



# SEAEDD

Southeast Arkansas Economic Development District

SEAEDD, Inc.

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Prepared For:

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Economic Development Administration

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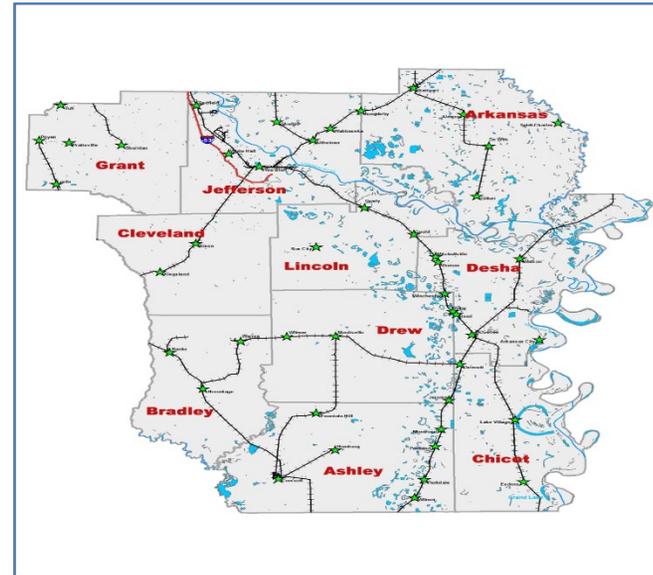
**2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs)**

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County	County Seat	Founded	Land Area	Population 2020 Census
Arkansas	DeWitt/Stuttgart	1813	1,033.79	19,019
Ashley	Hamburg	1848	939.08	21,853
Bradley	Warren	1840	653	10,545
Chicot	Lake Village	1823	691	11,800
Cleveland	Rison	1873	599	8,689
Desha	Arkansas City	1838	820	13,008
Drew	Monticello	1846	836	18,509
Grant	Sheridan	1869	633	17,853
Jefferson	Pine Bluff	1829	914	77,435
Lincoln	Star City	1871	572.17	14,134

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Southeast Arkansas Economic Development District, Inc. (SEAEDD) herewith presents our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). This document is designed to bring together the public and private sectors in the creation of an economic roadmap to diversify and strengthen regional economies. Through resources provided by the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA), SEAEDD has identified and set in motion a strategy to contend with the impediments which have deterred economic growth in our region.



While current trend indicators referred to in this CEDS are bleak, SEAEDD, through its Board of Directors, is optimistic that the many programs and plans aimed at unemployment and the development of infrastructure will reverse the negative trends. This reversal will undoubtedly lead to a slowdown of the outward migration from the area, eventually creating a stable tax and skilled employment base.

Southeast Arkansas endures high levels of unemployment, below average income levels and a continued decline in population. The programs and strategies in the CEDS center on shifting the repressiveness of the region to one that will provide an economic base that fosters self-dependence. The underlying theme that will lead to this shift is the proactive approach SEAEDD continues to use in economic development activities. Southeast Arkansas cannot afford to approach its economic woes from a reactionary methodology. Utilization of the area's natural resources, via intermodal transportation networks currently in the planning stages or already under development and nearing completion, has the potential to make Southeast Arkansas an exporting center. The many lakes, rivers, and forests in the district presently provide a recreational venue principally for Arkansas. Promotion of these inherent assets, drawing outdoorsmen and recreationalists from surrounding states, could make tourism a significant factor in the economy of Southeast Arkansas.

In the past, this delta region has flourished due to the exploitation of a wealth of natural resources and agricultural commodities. Over the years, the success of farming ventures has declined all over the nation. This has hit Southeast Arkansas especially hard. This was the base of the local economy and through creative tactics these kinds of natural resources and agriculture could lead to big gains for the economy and people of Southeast Arkansas once again. The goal of diversification in economic development is apparent, but it is as important to maximize the utility of what you have naturally. A major goal in SEAEDD's economic development policy is to foster and implement innovative projects that lead to new cutting edge uses and industries for the area's natural resources. Southeast Arkansas needs to be on the cutting edge of new enterprises that protect the natural resources located in the area and utilize this to capitalize on value added processes and industries for historically low yield activities.

This CEDS provides a blueprint whereby future generations in Southeast Arkansas will have the opportunity to acquire gainful employment without leaving their native soil. It is the intent of this blueprint to grow an economy that is diverse and proactive towards its own well-being.

To that end, the ultimate goal is to build a self-sufficient, self-correcting base for a healthy economic system that at the end of the day improves and maintains a high standard of living for the residents of the area and the region.

## **ORGANIZATION & MANAGEMENT**

### **Organizational Structure**

The Southeast Arkansas Economic Development District, Inc. (SEAEDD) was formed as a non-profit organization in January of 1967. The certificate of incorporation and the articles of incorporation, with appropriate amendments, have been previously submitted and are on file.

### **Areas included in the SEAEDD District**

The District is composed of ten counties in Southeast Arkansas. The counties are Arkansas, Ashley, Bradley, Chicot, Cleveland, Desha, Drew, Grant, Jefferson, and Lincoln. All ten counties, and the municipalities within the ten-county area, actively participate in the entire planning process. The Board of Directors is composed of fifty-five elected officials and private businesspersons. There are no significant nonparticipants.

### **Board Members (Planning Committee)**

A listing of all SEAEDD Board members with their affiliations, address and phone number is attached.

### **Planning Process**

The Planning Committee is comprised of the SEAEDD Board of Directors, which meets every other month in an ongoing effort to ensure the District's CEDS best suits the needs of the area. Strategies are assessed and ad hoc committees are formed as needed to determine the future directives of the program operations. Overall management and executive responsibility for operation of SEAEDD is vested by the Board of Directors in the Executive Director, who is responsible for carrying out policies and procedures mandated by the Board. The SEAEDD Board of Directors annually reviews the goals and objectives set forth through an update which monitors ongoing programs as well as new programs.

## **GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE REGION**

SEAEDD is located in the southeast portion of Arkansas and consists of the following counties: Arkansas, Ashley, Bradley, Chicot, Cleveland, Desha, Drew, Grant, Jefferson, and Lincoln. The district is located in the lower Mississippi Valley region and is bounded as follows: on the north by Pulaski, Lonoke, Monroe, and Phillips counties, on the east by the Mississippi River, on the south by the State of Louisiana, and on the west by Union, Calhoun, Dallas, and Hot Springs counties. According to the United States survey, the district has an area of 7,563 square miles and is approximately 105 miles in width (east to west) and 120 miles in length (north to south).

According to the 2020 census, the total population of the district is 191,418. Jefferson County is the most populous county with 67,260 residents, which is 35% of the overall population of the district. Cleveland County is the least populated county with 7,550 residents. The rural population represents 5% of the district population.



The topography of the district consists of plains, lowlands, and the rolling hills of the Gulf Coastal Plain. The White and Mississippi Rivers form natural boundaries for the entire eastern edge of the district. At present, there are two bridges that span the eastern boundary of the district—at St. Charles in Arkansas County (spanning the White River) and at Lake Village in Chicot County (spanning the Mississippi River). With the advent of Interstate 69, plans are underway for an additional Mississippi River crossing from Rosedale, Mississippi to near Watson, Arkansas (Desha County). To the west, portions of the district's boundary are demarcated by the Saline River, Moro Bayou, and the Ouachita River. In addition to natural boundaries, the state of Louisiana bounds the entire district to the south. The change in terrain from the rich soils of the Mississippi Delta to the forested areas of the Gulf Coastal Plains is distinguished by the longest bayou in North America, Bayou Bartholomew. Bayou Bartholomew dissects the district from the northwest in Jefferson County southeast through Ashley County and continuing to Monroe, Louisiana.

