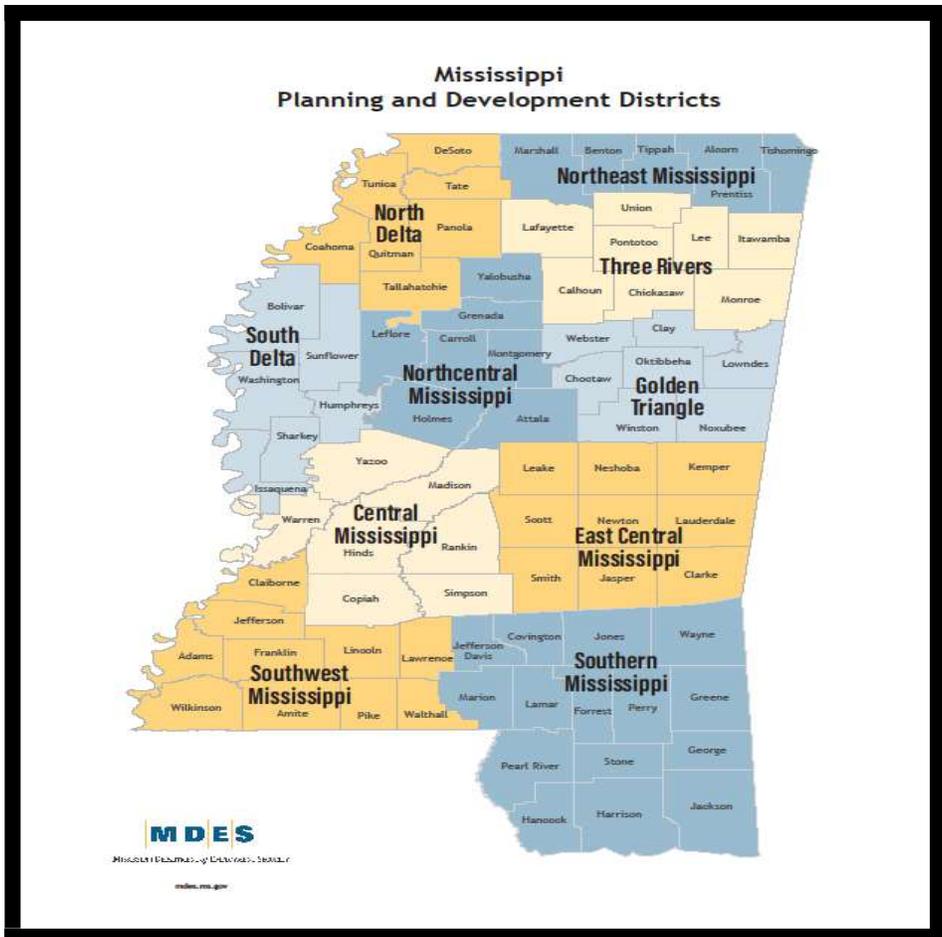




Comprehensive Economic  
Development Strategy (CEDS) 2022-  
2026



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

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Section I: Summary of Existing Economic Development Conditions

