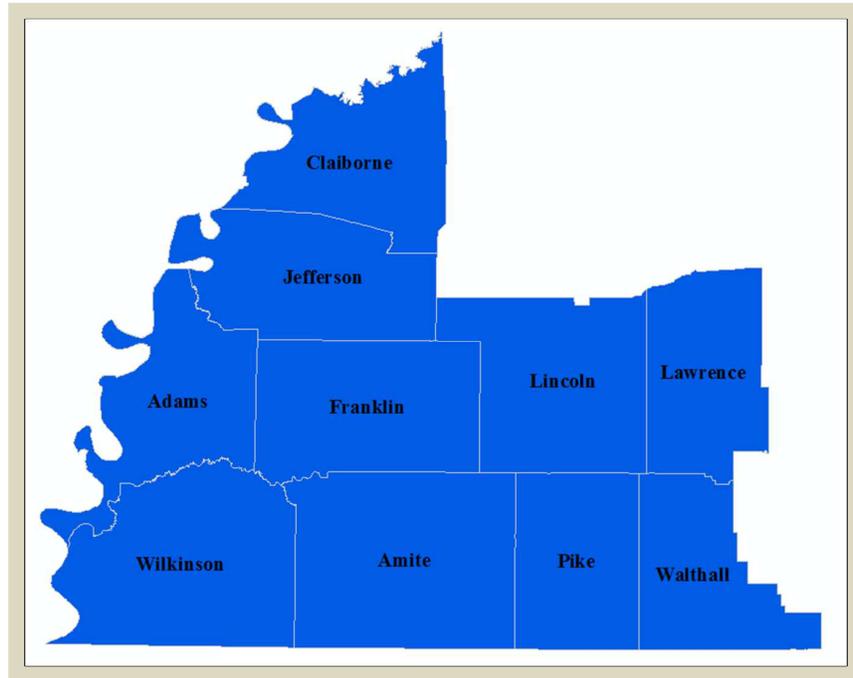


# **SOUTHWEST MISSISSIPPI**

## **PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT**

### COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS) 2017-2022





*Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*  
*For*  
*Southwest Mississippi Planning and Development District*

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## INTRODUCTION

### ***PURPOSE OF THE CEDS***

The CEDS will provide useful regional information, guidance, and perspective to local economic development stakeholders, whether they are at the municipal, county, or regional level. The CEDS is a product of a planning process, made up of a CEDS Committee, which was intentionally inclusive of diverse representatives in the public, private, and non-profit sectors throughout the Southwest Mississippi region. The CEDS is not intended to generate mandates to individual cities or counties but rather designed to provide a conceptual framework to be used by stakeholders to strengthen the competitiveness, economic resilience, and quality of life in Southwest Mississippi.

### ***THE DISTRICT***

The Southwest Mississippi Planning and Development District consists of 10 counties, 20 municipalities and 1 hamlet located in Southwest Mississippi.



## SECTION I

### SUMMARY OF EXISTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONDITIONS

#### 1) Population Demographics

##### a) Population Growth –

GEOGRAPHY (UNITED STATES, MISSISSIPPI OR COUNTY IN DISTRICT)	PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION CHANGE BETWEEN 2000 AND 2010 CENSUS	PERCENTAGE POPULATION CHANGE BETWEEN 2010 AND 2016 CENSUS ESTIMATES
UNITED STATES	9.7	4.5
STATE OF MISSISSIPPI	4.3	.7
ADAMS COUNTY	-5.9	-3.2
AMITE	-3.4	-2.9
CLAIBORNE	-18.8	-4.8
FRANKLIN	-3.9	-4.1
JEFFERSON	-20.7	-5.6
LAWRENCE	-2.5	-1.4
LINCOLN	5.1	-1
PIKE	3.8	-1.8
WALTHALL	1.9	-5.5
WILKINSON	-4.2	-8.4
<b>AVERAGE FOR ALL DISTRICT COUNTIES</b>	<b>-4.9</b>	<b>-3.9</b>

*Source: Census*

The outmigration of the district has become an alarming trend. There were some significant negative trends within certain counties for various reasons between 2000 and 2010 but Census estimates are showing the negative trends will include all 10 counties in the 2020 Census.

Adams County experienced significant out-migration due to the closure of several large employers, including International Paper and Johns Manville plants in the last 15-20 years. The lack of growth in some of the surrounding Counties and decline over the last decade in a number of them could also be attributed to these closures, due to these employers having employees who lived in surrounding Counties who were laid off.

Jefferson and Claiborne Counties are considered two of the poorest counties in the district. They experienced well above average out-migration in the previous CEDS and while the outmigration rate isn't anticipated to be in the teens it's still at a considerable high rate. There is a severe lack of industry and jobs in those areas. Claiborne County does have Grand Gulf Nuclear Power Plant of which completed a \$1 billion modernization and expansion in capacity in 2011-2012. The plant faces future workforce

challenges including an aging workforce of which there's the potential to replace 700 employees over the next 5-10 years.

