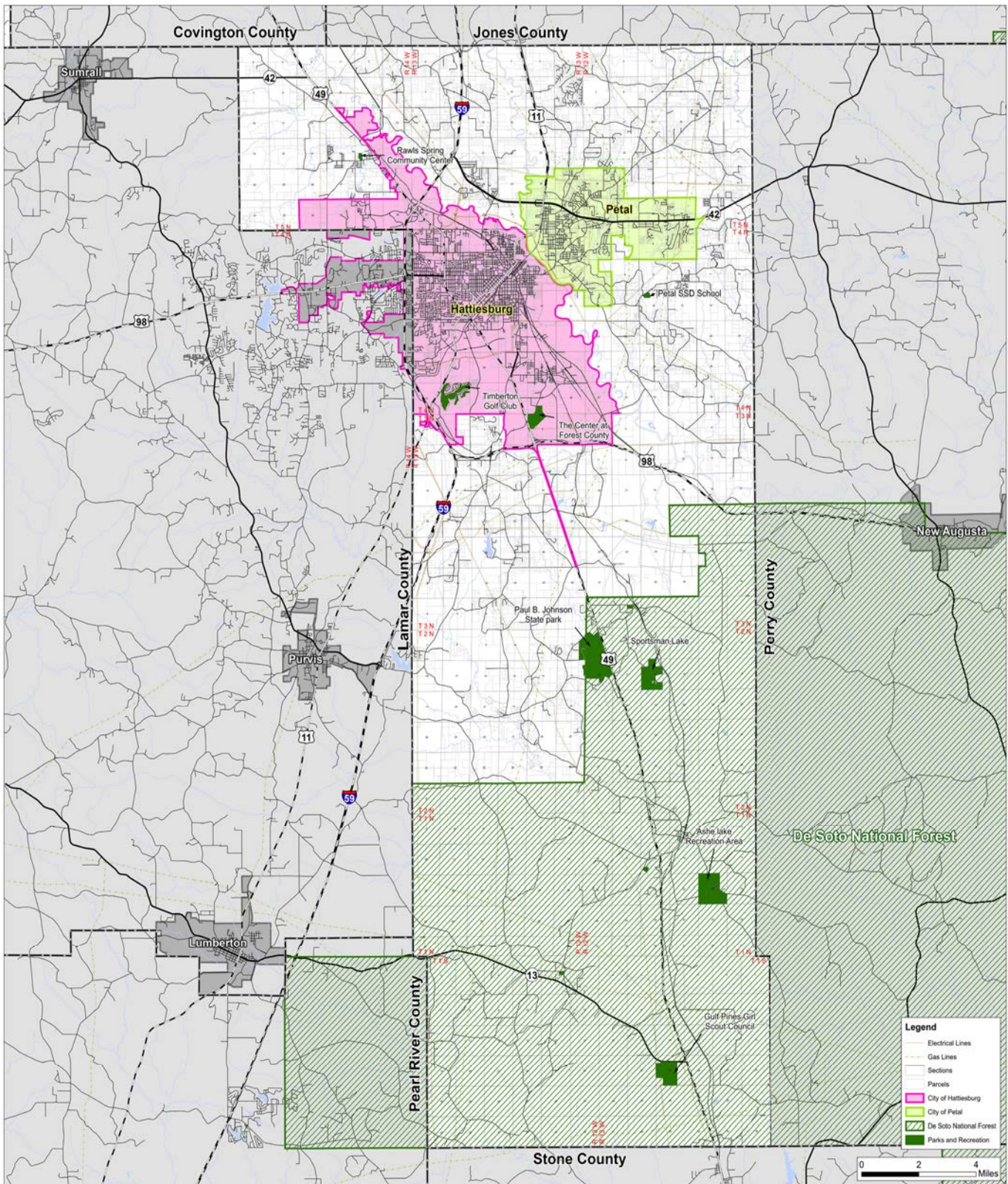
The Forrest County Multipurpose Center sits on a 160-acre complex centrally located off Highway 49. The facility is anchored by a 120,000-square-foot arena that accommodates more than 5,000 in stadium and floor seating. The main arena can host a variety of events, including rodeos, barrel



rices, archery, concerts, monster truck shows, motocross races, consumer shows, cheer competitions, and more. A 3,300-square-foot conference center is located adjacent to the main arena and is available to host a wide variety of events and functions. It can seat up to 300 and includes a stage, podium, sound system, and screen. The complex also houses several outdoor buildings used to hold livestock and host outdoor events. Features include open show areas, permanent and temporary stalls, ceiling fans, electrical outlets, a paging system, indoor wash racks, restrooms, and show facilities.

An on-site RV park is fully equipped with 147 full-service sites, each capable of handling 30-50 AMPS of power. The sites have water, sewage, and electricity connections. Additionally, concrete slabs and patios are park-wide site features. The RV park is located beside the 16-acre Forrest County Lake. It is available to those who attend and/or participate in Multipurpose Center events, as well as to anyone simply wanting to stay for a weekend or a month. The campgrounds can accommodate horse trailers and RVs.

The county's Multipurpose Center plays a significant role in community events and disaster relief operations. However, it faces deferred maintenance, including the need for a new sound system, bathroom upgrades, and repairs to animal stalls. Capacity for animals has fallen from 500 to 380 over time due to wear and tear on facilities. Financial sustainability remains a challenge, with the facility incurring losses of around \$200,000 annually. Despite these challenges, the Multipurpose Center is building back its schedule of events following COVID and is a recognized asset for the county. Recommendations include investing in renovations and upgrading to restore full capacity of 500 stalls, improving marketing to attract larger events, and enhancements to the RV park.



Community Centers

The county operates 14 community centers at locations throughout the county. Each location has an indoor meeting space available for rental use by the public for gatherings and events. Door codes and electronic locks allow safe and secure access. Each center has various recreational amenities, such as ballfields, walking tracks, and passive recreational amenities. Recreational areas countywide need some maintenance but are in generally good condition. County residents would like to have more recreational amenities, particularly in underserved areas. Recommendations include a master plan for each location to be incorporated into a countywide master plan for recreational development and coordination.

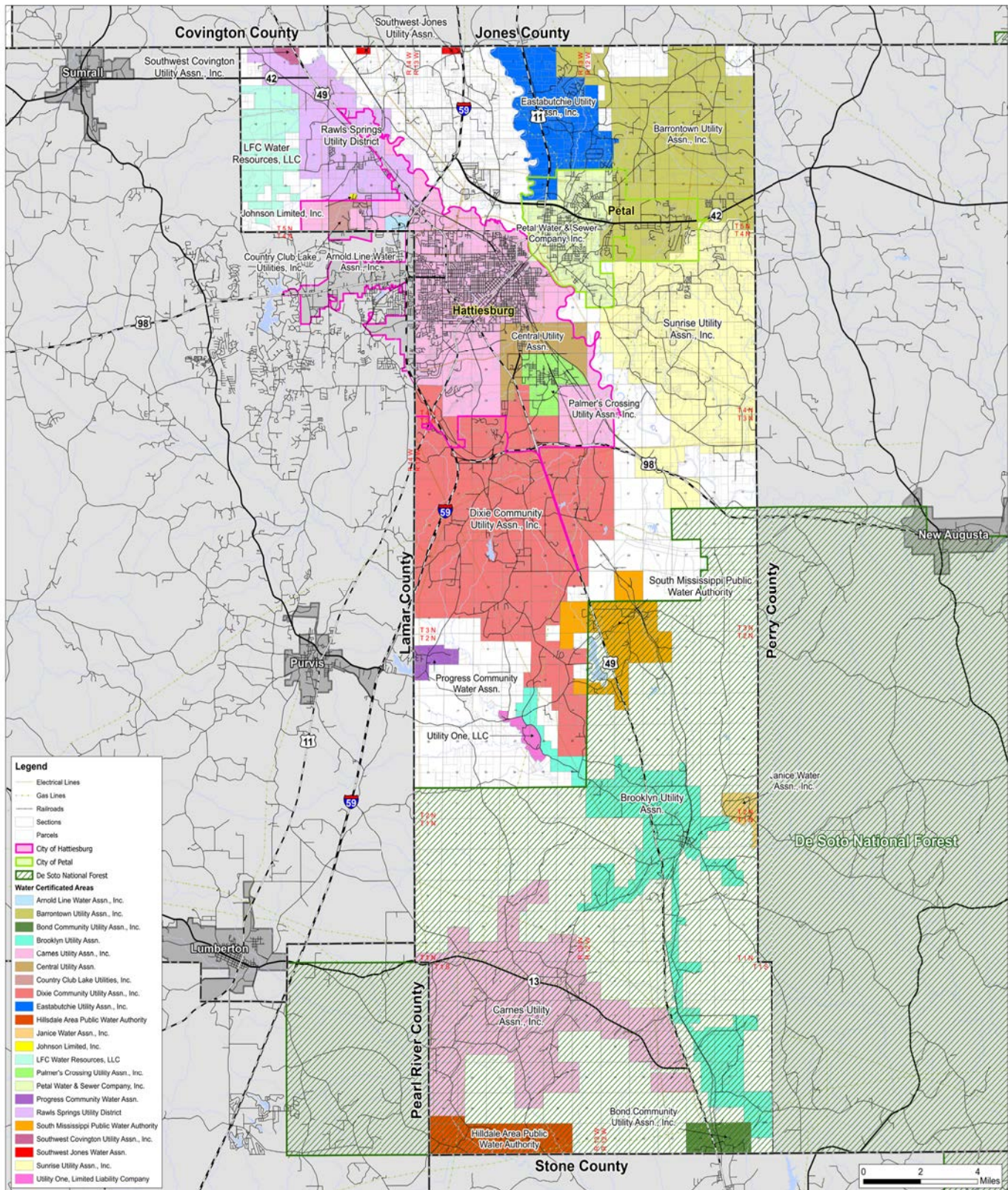
Utilities and Infrastructure

A patchwork of water, sewer, and broadband services characterizes utility infrastructure in Forrest County. Sewer service is limited in several areas, particularly in growth corridors like the area near the Eagle One site. Expansion of sewer infrastructure is critical to support development and attract businesses. Additionally, hydrant coverage is uneven, with some areas lacking sufficient fire protection. Upgrading broadband and connectivity for public facilities will enhance emergency response and operational efficiency.

Recommendations include investing in sewer expansion along key corridors, expanding the hydrant network, and coordinating with fire and water departments. Broadband improvements will be essential for supporting public safety operations, education, and economic growth.



Forrest County Comprehensive Plan - 2026



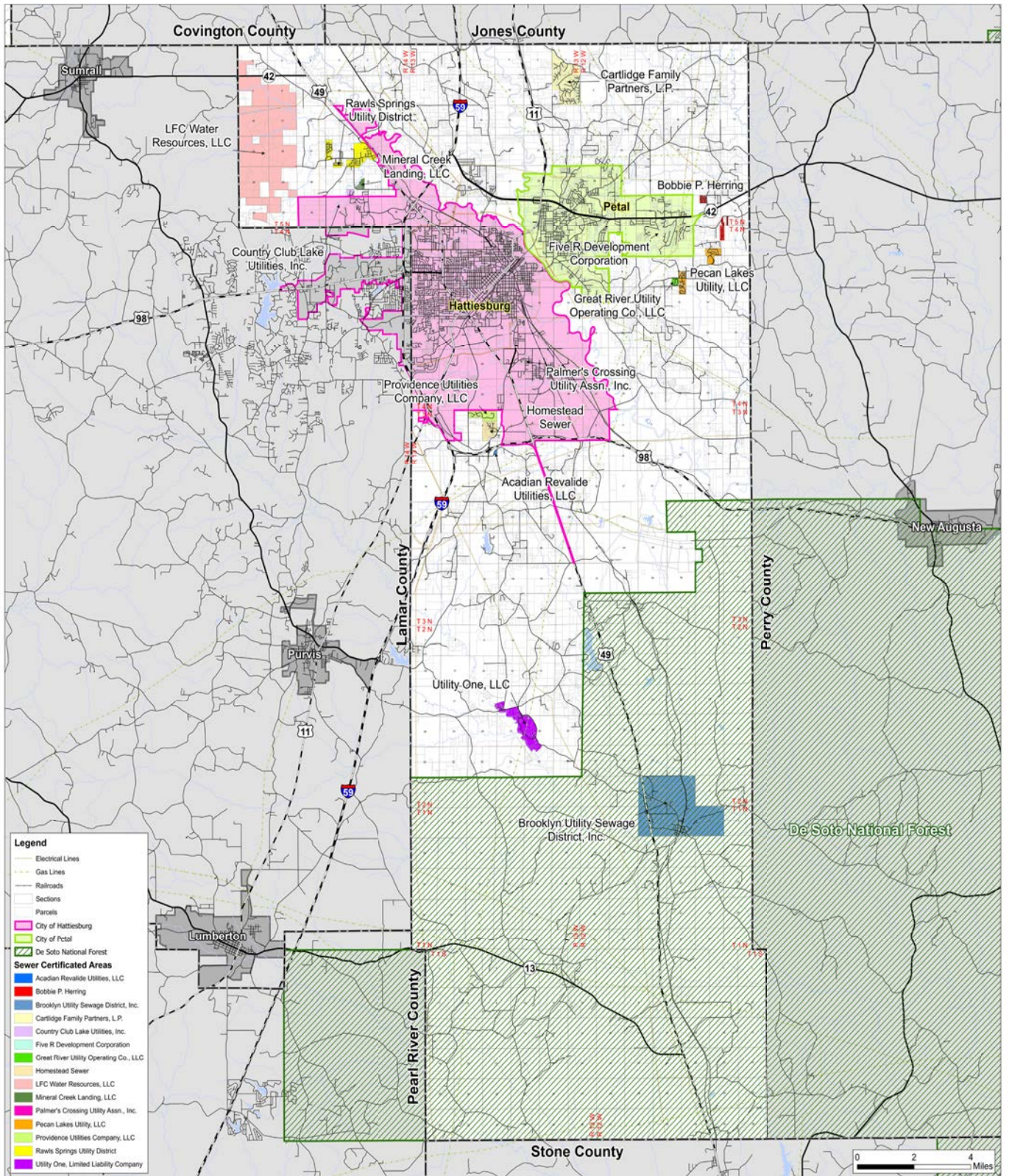
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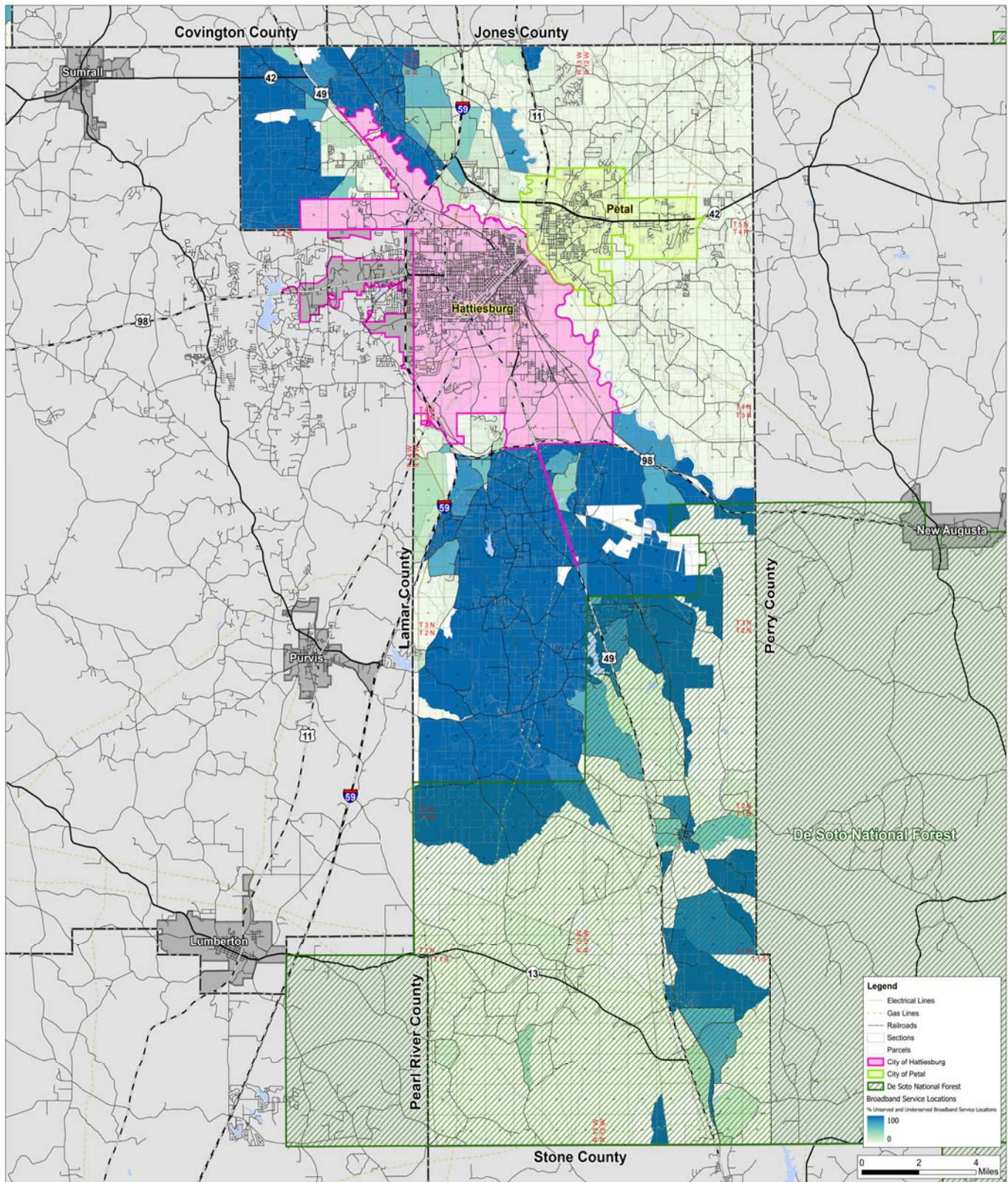
Water Certificated Areas Comprehensive Plan Forrest County, Mississippi

Source(s):
Mississippi Automated Resource
Information System (MARIS);
US Census Bureau TIGER Line Files;
Mississippi Public Service Commission
January 6, 2025; 2024 Forrest County
Parcel Data

Note: This map is accurate for planning purposes only
Date: August 26, 2025







Education and Schools

Forrest County's public education is provided through four public school districts: Forrest County School District, Forrest County Agricultural High School, Hattiesburg Public School District, and Petal School District. Together, they serve more than 10,000 students and form a foundational component of the county's workforce development and quality of life. These districts offer a range of academic, vocational, and extracurricular programs and are geographically distributed to serve both urban and rural populations.

While current facilities meet most needs, public perception of school quality varies, influencing residential development patterns and economic growth. Enhancing educational infrastructure and connectivity, including improved pedestrian and bicycle access to schools, is a priority. Partnerships with school districts for facility and technology upgrades will be essential as the county grows. A countywide high school or regional educational hub could be considered to address future population shifts and support economic development goals.

Public Schools in Forrest County

Forrest County School District

The **Forrest County School District** serves students in the unincorporated areas of Forrest County and territory inside the City of Hattiesburg. It operates a combination of K–8 attendance centers and traditional schools to meet the needs of rural and semi-rural communities. Students generally transition to North Forrest High School beginning in the 9th grade. District-wide enrollment is approximately 2,500.

Schools in the Forrest County School District include:

- **NORTH FORREST HIGH SCHOOL** (Grades 7–12)
- **NORTH FORREST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL** (Grades K–6)
- **DIXIE ATTENDANCE CENTER** (Grades K–8)
- **RAWLS SPRINGS ATTENDANCE CENTER** (Grades K–8)
- **SOUTH FORREST ATTENDANCE CENTER** (Grades K–8)
- **EARL TRAVILLION ATTENDANCE CENTER** (Grades K–8)



Forrest County Agricultural High School

The **Forrest County Agricultural High School** is Mississippi's only stand-alone agricultural high school district, serving students countywide and beyond in grades 9 through 12. It operates independently from the Forrest County School District and focuses on both academic instruction and vocational training.



Hattiesburg Public School District

The **Hattiesburg Public School District** serves students within the city limits of Hattiesburg. The district has a rich academic history and offers pre-K through 12th-grade instruction with an emphasis on academic excellence, equity, and student engagement. Total enrollment is approximately 3,900.

Schools in the district include:

- **HATTIESBURG HIGH SCHOOL** (Grades 9–12)
- **HATTIESBURG MIDDLE SCHOOL** (Grades 6–8)
- **HAWKINS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL** (Grades K–5)
- **GRACE CHRISTIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL** (Grades K–5)
- **ROWAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL** (Grades K–5)
- **THAMES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL** (Grades K–5)
- **WOODLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL** (Grades K–5)
- **MARY BETHUNE ALTERNATIVE CENTER** (Grades 6–12)



Petal School District

The **Petal School District** serves the City of Petal and nearby unincorporated areas of northeast Forrest County. It is widely regarded as one of Mississippi's highest-performing school systems. The district has earned state and national recognition for its academic achievement, graduation rates, and student engagement. It serves over 4,200 students across five schools.

