



# **ANNUAL REPORT**

**FY 2022-2023**

# Message from the President



Dear friends and stakeholders,

On behalf of the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) Board of Directors, I am excited to share with you the NEFRC's 2022-2023 annual report—which outlines their successes this past fiscal year.

From the beginning, the NEFRC has embraced the qualities that make Northeast Florida unique and strived to be champions for change across our region. As we continue transforming our priorities to meet the ever-evolving needs of our communities, we remain committed to embracing new ideas and looking for ways to make meaningful, positive, and lasting impacts across Northeast Florida.

Of course, the Board and NEFRC are pleased with the progress made as a team this past fiscal year—including the commitment the Council has made to further promoting the tremendous outdoor recreational opportunities across our seven counties. And, I am always amazed by the things we accomplish when our teams and stakeholders come together as a *force for good* for our region.

I'm honored to have served as the Board of Directors President through June of this fiscal year and proud to welcome Commissioner Christian Whitehurst to the role of NEFRC Board President.

Sincerely,

**Hon. Randy DeFoor**

2022-2023 President, NEFRC Board of Directors  
Former City of Jacksonville City Council Member

# About the NEFRC

Formed in 1977, the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) is one of ten regional planning councils in Florida. A dynamic network of local governance, the NEFRC serves seven counties and 25 municipalities.

In its mission to celebrate the unique assets of Northeast Florida—while engaging its businesses, governments, organizations, and people—the NEFRC provides a variety of services:

- State and federal programs that benefit all counties
- Technical assistance through paid service agreements
- Project-specific work via grant application and implementation

# Board of Directors

The NEFRC Board of Directors is comprised of 35 members—two-thirds local elected officials, one-third gubernatorial appointees, and four ex-officio non-voting members. The board members provide critical insights and information that help the council make informed decisions that affect the quality of life within our region. Board leadership traditionally serves a term of 12 months, turning over in October at the start of the new fiscal year.

## FY 2022-2023 Board Officers

Hon. Randy DeFoor, President (through 6/1/23), Duval County

Hon. Christian Whitehurst, 1<sup>st</sup> VP (6/1/23), St. Johns County

Hon. Joyce Morgan, 2<sup>nd</sup> VP (through 6/1/23), Duval County

Mr. Darry Register, Secretary & Treasurer, Baker County



# Economic Development



# NEFRC's Role in Regional Economic Development

Designated by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) as the Economic Development District for our Region, the NEFRC receives EDA funding to develop and maintain the Region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

## Grants

The NEFRC assists organizations with EDA (and other grants), and recently helped St. Johns County apply for an EDA grant for the Hastings First Coast Technical College Workforce Training Center.

- Public works (construction and infrastructure)
- Economic adjustment (e.g., feasibility studies, strategic plans, etc.)
- Disaster supplemental, CARES, ARPA, etc. (often have lower match requirements)

## REMI Economic Impact Forecasts

REMI is an economic forecasting and policy analysis software model through which the NEFRC can project employment, GDP growth, and population due to proposed business development projects.

NEFRC performs analyses of proposed economic development projects using the REMI software to predict their impact on jobs, income, and other factors. This past year, NEFRC conducted REMI analyses for Baker, Clay, Duval, and Flagler Counties, plus additional projects for the City of Jacksonville, JAXUSA, and JEA.





# Post-Disaster Economic Recovery Coordinator

Funded by the Economic Development Administration (EDA)—in response to Hurricanes Ian and Nicole—the NEFRC’s Post-Disaster Economic Recovery Coordinator will work with the most impacted communities in our region on economic development, recovery, and resiliency (with a focus on the counties of Flagler, Putnam, and St. Johns).

Over the next two years, this position will focus on collaborating with local governments on future disaster preparedness and economic resiliency by assisting in grant processes, assessing the impact of disaster on local businesses and the regional economy, and holding business-focused recovery workshops for local business organizations and groups.

# Ecotourism and Trails

In 2023, following the impacts of Hurricanes Ian and Nicole, the NEFRC was asked by their Board of Directors to devise a regional initiative concentrated on ecotourism and trails. Done primarily to help diversify local economies—and to reduce the severe economic impacts of recent disasters—the initiative is largely focused on promoting recreational opportunities, creating a regional brand to attract visitors, and developing consensus on a trail system across Northeast Florida.