***Land use patterns affecting the local and regional economic development process:***

Prevailing practices in land use management and controls: With the exception of Pine Bluff, Stuttgart, and Crossett, the district is relatively unencumbered with land use management and control. There are several state and federal wildlife refuges in the district—the White River National Refuge in Arkansas and Desha Counties, the Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge in Ashley and Bradley Counties, Bayou Meto State Wildlife Management Area in Jefferson and Arkansas Counties, being the most notable. Much of the western half of the district is owned by timber and paper companies, such as Potlatch, Evergreen, and Georgia Pacific, who all practice environmental and ecological control on their land. Other than those areas, the district remains unencumbered by regulations as to land use.

***Land use criteria needed to promote economic development:***

As mentioned above, the district imposes no impediments to economic growth and development due to land use controls. When Industry stands to gain from land use restrictions, local governments have tended to cooperate.

***Land use controls by each city or county:***

Cities such as Pine Bluff and Stuttgart practice zoning for land use controls. The counties are without any land use control at present. However, a current trend underway in Southeast Arkansas is utilizing intermodal transportation planning. This has spawned new land use by encouraging industrial parks to locate near transportation facilities other than major highways and interstates. A study was conducted to determine the feasibility of an industrial park adjacent to Grider Field (airport) in Jefferson County. Recruitment of industry is also a priority for the property abutting Yellow Bend Port. There is also a study which encourages construction of rail service to Yellow Bend. The feasibility studies for Grider Field and Yellow Bend Port construction were EDA projects.

## **Economic Development Trends and Factors Relevant to an Analysis of an Area's Economy**

Historically, Southeast Arkansas' economy has been agriculturally related. Industry considered light assembly and apparel operations, both providing minimum wage jobs for the repressed labor force. During the 1970's, Southeast Arkansas discovered new venues for economic development. River ports on the now navigable Arkansas River opened international markets for natural and cultivated products. An improved highway system expanded the mobility of the citizenry. Congress pumped much needed grant money into all of rural America for housing and infrastructure in an ongoing battle against poverty. Southeast Arkansas was gaining new industries, many paying above average wages. The family farmer was alive and well.

The 1980's saw a significant drop in construction as grant funds continually shrank. Many small businesses were forced to close, unable to compete with corporate chains. Illiteracy, teen pregnancy, school dropouts, out-migration and other factors inhibited economic growth during this era. The small family farm was no more and many of the minimum wage industries left the area in search of cheaper labor. The people of Southeast Arkansas soon realized they would have to help themselves. Local taxes on the municipal and county level were enacted to provide for the good of all. Industry recruiting was tackled on the local level with a good measure of success. Intermodal transportation networks began to become a reality, and high-tech industry realized the potential of Southeast Arkansas.

Today, the district still faces many of the same obstacles which have provided steady employment opportunities for the disadvantaged. Small towns continually make progress reopening the downtown area for trade. Abundant natural resources, including the many rivers, streams, and forests are being utilized for tourism in meeting the ever-increasing demand of pleasure. A proposed interstate highway, which will link Canada with Mexico, will traverse the heart of Southeast Arkansas. A new bridge spanning the Mississippi River a few miles north of Yellow Bend Port will present more opportunities and another challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **REGIONAL CLUSTERS**

### ***Industries that have experienced growth***

The healthcare industry, particularly nursing and care for the elderly has experienced a great deal of growth in recent years. The population of Southeast Arkansas is an aging one. Because of this trend, this industry is likely to continue to experience growth in the coming years.

The timber industry has also experienced growth. In particular, the manufacture of specialty equipment has become a cottage industry for parts of the district, especially in Cleveland County. River Ridge Equipment is located in Cleveland County and has begun manufacturing equipment specially designed to meet the unique needs of the timber industry. Other timber-related industries have also continued to grow and expand in and around the district. The district has a long history of big timber related businesses as well, such as Georgia Pacific in Crossett (Ashley County) and Evergreen Packaging in Pine Bluff (Jefferson County), as well as various smaller operations throughout the district.

The transportation industry is projected to grow in the coming years as the Railroad Rehabilitation project in the southern end of the district is completed as well as the intermodal facility in Warren (Bradley County). This should lead to the construction of additional transload facility

in other parts of the district as those areas seek to take advantage of the transportation corridor that will ultimately connect Southeast Arkansas to national and international markets. The anticipated growth in this industry will lead to additional growth in related areas, such as diesel service and repair, crosstie processing, and truck driving.

### ***Industries that have experienced attrition***

In recent years, Southeast Arkansas has experienced an exodus of many manufacturing companies as well as changes in aquaculture and the processing plants that accompanied that industry. In addition, there have been changes in the agriculture industry which may not be evident as attrition, but have had that effect.

A number of manufacturing companies have left the area, which has left a void in that particular industry in this region. While that is concerning, this has also opened opportunities to industries desiring to locate in the region. There are sites that are available for occupancy by manufacturing companies that do not wish to build a new facility. Rather than the expense of building, companies may use existing facilities and modify them to fit their specific needs.

Processing plants for the aquaculture industry was once big business in Southeast Arkansas. However, as many fish farms closed as demand dwindled many processing plants in Southeast Arkansas have closed their doors as well. In addition to the attrition in aquaculture, the poultry industry has experienced attrition in the area. Poultry was also big business in Southeast Arkansas at one time. While Tyson still has a plant in Pine Bluff, there are fewer producers in the Southeast Arkansas area. This has had a ripple effect on industries that were tied to poultry production. As the number of producers dwindled, so did the companies that complemented the industry.

Perhaps, the most important change in agriculture in Southeast Arkansas is not as evident as the attrition other sectors have experienced. While there are as many, and possibly more, acres in production than in the past, there are fewer farms. This has resulted in a smaller number of farms, but an increase in the overall size of the farming operations.

In addition to these changes, many industries have become much more reliant on mechanized labor rather than traditional labor pools. The result is, in many cases, fewer employees and more machines.

## **EXTERNAL TRENDS AND FORCES**

The area is poised for success in the national and global economies. There has been a great deal of growth in transportation and intermodal facilities in the area. The district has acquired and will soon have rehabilitated over 20 miles of rail stretching from Chicot County into Louisiana. This project was completed in cooperation with agencies from the U.S. government, the State of Arkansas, and the State of Louisiana.



**Tourism and export:** The district boasts highway, railways, airports, and waterways that connect it to critical points throughout the United States and beyond. With major highways that lead to the State's capital city (Little Rock), waterways that connect the district to not only U.S. destinations, but to ports with international connections, as well as railways that connect to these port cities, industry and trade in the district is well connected for exporting its wares nationally and globally. In addition to the current highway system, the I-69 corridor will wind its way through many parts of the district when it is completed. This will offer many benefits and opportunities to the area.

The highways that run throughout Southeast Arkansas often dot tourist attractions that many might enjoy on their way to points elsewhere if they do not plan to spend any significant amount of time in the area. Many Arkansas residents traverse Southeast Arkansas on their way to popular Gulf Coast vacation spots. Sites of interest include the Arkansas Entertainer's Hall of Fame in Pine Bluff, the Japanese Internment Museum in McGehee, as well as a host of other locally flavored museums throughout many of the towns in the district.



Still, there are many outdoor attractions that are bound to peak the interests of many outdoor enthusiasts from across the state and even the nation. The district abounds in both State and National Wildlife Refuges. These locations, such as the famed Bayou Meto Wildlife Management Area in Jefferson and Arkansas Counties, as well as the famous White River Bottoms in Arkansas County, attract sportsmen and other outdoor enthusiasts throughout the year. In addition, Cane Creek State Park in Lincoln County is home to high quality mountain bike trails, as well as gorgeous hiking trails. Other attractions in the area include bird watching, fishing, and camping.

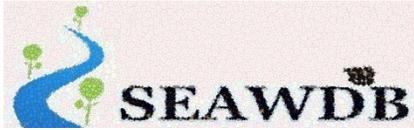
**Growth from trade and investment:** As the routes of transportation continue to grow throughout Southeast Arkansas, the opportunities for growth in the area will be unparalleled. The Arkansas River Navigation System is maintained on a regular basis, which offers river transportation to the Mississippi River and on to the Gulf of Mexico. In addition, there is rail transportation available and growing from the district into Louisiana. One stretch of rail approximately 25 miles long will stretch from Chicot County into Northern Louisiana.