Schools in the district include:

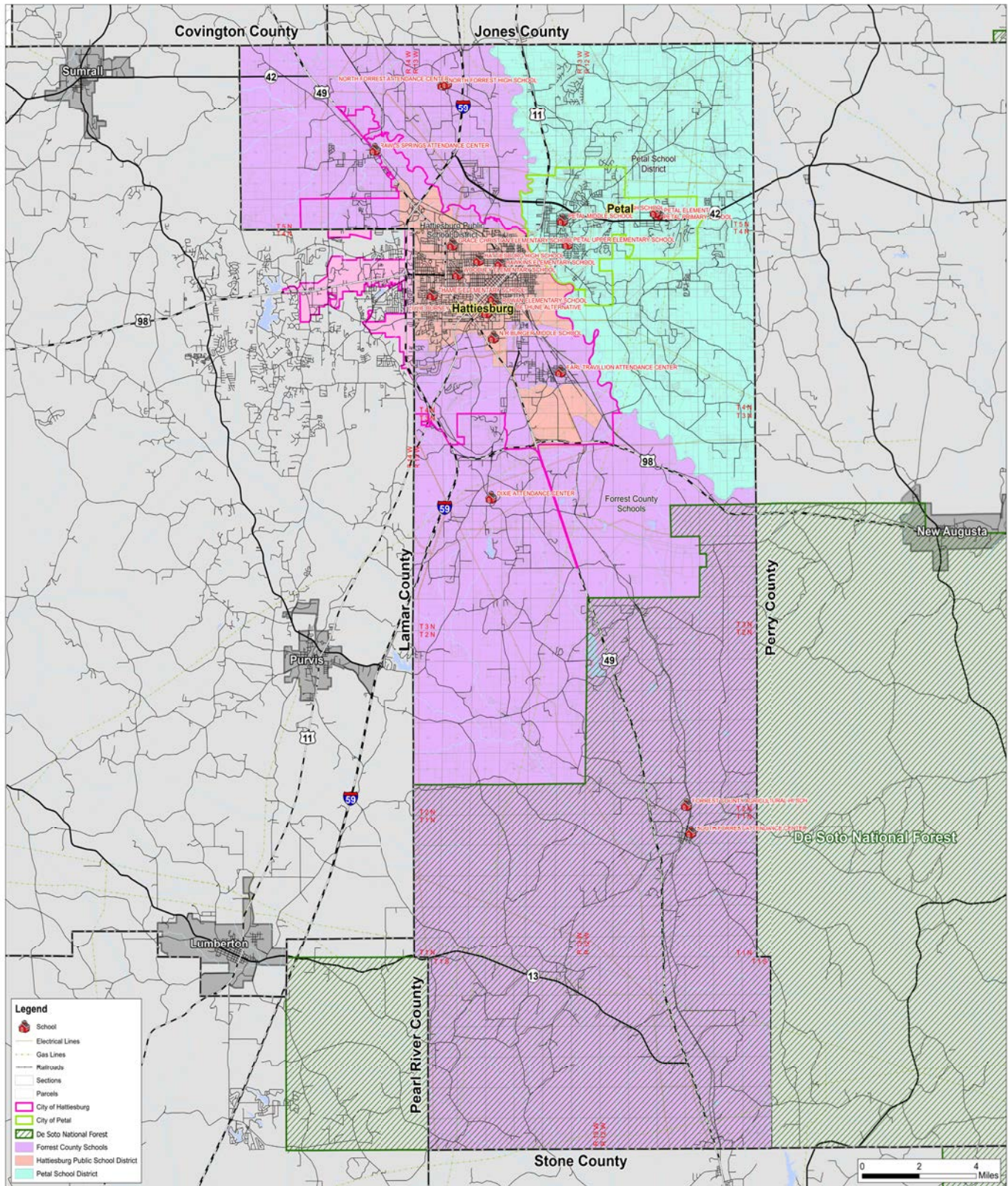
- **PETAL HIGH SCHOOL** (Grades 9–12)
- **PETAL MIDDLE SCHOOL** (Grades 6–8)
- **PETAL UPPER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL** (Grades 4–5)
- **PETAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL** (Grades 1–3)
- **PETAL PRIMARY SCHOOL** (Pre-K–Kindergarten)



Enrollment and Educational Impact

According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey and the Mississippi Department of Education, Forrest County has over 10,000 students enrolled in public K–12 schools across its four districts. Public schools in the county benefit from strong partnerships with higher education institutions such as the University of Southern Mississippi and William Carey University, which provide pipeline programs, teacher training, and dual enrollment opportunities.

Public school facilities in Forrest County are generally in good condition; however, community feedback during the comprehensive planning process has emphasized the need for improvements to pedestrian and bicycle access to schools, updated facilities in some rural areas, and support for equitable educational resources throughout the county. Educational quality is a significant factor influencing residential development and workforce readiness, making investments in the school system a top priority for future growth and community well-being.



Higher Education in Forrest County

Forrest County is a regional center of higher education in South Mississippi, home to three significant postsecondary institutions: **Pearl River Community College's Forrest County Center**, **The University of Southern Mississippi (USM)**, and **William Carey University (WCU)**. These institutions contribute to the county's identity as a hub of academic, cultural, and professional development and play a central role in workforce training, economic advancement, and community enrichment.

Together, they support tens of thousands of students and provide programs ranging from career and technical certificates to doctoral degrees. Their presence has helped shape Forrest County's economy, attracted businesses, supported innovation, and advanced educational attainment well beyond the state average.

Pearl River Community College – Forrest County Center

LOCATION: U.S. Highway 49 South, Hattiesburg

YEAR ESTABLISHED: 1970 (Forrest County Center)

ENROLLMENT: ~1,400 students (Forrest County Center); 6,300 systemwide

INSTITUTION TYPE: Public Community College

DEGREES OFFERED: Associate of Arts, Associate of Applied Science, Technical Certificates, Career and Workforce Credentials, Adult Education

Institutional Overview

The Forrest County Center of Pearl River Community College (PRCC) serves as a vital provider of accessible and affordable higher education in Forrest County and the greater Pine Belt region. Initially established in 1970, the Hattiesburg-based campus has grown into a comprehensive center for



academic transfer, career-technical training, and workforce development. As one of Mississippi's leading community colleges, PRCC plays a foundational role in raising educational attainment, supporting adult learners, and preparing students for both university transfer and immediate entry into the workforce.

Strategically located along U.S. Highway 49 in Hattiesburg, the Forrest County Center provides educational opportunities to a diverse student body, including recent high school graduates, working adults, veterans, and career changers. Its reputation for small class sizes, hands-on learning, and flexible scheduling makes it a trusted gateway to higher education.

Academic Programs and Areas of Strength

Students at the Forrest County Center may pursue associate degrees for university transfer or gain job-ready credentials through a wide range of career and technical education (CTE) programs. The center is especially well known for its:

NURSING AND ALLIED HEALTH PROGRAMS, INCLUDING:

- Practical Nursing (LPN)
- Associate Degree Nursing (ADN)
- Health Care Assistant and Pre-Nursing Pathways

SKILLED TRADES AND TECHNICAL TRAINING, INCLUDING:

- Welding and Cutting Technology
- HVAC
- Electrical Technology
- Construction and Manufacturing Skills

PUBLIC SAFETY PROGRAMS, INCLUDING:

- Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)
- Paramedic Technology

BUSINESS AND COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY, INCLUDING:

- Office Systems
- Computer Networking
- Accounting and Entrepreneurship



UNIVERSITY TRANSFER CURRICULUM IN ENGLISH, MATH, SCIENCE, SOCIAL SCIENCE, AND HUMANITIES

Facilities and Campus Life

The Forrest County Center offers a compact but modern campus designed to support both academic and technical instruction. Key facilities include:

- Allied Health Center, equipped with nursing simulation labs
- Technical and Vocational Shops, with real-world tools and equipment
- The Lowery A. Woodall Advanced Technology Center, located nearby, serves as a regional hub for industry training, certification testing, and customized workforce solutions
- Student Success Center, offering advising, tutoring, testing, and academic support
- Commons areas and computer labs, supporting flexible learning and digital access

While PRCC is a commuter campus, students have access to campus clubs, service organizations, and student leadership programs that foster connection and professional development.

Community and Economic Contributions

PRCC is a major contributor to Forrest County's workforce development infrastructure, aligning its programs with regional employment demands in healthcare, skilled trades, public safety, and business. Through its Adult Education Division, the center offers:

- GED/HiSET preparation
- English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction
- Workforce certification programs (e.g., forklift operation, OSHA training, healthcare tech)
- Customized employer training in partnership with local industries and economic developers

The college maintains close working relationships with Camp Shelby, regional hospitals, school districts, and the Mississippi Department of Employment Security, helping to upskill the local workforce and connect students directly to job opportunities.

Civic and Educational Engagement

The Forrest County Center supports educational access through:

- High school dual enrollment opportunities
- Adult literacy and career readiness workshops
- Pathways into nursing, emergency services, and public sector jobs
- Veterans' education and military transition programs

Additionally, PRCC frequently collaborates with community-based organizations to host events, provide technical training, and expand services for first-generation college students.

Summary Role in Forrest County

Pearl River Community College's Forrest County Center is a critical access point for postsecondary education, a reliable workforce partner for local employers, and a key contributor to Forrest County's long-term economic competitiveness and social mobility.

The University of Southern Mississippi (USM)

LOCATION: West 4th Street, Hattiesburg

YEAR ESTABLISHED: 1910 (originally as Mississippi Normal College)

ENROLLMENT: ~14,000 students (combined Hattiesburg and Gulf Park campuses)

INSTITUTION TYPE: Public Research University

DEGREES OFFERED: Bachelor's, Master's, Specialist, Doctoral (including Ph.D., Ed.D., and professional degrees)

Institutional Overview

The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) is a premier public research university and the academic centerpiece of Forrest County. Founded in 1910 as Mississippi Normal College, USM has evolved into one of the state's top-tier research institutions, offering over 140 academic programs across multiple disciplines. With its main campus in Hattiesburg, the university catalyzes regional innovation, economic development, and civic engagement.

As a Carnegie R1-designated institution ("Very High Research Activity"), USM balances rigorous academic offerings with cutting-edge research, public service, and student success initiatives. The university attracts students from all 50 states and over 70 countries, underscoring its role as a cultural and intellectual hub for Forrest County and the Gulf South.



Academic Programs and Areas of Strength

USM offers a broad range of degree programs through its five academic colleges and Graduate School. The institution is known for its excellence in:

NURSING AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS

- Comprehensive undergraduate and graduate programs in nursing, public health, and health-care leadership

BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Accredited by AACSB, offering majors in marketing, finance, supply chain, and entrepreneurship

EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY

- Historic strength in teacher training, educational leadership, counseling, and applied psychology

POLYMER SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

- Nationally ranked program conducting advanced research in materials and nanotechnology

MASS COMMUNICATION AND JOURNALISM

- Industry-recognized programs in public relations, broadcasting, and film production

MARINE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

- Coastal and oceanographic research through USM's Gulf Park and coastal facilities

Degree options include Bachelor of Arts/Science (BA/BS), Master's, Specialist, and Doctoral degrees (Ph.D., Ed.D.), along with professional programs in nursing and the sciences.



Facilities and Campus Life

The Hattiesburg campus is a vibrant residential and academic environment, featuring:

- Modern academic buildings and high-tech research laboratories
- Joseph A. Greene Science Center, Scianna Hall (College of Business), and the College of Nursing and Health Professions Complex
- Multiple student residence halls and dining options

- The Mannoni Performing Arts Center, Sarah Gillespie Museum of Art, and University Museum
- NCAA Division I athletic facilities, including The Rock (football), Reed Green Coliseum, and Pete Taylor Park
- Campus recreation and wellness centers, student union, and green spaces

USM hosts over 200 student organizations and offers leadership development, multicultural programming, and service-learning initiatives that enrich student life.



Community and Economic Contributions

USM is one of the largest employers in Forrest County and has a significant economic footprint through its:

- Research and innovation, including nationally funded projects in homeland security, polymer science, and marine ecology
- Entrepreneurial and business support, including the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and the Business Engagement Center
- Workforce training in high-demand fields such as healthcare, education, and advanced manufacturing
- Talent retention and graduate placement, supplying the regional economy with professionals in healthcare, education, business, and public service

The university also contributes to cultural tourism, arts development, and quality of life through its public performances, exhibitions, and athletic events.

Civic and Educational Engagement

USM maintains a strong community presence through:

- Teacher education partnerships with local school districts
- K-12 outreach through literacy programs, STEM camps, and tutoring
- Public health initiatives, nutrition education, and mental health awareness campaigns

- Veteran and military services, supporting active duty and retired personnel
- Service-learning and volunteerism, embedded across academic disciplines

The university's Center for Community Engagement and Office of Inclusion and Multicultural Engagement further support civic dialogue, equity, and capacity-building.

Summary Role in Forrest County

The University of Southern Mississippi is a driving force for academic achievement, innovation, and regional vitality in Forrest County. Its impact spans economic development, workforce training, research excellence, and community enrichment, making it indispensable to the county's future growth and prosperity.

William Carey University (WCU)

LOCATION: Tuscan Avenue, Hattiesburg

YEAR ESTABLISHED: 1906 (relocated to Hattiesburg in 1911; renamed William Carey University in 2006)

ENROLLMENT: Approximately 5,000 students (across Hattiesburg, Biloxi, and Baton Rouge campuses)

INSTITUTION TYPE: Private Christian University

DEGREES OFFERED: Associate, Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral (including DPT, DO, Ed.D., and DMA)

Institutional Overview

William Carey University (WCU) is a private Christian institution of higher learning that combines a liberal arts foundation with professional training, spiritual formation, and service-oriented leadership. With its main campus in Hattiesburg, WCU is one of Mississippi's fastest-growing universities, playing a vital role in educating professionals in healthcare, education, business, ministry, and the arts.

Founded in 1906 and relocated to Forrest County in 1911, WCU now operates multiple campuses across the Gulf South, but its flagship presence remains in Hattiesburg. The university is affiliated with the Mississippi Baptist Convention and serves a diverse student population with a commitment to academic excellence, character development, and community service.

Academic Programs and Areas of Strength

William Carey University offers a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs through its various colleges and schools. Areas of distinction include:



COLLEGE OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE (WCUCOM)

- The state's first and only osteopathic medical school, dedicated to preparing primary care physicians for rural and underserved communities.

SCHOOL OF NURSING AND HEALTH SCIENCES

- High-performing programs in:
 - Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN)
 - Master of Science in Nursing (MSN)
 - Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT)

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

- One of Mississippi's leading producers of licensed educators and administrators, offering:
 - Elementary and Secondary Education
 - Educational Leadership
 - Dyslexia Therapy
 - Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND COMMUNICATION

- Degrees in accounting, marketing, management, and public relations rooted in ethical and service-based leadership.

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND LETTERS

- Programs in English, History, Modern Languages, Political Science, and Christian Ministries.

SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND MINISTRY STUDIES

- Renowned for performance, worship leadership, and church music.

SCHOOL OF NATURAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

- Including biology, chemistry, and psychology with strong pre-medical preparation.

SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS

- Award-winning programs in visual arts, theatre, and dance.

WCU emphasizes small class sizes, individualized attention, and academic programs designed to meet both workforce needs and spiritual formation.

Facilities and Campus Life

The Hattiesburg campus of William Carey University has undergone substantial rebuilding and modernization following a devastating EF-3 tornado in 2017. The revitalized campus now includes:

- State-of-the-art academic buildings, including facilities for medical, nursing, and science education
- Simulation laboratories and clinical training spaces

- New residence halls and dining facilities
- Fine arts studios, theatres, and recital spaces
- Student wellness and recreation centers
- Chapels and ministry spaces for worship, prayer, and faith-based activities

Although WCU does not operate a traditional athletic program under NCAA or NAIA, it supports a rich campus culture of student engagement, spiritual life, service-learning, and leadership development.

Community and Economic Contributions

WCU is a major contributor to Forrest County's workforce, particularly in:

- Healthcare, through its nursing and medical school graduates
- Education, as one of the largest sources of teachers and administrators for K–12 schools statewide
- Public health and rural care, thanks to WCUCOM's emphasis on primary care in underserved areas
- Business and entrepreneurship, with graduates filling professional and managerial roles in the regional economy

The university is also a large employer and active community partner. Its clinical partnerships with local hospitals, schools, and nonprofits extend its influence far beyond the campus.

Civic and Educational Engagement

WCU maintains a deep commitment to community service, reflecting its faith-based mission. Key engagement efforts include:

- Student mission work and volunteer service in local, national, and international contexts
- Partnerships with local school districts for student teaching and professional development
- Community-based health education, wellness programs, and clinical outreach
- Public cultural programming, including concerts, theater productions, and art exhibitions open to the public

The university's holistic approach to education and service supports civic engagement and lifelong learning for students and community members alike.

Summary Role in Forrest County

William Carey University is a pillar of Christian higher education in Forrest County, distinguished by its dedication to faith, service, and academic achievement. Its growing impact on the regional workforce, especially in healthcare and education, makes it a vital institutional partner in the county's continued development and quality of life.

Conclusion

Forrest County's community facilities form the essential framework for delivering public services, safeguarding residents, and supporting quality of life. This chapter demonstrates that sustained investment in administrative buildings, public safety infrastructure, educational institutions, utilities, and recreational assets is critical to meeting current needs and preparing for future growth. Strategic upgrades guided by principles of equity, resilience, and efficiency will ensure that facilities remain accessible, modern, and capable of serving a diverse and expanding population. By coordinating facility planning with broader land use and economic development strategies, Forrest County can strengthen service delivery, enhance community resilience, and support the long-term prosperity of both urban and rural areas.

05 IMPLEMENTATION

The Implementation chapter is the bridge between vision and action. The comprehensive plan outlines a shared vision for the future of Forrest County rooted in safety, opportunity, resilience, and stewardship. That vision, however, will remain aspirational unless it is paired with a deliberate and practical framework for acting. Implementation is where planning becomes doing.

This chapter provides the framework. It translates the goals, objectives, and plans for land use, transportation, and community facilities outlined in earlier chapters into a coordinated set of strategies, projects, and policy updates that can be tracked over time. The implementation process is neither linear nor rigid. Success will require the County to take a flexible and responsive approach, aligning local efforts with regional and state partnerships, leveraging investments, modernizing development regulations, and coordinating the work of multiple public and private partners.

The implementation plan emphasizes the need for an agile and adaptive approach, providing a general overview of how the plan can be implemented and recommending a five-year action plan that outlines near-term priorities. It is not a conclusive checklist. It is subject to change as funding becomes available, partnerships evolve, or urgent needs emerge.

However, as Forrest County's leadership, staff, and stakeholders use this plan regularly to set

budgets, evaluate development proposals, pursue grants, and align the work of departments and boards with a clear, long-term direction, the action plan can serve as a guide for accountable, adaptable, and pragmatic implementation.

Above all, this chapter emphasizes the importance of accountability. Implementation tools must be reviewed regularly, tracked publicly, and adjusted as needed. Progress will be judged by what is built and adopted, as well as how effectively the County adapts to changing circumstances, responds to its residents, and delivers on the promise of the plan.

Planning and Implementation

The success of this plan depends not on the perfection of any single strategy, but on the County's ability to implement change deliberately, incrementally, and with a willingness to adapt. Rather than imposing rigid schedules or prescriptive rules, the approach outlined here embraces flexibility, continuous learning, and sustained coordination. This allows the County to respond to new information, changing conditions, and the practical realities of local governance.

Implementation is viewed as an ongoing process, rather than a one-time phase. The strategies in this chapter reflect an understanding that progress is often made in small, consistent steps. Pilot programs, demonstration projects, and iterative

code updates are valued as tools for testing ideas, building trust, and generating visible momentum. These “small wins” can lay the groundwork for more ambitious reforms and signal meaningful change to residents and stakeholders.

This approach is essential for land use planning, which spans multiple disciplines and impacts nearly every aspect of community life. The comprehensive plan is inherently holistic, linking housing, transportation, infrastructure, economic development, and environmental stewardship through shared priorities and a unified spatial vision. Successful implementation will require Forrest County to adopt a unified development code that consolidates land development, subdivision, design, and environmental regulations under a single, consistent framework. This code will serve not only to implement the Future Land Use Map but also to reinforce broader goals for resiliency, equity, and efficiency.

To ensure the plan remains relevant and actionable, Forrest County will:

- Reference the plan regularly when making budget, capital, and land use decisions;
- Report on progress annually, highlighting actions completed and lessons learned;
- Convene a check-in every two years to recalibrate near-term priorities; and
- Conduct a comprehensive review every five years, using updated data, public input, and inter-agency coordination to refine goals and update the action plan.

This framework recognizes that thriving communities are not static; instead, they are responsive, evolving, and open to new ways of solving old problems. Implementation in this framework requires:

FLEXIBILITY AND CONTINUOUS LEARNING – implementation is not rigid but adaptive, allowing for adjustment as new information and conditions emerge.

SMALL, INCREMENTAL STEPS – progress is often achieved through pilot programs, demonstration projects, iterative code updates, and “small wins” that build momentum and trust.

REGULAR REVIEW AND ADJUSTMENT – the plan calls for:

- Annual progress reports
- Biennial check-ins to recalibrate priorities
- A formal five-year comprehensive review using updated data and public input.

HOLISTIC, INTEGRATED APPROACH – implementation links land use, housing, transportation, infrastructure, economic development, and environmental stewardship under a unified framework.

ADAPTIVE FRAMEWORK – built on three methods that overlap:

- Investments (capital projects, infrastructure, services)
- Regulations (unified development code, land development, subdivision, hazard codes)
- Coordination (inter-departmental, regional, stakeholder partnerships)

By committing to flexible implementation, Forrest County builds the future it envisions and the capacity to adapt and lead through whatever future may come. Implementation is a new phase of comprehensive planning that represents an ongoing, consistent, frequently evaluated, and adjusted effort.

Implementation Approach

Forrest County's implementation strategy is based on an adaptive framework that enables flexible and responsive decision-making over time. Rather than assigning each action to a single category or delivery path, the plan acknowledges that effective implementation is multidimensional, often requiring a combination of investments, regulatory changes, and coordinated partnerships to achieve success.

Some initiatives may begin with infrastructure funding and later require updates to ordinances or inter-agency agreements. Others may originate as pilot programs, requiring new partnerships before they are formally adopted. This fluidity is by design. It reflects the reality that action plans must evolve in response to changing circumstances and that success depends on the County's ability to adapt, integrate, and respond across various sectors.

While implementation methods are described individually below, they are not intended to function in isolation. Most of Forrest County's key initiatives will draw from more than one of these strategies:

- Investments provide resources to build and maintain critical infrastructure and the personnel needed to implement and coordinate plans.
- Regulations establish the rules and standards that shape development and protect the public.
- Coordination ensures that internal departments, local partners, and regional agencies work toward shared goals.

Together, these three methods provide a foundation for action, each one strengthened by flexible scheduling, consistent review, and the ability to pivot when new challenges or opportunities arise.

Investments

Public investment plays a central role in building the future Forrest County envisions. Capital projects, service expansions, and targeted infrastructure upgrades can unlock new opportunities, reduce risks, and improve daily life for residents. The County will:

- Maintain a five-year Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) that aligns funding with priority needs for roads, water, sewer, and drainage.
- Pursue external funding through state and federal grant programs.
- Leverage investments in broadband infrastructure, health access, and recreation facilities to improve quality of life and economic competitiveness.
- Use capital spending to signal commitment, attract private development, and support areas designated for future growth.
- Invest in personnel and new departments needed to craft and implement plans and strategies.
- Procure additional one-time support for projects through engineering, planning, architectural, and other service agreements.

Regulations

Effective planning requires more than investment; it also requires a regulatory framework that aligns everyday development decisions with long-term goals. Regulations should be transparent, predictable, and flexible enough to reflect the rural character and growth potential of Forrest County. Implementation will include:

- Adopting a unified development code that brings land development, subdivision, and design standards into a single, modern ordinance that recognizes Forrest County's character and development needs, providing an appropriate level of regulation to be responsive to issues without burdening individuals.
- Embedding the Future Land Use Map and associated place types into decision-making processes through meaningful regulatory standards.
- Updating building and hazard codes to enhance resilience and reduce long-term risk in flood-prone or vulnerable areas.
- Creating regulatory pathways that support housing choice, infrastructure efficiency, and rural commercial development while protecting farmland and natural resources.

Coordination

Because the comprehensive plan is holistic, implementation requires deliberate coordination across multiple departments, agencies, and partners. Many of the plan's most ambitious goals, whether they involve transportation, land use, housing, or health, will only be successful through collective effort. The County will:

- Maintain an inter-department Development Review Team to streamline project review and improve internal collaboration.
- Support regional planning partnerships, including collaboration with the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and state transportation officials on growth corridors.
- Convene issue-specific working groups, such as a Broadband Task Force or Rural Mobility Working Group, to pilot solutions and pursue joint funding.
- Partner with community organizations, utility providers, and local municipalities to share responsibilities, reduce duplication, and amplify results.

