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SECTION 1 – DISCUSSION OF IDENTIFIED ISSUES

EVALUATION AND APPRIASAL

I. DISCUSSION OF IDENTIFIED ISSUES

In 2006, Washington County, in cooperation with the West Florida Regional Planning Council (WFRPC), sponsored a workshop aimed at assisting the Towns of Ebro, Vernon, and Wausau with the Visioning Process. The County Planning Office continues to participate in the visioning processes of these municipalities that participate in the County's Comprehensive Plan. Later in the same year, the Washington County Planning Office partnered with the Local Mitigation Strategy Committee (LMS) to discuss the needs of the community. The public and all local agencies were invited to the meetings with excellent attendance at both. On April 26, 2007, a public workshop, with Department of Community Affairs' (DCA) staff in attendance, was presented to discuss the EAR process and identify those issues that are of concern for all citizens of Washington County. With WFRPC facilitating the meeting, and other state, local agencies, planning commissioner members, County Commissioners, and County department supervisors in attendance, the issues that follow in this section were identified as items of concern. These issues were approved by the Washington County Board of County Commissioners and submitted to DCA with a request for a letter of understanding that Washington County's Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) would address these. A response in the form of the Letter of Understanding was received from DCA with agreement as to the issues and a request that the EAR address groundwater and springs protection. It is these issues that are the foundation of the Washington County Evaluation and Appraisal Report.

- A. Issue 1 - Transportation. The increased demand on the local transportation system caused by growth requires some attention on both the State and County levels. Emphasis continues to be on increasing capacity on SR 77 and SR 79 and sustained maintenance that will allow efficient traffic circulation throughout the County. There are two segments of SR 77 that are currently exceeding the adopted LOS standard as shown in the 2006 Level of Service Analysis document for Washington County. The segments are: from Beginning of 3 lane section to north of I-10 to South Blvd. and from South Blvd. to North City Limits of Chipley. Both are entirely within the city limits of Chipley. The MSV for both segments are based on a rural developed area type (less than 5,000 population). Previous problems with capacity on SR 77 within the incorporated area of Washington County was addressed when an adversely impacted section of the roadway was changed from Rural Undeveloped to Rural Developed changing the maximum service volume for the peak direction service volume from 420 to 810 as reflected in the FDOT 2006 AADT reported dated July 2007. This change allows greater flexibility for future development of this corridor.

SR 77 and SR 79. Both of these projects are seen as a maintenance and capacity activity to preserve the existing transportation investment along these routes and to improve safety considerations for those members of the public using these facilities. These projects are of major importance to Washington County as it increases safety and capacity along both

roadways. Both projects are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and will not conflict with any objectives, goals, and policies of the plan. However, the County may need to examine the potential impacts from the construction process that could extend out to the year 2020, as funding becomes available. Both roadways serve as the corridors for Washington County residents working in Bay County.

SR 79. This roadway serves not only as a main tourist route to the beaches, but as the major evacuation route from the beach. The road will be a major roadway serving SR 388 to the new international airport located in northern Bay County. Construction for the four-lane project for the section of SR 79 within Washington County has started with a completion date depending on funding availability. This road will be a four-lane roadway with a complete planned phase currently extending from the Bay County line north to the Holmes County line. The design is such that traffic will be moved at a minimum of 50 miles per hour. The project development and environmental study for the project development and environmental study from SR 20 to I-10 has been completed. Right-of-way acquisition and construction are not fully funded at this time.

Divided by a grassy median, the road may initially have a negative impact on the towns of Ebro and Vernon with the Red Head and New Hope communities also impacted. The impact on all affected communities will be immense. While solving problems for capacity of the roadway for nature, residential, land, and economic development (especially providing access to the new international airport on SR 388) some problems may arise out of the four-lane project that will require assistance from the County. While there has been some anticipation and concern about service interruptions, the City of Vernon has been assured that services, to include utilities, will last only a couple of hours at the time. Traffic will not be interrupted and the delays will be no more than what is normally experienced during this type of construction.

The only event that might cause concern is a massive evacuation from the Gulf Coast area for which FDOT would take the necessary measures to ensure that traffic moves at an efficient rate to protect lives.