In addition to established transportation systems, the I-69 corridor will offer additional opportunities for investment and trade throughout the Southeast Arkansas area. Natural resources abound in the area, which should continue to attract investors in industries that rely on a steady supply of natural resources.

## WORKFORCE CONSIDERATIONS

The area’s community colleges, workforce boards, economic development agencies, and industry groups have traditionally worked together for the good of the area. These groups are actively working together on job creation and training projects such as D-Tech, Railroad Rehabilitation, and Crossett Industrial Park Improvement. In addition, employers communicate their needs to workforce boards as well as training providers in the area so that employer demand may be met.



One critical part of success in this area is the Southeast Arkansas Workforce Development Board. This board is appointed by the area’s elected officials. Members of the board include a majority of business representatives, representatives of both community colleges and secondary schools, as well as representatives

of labor from the area’s industries, and members of other economic development agencies. By bringing these groups together, the board can work to ensure the needs of employers in the area are met.

The Workforce Development Board is required to have a local five-year plan. The area’s local elected officials review and approve the local area workforce development plan.

One of the services provided under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act is work-based learning, such as apprenticeship programs. In addition, the area has summer employment opportunities for area youth under which youth learn job readiness skills from their employers and are required to complete some classroom training as well.

In addition, employers in the area work with training providers, such as the area’s community colleges, to communicate the needs of their industry. In response, training providers in the area can tailor training programs to meet the immediate needs of employers in the area.

Performance measures under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act will be tied to job and career results and are based on labor market and career information. Because the local workforce board is made up of members of private business and industry, some of whom take part in the annual meeting hosted in the area by the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services that identify local demand occupations, many of the training programs eligible to be funded by the one-stop system is driven by employer needs.

**TABLE 1  
DEMOGRAPHICS\***

County	Total Population	White	Black	Other
Arkansas	17,149	68.21%	24.23%	7.55%
Ashley	19,062	67.98%	24.49%	7.53%
Bradley	10,545	55.86%	27.85%	16.29%
Chicot	10,208	38.72%	53.07%	8.21%
Cleveland	7,550	85.64%	9.09%	5.27%
Desha	11,395	42.52%	47.37%	10.11%
Drew	17,350	65.08%	27.93%	6.99%
Grant	17,958	89.29%	2.55%	8.16%
Jefferson	67,260	37.88%	56.25%	5.87%
Lincoln	12,941	64.32%	28.22%	7.46%
State	3,011,524	70.21%	15.07%	14.72%
USA	331,449,281	61.63%	12.40%	25.97%

\* Source: 2020 U.S. Census

**Population and Workforce Characteristics**

The district continues to experience a downward trend in population. Grant County is the only county in the ten-county district that has shown a population increase. Table 1 (above) shows the racial composition of the district by county.

**Labor Force**

Table 2 on the right illustrates the size of the annual unemployment rates from 2017—2021.

**TABLE 2**  
**UNEMPLOYMENT RATES\* (NOT SEASONALLY ADJUSTED)**

County	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Arkansas County	3.4	4.0	2.9	3.3	3.3
Ashley County	7.4	9.4	5.3	5.2	5.6
Bradley County	4.7	5.9	4.0	4.3	4.6
Chicot County	8.6	10.5	6.8	6.7	6.6
Cleveland County	4.0	6.1	3.8	3.8	4.4
Desha County	5.9	7.1	4.3	4.4	4.8
Drew County	5.0	6.9	5.1	4.8	5.1
Grant County	3.2	5.2	3.1	3.1	3.2
Jefferson County	6.6	8.1	5.3	5.2	5.2
Lincoln County	4.6	6.0	4.2	4.2	4.2
Arkansas (State)	4.0	6.1	3.5	3.6	3.7

**TABLE 3  
EDUCATION\***



**Education, Sex, and Age**

Table 3 below shows an average of 84.6 percent of the Southeast Arkansas population over the age of 25 years, in 2020, had attained a high school diploma as compared to 88.7 percent over the same time period for the total state population and 89.4 percent over the same time period for the nation. Individual counties in the district over the same period ranged from 78.2 percent completion in Chicot County to 90.2 percent in Grant County.



County	Population Aged 25+	H. S. Diploma or Equivalent	Some College	Associate degree	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree
Arkansas	12,360	43	17.1	9.5	10.8	5.6
Ashley	13,605	48.6	17.9	6.5	9.1	3.1
Bradley	7,522	42.8	19.5	7.2	10.1	3.7
Chicot	7,286	37.8	20.7	5.0	10.2	4.5
Cleveland	5,743	46.1	20.6	6.9	11.3	4.6
Desha	7,722	45.1	17.5	3.5	10.4	3.6
Drew	11,636	36.9	21.2	5.9	15.0	7.7
Grant	12,785	39.5	23.8	6.6	14.1	6.2
Jefferson	46,169	40.2	23.3	6.0	11.9	6.1
Lincoln	9,974	47.7	17.9	5.2	5.8	2.7
Arkansas (State)	2,037,763	34.1	21.4	7.9	15.9	9.4
U.S.	228,193,464	26.3	19.3	8.8	21.2	13.8

\*Source: Discover Arkansas

***Average Wage Levels for Industries and Businesses in Comparison with State Averages***

Table 4 below lists the average wages for the SEAEDD counties, the state, and the wage average for manufacturing, construction, wholesale, retail, financial, services, and local and state governments.

**TABLE 4  
AVERAGE WEEKLY WAGE LEVELS BY COUNTY\***

County	Private Industry	Local Government	State Government
Arkansas	\$880	\$731	\$715
Ashley	\$856	\$717	\$780
Bradley	\$774	\$721	\$598
Chicot	\$732	\$734	\$697
Cleveland	\$748	\$711	\$845
Desha	\$806	\$764	\$667
Drew	\$769	\$773	\$934
Grant	\$896	\$828	\$714
Jefferson	\$876	\$780	\$851
Lincoln	\$765	\$732	\$804
Arkansas (State)	\$1,448	\$1,305	\$935

\*Source: Discover Arkansas (2021 Averages)



## ***Vocational Training Program Opportunities for the Area***

Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas, DeWitt  
Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas, Stuttgart  
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff  
Southeast Arkansas College, Pine Bluff  
University of Arkansas at Monticello – College of Technology, McGehee  
South Arkansas Community College, Warren  
University of Arkansas at Monticello  
University of Arkansas at Monticello – College of Technology, Crossett



Most offer training in nursing, business, truck driving, and barber/cosmetology.  
Other trade and specialty schools in the SEAEDD area:

- 2 Barber School (1 in Pine Bluff, and 1 in Dermott)
- 3 Truck Driving School (1 in Pine Bluff, 1 in Lake Village, and 1 in Little Rock)
- 10 Nursing Schools (1 in Stuttgart, 4 in Pine Bluff, 1 in Monticello, 2 in Stuttgart, 1 in McGehee, and 1 in Dermott)



## ***Types of Labor Skills Needed in the Region***

The Arkansas Department of Workforce Services' Projected Employment Opportunities List (demand occupations list) 2022—2023 for Southeast Arkansas includes, but are not limited to, the following:

<b>SOC Code</b>	<b>SOC Title</b>
13-2031	Budget Analysts
13-2081	Tax Examiners and Collectors, and Revenue Agents
17-2141	Mechanical Engineers
19-1029	Biological Scientists, All Other
19-1032	Foresters
19-2031	Chemists
19-4021	Biological Technicians
19-4031	Chemical Technicians
23-2011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants
25-1041	Agricultural Sciences Teachers, Postsecondary
25-4022	Librarians and Media Collections Specialists