This flexible, integrated approach is designed to support progress while allowing for change. It recognizes that few actions fit into neat categories and that achieving the County's goals will require practical, often overlapping techniques that evolve.

Five-Year Action Plan

The Five-Year Action Framework is intended to serve as a flexible guide for advancing the goals and objectives outlined in this Comprehensive Plan. Rather than prescribing a fixed set of projects or commitments, the framework translates the County's long-term vision into a menu of **potential actions that may be considered, adapted, or deferred based on available resources, organizational capacity, partnerships, and emerging opportunities.**

The framework recognizes that implementation conditions will evolve over time. Departments and decision-makers are encouraged to use the recommended actions as a starting point for discussion, prioritization, pilot efforts, and incremental progress. Not every action is expected to be undertaken, and the County may pursue alternative approaches that achieve the same objectives as circumstances warrant.

The Action Framework is presented as a matrix in Appendix A and includes approximately 170 recommended action items organized over a five-year or longer horizon. Actions are grouped under the six primary goals of the plan, each representing a broad strategic priority. Within each goal, actions are organized by objective, which identify specific focus areas and provide a structure for exploring implementation options.

This organization is intended to support coordination across departments and partners while allowing flexibility in timing, sequencing, and scale. The framework should be revisited regularly and adjusted as the County evaluates progress, learns from implementation experience, and responds to changing conditions.

The six goal-based groupings include:

- **GOAL 1:** Sustainable Growth and Development
- **GOAL 2:** Resilience and Environmental Stewardship
- **GOAL 3:** Economic Vitality and Opportunity
- **GOAL 4:** Connectivity and Accessibility
- **GOAL 5:** Community Facilities and Quality of Life
- **GOAL 6:** Plan Governance and Engagement

Each action item under these goals includes references to the supporting objective, the department or organization responsible for implementation, identified or potential funding sources, and an estimated timeframe.

The range of actions is intentionally diverse. Some tasks involve drafting ordinances or internal staffing; others require long-term infrastructure investments, regional partnerships, or public engagement. This variety reflects the comprehensive nature of the plan and is intended to provide a spectrum of options that can be explored as conditions, priorities, and capacity evolve.

Consistent with the exploratory nature of this framework, the Five-Year Action Plan should not be interpreted as a fixed checklist or mandated work program. It is intended to function as a living implementation guide that can be refined over time. County leadership and staff are encouraged to periodically revisit the framework, adjust priorities, and modify or substitute actions to reflect changing needs, available resources, partnership opportunities, and lessons learned through implementation. The County is encouraged to revisit and recalibrate these priorities regularly to ensure continued alignment with changing needs, available resources, and emerging opportunities. This iterative approach helps ensure that implementation remains both focused and flexible, anchored by long-term goals but responsive to real-world conditions.

Understanding the Exploratory Action Plan Layout

Each row of the matrix includes the following columns to guide implementation:

OBJECTIVE REFERENCE

- Links the action back to the specific goal or objective in the main body of the plan, ensuring continuity and traceability.

ACTION ITEM

- A short, descriptive statement of the specific step to be taken.

LEAD ENTITY

- Assigning responsibility is essential for accountability. The Action Plan identifies which department or partner is responsible for initiating each task. In many cases, the Planning Department plays a central coordinating role. Where specialties such as GIS and Grants are expected within the Planning Department, they are noted. Implementation will often require support from various departments, including Engineering, Roads and Bridges, Finance, Utilities, GIS, and external stakeholders such as utility providers or regional agencies.

FUNDING / RESOURCES

- Each action includes a note about likely funding sources or resource needs. Some items can be accomplished using internal staff time and existing budgets, which align with General Fund Operating expenses. Others will require grants, special appropriations, or capital improvement planning, as well as General Fund One-Time expenses. The identified sources are speculative. The county will need to explore these and alternative funding options.

TIMELINE

- Timing recommendations help organize near-term and mid-term efforts and allow for manageable sequencing. Some items are designed to build momentum early in the plan's lifecycle (e.g., adopting the Future Land Use Map). In contrast, others require coordination or new capacity that will take longer to establish.

The Five-Year Action Plan is designed to be a dynamic tool, utilized by staff, elected officials, and the public to monitor progress, establish priorities, and inform annual budgeting and programming decisions. While it outlines a recommended path forward, it leaves room for adjustment and encourages regular review to stay responsive to new needs, opportunities, and realities in Forrest County.

Plan Maintenance, Review, and Updates

The comprehensive plan is intended to guide long-term growth and decision-making in Forrest County, but it is not a static document. To remain valuable and relevant, the plan must be maintained as a living framework that is regularly reviewed, updated, and adjusted to reflect changing needs, emerging opportunities, and evolving community priorities.

Over time, shifts in economic trends, population dynamics, infrastructure capacity, environmental conditions, and policy landscapes may all influence the County's direction. Without a system of structured review and proactive updates, the plan risks falling out of sync with on-the-ground realities. To address this, Forrest County will adopt a consistent approach to plan maintenance based on continuous monitoring and a formal update cycle.

Five-Year Update Cycle

Forrest County will conduct a comprehensive review and update of the plan every five years. This update should include:

- A review of progress on key goals and implementation actions
- Updated demographic, land use, and infrastructure data
- Public and stakeholder engagement to reaffirm priorities
- Adjustments to goals, objectives, and action steps as needed
- Revisions to maps and supporting documents to reflect current conditions

This five-year cycle ensures that the plan evolves in tandem with the County, maintaining its relevance as a decision-making tool for elected officials, department leaders, partner agencies, and the public.

Interim Monitoring and Adjustments

Between major updates, the County will also support ongoing monitoring and interim adjustments through the following practices:

- Annual Progress Reporting: Planning staff or a designated implementation team will prepare a short report each year summarizing completed actions, funding updates, notable challenges, and recommendations for the upcoming year.
- Plan Amendments: As circumstances warrant, such as after a major natural disaster, significant economic development, or the adoption of major capital investments, the County may initiate targeted plan amendments to ensure alignment with new conditions.

Public Involvement in the Update Process

Community engagement is central to the integrity of the planning process. Each five-year update will include meaningful opportunities for public input, including:

- Public meetings or open houses to present findings and solicit feedback
- Stakeholder interviews or focus groups
- Online surveys or comment forms
- Publication of proposed revisions for public review before adoption

These engagement efforts help ensure the plan remains grounded in the lived experiences, aspirations, and challenges of Forrest County residents and stakeholders.

Responsibility and Oversight

Primary responsibility for plan maintenance will rest with the Forrest County Planning Department, in coordination with the Board of Supervisors, partner agencies, and the departments and organizations responsible for implementation. A consistent approach to tracking and reviewing the plan ensures that the County's vision remains actionable, its goals remain attainable, and its strategies remain aligned with the evolving future of the community.

Conclusion

Implementation is the beginning of a new phase of continuous comprehensive planning that requires leadership, collaboration, and persistent action. The tools, strategies, and framework outlined in this chapter are designed to guide the County in turning community goals into visible outcomes. But even more important than any individual action is the mindset the County brings to this work: one of flexibility, accountability, and continual improvement.

Forrest County's future will be shaped not by static plans, but by how well those plans evolve to meet changing needs. By staying focused on shared goals, aligning day-to-day decisions with long-term priorities, and measuring success along the way, the County can bring this plan to life with one thoughtful step at a time.



APPENDIX A: FIVE-YEAR ACTION PLAN

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Appendix A: Five-Year Action Plan

Goal 1: Sustainable Growth and Development

Objective	Key Action Item	Lead Entity + Partners	Resources / Funding Path	Timing
1.1 Future Land-Use Framework	Adopt countywide Future Land-Use (FLU) map & Place-Type policies	Planning; Board of Supervisors	General Fund(One-time)	Immediate
	Update FLU map every 5 yrs with plan review	Planning	General Fund (Operating)	3-5 Years
1.2 Planning & Land Development Tools	Draft & adopt unified land development + subdivision ordinance that codifies FLU Map & rural design standards	Planning; Consultant; Board of Supervisors	General Fund(One-time)	3-5 Years
	Embed regulating plan & standards in new land development ordinance	Planning; Consultant; Board of Supervisors	General Fund(One-time)	3-5 Years
	Modernize subdivision regs (ROW, drainage, connectivity)	Planning; Consultant; Board of Supervisors	General Fund(One-time)	1-2 years
	Adopt countywide building & fire codes (w/ rural amendments)	Planning; Board of Supervisors	General Fund(One-time)	3-5 Years
	Publish plain-language user guide	Planning	General Fund (Operating)	3-5 Years
	Host builder / consultant workshops & publish “How-to Permitting Guide”	Planning; Building Dept.; Chamber	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Schedule 5-year ordinance review cycle with public hearings	Planning; Clerk; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating)	5+ Years
1.3 County Design Process	Publish Rural Design Manual	Planning	General Fund (Operating)	3-5 Years
	Form inter-department dev review team (Planning + Road + Utilities)	Planning; Road; Utilities	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Require sketch-plan meeting for ≥ 5-lot projects	Dev. Review Team	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years

1.4 Conservation Subdivisions

Conduct corridor design charrettes (e.g., Hwy 98)

Planning; MDOT; Consultants

General Fund (Operating); MPO

3-5 Years

1.5 Countywide GIS Database

Add density-bonus & expedited-review incentives

Planning

General Fund (Operating)

3-5 Years

Establish land-trust partner for conserved open space

Planning; Volunteers

General Fund (Operating)

3-5 Years

Hire / assign full-time GIS/Planner

IT; HR; Planning

General Fund (Operating)

1-2 years

Clean parcel & infrastructure layers

Planning/GIS

General Fund (Operating)

1-2 years

Integrate road, drainage, place-type layers

Planning/GIS; Road Dept.

General Fund (Operating)

1-2 years

Publish public land use planning web viewer

Planning/GIS; IT

General Fund (Operating)

3-5 Years

1.6 Infrastructure Investment

Draft 5-yr Capital Improvements Plan (CIP)

Road; Planning; Board of Supervisors

General Fund (Operating)

1-2 years

Coordinate MDOT upgrades to US 49 & 98

Road; Planning; MDOT

General Fund (Operating)

3-5 Years

Apply for State/Fed DOT grants (growth corridors)

Planning; Board of Supervisors

General Fund (Operating)

3-5 Years

Launch public CIP dashboard

IT; Planning/GIS

General Fund (Operating)

1-2 years

1.7 Proactive Road Maintenance

Complete PCI survey & publish rankings

Road Dept.; Planning/GIS

General Fund (Operating)

Ongoing

Adopt annual resurfacing & shoulder program

Road Dept.; Board of Supervisors

General Fund (Operating)

Ongoing

Issue pavement report cards every 3 years

Road Dept.

General Fund (Operating)

1-2 years

1.8 Sewer Service Expansion

Negotiate inter-local sewer MOUs (Eagle One)

Cities; Water Assns.; Board of Sup.

General Fund (Operating)

1-2 years

Commission phased engineering study & cost share (Eagle One)

Water Assns.; Board of Sup.

General Fund (One-time)

1-2 years

Secure MDA/EDA/USDA funding for trunk lines (eagle One)

Water Assns.; Board of Sup.

General Fund(Operating); MDA; EDA; USDA

1-2 years

1.9 Affordable & Workforce Housing	Negotiate inter-local sewer MOUs (Hwy 49, 98)	Cities; Water Assns.; Board of Sup.	General Fund (Operating)	3-5 Years
	Commission phased engineering study & cost share (Hwy 49, 98)	Water Assns.; Board of Sup.	General Fund (One-time)	3-5 Years
	Secure USDA funding for trunk lines (Hwy 49, 98)	Water Assns.; Board of Sup.	General Fund(Operating); EPA; USDA	3-5 Years
	Convene Housing Task Force	Planning; Builders; Non-profits	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Map multi-family / infill sites near jobs	Planning/GIS	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Launch rehab & infill grant/loan program	Task Force; Community Dev.	General Fund(Operating); CDBG; bank CRA	1-2 years
	Draft & adopt rental inspection ordinance	Planning; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating)	3-5 Years
	Establish land bank for infill properties	Land Bank; Task Force	General Fund(Operating); CDBG; bank CRA	3-5 Years

Goal 2: Resilience and Environmental Stewardship

Objective	Key Action Item	Lead Entity + Partners	Resources / Funding Path	Priority
2.1 Countywide Drainage Study	Procure hydrology consultant; launch countywide drainage & flood-mitigation study	Board of Supervisors; Planning; Consultant	General Fund(One-time), NRCS, EPA	1-2 years
	Inventory culverts, ditches & bottlenecks; collect LiDAR	Consultant; Road Dept.; Planning/GIS	General Fund(One-time)	1-2 years
	Prioritize green-infrastructure retrofits (bioswales, detention basins)	Planning; Consultant	General Fund(One-time), NRCS, EPA	3-5 years
	Fold final study into 5-yr CIP & land-development regs	Planning; Consultant; Board of Supervisors	General Fund(Operating)	3-5 years
2.2 Green-Infrastructure Plan	Publish interactive public flood-risk map	Planning(GIS); IT	General Fund(Operating)	3-5 years
	Convene inter-agency Green Infrastructure Working Group	Planning; Land Trust	General Fund(Operating)	1-2 years
	Draft countywide hub-and-link GIS layer; embed in FLU Map	Planning(GIS)	General Fund(Operating)	1-2 years
	Secure easements / dedications	Planning(GIS); Legal; Board of Supervisors	General Fund(One-time/Operating), LWCF, RTP	3-5 years
2.3 Septic-to-Sewer Conversion Program	Fund greenways & riparian buffers (local + grants)	Planning(GIS); Board of Supervisors	General Fund(One-time/Operating), LWCF, RTP	3-5 years
	Issue design standards for trails, buffers, natural-surface paths	Planning(GIS); Consultant; Board of Supervisors	General Fund(Operating)	3-5 years
	Map priority conversion areas (small lots near waterways)	Planning(GIS); Water Assoc.	General Fund(Operating)	1-2 years
	Create grant / low-interest loan fund	Planning(Grants); Board of Supervisors	General Fund(One-time/Operating), CRA, CDBG	3-5 years
	Coordinate phased trunk-line extensions with utility districts	Planning(Grants); Water Assoc.; Board of Supervisors	General Fund(One-time/Operating), USDA, EPA, CDBG	3-5 years

2.4 Hazard-Resistant Codes	Launch homeowner outreach portal & hotline	Planning(GIS); Water Assoc.	General Fund(One-time/Operating), USDA, EPA, CDBG	3-5 years
	Track annual conversions & downstream water-quality metrics	Planning(GIS); Water Assoc.	General Fund(One-time/Operating), USDA, EPA	Ongoing
	Adopt latest building codes with flood & wind amendments	Planning(GIS); Board of Supervisors	General Fund(One-time)	1-2 years
	Hire & train officials & inspectors	Board of Supervisors	General Fund(Operating)	1-2 years
	Publish “builder quick-guide”	Planning(Bldg); Board of Supervisors	General Fund(Operating)	1-2 years
	Create a library of pre-approved housing plans	Planning(Bldg); Board of Supervisors	General Fund(Operating); Consultant	3-5 years
	Introduce permit checklist (wind, fire, LID)	Planning(Bldg)	General Fund(Operating)	1-2 years
	Synchronise code review with 3-yr update cycle	Planning(Bldg); Board of Supervisors	General Fund(Operating)	3-5 years
	Monitor compliance via annual audit	Planning(Bldg); Board of Supervisors	General Fund(Operating)	Ongoing
	Overlay FEMA DFIRM & drainage layers in GIS; require pre-dev hazard assessments	Planning(GIS); EMA	General Fund(Operating)	1-2 years
2.5 Integrate Hazard-Mitigation into Planning	Align CIP scoring to favour projects with mitigation benefits	Planning; EMA; Board of Supervisors	General Fund(Operating)	3-5 years
	Update CIP alongside Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan cycle	Planning; EMA; Board of Supervisors	General Fund(Operating); HMGP	3-5 years
	Pursue FEMA HMGP funds for structural flood projects	Planning(Grants); EMA; Board of Supervisors	General Fund(Operating); HMGP	3-5 years
	Brand & launch “Ready Forrest” public-education campaign	Planning; EMA; Board of Supervisors	General Fund(Operating)	1-2 years
2.6 Emergency Preparedness Programs	Update evacuation-route signage; distribute shelter maps	Planning; EMA; Road; Board of Supervisors	General Fund(Operating)	3-5 years
	Conduct annual multi-agency drills & volunteer training	EMA; All agencies	General Fund(Operating)	Ongoing

Deploy countywide text/e-mail mass-notification platform	EMA; IT	General Fund(One-time/ Operating)	1-2 years
Evaluate program via post-event after-action reviews	EMA; All agencies	General Fund(Operating)	Ongoing

Goal 3: Economic Vitality and Opportunity

Objective	Key Action Item	Lead Entity + Partners	Resources / Funding Path	Priority
3.1 Leverage Eagle One Mega Site & Other Industrial Assets				
	Complete “pad-ready” site work, power, fiber, water/sewer at Eagle One	ADP; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (One-time); MDA; EDA	1-2 years
	Negotiate MDOT interchange upgrades & frontage-road plan on I-59/US-11	ADP; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (One-time); MDA; EDA; MDOT	1-2 years
	Launch Target-Industry Recruitment Campaign; two trade shows/yr	ADP; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Create “rapid-response” 30-day permitting protocol for mega-projects	Planning; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Offer performance-based incentives tied to local hiring	ADP; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating)	Ongoing
3.2 Grow Agri-Entrepreneurship & Agri-Tourism				
	Form Forrest Local Food Council & online food-hub marketplace	Planning; Parks; Non-profits	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Pilot county-branded Saturday farm-markets & U-Pick / farm-stay itineraries	Planning; Food Council	General Fund (One-time/Operating)	1-2 years
	Small-grant program for value-added products & on-farm events	Planning; Parks; Food Council; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating)	3-5 Years
	Develop way-finding & heritage signage for county assets	Planning; Parks; Tourism	General Fund (One-time/Operating)	3-5 Years
	Host annual Agri-Tourism Summit with Extension & tourism bureau	Planning; Parks; Tourism	General Fund (One-time/Operating)	3-5 Years
3.3 Expand Workforce-Development Partnerships				
	Create Pine Belt Workforce Alliance (PRCC + USM + WCU + employers)	ADP; PRCC; USM; WCU; Industry	General Fund (Operating); WIOA	1-2 years
	Secure WIOA / state funds for training cohorts	Workforce Alliance	General Fund (Operating); WIOA	1-2 years

3.4 Create Small-Business Incubators in Community Centers / Libraries	Launch annual Career Pathways Expo (rotate PRCC & USM)	Workforce Alliance	General Fund (Operating); WIOA	1-2 years
	Incentivize paid internships / apprenticeships	Workforce Alliance	General Fund (Operating); WIOA	1-2 years
	Veterans-to-industry fast-track at Camp Shelby	Workforce Alliance	General Fund (Operating); WIOA	1-2 years
	Retrofit spaces as co-working / innovation hubs w/ broadband	Board of Supervisors; ADP; Planning	General Fund (One-time/ Operating); USDA; EDA	3-5 Years
	Partner w/ schools & state entities for mentorship & clinics	ADP; PRCC; USM; WCU; Industry	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Seed revolving micro-loan pool (\$5k-\$50k) for graduates	ADP; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (One-time/ Operating); SBA; EDA	1-2 years
	Run monthly Idea Pitch Nights & mentor-in-residence program	ADP; PRCC; USM; WCU; Industry	General Fund (Operating); Sponsorships	1-2 years
	Track metrics: jobs created, 3-yr survival rate	ADP; PRCC; USM; WCU; Industry	General Fund (Operating)	Ongoing
	Develop unified "Discover Forrest County" brand & web / signage kit	Parks; Tourism	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Produce heritage-tourism map linking county assets	Parks; Tourism	General Fund (One-time/ Operating)	1-2 years
3.5 Enhance Marketing, Branding & Tourism	Host media familiarization tours & target 2 travel-show spots annually	Parks; Tourism	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Install digital kiosks at visitor nodes w/ events & trail info	Parks; Tourism; IT	General Fund (One-time/ Operating)	3-5 Years
	Deploy Mobile Business Resource Van (SBDC) for rural pop-ups	ADP; PRCC; USM; WCU; Industry	General Fund (One-time/ Operating); SBA; EDA	3-5 Years
3.6 Support Small-Business Growth in Underserved Communities				

Establish micro-loan fund (CDFI partner)	ADP; PRCC; USM; WCU; Industry	General Fund (One-time/Operating); CDFI; USDA	3-5 Years
Quarterly rural business-skills clinics at community halls	ADP; PRCC; USM; WCU; Industry	General Fund (One-time/Operating); CDFI; USDA	1-2 years
Coordinate broadband build-out zones w/ rural commercial clusters	ISPs; Planning; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (One-time/Operating); NTIA; USDA	3-5 Years
Launch annual Forrest County Heritage Festival rotating towns	Parks; Tourism	General Fund (One-time/Operating)	1-2 years
Mini-grants for façade improvements & public art	Parks; Tourism; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (One-time/Operating)	1-2 years
Community-led mural program celebrating history	Parks; Tourism; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (One-time/Operating)	3-5 Years
Pilot “tactical urbanism” streetscape kits for main streets	Parks; Tourism	General Fund (One-time/Operating)	1-2 years

3.7 Promote Placemaking & Cultural Events

Goal 4: Connectivity and Accessibility

Objective	Key Action Item	Lead Entity + Partners	Resources / Funding Path	Priority
4.1 Integrated Transportation Network	Adopt county-wide roadway-design policy linked to Place-Type framework	Planning; Road; Board of Supervisors; MDOT	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Prioritize suburban corridors for shoulder widening, ADA sidewalks & striped bike lanes	Planning; Road; Board of Supervisors; MDOT	General Fund (Operating/one-time); MDOT	1-2 years
	Add paved shoulders / bike lanes when priority corridors are resurfaced	Planning; Road; Board of Supervisors; MDOT	General Fund (Operating)	Ongoing
	Update subdivision / site-plan checklists (ROW dedication, ped/bike links, stubs)	Planning	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Partner with schools on Safe Routes improvements; coordinate with “Safe Routes & Shoulders” program	Planning; School Districts; Board of Supervisors; MPO	General Fund (Operating/one-time); MDOT	3-5 years
4.2 Rural Mobility Plan	Form Rural Mobility Working Group; draft long-range plan & key job-center routes	Planning; Board of Supervisors; MPO; Nonprofits; MDOT	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Pilot on-demand micro-transit; 12-month evaluation	Planning; Board of Supervisors; MPO; Nonprofits; MDOT	General Fund (Operating/one-time); MDOT	3-5 years
	Map rural employment clusters & design flexible “flag-stop” routes; integrate in trip-planner app	Planning(GIS); Board of Supervisors; MPO; Nonprofits; MDOT	General Fund (Operating/one-time); MDOT	1-2 years
4.3 Trail Connectivity Master Plan	Pursue FTA Rural Transit & local-match funds to sustain operations	Board of Supervisors; MDOT	General Fund (Operating/one-time); MDOT	Ongoing
	Commission county-wide Trail Connectivity Master Plan (link Longleaf Trace, communities)	Planning; Parks; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/one-time)	1-2 years
	Secure easements / rail-banked corridors for new multi-use spurs	Planning; Parks; Land Trust; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/one-time); LWCF; RTP	3-5 years