Section II: SWOT Analysis

Section III: Strategies and Implementation Plan

Section IV: Performance Measures

## **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.

Adams County- Natchez

Amite County- Liberty, Gloster

Claiborne County- Port Gibson

Franklin County- Meadville, Bude, Roxie

Jefferson County- Fayette

Lawrence County – New Hebron, Silver Creek, Monticello

Lincoln County – Brookhaven, Hamlet of Bogue Chitto

Pike County- McComb, Summit, Osyka, Magnolia

Walthall County –Tylertown

Wilkinson County- Centreville, Woodville, Crosby



## SECTION I

### SUMMARY OF EXISTING SOCIAL/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONDITIONS

#### 1) Population Demographics

##### a) Population Growth –

GEOGRAPHY (UNITED STATES, MISSISSIPPI OR COUNTY IN DISTRICT)  (2020 POPULATION)	PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION CHANGE BETWEEN 2000 AND 2010 CENSUS	PERCENTAGE POPULATION CHANGE BETWEEN 2010 AND 2020 CENSUS ESTIMATES
UNITED STATES (331,449,281)	9.7	4.5
STATE OF MISSISSIPPI (2,961,279)	4.3	.2
ADAMS COUNTY (29,538)	-5.9	-8.5
AMITE (12,720)	-3.4	-3.1
CLAIBORNE (9,135)	-18.8	-4.8
FRANKLIN (7,675)	-3.9	-5.5
JEFFERSON (7,260)	-20.7	-6
LAWRENCE (12,016)	-2.5	-7
LINCOLN (34,907)	5.1	.1
PIKE (40,324)	3.8	-2
WALTHALL (13,884)	1.9	-10
WILKINSON (8,587)	-4.2	-13
<b>AVERAGE FOR ALL DISTRICT COUNTIES</b>	<b>-4.9</b>	<b>-6</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 show the negative trends have now included 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 20 years. The lack of growth in some of the surrounding Counties and decline over the last 20 years 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 experienced well above average out-migration in the previous CEDS and now their outmigration rate is roughly average for the area. Walthall and Wilkinson Counties had the highest out-migration rate for the 2020 Census. It is not understood where this came from as there hasn't been any huge industry closures, etc. Although one answer could be this: The U.S. Census Bureau released the 2020 Census estimated undercount and overcount rates by state and D.C. from the Post-Enumeration

Survey (PES). Mississippi’s undercount percentage is estimated at -4.11%. To put that in real terms, that means the state likely did not lose population, but rather grew by nearly 120,000 people, if these latest estimates from the Census Bureau are to be believed.

There is a lack of industry and jobs in these 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.

**b) Age**

<b>GEOGRAPHY (UNITED STATES, MISSISSIPPI OR COUNTY IN DISTRICT)</b>	<b>% OF POPULATION BETWEEN 18 &amp; 24 2010</b>	<b>% OF POPULATION BETWEEN 18 &amp; 24 2020</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF INCREASE/DECREASE IN POPULATION AGE 18 TO 24 FROM 2010 TO 2020</b>
<b>ADAMS</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>.8</b>
<b>AMITE</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>-2</b>
<b>CLAIBORNE</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>2.3</b>
<b>FRANKLIN</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>-.5</b>
<b>JEFFERSON</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>-.4</b>
<b>LAWRENCE</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>-.4</b>
<b>LINCOLN</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>-.3</b>
<b>PIKE</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>.6</b>
<b>WALTHALL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>2.2</b>
<b>WILKINSON</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>-.8</b>
<b>AVERAGE FOR ALL DISTRICT COUNTIES</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>1.5</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 2016-2020</b>	<b>% OF POPULATION WITH BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER 2016-2020</b>
<b>UNITED STATES</b>	<b>88.5</b>	<b>32.9</b>
<b>STATE OF MISSISSIPPI</b>	<b>85.3</b>	<b>22.8</b>
<b>ADAMS COUNTY</b>	<b>75.5</b>	<b>17.8</b>
<b>AMITE</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>CLAIBORNE</b>	<b>79.3</b>	<b>20.7</b>
<b>FRANKLIN</b>	<b>83.8</b>	<b>12.6</b>
<b>JEFFERSON</b>	<b>80.4</b>	<b>19.1</b>
<b>LAWRENCE</b>	<b>84.7</b>	<b>17.7</b>
<b>LINCOLN</b>	<b>86.5</b>	<b>15.8</b>
<b>PIKE</b>	<b>82.5</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>WALTHALL</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>15.5</b>
<b>WILKINSON</b>	<b>77.2</b>	<b>14.2</b>
<b>AVERAGE FOR ALL DISTRICT COUNTIES</b>	<b>81.5</b>	<b>16</b>

Source: Census

The chart above indicates that 81% of Southwest Mississippi’s population has a high school education, while slightly 16% is college educated. This is slightly below the Mississippi average and significantly lower than the National average. These numbers increased several percentage points overall since the last CEDS and the 2010 Census. This is good news for the District.