Regardless of assurances that interruption and delays will be minimal during construction and the smooth flow of traffic will not be impeded, the County should continue in efforts to provide a fully-equipped and manned satellite EMS station within or near Ebro to provide emergency services during periods of construction and post construction. The distance from Washington/Bay county line to the nearest fully-staffed medical trauma center facility at Gulf Coast Hospital 28.6 miles to Gulf Coast Medical Center in Bay County. When added to the 20.9 miles response distance from the nearest EMS facility (Vernon EMS) 50 miles would be required to respond and deliver the injured party to a proper medical facility. The same EMS service to Northwest Florida Community Hospital in Chipley would require a 57 mile trip. An EMS team that is available at or near Ebro will greatly reduce the response time for medical emergencies.

While SR 20 provides an east or west route across the County, there are no other paved roads or unpaved roads that might provide any alternate evacuation or escape route to those evacuees coming from the Gulf Coast area or Washington County. The roadway between

Ebro and Vernon is subject to flooding at some locations (possibly delaying the ability to evacuate or return from and to Bay County). The County should develop a plan to perform an engineering study on the opening of an alternate route to connect SR 79 and SR 77. Not only would this provide an alternate evacuation route for those living in the center of the county and south of Vernon, but would have a positive effect on economic development within the County.

SR 77. Not only does this roadway serve as a main tourist route to Bay County and the beaches, but also as the major evacuation route from Panama City and eastern Bay County. The road will be a major roadway to access SR 388 to the new international airport located in northern Bay County that is now under construction with a completion date of May 2010.

This road will be a four-lane roadway with a complete planned phase currently extending from the Bay County line north to the Holmes County line. The design is such that traffic will be moved at a minimum of 50 miles per hour. The project development and environmental study for the project development and environmental study from SR 30 to I-10 has been completed. Right-of-way acquisition and construction are not funded at this time (11-30-07).

SR 77 is in the Planning Phase and is not expected to receive any construction funding in the next few years. Divided by a grassy median, the roadway improvement project will bypass Wausau with little resulting impact on the town other than the abandonment of that section of SR 77 through the town itself. That part of the current SR 77 passing through Wausau will be turned over to the County unless Wausau agrees to assume all responsibility for maintenance. Any improvements that the Town of Wausau desires on that state-abandoned roadway as part of their visioning process will need to be funded by the County or the Town. There are some road improvement grants available that the County or Town may want to pursue to meet the goals of the visioning of what they want the Town to look like in the future. Pioneer Road will serve as the access road to SR 77 for traffic in and around Wausau. The bypass will start approximately one mile south of the Wausau city limits to one mile north of the city limits. The Project Development and Environmental (PD&E) study is complete and the corridor for the roadway will not change unless some unexpected circumstances arise like the detection of a protected species within that corridor forces a change in the route.

This road will be a four-lane roadway with a complete planned phase currently extending from the Bay County line north to the Jackson County line. The design is such that traffic will be moved at a minimum of 50 miles per hour. The PD&E study for the project development and environmental study from SR 20 to I-10 has been completed. Right-of-way acquisition and construction are not fully funded at this time.

While solving problems for capacity of the roadway for future residential land economic development (especially providing access to the new international airport on SR 388), some problems may arise out of the four-lane project that will require assistance from the County. While there has been some anticipation and concern about service interruptions, the County has been assured that services, to include utilities, will last only a couple of hours at

the time. Traffic will not be interrupted with delays being no more than what is normally experienced during this type of construction. The only event that might cause concern is a massive evacuation from the Gulf Coast area for which the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) would take the necessary measures to ensure that traffic moves at an efficient rate to protect lives.

Regardless of assurances that interruption and delays will be minimal during construction and the smooth flow of traffic will not be impeded, the County should continue in efforts to provide a fully-equipped and manned satellite EMS station within or near the county line on property currently owned by the County at SR 77 and Spring Pond Road to provide emergency services during periods construction and post construction. The distance from Washington/Bay county line to the nearest fully-staffed medical trauma center facility at Gulf Coast Hospital 19 miles to Gulf Coast Medical Center in Bay County. When added to the 14 miles response distance from the nearest EMS facility (Vernon EMS) 23 miles would be required to respond and deliver the injured party to a proper medical facility. The same EMS service to Northwest Florida Community Hospital in Chipley would require a 40 mile trip. An EMS team that is available at or near the Crystal Lake area will greatly reduce the response time for medical emergencies.