4.4 Broadband Expansion & Digital Equity

Design “Trail Town” gateways (parking, restrooms, way-finding) at Brooklyn & Hwy 98	Planning; Parks; Land Trust	General Fund (Operating/one-time); LWCF; RTP	3-5 years
Apply for RTP, LWCF, MDOT TAP; schedule phased engineering & construction	Planning(Grants); Parks; Land Trust	General Fund (Operating/one-time); LWCF; RTP	3-5 years
Establish Forrest Broadband Task Force	Board of Supervisors; Schools; ISPs	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
Complete county-wide broadband coverage & speed map; ID underserved blocks	Task Force; Planning(GIS)	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
Negotiate PPP MOUs with last-mile providers; pursue funds & local match for trunk-fiber	Task Force; Planning(Grants)	General Fund (Operating/one-time); NTIA; USDA	3-5 years
Launch Digital Inclusion Initiative (device lending, skills workshops, Wi-Fi hotspots)	Task Force	General Fund (Operating/one-time)	1-2 years

4.5 Eagle One Interchange

Initiate feasibility and traffic studies to establish interchange justification and design options	Board of Supervisors; MDOT, MPO	General Fund, MPO, MDOT	Immediate
Conduct engineering, environmental review, and right-of-way acquisition in coordination with MDOT	Board of Supervisors; MDOT, MPO	General Fund, MPO, MDOT	Immediate
Secure construction funding from a mix of federal discretionary grants, state appropriations, and intergovernmental resources	Board of Supervisors; MDOT, MPO	General Fund, MPO, MDOT	1-2 years

Construct interchange and integrate supporting local road network improvements (east-west connectors, frontage roads)

MDOT

General Fund, MPO, MDOT

1-2 years

Goal 5: Community Facilities and Quality of Life

Objective	Key Action Item	Lead Entity + Partners	Resources / Funding Path	Priority
5.1 Parks, Recreation & Community Facilities	Map park / recreation gaps county-wide & acquire neighborhood-park sites in rural hubs	Planning; Parks	General Fund (Operating/One-time); LWCF; RTP	1-2 years
	Add playgrounds, restrooms & ADA loops at community centers; adopt 10-yr maintenance schedule	Parks; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/One-time); LWCF; RTP	3-5 years
	Connect new multi-use trail links from new parks to Longleaf Trace & school clusters	Parks; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/One-time); LWCF; RTP	3-5 years
5.2 Parks & Recreation Master Plan	Hire consultant team & launch public surveys / charrettes	Parks; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (One-time)	1-2 years
	Set LOS standards & 5-yr CIP for park acreage, trails & programs	Parks; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (One-time)	3-5 years
5.3 County Parks Dept. / Interlocal Partnership	Draft interlocal agreement & governance charter (Supervisors + cities)	Parks; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Launch pilot county-wide youth-sports league	Parks; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating)	3-5 years
	Hire / assign full-time Parks & Recreation Director	Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
5.4 Health & Public-Safety Services Access	Schedule mobile health-clinic rotation at rural centers; pursue HRSA grants	PRCC; USM; WCU; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/One-time); HRSA	1-2 years

5.5 Healthy-Living Initiatives	Co-locate dental / behavioral-health suites in new public-safety buildings	PRCC; USM; WCU; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/ One-time); USDA	3-5 years
	Host bi-annual “Health + Safety Fairs” with screenings & CPR training	PRCC; USM; WCU; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating); Sponsorships	1-2 years
	Launch Healthy Homes rehab / hazard-abatement program	PRCC; USM; WCU; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/ One-time); Sponsorships	1-2 years
	Partner with schools on nutrition & after-school fitness classes	PRCC; USM; WCU; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/ One-time); Sponsorships	1-2 years
	Create community gardens & farmers-markets at centers	Parks; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/ One-time); Sponsorships	3-5 years
5.6 Southern Service Satellite Facilities	Select / renovate Brooklyn building for sheriff sub-station, tax/tag office, tele-health room	Board of Supervisors; Sheriff; Tax Collector	General Fund (Operating/ One-time); USDA	3-5 years
5.7 Fire-Protection Staffing Capacity	Hire 6 FTE firefighters over 3 yrs; add stipends & tuition aid for volunteers	Board of Supervisors; Fire Coordinator	General Fund (Operating)	3-5 years
	Conduct quarterly in-county Fire Academy trainings	Board of Supervisors; Fire Coordinator	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
5.8 County-wide Fire-Protection System	Apply annually for FEMA AFG PPE / apparatus grants	Board of Supervisors; Fire Coordinator	General Fund (Operating)	Ongoing
	Form chiefs’ working group for consolidation & shared purchasing	Fire Working Group	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Publish apparatus-replacement schedule & joint procurement plan	Fire Working Group	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Design central Fire/EMS training campus (burn tower, classrooms)	Fire Working Group; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/ One-time); USDA	3-5 years
5.9 New Fire Stations (growth areas)	Acquire sites & build stations—Rawls Springs, Evelyn Gandy, Eagle One	Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/ One-time); USDA	5+ Years

5.10 Centralized 911 Dispatch	Coordinate hydrant extensions	Water Assoc.; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/One-time); USDA	5+ Years
	Procure radio-integration & renovate EOC wing for unified dispatch	EMA; IT; Sheriff; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/One-time); FEMA	1-2 years
	Execute interlocal agreements to join dispatch systems	EMA; Sheriff; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating)	3-5 years
	Cross-train telecommunicators for multi-agency routing	EMA	General Fund (Operating)	3-5 years
5.11 Sheriff's Facilities Upgrade	Complete space-needs study for admin / investigation / detention	Sheriff; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/One-time)	1-2 years
	Plan justice-complex expansion near US 49 (evidence vault, interview rooms)	Sheriff; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/One-time)	3-5 years
	Pursue financing for justice complex expansion	Sheriff; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (One-time)	5+ Years
	Adopt annual staffing analysis using FBI workload metrics	Sheriff	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
5.12 Law-Enforcement Staffing & Equipment Review	Implement step-pay plan & tuition reimbursement	Sheriff; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
	Replace patrol vehicles & radios on regular cycle	Sheriff; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating)	3-5 years
	Draft county-wide Emergency Operations Protocol	EMA; Sheriff; Fire	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years
5.13 Inter-agency Coordination Protocols	Hold monthly command-staff roundtables & annual full-scale exercise	EMA; All Agencies	General Fund (Operating)	Ongoing
	Upgrade arena systems, conference space, and site infrastructure to improve functionality, safety, and visitor experience, including lighting, sound, climate control, restrooms, parking, traffic circulation, and RV park utilities.	Multipurpose Center; Board of Supervisors; County Maintenance; Tourism/Economic Development	General Fund (Capital/One-time); Tourism Revenues; Event Revenue	1-2 years

5.15 Modernize Community Centers	Develop a targeted recruitment and marketing program to attract regional and multi-day events such as agricultural shows, tournaments, expos, and entertainment events, and establish partnerships with tourism organizations and event promoters to increase year-round utilization.	Multipurpose Center; Board of Supervisors; County Maintenance; Tourism/Economic Development	General Fund (Capital/One-time); Tourism Revenues; Event Revenue	1-2 years
	Extend gig-speed fiber, Wi-Fi & security cameras to all 14 centers	Parks; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/One-time); NTIA; USDA	3-5 years
	Launch evening adult-education & coding clubs with USM / PRCC	Parks; USM; PRCC	General Fund (Operating/One-time); Sponsorship; WIOA	1-2 years
	Expand / relocate Central Shop & upgrade 5 district barns (broadband, secure storage, equipment refresh)	Road Dept.; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/One-time)	5+ Years
5.16 Road Dept. Facilities & Fleet Support	Plan new Juvenile Detention Centre (site, design, funding)	Sheriff; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/One-time)	5+ Years
	Explore regional mental-health facility at Purvis Armory; seek MS DMH support	Sheriff; Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/One-time)	5+ Years
5.17 Juvenile Detention & Mental-Health Facilities	Start multi-year program: space analyses, e-records, security & ADA upgrades	Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating/One-time)	1-2 years
	Conduct space analyses every five years & life-cycle maintenance plans	Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating)	3-5 Years
Goal 6: Plan Governance and Engagement				
Objective	Key Action Item	Lead Entity + Partners	Resources / Funding Path	Priority
6.1 Planning & Development Capacity	Hire / assign full-time GIS/Planner	Board of Supervisors	General Fund (Operating)	1-2 years

6.2 Annual “State of the Plan” Report

Hire/assign full-time Code Enforcement staff
 Hire/assign full-time grant writer/manager

Board of Supervisors
 Board of Supervisors

General Fund (Operating)
 General Fund (Operating)

1-2 years
 3-5 Years

Develop KPIs for each goal (e.g., miles of broadband built)

Board of Supervisors;
 Dept. Heads

General Fund (Operating)

1-2 years

Compile illustrated annual report & present at broadcast public meeting each spring

Planning; Dept. Heads

General Fund (Operating)

Ongoing

6.3 Online Public Portal

Scan & upload ordinances, minutes, permits to cloud repository w/ keyword search

Board of Supervisors;
 IT

General Fund (Operating)

1-2 years

Launch “Docs & Data” web portal w/ open-data downloads

Board of Supervisors;
 IT

General Fund (Operating/
 One-time)

1-2 years

Enable e-notification subscriptions for agenda packets & new regs

Board of Supervisors;
 IT

General Fund (Operating/
 One-time)

1-2 years

Adopt digital records-retention & back-up policy; quarterly audits

Board of Supervisors;
 IT

General Fund (Operating)

1-2 years

Record & digitally broadcast all county public meetings

Board of Supervisors;
 IT

General Fund (Operating)

1-2 years

6.4 Human Resources Capacity and Workforce Development

Create a centralized Human Resources and Personnel Management office under the County Administrator to handle payroll, benefits, personnel policy administration, and workforce development. Adopt updated personnel policies and implement HR software for recordkeeping and reporting.

County Administrator
 / Board of Supervisors;
 Finance Department;
 Department Heads (as partners)

General Fund (Operating)

1-2 years

APPENDIX B-1: FORREST COUNTY PROFILE AND DEMOGRAPHIC CONDITIONS

Introduction

This chapter begins with a historical sketch of Forrest County, tracing its formation, milestones, and the people and events that have defined its identity. This historical perspective sets the stage for understanding the county's development and cultural significance. Next, it examines the county's population trends, highlighting growth patterns, demographic shifts, and the challenges and opportunities associated with these changes. Population data informs much of the planning process, providing the foundation for strategic decisions. Together, these elements profile a county in motion, balancing its heritage with aspirations for the future. This chapter provides the context and insights needed to understand Forrest County's unique character and potential as a vibrant and thriving community.

Historical Overview

Forrest County has a rich history rooted in its physical development, population growth, and evolving economy. Located in the Piney Woods of southern Mississippi, the Choctaw Nation initially ceded the land to the United States in the 1805 Treaty of Mount Dexter. Formed from the Second Judicial District of Perry County, Forrest County was named in honor of Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest. It officially became organized on January 6, 1908. Its county seat, Hattiesburg, founded in 1880 by Captain William H. Hardy and named for his wife, Hattie, became the "Hub City" of South Mississippi, anchoring the region's growth.

Physical Development and Settlement Growth

Forrest County's economy initially relied on timber and agriculture. By the late 19th century, communities had begun to spring up along riverbanks and timberland clearings. Communities such as Mars Hill, Monroe, and Brooklyn emerged as centers for agriculture, lumbering, and trade. Meanwhile, other settlements, such as Bonhomie Junction, Currie, and Chancellor, developed around industries and railroads. These towns collectively contributed to the growth of Forrest County's population and settlement patterns.

The arrival of the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad in the late 19th century catalyzed urbanization, establishing Hattiesburg as a vital rail hub connecting southern Mississippi to major markets. Hattiesburg's connections to four major railroads positioned it as a gateway to commerce and trade, spurring the growth of surrounding communities like McCallum, Rawls Springs, and Eatonville. The vast yellow pine

forests attracted lumber companies in the early 20th century, which established sawmills and logging camps in communities such as Maxie, Epps, and Dragon.

By 1910, the county's population had reached 20,722. Hattiesburg's rapid growth as a center of commerce and industry set the tone for the county's development. By the 1930s, the timber industry's prominence began to wane, giving rise to more diversified economic activities, including agriculture and small-scale manufacturing. By 1930, Forrest County's population had grown to 30,115, and Hattiesburg alone accounted for 13,270 residents. Notably, Forrest County was one of only five counties in Mississippi during this time where urban dwellers outnumbered rural residents. The county's workforce consisted of 2,244 industrial workers, compared to just 1,026 farm owners and tenants, reflecting a shift in employment from agriculture to non-agricultural industries. Forrest County also became a leader in retail, banking, and professional services. By 1960, it boasted Mississippi's largest retail workforce and ranked among the state's top counties in nonagricultural employment, retail sales, and per capita income. In the 1960s, the chemical manufacturing industry surpassed retail as its largest sector.

Cultural and Educational Foundations

Education was central to Forrest County's urbanization. Mississippi Normal College (now the University of Southern Mississippi) was founded in Hattiesburg in 1910, followed by Mississippi Woman's College (now William Carey University) in 1911. These institutions attracted students from across the state, establishing Hattiesburg as a cultural and intellectual hub in southern Mississippi. By 1960, Forrest County was one of only three counties in the state where the median level of schooling exceeded 11 years, a testament to its advanced educational infrastructure.

Forrest County's contributions to the civil rights movement were profound, with leaders such as Vernon Dahmer, Victoria Gray Adams, Clyde Kennard, and the Ladner sisters spearheading efforts for equality and voter registration. While activities were met with resistance and tragedy, they underscored the county's commitment to progress and justice.

Modern Identity

By the mid-20th century, Forrest County had evolved into a vibrant and dynamic region. Hattiesburg's designation as the "Hub City" symbolized its role as a gateway to South Mississippi. Communities across the county continued to adapt to economic and social changes, leveraging their historical roots to shape future development. By 2020, Forrest County's population had grown to 78,158, with a demographic shift reflecting an increasing African American and Latino presence alongside its predominantly white population. The county remains a leader in education, commerce, and cultural innovation, building on its historical foundations while embracing modern challenges and opportunities.

Future Opportunities- Eagle One

Forrest and Lamar counties in Mississippi have established a robust economic development partnership to enhance regional growth and attract large-scale industrial investments. A central element of this collaboration is the **Eagle One Mega Site**, a 2,155-acre industrial site strategically located just south of

Hattiesburg, spanning both counties. This site offers significant advantages, including three miles of frontage on Interstate 59 and one mile on Highway 11, making it highly accessible for potential industrial tenants.

The **Area Development Partnership (ADP)**, the regional chamber of commerce and economic development organization, plays a pivotal role in this collaboration. The ADP's roots date back to 1906, when it was founded as the Commercial Club of Hattiesburg, and later became the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce in 1933. A significant transformation occurred in 1992 when the Hattiesburg Chamber merged with the Forrest County Development Foundation, forming the ADP. This merger unified resources to enhance economic growth and quality of life in Greater Hattiesburg. In 2001, the ADP expanded its regional focus by merging with the Lamar County Chamber of Commerce, further solidifying the collaborative efforts between Forrest and Lamar counties. This merger strengthened regionalism with unified marketing for economic development, thereby enhancing its appeal to potential investors.

The partnership has secured substantial funding to develop the Eagle One Mega Site. In early 2023, the Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) awarded the site \$9.9 million in grant funding, which facilitated infrastructure improvements and enhanced site readiness. Additionally, in December 2023, Governor Tate Reeves announced nearly \$360,000 to strengthen wastewater capacity, further boosting its attractiveness to large industrial prospects.

This collaborative approach has positioned the Hattiesburg area, encompassing both Forrest and Lamar counties, as a competitive destination for industrial development, leveraging shared resources and strategic planning to drive economic growth in the region.

SWOT Analysis: Forrest County, Mississippi

The SWOT analysis provides a candid assessment of Forrest County's current conditions and future outlook by identifying its internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as the external opportunities and threats that influence long-term success. Developed through public engagement, stakeholder interviews, and technical review, this analysis captures the key factors shaping growth, investment, and service delivery across the county. It serves as a foundation for strategic decision-making by highlighting what Forrest County does well, where it faces challenges, what emerging trends can be leveraged, and what risks must be addressed to ensure a resilient and prosperous future.

Strengths

- **STRATEGIC LOCATION AND TRANSPORTATION:** At the intersection of major highways (I-59, U.S. 49, U.S. 11, U.S. 98) and rail lines, connecting Hattiesburg to key regional markets. Ongoing plans for road extensions to enhance connectivity, including the Eagle One Mega Site.
- **DIVERSE ECONOMY:** Anchored by healthcare, education (University of Southern Mississippi, Pearl River Community College, William Carey University), military (Camp Shelby), and manufacturing sectors.

- **RECREATIONAL AND NATURAL ASSETS:** Black Creek Scenic River, De Soto National Forest, Longleaf Trace, and local parks offer outdoor recreation and tourism potential. Community centers in each district and new recreation programming are improving quality of life.
- **EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE:** High percentage of college graduates and strong educational institutions support workforce development.
- **EAGLE ONE MEGA SITE:** A premier industrial development location, offering over 2,200 acres and substantial infrastructure capacity.
- **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:** Comprehensive public input was collected for the county's comprehensive plan through multiple community meetings.
- **CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE:** Hattiesburg's downtown, Civil Rights history, and military museums enhance the county's identity.

Weaknesses

- **NATURAL HAZARD RISKS:** Prone to hurricanes, tornadoes (e.g., EF-3 tornado in 2017), flooding, and wildfire risks.
- **AGING AND INCOMPLETE INFRASTRUCTURE:** Aging roads, water, sewer, and drainage systems, with more limited service in rural areas. Deferred maintenance of drainage, county buildings, and recreational facilities.
- **LIMITED COUNTY-WIDE REGULATORY TOOLS:** Absence of a countywide zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and building codes impedes orderly development.
- **SERVICE AND ACCESS GAPS:** Rural areas lack consistent public safety presence, centralized 911 dispatch, sufficient hydrant infrastructure, and affordable housing.
- **ECONOMIC DISPARITIES:** High poverty rates, economic divides within urban and rural areas.
- **VULNERABLE POPULATIONS:** The aging population and those with limited mobility have limited transportation options.
- **SERVICE GAPS:** Lack of consolidated county water and sewer system, limited recreational staffing and support, insufficient public safety presence in rural areas, and underfunded schools.

Opportunities

- **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL:** Leverage Eagle One Mega Site, enhanced transportation corridors, and industrial parks to attract new industries and expand the local economy.
- **Strategic Infrastructure Expansion:** Extend sewer and water capacity, upgrade road connections (including to I-59, U.S. 49, and U.S. 98), and modernize communication systems for emergency response and daily needs.
- **RECREATION, TOURISM, AND HERITAGE:** Expand and enhance marketing of recreational and cultural assets, expand trail systems, and capitalize on heritage tourism (Civil Rights, Camp Shelby, De Soto National Forest).
- **TECHNOLOGICAL UPGRADES:** Implement fiber optic broadband expansion, smart grid en-

hancements, and advanced utilities to support growth and resilience.

- **COMMUNITY SERVICES AND AMENITIES:** Expand public facilities, including community centers, satellite government offices, public safety stations, and health clinics, especially in underserved southern areas. Develop satellite government offices, public safety hubs, new community centers, fire stations, and affordable housing to meet anticipated growth and equity goals.
- **EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE TRAINING:** Build on the county's educational assets, including vocational and technical training, and align programs with local economic needs. Align educational programming with industry needs, invest in technical and vocational training, and expand educational outreach to underserved areas.
- **RESILIENCE PLANNING:** Expand mitigation efforts (floodproofing, hazard awareness, conservation efforts, etc.) to reduce vulnerability and strengthen preparedness.
- **POLICY AND GOVERNANCE ENHANCEMENTS:** Update subdivision regulations, consider zoning and building codes, and explore a consolidated fire protection system and centralized dispatch to streamline services.

Threats

- **SOCIOECONOMIC CHALLENGES:** Persistent poverty, limited upward mobility, and a shortage of high-wage jobs may constrain growth and stability.
- **AGING INFRASTRUCTURE:** Without significant investment, infrastructure failures in transportation, water, sewer, and drainage systems may disrupt services and deter development.
- **EMERGENCY SERVICES VULNERABILITIES:** Limited centralized dispatch, aging equipment, and the need for new facilities (e.g., fire stations, emergency shelters, crisis stabilization units) may impact public safety and limit growth opportunities.
- **PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY GAPS:** Vulnerabilities in emergency preparedness, public health, and safety services could be exposed during major disasters.
- **LIMITED LAND USE REGULATION:** Without zoning, building codes, and coordinated land use planning, unmanaged growth could degrade natural resources, worsen hazards, and strain public services.
- **COMPETITIVE PRESSURES FROM NEIGHBORING COUNTIES:** Lamar County's proactive zoning and planning, stronger school systems, and faster growth rates may draw investment and residents away from Forrest County.

Geography, Natural Resources, and Ecology

Geographic Features

Forrest County is situated in the southeastern region of Mississippi, covering 300,160 acres (469 square miles). It lies within the Lower Coastal Plain physiographic region and the Pine Belt or Piney Woods region of Mississippi.

The Lower Coastal Plain of Mississippi is a dynamic physiographic region with its gently rolling to moderately steep topography, extensive forests, and fertile floodplains. Spanning much of southern Mississippi and extending into neighboring Gulf Coast states, the region's elevations range from sea level near the coast to over 400 feet in upland areas. Its landscape transitions from broad, flat floodplains along rivers and creeks, such as the Leaf River and Black Creek in Forrest County, to rolling uplands and ridges shaped by waterway erosion. These rivers not only define the terrain but also support rich ecosystems, creating productive floodplains and terraces. These natural lowlands store and convey floodwaters, reducing flood impacts while supporting rich ecosystems. FEMA's Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps (DIRMs) outline the 100-year and 500-year floodplains across the county, providing critical information for land use planning, floodplain management, and insurance requirements.