*d) Unemployment*

<b>GEOGRAPHY (UNITED STATES, MISSISSIPPI OR COUNTY IN DISTRICT)</b>	<b>AVERAGE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (%) FROM 2012-2017</b>	<b>UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (%) FROM 2022</b>
<b>UNITED STATES</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>3.8</b>
<b>STATE OF MISSISSIPPI</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>4.4</b>
<b>ADAMS COUNTY</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>6.3</b>
<b>AMITE</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>5.7</b>
<b>CLAIBORNE</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>10.6</b>
<b>FRANKLIN</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>5.8</b>
<b>JEFFERSON</b>	<b>15.9</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>LAWRENCE</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>5.4</b>
<b>LINCOLN</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>PIKE</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>5.6</b>
<b>WALTHALL</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>5.6</b>
<b>WILKINSON</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>7.4</b>
<b>AVERAGE FOR ALL DISTRICT COUNTIES</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>7.1</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 3 percentage points higher than the State as a whole and 3.3 points higher than the United States average.

Several Counties, particularly Jefferson and Claiborne have particularly severe unemployment rates which are part of endemic problems in these Counties which are plagued by persistently high poverty. 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.



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>45%</b>
<b>AMITE</b>	<b>41%</b>
<b>CLAIBORNE</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>FRANKLIN</b>	<b>45%</b>
<b>JEFFERSON</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>LAWRENCE</b>	<b>52%</b>
<b>LINCOLN</b>	<b>51%</b>
<b>PIKE</b>	<b>48%</b>
<b>WALTHALL</b>	<b>47%</b>
<b>WILKINSON</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>AVERAGE FOR ALL DISTRICT COUNTIES</b>	<b>45%</b>

Source: MDES

The chart above shows that the workforce participation rate for Southwest Mississippi is approximately 12 percentage points lower than the Mississippi average and 18 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 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.

<b>LaborForce Estimates</b>	<b>Unemployment -----</b>			
<b>Area</b>	<b>Labor Force</b>	<b>Employed</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Rate</b>
<b>U.S.</b>	<b>209,093,059</b>	<b>134,163,349</b>	<b>5,700,000</b>	<b>3.8</b>
<b>MISSISSIPPI</b>	<b>1,681,480</b>	<b>1,223,400</b>	<b>56,600</b>	<b>4.4</b>
<b>ADAMS</b>	<b>10,540</b>	<b>9,880</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>6.3</b>
<b>AMITE</b>	<b>4,440</b>	<b>4,180</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>5.7</b>
<b>CLAIBORNE</b>	<b>3,000</b>	<b>2,680</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>10.6</b>
<b>FRANKLIN</b>	<b>2,650</b>	<b>2,500</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>5.8</b>
<b>JEFFERSON</b>	<b>1,950</b>	<b>1,660</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>LAWRENCE</b>	<b>4,760</b>	<b>4,500</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>5.4</b>
<b>LINCOLN</b>	<b>14,990</b>	<b>14,390</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>PIKE</b>	<b>14,370</b>	<b>13,560</b>	<b>810</b>	<b>5.6</b>
<b>WALTHALL</b>	<b>4,960</b>	<b>4,680</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>5.6</b>
<b>WILKINSON</b>	<b>2,590</b>	<b>2,400</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>7.4</b>

Source: MDES

**g) PCI (per capita income)**

<b>Geography (United States, Mississippi or County in District)</b>	<b>Per Capita Income</b>
United States	\$35,384
State of Mississippi	\$25,044
Adams County	\$18,551
Amite	\$22,414
Claiborne	\$17,829
Franklin	\$22,723
Jefferson	\$16,602
Lawrence	\$23,215
Lincoln	\$23,586
Pike	\$18,679
Walthall	\$21,029
Wilkinson	\$18,074
Average for all District Counties	\$20,270

*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.

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.

### Area Profile for South Central Mississippi Works, MS

The table below shows the occupations with [the highest total annual average openings](#) in South Central Mississippi Works, MS for the 2012-2022 time period.

Rank	Occupation	2012 Estimated Employment	2022 Projected Employment	2012-2022 Annual Avg. Percent Change	Total Annual Average Openings
1	Registered Nurses*	10,910	13,160	1.89%	390
2	Cashiers	12,030	12,340	0.25%	365
3	Retail Salespersons	11,710	12,390	0.57%	365
4	Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive	8,590	8,510	-0.09%	255
5	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	7,240	7,860	0.83%	235
6	General and Operations Managers	6,730	6,530	-0.30%	195
7	Home Health Aides	4,430	6,530	3.96%	195
8	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	5,730	6,090	0.61%	185
9	Nursing Aides, Orderlies, and Attendants*	5,020	5,690	1.26%	170
10	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	5,040	5,320	0.54%	160

Source: Occupational Employment Statistics and Wages Program  
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### Area Profile for South Central Mississippi Works, MS

The table below shows the occupations with the [highest 2012-2022 annual avg. percent change](#) in South Central Mississippi Works, MS for the 2012-2022 time period.