25-9045	Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary
27-1023	Floral Designers
29-1031	Dietitians and Nutritionists
29-2032	Diagnostic Medical Sonographers
33-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Correctional Officers
33-3021	Detectives and Criminal Investigators
33-9011	Animal Control Workers
39-4021	Funeral Attendants
43-4141	New Accounts Clerks
43-9061	Office Clerks, General
43-9199	Office and Administrative Support Workers, All Others
45-2093	Farmworkers, Farm, Ranch and Aquacultural Animals
45-4023	Log Graders and Scalers
47-2031	Carpenters
47-2111	Electricians
47-3019	Helpers, Construction Trades, All Others
47-4051	Highway Maintenance Workers
49-2022	Telecommunications Equipment Installers and Repair
49-3023	Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics
49-3031	Bus and Truck Mechanics and Diesel Engine Specialist
49-3052	Motorcycle Mechanics
49-9021	Heating, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Mechanics
49-9044	Millwrights
49-9097	Signal and Track Switch Repairers
51-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating
51-4111	Tool and Die Makers
51-4194	Tool Grinders, Filers, and Sharpeners
51-5112	Printing Press Operators
51-7041	Sawing Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders, Wood
51-7042	Woodworking Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders
51-8013	Power Plant Operators
51-8021	Stationary Engineers and Boiler Operators
51-9011	Chemical Equipment Operators and Tenders
51-9041	Extruding, Forming, Pressing, and Compacting Machine Setters, Operators and Tenders
51-9051	Furnace, Kiln, Oven, Drier, and Kettle Operators and Tenders
51-9124	Coating, Painting, and Spraying Machine Setters, Operators and Tenders
51-9196	Paper Goods Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders
53-3032	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers

- 53-7011 Conveyor Operators and Tenders
- 53-7051 Industrial Truck and Tractor Operators
- 53-7061 Cleaners of Vehicles and Equipment
- 53-7199 Material Moving Workers, All Other

***Labor Force Summary***

The labor force in Southeast Arkansas, unlike many areas, is in a state of transition away from an agricultural focus toward a mixture of manufacturing and service trades. The balance of manufacturing jobs appears to be concentrated primarily in Arkansas, Ashley, Drew, Desha, Jefferson, and Lincoln Counties. Seasonal employment problems continue to be most obvious in Bradley County, where the tomato industry is the primary seasonal employer. Overall, the main problem facing the labor force in Southeast Arkansas is both lack of education and the perceived lack of a trainable unemployed population. In the past, the main companies willing to locate

in the delta region were the garment companies, which relied on a steady flow of unskilled, low wage labor.

As a general rule, those companies now operate outside the United States.

The per capita income for Southeast Arkansas historically has not been comparable to the U.S. average, or even the state average. Arkansas has never kept pace with the national per capita income. In fact, only Mississippi has a lower per capita income than Arkansas in the 12 states that comprise the southeast region of the United States. Grant and Arkansas Counties are the only counties in the district that have a higher per capita income than the state average.

**TABLE 5**

**PER CAPITA INCOME BY COUNTY\***

Arkansas County	\$26,969	17.2% in poverty
Ashley County	\$23,138	17.1% in poverty
Bradley County	\$22,912	20.6% in poverty
Chicot County	\$21,418	26.8% in poverty
Cleveland County	\$23,998	13.8% in poverty
Desha County	\$19,090	22.8% in poverty
Drew County	\$26,440	18.4% in poverty
Grant County	\$30,639	9.9% in poverty
Jefferson County	\$21,941	18.9% in poverty
Lincoln County	\$14,182	23.6% in poverty
Arkansas	\$27,724	16.3% in poverty
U.S.	\$35,384	11.6% in poverty

\*U.S. Census 2016-2020

**TABLE 6**  
**MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME\***

Arkansas County	\$51,000
Ashley County	\$43,601
Bradley County	\$41,808
Chicot County	\$33,523
Cleveland County	\$46,349
Desha County	\$31,855
Drew County	\$42,924
Grant County	\$59,051
Jefferson County	\$40,402
Lincoln County	\$46,554
Arkansas	\$49,475
U.S.	\$64,994

\*U.S. Census 2016-2020

### **SPATIAL EFFICIENCIES/SUSTAINABILITY**

The land and property located in Southeast Arkansas can be developed in a manner to attract business and industry to the area. There are many industrial parks located in the district, many of which have undeveloped sites that can be utilized by business and industry to meet their specific needs. In some ways, these areas are unique by virtue of the fact that some locations do remain largely undeveloped. This means that business and industry can develop them as they see the best fit to meet their specific needs.

There is affordable housing in the district. As many residents have left the area over the past decades, there are many affordable housing options available to new residents that may relocate to the area for jobs that could come available by a business or industry choosing to locate in Southeast Arkansas. In addition to the existing housing options, residential developers have adequate space to develop new housing options as the need arises.

Currently, railroad rehabilitation in the southern part of the district is taking place. This will serve to link not only the counties in which the rail line is physically located, but also other counties in the district that have highways connecting them to the rail line in the southern part of the district. This section of rail is located near river ports on the Mississippi River and near highways as well. The location of these various modes of transportation serves to link the district to other parts of the nation and the globe.



There is also an intermodal facility in Drew County, which serves as a hub for products being transferred to and from rail and truck transportation. The development of additional intermodal facilities in the southern part of the district, on or near the rehabilitated rail, could serve to further link Southeast Arkansas to the national and global economies.

Despite the developments in transportation, the lack of an adequate highway system has always been a hindrance to economic development in Southeast Arkansas. There is not a continuous four-lane facility in the SEAEDD area, not a mile of interstate highway east of a line from Texarkana to Little Rock. Many large retail and industrial corporations eliminate Southeast Arkansas from consideration for distribution centers, retail stores, general offices and plants because of this one factor. The farm-to-market roads are deteriorating at an unprecedented pace due to a lack of funds on the county and municipal level. Interstate 69, the future NAFTA trade route eventually connecting Canada with Mexico will enter the district tentatively from near Rosedale, Mississippi to near Watson (Desha County) and will traverse the district from the east onward to Southwest Arkansas. A new highway bridge and rail bridge will complement the interstate route.



### *Land Use*

Landfills have been at the forefront of discussion among sensitive environmental issues, not just in Southeast Arkansas, but throughout the entire state. Closing old landfills, meeting the stringent requirements for new landfills, disposal of waste tires, solid waste transportation, and disposal of contaminated waste, all have the potential to restrict economic development. The Southeast Arkansas Regional Solid Waste Management Board (SEARSWMB) for which SEAEDD serves as staff, has effectively dealt with each issue in a manner so as not to hinder or present obstacles for future development of the district. There are currently 3 Class I landfills permitted by the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) in the district. They are located in Jefferson County in the northern most part of the district, in Arkansas County in the northeastern section of the district, and in Ashley County, in the extreme southern section of the district. Most counties still operate Class IV landfills for the disposal of inert, nonperishable matter and other approved wastes. The SEARSWMB has utilized state grant monies to institute a transfer station network for the collection of solid waste throughout the district. SEAEDD staff has assisted local governments in obtaining the grant monies and the required permitting. Recycling has been slow to catch on in the district, but through awareness, has recently been making great strides. Each county now has some form of a recycling program. The district has also established a network of waste tire collection centers in each county thereby removing the unsightly and mosquito breeding nuisances from the public. No disposal sites in the district are known to contain hazardous and/or toxic substances. There are no Superfund or state designated hazardous waste sites in the SEAEDD area.

Most of the district's communities are attempting to deal with the issue of solid waste disposal in a manner that is consistent with State and Federal disposal regulations. As mentioned, a Solid Waste Plan for Southeast Arkansas, funded by ADEQ, has been prepared, that outlines strategies to guide the area in developing environmentally sound solid waste collection and disposal means. A part of this strategy is the establishment of recycling programs, which are under way in district communities.

The biggest problem facing most areas of the state is the development of solid waste landfills that meet Subtitle D EPA regulations. The costs of meeting these requirements, in addition to the issue of sitting new landfills, will restrict future construction of landfills. Resultantly, disposal and transportation costs are expected to increase accordingly.