Moving forward, the NEFRC intends to continue implementing a broad scope of work with regional partners to support our local communities in advancing recreational opportunities. This work includes investigating opportunities to partner with the National Parks Service—Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program for support.

## NEFRC-Completed Action Items

### Partnership Meetings

As a crucial first step—and to increase the project’s chances of future success—NEFRC staff met with lead trails and tourism agencies to garner support for the proposed initiative and gain situational awareness of current regional activities.

### Data Collection and Analysis

- Collected available Geographic Information System (GIS) data to generate a regional map highlighting current overland, blue trails, and amenities near the trails
- Conducted a review of information regarding the economic and health benefits of recreational activities (with a focus on blue and overland trails)
- Completed an inventory of Federal and State programs that directly assist trail development and ancillary support
- Reviewed criteria for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s Trail Town Program, of which some communities within the region have already received the designation



# Town of Welaka

## Downtown Vision Project

Through funding from a Competitive Florida Partnership grant, the NEFRC assisted the Town of Welaka with a strategic planning process for economic development in anticipation of surrounding development. NEFRC collaborated with the Center for Hydro-generated Urbanism at the University of Florida Faculty of Architecture to develop a visual narrative that illustrates the resident's vision for their village center. Recommendations for the Town included expanding river use, conducting a historic property and tree canopy survey, and linking the Town assets by creating a town center plaza that connects the downtown through pedestrian-friendly streets. The NEFRC hosted six public meetings and gathered quantifiable feedback on the proposed architectural concepts and styles through a visual preference survey.

 See more on the [Town of Welaka Downtown Vision](#)^

### Award Winner

The project was recognized as a winner of the **National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) 2023 Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Award** which honors projects for their creative approaches to advancing regional economic development and improving quality of life.





Meeting to discuss progress report on the A1A OITSB Operational Plan



Kick-off meeting and SWOT analysis of the A1A OITSB

# A1A Ocean Islands Trail Scenic Byway

The NEFRC received funding from a Community Planning Technical Assistant grant (2022) to develop an operational plan for the A1A Ocean Islands Trail Scenic Byway (OITSB) to help with succession planning and organizational sustainability. Additional goals of the project work were to build partnerships and to align the A1A OITSB resiliency goals with those of Duval and Nassau Counties. The latter of which was due in large part to the nature of the environment surrounding the Byway.

A coastal highway, the Byway is a 40-mile stretch of beach and barrier islands along Florida's iconic Highway A1A—running from Fernandina Beach in the north to its southern terminus in Jacksonville Beach—and is vulnerable to climate exposure elements that put at risk the natural beauty, cultural, and economic resources it contributes to the area.

 [Read the \*\*A1A OITSB Organizational Plan\*\*](#)<sup>^^</sup>



<sup>^^</sup>[https://drive.google.com/file/d/13co\\_HMgg-tdh89vZhFuvPkmbW6Nffpms/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/13co_HMgg-tdh89vZhFuvPkmbW6Nffpms/view)



# Emergency Preparedness



# Hurricane Preparedness and Response

## Preparedness Exercises

### Annual Hurricane Exercise in St. Johns County

Approximately 175 people participated in the annual hurricane exercise at the St. Johns County Emergency Operations Center. Due to the mythical *Hurricane Skywalker*, the Emergency Operations Center was activated to plan for, support, and implement response measures across the community. Exercise participants faced challenges in the immediate hours after the impact of Hurricane Skywalker. In the storm scenario, the County experienced significant wind, storm surge, overland flooding, and tornado damage.

### Annual JEA Hurricane Exercise

The 2023 JEA-City of Jacksonville (COJ) Hurricane Exercise was a three-day functional exercise with JEA's Leadership and Section Chiefs and the COJ Emergency Preparedness Division. This functional exercise was designed to test and evaluate JEA's integration of National Incident Management System (NIMS) concepts and the use of Incident Command System (ICS) structure and report forms for managing incident response.

### Jacksonville Transit Authority Major Hurricane Exercise

NEFRC staff planned and implemented a major hurricane tabletop exercise for JTA executive leadership and program directors. The discussion-based exercise was designed to test and validate the agency's All-Hazards Plan and Continuity of Operations Plan.



## Response

### NEFRC Staff Activation

During Hurricanes Ian and Nicole, NEFRC staff were activated and deployed throughout the region—including the Emergency Operations Center in the City of Jacksonville, St. Johns County, and Flagler County—while also providing direct staff support to Flagler Beach.

### After-Action Reporting

In the Fall of 2022, the NEFRC completed the St. Johns County After-Action Report and Improvement Plan for Hurricanes Ian and Nicole. This report provided observations on strengths and opportunities for improvement as they related to the County's storm response.

# Northeast Florida

## Local Emergency Planning Committee



Pursuant to the Emergency Planning and Community Right-To-Know Act, a Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) is responsible for preparing a regional hazardous materials emergency response plan, acting as a repository for regional hazardous materials information, and performing outreach functions to increase hazardous materials awareness.

The membership of the Northeast Florida LEPC is comprised of local professionals representing occupational categories like firefighting, emergency management, transportation, health, and law enforcement.

 Find out more about the LEPC at [www.nefrc.org/lepc](http://www.nefrc.org/lepc)

St. Johns County Fire Rescue Initial Responding Unit Exercise





Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department Foam Training

# Partnership in Action

Since 2016, the Northeast Florida LEPC has provided specialized Hazardous Materials training to 3400+ regional personnel—more than 150 of which were trained in 2023.

## FY2022-2023 LEPC-Provided Trainings



### Battery Emergency Response

Hosted a battery emergency response course in Duval County



### Anhydrous Ammonia Training

Hosted live anhydrous ammonia training for the region (in partnership with TRANSCAER)



### Initial Responding Unit Exercise

Conducted an Initial Responding Unit Exercise in St. Johns County



### HazMat Technician Course

60 responders (across 2 counties) completed a 160-hour HazMat Technician Course



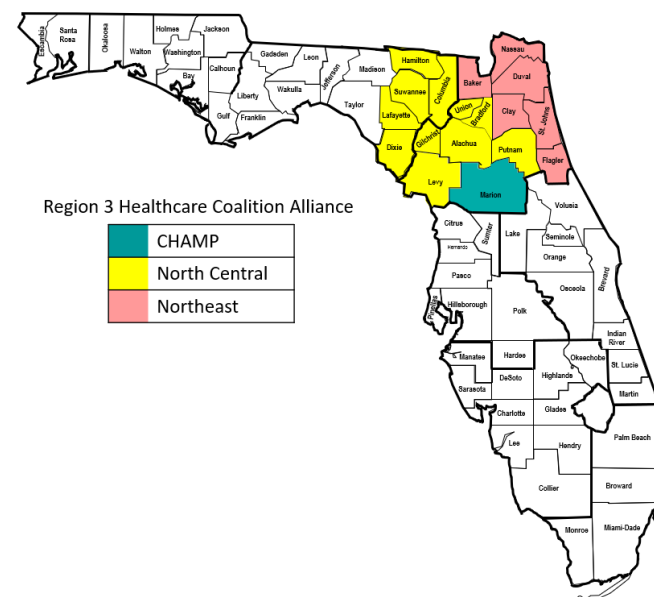
### Florida HazMat Symposium

Sent 57 responders to the Florida HazMat Symposium in Daytona

# Regional Healthcare Coalition (HCC) Program

A federal initiative bringing together all healthcare sectors to plan, train, exercise, and equip in advance of disasters and emergencies. Made up of 10 funded HCC regions, the Florida Department of Health contracts the NEFRC to manage three healthcare coalitions that serve 18 counties.

Known as the Alliance, coalition membership is comprised of **822 individuals** (from 520 organizations, agencies, and facilities) across 11 business sectors. A total of **\$378,248** was spent on member projects during fiscal year 2022-2023 in the 18-county HCC region. This total includes the **239 pediatric restraints** purchased and distributed for EMS agencies within our 18 counties.



## Member Projects Awarded in NEFRC Counties

### HPP-Funded Projects (October 2022-July 2023)

<b>\$10,120</b>	<b>\$5,221</b>
Radiation Detectors for Decon Teams (Baptist Health System Jacksonville)	Portable HVAC Units (Mental Health Resource Center Jacksonville)

### Pediatric Restraint Distribution (October 2022-August 2023)

<b>134</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>15</b>
PediMate+ Units Purchased & Distributed	NeoMate Units Purchased & Distributed	KangooFix Units Purchased & Distributed

### FHA-Funded Projects (October 2022-July 2023)

<b>\$36,380</b>	<b>\$11,328</b>
Infectious Disease Equipment: 30 PAPR Systems (HCA Orange Park Hospital)	Infectious Disease Equipment: 8 PAPR Systems (HCA Memorial Hospital)

<b>\$27,450</b>	<b>\$35,690</b>
Infectious Disease Equipment: 15 PAPR Systems (UF Health Jacksonville)	Mobile Morgue Expansion Cube (Flagler Hospital)

## Events and Training

- Hosted speakers from the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) regarding the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival Mass Casualty Incident on October 13, 2022, with 300+ attendees at the event.
- From October 2022 to October 2023, more than 594 individuals received emergency preparedness-related training, and 680 people participated in some form of emergency preparedness-related exercise.

# NEFRC Outreach



City of Jacksonville Council Member Michael Boylan and NEFRC CEO Beth Payne with the 2023 Florida APA Best Practice Award for the City's work on Critical Quality of Life Issues

# Regional Community Institute (RCI)

The Regional Community Institute (RCI) provides visionary leadership and coordination between stakeholders to enhance and preserve the quality of Northeast Florida's natural, built, economic, and social environment. Formed in 2005, for charitable and educational purposes, RCI is comprised of graduates of the NEFRC's Regional Leadership Academy.

## Focus Areas



Economic Development



Heirs' Property



Regional Tourism



Sea Level Rise



Cultivation



Transportation



Water

## Recent Accomplishments

Stakeholders who partnered on the **First Coast Vision** (2011) reconvened to discuss measures related to the **First Coast Well-Being Index**—designed to help assess the success of our Regional Vision

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Examinations conducted on agriculture, fishing, and silviculture to better understand their impact on the natural resources, resilience, and economic development of Northeast Florida

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Community forums held around heirs' property—with discussions on various experiences and lessons learned to better help community members understand the ways they can ensure maintenance of their property rights

🔍 Discover more about RCI's efforts at [www.nefrc.org/rci](http://www.nefrc.org/rci)

# Regional Leadership Academy

The Northeast Florida Regional Leadership Academy (RLA) is a program of the NEFRC that nurtures and cultivates a commitment to regionalism. RLA helps educate regional leaders and invests in the future of our communities through a mission to make Northeast Florida a better place to live and work.

Through a seven-class program, leaders representing business, agriculture, healthcare, media, elected officials, education, government, and nonprofits explore our region. Classes are focused on understanding local history and resources, discussing region-specific opportunities, and exploring some of the creative solutions employed by cities and counties.



## 2023 Regional Leadership Academy Graduates

Brandy Carvalho—Director of Strategic Advancement & Economic Resources (Nassau)

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Jason DeLorenzo—Chief of Staff, City of Palm Coast (Flagler)

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Diana Donovan—Executive Director, Cultural Council of Greater Jacksonville (Duval)

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Nicole Hamm—Executive Director, Blue Zones

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Fara Illami—NEFRC Resiliency Manager

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Jonathan Lord—Emergency Management Director (Flagler)

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Ethan Nazzaro—Traders Hill Farm (Nassau)

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Crawford Powell—President, Clay Economic Development (Clay)

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Jorge Salinas—Deputy County Administrator (Flagler)

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David Sullivan—County Commissioner (Flagler)

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Zoe Tressel—Student, Jacksonville University

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Lisa Walsh—Palatka Planning Director (Putnam)

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TJ Ward—North Florida Director of Advocacy, Project Opioid

 Learn more at [www.nefrc.org/regionalleadershipacademy](http://www.nefrc.org/regionalleadershipacademy)





# NEFRC-Provided Opioid Abatement Assistance



## Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis Assistance

Facilitated community meetings for three Northeast Florida counties (Baker, Clay, and Duval) and provided substance use disorder SWOT Analysis Reports for use by local governments to prioritize and fund opioid abatement initiatives.



## Task Force Assistance

Helped Clay County implement and manage the Opioid Litigation Task Force—established to rate and score relevant projects to secure opioid abatement funding.



## Grant Evaluator

Served as a grant evaluator for Clay County Community Paramedicine Program's First Responders – Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act Grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

# Policy and Planning



# Policy & Planning Services

## Planning Technical Assistance

Staff at the NEFRC engage and support our stakeholders in a variety of ways, including support with regional policy issues and technical assistance for urban planning. Among the assistance provided—and communities supported—by the NEFRC this past fiscal year are:



Town of Pomona Park  
(Putnam County)



Town of Baldwin  
(Duval County)



Town of Interlachen  
(Putnam County)



Clay County with its  
strategic planning  
process



Town of Beverly Beach  
(Flagler County) with  
planning issues



Convened region-wide  
planning directors to  
discuss pertinent  
issues



Town of Glen St. Mary  
(Baker County) with  
comprehensive plan  
compliance

## Affordable Housing

In FY 2022-2023, the NEFRC continued working to impact affordable housing issues through its standing committee. Established in 2016, the affordable housing committee shares relevant information across the seven counties in our region, helps to consider local and regional solutions as presented in the adopted 2022 strategy, and hosts informational webinars on relevant issues (e.g., Live Local Act).

Among the best practices and topics addressed by the affordable housing committee are:

- Workforce development (for housing)
- Public housing
- Tiny homes
- Non-profit support
- Current state of the apartment rental market



# Special Project and Program Highlights

## Special Committee on Critical Quality of Life Issues

Throughout the fiscal year, the NEFRC supported the City of Jacksonville with developing and managing the Special Committee on Critical Quality of Life Issues (CQLI). As part of the work, a process was undertaken to create a reference guide outlining best practices and strategies—as well as key lessons learned—in relation to critical quality of life issues. The created report will help the city grow and prosper by supplying leaders with key recommendations to better address homelessness, affordable housing and access to healthcare.



## Putnam County FTA HOPE Grant

The NEFRC also began working with Putnam County and Smart North Florida (the nonprofit arm of the North Florida TPO) to use Federal Transit Administration funding—via the Helping Obtain Prosperity for Everyone grant program—to best determine how to better get Putnam residents to better-paying jobs both within and outside the county.

## Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) Program

Florida State Legislature created the Transportation Disadvantaged Trust Fund and Transportation Disadvantaged Commission in 1989. The Commission ensures that low-cost, on-demand transportation exists for the mentally, physically, & economically disadvantaged who might not otherwise have access. At the county level, Local Coordinating Boards (comprised of various local stakeholders) determine service standards and provide guidance to service providers that receive state funds to carry out TD.

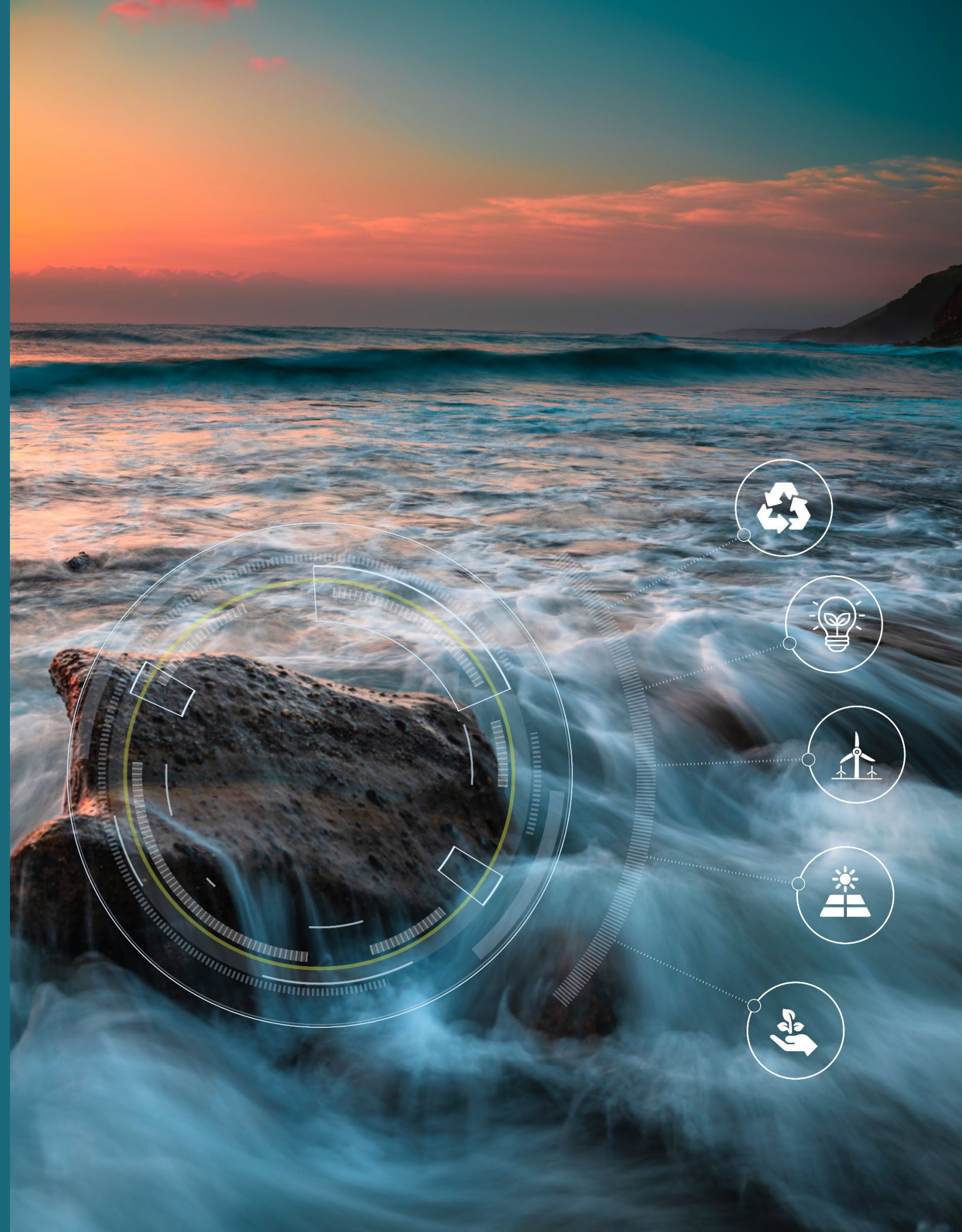


The NEFRC has proudly served as the designated official TD coordinating agency for Baker, Clay, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns Counties since 1994—and Duval County since 2021. In FY 2022-2023, the NEFRC continued to manage the TD program for our region—including hosting the quarterly county meetings and coordinating with service providers.



Photo by Ant Rozetsky on Unsplash

# Resiliency



# NEFRC Resiliency Services

Since 2014, the NEFRC has engaged in efforts to address issues of resiliency and sea-level rise across the region. As a part of these efforts, the NEFRC also maintains staff with expertise in climate change and resiliency.

Through these staff, the NEFRC provides several resiliency services for the public and private sectors. Among these are:



## Regional Resiliency Collaborative

The NEFRC created the Resilient First Coast (RFC) Collaborative.



## Support for Disaster Recovery Groups

The NEFRC provides support for long-term disaster recovery groups and community organizations active in disaster.



## Local, Regulatory, and Military Coordination

Providing coordination between local governments, regulatory agencies, and national partners.



## Vulnerability Assessments & Adaptation Plans

The NEFRC coordinated vulnerability assessments throughout the region, resulting in a guide for vulnerability assessment methodology in Northeast Florida that complements the guide from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, going above and beyond state statute requirements.

NEFRC also assisted Flagler and Baker Counties in their vulnerability assessments and compiled a geodatabase for statutorily required critical assets to be utilized within the exposure and sensitivity analysis associated with the vulnerability assessment.



## Educational Presentations and Community Events

Hosting educational presentations and community events focused on sea level rise, adaptation planning, and community preparedness.



## Multi-Scale Project Partnerships

NEFRC assisted the US Army Corps of Engineers with a project focused on helping to educate groups such as young engineering professionals, local government leaders, and municipal planners on Nature-Based Solutions.\*

\*Sustainable planning, design, environmental management and engineering practices that weave natural features or processes into the built environment to promote adaptation and resilience.

# Resilient First Coast (RFC)

## Collaborative Overview

Comprised of more than 20 member organizations, the RFC will actively promote regional cooperation on initiatives that improve the environment, quality of life, infrastructure, and economic resilience of Northeast Florida to adapt and thrive in the face of acute shocks and chronic stresses related to climate change.



## Resilient First Coast Leadership Team



**Hon. Roxanne Horvath**  
Commissioner  
City of St Augustine



**Jessica Beach**  
Chief Resilience Officer  
City of St Augustine



**Fara Ilami**  
Regional Resiliency  
Manager NEFRC

## Resilient First Coast Pillars

### Environment

Rural and agricultural lands, justice and equity, natural hazards, and natural systems

### Infrastructure

Critical assets, transportation, and technology (broadband)

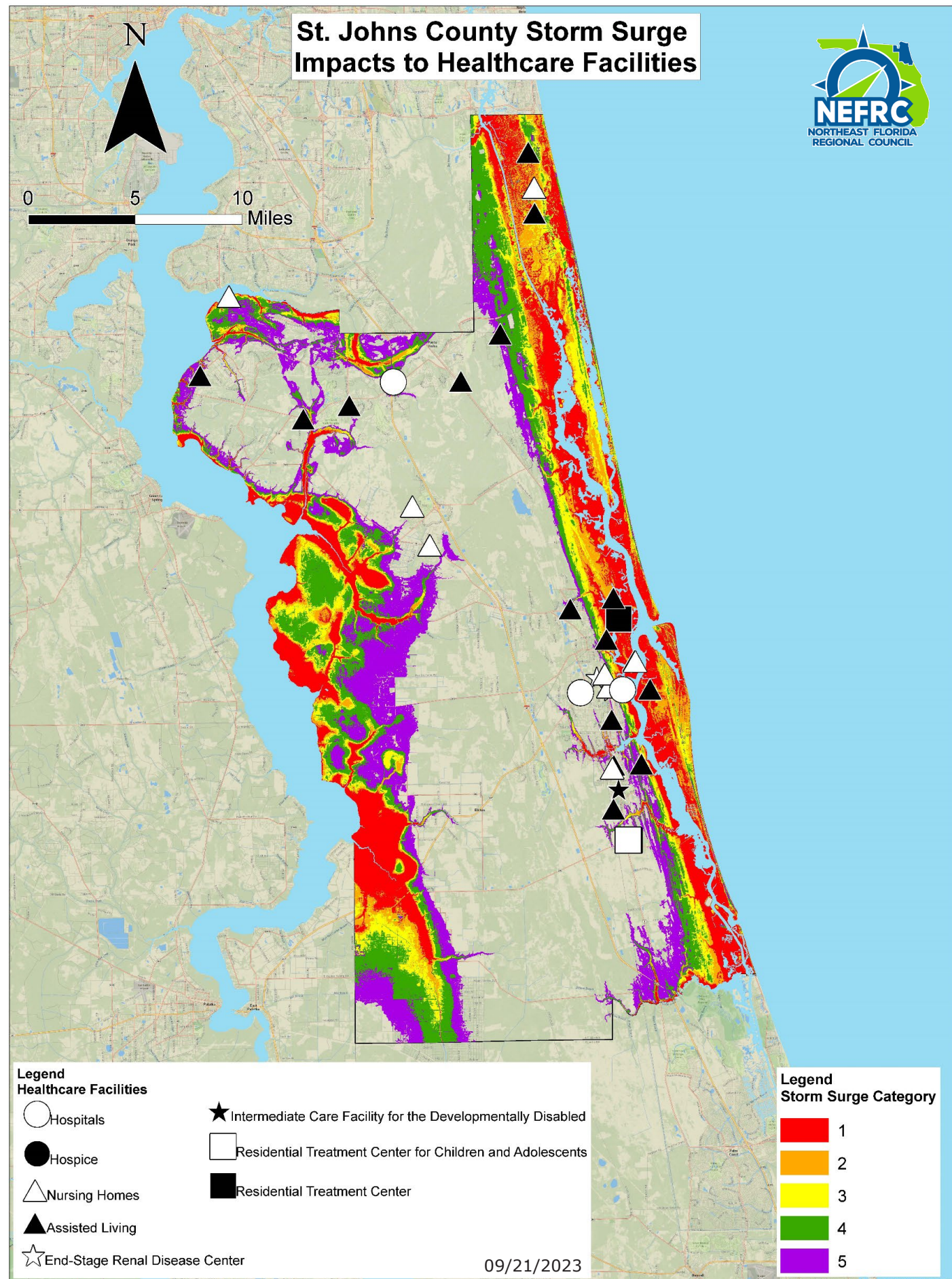
### Economic Resilience

Growth, mobility, quality jobs, and workforce training

### Quality of Life

Health and wellness, access to energy and clean water, food security, and safe, resilient, cost-effective housing

 Discover more about RFC at [resilientfirstcoast.com](https://resilientfirstcoast.com)



# North Florida Resiliency Plan for the Health and Medical Lifeline

The NEFRC was awarded a disaster mitigation Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to develop a North Florida Resiliency Plan for the Health and Medical Lifeline from December 2021 to December 2025. The project aims to improve healthcare facilities' ability to function in the face of climate change and extreme weather events in 18 counties served by the Healthcare Coalition program. Two major accomplishments include the development of a:

## Map Series

A map series of healthcare facilities and the impacts of storm surge, sea level rise, and overland flooding for each of the eighteen counties within the Healthcare Coalition.

## Climate Exposure Analysis

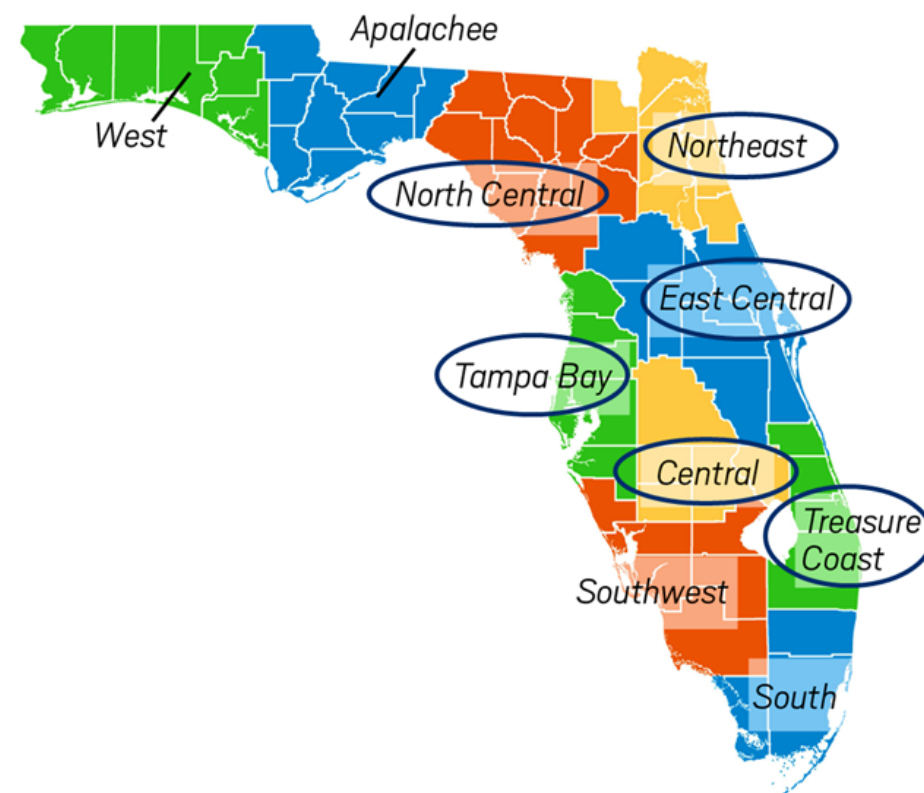
A Climate Exposure Analysis examined the inundation caused by storm surge, flooding, and sea level rise scenarios and the resulting exposure to water of the county, its healthcare facilities, and the roads that provide access to these healthcare facilities.



# Advancing Mitigation Assessment and Planning Through Regional Collaboration

Over the past year, the NEFRC participated in a multi-regional Community Development Block Grant with five other regional councils. The goals of the project are to provide a cohesive, statewide approach to resilience planning, promote the inclusion of inland counties in resilience efforts, develop a regional framework for funding mitigation projects, and to create implementable strategic plans across Florida.

This project will continue through 2026.



Future extreme rainfall modeling

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Mitigation needs assessment, template, and mitigation priority areas and project list

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Small area mitigation plans

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Regional Resilience Exposure Tool (R2ET)

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Interactive best practice application

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Stakeholder engagement



# **Bringing Communities Together**

Baker • Clay • Duval • Flagler  
Nassau • Putnam • St. Johns