

The Heartland Regional Resiliency Coalition

Memorandum of Understanding

This memorandum of understanding (MOU) is entered into among the undersigned Members of the Heartland Region. All Parties are collectively referred to as Members.

On September 8, 2021, Central Florida Regional Planning Council's Board affirmed by unanimous decision to support the creation of a program to convene stakeholders in the seven-county Heartland Region to develop the framework for a regional resiliency coalition, herein including the undersigned local governments and government agencies and entities serving the Heartland Region.

WHEREAS, the Heartland Region including the counties of DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, Okeechobee and Polk is home to more than 1,015,841 residents as of 2020, approximately 4.7% of the 2020 population of the State of Florida, and includes recreational spaces, state parks, wildlife preserves, protected natural areas, significant agricultural lands as well as a military installation; and

WHEREAS, the Heartland Region of Florida consists of seven inland counties, five of which are rural, one of which is large urban and one of which is small urban and all of which contain an economy that is driven by natural resource-based industries including forestry, fishing, and agriculture; key industries such as aviation, manufacturing, logistics; academic institutions and government services; and businesses large and small which anchor the communities of the Heartland; and

WHEREAS, according to the 2020 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Update for the Central Florida Region, the industries that employ the greatest number of people include government; leisure and hospitality; professional and business services; trade, transportation and utilities; education and health services, manufacturing, financial activities, and construction; and

WHEREAS, additional regional approaches building on the Heartland 2060: Building a Resilient Region plan are critical to supporting ongoing local efforts to increase adaptive capacities to improve resilience in confronting shocks and stressors to both the natural and built environments; and

WHEREAS, Heartland Regional Resiliency Coalition is being formed to advance local and regional responses to significant economic, community, and natural system disruption, provide technical assistance and support, and pursue collaborative solutions in addressing these effects on our communities; and

WHEREAS, the Counties of Desoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, Okeechobee, and Polk and the municipalities within as well as government agencies and entities serving the Heartland Region (the "Members"), share a sense of community, economy, and critically important environmental resources; and

WHEREAS, the Heartland region is known for its beautiful rivers, lakes, and wildlife habitats which are central to the quality of life, tourism industry, and economic vitality of the region; and

WHEREAS, extreme weather events can impact the lives of residents, damage property, disrupt businesses, increase crop damage, and degrade natural systems. Such impacts result in disruptions to

local economies, lost revenues for the private and public sectors, loss of employment opportunities over time, and extreme demand for governmental resources to combat and recover from those events; and

WHEREAS, the region is particularly vulnerable to adverse impacts from flooding resulting from increases in frequency and duration of rainfall events, wind damage from severe weather systems, and extreme temperature variations; and

WHEREAS, a coordinated approach is necessary to maximize the benefit of efforts to address such impacts and to improve the region's resilience to such events; and

WHEREAS, to most effectively address these challenges, the Members are committed to being resilient to a changing environment, and will consider adaptation and risk reduction strategies intended to ensure public safety and safeguard critical infrastructure, property, environmental assets, and basic quality of life for current residents and future generations; and

WHEREAS, while many counties and cities in the Heartland have independently identified and undertaken activities to address vulnerabilities, they recognize the value of a collaborative commitment to build resiliency in the region, foster best practices, and benefit from cross jurisdictional initiatives; and

WHEREAS, the Members have joined in formation of the Heartland Regional Resiliency Coalition to coordinate their efforts and enhance their abilities to identify, plan, and implement sustainability and resiliency measures to guard against threats and protect our natural environment and our communities, for the health and safety of the region; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GOVERNING BOARDS OF THE COALITION MEMBERS THAT:

SECTION 1. Findings — The findings set forth above are adopted and set forth as the reasons and statement of purpose for the formation of the Heartland Regional Resiliency Coalition.

SECTION 2. Regional Cooperation — The Members shall work together to maximize their efforts to mitigate and adapt to various identified effects by: identifying vulnerabilities in their communities; identifying common vulnerability assessment methodologies; planning for mitigation and adaptation actions that will enhance the resiliency of their communities; learning from each other through sharing their knowledge from prior efforts and planning documents; leveraging their opportunities; and pursuing public private partnerships.

SECTION 3. Regional Resiliency Action Plan — The Members shall develop a Regional Resiliency Action Plan which shall include strategies for coordinated regional preparation for and adaption to a rapidly changing environment.

SECTION 4. Basis of Planning — The Members will base strategies and actions on commonly accepted methodologies and valid technical data while working together to use recognized and consistent projections to assess vulnerability and inform planning efforts.

SECTION 5. Strategy — The Members shall develop strategies which recognize the region-specific vulnerabilities of the Heartland to the impacts of extreme weather and climate and include recommendations for the pursuit of state and federal resources.

SECTION 6. Community Involvement — The Members shall work collaboratively to recognize and engage the regional community, involving a diverse stakeholder representation in developing policies and recommendations for implementation of the Regional Resiliency Action Plan.

SECTION 7. Collaboration — The Central Florida Regional Planning Council shall serve as the entity to provide a collaborative platform to seek resources and projects, on behalf of the Coalition in furtherance of the efforts of the Coalition in coordination with Members and other stakeholders.

SECTION 8. Intent — The Members each join the Heartland Regional Resiliency Coalition as an expression of their intent and commitment to work together on a regional level to identify and address the effects of but not limited to flooding, wind damage, and extreme weather. Coalition Members do not hereby commit local resources or staffing and acknowledge that the governing body of each Member retains those powers and authorities.

SECTION 9. Additional Members may be added to this MOU without additional action and signing by all Members.

SECTION 10. This Memorandum of Understanding shall take effect on April 1, 2022.