Select areas along the Arkansas River, Saline River, Bayou Bartholomew, and Ouachita River, in particular, as well as other area waterways and lakes are ecologically sensitive and provide unique habitats for plants and animals. The most significant of these areas have been identified by the Arkansas Game & Fish Commission. Conservation areas, unique habitats and ecologically sensitive areas must be considered in the evolution of economic development plans and projects. Local, area wide and particularly appropriate state and federal agencies, reviews of projects and plans will help assure that this matter is properly considered.

***Are there opportunities to redevelop brownfields and vacant industrial space?***

As previously mentioned there are many undeveloped lands available for development throughout the district. Many of these sites are located in industrial areas. This should appeal to those businesses and industries that have unique specifications to meet in building a facility. However, there are also other vacant and unused facilities that could be renovated to meet the specifications of business and industry seeking to locate in Southeast Arkansas. By working with various state and federal agencies that regulate the use of brownfields, these areas could also be redeveloped for use as industrial sites. Nonetheless, no disposal sites in the district are known to contain hazardous and/or toxic substances.

Other opportunities for redevelopment may include some of the historic buildings that dot the district's map. Southeast Arkansas is dotted with historical buildings as well as archaeological resources. Arkansas Post, near Gillette in Arkansas County, is considered the earliest European settlement in the lower Mississippi River Valley. Arkansas County is also the oldest county in the state with several buildings on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The majority of downtown Monticello, in Drew County, is also listed in NRHP. The land in Southeast Arkansas has been inhabited for thousands of years. The Paleo Indians (10,000 B.C.—8,000 B.C.), the Archaic Indians (8,000 B.C.—1,000 B.C.), the Mound Builders (1,000 B.C.—700 A.D.), the Caddo (1700—1835 A.D.), and more recently the Quapaw and displaced Cherokee and Choctaw, were all early and historic residents of Southeast Arkansas. Indian artifacts are frequently recovered along the bayous and streams in Southeast Arkansas. A number of historic buildings and archeological resources in Southeast Arkansas have been added to the National Register of Historic Places.



The State Historic Preservation Officer and State Archeologists review all construction projects seeking federal or state funds to assure that any significant buildings or archeological resources are not adversely affected.

The workforce in the area can easily access the jobs and housing options in the area. As mentioned above, there are affordable housing options available. In addition, the workforce in the predominantly rural area that comprises the district is accustomed to “going to” the opportunities as they arise. The residents of Southeast Arkansas are a fairly mobile group. As many options for work and shopping have left smaller communities, the people that remain have become increasingly mobile out of necessity. This should bode well for a business or industry seeking to locate in the area. Many businesses and industries may be turned off by merely looking at the population numbers of a specific community. However, it is important to consider that the people of Southeast Arkansas have become more mobile and are willing to travel to their jobs or relocate if necessary.



### ***Broadband Needs***

All of the key players recognize the need for broadband and telecommunications connections for the area. Connectivity is the wave of the future for many businesses and industries. Many of the key players realize this because they must be connected as well. Efforts have been underway to bring broadband access to outlying areas of the district. While most of the communities in the district have some type of accessibility to broadband, it is well recognized that broadband connectivity is necessary as technology continues to grow and improve. Currently, many of the communities in the area have broadband suppliers.

However, there are still areas that lack broadband access, but these communities continue to seek methods of access. The major roadblock to access is not necessarily funding, but the physical location of the infrastructure required to connect these rural areas.

### ***Energy Needs***

#### ***Are the energy needs of the area—and the importance of reliable energy security—understood?***

Area leaders and key players recognize the need for a ready and reliable energy source. In order to attract business and industry to the area, there must be a reliable energy source. There are many sources available in the district. Obviously, electricity is necessary, but other energy sources such as gas and water are also readily available in the area.

A study was conducted by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock Institute for Economic Advancement which outlined the trends in the area for workforce as well as leading industries. Also included as part of this study was the flow of traffic throughout the district. Illustrations show the areas which residents travel to and from in the district for work, shopping, and entertainment.

As part of the continued efforts to identify the best methods of transportation in the area, a joint study of the transportation corridor, of which the rail rehabilitation is a part, is being undertaken by UALR and Louisiana Tech University. This transportation corridor will impact not only the counties in which it is located, but all of the counties of Southeast Arkansas as they are all, in one way or another, connected to it. This means that businesses and industries located even in the northern most part of the district will be better connected to the national and global economies as development of the transportation corridor continues.

In an ever-changing environment, alternative energy resources are constantly being researched and developed by energy providers. As demand continues to grow, both existing and potential providers of energy resources will adapt to meet the needs of businesses and industries in the area. Projects have been being developed to seek innovative and alternative energy resources, which SEAEDD has been seeking state and federal funding sources to assist in this development.

In many of the communities of Southeast Arkansas, electricity is provided by electric cooperatives which are locally operated. This gives these communities an advantage because they are able to easily communicate the energy needs of the community to the source of power that will provide the required energy to the businesses and industries of the area.

### ***Natural Resources***

The district is blessed with abundant surface water. As previously mentioned, the Mississippi River forms the eastern boundary of the district. The Arkansas, White, Saline, and Ouachita Rivers, as well as Bayous Bartholomew, Moro, and Meto are other significant sources of running water. Besides the hundreds of oxbow lakes in Southeast Arkansas, Lake Chicot being the largest in the U.S. at 22 miles, there are several noteworthy man-made

lakes. Cane Creek Lake and State Park in Lincoln County, Lake Monticello in Drew County and Lake Georgia-Pacific in Ashley County are the major standing water assets in the district.

### ***Public Utilities***

A number of communities in Southeast Arkansas are under EPA/State compliance orders. These communities recognize the need to upgrade their wastewater collection or treatment systems. These communities are at various stages of planning, design, or construction to implement the necessary improvements to bring their systems into compliance. The district is assisting these communities in identifying the funding sources that can provide financial loans and grant assistance.

There are also communities in Southeast Arkansas, all of which are small, rural towns that lack a centralized wastewater system relying for the most part on private, individual septic systems. For some of these communities, serious health problems have occurred due to the failure of these individual systems. The district along with consulting engineers assists these communities in determining the feasibility of constructing centralized systems that can serve an entire community and alleviate this health problem.

### **NATURAL HAZARDS**

Each county in the district has developed a hazard mitigation plan. The plans took into account the current risks that the county faced, as well as possible future risks based on previous occurrences. While each county has its own unique set of circumstances to consider, all of the counties have in common the threat of droughts, flooding, and wildfires. The specific plans for each county have addressed these, and other specific, concerns as well as how they will be dealt with in the unfortunate event that they occur.

All of the counties must have a hazard mitigation plan in place to be eligible for state and federal emergency funds, such as FEMA and ADEM. All approved plans must have those components in place to meet the requirements of FEMA and ADEM.

As the climate changes, there is always the risk of a change in the physical environment in which we live. For many communities this means concerns about rising river levels, which can be the result of changes in sea levels or flash flooding from heavy rains and dangerous storms. Included in the list of concerns are contaminations of water supplies that could occur as a result of these rapid changes in water levels.

On the other side of the coin, there is also a concern about possible drought and water shortages. While this is not as big a concern for many parts of the district due to the abundance of freshwater bodies, it must be considered. This is especially true for the district as much of the economy is tied to agriculture. Many farmers depend on regular rain, not only to naturally water their crops, but to fill the reservoirs from which they may irrigate when dry spells occur.

### ***System Capacities for Water and Fire Protection***

Great strides have been made in seeing that each resident of Southeast Arkansas has potable water for consumption. Municipal and rural water systems now serve all but the more remote areas which still rely on shallow wells for their drinking water. Because economic development is heavily influenced by availability of treated water, SEAEDD has placed a priority on obtaining funds for communities in need of this staple.