Rank	Occupation	2012 Estimated Employment	2022 Projected Employment	2012-2022 Annual Avg. Percent Change	Total Annual Average Openings
1	Engineering Technicians, Except Drafters, All Other	10	20	7.18%	N/A
2	Court Reporters	10	20	7.18%	N/A

3	Home Economics Teachers, Postsecondary	10	20	7.18%	N/A
4	Information and Record Clerks, All Other	10	20	7.18%	N/A
5	Personal Care Aides	750	1,170	4.55%	35
6	Logisticians	20	30	4.14%	N/A
7	Arbitrators, Mediators, and Conciliators	20	30	4.14%	N/A
8	Architecture Teachers, Postsecondary	20	30	4.14%	N/A
9	Library Science Teachers, Postsecondary	20	30	4.14%	N/A
10	Interpreters and Translators	60	90	4.14%	5

Source: Occupational Employment Statistics and Wages Program  
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## Area Profile for South Central Mississippi Works, MS

### Occupations by Projected Growth Table

The table below shows the occupations with the **lowest total annual average openings** in South Central Mississippi Works, MS for the 2012-2022 time period.

Rank	Occupation	2012 Estimated Employment	2022 Projected Employment	2012-2022 Annual Avg. Percent Change	Total Annual Average Openings
1	Human Resources Managers	50	60	1.84%	N/A
2	Education Administrators, All Other	70	80	1.34%	N/A
3	Gaming Managers	30	30	0.00%	N/A
4	Natural Sciences Managers	30	30	0.00%	N/A
5	Postmasters and Mail Superintendents	70	60	-1.53%	N/A
6	Managers, All Other	80	80	0.00%	N/A
7	Buyers and Purchasing Agents, Farm Products	20	20	0.00%	N/A
8	Insurance Appraisers, Auto Damage	20	20	0.00%	N/A
9	Logisticians	20	30	4.14%	N/A
10	Meeting, Convention, and Event Planners	60	80	2.92%	N/A

Source: Occupational Employment Statistics and Wages Program  
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## Area Profile for South Central Mississippi Works, MS Education Requirements on Advertised Jobs Table

The table below shows the minimum level of education requested by employers on job openings advertised online in South Central Mississippi Works, MS on September 1, 2022. There were 12163 job openings advertised online that did not specify a minimum education requirement (Jobs De-duplication Level 2) Opens in a new browser window.

Rank	Education Level	Job Openings	Percentage of Job Openings
1	No Minimum Education Requirement	7	0.05%
2	High School Diploma or Equivalent	1,337	9.19%
3	3 Years of College or a Technical or Vocational School	8	0.06%
4	Vocational School Certificate	29	0.20%
5	Associate's Degree	309	2.12%
6	Bachelor's Degree	609	4.19%
7	Master's Degree	58	0.40%
8	Doctorate Degree	24	0.17%
9	Not Specified	12,163	83.63%

Source: Online advertised jobs data  
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MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT of EMPLOYMENT SECURITY

The charts 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.

The charts indicate 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.