SR 79 and SR 77 Connector. While SR 20 provides an east or west route across the County, there are no other paved roads or unpaved roads that might provide any alternate evacuation or escape route to those evacuees coming from the Gulf Coast area or Washington County. SR 77, between the county line and SR 279, has not other connector. The County should develop a plan for an engineering study on the opening of an alternate route to connect SR 79 and SR 77. Not only would this provide an alternate evacuation route for those living in the center of the county and south of Vernon, but would have a positive effect on economic development within the County.

Elkcam Connector. A proposed Elkcam Connector Road will be an important addition to the transportation system of the County and region. This proposed road is generally located in the southeastern section of the County and will connect SR 77 and US 231 providing for both evacuation and traffic concurrency for the south end of the County. The County is actively pursuing a Feasibility Corridor Study for the Elkcam Connector, East to US 231, under the Transportation Regional Incentive Program (TRIP) Joint Program Agreement (JPA) between the FDOT and Northwest Florida Regional Transportation Planning Organization.

Unpaved Roads. Unpaved roads form much of the infrastructure of the county, especially in rural areas. During storms, these roads become impassable due to water, fallen trees, downed power lines and debris. The county should be developing comprehensive policies to actively pursue an effective road paving program to ensure that alternative east-west routes are available that will provide more efficient means of evacuation and normal movement of transportation within the County. As outlined in the Transportation Element of this report, the matrix system as devised by the County engineer and approved by the Board of County Commissioners should be maximized to ensure that road paving and resurfacing projects be prioritized according to need as opposed to political pressure. If allowed to, this method can serve as an effective tool to determine prioritization of road paving projects.

Roads List. Examination of public records, old road lists, roadwork records from public works, planning records, and property appraiser plats has produced a list of roads within the County. This list contains private roads and county-maintained roads. Some roads have recorded easements dedicating land to the county for the purpose of road construction. Other roads became county-maintained roadways through adverse possession pursuant to F.S. 95.361. This statute gives legal claim to the public entity that has been maintaining roads for a specified number of years (four if constructed by a governmental entity, seven if constructed by a nongovernmental entity. The board adopted this list in October of 2006 and approved updates in March of 2007. Future updates will be made as needed. The adoption of this list of roads does not necessarily give the green light to further development on the roadways. Many of the roads are nothing more than mere lanes and driveways. Emphasis and policies should be established by the Public Works Department to refrain from maintaining a driveway or lanes. Once the maintenance begins, it hard for the public and developers to accept the fact that these roads may not be suitable or intended for development and must still meet concurrency standards already established.

Levels of Service. With the roads list complete, there is a need to establish levels of service for the identified roadways. The county purchased a laser profiling vehicle, which has proved to be cost-effective by training county personnel to operate the profiler for obtaining the condition assessment. This machine offers the ability to accurately measure rutting across the pavement lane, which is often a cause/factor in wet weather vehicular accidents, as well as the ability to accurately measure roughness/smoothness of the roadway. All of the above functions are conducted at highway speeds thus eliminating the need for lane closure or interruption of traffic flow which is often required for other systems.

As these studies are conducted, the information is given to the County engineer to be used to assist with classifying roads for resurfacing according to pavement condition, number of persons served, road classification, and importance of road travel to other Washington County entities. The goal of this system is to provide an inventory of transportation facilities, but simultaneously, it is proving to be an asset in providing information that will result in safer road travel throughout the county. Failure to comply with GASB 34 can result in loss of funding currently afforded us at the state and federal level. It could also result in our county being prohibited from issuing bonds for capital improvement projects or it could raise our interest rates on the issuance of those bonds. Those are consequences we cannot afford