In most cases, fire protection is incorporated as anew water systems are constructed or extended. However, in some cases the cost-benefit ratio of involving fire protection with water service makes it a prohibitive project. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (RC&D) Council has provided many of these areas with dry wells. This has also served to lower insurance premiums which have the potential to spur growth.

### ***Flood Plains and Wetlands***

Throughout the district are designated flood plains and flood ways. Most are noted on flood hazard maps prepared by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), and are usually easily identifiable on these maps. In accordance with federal regulation, communities are required to monitor and control development that might negatively affect the development or the flood hazard area. Projects seeking federal or state assistance must also be reviewed by the appropriate agency for conformance with flood hazard regulations. In Arkansas, identified wetlands exist along the Arkansas River. These are protected by federal and state regulations which prohibit certain types of activities in the wetlands area and control

pollution that might affect the wetlands area. The Arkansas Game & Fish Commission has identified the location of these wetland areas as well as areas that are otherwise critical habitats or support endangered species. There are no known critical habitats for any endangered or threatened species within the district.

## **EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT**

*Is there active engagement from the area's vulnerable and/or underserved populations (low-income families, seniors, ethnic minorities)?* Yes. Members of the area's vulnerable and underserved populations participate in public hearings and their input is invited on issues such as policy and planning. In addition, participation is sought from these groups on infrastructure changes, environmental studies, and community development activities.

Also, members of these groups are active participants as members of the Southeast Arkansas Workforce Development Board and the SEAEDD Board of Directors. Beyond those serving in leadership roles, the workforce system serves members of these vulnerable and underserved populations.

*Have those populations been provided appropriate access to and inclusion in the planning process and has their input into the final product been actively encouraged?* Yes. Public hearings are advertised in the local newspapers and posted in local municipal buildings as well as other high traffic areas, such as post offices and grocery stores. Comments from these participants are also considered prior to the adoption of policy and plans.

Upon request, electronic copies of documents have been made available. The use of email and electronic copies has helped to widen the distribution of information and therefore increases potential feedback from residents. More recently, social media has been used as a tool in particular by the workforce centers.

## **PARTNERS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

There are many influential actors in the area. The larger industries in the area are key partners in continuing to develop the economic competitiveness of the district. Such industries include Georgia Pacific and Evergreen Packaging. In addition, there are many smaller businesses that are key players in their individual industries, such as River Ridge Equipment which specializes in manufacturing products that are unique to the timber industry.

The local chambers of commerce and economic development agencies located throughout the district are key players in the continued development of the economic competitiveness of the area. Often times, these players are the first point of contact for many businesses and industries seeking to locate in the area. These players are often very attune to the characteristics of the area, as well as the needs of the business or industry seeking to locate here.

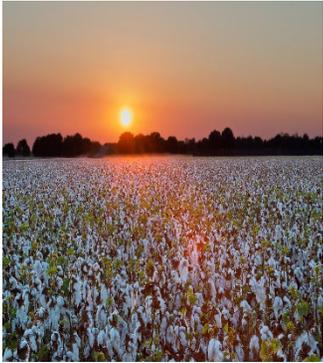
Finally, the area's local elected officials are major players in the area. More times than not, these individuals meet with leaders of business and industry to discuss options available in their local communities. These players are critical to this process because they are the face of the communities in which they serve. They understand well the needs of those living in their communities because they are not only elected officials, but also neighbors of those that live there.

## **RESOURCES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

As mentioned above, the local area chambers of commerce, local economic development agencies, and local elected officials are relevant resources for economic development. In developing a plan for the district, it is important to start at the ground floor—in the individual communities that make up the district. The local communities are the building blocks that make up the entire district and the overall economic umbrella of the district.

Approaching a snapshot of the entire district requires reviewing the economies of the individual areas that make up the district. The local chambers, economic development agencies, and local elected officials are on the front line when it comes to initial contact with business and industry interested in locating in the area. Each of these players has information specific to the individual area in which they are located and can best serve marketing themselves to those interested.

There are numerous State and Federal agencies that can provide support and funding to build capacity for economic development activities. Projects in the district have been funded by Delta Regional Authority, United States Department of Agriculture/Rural Development, and Arkansas Economic Development Commission. Numerous other federal and state agencies can be leveraged to support various projects. Those agencies are listed below.



In addition to the state and federal agencies that have been used as a funding source for projects in the area, the businesses and industries that benefit from these projects often match monies made available from state and federal agencies. In addition, these businesses and industries make investments for their own capital improvement.

### *Natural Resources*

There are abundant natural resources in Southeast Arkansas available as resources for continued economic development.

There are heavily forested areas in the district, chiefly west of Bayou Bartholomew, which provide significant raw materials for the construction and paper industries. The harvesting and processing of lumber are the major industries in several of the counties in Southeast Arkansas. A variety of hardwoods and softwoods are in abundant supply in the cultivated areas in the western parts of the district.



Gravel is also available for commercial extraction in several of the counties within the district, namely Jefferson, Cleveland, Drew, Bradley, and Lincoln Counties. The extracted resources are primarily used in rural areas for maintenance and construction of roads.



Dominating soil throughout the district is utilized to optimum advantage. Soils of the delta are rich alluvial deposits perfectly suited for commercial agriculture. Soils in the western portion of the district are not the quality of the delta and are better suited for light farming, forestry, and livestock. However, portions of Bradley County contain soils that are rich in nutrients required by the delicate tomato, which results in the famous Bradley Pink Tomato.

While there are no active mining operations in Southeast Arkansas deposits of lignite, magnetite and oil have been identified in the region. There are currently no plans to exploit these resources.

### ***Prime or Unique Farmland***



Southeast Arkansas contains farmland considered prime farmland by the U.S. Department of Agriculture/Rural Development, Arkansas Natural Resources Commission. This land is located throughout the District's ten counties. Some of this farmland, mostly near urban areas, has been developed as sites for industry and no doubt more will be converted to this use, depending upon the extent of industrial development in the area. Communities' and the area's economic development plans should consider the issue of land use as it relates to farmland to avoid the loss of the area's prime and unique farmland. The acreage of prime farmland located

in each of the ten counties of the District is listed below:

### ***Opportunities and Weaknesses for Economic Development***

Southeast Arkansas Counties had increases in earnings of over fifteen percent over the past four years. According to the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services, Personal Care and Service Occupations (16.18%) and Leisure and Hospitality (14.04%) are projected as the top long-term employment growth industries for Southeast Arkansas.

### **VISION STATEMENT**

Partnering private and public sector resources to strengthen and diversify the region's economy. To develop and increase community resilience.

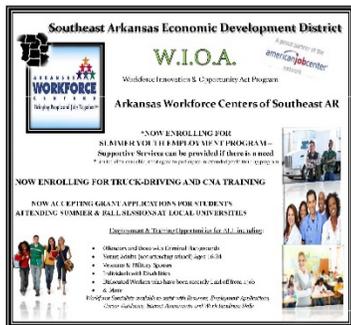
### **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The goals and objectives detailed in this document are designed to solve economic problems and capitalize on the resources in SEAEDD area.



#### 4. To promote business and related services

- Encourage financing for business development and expansion of business through SAVE, Inc., USDA/RD, ADFA and SBA
- Promote technical assistance and training
- Engage Partnerships within the existing Small Business Support Infrastructure to enhance regional programs specifically aimed at assisting Small Business Owners in Rural Areas.
- Collaborate with Industrial Foundations, Chambers of Commerce, USDA/RD and SBA to promote technical assistance and training for businesses
- Complete a Target Industry Study



#### 5. To promote economic development through education and job training

- Partner with educational institutions to promote workforce training
- Promote Arkansas Be Pro, Be Proud Programing and the Ready for Life Initiative through the AEDC
- Offer employment development, educational opportunities and job skills training to economically disadvantaged and unemployed persons in the area
- Provide summer employment for eligible youth participants



### CEDS PLAN OF ACTION

In identifying obstacles which have prevented growth in the District, we have also identified benchmarks that can be used in measuring a degree of success in transforming the public perception, and to some extent, the reality of conditions in Southeast Arkansas. By reversing negative trends we are able to gauge progress. Some of the barriers to economic development identified in this document that can be used as benchmarks by reversing trends

are out-migration, higher than average unemployment rates, high school dropout rates, teen pregnancy, deterioration of downtown areas, lack of adequate roads, bridges and highways, and others. The 2020 census will provide data that will be used to measure success in attaining many of the goals set forth in this document. Increased income from tourism, plant expansions and construction, increases in building permits, and less dependence on public sustenance are but a few of the objectives SEAEDD will endeavor to achieve.

