



NEWSLETTER

February 2026 - Bringing Communities Together Since 1977



CELEBRATING 49 YEARS OF REGIONAL SERVICE

This month, the Northeast Florida Regional Council proudly marks 49 years of service to the Region. For nearly five decades, NEFRC has supported local governments through collaboration, strategic planning, and regional problem-solving that strengthens our communities. As we reflect on this milestone, we remain focused on advancing resilient, forward-looking solutions that position Northeast Florida for continued success.

Thank you to our Board of Directors, partners, and communities for 49 years of shared commitment to Northeast Florida.



Thank you for subscribing to our newsletter. We hope you find it informative and useful. Please share it with others, and encourage them to subscribe to stay up-to-date with all the exciting developments happening in the Northeast Florida Region. Together, we can continue to make the Region a better place for everyone.

A Message From Our CEO



As we continue serving the communities of Northeast Florida, I am proud of the meaningful progress we are making together at the Northeast Florida Regional Council. This year, our work is guided not only by present needs, but by a forward-looking vision as we prepare to celebrate our 50th anniversary in 2027. For nearly five decades, NEFRC has brought local governments, regional partners, and community stakeholders together to address shared challenges and opportunities. That spirit of collaboration remains at the heart of everything we do and is a tenant in Community Development, Resiliency, and in Emergency and Healthcare Preparedness.

Looking ahead, we remain focused on innovation, transparency, and service. The region we call home is growing and evolving, and with that growth comes both opportunity and responsibility. At NEFRC, we are dedicated to providing technical expertise, planning support, and collaborative forums needed to ensure that progress benefits all our communities. We continue to serve our seven counties and 25 municipalities with innovative projects and programs – the Community Visioning Program, the Military Installation Readiness Review and our newest project focusing on aquatic connectivity and resilient infrastructure. I am grateful to our Board, staff, and regional partners for their continued dedication and professionalism. Together, we are shaping a stronger, more resilient Northeast Florida—one built on cooperation, collaboration, and a shared vision for the future.

Warm regards,

Elizabeth Payne, AICP
Chief Executive Officer

PROJECT & PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Community Visioning Continues



The Community Visioning Program continues to support local governments across Northeast Florida by engaging residents in meaningful conversations about their community's future. The purpose of the program is simple: to help communities define a shared vision that guides future planning, growth, and investment decisions. Since our last update, staff have successfully completed the visioning process for the City of Bunnell, producing a Community Visioning Report that outlines clear community priorities.

City of Fernandina Beach Comprehensive Plan Update

This month, we are excited to begin the Comprehensive Plan update process with the City of Fernandina Beach, continuing our commitment to ensuring local voices shape the future of our region. Through community meetings, surveys, and collaborative discussions, we remain focused on helping our member governments align planning efforts with the values and aspirations of the residents they serve.

Upcoming Meetings

Fernandina Beach 2050 Neighborhood Vision Plan

- Vision Plan Presentation - March 3, 2026
- Community Workshop #1 - April 13, 2026
- Community Workshop #2 - April 27, 2026
- Community Workshop #3 - May 11, 2026
- Plan PAB Presentation - August 12, 2026
- City Commission Presentation - August 19, 2026

2026 OPERATION SHELTER-IN-PLACE: A HAZMAT INCIDENT

Shelter-In-Place means seeking immediate shelter inside a building when outside air quality is threatened or compromised by a chemical hazard; sheltering in place keeps you inside an area offering more protection.

The Region 3 Healthcare Coalition Alliance, in partnership with the Big Bend Healthcare Coalition, multiple Local Emergency Planning Committees Districts, Regional Domestic Security Task Force (RDSTF) Regions 2 and 3, and several Florida Regional Planning Councils, will host a community-based Operation Shelter-in-Place (SIP) exercise on Tuesday, April 28, 2026. This multi-regional initiative strengthens coordination among healthcare facilities, emergency management, public safety partners, and planning agencies in preparation for hazardous materials incidents.

The Shelter-in-Place training series was originally developed to help healthcare facilities meet Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) training and testing requirements. Through a Train-the-Trainer (T-t-T) model, participants receive specialized instruction and then return to their facilities to conduct site-specific Shelter-in-Place exercises with their staff. Each exercise is documented and contributes to a formal after-action report and improvement plan, ensuring lessons learned translate into stronger preparedness.

The impact of the first series was significant: 106 individuals across seven counties completed the training, 48 agencies conducted Shelter-in-Place exercises, and 812 personnel participated in facility-level exercises. Building on that success, the 2026 initiative will continue expanding regional collaboration and strengthening our collective ability to respond effectively during hazardous materials emergencies.

Meeting Schedule

St. Johns County - February 17, 2026
Alachua County - February 26, 2026
Leon County - March 3, 2026
Calhoun County - March 11, 2026
Duval County - March 11, 2026
Marion County - March 12, 2026
Columbia County - March 17, 2026
Madison County - March 24, 2026
Clay County - March 26, 2026

Advancing Regional Resilience Through Aquatic Connectivity

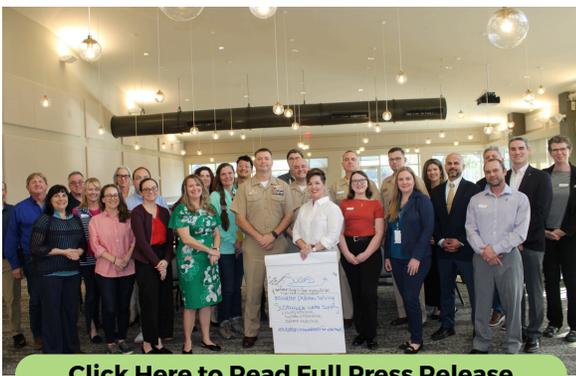
The Northeast Florida Regional Council has officially launched a new resilience initiative supported by a \$400,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. This project brings together a strong coalition of partners, including:

- the University of North Florida
- Jacksonville University
- the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership
- the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- the North Florida Land Trust
- and The Pew Charitable Trusts.



The initiative will assess road-stream crossings across the region to identify barriers that restrict fish passage and limit the movement of wildlife and natural systems. Beyond environmental benefits, the project will also evaluate how improving these crossings can strengthen the resilience of critical infrastructure, protect communities, and support reliable evacuation routes during extreme weather events. NEFRC is excited to kick off this collaborative effort and looks forward to the long-term impact it will create—enhancing ecological connectivity while supporting safer, more resilient communities throughout Northeast Florida. Stay tuned for future project updates over the next two years.

ECFRPC, in collaboration with NEFRC, Launches Military Installation Readiness Review for Bugg Spring and Pinecastle Range Complex



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On February 11, 2026, NEFRC joined East Central Florida RPC (ECFRPC) to officially launch a Military Installation Readiness Review (MIRR) for Bugg Spring and the Pinecastle Range Complex. This marks ECFRPC's second recent regional MIRR effort and represents an important continuation of collaborative, forward-looking planning to support mission readiness across Central and Northeast Florida.

We are honored to work alongside ECFRPC, federal partners, and military leadership to support these essential installations. Regional collaboration is critical in ensuring that our military assets remain resilient, mission-ready, and supported by compatible growth and infrastructure in surrounding communities. This project reflects the strength of inter-council partnership and our shared commitment to protecting both national defense missions and the long-term vitality of our Region.

NEFRC Participates in 2026 JEPB-UNF Environmental Symposium



This year, the Northeast Florida Regional Council participated at the Symposium Partner level in the 2026 JEPB-UNF Environmental Symposium, hosted by the City of Jacksonville's Environmental Protection Board and the University of North Florida's Institute of Environmental Research and Education.

The annual event brings together residents, government agencies, utilities, and industry leaders to collaborate on environmental priorities and innovative solutions. As a member of the Planning Committee, NEFRC helped shape this year's theme, "Our Common Ground: Finding Balance and Empowering Communities," reinforcing the value of shared responsibility in advancing resilience. In addition to providing financial support, NEFRC highlighted its Resilient First Coast Collaborative during the program, further strengthening regional partnerships. We look forward to continuing our engagement in initiatives that support a more resilient Northeast Florida.

Supporting Disaster Response Partnerships



THE COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION
— FOR NORTHEAST FLORIDA —

The Northeast Florida Regional Council received grant funding in the amount of \$25,000 from the Community Foundation for Northeast Florida to support outreach and engagement activities for Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD) across the Region. These funds will help strengthen coordination among nonprofit, faith-based, and community partners that play a critical role before, during, and after disasters.

The Council is currently receiving proposals from counties outlining how they plan to utilize the anticipated funding to enhance local collaboration, preparedness, and response efforts.

The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida—Florida's oldest and one of its largest community foundations—works to build a stronger region by connecting philanthropy with community needs. Through this partnership, NEFRC is proud to help expand resources that support coordinated disaster response and recovery throughout the Region.