

# STATE OF FLORIDA

## OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

### EXECUTIVE ORDER NUMBER 20-170

WHEREAS, economic progress has been made in many rural areas, the growth and prosperity enjoyed by most communities in the State during the past 45 years did not extend into Florida's rural areas; and

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, Section 288.0656(7), Florida Statutes, authorizes the Rural Economic Development Initiative to recommend to the Governor up to three areas for designation as Rural Areas of Opportunity; and

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

WHEREAS, the counties of Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty and Washington were designated on November 8, 1999, by Executive Order 99-275, as a Rural Area of Opportunity for a term of five years due to being adversely affected by extraordinary economic events.

Such extraordinary economic events include the “net ban” constitutional amendment, the closure of the paper mill in Port St. Joe as well as other plant closures throughout the region. Five of the eight counties in the region were among the second most economically distressed in the state; and

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, the re-designation expired on January 8, 2015 and the Rural Economic Development Initiative met on January 16, 2015 and agreed to recommend to the Governor to continue the designation of the counties of Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, Wakulla and Washington and the area within the city limits of Freeport as a Rural Area of Opportunity. Executive Order 15-133 was amended by Executive order 17-212 to add the area in Walton County north of the Choctawhatchee Bay and the Intracoastal Waterway to the Northwest Rural Area of Opportunity with an expiration date of July 8, 2020; and

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

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

Section 1. The area within the boundaries of the counties of Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, Wakulla and Washington and the area in Walton County north of the Choctawhatchee Bay and the Intracoastal Waterway is designated as a Rural Area of Opportunity.

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

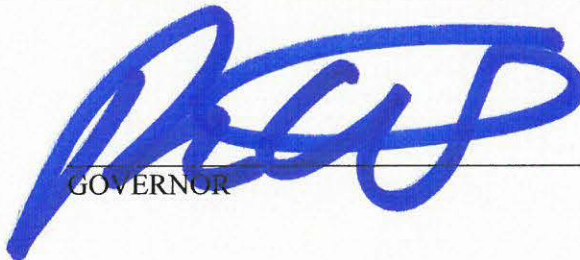
Section 3. On a case-by-case basis, the criteria, requirements or similar provisions of economic development incentives may be waived. Such incentives include, but shall not be limited to, the Qualified Target Industry Tax Refund Program under Section 288.106, Florida Statutes, the Quick Response Training Program under Section 288.047, Florida Statutes, the Quick Response Training Program for participants in the welfare transition program under Section 288.047(8), Florida Statutes, transportation projects under Section 288.063, Florida Statutes, the brownfield redevelopment bonus refund under Section 288.107, Florida Statutes, and the rural job tax credit program under Sections 212.098 and 220.1895, Florida Statutes.

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

Section 5. This designation shall be in effect for five years and will expire on July 8, 2025 but shall be reviewed by the Rural Economic Development Initiative annually. The Rural Economic Development Initiative may recommend that the designation be terminated or continued based on economic development progress from current base lines or upon performance under the Memorandum of Agreement.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Florida to be affixed at Tallahassee this 8th Day of July, 2020.



  
GOVERNOR

ATTEST:

  
SECRETARY OF STATE

**FILED**  
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TALLAHASSEE FLORIDA