### **Major work elements**

**Short-term** - The major short-term work elements of the District are listed below. The District staff is responsible for implementing the work program and activities accordingly.

- Performing activities necessary to maintain the economic development process.
- Preparing special economic studies and projects identified in the CEDS or approved by the Board of Directors.
- Networking with economic development organizations and other groups to implement the Economic Development Plan recommendations.
- Developing and maintaining a socioeconomic information system.
- Disseminating socioeconomic information.
- Maintaining current information on Federal, State, and local economic development programs. Special emphasis should be placed on EDA Programs.
- Providing staff support to develop and monitor projects and programs that will increase economic development opportunities within the district. Priority should be placed on developing grant applications.
- Providing technical assistance for capital improvement programs for member agencies, industrial parks, land use regulations, district committees and subcommittees, and cities and counties.
- Implementing special projects, studies and programs that have been specifically identified in the district's Economic Development Plan.
- Providing training and workshops to local governments, economic development groups, and businesses.

- Coordinating and networking with agencies and businesses located outside the district that can provide benefits for the district's economic development program.
- Other activities approved by the Austin Regional Office.

#### **Long-term -**

- Reversing trends: The District will endeavor to reverse the current negative trends previously identified in this document.
- Infrastructure: Development of sufficient infrastructure, especially in repressed areas, remains a major work element for District staff.
- Diversified economy: Technological advancements present a challenge to rural areas such as ours. More emphasis will be placed on training the workforce to enter the computer age.
- Intermodal Transportation: The District will promote and engage in developing an intermodal transportation network that avails itself of the many rivers that abound in Southeast Arkansas.

#### **One year program**

The District will complete the work elements listed. Planning and technical assistance will be provided to the ten member counties to enhance their economic development activities. During SEAEDD Board of Directors' Meetings, the work program elements are discussed and reviewed. Each County Judge is familiar with and aware of the annual work program of the District.

#### **Program Guidelines**

Comprehensiveness - The SEAEDD Board, comprised of fifty-five elected officials and representatives of business from throughout Southeast Arkansas, ensures that diverse projects and programs are undertaken by District staff. The Board members responsively address the economic development needs of the District. Current programs and activities encompass industrial and economic development, financing infrastructure development, education/training and tourism promotion.

### **Organization of proposed activities -**

**Industrial Promotion:** The District will promote industrial development through coordination of efforts with local Industrial Foundations, Chambers of Commerce and the state and federal resources available. SEAEDD, Inc. will continue to engage in staff activities designed to promote a diversified economy within the service area of the District by assistance and involvement in industrial development and expansion.

**Business and Service Promotion:** Business and service promotion will be addressed by providing job training, through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), financing for development and expansion of businesses through the SAVE, Inc. Revolving Loan Fund and through coordination of efforts with local Industrial Foundations, Chambers of Commerce, other local agencies and local governments.

**Education and Training:** SEAEDD, Inc. is the grant recipient of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Program for the ten-county area in Southeast Arkansas. Employment development, education, and job skills training will continue to be offered to the economically disadvantaged and unemployed people in the area. WIOA Programs of the District will include the Entry Employment Experience Program for high school seniors, the Dislocated Workers Program, Universities and Two-Year Schools, and programs delivering specialized training for high school dropouts, illiterate adults, veterans, welfare recipients, and the unemployed and unskilled.

**Financing:** SEAEDD, Inc. will continue to seek out small business and development projects that will yield the highest permanent job creation, through its Revolving Loan Fund (SAVE, Inc.) and combined efforts with other financial resources such as the Arkansas Development Finance Authority, USDA/RD and the U.S. Small Business Administration. South Arkansas Venture Enterprises, Inc. is the vehicle by which SEAEDD operates the Title IX Revolving Loan Fund. Fixed rate financing is available for small businesses meeting the job creation and leveraging requirements for start-up, expansion or retention. One local banker serves the SAVE, Inc. Board of Directors, providing linkage with private lending sources.

**Communities Facilities:** The District will provide planning and technical assistance to local governments and assist with economic development compliance with federal and state regulations in obtaining grants and administering them. Developing adequate infrastructure is a top priority for Southeast Arkansas. Infrastructure development enhances economic development and a better quality of life for the citizenry.

Tourism Promotion: Promoting tourism growth by developing recreational facilities such as lakes, local parks, baseball fields and basketball courts, SEAEDD, Inc., will assist cities and counties with the preparation of grant applications for funding assistance from the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism. The 50/50 Matching Grants, Trails for Life and FUN Park (Facilities for Underdeveloped Neighborhoods) grant program and they will be utilized whenever applicable for small counties. Applications are prepared upon request.

Multi-year program - The short-term and long-term elements identified previously in this section include multi-year programs as well as projects that require only one or two years. Development of an intermodal transportation system, reversing current negative trends, revitalizing central business districts and promotion and development of an adequate highway system are projects that will require several years.

Sufficiency of resources - Most of the projects identified in this document can rely on the following sources:

- a. Economic Development Administration (EDA)
- b. Department of Housing and Urban Development ((HUD)
- c. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- d. USDA Rural Development (USDA/RD)
- e. U. S. Department of Labor (DOL)
- f. U. S. Small Business Administration (SBA)
- g. Delta Regional Authority (DRA)
- h. Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC)
- i. Arkansas Natural Resources Commission (ANRC)
- j. Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism
- k. Arkansas Department of Emergency Management (ADEM)
- l. Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ)
- m. Arkansas Development Finance Authority (ADFA)

- n. Arkansas Highway & Transportation Department (AHTD)
- o. Arkansas Game & Fish Commission
- p. Arkansas Department of Aeronautics

## **EVALUATION FRAMEWORK: PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

As required by EDA, SEAEDD has reported on specific performance measures on an annual basis. These measures are used to evaluate the successful development and implementation of SEAEDD's area CEDS. The performance measures used to evaluate the projects are as followed:

Number of jobs created after implementation of the CEDS

Number and types of investment undertaken in the region

Number of jobs retained in the region

Amount of private sector investment in the region after implementation of the CEDS

Changes in the economic environment of the region

### **Economic Resilience**

All counties are vulnerable to disasters. The State of Arkansas continues to experience major disaster declarations for severe storms, tornadoes, flooding and winter storms. However, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic became the number one issue facing our cities, counties, states, and nation. At each level of government, efforts were made to slow the pandemic and prevent wide-scale illness and death amongst Americans. The spreading pandemic led to government- enforced shutdowns of businesses, a downturn in consumer activity, supply chain and logistics abnormalities and slowdowns, and left many business owners, suppliers, and consumers with difficult choices in navigating the changing economic landscape of the country.

The changing economic landscape presented a new opportunity for Federal and State agencies, Chambers of Commerce, nonprofits, and planning and development districts (PDDs) to provide technical assistance, funds, and other support to our local economic partners. As we recover from COVID-19 effects we continue to support our communities from where we are now in a post-pandemic world to stronger, more resilient economies and communities.

Economic Resilience can be defined as the ability to quickly recover from a disaster. The development of a comprehensive regional or community level instrument that can be utilized for disaster preparedness and recovery efforts, regardless of the type of disaster (natural, man-made or technological) can increase the area resilience.