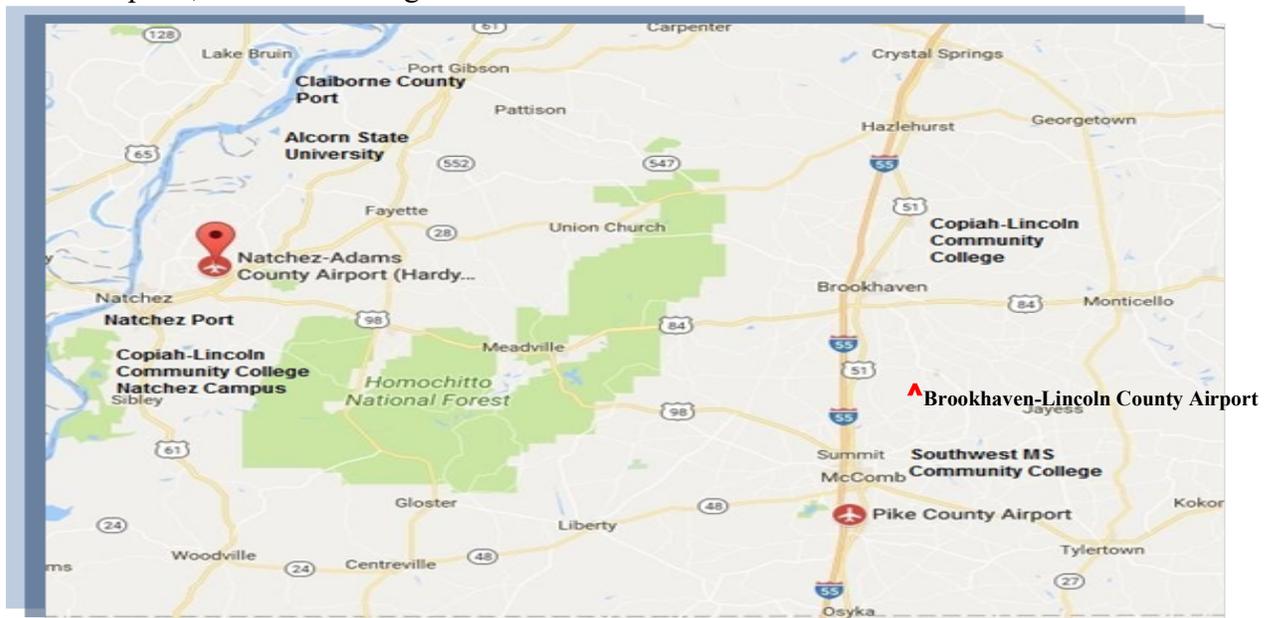
In order to retain these jobs, close relationships should be developed between current manufacturing industries, colleges and universities and trade schools in order to assure that their workforce needs are being met. Additionally, research should be done to determine the workforce and infrastructure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

Strategic Findings: A well educated and trained workforce will be essential in Southwest Mississippi in the coming years.

### 3) Infrastructure

Local Airports, Ports and Colleges:





*Courtesy Southwest Mississippi Partnership*

There are a few areas of infrastructure improvement needed throughout the district.

Walthall County is preparing a 30-acre site adjacent to US 98 for commercial development to attract industries in need of a shovel-ready site. Assistance is needed in building a road through the site and leveling the ground after clearing. A feasibility study for making MS Hwy 27 a four-lane needs updating.

Hwy 24 and 48 running through Amite and Wilkinson County desperately needs four-lane improvements for the logging trucks that frequent this route daily. It's an unsafe route due to its current two-lane configuration.

Over in Franklin County there is much improvement needed to the Clear Springs Recreation area that is currently owned by the National Forest Service. At one time this was a top destination for campers, hikers and mountain bikers throughout the country but the park has aged and tourist traffic has declined as a result.

Claiborne County has a general cargo dock on a slack water harbor on the Mississippi River but has 600 acres available for a real port with serious river transport capabilities. This would be a huge recruiting tool for the entire area. There is also an Opportunity Zone initiative to restore Ferry service across the MS River at the Bruinsburg Landing to St. Joseph, LA led by MDOT and LDOT. This would provide a long term transportation infrastructure improvement for the region and create an additional River Cruise landing opportunity on the Mississippi River

**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. As we learned during the pandemic it's also essential for at-home work. 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.

## 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)
- Opportunity Zones
- Wood Resources/Forestry

#### Weaknesses

- Attitude Towards Value of Education
- Brain Drain (college graduates leave the area.)
- 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, Festivals and Parks.

#### 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.

Opportunity Zones need to be marketed and used as a tool for recruitment of industry.

Forest related economic activity in Mississippi generates roughly 60,000 jobs and almost \$3 billion in income (per MS State University Extension).

### 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 or cultural events that perhaps could use more national promotion as well as nationally and regionally significant museums and monuments. Such events include Lil Green Day in Claiborne County, The Natchez Balloon Festival, The Homochitto River Festival in Franklin County and the Atwood Music Festival in Monticello to name a few.