Many small towns have yet to recover from the devastating results of NAFTA. Smaller communities like Monticello, New Hebron, Tylertown and Magnolia lost a huge part of their tax base in addition to the job loss. This has not only caused some migration of population it has compounded the lack of revenue to improve and enhance the local infrastructure.

There have been many industrial announcements (mostly alternative energy projects) over the last few years in the area but the drop in oil prices has either halted construction or canceled projects altogether.

***b) Age***

<b>GEOGRAPHY (UNITED STATES, MISSISSIPPI OR COUNTY IN DISTRICT)</b>	<b>% OF POPULATION BETWEEN 18 AND 24 2000</b>	<b>% OF POPULATION BETWEEN 18 &amp; 24 2010</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF INCREASE/DECREASE IN POPULATION AGE 18 TO 24 FROM 2000-2010</b>
<b>UNITED STATES</b>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>-0.8</b>
<b>STATE OF MISSISSIPPI</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>-0.8</b>
<b>ADAMS COUNTY</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>-0.5</b>
<b>AMITE</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>-0.8</b>
<b>CLAIBORNE</b>	<b>23.1</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>-5.8</b>
<b>FRANKLIN</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>-1.5</b>
<b>JEFFERSON</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>-1.9</b>
<b>LAWRENCE</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>-1.7</b>
<b>LINCOLN</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>-1.2</b>
<b>PIKE</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>-1.9</b>
<b>WALTHALL</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>-1.9</b>
<b>WILKINSON</b>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>-1.3</b>
<b>AVERAGE FOR ALL DISTRICT COUNTIES</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>-1.9</b>

*Source: Census*

The above table uses Census information to analyze youth out-migration by analyzing the shift in the 18-24 year old population as a percentage of the total. If youth were leaving

in significant numbers to find employment, this population segment would be in decline in relation to the total. As the table reflects, there doesn't appear to be a significant problem with the number of young people who are leaving. However, it does not show the impact of "brain drain" caused by a small number of exceptional young people who may be leaving to find other opportunities.

**c) Education**

<b>GEOGRAPHY (UNITED STATES, MISSISSIPPI OR COUNTY IN DISTRICT)</b>	<b>% OF POPULATION WITH HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION</b>	<b>% OF POPULATION WITH BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER</b>
<b>UNITED STATES</b>	<b>80.4</b>	<b>24.4</b>
<b>STATE OF MISSISSIPPI</b>	<b>72.9</b>	<b>16.9</b>
<b>ADAMS COUNTY</b>	<b>73.4</b>	<b>17.5</b>
<b>AMITE</b>	<b>67.2</b>	<b>9.4</b>
<b>CLAIBORNE</b>	<b>71.6</b>	<b>18.9</b>
<b>FRANKLIN</b>	<b>67.5</b>	<b>10.5</b>
<b>JEFFERSON</b>	<b>59.7</b>	<b>10.6</b>
<b>LAWRENCE</b>	<b>72.9</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>LINCOLN</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>12.4</b>
<b>PIKE</b>	<b>70.3</b>	<b>12.5</b>
<b>WALTHALL</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>10.4</b>
<b>WILKINSON</b>	<b>58.1</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>AVERAGE FOR ALL DISTRICT COUNTIES</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>12.4</b>

Source: Census

The chart above indicates that 68% of Southwest Mississippi's population has a high school education, while slightly above 12% is college educated. This is slightly below the Mississippi average and significantly lower than the National average. The situation is particularly acute in some of the poorest Counties in the District, such as Jefferson and Wilkinson, which have over 40% of the population without a high school education. This is double the National percentile.





*d) Unemployment*

<b>GEOGRAPHY (UNITED STATES, MISSISSIPPI OR COUNTY IN DISTRICT)</b>	<b>AVERAGE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (%) FROM 1990-2011</b>	<b>AVERAGE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (%) FROM 2012-2017</b>
UNITED STATES	6	6.3
STATE OF MISSISSIPPI	7.1	7.2
ADAMS COUNTY	8.3	8.6
AMITE	7.1	8.1
CLAIBORNE	12.2	13.5
FRANKLIN	8.3	8.2
JEFFERSON	16.5	15.9
LAWRENCE	8.5	8.2
LINCOLN	7.5	6
PIKE	7.8	8.1
WALTHALL	8.0	9.1
WILKINSON	10.9	10.9
<b>AVERAGE FOR ALL DISTRICT COUNTIES</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>9.7</b>

