

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Board of County Commissioners

July 11, 2025



Northeast Okaloosa County Designated as Rural Area of Opportunity for New Job Creation

Okaloosa County, Florida – Northeast Okaloosa County now joins neighboring counties as a Rural Area of Opportunity (RAO) following an Executive Order by Gov. DeSantis on Tuesday. This designation will be used as a tool to attract job-creating industries that will further stimulate the economy in northeast Okaloosa County.

“Having this designation will position Okaloosa County for success in further job creation that has already begun with recent endeavors from companies invested in northeast Okaloosa County at Shoal River Industrial Park,” said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Paul Mixon. “We have invested in the creation of new and improved infrastructure in this region. We will now be able to leverage that with this recent designation to attract companies that will establish an economic environment that will benefit residents in our area looking for higher wages.”

Gov. DeSantis’ Executive Order adds Okaloosa County to the Northwest Rural Areas of Opportunity, which include Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, Wakulla, Washington, and portions of Walton County, including the City of Freeport and areas north of the Choctawhatchee Bay and the Intracoastal Waterway. Okaloosa’s northeast area designation includes the area east of State Road 85 and north of Interstate 10 and all unincorporated areas including the City of Laurel Hill and the unincorporated areas of Auburn, Deerland, and Svea.

The RAO has a successful history of benefiting neighboring counties. A Busy Bee fuel station and temperature gauge company, Probes Unlimited, have opened in recent years in Holmes County. The RAO has also attracted Pointe Blank Enterprises, an armor manufacturing company to Wakulla County.

“We now have an additional tool to help attract positive economic development and jobs to Okaloosa County,” said One Okaloosa EDC Executive Director Nathan Sparks. “We appreciate Gov. DeSantis for including us in this designation and look forward to building upon this success.”

The benefits of the RAO include:

- Waivers for local match or wage requirements for state grants / incentives.
- Access to additional state economic development incentive programs (i.e. rural job tax credits)
- Expedited permitting review from state agencies.
- Ability to seek waivers from certain state rules that may negatively impact an economic development project.
- Benefit of being represented by the “Opportunity Florida” regional organization – www.opportunityflorida.com
- Opportunity Florida offers scholarships for elected leaders within the defined area to attend economic development conferences.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER NICK TOMECEK AT 850.651.7321

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