

WAKULLA COUNTY/CITY OF ST. MARKS COMMUNITY RATING SYSTEM PROGRESS REPORT

January 4, 2023

On October 29, 1999, the Wakulla County Board of County Commissioners adopted the Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS) as the County's Community Rating System (CRS) Floodplain Management Plan. Once every five years, the LMS must be evaluated to assess what should be revised in the plan to ensure that it is up to date and compliant with federal and state requirements. This plan has been updated as required over the years by the LMS Steering Committee (a volunteer workgroup). The current LMS was adopted by the City of St. Marks Council on March 11, 2021, and approved by the Wakulla County Board of County Commissioners on April 5, 2021. The revised LMS was reviewed and approved by state and federal agencies on May 4, 2021, which places its expiration in 2026.

The LMS contains a list of projects that can be utilized to assist Wakulla County (County) and the City of St. Marks (City) in reducing their risk and vulnerability to known hazards. This list is routinely updated by the LMS Working Group, and the current version of this list contains 69 projects. A Crawfordville area stormwater study and the acquisition of land in Crawfordville for stormwater use are ranked as the first two priority projects. Funding is being sought to complete these projects, and both are included in the County's Adopted Infrastructure Plan.

The third and fourth-ranked projects seek to improve stormwater drainage in Panacea through a drainage study and associated drainage improvements. Currently, the County is conducting an elevation survey of local roads on the east side of Panacea from Bottoms Road to Levy Bay Road to facilitate these projects. Both components of this project have been included in the Adopted Infrastructure Plan.

The replacement and elevation of the Sopchoppy River Bridge on Highway 375, Smith Creek Road, is the next priority item. Funding is being sought to replace and elevate this critical infrastructure. The sixth-ranked project is for stormwater mitigation in the Wakulla Gardens subdivision. To date, a stormwater study for the Wakulla Gardens subdivision has been completed, and construction plans for six flood basins in the subdivision are also complete. Stormwater improvements are currently being made in this subdivision in conjunction with central sewer expansions and road improvements. The creation of a one-foot freeboard requirement for new construction in the Special Flood Hazard Area is next on the list. This would require new structures to be built one foot above the currently required base flood elevation to allow better protection from flooding. The Board of County Commissioners approved revisions to the Wakulla County Floodplain Management Ordinance incorporating one-foot of freeboard for structures on June 6, 2022.

The next several projects pertain to sewer infrastructure. Project eight seeks to upgrade and expand the entire countywide sewer system and better protect it from flood-induced impacts. Phase III of the Magnolia Gardens septic-to-sewer project is currently underway and expected to be completed by Spring 2023. Wakulla Gardens Phase III septic-to-sewer is slated to start construction in Spring 2023. Several additional phases of septic-to-sewer projects are slated to be designed, engineered, and constructed over the next five years. Projects nine through 23 on the LMS Projects List involve the raising and waterproofing of electrical panels located in the Special Flood Hazard Areas to prevent stormwater intrusion. These improvements are proposed at the following sewer lift stations: Number 1 – 12, 28, 30, and 34. Thus far, funding has been secured from the Department of Economic Opportunity and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (FDEP) Resilient Florida Program for improvements to lift stations 2, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 28, 33, and 34.

The study, acquisition of land, and implementation of stormwater improvements in Magnolia Gardens and Greiner's Addition subdivisions is the 24th ranked item. Stormwater improvements in conjunction with central sewer expansion have been completed in a portion of Magnolia Gardens. Plans for both stormwater improvements and central sewer expansion are currently under construction in Greiner's Addition subdivision. The 25th and 26th ranked endeavors pertain to the City of St. Marks and are awaiting funding. These projects include sewer expansions and the removal of septic tanks from the surge area within the City of St. Marks and a stormwater mitigation project that focuses on the conveyance of flood water through the City. While the City has completed some drainage improvements along Fire Escape Road, funding is required to support further drainage improvement efforts within the City limits. In the interim, the County is performing the required ditch maintenance for conveyance.