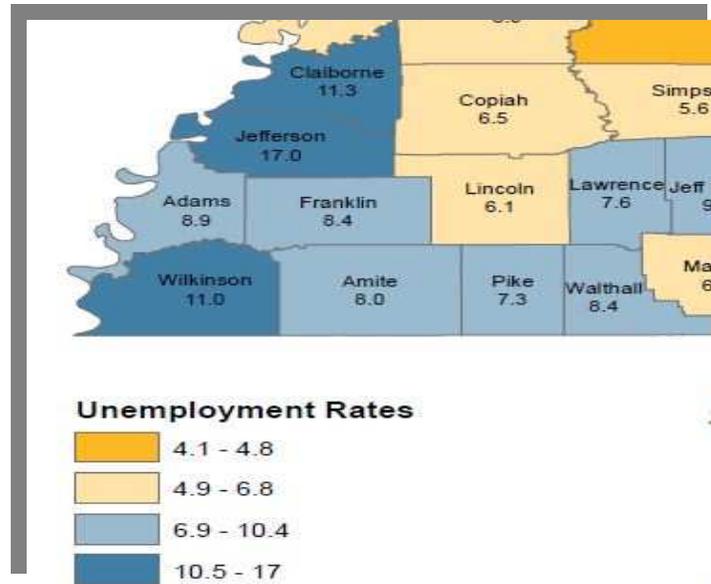
*Source – Mississippi Dept. of Employment Security (MDES)*

The above table shows that unemployment has been a persistent problem in the SWMPDD region for the last 35 years. Rates run about 2.5 percentage points higher than the State as a whole and 3.4 points higher than the United States average.

Several Counties, particularly Jefferson, Wilkinson and Claiborne have particularly severe unemployment rates which are part of endemic problems in these Counties which are plagued by persistently high poverty and general social decline. These counties are in particularly bad need of economic development, although it is challenging to entice employers to locate there, thus creating a “chicken and egg” scenario which results in it being difficult to determine the origin of these Counties’ very serious economic problems.

July 2017 rates  
Per MDES:

US-4.6  
MS-6.1



e) *Poverty*

GEOGRAPHY (UNITED STATES, MISSISSIPPI OR COUNTY IN DISTRICT)	PERCENT OF INDIVIDUALS BELOW POVERTY LEVEL (2010 CENSUS)	PERCENT OF INDIVIDUALS BELOW POVERTY LEVEL LATEST 5 YEAR ESTIMATE (2011-2015)
UNITED STATES	12.4	15.5
STATE OF MISSISSIPPI	21.6	22.5
ADAMS	31.5	30.1
AMITE	24.5	22.4
CLAIBORNE	37.9	42
FRANKLIN	25.1	18.9
JEFFERSON	42.8	48.7
LAWRENCE	18.6	22
LINCOLN	18.5	26.6
PIKE	26.2	29.1
WALTHALL	24.2	28.7
WILKINSON	26.6	32.3
AVERAGE FOR ALL DISTRICT COUNTIES	27.1	30

Source: Census

The information in the preceding table, which is derived from the 2010 Census and updated using American Community Survey 5-year estimates, shows that the poverty rate for Southwest Mississippi is roughly double the rate of the National and significantly higher than the entire State. Over one in four people in Southwest Mississippi live in poverty. In some of the worst Counties, the rate is one in three.



*A common site in Southwest Mississippi*

*f) Workforce*

<b>WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION</b>	
<b>GEOGRAPHY (UNITED STATES, MISSISSIPPI OR COUNTY IN DISTRICT)</b>	<b>PERCENT OF INDIVIDUALS PARTICIPATING IN THE WORKFORCE</b>
<b>UNITED STATES</b>	<b>63%</b>
<b>STATE OF MISSISSIPPI</b>	<b>57%</b>
<b>ADAMS</b>	<b>47%</b>
<b>AMITE</b>	<b>51%</b>
<b>CLAIBORNE</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>FRANKLIN</b>	<b>56%</b>
<b>JEFFERSON</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>LAWRENCE</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>LINCOLN</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>PIKE</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>WALTHALL</b>	<b>52%</b>
<b>WILKINSON</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>AVERAGE FOR ALL DISTRICT COUNTIES</b>	<b>48%</b>

*Source: MDES*

The chart above shows that the workforce participation rate for Southwest Mississippi is approximately 9 percentage points lower than the Mississippi average and 15 percentage points less than the National average. While most of this rate can be attributed to the lack of job opportunity, there are several Counties, particularly Jefferson, Wilkinson and Claiborne which have particularly low numbers. This rate could be attributed to

frictional unemployment which is the result of generations of socioeconomic problems associated with the high poverty rates in these Counties.