## **PLANNING FOR AND IMPLEMENTING RESILIENCE**

During the planning process, the District can serve as an analyst, catalyst, advocate and visionary for the local area. By clearly understanding these roles, the District's assistance can be vitally important to the stakeholders.

### **Planning For Disasters**

Planning can provide our communities a guide for future growth and development with measurable goals, actionable strategies, and clear delineations of responsibilities. Having this guidance or planning in place prior to disruptions can ensure our response and reactions to disruptions are quicker, more efficient and longer lasting.

Disaster planning is a continually evolving process and will need ongoing maintenance for the community to be best prepared when a disaster occurs.

Because of its geography and location Southeast Arkansas has experienced flooding, severe storms, and tornado damage. Each county addresses these issues, among others, in their individual hazard mitigation plans. Below are district wide initiatives for preparation, recovery, and resilience.

### **Pre-disaster preparedness -**

- Identify business and community stakeholders to actively participate in the planning process.
- Identify leadership for Chief Elected Officials, Emergency Management personnel, first responders, etc.
- Establish an information collection centers & communication network to enhance response time
- SEAEDD encourages the stakeholders (local government, community leaders, educational institutions, business owners, executives, utility companies, etc.) to develop a Hazard Mitigation Plan or Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) to access capacity and address economic and community vulnerabilities.

- SEAEDD can assist stakeholders in identifying and securing resources to mitigate economic and community vulnerabilities.
  - Drainage, bridges, transportation infrastructure, installation of warning systems, emergency vehicles, purchase of communication equipment (radios, phones), safe rooms, emergency shelters, emergency generators, evacuation plans for schools, daycares, senior facilities, hospitals, housing, insurance, local building codes, zoning & land use, etc.
  - Educational outreach & training for the residential and business community

**Disaster recovery –**

- Emergency response teams address the immediate threats presented by the disaster: emergency services, public safety, distribution of basic human needs and evacuation procedures
- Contact Department of Workforce Services Rapid Response Coordinator - Work Adjustment & Retraining Notification Act (WARN), local community colleges and job-training providers to assess workforce retention (WIOA-NEG)
- Conduct disaster assessment and identify resources/funding for infrastructure and public facilities restoration and post-disaster economic development projects: debris management, temporary housing, public utilities, health & social services, tourism renewal
- Distribute and advertise available resources and contact information
- Establish, promote and market business recovery systems that will assist resources and services to address business needs
- Implement plan for temporary and transitional supportive services: food pantry, temporary & transitional housing, state social services agencies, transportation assistance, PPE, access to medical facilities and services, and financial assistance

Disaster planning is a continually evolving process and will need ongoing maintenance for the community to be best prepared when a disaster occurs. An important component of implementation involves exercising the Plan and training staff for their respective post-disaster roles. The disaster recovery literature clearly demonstrates that communities are better prepared to recover more quickly. The roles and responsibilities that many will have to assume after a disaster may be different from their usual jobs and will require special knowledge of disaster recovery so that everyone knows their particular role. The exercise should focus on determining whether actions included in the Plan are adequate to cover all of the predicted needs, identify gaps and should include the sequencing of events to determine if resources will be adequate for all of the actions that will need to be implemented simultaneously. To be effective, the Plan must build in flexibility and be adaptable to the dynamic

and changing conditions.

Along with these immediate benefits, when applying for federal, state, or private grants, our communities can reference back to these plans to give the granting agency an idea of the needs, priorities, and capabilities of the region and its' communities. Our communities can then use these plans to show funding agencies that we are a forward-thinking, development-oriented region with plans for future growth.

Beginning in the winter of 2020, SEAEDD staff held discussions collectively and individually with board members, community leaders, and stakeholders from elected officials to the resilience and recovery task force, throughout this planning process.

The process also included the publication of initial pandemic research findings of the Arkansas Economic Development Institute.

More detailed communications and refined issues identification proceeded with the completion of our follow up attitudinal surveys conducted in conjunction with the Delta Center for Economic Development (DCED) during the fall of 2021, as well as the presentation of county and regional snapshots provided by the DCED.

### **Measuring resilience**

The measurement of resilience is important because it enables us to evaluate an important strategy for reducing economic losses from disasters, since individual companies' supply chain resilience contributes to the overall economic resilience of a region. Failure to incorporate resilience in loss estimation will result in inflated assessments of business interruption from disasters. Failure to include resilience in policymaking will result in missed opportunities to further reduce losses.

- Power and water are restored to all but the destroyed structures.
- Schools are reopened or temporarily relocated
- Most of the road network and traffic signalization is operational
- The long-term process of rebuilding a community's destroyed or damaged housing stock, commercial and industrial buildings, public facilities, and infrastructure to the same pre-disaster levels and standards.
- The recovery of the economy and quality of life factors within the community, including employment opportunities, social networks, cultural events, environmental quality, and educational and recreational opportunities.

- Replacement of housing stock adequate for the post-disaster population such that interim housing can be removed
- Economic indicators show unemployment has stabilized at a rate near pre-disaster levels or comparative to other similar locations
- 70% or more of businesses have reopened and remained in business for at least 3 months
- The percent of population dependent upon disaster assistance and social assistance programs has decreased to near pre-disaster levels

The following economic recovery and resilience-building Action Items for the SEAEDD Region were identified through discussions with key stakeholders, guidance from the Resilience and Recovery Taskforce, and extensive data analysis by our partner university centers as well as our internal research efforts:

Broadband

Housing & Transportation

Infrastructure Opportunities

Health & Wellness

Workforce Development

Business Services

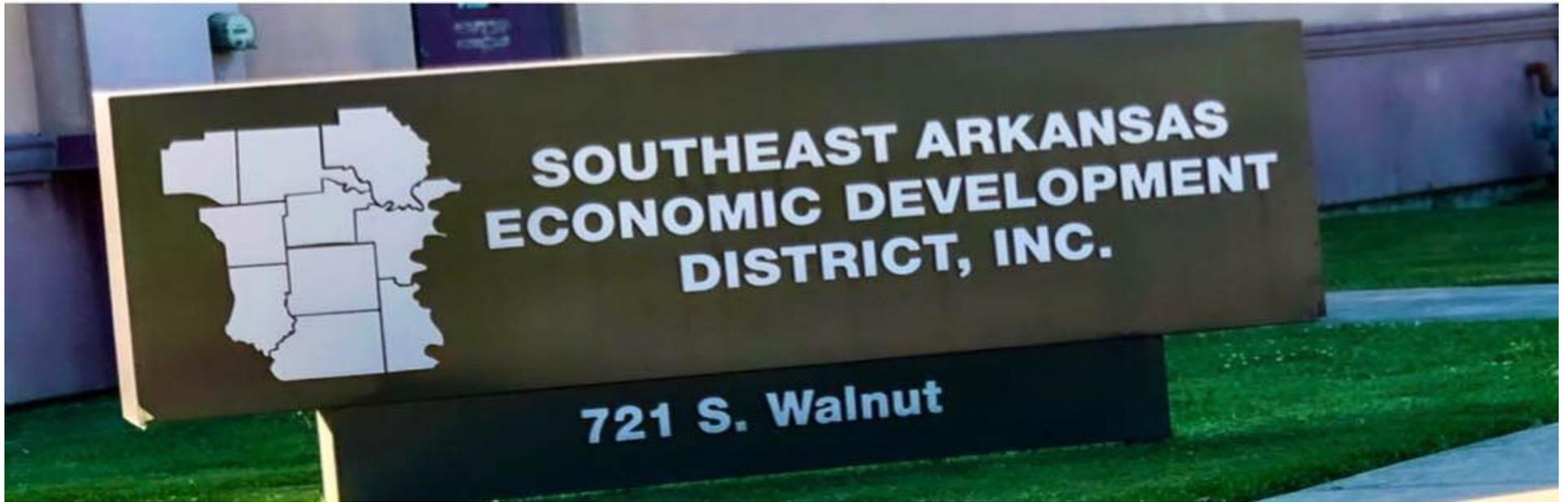
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