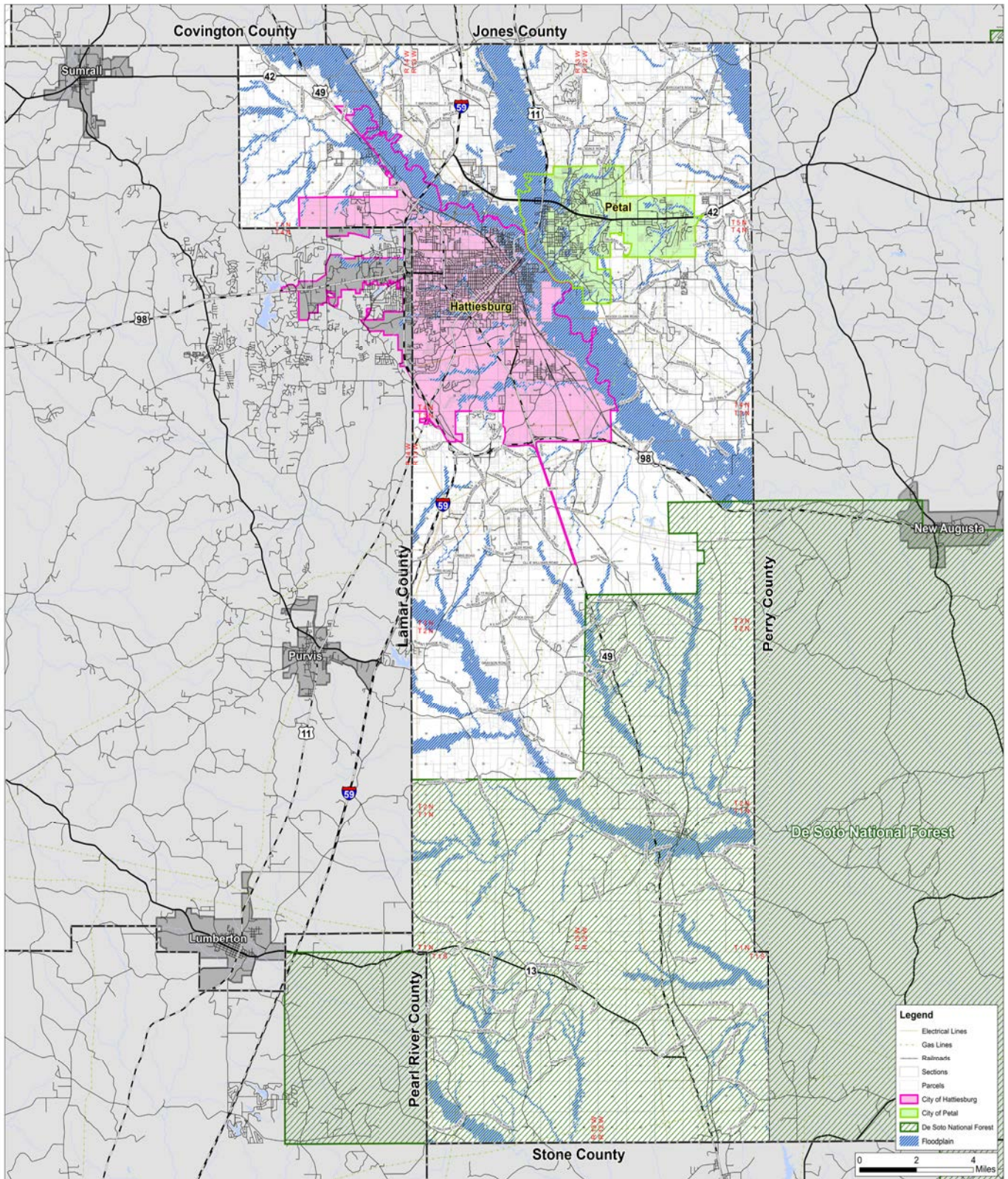
The region's natural features, including vast pine forests (longleaf, loblolly, and slash pines) and bottomland hardwoods, support a thriving forestry industry. The Lower Coastal Plain's humid subtropical climate, characterized by hot summers, mild winters, and an average annual rainfall of 50 inches, supports a diverse range of vegetation and offers numerous agricultural opportunities. Underlain by sedimentary deposits from ancient marine environments, the area's geology contributes to its rolling terrain. These natural characteristics make the Lower Coastal Plain well-suited for forestry and agriculture, though steep slopes and flood-prone areas limit certain types of development.

The Pine Belt region of Mississippi is characterized by its vast pine forests, rolling terrain, and economic history associated with the forestry and timber industries. This area overlaps significantly with the Lower Coastal Plain but has a distinct identity tied to its forested landscape and historical development. The Pine Belt's name derives from its dominant vegetation (longleaf, loblolly, and slash pines), which has historically covered much of the region. These forests have supported a robust timber and wood-products industry, shaping the region's economy and culture. While much of the original longleaf pine forest was harvested in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, managed pine forests now dominate the landscape.

Topography, Elevation, and Slope

The region's topography features gently rolling to moderately steep hills, interspersed with broad floodplains and terraces along rivers like the Leaf River, which crosses the northeastern section, and Black Creek, which flows through the county's southern half. Broad, level areas characterize the floodplains along the Leaf River and Black Creek, while the uplands feature rolling ridges and steeper slopes. Elevations generally range from about 100 feet in low-lying areas to over 400 feet in uplands. The soil and terrain are well-suited for pine forest growth, and the sandy to loamy soil provide good drainage in upland areas. The slopes in the uplands range from gentle gradients of 2-5% to more pronounced slopes exceeding 12% in some areas. These variations in topography and slope influence drainage patterns, land use, and development potential across the county.

Forrest County Comprehensive Plan - 2026



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Floodplains (DFIRM) Comprehensive Plan Forrest County, Mississippi

Source(s):
Mississippi Automated Resource
Information System (MARIS);
US Census Bureau TIGER Line Files;
Federal Emergency Management Agency
(FEMA); 2024 Forrest County Parcel Data

Note: This map is accurate for planning purposes only
Date: November 12, 2024
Revised: February 19, 2025



Climate

Forrest County has a humid subtropical climate characterized by long, hot summers influenced by moist air from the Gulf coast, and mild winters with rare cold spells that typically last only one to two days. Annual precipitation averages around 48 inches, evenly distributed throughout the year, with a slight peak during winter. Summer thunderstorms are frequent, while snowfall is rare, with most winters recording no measurable accumulation. The county's extended growing season underscores its suitability for diverse crop production. The county occasionally experiences tornadoes and the remnants of tropical storms or hurricanes, which can result in heavy rainfall over a short period, affecting land and infrastructure.

Population

Forrest County has experienced consistent population growth since its establishment, reflecting a steady and stable expansion over time. Beginning with its founding in 1908 and its first decennial population count of 20,722 in 1910, the county experienced rapid growth throughout the early 20th century, reaching 34,901 by 1940. Significant increases occurred between 1910 and 1930 when the population jumped from 21,238 to 30,115. Post-World War II growth further accelerated, with the population rising to 45,055 in 1950 and continuing to increase through the mid-century, reaching 57,849 by 1970. While growth persisted into the late 20th century, it began to slow slightly, with the population reaching 72,604 by 2000. In the early 21st century, growth rates further moderated, with the county's population increasing from 74,934 in 2010 to 78,158 in 2020. Despite the gradual slowing of population growth, Forrest County has maintained a positive trend, indicating a stable and gradually expanding community.

Forrest County's population trends reveal steady growth over the decades, with a 35.1% increase from 1970 to 2020 and a moderate 4.3% growth in the last decade. Forrest County has experienced population growth similar to that of most of its neighbors, except for Lamar County, which stands out among its adjacent counties, having grown by 322.3% over the same period. This growth is driven by rapid development and suburbanization. In contrast, Jones County grew by just 19.3% from 1970 to 2020 and saw a slight population decline (-0.8%) between 2010 and 2020, suggesting stagnation or challenges in retaining residents. Covington County and Perry County also experienced weaker long-term growth (31.0% and 27.0%, respectively) and recent population declines (-6.3% and -6.0%, respectively). Stone County, however, mirrors Forrest County's steady growth, with a 126.3% increase from 1970 to 2020 and a 3.1% growth from 2010 to 2020, though its overall population size remains significantly smaller.

When compared to other counties with major universities, such as Oktibbeha (home to Mississippi State University) and Lafayette (home to the University of Mississippi), Forrest County shows moderate growth. Oktibbeha's population increased by 80.1% from 1970 to 2020 and by 8.6% from 2010 to 2020, while Lafayette outpaced both with 130.8% long-term growth and 17.9% growth in the last decade. The presence of universities in these counties has likely driven their higher growth rates. Forrest County, home to the University of Southern Mississippi, has seen slower but stable growth. The differences highlight the varying impacts of local economies and urbanization on higher education institutions.

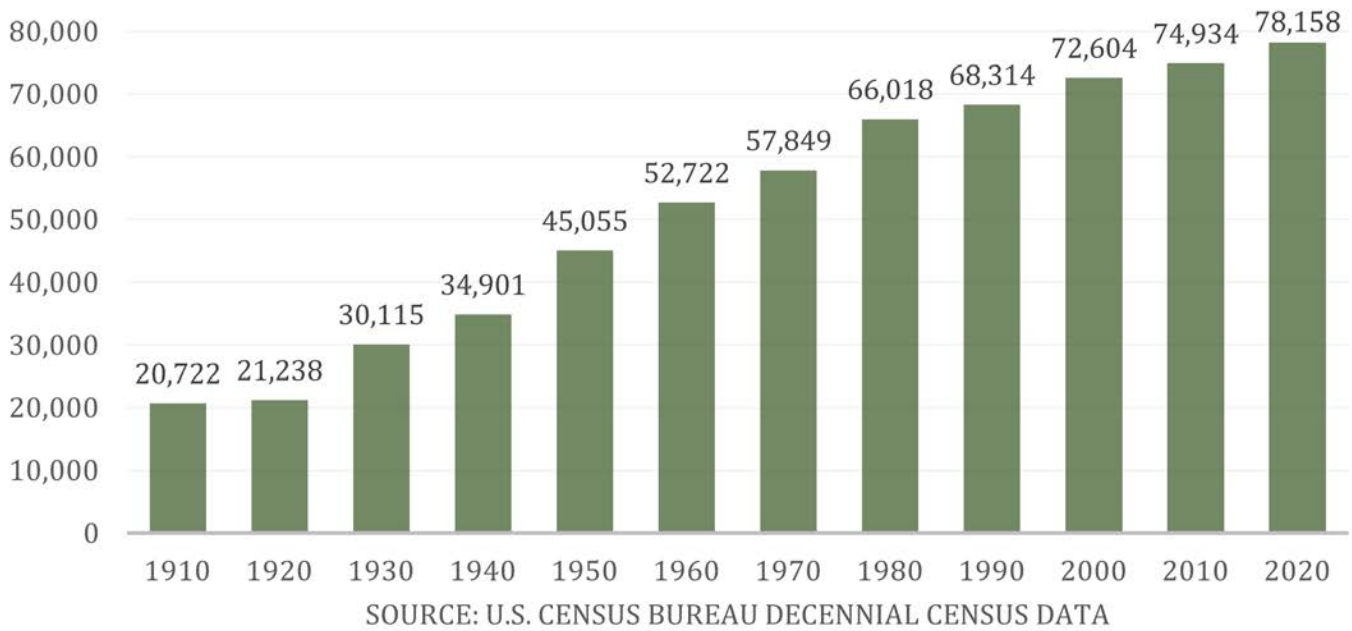
Understanding the trajectory of comparable communities can be insightful as Forrest County navigates its future. Forrest County and Lee County, both similarly sized counties in Mississippi, exhibit distinct differences in population growth patterns and economic drivers. As of 2020, Lee County had a slightly larger population of 83,343 compared to Forrest County's 78,158. Over the long term (1970–2020), Lee County experienced significant population growth of 80.6%, more than double the 35.1% growth of Forrest County during the same period. However, recent growth trends (2010–2020) show that Lee County's growth has plateaued at just 0.5%, while Forrest County continues to grow at a moderate rate of 4.3%.

Economically, the two counties differ in their primary drivers. Forrest County's growth is anchored by the University of Southern Mississippi, which fosters a vibrant educational, cultural, and research environment. Lee County's economy has historically been driven by manufacturing and its role as a regional commercial hub centered around the city of Tupelo. Recent economic development trends in Lee County reflect diversification into healthcare, logistics, and technology sectors, alongside continued retail growth and revitalization efforts in Tupelo's downtown area. Although its recent population growth has slowed, these initiatives have bolstered Lee County's position as a regional economic leader.

The comparison between Forrest County and Lee County becomes particularly meaningful considering Forrest County's participation in the Eagle One Mega Site. Lee County's historical success in economic development, marked by significant investments in industrial parks and the attraction of large-scale industries such as the Toyota manufacturing plant, underscores the transformative impact of strategic site development. These efforts positioned Lee County as a regional economic leader and a magnet for industrial and commercial growth. While both counties have comparable population sizes, Lee County's historical growth trajectory has been stronger, reflecting its industrial and commercial appeal. These differences highlight how the evolving economic bases influence the development of two similarly sized Mississippi counties.

Forrest County's development of the Eagle One Mega Site indicates a similar trajectory, signaling its aspiration to strengthen its economic base and compete on an international scale. By leveraging its strategic location and regional partnerships, Forrest County demonstrates an increasing commitment to large-scale economic development that can generate substantial employment opportunities, diversify its economy, and enhance its competitiveness.

The parallels between Lee County's historical investments and Forrest County's current efforts suggest that Forrest County is poised for significant future growth. The development of Eagle One not only enhances Forrest County's ability to attract major industrial projects but also positions it as a regional hub for innovation and economic expansion. This shift reflects a forward-thinking approach to economic development, one that capitalizes on infrastructure, regional collaboration, and strategic planning to secure long-term prosperity for the county and its residents. It also foretells significant opportunities for future population growth in Forrest County, as the benefits of regional economic development investments accrue over the next several decades.



Population Change and Migration Trends in Forrest County

Forrest County's population increased by 3,224 residents between 2010 and 2020, reaching a total of 78,158. This growth was driven almost entirely by natural increase, with 10,662 births and 7,473 deaths during the decade, resulting in a net gain of 3,189 residents, as births exceeded deaths. However, the impact of migration was minimal, with only 35 additional residents attributed to net in-migration over the same period.

The county's reliance on natural increase as the primary driver of population growth reflects a stable birth rate and an aging population, for which deaths are increasing but not yet outpacing births. The low net migration figure suggests that while some new residents have moved to the county, the out-migration of existing residents offsets these gains. This trend may indicate challenges in workforce retention, job availability, or housing affordability, factors that can influence residents' decisions to relocate.

The implications of these trends are significant for long-term planning and economic development. The continued presence of young families and working-age adults, as reflected in birth rates, supports the need for quality education, childcare services, and family-friendly amenities. At the same time, the county's ability to attract and retain residents through employment opportunities, housing options, and infrastructure investments will be critical in ensuring sustained growth. Addressing factors that contribute to low in-migration, such as economic diversification, housing availability, and workforce development, will be key priorities in shaping Forrest County's future population trends.

Demographic Trends in Forrest County

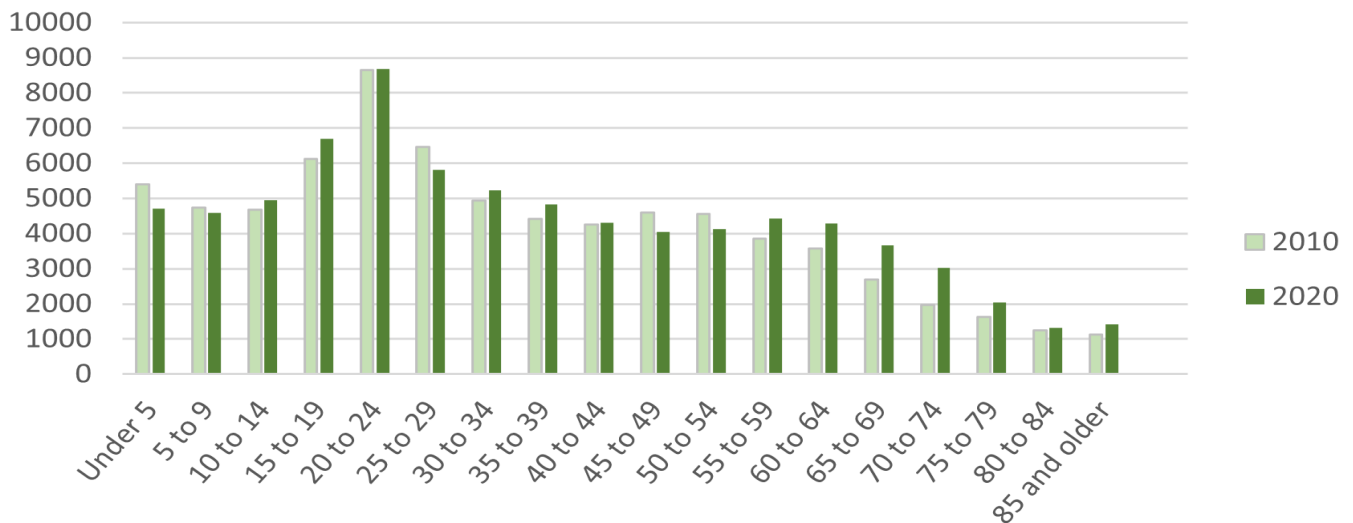
Forrest County has experienced steady demographic changes over the past decade, with shifts in age distribution and racial composition reflecting broader trends in regional development, aging popula-

tions, and increasing diversity. The county's total population grew by 4.3% from 74,934 in 2010 to 78,158 in 2020, indicating continued, albeit modest, expansion.

Age Distribution

The county's age distribution reveals an aging population alongside fluctuations in younger cohorts. The under-5 and 5-to-9-year-old age groups declined slightly, reflecting a potential decrease in birth rates or outmigration of young families. However, the number of school-age children in the 10-to-14 and 15-to-19 age brackets increased, suggesting some stability in younger populations.

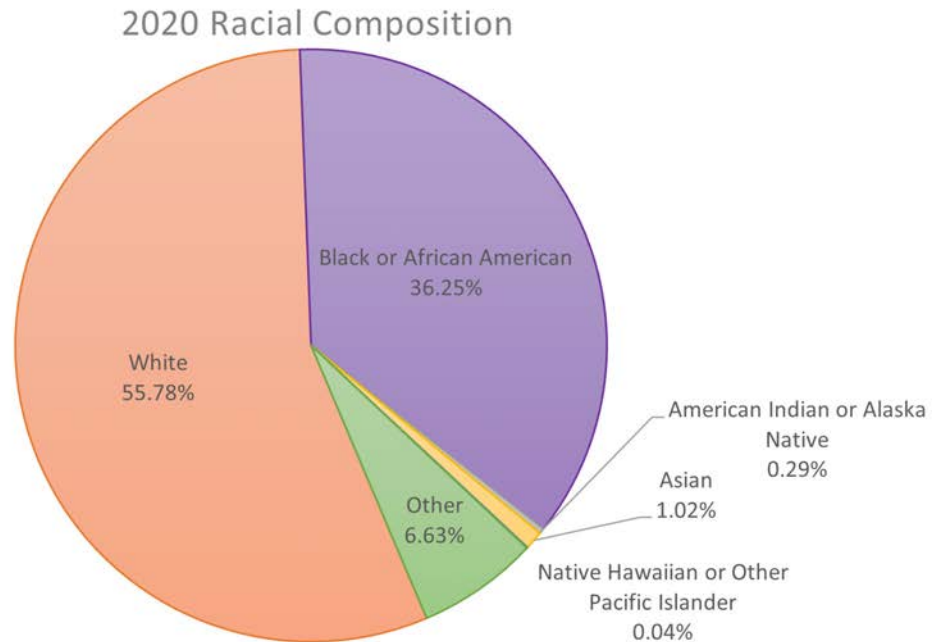
The 20-to-24 age group, which includes many college-age residents attending the University of Southern Mississippi, remained relatively stable at around 8,689 in 2020. However, the 25-to-29 cohort experienced a decline, potentially reflecting post-graduation migration patterns as young professionals seek employment opportunities elsewhere.



In contrast, the 30-to-39-year-old cohorts saw moderate growth, while middle-aged groups, notably those aged 45 to 54, declined, which is consistent with aging trends and generational shifts. Notably, the population aged 55 and older saw significant increases, particularly among those aged 60 to 74, reinforcing the trend of an aging community. The number of residents aged 85 and older also increased by nearly 25%, indicating a rise in longevity and a growing demand for senior services.

Racial and Ethnic Composition

Forrest County continues to diversify, with shifts in racial and ethnic demographics shaping the community's cultural and social fabric. The White population declined slightly, decreasing from 59.7% in 2010 to 55.8% in 2020, while the Black or African American population maintained a steady share of 36.2% of the total population.



The most significant population growth occurred in the “Other” racial category, which more than doubled, increasing by 116% from 2,398 in 2010 to 5,179 in 2020. This suggests a rise in individuals identifying as multiracial or from ethnic backgrounds not traditionally categorized. The Asian population also grew notably, increasing from 498 to 796 residents. Meanwhile, the American Indian or Alaska Native population increased by 22.7%, though it remains a small portion of the total. Conversely, the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander population has only a small numeric presence in the community and declined between 2010 and 2020.

Forrest County	2010		2020		Percent Change
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Total Population	74,934		78,158		4.3%
White	44,726	59.7%	43,597	55.8%	-2.5%
Black or African American	27,082	36.1%	28,330	36.2%	4.6%
American Indian or Alaska Native	185	0.2%	227	0.3%	22.7%
Asian	498	0.7%	796	1.0%	0.0%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	45	0.1%	29	0.0%	0.0%
Other	2,398	3.2%	5,179	6.6%	116.0%

U.S. Census Bureau 2020 & 2010 Decennial Census Data (P1)

Implications for Future Planning

Forrest County's shifting demographics present both opportunities and challenges. The aging population underscores the need for expanded healthcare services, senior housing, and workforce succession planning. The stable but evolving racial composition suggests a growing need for inclusive policies, culturally relevant services, and economic development policies that embrace diversity. Additionally, the declining young adult population could signal a need for workforce retention initiatives, job creation, and housing strategies to encourage graduates and young professionals to remain in the area.

Overall, these demographic trends provide a foundation for understanding the county's evolving needs and guiding policies to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth for the next decade. These changes highlight an increasingly diverse community, with implications for education, workforce development, and cultural engagement.

Population Projections for Forrest County

Population projections are a fundamental tool in comprehensive planning, allowing decision-makers to anticipate future growth and infrastructure needs. Three methods are commonly used for population projections are the Arithmetic, Average Rate, and Linear methods. Each method provides different insights and assumptions about growth patterns, and their combined analysis helps estimate future trends for Forrest County.

Arithmetic Projection

This method calculates the future population by applying the average numerical increase from past decades to future years. The projection assumes a consistent rate of growth based on historical trends, adding a fixed number of residents each decade. According to this method, Forrest County's population is expected to reach 82,220 by 2030, 86,282 by 2040, and 90,343 by 2050.