LaborForce Estimates			Unemployment	-----
Area	Labor Force	Employed	Number	Rate
U.S.	161,911,000	154,470,000	7,441,000	4.6
MISSISSIPPI	1,303,800	1,224,700	79,100	6.1
ADAMS	11,430	10,410	1,020	8.9
AMITE	4,500	4,140	360	8.0
CLAIBORNE	3,120	2,770	350	11.3
FRANKLIN	2,860	2,620	240	8.4
JEFFERSON	2,280	1,890	390	17
LAWRENCE	4,780	4,410	370	7.6
LINCOLN	14,930	14,020	910	6.1
PIKE	14,600	13,530	1,070	7.3
WALTHALL	5,090	4,660	430	8.4
WILKINSON	2,800	2,490	310	11

Source: MDES

*g) PCI (per capita income)*

Geography (United States, Mississippi or County in District)	Per Capita Income
United States	\$28,930
State of Mississippi	\$21,057
Adams County	\$17,669
Amite	\$17,635
Claiborne	\$12,229
Franklin	\$22,098
Jefferson	\$12,601
Lawrence	\$19,844
Lincoln	\$18,844
Pike	\$17,777
Walthall	\$17,872
Wilkinson	\$15,307
Average for all District Counties	\$17,188

Source: Census

This chart shows the typical pattern of Southwest Mississippi trailing the United States average drastically and being significantly below the Mississippi average. It also shows the diversity within the region, with several Counties having significantly higher incomes than other Counties along the Mississippi River i.e. Jefferson, Claiborne and Wilkinson, which are extremely distressed.

Strategic Conclusion for Population Demographics – The bottom line conclusion for the preceding data analysis is that Southwest Mississippi has a poorly educated workforce which has at least partially resulted in the region suffering economically. In areas with a poorly educated and trained workforce, it is more difficult to achieve high workforce participation rates, due to difficulties in attracting industry which will produce jobs.

The level of educational attainment generally follows the pattern of poverty, in that Counties with the lowest level of education tend to have the highest indicators of poverty. The one exception is Claiborne County, which has a skewed result due to it being the location of Alcorn State University. The students, most of who are not from Claiborne County, give this County an unrealistic level of educational attainment. Immediately upon graduation, virtually all of these students leave Claiborne County.

The lack of educational attainment also results in lower than average salaries. Residents who are employed are working for lower wages due to their educational level. The salary scale tends to follow the educational trend, with the lower salaries being in the Counties which also have the lowest educational levels.

## 2) Clusters

Clusters are geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, and associated institutions in a particular field that are present in a nation or region. These clusters provide employment concentrations within a region.

Due to the poor economic conditions of Southwest Mississippi, there are few traditional clusters in the district. The cluster definition in this region must be expanded to include various sectors which are scattered throughout the Southwest Mississippi region.

The chart below expands on them by providing information concerning size and percent of total workforce.

CLUSTER	AVERAGE ENTRY LEVEL WAGES	% OF REGIONAL WORKFORCE	% PROJECTED GROWTH TO 2022
OFFICE/ADMINISTRATION	\$20,199	15	1.7
SALES/RETAIL	\$17,365	10	5
FOOD PREP/SERVICE	\$17,238	9	2
HEALTH CARE PRACTITIONER/TECH	\$34,538	8	17
TRANSPORTATION	\$19,952	7	6
PRODUCTION/MANUFACTURING	\$20,994	6.7	3.7
EDUCATION/LIBRARY	\$21,574	6.3	13

Source: MDES

The chart above comes from information obtained from the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES). This information isn't available for each county but is

grouped together by Workforce Development Areas. These figures are compiled using the Southcentral Mississippi Workforce Development Area which does include some counties not in our 10 county area though all counties are contiguous and thus this chart can be used as a guide for our region of the state. In the previous CEDS “construction” was a primary cluster. This is no longer the case for our region. The Health Care Practitioner/Tech average entry level salary appears low due to the fact that specialized health care practitioners salaries were listed as N/A thus it can be assumed that the much larger salaries, in most cases 6 figure salaries, of these specialized practitioners would have elevated that average considerably. The “projected growth to 2022” information was taken from the MDES’ “Occupational Employment Projections.”

Strategic Findings: The four major clusters are office/admin, sales/retail, food prep and Health Care.

The chart above indicates that Southwest Mississippi needs to work toward providing education and technical training for the health care service field, in order to keep “feeding the cluster.” While healthcare isn’t the largest cluster in the region according to the MDES, the wages are better on average and this cluster is anticipated to grow considerably faster and larger than the other clusters. Better education and technical training could result in residents obtaining higher level jobs with better salaries.