Bike Paths and Pedestrian Travel. According to the Florida Department of Transportation's Long Range Program Plan for 2008-09 through 2012-13, Florida has a high fatality rate for bicyclists and pedestrians. In 2005, there were 124 bike fatalities and 576 pedestrians killed on Florida roadways. This fact emphasizes the need to plan for safe and efficient bike and pedestrian traffic in future planning even though the present status of the County is considered rural and may remain that for sometime. Special consideration should be given to providing safe accessibility to schools. Requirements should be established for developers to provide bicycle and pedestrian paths within a two-mile radius of any school in both new developments. Where feasible, the missing links or gaps in the existing sidewalks should be identified and eliminated where appropriate. Bicycle lanes should be required on new or reconstructed arterials and major collector roadways. Where feasible, restriping of arterial or major collector roadways under the County's jurisdiction should be considered

anytime the roadway is scheduled for resurfacing. If the right-of-way is constrained, the County may wish to consider reducing motor vehicle travel lanes if possible to allow for bike and pedestrian travel. The County should consider adopting the FDOT Bicycle Facilities Planning and Design Guidelines Handbook (Revised April 2000) to serve as a guideline for both the County and Developers in the construction of new bike paths and pedestrian travel. Shared use paths should be used by pedestrians, skaters, and joggers as well as bicyclists.”

Regarding concern for local issues expressed by the community, the lack of bike paths and sidewalks in the community appears to be an issue, including the lack of construction on the Falling Waters - Chipley bike path. That contract has now been awarded to Jones Construction Company and has since ceased to be an issue. The remaining concern over this project is making sure that the path ties in with the sidewalk network of the City of Chipley and those county roads in and around Chipley. There are three schools located in Chipley with students walking and riding bikes further supporting the need for both sidewalks and bicycle paths. Crucial missing gaps, not only in the routes to school, but in those areas serving low income and elderly neighborhoods need to be completed with comparable sidewalk construction. The City of Chipley and the County should identify funding sources to enhance and expand the existing pedestrian and bike travel system.

The same set of circumstances in the town of Vernon exists with regards to schools. The schools are virtually isolated when it comes to pedestrian traffic with no sidewalks available for either. There is only one course of sidewalks through the town of Vernon on SR 79. It is expected that the sidewalks system along that route will be expanded and upgraded during the four-lane construction project. This still leaves the sidewalk issues to the school as an issue. Again, the County and Town of Vernon should work together to identify funding sources and build a pedestrian and bike travel system.

The rural nature of the County does not create ideal conditions for, but policy should be established so as to require all developers of major subdivision to install sidewalks. All subdivisions that are required to construct and pave roads should be required to also include sidewalks in the development regardless of the number of lots or the particular location within the County. If new subdivisions are installed along already paved road sidewalks should be required regardless of the status of the roadway (i.e., collector, arterial, major or minor) with the developer absorbing the initial costs of installation and the County accepting when the roads meet the requirements for acceptance as county-maintained roads. In most rural areas along roadways for which the FDOT is responsible, bike lanes are being reserved and marked for travel. However, neither the State nor the County has erected any signs or indicators to motorists that these lanes are reserved for bicycle or pedestrian traffic.

Development Adjacent to Roadways. The Comprehensive Plan currently provides for an Access Management Systems as a part of the Land Development Code. A key component to the code is the “Controlled Access Roadway Segments” which are designated areas where roadway access from adjacent residential as well as commercial areas is limited to a specific number and distance from one another to provide for future separation between local and through traffic. Land uses and property splits should be reevaluated to ensure that

resulting development lots and development are consistent with good development. Land uses and property splits should be reevaluated to ensure that resulting development lots and development are consistent with good development practices along as Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) roadways and emerging SIS.

Recommended Actions. The County does not have a formal transportation plan that consolidates all of the County transportation policies and directives into one document. Requirements are established at several different sources sometimes causing confusion to County personnel, the public, and developers. As required by recent revisions to Florida's Growth Management statutes, a financially feasible plan for providing new corridors and expanding existing ones will need to be included in the EAR based amendments. To provide easily understood criteria for the transportation system, the County needs to consider the following proposed changes.

Begin work on a comprehensive transportation and road paving plan for the County to include both motorized vehicular traffic and bicycle/pedestrian traffic.