Average Rate Projection

This method calculates the percentage rate of growth per decade and applies the average rate to estimate future population. It accounts for variations in growth rates over time rather than assuming a fixed numerical increase. Based on this method, Forrest County's population is projected to be 83,065 by 2030, 88,280 by 2040, and 93,822 by 2050.

2020 Population	78,158
2010 Population	74,934
Difference	3,224
Total births (2010-2019)	10,662
Total deaths (2010-2019)	7,473
Growth due to natural increase (births minus deaths)	3,189
Growth due to out-migration (2010-2019)	35
U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census Data and Mississippi Department of Health - Vital Statistics	

2023 Population	78,027
2013 Population	75,991
Difference	2,036
Total births (2013-2022)	10,343
Total deaths (2013-2022)	8,239
Growth due to natural increase (births minus deaths)	2,104
Growth due to out-migration (2013-2022)	-68
U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2022 and 2013 5-Year Estimates (DP05) and Mississippi Department of Health - Statistics	



Linear Projection

The linear model assumes that the growth pattern follows a straight-line trend based on past increases, adjusting the projected numbers accordingly. This approach provides a middle-ground estimate, balancing past trends with a gradual slowdown in growth. Using this method, the county's population is expected to be 82,905 by 2030, 86,693 by 2040, and 90,481 by 2050.

Evaluating the Projections and Providing a Reasonable Estimate

Each method provides similar, though slightly varied, estimates for Forrest County's future population. The arithmetic projection assumes a steady increase, the average rate model accounts for variable growth rates, and the linear projection smooths out historical fluctuations. Given recent trends that include moderate growth driven by natural increase with minimal in-migration, the most reasonable estimate for Forrest County's population in the next 25 years (by 2050) falls between 90,000 and 95,000 residents. A projection of 92,500 by 2050 is a reasonable midpoint, acknowledging continued but moderate growth.

Importance and Limitations of Population Projections in Comprehensive Planning

Population projections are crucial for land use planning, infrastructure development, transportation improvements, and the allocation of public services. These forecasts help officials plan for schools, utilities, housing, and economic growth by anticipating future demand.

However, projections have limitations. They rely on historical trends and assume that past growth patterns will continue, which may not always be the case. External factors, such as economic shifts, policy changes, disasters, or the emergence of new industries, can significantly alter population trends. Migration patterns, often difficult to predict, can change due to factors like job opportunities, housing affordability, or broader demographic trends.

Forrest County's future growth will depend on economic development efforts, housing availability, and the ability to retain and attract new residents. While projections provide a framework for planning, they must be revisited periodically and adjusted based on real-world conditions. Nevertheless, changing conditions that lead to decreases in out-migration and higher retention will invariably cause much higher growth rates in Forrest County. Stated differently, the success of the comprehensive plan will lead to higher population growth as more people find Forrest County an attractive place to live and work.

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APPENDIX B-2: FORREST COUNTY ECONOMIC PROFILE

Introduction

A strong and resilient economy is central to Forrest County's prosperity and quality of life. Policies that foster job creation, increase household income, and promote sustainable development in both urban centers and rural communities require an understanding of the county's economic profile. This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of Forrest County's economic conditions, focusing on income trends, educational attainment, labor force characteristics, commuting patterns, industry composition, and occupational structure.

The data and insights in this chapter support economic development policies that respond to current realities while anticipating future opportunities. Forrest County can better align workforce development, infrastructure investments, and land use policies with a vision for inclusive growth by identifying areas of economic strength and recognizing barriers to upward mobility. Special attention is given to Forrest County's role as a hub for education, healthcare, and employment. The findings also inform future land use and infrastructure planning, ensuring that Forrest County's economic policies are grounded in both data and the aspirations of its people.

Median income and earnings

Between 2013 and 2023, Forrest County experienced modest but meaningful income growth. The median household income rose from \$36,726 to \$52,821. When adjusted for inflation, this represents a real income gain of \$4,439, or 9.2%, over the decade. The number of households also increased by 6.8%, reflecting overall population growth and economic stability. As incomes rose, the distribution of earnings shifted significantly, with a decline in extreme poverty and an increase in households with higher incomes. Poverty rates also improved, with fewer families and individuals living below the poverty line.

Forrest County's income distribution shifted noticeably over the past decade, reflecting a general upward trend in household earnings. The number of households earning less than \$10,000 dropped by nearly 46.5%, indicating a significant reduction in extreme poverty. Households in the mid-range income brackets (\$10,000 to \$34,999) also declined, suggesting some movement into higher income tiers. Meanwhile, the number of households earning between \$75,000 and \$99,999 grew by over 50%, and those earning more than \$100,000 nearly doubled, increasing by 93.8% from 3,255 to 6,309. These shifts indicate rising household prosperity and increased income mobility throughout the county.

Poverty rates in Forrest County have improved over the past decade, reflecting progress in economic conditions and household stability. The percentage of families living below the poverty level declined from 21.9% to 16.5%, while the share of all individuals in poverty fell from 27.6% to 21.5%. These reductions suggest that more residents are achieving economic security and that efforts to support income growth and reduce hardship are making a measurable impact. Relatively high poverty still exists in Forrest County, however, pointing to a critical need for workforce and economic development.

Forrest County	2013		2023		Change	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Number of Households	27,822		29,722		1,900	6.8%
Less than \$10,000	3,895	14.0%	2,082	7.0%	-1,813	-46.5%
\$10,000-\$14,999	2,532	9.1%	2,309	7.8%	-223	-8.8%
\$15,000-\$19,999	2,114	7.6%	1,800	6.1%	-314	-14.9%
\$20,000-\$24,999	1,864	6.7%	1,864	6.3%	0	0.0%
\$25,000-\$34,999	3,088	11.1%	2,459	8.3%	-629	-20.4%
\$35,000-\$49,999	3,895	14.0%	3,925	13.2%	30	0.8%
\$50,000-\$74,999	4,452	16.0%	5,029	16.9%	577	13.0%
\$75,000-\$99,999	2,727	9.8%	4,138	13.9%	1,411	51.8%
Over \$100,000	3,255	11.7%	6,309	21.2%	3,054	93.8%
Median Income	\$36,726		\$52,821		\$16,095 43.8%	
Below Poverty Level						
Families		21.9%		16.5%		
All People		27.6%		21.5%		

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 and 2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (S2502, S1701 and S1702)

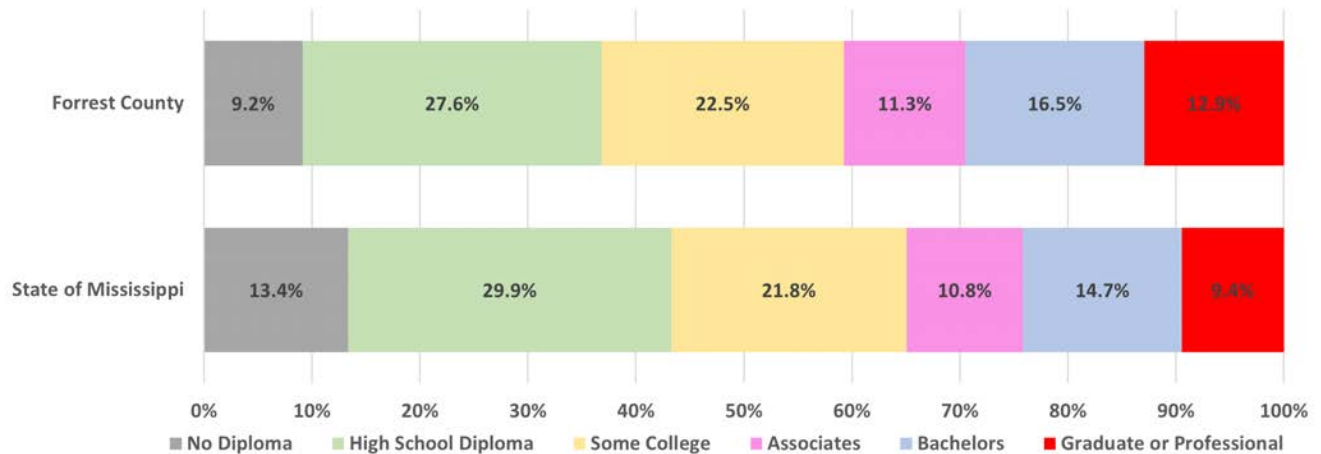
Educational attainment

Forrest County maintains a relatively strong educational profile, especially when compared to statewide averages in Mississippi. A smaller share of residents, at just 9.2%, lack a high school diploma, which is significantly below the state average of 13.4%. This indicates strong local support for basic education and higher graduation rates. Meanwhile, 27.6% of residents report a high school diploma as their highest level of education, slightly below the state's 29.9%. This suggests a modestly higher rate of residents pursuing education beyond high school.

About 22.5% of residents have attended some college without earning a degree, closely mirroring the state's figure of 21.8%, which reflects both challenges in degree completion and a pool of partially trained individuals. Associate degrees are held by 11.3% of the population, similar to the state's 10.8%, indicating consistent engagement with two-year college programs.

More notably, Forrest County exceeds the state average in higher education attainment. Approximately 16.5% of residents have earned a bachelor's degree, compared to 14.7% statewide, and 12.9% hold graduate or professional degrees, well above the state average of 9.4%. These figures underscore the significant impact of local institutions, such as the University of Southern Mississippi and William Carey University, and indicate a well-educated workforce with a solid foundation for economic growth.

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Civilian Labor Force

Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2019-2023 5-Year Estimates, Forrest County's labor force included a total of 62,165 residents aged 16 and over, reflecting the size of the working-age population. Of this group, 63.1% were in the labor force, which included both employed and unemployed individuals actively seeking work. The county's unemployment rate was 6.2%, slightly higher than state and national averages, signaling potential challenges in job availability or skills alignment. The small presence of the Armed Forces (0.3%) highlights limited military employment in the local economy. Meanwhile, 36.9% of the population is not in the labor force, comprising students, retirees, homemakers, and others not actively seeking work.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS	
Population 16 years and over	62,165
In labor force	63.1%
Civilian labor force	62.8%
Employed	58.9%
Unemployed	3.9%
Armed Force	0.3%
Not in labor force	36.9%
Civilian labor force	39,043
Unemployment Rate	6.20%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2019-2023 5-Year Estimates

This snapshot underscores Forrest County's moderate labor force participation, a relatively high employment rate, and a higher-than-average unemployment rate for the period surveyed (2019-2023), indicating opportunities for workforce development, skills training, and economic diversification to support job growth and resilience.

Commuting patterns

Forrest County's workforce includes 35,981 workers aged 16 and over, who predominantly rely on personal vehicles for their daily commute. A substantial 82.0% of workers drive alone in a car, truck, or van, highlighting the county's strong automobile dependence. Carpooling is utilized by 7.3% of commuters, providing a limited alternative to solo driving.

Public transportation use is minimal, with only 0.5% of workers using transit services (excluding taxicabs). This reflects the limited public transit options in the county and suggests opportunities for expanded transit access or service enhancements. Active commuting options, such as walking (1.5%) and using other means (5.5%), which could include bicycles or informal shuttles, account for a small but notable share of commuters. The proportion of workers working from home stands at 3.1%, a figure that recent trends in remote work have almost certainly influenced.

The mean travel time to work is approximately 21.2 minutes, indicating relatively short commute times that reflect the county's compact development footprint in its northern half and limited urban congestion.

COMMUTING TO WORK	
Workers 16 years and over	35,981
Car, truck, or van -- drove alone	82.0%
Car, truck, or van -- carpoolled	7.3%
Public transportation (excluding taxicab)	0.5%
Walked	1.5%
Other means	5.5%
Worked from home	3.1%
Mean travel time to work (minutes)	21.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2019-2023 5-Year Estimates

Industry profile

Forrest County's civilian employed population includes approximately workers, distributed across a diverse range of industries. The largest employment share comes from Educational Services, Health Care, and Social Assistance, comprising 26.5% of the workforce. This underscores the county's role as a regional hub for healthcare and education, supported by major institutions such as Forrest General Hospital, the University of Southern Mississippi, and William Carey University.

Retail Trade (13.2%) and Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation, and Food Services (13.5%) represent significant employment sectors, reflecting the county's consumer-oriented economy and service-based industries. The Manufacturing sector accounts for 9.3%, providing stable employment in production and industrial roles.

Professional, Scientific, Management, Administrative, and Waste Management Services employ 8.1% of

the workforce, demonstrating a modest presence of knowledge-based and business support activities. Construction (6.5%) and Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities (5.0%) contribute to the economic mix, offering essential infrastructure and logistics capabilities.

Smaller shares are seen in Finance, Insurance, Real Estate, and Leasing (4.3%), Public Administration (4.5%), and Other Services (5.2%), which reflect the diversity of the local economy. Wholesale Trade (1.8%), Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Mining (1.4%), and Information (0.8%) sectors remain relatively limited in scope.

This industry mix reveals a service-dominant economy with a robust base in healthcare, education, retail, and food services, while also maintaining essential industrial, technical, and business service sectors.

INDUSTRY	
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	36,603
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	1.4%
Construction	6.5%
Manufacturing	9.3%
Wholesale trade	1.8%
Retail trade	13.2%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	5.0%
Information	0.8%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	4.3%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	8.1%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	26.5%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	13.5%
Other services, except	
Public administration	5.2%
Public administration	4.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2019-2023 5-Year Estimates

Occupational profile

The region's occupational structure reflects a diverse economy, with healthcare, education, retail, and service sectors driving employment. However, income disparities and a heavy reliance on low-wage jobs highlight the need for inclusive economic development policies, workforce training, and investment in high-skill industries. Planning must consider the region's role as a regional hub and address the interdependence of Forrest, Lamar, and Perry counties in supporting a resilient, equitable, and thriving workforce.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) provides a detailed snapshot of occupational patterns for the Hattiesburg MSA, which encompasses Forrest County, Lamar County, and Perry County. This metropolitan region reflects the economic landscape not only of Forrest County, the regional hub, but also of the neighboring counties that contribute to and benefit from Hattiesburg's urban core.

HEALTHCARE AS THE ECONOMIC ENGINE

- Healthcare occupations form the backbone of the local economy, employing the largest share of workers. The MSA reports over 6,300 healthcare practitioners and technical workers, earning a median annual wage of approximately \$62,870. When



combined with the 2,800 healthcare support workers (median salary of around \$30,100), this sector provides employment opportunities across a broad spectrum of skills and wages. Hattiesburg's role as a regional healthcare hub, anchored by major institutions such as Forrest General Hospital and clinics serving rural areas, drives this dominance.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND WORKFORCE

- Educational roles, employing 4,380 workers, are similarly vital, given the presence of the University of Southern Mississippi and William Carey University. However, educational wages remain modest (median wage around \$22.30/hour), which could challenge the retention of skilled educators and staff.

SERVICE AND SALES EMPLOYMENT

- A significant proportion of the workforce is concentrated in sales (7,000 workers) and food preparation (7,010 workers), both of which offer low median wages (\$10.94–\$13.25/hour). These sectors are essential to the local consumer economy, but they also highlight the prevalence of low-wage jobs that contribute to income inequality across the MSA.

SKILLED TRADES AND TECHNICAL ROLES

- Middle-income opportunities are found in construction (2,140 workers), installation and repair (3,160 workers), production (3,550 workers), and transportation (5,050 workers). These sectors provide solid wage opportunities (\$19–\$25/hour) and underscore the importance of vocational education and training in regional workforce development policies.

PROFESSIONAL AND KNOWLEDGE-BASED SECTORS

- Fields such as management (2,860 workers), business and finance (2,170), legal (330), and IT and math (690) offer high wages (\$28–\$38/hour). However, these sectors account for a smaller share of total employment, suggesting room for growth in knowledge-based industries and professional services.

INCOME DISPARITIES AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY

- The wide gap between high-earning sectors (management, healthcare practitioners, legal, IT) and lower-wage service, sales, and administrative roles reflects challenges in upward mobility for many workers. Nearly a quarter of the workforce is concentrated in jobs that pay median hourly wages of less than \$15 per hour. This reinforces the need for targeted workforce development, expanded educational opportunities, and policies that promote economic inclusion.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

- The mix of high-skill and low-skill occupations suggests both resilience and vulnerability. The healthcare sector anchors economic stability, yet reliance on low-wage service sectors could limit the potential for economic growth. Promoting entrepreneurship, expanding high-tech and creative industries, and strengthening educational attainment are key policies to balance this dynamic.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2023 Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates

Conclusion

Forrest County's economic profile reveals a community on the path toward sustained growth. Over the past decade, residents have experienced meaningful gains in income and a marked decline in poverty, reflecting broader economic progress. The steady rise in households earning over \$75,000 and a nearly doubling of those above \$100,000 signal improved household prosperity and economic mobility, which are key indicators of a resilient local economy.

Educational attainment is a cornerstone of this progress. With significantly higher rates of bachelor's and graduate degrees than the state average, Forrest County benefits from the presence of two major universities that contribute not only to workforce readiness but also to innovation, culture, and regional identity. This strong educational foundation will remain essential in shaping a competitive and adaptable labor force.

The county's industry mix relies upon its educational advantages. The prevalence of healthcare, education, and service sectors underscores the importance of maintaining and expanding these regional anchors, as well as the educational systems that support them. Simultaneously, disparities in wages across occupations and the prevalence of low-wage service jobs emphasize the need to grow high-skill, high-wage sectors. Expanding access to technical training, entrepreneurship, and emerging industries will be critical to long-term competitiveness.

Commute data shows a heavy reliance on personal vehicles and minimal use of public transit, revealing opportunities for multimodal transportation investments that support workforce access, economic connectivity, and quality of life. The relatively short average commute time (just over 21 minutes) remains an asset for employers and workers alike.

In total, Forrest County's economic conditions illustrate a region with strong institutional foundations, gradual upward trends in household prosperity, and key sectors that position it for continued growth. Yet, to fully capitalize on these strengths, the county must address barriers to employment, support a broader range of job types, and ensure equitable access to opportunity. Strategic investments in workforce development, infrastructure, land use planning, and regional economic partnerships, especially those surrounding the Eagle One Mega Site, will shape Forrest County's future and enable it to grow in ways that are sustainable, inclusive, and aligned with community goals.



APPENDIX B-3: TRANSPORTATION AND EXISTING LAND USE

Introduction

Transportation and land use are deeply interconnected foundations of community development. In Forrest County, these systems shape how people move, where they live and work, and how the county grows over time. Chapter 4 provides a detailed assessment of Forrest County’s existing land use patterns and its transportation network, identifying the current conditions that frame future growth opportunities and infrastructure needs.

Forrest County’s transportation system is anchored by a regional roadway network that includes I-59, U.S. 49, U.S. 11, and U.S. 98 that links the county to broader economic centers in the Gulf South and serves as a vital engine for mobility and economic development. The county’s transportation infrastructure includes interstate and state highways, county roads, rail lines, general aviation facilities, and the nationally recognized Longleaf Trace multi-use trail. Together, these systems support the movement of people and goods, provide access to essential services, facilitate emergency preparedness, and foster connections between rural and urban communities.

At the same time, the land use pattern in Forrest County reflects a complex history of urbanization, rural development, and natural conservation. Much of the county’s population is concentrated in and around the Cities of Hattiesburg and Petal. At the same time, large portions of the unincorporated area remain rural, forested, or agricultural. DeSoto National Forest and Camp Shelby occupy significant portions of the county’s land, placing constraints on development while offering long-term benefits for conservation and outdoor recreation. Residential areas range from low-density subdivisions in rural communities to more suburban development near urban edges. Civic, commercial, and industrial uses are typically located along major corridors or in rural town centers.

This chapter examines the transportation system and current land use patterns, and how they can be coordinated to achieve the county’s goals for growth, safety, resilience, and connectivity. It includes an inventory of significant infrastructure assets and travel modes, identifies the types and intensities of land use present today, and considers how these patterns align with the county’s vision for the future. Corridor types are also described to show how land use and transportation interact at the street level, particularly in rural and suburban contexts.

As Forrest County prepares for continued growth and new economic opportunities, such as the Eagle One Mega Site, understanding the relationships between land use and transportation is essential. Well-planned development, supported by coordinated infrastructure investments, can enhance mobility, protect rural character, and improve the quality of life for all residents.

Transportation

Forrest County is strategically located in southeast Mississippi and is anchored by the City of Hattiesburg, often referred to as the “Hub City.” This nickname reflects the county’s role as a critical junction connecting major economic centers, including New Orleans, Mobile, Gulfport, and Jackson. Forrest County’s transportation system is vital to its economic prosperity, public safety, and quality of life, ensuring mobility for residents, businesses, and visitors alike. Its diverse and interconnected transportation networks, comprising highways, rail, aviation, public transit, and non-motorized infrastructures, support a robust local economy, foster tourism, and enhance resilience against natural hazards.

Roadway and Highway Network

Forrest County is served by a roadway network that ensures efficient connectivity within the county and to regional destinations. Key corridors and local routes form the backbone of the county’s transportation infrastructure, supporting both daily travel and economic activity.

- Interstate 59 (I-59) runs from I-10 in Slidell, Louisiana, north to the west border of the county, through Hattiesburg, and continues north, providing a critical corridor connecting Hattiesburg with New Orleans and Meridian.
- U.S. Highways include U.S. 49 (which bisects the county from northwest to southeast and connects Jackson to the Gulf Coast), U.S. 11 (paralleling I-59), and U.S. 98 (an east-west corridor connected to Mobile), enhancing regional connectivity and supporting freight and commuter traffic.
- Mississippi Highways 13 and 42 cross the county from east to west, connecting rural communities and serving as critical roads.
- Local roads and bridges are maintained by the Forrest County Roads and Bridges Department, ensuring safe and reliable access across the county’s diverse landscapes.

Aviation

Aviation facilities in Forrest County provide essential connections for both commercial and general aviation users, linking the region to national markets.

- Hattiesburg-Laurel Regional Airport offers commercial passenger services, connecting the region to larger U.S. air hubs. This facility plays a vital role in linking the county to national and international markets.
- Hattiesburg Bobby L. Chain Municipal Airport, located within the Forrest County Industrial Park, caters to general aviation, corporate flights, and emergency response operations, particularly serving the nearby Camp Shelby military training site.

Rail Infrastructure

Forrest County's rail infrastructure provides vital connections for both passenger and freight transport, playing a key role in supporting regional economic activity and mobility.

- Amtrak's Crescent Line, with a station in Hattiesburg, connects to cities along the eastern U.S. corridor, supporting passenger travel.
- Freight rail lines, operated by major railroads, transport goods critical to the region's manufacturing, forestry, and agricultural industries. The rail system is integral to supporting Forrest County's economic base, including large-scale industrial developments like the Eagle One Mega Site.



Non-Motorized and Recreational Transportation

Forrest County's investment in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure promotes healthy lifestyles, alternative commuting options, and tourism.

- Longleaf Trace, a nationally recognized 41-mile multi-use trail extending from Hattiesburg to Prentiss, offers opportunities for biking, walking, running, and equestrian activities. As one of the longest rail-to-trail conversions in the U.S., it is a key asset for recreation and eco-tourism.
- The Pathways Master Plan, developed by the Hattiesburg-Petal-Forrest-Lamar Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), provides a comprehensive framework for expanding sidewalks, shared-use paths, bicycle lanes, and safe street crossings, particularly in urbanized areas like Hattiesburg and Petal.