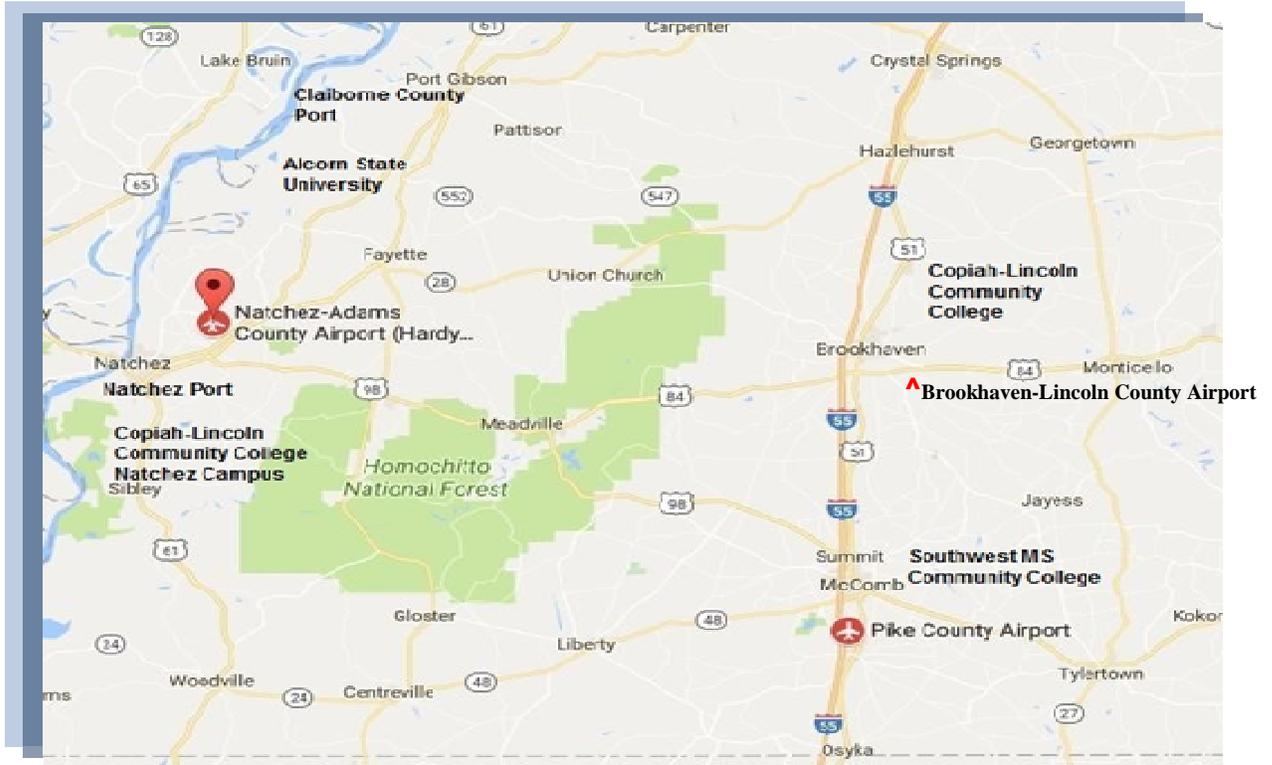
There also should be a major effort to retain manufacturing jobs and recruit new industry. This is complicated due to the affects of globalization.

In order to retain these jobs, close relationships should be developed between current manufacturing industries, colleges and universities and trade schools in order to assure that their workforce needs are being met. Additionally, research should be done to determine the workforce and infrastructure needs of new manufacturing industries in an effort to recruit them into the area.

While retail trade jobs are an obvious cluster in Southwest Mississippi, the wages paid to these employees is very low. There should still be an effort to retain retail jobs by assisting business owners in meeting their workforce and infrastructure needs. Relationships should be strengthened between the retail sector and educational institutions to make sure that their workforce needs are being addressed. Also, local governments should maintain working relationships with these retailers to assure that their infrastructure needs are met.

### 3) Infrastructure

Local Airports, Ports and Colleges:



*Courtesy Southwest Mississippi Partnership*

## ANALYSIS OF EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

<b>County/City</b>	<b>Broadband Telecommunication Capacity</b>	<b>Condition/Capacity of Water System</b>	<b>Condition/Capacity of Industrial Park</b>	<b>Condition/Capacity of Roads and Bridges Serving Business and Industry</b>	<b>Condition/Capacity of Sewer System</b>
<b>Adams County</b>	Good, through DSL, cable companies and satellite.	Good, but some areas are not served.	Accessed by a water and airport, as well as County road.	Good	Good
<b>City of Natchez</b>	Good, through DSL, cable companies and satellite.	Aging infrastructure but well maintained.	Accessed by a water and airport, as well as County road.	Good	Aging infrastructure but well maintained.
<b>Claiborne County</b>	Yes, through DSL, cable companies and satellite.	Good, but some areas are not served.	There are two with a total of 18 acres and an industrial building. They are accessed by County roads and are within 10 and 3 miles of Highway 61.	Fair	Aging infrastructure but there is a current CDBG project underway to improve this system.
<b>Port Gibson</b>	Yes, through DSL, cable companies and satellite.	Good	See Claiborne above, plus 600 acres available at the port.	Fair	See Claiborne above
<b>Jefferson County</b>	Yes, through DSL, cable companies and satellite.	Poor, see Fayette below		Fair	See Fayette below
<b>City of Fayette</b>	Good.	Poor, potential CDBG project and water loan to overhaul system	The City has an industrial park. It is accessed by a City street.	Fair	Poor, system needs major overhaul and has been cited for violations. good
<b>Franklin County</b>	Yes, through Franklin Telephone Company. 95% of the County is served.	Good, but some areas are not served.	The County has an industrial park with 80 acres available for development. It is accessed by a County road.	Fair but needs improvements.	good
<b>Town of Bude</b>	See Franklin above	Good because system just received an overhaul and aging water lines are being replaced	See Franklin above	Fair but needs improvement	good
<b>Meadville</b>	See Franklin above	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Roxie</b>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Lincoln County</b>	Average, some spotty coverage out in county	average	Good, plenty of room	poor	fair
<b>City of Brookhaven</b>	good	Great	Great	Good	Average
<b>Amite County</b>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Town of Gloster</b>	Fair, Needs Improvements	Good – 300,000 gallon capacity.	The Town has an industrial park with 10 acres available.	Fair	Good

<b>County/City</b>	<b>Broadband Telecommunication Capacity</b>	<b>Condition/Capacity of Water System</b>	<b>Condition/Capacity of Industrial Park</b>	<b>Condition/Capacity of Roads and Bridges Serving Business and Industry</b>	<b>Condition/Capacity of Sewer System</b>
<b>Town of Liberty</b>	Fair, through DSL, cable companies and satellite.	Good, upgrading through CDBG	The Town has an industrial park which is accessed by a Town street. Most of it is in use.	Good	Good
<b>Pike County</b>	Yes, through DSL, cable companies and satellite.	Good.	An industrial park is available with 320 acres open for development. It is accessed by a County Road.	Good	Good but there are some outlying areas unserved.
<b>City of Magnolia</b>	Good	Good	An industrial park is available which is accessed by Highway 51. It has 150 acres available.	good	Good.
<b>City of McComb</b>	Yes, through DSL, cable companies and satellite.	Good	An industrial park is available with 320 acres open for development. It is accessed by a County Road. Pike County's.	good	Good, the system had a major overhaul recently
<b>Town of Osyka</b>	Good	Fair	See Pike County above	Good	Fair, but there are some parts of the Town which are not served.
<b>Town of Summit</b>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Lawrence County</b>	Partial coverage through Bellsouth DSL Needs improvement	good	The County has a 40 acre undeveloped industrial park which is accessed by Highway 27.	good	good
<b>Town of Silver Creek</b>	Needs improvement	Good. It is serving 19% of its capacity.	An industrial park is available with 5 acres available for development.	Satisfactory.	System is at 50% of capacity and will need to be rehabilitated over the next 10-15 years.
<b>City of Monticello</b>	Good	Good	See Lawrence County above	Average	Poor
<b>Town of New Hebron</b>	Poor	Good, 60,000 tank	NA	Good	Good
<b>Wilkinson County</b>	Limited, Needs improvement	Needs improvement	The County has an industrial park with 100 acres available	Poor, underdeveloped	Poor
<b>Town of Crosby</b>	Good	Fair	NA	Poor	Poor
<b>Town of Woodville</b>	Average	Good	NA	Fair	Good
<b>Town of Centreville</b>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Walthall County</b>	Yes, through DSL, 4G LTE, cable, and satellite.	Good	Good. 55 remaining acres, 40 usable.	Fair. Road need to be wider with markers/lines.	Good
<b>City of Tylertown</b>	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good

*Source: surveys from various committee and community leaders. Did not receive 100% response.*

Strategic Findings: The chart above is based on surveys and discussions with County/City officials.

Broadband access is essential in today's economy. The limited access to broadband in rural areas of Southwest Mississippi impacts levels of educational attainment and access to information. Broadband communication accessibility has improved drastically since the last CEDS with the only real voids being in the rural portions of the counties. The rural areas have some access via satellite service providers but they complain the service is sub-par.

Based on the sample responses to the survey, it appears that water systems are in surprisingly good shape. There was only one system which had major problems and it appears as that system will be getting a much needed overhaul in the near future.

Sewer systems were in a little worse condition, although the majority provided a listing of good. There were enough problems revealed to show that this could be a possible area need. One of the problems with sewer systems is the continual changes in federal and state regulations. Towns cannot financially keep pace with the necessary upgrades in order to be in compliance with such regulations.

The responses concerning access roads to business and industry indicated that these were in fair/good condition. This indicates that this may be a particular need for the District though there has been some vast improvements in this area since the last CEDS.