- B. Issue 2 - Affordable Housing. There are numerous housing programs available in Florida that promotes affordable housing and many recommendations made by Florida's Affordable Housing Study Commission. A summary of recommendations include some of the following steps.

Review, evaluate and update all housing data in the Housing Element. To determine the needs for affordable housing, data and analysis needs to be updated using the methodology provided by the Shimberg Center for Affordable Housing. Using that data, the goals, objectives, and policies of the County should be adjusted accordingly. The Census provides the information that determines needs for future housing within the County. For subsequent census years, the County Planning Office and 9-1-1 Addressing Office should work with the public and private sector to assist the federal government during the Census years to carry out intensive publicity campaign encouraging households to fill out their Census form.

Evaluate the Fair Housing Ordinance and incorporated any needed changes into the Comprehensive Plan.

Establish policies that encourage public and private initiatives in providing affordable housing.

Washington County should consider an Inclusionary Housing Ordinance to provide that a certain threshold of units such as adopt inclusionary housing ordinances to implement the housing elements of their comprehensive plans. The following elements would be included within this ordinance:

All major subdivisions (over ten lots) will be required to allocate 10 percent of the total number of residential units as inclusionary lots for affordable housing with a minimum of two being required,

All subdivisions of ten lots and less will be required to allocate no less than one lot as inclusionary unit to affordable housing. All lots classified as inclusionary units will be subject to the same deed restrictions as lots within the subdivision. Inclusionary units must be aesthetically similar but not necessarily the same as the market rate units. Long-term affordability restrictions are to be placed on the inclusionary units.

Mobile Homes: Mobile homes comprise 41.22 percent of the housing units within the County while some mobile homes have been replaced with permanent dwellings in recent years. The mobile homes that were replaced sometimes remain on the property to be used as supplemental residences for rental units or aging parents or other family members if density allows.

Recreational Vehicles. Recreational vehicles are not allowed to be used as permanent housing within the County and therefore, are not considered to be affordable housing at any time. The Land Development Code supports the Florida Statutes that prohibit this type use of RVs. However, the EAR-based Housing Element and Land Development Code jointly should fully clarify the use of the RVs within the County is restricted to temporary use during the construction of a site-built home and emergency use when an occupant is displaced from his/her permanent residence due to a disaster that makes a permanent dwelling uninhabitable.

Emergency Housing Plan: Washington County has adopted an emergency housing plan and incorporated into the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP). This plan takes into consideration that emergency/disaster events could and likely would interrupt normal housing for both permanent and renting residents of Washington County. The County also realizes that the quicker housing is available and sheltering can begin, the quicker life begins to take on normalcy. The Emergency Housing Plan identifies adequate sites for temporary/FEMA style housing and the expediting procedures to establish such sites. This plan was developed with cooperation from the Florida Division of Emergency Management, West Florida Regional Planning Council, Washington County Building Department, Washington County Planning and Zoning Department, and Washington County Emergency Management Department.

Recommendations:

Add the following policy: It will be the policy of the County that recreational vehicles will not be utilized as permanent housing in Washington County. Temporary use of recreational vehicles will be limited to use during construction of a new residence or displacement of the property owner or tenant due to disaster reasons as allowed under the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP).

- C. Issue 3 - Urban Sprawl. Currently, the County is still experiencing growth at a slower rate with minimal impact on the County's infrastructure. However, there is a potential, where urban sprawl is concerned, for it to become costly to expand all services to the more remote areas of the County. Road maintenance becomes more expensive in efforts to reduce congestion on roadways. Fire and EMS services in poorly placed developments become a

challenge and are expensive to provide to outlying development. There are no central water or wastewater treatment plants available in the unincorporated sections of the County (other than a portion of Sunny Hills Subdivision). It is not reasonable to think that this will not become a major problem sometime in the future should the County experience the growth that is sure to happen. Along with inappropriate placement of development to available services, the beauty and serenity of the natural resources of the County are diminished. Urban sprawl also adds to the danger of wildfire as the densely wooded areas of the county are exposed to fire risk caused from human habitation. Evacuation during storms and floods adds to the challenge of maintaining development in non-urban areas. Schools, health facilities, public services, and shopping are harder to come by when development does not occur near urban areas. The absences of employment centers and the high fuel costs serve as a deterrent to employment for residents living in non-urban areas.