The next several projects cover a variety of topics. Project number 27 is the Florida Division of Forestry's fire prevention public awareness campaign. This is an ongoing project that has included activities, such as seminars, on fire prevention. An upgrade of the road construction standards in flood-prone areas is the next ranked project, and County staff will pursue this regulation change as time permits. Item number 29 seeks to improve an alternative access route through Panacea to be utilized during times of flooding. This project has been awarded funding through FDEP's Resilient Florida Program. Improvements are anticipated to commence construction in Spring 2023. The next issue pertains to a natural hazard ongoing public outreach campaign. Wakulla County has placed updated flood zone maps and flood informational material on its website as part of this project. In addition, educational information related to hurricane preparedness, flood insurance, and permitting within the flood zone is included in the local newspaper each year.

Projects ranked 31 and 32 on the LMS list affect the Sopchoppy area. Project 31 proposes the replacement and elevation of the Sopchoppy River Bridge on County Road 22, Rose Street. Funding for this item is required to move this project forward. Stormwater mitigation in Sopchoppy to include a study, land acquisition, and construction of detention ponds is ranked as project 32. The City of Sopchoppy completed a stormwater improvement project along portions of Orange Avenue and Gulf Street in 2020. The City of Sopchoppy has applied for and

will continue to seek funding from the Community Development Block Grant Mitigation Program (CDBG-MIT) to complete Phase Three of its planned stormwater improvements.

The next few items on the list cover various topics. The first of these implements is the Florida Forestry Service's fuel reduction plan to better protect residents from wildfires. Progress towards this goal has been made through prescribed burning during the last year. The next item on the list is the replacement of overhead power lines with underground cables in the City of St. Marks. This relocation project includes work that so far has been completed on Waterfront Street, Riverside Drive, and a portion of Port Leon Drive, extending north to City Hall. Funding is required for the next phase which will extend north to the town center. Item number 35 is for beach renourishment along the Mashles Sands shoreline. This will address several coastal erosion problems in the area and has been included in the Adopted Infrastructure Plan. Funding is needed to complete this project. The retrofitting of homes was ranked as project number 36, and this can improve a structure's resistance to the effects of natural hazards. Through programs such as the State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) funding, qualifying residential property owners can better prepare their homes for natural events. Additional funding is anticipated for the SHIP program, and citizens are encouraged to inquire about their eligibility.

Flooding and evacuation-related activities make up the next few projects. The four-laning of Crawfordville Highway, which is a critical evacuation route, was included as the next priority. County staff has worked with the Capital Regional Transportation Planning Agency and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) on this project and four-laning is currently underway in the northern portion of the County. The acquisition of severe repetitive loss properties for the purpose of creating open space is the next project. As severe repetitive loss property owners become interested and funding is available, these projects will be pursued. An ongoing education campaign targeted towards the owners of properties within repetitive loss areas, which are areas where property owners have made multiple flood insurance claims, is the next item included on the list. Each year County staff sends informational materials covering several flood-related topics and property protection measures to these owners.

The list of undertakings continues with projects for the hardening of government facilities, electrical lines, and roadways. The next six projects propose to install generators at the following locations: Public Works Fuel Station, Board of County Commissioners Administration Complex, St. Marks City Hall, Sheriff's Office Annex, Wakulla County Community Center, and the Wakulla County Court House. Funding requests under the Florida Department of Emergency Management's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program were awarded in 2021 for five of these generators and installation is currently underway. The pursuit of funding for the Wakulla County Court House generator project is ongoing.

Project number 46 consists of obtaining bypass pumps to serve lift stations within the City of St. Marks, which was awarded funding in November 2021, and this project was completed in 2022. The subsequent project includes the installation of wiring for future generators in government buildings. Retrofitting overhead electrical lines with underground lines in areas with heavy tree canopies throughout the County makes up the next item. Projects 49 and 50 propose to elevate

Old Fort Road and Mashas Sands Road, which are both subject to flooding. To date, portions of Old Fort Road have been elevated. Project number 51 in this group is for a road elevation study. This would include a County-wide study to assess which roadways have the greatest need and would be the most feasible to elevate above potential floodwaters. This project is awaiting funding.