Strategic Findings: Several years ago Hurricane Katrina had numerous effects on Southwest Mississippi which appeared to be permanent, many effects were good. The permanent nature of these effects didn't last. While there was an upswing in overall population, retail sales and home sales following Katrina those effects have since worn off and the region appears to be in even worse condition than it was prior to the hurricane. There have also been additional damaging storms since and a major flood that had a massive negative impact, especially to the areas alongside the Mississippi River.

The strategy committee felt that the best way to address the existing conditions discussed in the analysis section was the development of regional solutions which will enhance the prospects of attracting industries which would create better paying jobs for the Southwest Mississippi District. These jobs will help retain current exceptional individuals who are leaving the area and address the problem of residents who have job skills, but are not willing to relocate to areas where they can be employed. Many of these residents have been laid off after the closing of major industries in the area.

## SECTION II

### SWOT ANALYSIS (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

Responding to the trends outlined in the previous section requires an organizational framework that categorizes those trends and leads to development responses. This CEDS utilizes a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) to do that. The CEDS committee conducted a SWOT analysis and developed new measurable goals and objectives for the region. The SWOT framework is presented below. The goals, objectives and actions are presented as “Themes”. Each theme and component is analyzed in the subsections that follow.

#### Strengths

- Post-secondary Education Opportunities
- Natural Resources
- Culture/Resilience
- Infrastructure (Waterway, Hwy 55)

#### Weaknesses

- Attitude Towards Value of Education
- Shortage of Skilled Labor
- Infrastructure (Non-waterway Railway)
- Regional Competition

#### Opportunities

- Harmonize Development Efforts in the Region
- Diversify Regional Economy by Developing Industry Clusters
- Advocate for Middle-skills Job Development
- Develop Regional, National and Global Brand Appeal Messages About the Value of This Region to Overcome Negative Perceptions via existing Museums, Monuments and Festivals.

#### Threats

- Over-Reliance on Few Industries for Employment
- Migration Patterns

### Strengths

Meeting the challenges of a changing workforce can be one of the strengths of the region. The multiple post-secondary education and training – The Southwest Mississippi Community College Regional Workforce Training Center and Copiah Lincoln Community Colleges Vocational, Career and Technical programs and other private training and technical schools in the region- provide an economic driver for the region, ensuring the capability to develop and maintain a skilled workforce.

The Mississippi River has been one the areas greatest natural resource. The port/industrial park at Natchez has two docks as well as two cranes for loading, offloading and transport. Just north of Natchez is Port Gibson but it only has a general cargo dock on a slack water harbor. There's potential at Port Gibson where there is 600 acres available but it lacks necessary infrastructure for serious river transport. Likewise, Interstate 55 cuts through the heart of Southwest MS providing a major thoroughfare for the transport of goods. It runs north/south connecting to Jackson, MS and Memphis to the north and to the major port of New Orleans, LA to the south.

The abundance of natural resources in the region supports not only the industries that rely on waterways for transport of products, but also the recreational and tourism industries. These same natural resources are instrumental to the *culture and resiliency* of the region. Hunting, fishing, and trapping are embedded in the regional culture as a means of recreation as well as providing economic support to families and businesses.

The infrastructure in terms of waterways is strong and Intrastate 55 runs right through the heart of Southwest Mississippi.

### Weaknesses

Though the region has numerous strengths, it does also have competitive disadvantages or weaknesses. First, employment in the region is unstable, it is strongest at the high- and low-skill levels of the employment spectrum. In the middle-skill jobs, there is often a mismatch between the applicant's credentials and the skills an employer expects.

Historically, higher paying jobs within the energy or manufacturing sector could be had without a high school diploma or college degree. This is no longer the case as many of the manufacturing plants have closed in the region. With the advances of technology, the higher paying jobs require some level of post-secondary education or training.

Likewise, infrastructure, including transportation, public utilities and broadband, has not kept up with the pace of the national level. As a result limited rural public transportation options constrain employment and educational options for residents. Access to broadband, education and workforce training is hindered by infrastructure challenges. Limited broadband access in rural areas not only impacts educational attainment, it reduces the ability of these areas to attract economic development. Railway also plays a vital role. The railway linking the western most counties was in severe danger of closing a few years ago which would have had a devastating effect and would have reverberated into the eastern counties as well. For now this rail has been saved but lingering fears still exist. A Tiger grant was recently awarded to repair this rail. The railway in the western portion of the district is equally as vital, specifically to the last major industry in Lawrence County, Georgia Pacific. This rail is in need of refurbishing.

Regional competition is a challenge. Collaboration within and across regions would support major projects.

### Opportunities

Southwest Mississippi is fortunate to have numerous stakeholders involved in promoting economic development throughout the region. There is already strong collaboration at work among these local and regional actors, but the opportunity always exists to strengthen coordination and harmonize development efforts across the region. Greater information sharing and complementary initiatives (e.g., surveys, data sharing, and coordination of local planning documents with regional goals and objectives) are examples of such coordination and collaboration.

