

1. Introduction

Overview

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requires that county governments have an adopted Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS) as a prerequisite for receiving funds from the Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) grant assistance and the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). This is mandated by the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000) which was signed into law on October 20, 2000.

FEMA set forth guidelines for the LMS in the Interim Final Rule in the Federal Register of 44 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 201. This document instructs that a Local Mitigation Strategy identifies natural hazards and their impacts, identifies actions to reduce losses resulting from the hazards, and creates a process for the implementation of the plan. It also states that a previously approved plan must be reviewed, revised, and resubmitted for approval every five years in order for the county and its jurisdictions to remain eligible for HMGP funds.

The Polk County LMS was first created in 1999. The 2010 LMS update was written in accordance with all FEMA and State of Florida guidelines. The updated plan includes documentation on the planning process, those involved in preparing it and how the public participated. It includes a risk assessment for every hazard affecting the county and its jurisdictions, as well as the mitigation actions that have been completed since the last plan, those that are in progress, or those that are proposed.

Purpose

The purpose of the LMS is to create a plan to reduce the effects of hazards prior to the event. There are many types of hazards that local governments can face. Most of them are natural hazards such as severe storms, drought, earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, and high winds. Often, combinations of these result in adverse weather systems such as hurricanes and tornadoes. Some hazards are manmade, such as terrorism or chemical spills. Numerous mitigation actions can be taken to reduce the vulnerability of the county and its jurisdictions to these hazards. Only natural hazards will be addressed in this LMS.

The Polk County LMS is a multi-jurisdictional plan that assesses the vulnerability of the county and its jurisdictions to hazards and elaborates on the risk associated with each type of hazard. It evaluates local mitigation efforts that should be taken and their usefulness, as well as providing guidance for implementation at the jurisdictional level. Through adoption of this plan, the county and its jurisdictions will be eligible for federal funds to carry out their mitigation actions from HMGP and PDM grants.

County Profile

Polk County is Florida's fifth largest county with a total land area 2,010 square miles, of which approximately 85,000 acres are lakes. Polk County is also Florida's ninth largest county in terms of population with an estimated 57,184 residents in 2007. That is only about 3.11% of the total population of Florida. However, approximately 8.5 million people reside within a 100-mile radius of Polk County, making this area one of the largest concentrations of population in the Southeast. The County is bounded by eight Counties: Lake and Sumter to the north, Pasco and Hillsborough

to the west, Hardee and Highlands to the south, Orange and Osceola to the east, Manatee to the southwest, and Okeechobee to the southeast.

There are 18 jurisdictions in Polk County that are affected by this LMS. They are:

- Unincorporated Polk County
- City of Auburndale
- City of Bartow
- City of Davenport
- City of Dundee
- City of Eagle Lake
- City of Fort Meade
- City of Frostproof
- City of Haines City
- Village of Highland Park
- Town of Hillcrest Heights
- City of Lakeland
- Town of Lake Alfred
- Town of Lake Hamilton
- City of Lake Wales
- City of Mulberry
- Town of Polk City
- City of Winter Haven

Demographics

The following table shows the population of Polk County as of the 2007 American Community Survey distributed by the US Census Bureau. It also shows the population over 18 years old, and the population over 65 years old. Unlike many counties in Florida, Polk County has a fairly small amount of residents over 65 years of age.

Table 1-1 Polk County Population Distribution, 2007

	Total	Male	Female
Population	557,184	274,684	282,500
18 years and older	422,177	205,377	216,800
65 years and older	96,695	43,030	53,665

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey

Table 1-2 Polk County Poverty Levels, 2007

Poverty Levels	Percentage	Total
All People	13.3%	74,105
Under 18 years	20.2%	27,271
18 yrs and over	11.1%	46,862

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey

Table 1-3 Polk County Employment Status, 2007

Employment Status	Percent in Labor Force	Unemployment Rate	Total
In Labor Force	59%		256,675
Employed		94%	242,379
Unemployed		6%	14,296
Not in Labor Force	41%		181,408

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey

Polk County has the ninth largest labor force compared to all counties statewide. The rate of increase in the size of the labor force has accelerated in the past five years for the same reasons that population growth has exhibited similar patterns. A strong and improving economy has attracted younger people to our area, and more people are entering the labor market. This trend is likely to continue, adding approximately 5,500 to the labor force on an annual basis resulting in a projection of approximately 285,500 by the year 2010, though the numbers may be reduced prior to 2010 due to the national economic slowdown. The October 2007 figures show the estimated size of the labor force to be 276,020 with 263,118 employed and 12,902 unemployed. Job growth has expanded in the service providing industries while decreasing in the more traditional goods providing industries like manufacturing and mining. As shown in the tables below, Polk County has a number of public and private employers with employment in excess of 1,000.