There are no county-wide urban services to offer with regard to water and wastewater treatment plants (WWTP). Aqua Utilities, Inc., operates a limited central water and WWTP in the Sunny Hills Subdivision, but has not been able to extend those services either to areas within the subdivision or the surrounding areas. Chipley and Vernon both have a central water and WWTP but have not extended services outside of the town limits. This has served to discourage development in the areas where infrastructure is available.

No existing private sector or package treatment system will be permitted to add customers unless all Levels of Service Standards are met, and operations are in conformance with all FDEP permits. This applies specifically to Aqua Utilities, Inc., system located within the Sunny Hills Subdivision. In these areas no private wells or septic tanks should be allowed where platting and development have been approved based on the availability of central utilities.

Developments approved based on the promise of the developer to install central water and/or sewage must install systems that will be compatible with any central system as approved.

The provision for clustered subdivisions allow a minimum of 10 lots to be developed on existing county-maintained paved or unpaved roads and a maximum of 49 lots if on continuous paved roads without pursuing a land use change. This encourages urban sprawl to areas where services are not available. Recommendations have been made that this lot minimum be reduced to 6 lots and the maximum to 20.

The Capital Improvements Element schedule includes engineering feasibility studies and service area identification for both a county-wide sanitary system and potable water system. No funding source has been identified to pursue this study, but the County needs to look at identifying a funding source soon.

With approximately 27,000 antiquated vacant lots (with no infrastructure present) in the County, changes to the Future Land Use maps should be accomplished only when the developer submits an appropriate need assessment based on sound economic and housing needs methodology

- D. Issue 4 - Economic Development. The primary deficiency of the Comprehensive Plan is the lack of an Economic Element. This element, while not required, will act as a guide for achieving desirable economic development, which will foster an improved commerce and quality of life for all residents throughout the county. For that reason, a joint effort of Washington County and its municipalities, Caryville, Chipley, Ebro, Vernon, and Wausau in the creation of their economic elements is beneficial.

The Element should present forecasts for the county's economic development, select a preferred course of economic development, advance economic goals, design a set of objectives and policies to achieve preferred economic development, and present a strategy for implementing those policies that is consistent and in concert with the county and city's growth management plans. The ability to achieve such goals relies partially on state, national, and global economic events and policies. However, this element will focus on how the county and its municipalities can support their local economies, attempt to protect them from economic downturns, and encourage prosperity during periods of economic growth. The Economic Element will be based on the best available data of measurable economic indicators, trend analysis, and assumptions based on the measurable economic trends. Relevant data from the 2000 Census will be utilized for the element.

- E. Issue 5 - Urban Services. The lack of urban services in areas where they should exist is of concern. It is expected that the Town of Ebro will be greatly impacted at some time in the future due to the new Panama City - Bay County International Airport with a groundbreaking in November 2007. The airport is being built in the 75,000-acre West Bay Area Sector on 1,300 acres of a 4,000-acre site being donated to the Airport Authority by The St. Joe Company. The four-laning of SR 79, the main thoroughfare through Ebro, will also add to the possibility for growth of Ebro and the surrounding area. Some residential development is being attempted in that area, but the lack of utilities – both central water and wastewater treatment, has discouraged growth. Workshops conducted included utility companies, financial institutions, municipalities, and the County participating.

There is a need to establish policies to provide for evaluations of the need for urban services for identified areas of the County that would normally be expected to have those services; one area is the Town of Ebro who will be affected by the new Bay County International Airport; establish an interlocal agreement to cooperate with the City of Chipley to provide urban services (central water/wastewater services) for the area south of I-10 on SR 77; establish policies that will serve to assist in alleviating disruptions in urban services to all municipalities during the four-lane projects of SR 79 and SR 77. There are no county-wide urban services to offer with regard to water and wastewater treatment plants (WWTP). Aqua Utilities, Inc., operates a limited central water and WWTP in the Sunny Hills Subdivision, but has not been able to extend those services either to areas within the subdivision or the surrounding areas. The Chipley and Vernon both have a central water and WWTP but have not extended services outside of the town limits. This has served to discourage development in the areas where infrastructure is available.