Public Transit

Public transportation in the Hattiesburg area plays a vital role in connecting residents to essential services, employment opportunities, and commercial destinations. Hub City Transit (HCT) and the Hattiesburg-Petal-Forrest-Lamar Metropolitan Planning Organization (HPFL-MPO) work collaboratively to enhance regional transit accessibility and efficiency.

- Hub City Transit (HCT), which offers fixed-route bus service within Hattiesburg, connecting residents to employment centers, healthcare facilities, and commercial hubs. HCT also provides paratransit services for seniors and individuals with disabilities, ensuring equitable access to mobility.

- The Hattiesburg-Petal-Forrest-Lamar MPO plays a critical role in regional transit planning, focusing on improving connectivity between rural communities and urban transit hubs. While transit coverage is robust in central Hattiesburg, rural connectivity remains a challenge, and expanding multimodal options is a key priority.

Hattiesburg-Petal-Forrest-Lamar Metropolitan Planning Organization (HPFL-MPO)

The Hattiesburg-Petal-Forrest-Lamar Metropolitan Planning Organization (HPFL-MPO) is the regional transportation planning agency for the Hattiesburg Urbanized Area, which encompasses portions of Forrest and Lamar counties, as well as the cities of Hattiesburg and Petal. The MPO coordinates transportation planning, programming, and funding to ensure projects meet federal requirements while addressing the region's mobility, safety, and economic development goals.

As a federally designated body, the MPO manages the allocation of federal transportation funds, integrating highway, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian projects into a cohesive regional network. It fosters collaboration between local governments, MDOT, transit agencies, stakeholders, and the public, ensuring that planning is responsive to local needs and community input.

Key MPO functions include:

- The Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is a 20+ year vision that identifies long-term transportation investments to support growth, safety, and economic development.
- The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a short-term, four-year list of federally funded transportation projects.
- The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) outlines annual planning studies and activities.
- The Public Participation Plan (PPP) ensures transparent and inclusive decision-making through meaningful engagement with the public.

The MPO's planning area covers a mix of urban, suburban, and rural landscapes with diverse transportation needs. Its priorities include improving multimodal connectivity, supporting economic development (e.g., the Eagle One Mega Site), enhancing safety and environmental sustainability, and ensuring equitable access to transportation for all residents.

Forrest County can leverage the MPO's expertise, resources, and planning framework to strengthen its comprehensive plan. The MPO's data, project prioritization, and access to federal funding provide essential tools for integrating transportation improvements into county-wide goals for growth, resilience, and quality of life. Through collaborative planning with the MPO, Forrest County can ensure that transportation investments align with long-term visions for sustainable and equitable development.

Functional Classification of Roads

Forrest County's roadway network is composed of a hierarchy of roads classified by their function within the overall transportation system. The functional classification system helps define the role each

roadway plays in facilitating travel and access across the county. It is a critical tool for planning, design, maintenance, and funding decisions, providing a framework for aligning roadway design with expected travel behavior and land use.

Roadways in Forrest County are categorized into three principal classifications:

Arterials

Arterial roads serve the highest volume of traffic and provide regional and inter-county mobility. These roads prioritize movement over access and are typically designed for higher speeds with limited driveway connections. In Forrest County, Interstate 59, U.S. Highway 49, U.S. Highway 98, and U.S. Highway 11 function as the county's principal arterials. They connect major cities, support freight and commuter traffic, and are essential for economic activity and emergency response. Arterials also form the backbone of access to regional employment centers such as the Eagle One Mega Site.

Collectors

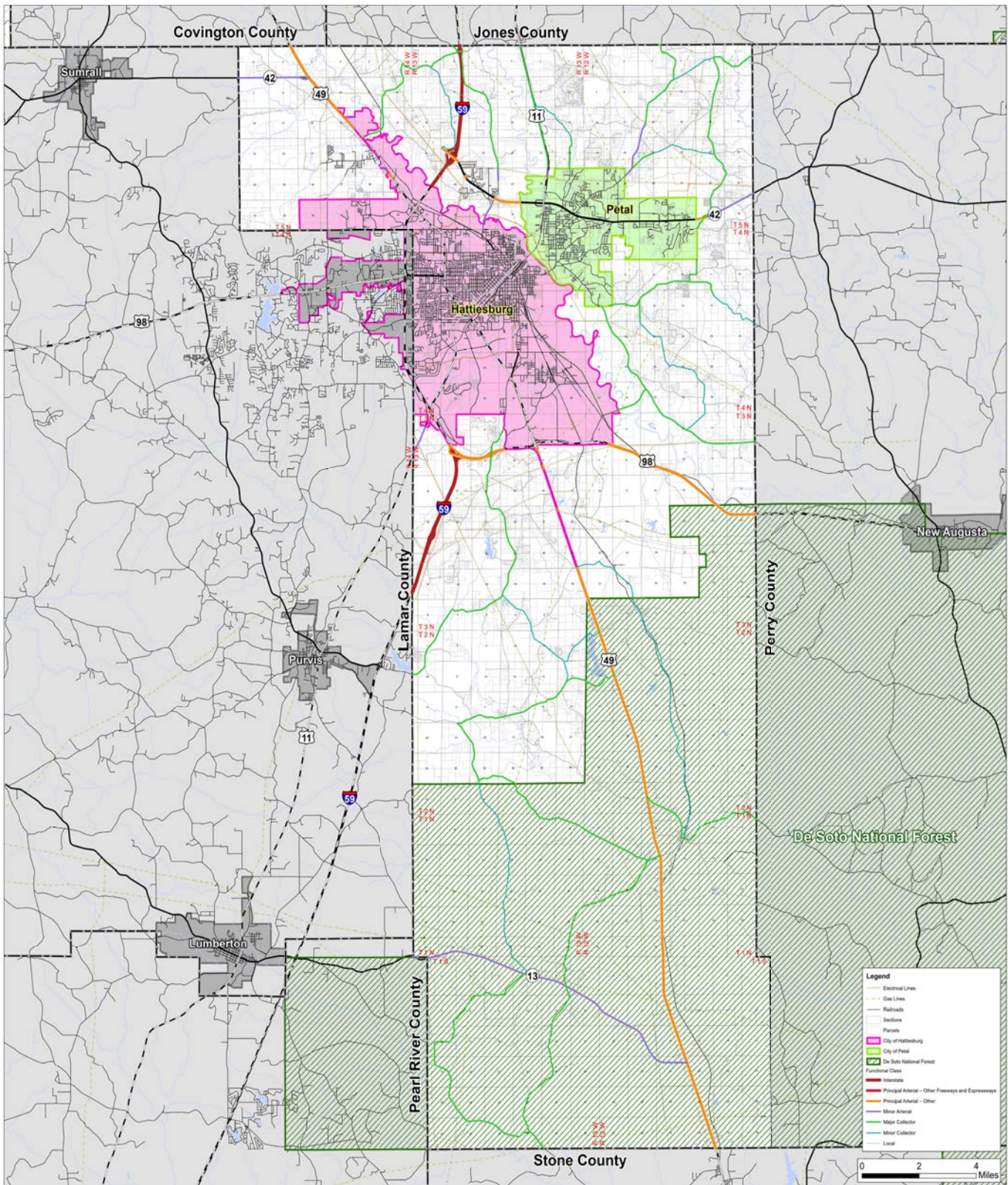
Collector roads provide a vital link between local roads and arterials. They balance mobility and access by collecting traffic from local streets and channeling it into the arterial network. Collectors may vary from rural two-lane roads with minimal shoulders to suburban streets with curbs, sidewalks, and turning lanes. In Forrest County, Highways 13 and 42, along with specific county-maintained corridors near Hattiesburg and Petal, function as minor arterials or collectors depending on traffic volume and connectivity.

Local Roads

Local roads provide direct access to homes, farms, businesses, and community facilities. These roads serve short-distance trips and make up the largest share of the roadway network by mileage. In rural parts of Forrest County, local roads may be unpaved or narrow with deep ditches and no shoulders. In suburban and newer subdivisions, local streets are often curvilinear, ending in cul-de-sacs with limited external connections. While traffic volumes are low, these roads are essential for access and emergency services, particularly in unincorporated areas.

The Forrest County Roads and Bridges Department is responsible for maintaining the local and collector roadways outside municipal boundaries. At the same time, the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) oversees state and federal highways. Understanding and applying functional classification supports long-range transportation planning, guides roadway design standards (e.g., lane widths and right-of-way needs), and helps determine funding eligibility for improvements through federal and state programs.

As Forrest County continues to grow and development patterns evolve, the functional classification system provides a critical planning tool to coordinate land use and infrastructure investments, ensuring roads are designed and maintained in a way that supports safety, efficiency, and quality of life.



Traffic Counts and Travel Volumes

Understanding traffic volumes is essential for planning infrastructure improvements, maintaining roadway safety, and aligning land use decisions with transportation capacity. Traffic counts, typically measured as Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT), provide insight into how frequently roads are used and help identify corridors where congestion, safety improvements, or capacity upgrades may be needed.

In Forrest County, traffic volumes vary widely depending on the road's functional classification, proximity to urban centers, and the type of land use it serves. The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) maintains a network of permanent and short-term traffic count stations that record vehicle volumes across the state, including along key corridors in Forrest County.

High-Volume Corridors

The highest traffic counts in the county occur on major arterial routes serving regional and long-distance travel. For example:

- **INTERSTATE 59**, which traverses Forrest County from southwest to northeast, carries 25,000 to 40,000 vehicles per day, depending on the segment. It serves both commuter and freight traffic.
- **U.S. HIGHWAY 49**, the primary north-south corridor through Hattiesburg, consistently records some of the highest AADT volumes in the county, often exceeding 35,000 vehicles per day in urban segments.
- **U.S. HIGHWAY 98**, a key east-west route connecting Hattiesburg to Columbia and the Mississippi Gulf Coast, sees traffic counts ranging from 15,000 to 25,000 AADT near suburban areas, with lower volumes further from the city.

These corridors experience recurring congestion during peak travel times, and targeted improvements such as intersection upgrades, signal coordination, and turn lane additions have been undertaken or programmed in response.

Moderate-Volume Roads

Secondary arterials and major collectors typically experience moderate traffic volumes, often ranging from 5,000 to 15,000 vehicles per day. These include:

- **MS HIGHWAY 42**, which connects Petal to rural areas east of the county
- Segments of **U.S. HIGHWAY 11**, especially near Rawls Springs and central Hattiesburg
- **OLD HIGHWAY 11** and local collector roads near growth corridors like Evelyn Gandy Parkway

These roadways serve as vital connectors between residential areas, schools, commercial centers, and job sites. Monitoring trends in traffic volumes on these routes helps the county prepare for infrastructure needs in rapidly developing areas.

Low-Volume Rural Roads

Local roads in unincorporated and rural parts of Forrest County typically have traffic volumes below 2,000 AADT. These roads provide direct access to homes, farms, and timberland, and while traffic counts are low, they remain essential for mobility and emergency services. Low traffic volumes do not necessarily mean low importance; many of these roads are critical for school bus routes, mail delivery, and access to agricultural or forestry areas.

Use of Traffic Counts in Planning

Traffic volume data is used in multiple planning applications, including:

- Roadway maintenance prioritization
- Design of new intersections, turn lanes, or access points
- Traffic impact studies for new developments
- Funding applications for transportation improvements
- Safety and crash analysis (when paired with incident data)

Forrest County and the Hattiesburg-Petal-Forrest-Lamar Metropolitan Planning Organization (HPFL-MPO) routinely use MDOT traffic count data and conduct supplemental studies as needed to identify trends, plan capital improvements, and update the long-range transportation network. As the county grows, particularly near corridors such as U.S. 98 and the future Eagle One Mega Site, ongoing monitoring of traffic volumes will be crucial to support timely upgrades and maintain a safe and efficient transportation system.

Average Daily Traffic Counts

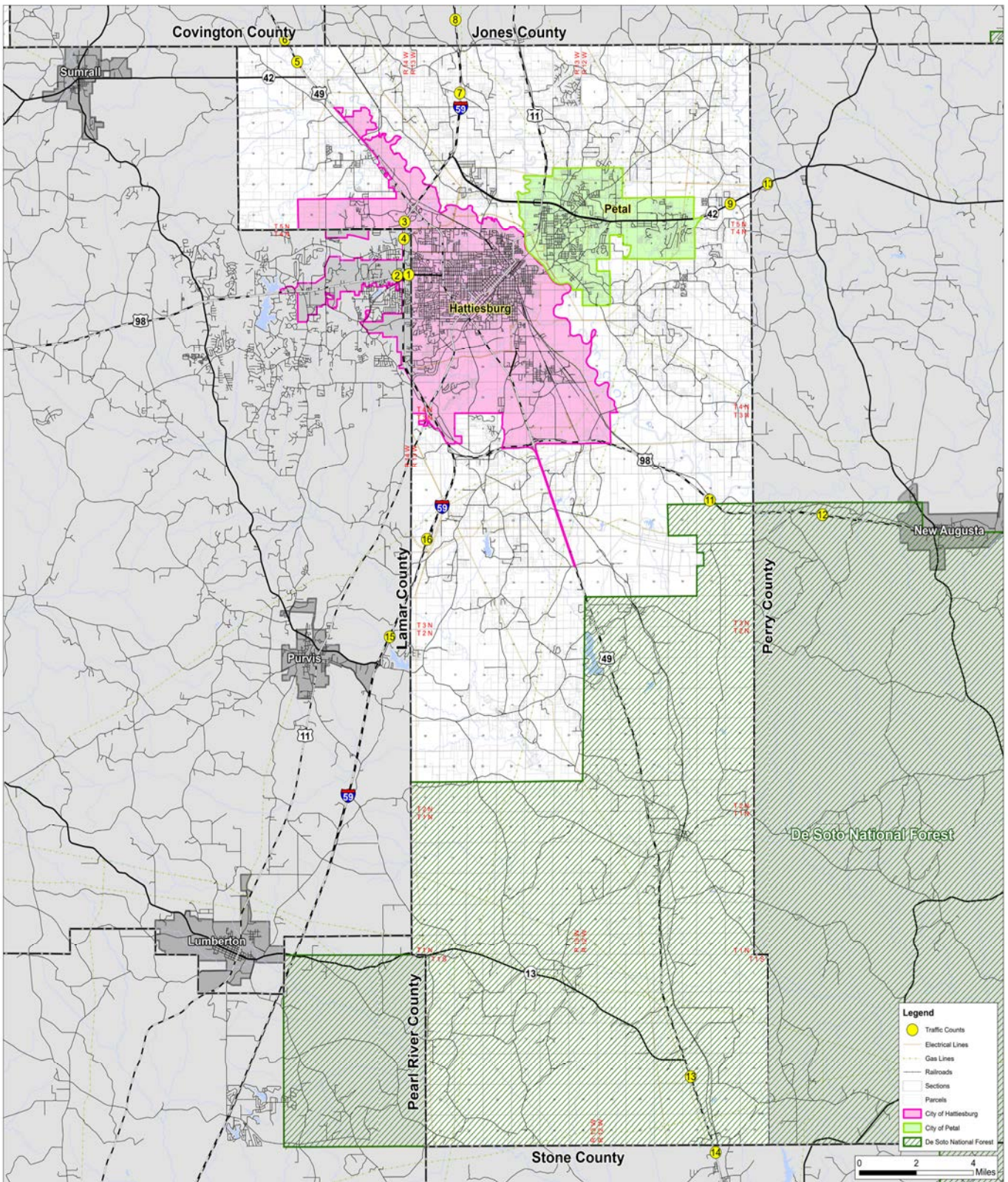
Map Number	Site ID	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023	5-Year		10-Year	
												# Change	% Change	# Change	% Change
1	370140	46,000	46,000	45,000	46,000	46,000	46,000	46,000	43,000	42,000	43,000	-3,000	-6.5%	-3,000	-6.5%
2	370135	66,000	62,000	63,000	64,000	62,000	62,000	62,000	64,000	63,000	64,000	2,000	3.2%	-2,000	-3.0%
3	180600	44,000	45,000	46,000	47,000	48,000	50,000	50,000	48,000	48,000	49,000	-1,000	-2.0%	5,000	11.4%
4	370270	44,000	45,000	46,000	47,000	48,000	50,000	50,000	48,000	48,000	49,000	-1,000	-2.0%	5,000	11.4%
5	180420	21,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	23,000	3,000	15.0%	2,000	9.5%
6	160010	21,000	21,000	22,000	23,000	23,000	23,000	23,000	24,000	23,000	23,000	0	0.0%	2,000	9.5%
7	180620	27,000	28,000	28,000	29,000	29,000	29,000	25,000	31,000	32,000	32,000	3,000	10.3%	5,000	18.5%
8	340715	28,000	28,000	30,000	31,000	31,000	33,000	33,000	31,000	31,000	32,000	-1,000	-3.0%	4,000	14.3%
9	180705	5,900	6,000	6,100	6,600	6,800	6,800	6,800	6,600	6,400	6,400	-400	-5.9%	500	8.5%
10	560210	5,900	6,000	6,100	6,600	6,800	6,800	6,800	6,600	6,400	6,400	-400	-5.9%	500	8.5%
11	180530	8,900	8,700	8,800	9,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	11,000	1,000	10.0%	2,100	23.6%
12	560010	9,800	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	12,000	11,000	11,000	1,000	10.0%	1,200	12.2%
13	180260	11,000	12,000	13,000	13,000	13,000	15,000	15,000	14,000	14,000	15,000	0	0.0%	4,000	36.4%
14	660090	11,000	12,000	13,000	13,000	13,000	15,000	15,000	14,000	14,000	15,000	0	0.0%	4,000	36.4%
15	370250	17,000	17,000	18,000	18,000	18,000	19,000	18,000	19,000	19,000	19,000	0	0.0%	2,000	11.8%
16	180580	18,000	18,000	18,000	19,000	19,000	20,000	21,000	20,000	21,000	21,000	1,000	5.0%	3,000	16.7%

Notes:

Red traffic counts are actual counts and black counts are estimates.

No traffic counts conducted or released for 2020.

Source: Mississippi Department of Transportation Average Daily Traffic Counts



Existing Land Use

Forrest County's existing land use pattern provides a snapshot of how the landscape is currently occupied and developed, reflecting generations of rural settlement, agricultural use, suburban expansion, and public land preservation. By analyzing existing land use, planners and decision-makers can identify development trends, infrastructure needs, and potential land use conflicts, and establish a foundation for future land use planning that aligns with community values and goals.

In Forrest County, land use is shaped by several key factors: the concentration of population and services in and around Hattiesburg and Petal; the presence of extensive public lands including Camp Shelby and the DeSoto National Forest; and a development pattern in the unincorporated areas that includes a mix of agriculture, forestry, large-lot residential development, and scattered rural centers. Most residential and commercial growth has occurred along major corridors and near municipal boundaries, while vast rural areas remain sparsely developed or are actively engaged in timber production.

This section documents the types and distribution of existing land uses across the unincorporated county. It highlights prevailing patterns, including low-density residential growth, agricultural and forested lands, industrial development zones, and key civic uses. Recognizing how land is used today helps guide future decisions that support coordinated growth, infrastructure investment, and preservation of the county's rural character and environmental assets.

Existing Land Use Categories

Single-Family Residential

Single-family residential land use includes detached homes occupied by a single household and situated on individual lots. In unincorporated Forrest County, these residences are commonly found along rural highways, county roads, and within small subdivisions at the edges of Hattiesburg and Petal. Lot sizes range widely from suburban-sized parcels near urbanized areas to estate-style homes on multi-acre tracts in rural communities. Most homes rely on water supplied by local water associations, private wells, and septic systems, particularly outside the urban fringe. While densities are generally low, scattered clusters of development reflect the organic pattern of rural settlement and subdivision.

Manufactured Home

Manufactured Home, as a category of land use, includes both individual manufactured housing units placed on separate lots and groupings of mobile homes arranged in park or community settings. This type of housing plays a critical role in meeting the county's affordable housing needs, particularly in rural areas. Manufactured homes are commonly found along secondary roads and in less densely developed areas of the county, often situated on large rural parcels or within small family subdivisions. While some units are permanently affixed and well-maintained, others represent older or temporary housing, contributing to the diversity (and in some cases, the challenges) of the rural housing stock.

Commercial

Commercial land use in the unincorporated areas of Forrest County is concentrated along major transportation corridors, particularly near intersections with U.S. and state highways. Uses include convenience stores, gas stations, auto services, restaurants, small offices, and general retail. These businesses primarily serve residents and passing motorists and are typically auto-oriented with deep setbacks and surface parking. While commercial uses are not widespread in rural areas, small nodes of commercial activity are found in rural town centers or near the entrances to more urbanized areas.

Industrial

Industrial land use includes manufacturing facilities, warehousing, distribution centers, construction yards, and other operations involved in processing, production, or large-scale storage. In Forrest County, industrial uses are generally located along major highways, with the most significant clusters along U.S. Highway 49 and U.S. Highway 11 north of Hattiesburg and Petal. The county's proximity to I-59 and regional rail infrastructure supports industrial logistics, and future expansion is expected, particularly near the Eagle One Mega Site. Industrial parcels often feature large buildings, extensive truck loading areas, and limited on-site workforce amenities.

Public and Semi-Public

Public and semi-public land use includes properties owned or operated by local, state, or federal agencies, as well as community-serving institutions. This category encompasses government buildings, schools, fire stations, community centers, cemeteries, and religious institutions. Notably, Forrest County features vast acreage under government ownership, most notably Camp Shelby, a major military training facility, and large portions of the DeSoto National Forest, which is federally managed. These areas are not available for development and serve essential military, conservation, and public recreation purposes. Together, they represent a significant share of the county's land base and shape both development patterns and infrastructure needs.