Utilizing and promoting the Opportunity Zones in our area offer another advantage to potential business and industry.

### 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.

The idea that people are moving out of the big cities in droves into more rural areas is a common misperception. There is in fact some data to suggest this but they are only moving as far as the nearest suburb. In other words, they aren't packing up and moving 5 hours away into more rural towns.

## 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***—Access to talent is arguably the most pressing need for employers across the country. The region can accomplish this by leveraging existing sector partnerships, and by recognizing the opportunity to develop new industry specific partnerships. The region should also increase accessibility to internships, apprenticeships, and work-based learning opportunities, and be intentional about how those opportunities are marketed across the region. Lastly, the region should focus efforts on youth employment, cultivating the talent pipeline of the future. Sector Partnerships are an employer-driven model for aligning resources and promoting collaboration among educational institutions, workforce service providers, and community-based organizations to meet the needs of business. The sector partnership model ensures business needs are factored into development of a strong and qualified workforce, while also expanding access to the skills development, leading to jobs with higher wages for workers. The region should continue to allocate resources to existing regional sector-partnerships and look at new strategic opportunities to create industry specific partnerships to assist additional target industries with an adequate talent pipeline. A strong network of sector partnerships will ensure that employer demand is driving programming, which in turn will result in a properly trained workforce to meet critical regional industry needs. Appropriate training should complement on-the-job training and should include curriculum focused on both soft and technical skills required to obtain meaningful career opportunities. These career opportunities should be outlined through clear career pathways, which can be integrated into school curriculum in the K-12 school system and through regional community and vocational technical schools. Lastly, the region should work together to develop and support youth employment programs. Exposing youth to the workforce early on will help individuals develop the necessary skills to enter the workforce after secondary education or postsecondary education. Wages and other compensation will enable individuals to earn while learning, and help employers connect with the next generation of workers earlier in the pipeline process. 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.

Objective – **Infrastructure**- Improvements to the existing port facilities, highways, railways, industrial parks and recreational parks in the region. Expansion of the nuclear power plant in Claiborne County would be a major economic boon. This potential expansion would provide Southwest Mississippi with job opportunities which have a much higher pay scale than current clusters.

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.

ii) 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.

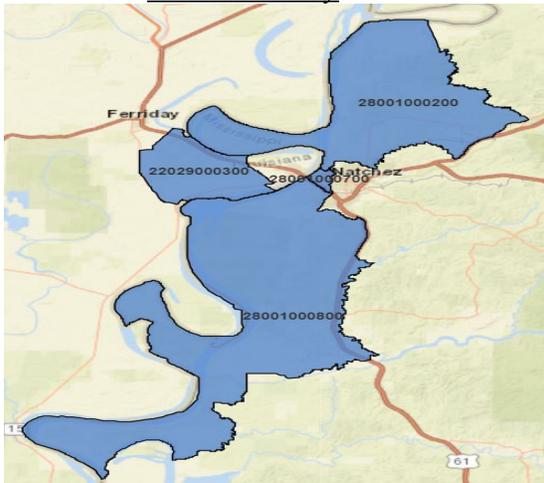
(1) **COVID-19 Impacts:** The COVID-19 Pandemic has affected not only the physical health of the residents of the Planning District but also the economic health of individuals, businesses and communities. For instance, the increase in unemployment highlighted the number of residents living near or below the poverty level. Tourism provides another potential source of income and economic stimulus for the Planning District. There are a number of tourist attractions and other alluring amenities in the District which bring in thousands of people per year. Not only do these areas improve the quality of life of the region's citizens, but they also generate a profitable influx of visitors from outside the immediate area. Rising to the challenge, some businesses changed their business models by adding e-commerce options, home delivery, curbside pick-up, take-out service and other options to keep customers and themselves safe and their businesses viable. The implementation of virtual learning for K-12 and higher education, the necessity of "work from home" for the public and private sector workforce and the increased use of telehealth emphasized the need for the expansion of broadband to unserved and underserved areas.