If a centralized service becomes available in the area where onsite private potable water and sanitary systems has been constructed, connection to the centralized service by that private service is required.

Buffers adjacent to agriculture and silviculture operations shall be 100 feet and shall be only native vegetation be used.

- F. Issue 6 - Protection of Open Spaces and Natural Resources. The County needs to establish policies that will ensure compatibility between environmentally sensitive areas and residential subdivisions. An example of, but not limited to, is the approximately 85,600 acres of land are included within the Holmes Creek watershed area. Currently, a 75-foot permanent natural vegetative buffer (above the observed normal waterline) is required and a minimum of 50 percent natural vegetative cover shall be undisturbed in these buffer areas. This policy change is needed to mitigate contaminate runoff from disturbed land. If the vegetative buffer is increased and the vegetation itself is left intact, then runoff is less likely to infiltrate the surface water, and in the case of lands adjacent to natural springs, the groundwater as well.

Springs, Groundwater and Surface Water protection. The County needs to establish policies to ensure that springs, groundwater and surface water continue to be protected as well as they have been while massive development of the county has been a prospect, as it becomes a reality. This can be achieved through accurate identification and careful control of adjacent land use to sensitive aquatic resources.

Recommendations:

Conservation of wetlands: The County should continue to work with the Water Management District to find land to convert to a "Conservation" land use designation. In order to identify these lands the Wetlands Map from the Future Land Use Map series should be overlapped with the Future Land Use Map and any land not yet converted to a "Conservation" land use designation should be identified as a candidate for future conversion.

Recommendation: Approximately one quarter of the total land in the county has a "Conservation" land use designation. This is especially significant as almost all of it follows the wetland boundaries in the county. This method of singling out a significant resource throughout the county and placing it under protection should continue. Any further conversion of land into conservation should follow this pattern.

Buffers: The requirement for conservation and wetland buffers and buffers for other managed areas should be changed to 100 feet. The retention of ground vegetation should be highly encouraged.

Best Management Practices: All Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) should include as a part of the PUD standards, practices and standards that will protect groundwater quality and prevent nonpoint source pollution stormwater runoff. Measures that will limit

impervious surface areas and minimize the use of fertilizer and pesticides should be utilized. Maintaining natural cover in landscaping could limit needs for both irrigation and fertilizer use and the use have both water quality and water conservation benefits.

Permitting: Requirement for Environmental Permitting Resource (ERP) rules (Chapter 62-346), F. A. C.) for stormwater became effective in October 2007. Additionally, it is anticipated that wetland regulations will become effective during 2008. It is recommended that the updated regulations be identified and included in the EAR-based amendments.

Water Conservation: It is recommended that requirements for any approved PUD include water conservation measures. It is further recommended that these include requiring the use of high-efficiency (low volume) plumbing fixtures, appliances, and other water conserving devices. On the exterior, ecologically viable portions of existing native vegetation should be incorporated into the landscape design to the greatest extent practical, and new plantings should not be irrigated outside of initial grow-in requirements. The potential use of reclaimed stormwater or appropriately treated wastewater should also be considered for remaining residential, commercial, or public area irrigation needs (if any)..

Policies should be added that utilize and encourage the utilization of systems that increase the availability of community water, sewer, and water reuse especially at government buildings, schools, and facilities with larger outdoor use.

Wildfire Mitigation: It is recommended that plans for all developments larger than six lots be subject the development guidelines and standards provided in the publication, "Wildfire Mitigation in Florida: Land Use Planning Strategies and Best Development Practices." Adequate fire suppression systems must be installed in new subdivisions.

- G. Issue 7 - Land Use. The current land use categories appear adequate for the County and should continue to be adequate through the year 2020. No change is indicated that would increase intensity since the lack of urban services (fire, EMS, central water and wastewater treatment) do not support an increase. There is no indication of or demonstrated need to decrease the gross density of one dwelling unit per 10 acres. It is noted here that should Sector Planning become a part of the pattern for development in Washington County, more modern land uses categories may be needed to be compatible with that concept.

The feelings toward protection of the County's agriculture lands can be viewed from two perspectives. One is from the landowner who has a fully operational farm. He does not agree that residential development adjacent to and in close proximity to his farm operation is not compatible the use of his land. On the other hand, the property owner who does not have an active farm operation feels that residential development up to and including his own property is good use of his land. A Rural Development Plan is highly desirable to prevent encroachment of agriculture lands by residential and commercial development, protect agricultural integrity, and deter the erosion of the natural resources of Washington County.

Recommendations:

Change the clustered subdivision thresholds to read, "not greater than six (6) lots on unpaved roads and not greater than 20 lots on continuous paved roads."

In order to retain the atmosphere of agricultural areas and low density residential areas, the County should consider reevaluating the intensities of Neighborhood Commercial (Subclass I and Subclass II) uses, transferring the more intense uses to the General Commercial category.

Increase the natural buffers separating uses (i.e., commercial from residential, or residential from agriculture to at least 75 while maintaining a natural buffer. In developments no greater than six residential lots will be increased to 50 feet.

By the year 2012, the County, in cooperation with the County Extension Office, should develop a Rural Development Plan designed to include land use impacts and alternatives, infrastructure provision, natural resource protection, and the agricultural economy.

Develop overlays and developmental policies along arterial roadways to promote commercial future land uses that are intermingled with other uses to create pedestrian-friendly commercial clustering in easily accessible locations rather than continuous strip development.

Develop more restrictive policies that will focus development away from wetlands and conservation areas by evaluating and changing setbacks and buffers as needed.

The County, in cooperation with the Regional Planning Council, will encourage a long-term plan for the 55,000 acres of land known as Moody's Pasture, and possible assimilation into a Sector Plan.

- H. Issue 8 - Revision of the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code. The Comprehensive Plan and the Land Development Code will be generally reviewed for content, grammar, compatibility and format during the EAR-based amendment process. This particular revision of the Comprehensive Plan will involve correcting scrivener's errors, formatting, and grammar in the Comprehensive Plan. The basic Plan is a product of 1991 and requires an update that uses a modern method of word processing to be user friendly and adaptable to revisions as needed. The Land Development Code will also be reviewed for the same type of errors. User-friendliness is the main objective in the revision of these two documents.
- I. Issue 9 - Public School Facilities Element Intergovernmental Coordination. The Public School Facilities Element (PSFE) is newly adopted as of May 2008. The PSFE establishes goals, objectives, and policies as the mechanisms by which to bring schools and associated facilities into the land use decision-making process as a key factor affecting those decisions. The Goals, Objectives, and Policies established within it are beginning to be met and the Comprehensive Plan has been effectively revised to address how school facilities planning interact with the other elements of the Comprehensive Plan. EAR-based Land Development Code revisions may be necessary based on the content of the PSFE as discussed in the Successes and Shortcomings Section.

- J. Issue 10 – Visioning (Added to this Section) . The visioning process of the Committee for Sustainable Emerald Coast Visioning began in 2008, with the West Florida Regional Planning Council as facilitators. The process began after the major work was accomplished on the Evaluation and Appraisal Report. As such, this particular process was not discussed or included in the Identified Issues. It is felt that this is an appropriate place to discuss visioning and it is added as an additional issue in *Section I- Identified Issues* of the EAR. This an on-going process involving government officials, the general public, the business community, agricultural and environmental interests, and the development community. While the scoping process was utilized as the basis for the EAR, the value of this visioning opportunity cannot be ignored.

While many of the concerns currently being discussed in the visioning process were addressed in the *Identified Issues* of the County, other concerns were identified as also being important in creating a vision for the future. This vision will enable growth while preserving natural areas, protecting wildlife and agricultural production, providing affordable housing, addressing health care facilities, and supporting healthy small towns and communities, while enabling a vibrant economic and social life.

Therefore, it is recommended that the County develop a visioning statement based on the resulting issues arising out of Sustainable Emerald Coast Visioning process and, where deemed appropriate by the Washington County Planning Commission these issues will be considered for incorporation into the EAR-based amendments. A policy to this effect (Policy 1-1-h) will be incorporated into the Future Land Use Element.