Vacant

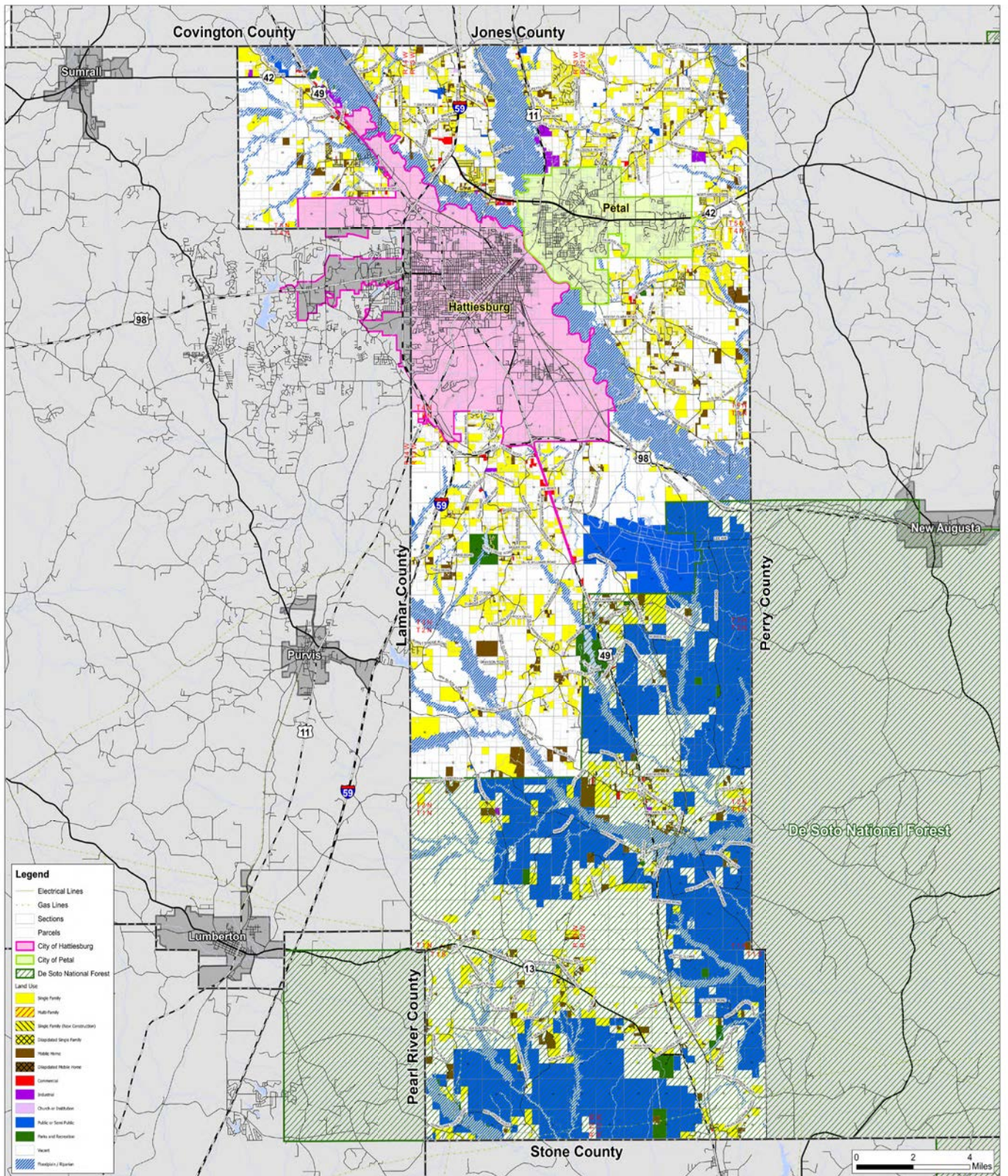
Vacant land refers to parcels with no apparent structure or active use. This category includes undeveloped lots within existing subdivisions, rural parcels held for future development, and land that may be physically constrained due to topography or access. Vacant lands are found throughout Forrest County and vary in size from small infill lots to large tracts of timber or former agricultural use. Some vacant properties may transition into residential, commercial, or industrial uses, while others may remain open due to natural features, ownership patterns, or lack of infrastructure.

DeSoto National Forest Overlay

The DeSoto National Forest overlay identifies lands that fall within the boundaries of the federally managed national forest, which spans large portions of southern Forrest County. While the publicly owned lands in this area are already classified as Public or Semi-Public land use, the overlay highlights their special management status and limited development potential. The U.S. Forest Service manages these lands for conservation, forestry, habitat protection, and recreational access. Development is strictly limited, and most infrastructure investment is focused on trailheads, fire control, and environmental stewardship. This overlay informs land use decisions by indicating where conservation priorities and federal land management objectives align with local development goals.

Land Use Category	Planning Area	
	Acres	Percent of Total
Residential	41,504.3	13.8%
Single Family	34,191.0	11.3%
Manufactured or Mobile Home	7,174.3	2.4%
Multi-Family	138.9	0.0%
Commercial	960.9	0.3%
Commercial	960.9	0.3%
Industrial	789.6	0.3%
Industrial	789.6	0.3%
Public/Semi-public	58,227.3	19.3%
Church or Institution	221.8	0.1%
Public/Semi-Public	58,005.5	19.2%
Parks and Recreation	1,942.1	0.6%
Parks and Recreation	1,942.1	0.6%
Vacant	186,944.7	62.0%
Vacant	186,944.7	62.0%
Total Parcel Acreage	248,912.63	82.5%
Total ROW Acreage	11,315.5	3.8%
Hattiesburg	30,484.0	10.1%
Petal	10,972.9	3.6%
Total Acreage	301,685.1	

Source: Slaughter & Associates Field Survey and Calculations



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 662.234.6970

Existing Land Use Comprehensive Plan Forrest County, Mississippi

Source(s):
 Mississippi Automated Resource
 Information System (MARIS);
 US Census Bureau TIGER Line Files;
 2024 Forrest County Parcel Data

Note: This map is accurate for planning purposes only
 Date: October 2, 2025



Conclusion: Key Findings and Considerations for Future Planning

The existing land use and transportation conditions in Forrest County reflect a community at a pivotal moment, stable and functional, yet increasingly shaped by the pressures and opportunities of growth. As the County looks to the future, the following key findings will guide the development of land use and transportation policies aligned with long-term goals:

Land Use Compatibility

Forrest County currently experiences relatively few conflicts between land uses. Most neighborhoods, commercial areas, and rural lands function without major incompatibilities, which speaks to the organic development patterns that have evolved. This stability provides a solid foundation for future planning efforts.

Corridor Commercialization Pressures

Increasing commercial development along major highway corridors, particularly U.S. 98 and U.S. 49, is beginning to raise concerns among residents in adjacent rural areas. These corridors are attractive for growth, but without thoughtful access management and buffering, the spread of highway-oriented businesses could compromise the rural character of nearby neighborhoods.

Infill Opportunities in the North

The northern urban fringe of the county, especially around Rawls Springs, presents substantial opportunities for infill development. Vacant lots and underutilized parcels offer space for new housing and amenities, particularly where utility extensions and public infrastructure investments can support this growth. Redevelopment in these areas can help meet demand while minimizing sprawl.

Constraints in the National Forest and Camp Shelby

Much of the southern portion of Forrest County is constrained by federal and military landholdings, including De Soto National Forest and Camp Shelby. These areas have limited infrastructure and strict land management policies that restrict development. However, future military investment at Camp Shelby and expanded recreational opportunities could change the demand for nearby support services and housing.

Truck Routing and Road Conflicts

Heavy truck traffic, particularly during major road construction, has led to frequent routing through residential neighborhoods and on local county roads not designed for such loads. These patterns create safety concerns and accelerate wear and tear. Designated truck routes and improved construction detour planning are necessary to manage freight movement across the county better.

Condition and Maintenance of Roads

Forrest County maintains an extensive road network that is generally in good shape compared to surrounding counties. The Road Department uses a grading system to prioritize needs and implements a four-year paving plan that is updated annually. Recent shifts toward in-house paving and asphalt overlay have increased responsiveness and efficiency.

Bridge Needs and Infrastructure Investment

Aging bridge infrastructure remains a critical issue, with many bridges, especially those with wooden pilings, requiring replacement. The county is actively addressing these needs through ongoing reconstruction efforts, reflecting a commitment to maintaining vital connections across the region.

Growth-Driven Infrastructure Demands

Strategic transportation infrastructure will be critical to unlocking future growth, especially in areas surrounding the Eagle One Mega Site and along the U.S. 98 corridor. The lack of adequate water, sewer, and road access in certain areas, particularly in the southern part of the county, presents challenges for attracting new development and investment.

Together, these findings underscore the need for a balanced approach that preserves the County's rural character, fosters strategic growth, and ensures a resilient transportation network for decades to come.

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APPENDIX B-4: HOUSING ANALYSIS

Introduction

Housing is crucial to a community's well-being, as it significantly impacts economic development, quality of life, and long-term sustainability. A diverse and well-maintained housing stock ensures that residents at various income levels and life stages can find suitable and affordable homes. Understanding current housing conditions, trends, and challenges enables the community to plan for future growth, address deficiencies, and promote policies that support safe, stable, and affordable housing opportunities.

This section examines key aspects of the housing landscape, including the total number of housing units, characteristics of households, the age of householders, structural conditions, and housing affordability. By assessing these factors, the community can identify existing needs and opportunities for future housing development and improvement. The findings in this section will inform policies for maintaining and expanding the housing supply to support a growing and diverse population.

Housing Units

The housing stock in Forrest County comprises 33,599 units. According to the 2023 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS) estimates, 29,722 units (88.5%) are occupied, while 3,950 units (11.8%) are vacant. The moderate vacancy rate suggests a somewhat tumultuous housing market. Vacancy may indicate factors such as seasonal housing, turnover in the rental market, or housing units needing rehabilitation.

Forrest County's housing stock is made up of single-family detached homes, mobile homes, and multifamily units. Single-family detached homes make up the largest share of housing (63.9%). Multifamily housing, including duplexes, triplexes, and apartment complexes, accounts for approximately 23% of the total housing stock (found mainly in the cities of Hattiesburg and Petal). In comparison, mobile homes comprise nearly 10% of all units. The breakdown of housing types is shown below:

Housing Type	Total Units	Percentage of Housing Stock
1-unit detached (single-family homes)	21,464	63.9%
1-unit attached (townhomes, duplex-style homes)	380	1.1%
Mobile homes	3,285	9.8%
2-unit buildings	779	2.3%
3-4 unit buildings	1,864	5.5%
5 or more unit buildings (apartments, larger complexes)	5,827	17.3%

Single-family detached housing is found in a variety of neighborhood patterns across Forrest County, with denser development in Hattiesburg and Petal, and suburban and rural-style neighborhoods throughout the rest of the county. At the same time, the presence of multifamily units (23%) reflects the availability of rental housing concentrated in Hattiesburg and Petal. However, the relatively small share of “missing middle” housing (2–4-unit buildings), which accounts for just 7.8% of total units, suggests a lack of diverse housing options that could provide affordable alternatives to single-family homes and larger apartment complexes.

The moderate vacancy rate of 11.8% raises important considerations for housing policy. Some unoccupied units may be transitional vacancies, but a portion may also be older homes or rental properties needing rehabilitation. Addressing these vacancies through housing rehabilitation programs could help bring more units back into the market and improve affordability. Additionally, expanding multifamily housing, townhomes, and small-scale rental developments could help alleviate cost burdens and provide more housing choices for residents.

Overall, Forrest County’s housing stock is primarily owner-occupied and single-family, with a modest share of rental and multifamily options. Moving forward, strategies that increase housing diversity, expand affordable rental options, and revitalize vacant properties could strengthen the county’s housing market and ensure a range of options for residents at all income levels.

Age of Housing

Forrest County’s housing stock consists primarily of older homes, with most occupied units built before 2000. According to the 2023 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS) estimates, only 24.1% of the county’s occupied housing units have been constructed since 2000, while the remaining 75.9% were built before the turn of the century. The most common housing age category is 1960-1979, which accounts for 31.4% of all occupied units, followed by homes built between 1980 and 1999, comprising 23.8% of the total.

Newer housing construction has been relatively limited, with just 2.0% of the county’s homes built since 2020 and 8.5% constructed between 2010 and 2019. The following table summarizes the distribution of occupied housing units by age:

Housing Age Distribution in Forrest County

Year Built	Total Occupied Units	% of Total Occupied Housing
2020 or later	607	2.0%
2010 to 2019	2,569	8.5%
2000 to 2009	4,115	13.6%
1980 to 1999	7,190	23.8%
1960 to 1979	9,513	31.4%
1940 to 1959	3,874	12.8%
1939 or earlier	2,387	7.9%

The data suggests Forrest County has a relatively old housing stock, with over half of all units (52.1%) built before 1980. This aging housing stock may require maintenance, modernization, and energy efficiency upgrades. The low percentage of recently built homes suggests that new construction has not kept pace with demand, which may affect housing availability and affordability.

Households

Household composition in Forrest County has undergone significant changes over the past decade, reflecting shifts in family structures, household sizes, and housing preferences. According to the 2023 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS) estimates, the county has 29,722 total households, an increase of 1,900 households (6.8%) from 27,822 households in 2013. Of these, 18,308 households (61.6%) are classified as family households, meaning they contain at least two individuals who are related. While the number of family households has grown, the average household size has declined from 2.58 to 2.48 persons per household, and the average family size has decreased from 3.24 to 3.12 persons per family. This trend suggests a shift toward smaller households, likely due to factors such as aging populations, lower birth rates, and an increase in single-person or non-traditional household arrangements. The changes in household characteristics over the past decade are summarized below:

Household Characteristics	2013 ACS	2023 ACS	Change (2013-2023)
Total Households	27,822	29,722	+1,900 (+6.8%)
Family Households	17,200	18,308	+1,108 (+6.4%)
Average Household Size	2.58	2.48	-0.10
Average Family Size	3.24	3.12	-0.12

A closer look at the household size distribution in 2023 reveals that single-person and two-person households are the most prevalent household types. Single-person households are 30.5% of all households, while two-person households account for 32.7%. Three-person households represent 13.0% of the total, and 7,086 households (23.8%) have four or more persons.

Household Size	Total Households (2023 ACS)	Percentage of Total Households
1-person households	9,057	30.5%
2-person households	9,732	32.7%
3-person households	3,847	13.0%
4+ person households	7,086	23.8%

These trends have several implications for housing and community planning in Forrest County. The growth in single-person households suggests a rising demand for smaller, affordable housing units, particularly for seniors, young professionals, and single adults. Additionally, the decline in family size may indicate a shift from large single-family homes to more compact and efficient housing options, requiring flexible designs that cater to diverse household needs. Furthermore, the increase in smaller households could signal an aging population requiring senior-friendly housing, including accessible

apartments, retirement communities, and affordable single-story housing options. Addressing these evolving housing needs will be crucial to ensure that Forrest County offers a diverse range of housing options that cater to various household types and income levels.

Structural Deficiencies in Housing – Forrest County

Housing quality is critical to ensuring the health, safety, and stability of a community's residents. In Forrest County, structural deficiencies are a concern, especially in rental housing units. The primary housing problems include incomplete kitchen and plumbing facilities, overcrowding, and a housing cost burden that significantly impacts many households.

This analysis is based on data from the 2017-2021 American Community Survey (ACS) Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) dataset, which provides detailed information on housing conditions in Forrest County. The dataset categorizes housing problems into four key indicators:

- Incomplete kitchen facilities
- Incomplete plumbing facilities
- Overcrowding (more than one person per room)
- Housing cost burden (spending more than 30% of household income on housing costs)

Households experiencing one or more of these issues are classified as having at least one housing problem. At the same time, those facing extreme cases of these deficiencies fall into the category of severe housing problems (which includes cost burdens exceeding 50% of income). The following sections examine the extent of these deficiencies among renters and homeowners in Forrest County and identify solutions to improve housing conditions.

According to the data, 9,230 households (32%) experience at least one major housing problem, with renters disproportionately affected. Over half of all renter households (51.6%) face at least one structural or affordability issue, compared to 17.7% of owner-occupied households. Additionally, 4,400 households (15%) face severe housing problems, including extreme overcrowding and inadequate plumbing and kitchen facilities. Again, renters bear the brunt of these challenges, with 27% of rental households experiencing severe deficiencies, compared to 6.5% of owner-occupied homes.

The high prevalence of structural deficiencies in rental housing suggests that a significant portion of Forrest County's rental stock may be aging or in poor condition. This issue is particularly pressing for very low-income households (earning $\leq 30\%$ of the Area Median Family Income), as they often lack the resources to relocate to better-quality housing or make necessary repairs. While homeowners generally face fewer structural challenges, some owner-occupied properties still require improvements, particularly among lower-income and elderly homeowners who may struggle to maintain their homes.

Addressing these deficiencies requires a comprehensive approach that includes incentivizing landlords to improve rental properties, providing financial assistance for home repairs, investing in new affordable housing options, and rental housing codes to address the worst conditions. Programs that offer rehabilitation grants, tax incentives, and low-interest loans for repairs could help improve housing conditions

across the county. Additionally, stricter code enforcement and incentives for mixed-income housing developments could lead to higher-quality housing options for all residents.

Overall, the data highlight a clear need for targeted housing interventions in Forrest County, particularly for renters and low-income households. Expanding housing rehabilitation programs, encouraging property improvements, and increasing the supply of quality, affordable housing will be essential to addressing structural deficiencies and ensuring a safe and stable housing environment for all residents.

Housing Affordability and Cost Burden in Forrest County

Housing affordability is a key factor in ensuring a stable and thriving community. The cost burden metric is commonly used to evaluate affordability, measuring the proportion of a household's income spent on housing-related expenses. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a household is considered cost-burdened if it spends more than 30% of its income on housing costs. Households spending over 50% of their income on housing are categorized as severely cost-burdened.

Housing costs for renters include gross rent (contract rent plus utilities), while housing costs for homeowners include monthly mortgage payments, property taxes, homeowners' insurance, utilities, and association fees. A high percentage of cost-burdened households within a community can indicate problems with housing affordability, economic instability, and long-term sustainability challenges.

This section evaluates housing affordability in Forrest County, Mississippi, by analyzing the cost burden across household income levels and tenure types (owners versus renters). The analysis is based on the 2017-2021 American Community Survey (ACS) Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) dataset, which provides data on income distribution, cost burden, and severe cost burden for both renters and homeowners.

Housing Cost Burden in Forrest County

Forrest County has 28,865 households, of which 16,700 (58%) are owner-occupied, and 12,170 (42%) are renter-occupied. The distribution of cost burden varies significantly between these two groups, with renters experiencing a much higher incidence of affordability challenges.

Key Findings on Cost Burden

- 49% of renter households (5,985) experience a cost burden (spending more than 30% of income on housing).
- 24% of renter households (2,975) are severely cost-burdened, spending more than 50% of their income on housing.
- 16% of owner households (2,650) experience cost burden, with 5% (790 households) severely cost-burdened.
- Lower-income households (earning $\leq 50\%$ of the Area Median Family) are the most affected, with over half experiencing a cost burden.
- Moderate-income households (50-80% Area Median Family Income) also experience a cost burden, though at lower rates.

The disparity in cost burden between renters and homeowners is a significant concern, suggesting that affordable rental housing options are limited in Forrest County.

Cost Burden Among Homeowners

HOMEOWNER COST BURDEN BY INCOME LEVEL

Among the 16,700 owner-occupied households, the cost burden varies widely based on income:

Income Level (Percent of Area Median Family Income)	Total Homeowners	Cost-Burdened (>30%)	Severely Cost-Burdened (>50%)
≤30%	1,135	925 (81%)	600 (53%)
>30% to ≤50%	1,160	525 (45%)	75 (6%)
>50% to ≤80%	2,420	765 (32%)	90 (4%)
>80% to ≤100%	1,730	180 (10%)	25 (1%)
>100%	10,255	255 (2%)	0 (0%)
Total	16,700	2,650 (16%)	790 (5%)

KEY OBSERVATIONS FOR HOMEOWNERS:

- Very low-income homeowners (≤30% Area Median Family Income) are the most vulnerable; 81% of these households are cost-burdened, and 53% spend more than half their income on housing.
- Moderate-income homeowners (50-80% Area Median Family Income) still face affordability issues, with 32% experiencing cost burden, though only 4% are severely cost-burdened.
- Higher-income homeowners (>80% Area Median Family Income) have significantly lower cost burden rates, indicating that housing is much more affordable for higher-income homeowners.

CHALLENGES FOR HOMEOWNERS:

- Rising property values and mortgage rates can make homeownership unattainable for lower-income households.
- High utility and maintenance costs can contribute to financial strain, particularly for older homes requiring repairs.
- Limited access to affordable home financing options for first-time homebuyers can make it difficult for moderate-income families to purchase homes.
- Limited new housing stock constructed constrains the availability of new homes and prevents more moderately priced homes from being built.

Cost Burden Among Renters

RENTER COST BURDEN BY INCOME LEVEL

Renters in Forrest County face much higher rates of cost burden than homeowners, particularly at lower income levels:

Income Level (Percent of Area Median Family Income)	Total Rent- ers	Cost-Burdened (>30%)	Severely Cost-Burdened (>50%)
≤30%	3,345	2,245 (67%)	1,885 (56%)
>30% to ≤50%	2,180	1,790 (82%)	965 (44%)
>50% to ≤80%	2,270	1,435 (63%)	125 (6%)
>80% to ≤100%	1,325	215 (16%)	0 (0%)
>100%	3,045	300 (10%)	0 (0%)
Total	12,170	5,985 (49%)	2,975 (24%)

KEY OBSERVATIONS FOR RENTERS:

- Very low-income renters (≤30% Area Median Family Income) are the most burdened, with 67% paying over 30% of their income on rent and 56% paying over half their income on rent.
- Over 80% of renters earning 30-50% Area Median Family Income experience a cost burden, indicating a severe shortage of affordable rental units.
- Even moderate-income renters (50-80% Area Median Family Income) struggle with affordability, with 63% cost-burdened.
- Higher-income renters (>80% Area Median Family Income) have much lower cost burdens, indicating that market-rate rentals are affordable only for those earning above the median income.

CHALLENGES FOR RENTERS:

- Insufficient affordable rental housing, particularly for very low-income households.
- Limited housing choice for middle-income renters, making it difficult to transition to homeownership.
- Rising rent prices and stagnant wages increase the risk of financial instability and homelessness.

Potential Solutions to Housing Affordability in Forrest County

- Expand Affordable Rental Housing
 - Increase the supply of low-cost rental units to reduce renter cost burdens.
 - Encourage public-private partnerships for affordable housing development.
 - Expand rental assistance programs for very low-income renters.

- **Housing Rehabilitation and Preservation**
 - Repair and preserve aging housing stock to improve living conditions.
 - Increase funding for home improvement grants targeting low-income homeowners.
 - Support landlord incentives for maintaining affordable rental units.
- **Homeownership Support for Moderate-Income Households**
 - Provide down payment assistance for first-time homebuyers.
 - Promote mixed-income housing developments to expand homeownership opportunities.
 - Encourage community land trusts or shared equity housing models.
- **Economic Development and Wage Growth**
 - Strengthen workforce development programs to help renters transition to higher-paying jobs.
 - Encourage business investments and job creation in the county to boost household incomes.
- **Zoning and Land Use Policies for Affordable Housing**
 - Ensure zoning codes allow for more multifamily and mixed-income housing.
 - Support accessory dwelling units (ADUs) to increase affordable rental options.
 - Adopt rental housing ordinances to ensure homes provided for rent are in safe condition

Conclusion

Housing affordability is a significant challenge in Forrest County, particularly for renters and lower-income households. The county has a high rate of cost burden among renters (49%), with a severe cost burden disproportionately affecting very low-income families. While homeowners are less affected, low-income owners still struggle with affordability. Addressing these challenges will require a combination of housing policy changes, financial assistance programs, and economic development initiatives to expand affordable housing options and reduce the cost burden for vulnerable populations.