(2) **OPPORTUNITY ZONES:** Our region has 4 Counties that offer Opportunity Zones. On April 9, 2018 the U.S. Department of the Treasury announced the certification of specific census tracts nominated by Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant and designated such census tracts as Qualified Opportunity Zones. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 established Opportunity Zones as a new community development program aimed to encourage long term investments in low-income and rural communities. Private investment within a Qualified Opportunity Zone

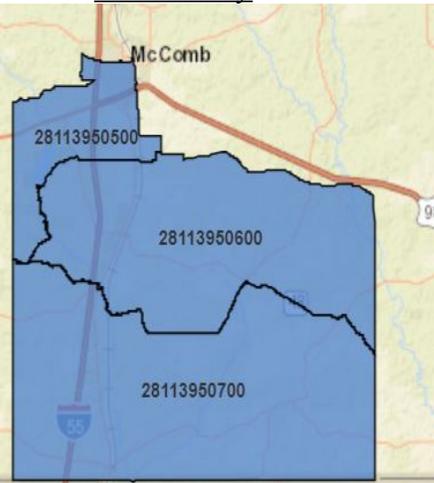
may earn tax relief on the capital gains generated through those investments. Tax benefits increase the longer investments are in place. Here is the list of our Counties with Opportunity Zones and the census tract they are located in:

- a. Adams County: 28001000200, 28001000700, 28001000800
- b. Claiborne County: 28021950300
- c. Lincoln County: 28085950200, 28085950600
- d. Pike County: 28113950500, 28113950600, 28113950700

Adams County



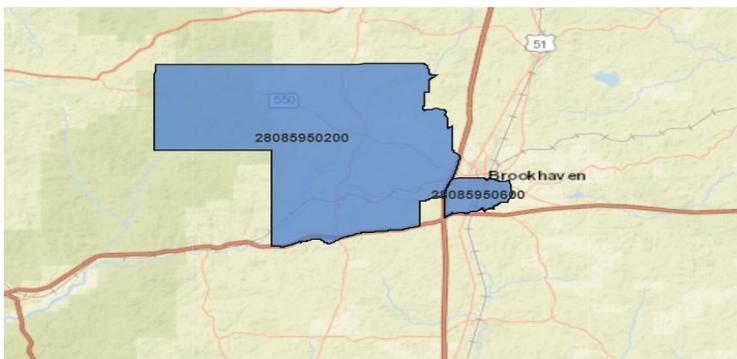
Pike County



Claiborne

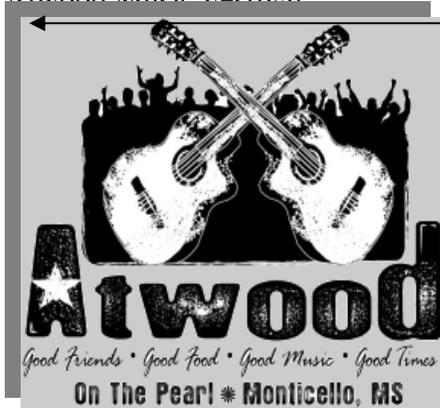


Lincoln County





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  
USDA just announced it is seeking applications for funding to establish revolving loan programs to support rural businesses and community development projects.
- 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.

**Committee Members for the Southwest Mississippi Planning and  
Development District Comprehensive Economic Development  
Strategy 2022-2026**

Robert Jones - Walthall County Businessman  
Leigh Ann Reeves- Chief Economic Development officer Lawrence  
County MS.  
Kenyan Jackson - President, Wilkinson County Board of Supervisors  
Angela Hutchins - Adams County Board of Supervisors  
Jill Busby - Director, Pike County Economic Development District  
Nolan Williamson - Lincoln County Board of Supervisors  
Helen Hunter - Jefferson County  
Jackie Whittington - President, Amite County Board of Supervisors  
Eddie Stebbins - Franklin County Supervisor  
Milton Chambliss - Executive Director, Claiborne County Economic  
Development District

**RESOLUTION**

Resolution Approving the Adoption of the Southwest Mississippi Planning and Development District's 2022-2026 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

On the motion of Board Member DIANA GILLARD, being duly seconded by Board Member ROBERT JONES, the following Resolution was unanimously adopted, to-wit: **A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF THE SOUTHWEST MISSISSIPPI PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT** approving the adoption of the 2022-2026 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

**PASSED AND APPROVED** this the 20th day of September, 2022.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
President

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness