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**Northwest Georgia Regional Plan
2013 – 2033**

**Regional Assessment
Supporting Analysis of Data and Information
Executive Summary**

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POPULATION

- The total population of the NWGRC region reached 863,217 in 2010, a 23.8% increase from 2000. The region's growth rate from 2000 to 2010 trailed that of the GMRC region, but exceeded that of the ARC and TRRC regions and the state.
- The region's 65-year-old and above population increased its share of total population from 11.37% in 2000 to 12.33% in 2010. The share of the region's population made up of senior citizen age groups (65 years old and older) appears likely to continue to increase over the planning period.
- The white race represented 84.10% of the region's population in 2010, a decline from 88.94% in 2000. The region's 2010 white share was considerably higher than that for the state (59.74%) and nation (72.41%). Compared to 2000, each non-white racial group had an increased share of the region's total population in 2010. Even so, the NWGRC region is not a very racially diverse area.
- The region's *Hispanic or Latino* population accounted for 9.54% of the total in 2010, up from 5.73% in 2000. The 2010 share was higher than that of the state (8.81%) but lower than that of the nation (16.35%).
- The region's income levels consistently fall well below those of the state as a whole. For 2006-2010, only Pickens County had per capita income above that of the state; only Pickens and Paulding Counties had median household income above that of the state; and only Paulding County had mean household greater than that of the state.
- The region's per capita personal income (PCPI) falls well below that of the state and nation in 2000 and 2010. For 2010, only Pickens County had a PCPI that exceeded that of the state.
- Following disturbing state and national trends, the percentage of the region's residents considered below the Census Bureau's poverty thresholds increased from 10.9% in 2000 to 16.3% in 2010. The estimate of the region's people of all ages in poverty increased from 77,550 in 2000 to 138,568 in 2010. This increase of 78.7% compared to a 68.7% increase for the state as a whole. Despite these significant increases, the region's poverty levels in 2010 remained below those of the state.
- The percentage of the region's residents 25 years old and over with an educational attainment of less than a high school graduate (23.8%) remained considerably higher than the percentage for the state (16.5%). The 2006-2010 percentage of the region's residents 25 years old and over with an educational attainment of bachelor's degree or higher (15.7%) remained much below the state's percentage (27.2%).
- Although educational attainment rates in the NWGRC region have improved in recent years, similar improvements throughout the state have resulted in only minimal progress in reducing the educational attainment gap between the NWGRC region and the state as a whole.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Private sector goods producing jobs accounted for 28.4% of the region's total employment, versus 13.9% for the state and 14.7% for the nation. Service providing jobs accounted for 53.6% of the region's total employment, versus 68.0% of the state's and 68.3% of the nation's total employment.
- Manufacturing accounted for 24.8% of all jobs in the region, a much greater share than the state's 9.1% and the nation's 9.0%.
- The NWGRC region's unemployment rate of 10.2% in 2011 was slightly lower than that of the TRRC region (10.6%) but was higher than that of the ARC region (9.6%), the GMRC region (8.6%), the state (9.8%), and the nation (8.9%).
- The region's households received 76.3% of their personal income from wage and salary income in 2006-2010. Reflecting the retirement-age population's growing share of total population, the region's households received 7.9% of their personal income from Social Security benefits and 5.0% from retirement benefits, up from 6.0% and 4.8%, respectively, in 1999.
- In 2010 the average weekly wages for jobs in the NWGRC region were lower than the ARC region in every sector and were lower than the state in all but one sector—agriculture, forestry, and fishing. For all industries, the NWGRC region's average weekly wages were only 66.0% of wages in the ARC region and 77.4% of wages in the state as a whole. Wages in the NWGRC region compare more favorably with wages in the GMRC and TRRC regions but still trail these regions in a majority of industry sectors and in average weekly wages for all industries.
- As a whole, the NWGRC region had a net outflow of 56,816 workers in 2000. Thirteen of the region's counties also had a net outflow of workers. Only Whitfield and Floyd Counties had a net inflow of workers in 2000.
- Of the region's employed residents in 2000, 71.86% worked in the region—55.15% worked in their county of residence and 16.71% worked in another NWGRC county. The remaining 28.14% of the region's employed residents worked outside of the region—18.77% of employed residents worked in another Georgia region, 9.35% worked in another state, and 0.02% worked in another country.
- Of the workers employed in the NWGRC region in 2000, 87.25% resided in the region—66.96% resided in their county of employment and 20.29% resided in another NWGRC county. The remaining 12.75% of the workers employed in the region resided outside of the region—6.07% of the workers employed in the region resided in another Georgia region and 6.68% resided in another state.
- The NWGRC region has a considerable and varied arsenal of local economic development agencies, programs and tools, education and training opportunities, and funding sources available to support economic development.

- Three of the ten industries with the most projected job growth from 2008 through 2018 are in the health care and social assistance sector, while six of the ten industries with the most projected job losses are in the manufacturing sector.

HOUSING

- Of the region's total housing units, the *1-unit, detached* housing type accounted for 72.65% of the total in 2006-2010, up from a 71.51% share in 2000. The region had more *1-unit, detached* type housing units in 2006-2010 than total housing units in 2000. The *mobile home* type accounted for 14.44% of all housing units in 2006-2010, down from 17.12% in 2000. Multi-family building units accounted for 11.21% of all housing units in 2006-2010, up from 9.98% in 2000.
- Annual new privately-owned residential building permits for single-family and total building units generally increased from 2001 through 2005, then began a steady decline through 2010. Permits for multi-family units, except for an uptick in 2003, declined annually from 2001 through 2009. Permits for single-family building units in 2010 were just 9.7% of like permits in 2005, and permits for total residential building units in 2010 were just 10.6% of like permits in 2005. Multi-family building unit permits in 2010 were 12.5% of like permits in 2001 and 20.7% of like permits in 2005.
- Of the NWGRC region's housing units, 18.0% were built in 2000 or more recently, compared to 19.9% of the state's housing units. A greater percentage of the region's housing units, however, were built before 1960, 17.3% compared to the state's 15.3%.
- In 2010 the region had 361,306 total housing units, with 87.0% occupied and 13.0% vacant. The state had a slightly higher occupancy rate of 87.7% and, consequently, a slightly lower vacancy rate of 12.3%. In the region, 62.4% of all housing units were owner-occupied, a considerably higher percentage than the state's 57.6%. Renter-occupied units in the region comprised 24.6% of total units, lower than the state's 30.1%.
- The percentage of the region's renter-occupied housing units considered to be cost-burdened increased from 33.1% in 2000 to 49.9% in 2006-2010. The region's percentage of cost-burdened, owner-occupied housing units increased from 18.2% in 2000 to 26.4% in 2006-2010. Despite these disturbing increases in the region's cost-burdened housing rates, the region's rates remained below those of the state for 2006-2010.
- Twelve of the region's fifteen counties have two or more subsidized independent retirement communities. The region has 71 personal care homes with a total of 1,552 units. At least one personal care facility is located in each of the region's counties. There are also 38 nursing homes, with a total of 3,761 beds, located in the NWGRC region. The region's nursing homes had an average occupancy rate of 89.8% in SFY 2010.
- In 2009 the NWGRC region had an estimated 1,565 homeless persons, of which only 171 were sheltered. The region accounted for 7.4% of the state's homeless but only 1.9% of the state's sheltered homeless. Stated another way, 10.9% of the region's homeless were sheltered, compared to 42.6% of the state's homeless. Of the region's

245 total emergency and transitional beds, 53.5% were for victims of domestic violence. Statewide, only 12.9% of total emergency/transitional beds were for victims of domestic violence.

- Of the region's civilian, non-institutional population 5 years old and over, 22.2% have a disability. For the population 5 to 15 years old, the percent with a disability is 5.9%; for the population 16 to 64 years old, the percentage with a disability is 21.7%; and for the population 65 years old and over, the percentage with a disability increases to 49.5%. All of these disability rates by age for the NWGRC region are higher than the statewide rates. For the region's civilian, non-institutional population 21 to 64 years old with a disability, 55.6% is employed. This percentage also is below the corresponding statewide percentage.
- The NWGRC region's AIDS rate of 61.0 per 100,000 is far below the statewide rate of 242.1 per 100,000.
- As a whole, the region has a numerical imbalance of jobs and housing suggesting it is job-poor and needs more employment opportunities for the resident, generally lower-wage labor force. This numerical imbalance can be misleading, however, as many resident workers have short commutes to job-rich sites outside the region in the Chattanooga and Atlanta metropolitan areas. Nevertheless, the region's imbalance of jobs and housing is increasing. In 2000, the jobs/employed population ratio was 0.73; in 2005, it was 0.69; in 2010, it was 0.67; and in 2011, it was 0.65.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

- The NWGRC region has 45 municipal public water systems, all classified as community water systems, which serve an estimated total population of 740,285. The NWGRC region also has 72 state, federal, and privately-owned public water systems. The majority of these non-municipal public water systems (44) are transient non-community water systems, 24 are community water systems, and 4 are non-transient non-community water systems. The region's non-municipal, community water systems serve an additional population of 16,575.
- Within the NWGRC region, including both surface water and groundwater, almost 244 MGD of municipal permitted water supply (on a monthly average basis) is available. The region relies primarily on surface water from rivers and storage reservoirs for this water supply. Groundwater sources make up only 11.5% of the region's total municipal permitted water supply.
- The NWGRC region's non-municipal permitted withdrawals total 3,850 MGD on a monthly average basis. These withdrawals are almost sixteen times the region's municipal permitted withdrawals. Surface water sources account for 99.5% of the region's non-municipal permitted water supplies, and the largest non-municipal permitted withdrawals are permitted surface water withdrawals associated with power generation. Non-municipal permitted water withdrawals associated with power generation account for 97.9% of total non-municipal permitted water supplies.

- The *Coosa-North Georgia Regional Water Plan* identified seven NWGRC counties with potential 2050 permitted capacity needs-- Catoosa, Chattooga, Fannin, Gilmer, Murray, Pickens, and Whitfield—indicating areas where continued localized facility planning may be needed.
- The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District's *Water Supply and Water Conservation Management Plan* (May 2009) provides water demand forecasts as well as the 2006 and planned 2035 municipal permitted surface water supplies needed to meet the 2035 forecasted demands for Bartow and Paulding Counties. Both counties will need additional permitted surface water supplies to meet future demand forecasts.
- The NWGRC region had 128 permitted wastewater treatment facilities as of April 2008. Of these, 47 were municipal or water district-type facilities, 74 were privately-owned facilities, 5 were federal government facilities, 1 was a state government facility, and 1 was classified as a city government facility.
- The *Coosa-North Georgia Regional Water Plan* provides a comparison of the future wastewater capacity needs with existing permitted capacity. Based on this comparison, eight NWGRC counties would meet 2050 demands with their currently permitted facilities. Four NWGRC counties—Catoosa, Fannin, Pickens, and Whitfield—would experience a shortage, suggesting that additional wastewater facility development or expansion may be required to meet projected future wastewater demands.
- The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District's *Wastewater Management Plan* (May 2009) provides wastewater flow forecasts and the existing (2006) and the planned 2035 municipal wastewater treatment facilities needed to accommodate the forecasted 2035 wastewater flows for Bartow and Paulding Counties. Both counties will need additional wastewater treatment capacity to meet forecasted (2035) wastewater flows.
- The NWGRC region is served by 55 fire departments. Most are public sector organizations such as municipal and county fire departments. In a few counties, fire protection is organized at the county level but service is provided by a network of individual fire companies or departments. These entities may be funded by, and be under varying degrees of control of, a county fire authority.
- Based on the National Fire Department Census, 72.3% of the region's registered departments operate 1 or 2 fire stations; 17.0%, operate 3 to 9 stations; and 10.6%, operate 10 or more stations. Of the region's USFA-registered fire departments (85% of total), 42.6% are volunteer, 34.0% are mostly volunteer, 14.9% are career, and 8.5% are mostly career.
- Law enforcement services in the NWGRC region are provided by approximately 68 local law enforcement agencies that include county sheriff agencies, county police agencies, county constable agencies, county marshal agencies, municipal police agencies, municipal marshal agencies, and school police agencies.
- Emergency medical services (EMS) providers in the NWGRC region are generally county governments that provide their own EMS or contract with private hospital or ambulance services.

- Phase II of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) stormwater program regulates local government owners and operators of municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4s) located in urbanized areas not already covered by Phase I. NWGRC local governments in Phase II MS4 designated areas are the counties of Bartow, Catoosa Floyd, Paulding, Walker, and Whitfield and the cities of Emerson, Fort Oglethorpe, Ringgold, Rome, Dallas, Hiram, Chickamauga, Lookout Mountain, Rossville, Dalton, Tunnel Hill, and Varnell. As a result of the 2010 Census, Cartersville has been designated an urbanized area and, thus, may become a regulated small MS4.
- According to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD), there are sixteen registered transfer stations in the NWGRC region as of March 2011.
- According to the Georgia EPD, there were thirteen solid waste disposal facilities (excluding solid waste inert landfills) operating in the NWGRC region as of October 2011. These facilities consisted of six municipal solid waste landfills, six construction and demolition landfills, and one industrial landfill.
- A total of 1,122,139.30 tons of solid waste were disposed in the region's thirteen landfills in 2011. Of this total, 95.04% was disposed in the six municipal solid waste landfills; 3.61% was disposed in the six construction and demolition landfills; and 1.35% was disposed in the one industrial landfill.
- Four of the region's landfills are projected to reach permitted capacity during the 20-year planning period. The owners/operators of these facilities will likely need to determine if the current facilities should be closed, expanded, or closed with a new disposal facility developed on a different site.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

- Using the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of a government, there are more than 150 local governments in the NWGRC region. The region's local governments consist of 64 general purpose local governments (15 county governments and 49 municipal governments), 22 school district governments (15 county school districts and 7 independent, or city, school districts), and more than 65 special district governments (mostly independent local government authorities).
- The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission is an ARC-designated Local Development District for its fifteen counties, all of which are in the Appalachian region. NWGRC receives an annual contract with ARC to assist communities with community and economic development issues and activities.
- ARC uses an index-based county economic classification system to identify and monitor the economic status of Appalachian counties. Each county is classified into one of five economic status designations as follows: *distressed*, *at-risk*, *transitional*, *competitive*, and *attainment*. For FY 2013, Chattooga is the region's only county classified as *distressed*. Gordon, Haralson, Murray, Polk, and Whitfield Counties are classified as *at-risk*, and the region's nine remaining counties are all classified as *transitional*.

- The NWGRC region's counties are located in three water planning regions. Haralson County is in the Middle Chattahoochee Water Planning Region, Bartow and Paulding Counties are located in the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District, and the region's twelve remaining counties are located in the Coosa-North Georgia Water Planning Region.
- Bartow and Paulding Counties (part of a 20-county Atlanta, GA nonattainment area) are currently nonattainment area counties under the 1997 8-hour ozone national ambient air quality standard (NAAQS), but they are in the process of being formally redesignated to attainment for the 1997 standard. In March 2008, the EPA revised the NAAQS for ground-level ozone, lowering the 8-hour standard from 0.08 ppm to 0.075 ppm. Designations for the 2008 standard become effective in April 2012. A 15-county Atlanta, GA area was designated as an 8-hour ozone nonattainment area under the 2008 standard. Bartow and Paulding are nonattainment area counties under the 2008 standard.
- Currently, Catoosa and Walker Counties (Chattanooga, AL-TN-GA), Floyd County (Rome, GA), and Bartow and Paulding Counties (Atlanta, GA) are nonattainment area counties under the 1997 NAAQS for PM_{2.5}, but all are in the process of being formally redesignated to attainment for the 1997 standards.

TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

- There were 11,081 miles of roads in the NWGRC Region in 2011. State routes comprised 1,555 miles of the total; county roads, 8,030 miles; and city streets, 1,496 miles.
- The region's network of state routes, which includes interstate highways and U.S. routes, includes all or portions of 47 state designated routes, portions of 7 U.S. routes, and portions of 5 interstate highways. Many of these routes are multiplexed or have multiplexed segments, with two or more signed or unsigned routes sharing a single segment of highway.
- Three of the Governor's Road Improvement Program (GRIP) corridors, defined by Georgia law, traverse the NWGRC region: (1) the Appalachian Developmental Highway, (2) the U.S. 27 corridor, and (3) the East-West Highway. The East-West Highway is proposed to pass through Dade, Walker, Catoosa, Whitfield, Murray, and Gilmer Counties while traversing the state from I-59 to I-85. Currently, there is no activity on the East-West Highway.
- The region's road network includes 1,912 bridges according to the Federal Highway Administration's National Bridge Inventory (NBI). Of this total, 106 of the region's bridges are rated "structurally deficient" and 236 are rated "functionally obsolete."
- According to the *2005-2035 Georgia Statewide Freight Plan*, only three highway segments in the NWGRC region, other than the interstate highways, are projected to carry more than ten million tons of truck freight in 2035. These segments are SR 71 from the Tennessee state line in Whitfield County to Dalton/I-75, the segment of US

411/SR 20 from Rome to Cartersville/I-75, and a segment of US 27/ SR 1 from Summerville to SR 140 in Floyd County.

- Both of the state's Class I railroads, Norfolk Southern (NS) and CSX Transportation (CSXT), operate major corridors through the region. According to the *2009 State Rail Plan (SRP)*, the Norfolk Southern corridor from the Cobb-Paulding County line through Rome and Dalton to Cohutta and the CSXT corridor from the Cobb-Bartow County line to Cartersville, followed by the CSXT corridor from Cartersville through Chatsworth to the Tennessee state line, are the highest rail tonnage routes in the region and among the highest in the state.
- Freight tonnage on Norfolk Southern's and CSXT's highest volume lines through the region is expected to double by 2035, but rail's mode share of freight tonnage is projected to decline from 26.5% in 1998 to 19.8% in 2035. Unlike the highway network, growth in rail freight will be primarily along existing main lines, and no new routes are forecast to become significant.
- Two shortline (Class III) railroads also operate in the region. The Chattooga & Chickamauga Railway (CCKY) operates 68 miles of track in Walker and Chattooga Counties. The Georgia Northeastern Railroad (GNRR) runs 100 miles from Marietta through Jasper, Ellijay, and Blue Ridge to McCaysville, with a short spur to Mineral Bluff.
- Currently, there are no intercity passenger rail service stops within the NWGRC region. Excursion passenger train services, however, are provided on segments of the region's two shortline railroads.
- The Georgia Rail Passenger Program (GRPP) is a comprehensive plan for a proposed, as yet unbuilt, system of commuter and intercity rail transportation. The GRPP contains a 425-mile system of seven commuter rail lines, centered on metro Atlanta, serving 55 communities. Of the currently planned commuter train routes, Bremen is the region's only community served by the system. The 52-mile Bremen route would utilize the Norfolk Southern, Atlanta to Birmingham, corridor. Two potential routes are also included in the GRPP, and both routes extend into the NWGRC region. One potential route branches from the Canton route at Marietta and follows the CSXT corridor to Cartersville. The other potential route branches from the Bremen route at Austell and follows the Norfolk Southern corridor to Rome.
- The GRPP also proposes a two-tiered intercity passenger rail network consisting of four, first-priority corridors and three, second-priority corridors. This network would utilize over 1,000 miles of the state's railroads, linking nine of the state's largest cities with the metro Atlanta / Macon area, as well as two of the largest travel markets in neighboring states. None of this proposed network of intercity passenger rail is within the NWGRC region.
- During the 2000 legislative session, the Georgia General Assembly passed H.B. 1348, which created a comprehensive and coordinated system of eighteen railroad passenger service corridors to be known as the Designated Georgia Rail Passenger Corridors. Designated Georgia Rail Passenger Corridors that traverse the region are as follows: Atlanta – Bremen; Atlanta – Cartersville; Bremen – Birmingham, Alabama; and Atlanta – Chattanooga, Tennessee.

- The idea of high-speed ground transportation service between Atlanta (Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport) and Chattanooga (Chattanooga Metropolitan Airport/Lovell Field) has been under consideration and study for more than a decade. Currently, a study that includes a Tier I Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is underway and nearing completion. Four alignment alternatives that warrant further consideration in the Tier I EIS have been identified and were presented to stakeholders and the public in November 2010. Throughout the NWGRC region, the alignment would occupy the I-75 right-of-way, utilizing the interstate's median (median alignment) or the broader I-75 corridor area (non-median alignment). Potential stations in the region would be Cartersville and Dalton.
- No commercial service airports are located within the NWGRC region, but the region does have nine general aviation airports. The region's airports (excluding Paulding Northwest Atlanta) served approximately 190,000 general aviation operations during the twelve-month period from July 2010 through June 2011.
- The demand/capacity ratio projections for 2021 in the Georgia Aviation System Plan range from 2% for the Gilmer County Airport to 42% for the Cartersville Airport. Based aircraft and annual aircraft operations at the Cartersville Airport, however, are currently below levels a decade ago and well below the 2011 projected levels. On the other hand, current based aircraft and annual aircraft operations are well above projected levels at Cornelius Moore Field and Pickens County Airport, where aircraft operations are currently more than two and a half times the projected levels for 2011.
- All fifteen counties in the NWGRC region have Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) transit and thirteen of the region's counties have rural public transit. In addition, there is one urban public transit system and one city rural public transit system.