The region can also become more economically resilient by working to develop and diversify the industry clusters adjacent to its existing strengths. The existing and developing industry clusters in the region also would benefit from the further development of middle-skills labor in the region. A greater focus and more resources toward developing and credentialing middle-skill employees would enhance economic development in the region. Perhaps more public awareness campaigns steering high school graduates towards our local two year colleges for middle-skills job training.

There is an opportunity to overcome the negative perceptions about the region by developing regional and national brand appeal messages highlighting the value of Southwest Mississippi to the country and the world. There are multiple festivals throughout the region that celebrate the local flair that perhaps could use more national promotion as well as nationally and regionally significant museums and monuments.

### Threats

The dominance of a small number of industry clusters in the economy poses a threat. Continued diversification of high-value-added industries in the region will enhance the overall economic resilience of the region.

Regional migration patterns pose a distinct challenge, as many residents (specifically college educated youth) have moved to communities where housing and insurance costs are affordable and jobs readily available. This population shift places a burden on government officials and developers to manage any growth of the region. Attracting new businesses to the region is essential, but it must be complemented by efforts to grow existing local businesses and develop local community engagement, or risk losing some of the distinct look and feel that marks so many different Southwest Mississippi communities.

## SECTION III

### STRATEGIES AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

A.) **GOALS** - Attract industries which will provide higher quality jobs for Southwest Mississippi residents and promote Southwest Mississippi's local flair.

- i) Objective - **Workforce Development**—The regional job training facility located at Southwest Mississippi Community College will help develop the labor force needed to attract better employers. Copiah Lincoln Community College can also be utilized for job training via their vocational/technical programs. These colleges need further promotion to get the word out to job seekers and to existing industry and speculative industry that specific training is available for our area.
- ii) Objective – **Infrastructure**- Improvements to the existing port facilities in the region. Railway improvements in the region are also a major issue that will need to be addressed. Improvements to existing industrial parks in all counties. Expansion of nuclear power plant in Claiborne County. This potential expansion would provide Southwest Mississippi with job opportunities which have a much higher pay scale than current clusters.
- iii) Objective – **Economic Dynamics** – Local Economic Development Organizations, Educational institutions, non-profits, etc. partner with City/County officials to attract new industry and promote existing industry. Improving the awareness, accessibility and scale of programs in the region that support and encourage prospective entrepreneurs and inventors to start and grow businesses; promote the uniqueness of the area via festivals, museums and regionally significant monuments, etc.
- iv) Objective – **Economic Resilience**- Resilience encompasses the notion that the area must be prepared to respond and recover from a disaster, whether it's economical or natural. This includes working to reduce the region's vulnerabilities to economic shocks (see the downturn in the oil industry), enhancing the regional economy's ability to recover from a shock, and supporting innovation in the region so that industry clusters in the area remain competitive as industries evolve.

Atwood Music Festival



The Great Mississippi River Balloon Race



## **B.) PLAN**

The District's Plan of Action for the Comprehensive Development Strategy will guide the implementation of the Goals and Objectives of the CEDS in a manner that:

- promotes economic development and opportunity.
- fosters effective transportation access.
- enhances and protects the environment.
- maximizes effective development and use of the workforce consistent with any applicable State or local workforce investment strategy.
- promotes the use of technology in economic development, including access to high-speed telecommunications.
- obtains and utilizes adequate funds and other resources.

To do this the District will continue to work closely with committee members and economic development partners to develop and implement the CEDS; use economic development programs to develop potential projects and will work with the State to ensure the integration of the projects with the State's economic priorities.

Current economic development programs will be utilized where possible to develop projects and goals. A listing of available programs is listed below, but is not limited to:

- Economic Development Planning Grants (EDA)
- Economic Development Infrastructure Grants (EDA)
- Community Development Block Grants
- Delta Regional Authority Programs
- Rural Development Community Programs
- Workforce Development Programs
- Home Investment Partnership Program

## **SECTION IV** **PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

In order to assure the success of any economic development plan, a formal plan of evaluation must be undertaken. To assess the implementation of the Strategy and ensure its success, the CEDS will be evaluated on an annual basis. The results of this evaluation will be used to provide an annual update and will provide for a new Strategy to be written every five years.

The evaluation will have two phases:

The first phase will include a comparison of the local economy's unemployment rate and per capita income from year to year in relation to the region, the state, and the nation. It will also include the number of jobs created and retained in the workforce. These alone are not adequate measures of economic development but can be used as

good indicators.

The second phase of the evaluation process will include a measure of previous year's goals and objectives. It will look at the number and type of investments made in the region and the amount of private sector investment.

Each year, the results of this evaluation will be summarized and presented as an update to the CEDS to the Economic Development Administration. It will also be provided to the CEDS Committee and the Board of Directors for the SWMPDD.