Project number 52 on the list seeks to replace septic tanks on Live Oak Island with central sewer. Next, the Working Group has included a project to construct a Category 3 shelter within the County as there are currently no shelters in the County that have been built to that standard. Funding is needed to proceed with these projects. The County has been awarded funding through CDBG-MIT to develop a comprehensive Shelter Plan which seeks to assess existing shelters and identify suitable facilities that meet American Red Cross Hurricane Evacuation Selection Standards. This project is projected to be complete by Fall 2023. Another project is to obtain a new First Responder Communication System. To complete these efforts, the County completed a systematic analysis of the existing aging and unrepairable first responder communication system in 2021 to determine the scope for its forthcoming replacement. From this study, it was determined that the entire system was unsalvageable and required a complete replacement. Wakulla County was approved for funding from Triumph Gulf Coast, Inc. in November 2022 to support the installation of a new Project-25 700/800 MHz digital simulcast turnkey radio network capable of meeting current and future communication needs.

The following set of projects relates to Talquin Electric Cooperative, Inc.'s infrastructure improvements. The first of these projects is to pursue the installation of a generator at the Songbird well water site to continue to serve 2,600 residents after a storm event. Talquin has indicated that they intended to apply for grant funding to complete this project. The next is to convert 5,573 overhead electrical service wires to underground service. The final project in this group is to install anchors at 115 transformer pads in the coastal areas of Shell Point, Live Oak Island, Oyster Bay, and Spring Creek to prevent storm surges from moving the transformers off the pads. Funding is needed to proceed with these two projects.

Item number 58 on the projects list includes the installation of flashing warning lights at the intersection of Bloxham Cutoff Road and Wakulla Springs Road, located centrally in the north portion of the County. This project was completed in 2022. Conducting needed repairs to the existing bridge located over the Sopchoppy River on Highway 375 makes up the next project. The County is currently seeking funding to support this project. Performing prescribed burning at County facilities, including Mashas Sands, Big Bend Maritime Center, the Wakulla Welcome Center, and the Wakulla Equestrian Center to reduce hurricane impacts are included as projects numbered 60 through 63, respectively. In 2018, a control burn was completed at the Big Bend Maritime Center. Currently, the Mashas Sand Land Management Plan is being updated and will include provisions for prescribed burning. Funding is being sought for the remaining sites and burning is anticipated to be completed in the future. The next project seeks to conduct a climate change study regarding the potential impacts of climate change and to identify mitigation techniques. The County has been awarded funding from CDBG-MIT to create a

Disaster Risk Analysis and Adaptation Plan to enhance resiliency planning by analyzing potential hazards and evaluating existing conditions. This project is currently underway with assistance from the Apalachee Regional Planning Council.

Project number 65 aims to construct a new combined Emergency Operations Center (EOC)/E911 Communication Center to serve as the Primary Public Safety Answering Point. The County was approved in 2022 for appropriation funding through the Dunn Community Projects to support the project. Additional efforts to secure matching funds required to complete the construction of this project are actively being pursued. Additional public safety infrastructure projects are listed as projects numbered 66 through 68, with land acquisition and/or construction of three new Fire Rescue Stations located in Shell Point, the City of St. Marks, and at the intersection of Lonnie Raker Road and Bloxham Cutoff. These new stations will maximize coverage areas and response times for public safety and emergency response throughout Wakulla County. At this time, the County has acquired all three sites and is seeking funding for the construction of each station.

The final project on the list includes the design and construction of a replacement bridge for Otter Creek Rise along Surf Road. This structure is considered a critical facility, and its replacement is significant to local infrastructure as it relates to public safety, evacuation, and flood mitigation efforts. This project has also been included within the County's Adopted Infrastructure Plan and Capital Improvements Element. FDOT has committed funding to support this project, and preliminary engineering and design are currently underway.

This Progress Report was prepared by Somer Pell of the Wakulla County Planning and Community Development Department. It will be made available to the governing boards through a memorandum and through a news release to the local press, "The Wakulla News", for publication. Its availability to the public will be posted on the Board of County Commissioners Public Notice board and County website, www.mywakulla.com. Copies of this Report and related documents may be obtained from the Planning and Community Development Department, which is located at 3093 Crawfordville Highway.

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