

Embargoed: Hold for Release 11:00 a.m., March 16, 2006

South Florida in 2030: Promised Land or Paved Paradise?

South Florida has an equal chance of becoming the Promised Land, Paved Paradise, Economic Divide, or Devastated Wasteland in the year 2030, according to the latest regional report card released March 16 by the Center for Urban and Environmental Solutions (CUES) at Florida Atlantic University.

In 2030, 8.4 million people will call the sliver of Florida from Vero Beach to the Florida Keys home, making the region about the size of the Chicago area today, according to the report. It will become more diverse and

grayer. The elderly will be the second most represented age group, up from a distant fourth (out of five) today. They will overtake youth (0-17), which will increase but in smaller numbers.

Big Changes Coming to South Florida		
	2003-2004	2030
Population	5.9 million	8.4 million
Anglo	46%	37%
Hispanic	33%	39%
Black	19%	21%
65+	1 million	1.9 million

“A lot of changes are coming,” says James

Murley, J.D., director of CUES and former secretary of community affairs for the State of Florida. “We look at our progress and then into the future through four scenarios. While life would be great in the Promised Land scenario, we have real challenges that could throw us into a Paved Paradise, Economic Divide, or even a Devastated Wasteland scenario.”

Charting the Course: Where is South Florida Heading? has painted the scenarios from quadrants intersecting the axis of environmental degradation and sustainability and the

axis of economic prosperity and scarcity:

- **The Promised Land** is a region where the Everglades and other habitats have been fully restored. The economy has produced plenty of high paying jobs. Less congestion and greater housing options abound.

- **Paved Paradise** suggests that South Florida is environment. Urban growth has pushed farther west and north,

roadway congestion worsens, and the Everglades restoration fails.

- **Economic Divide** between the haves and have nots grows, leading to poor socioeconomic conditions. Increased competition for scarce land increases housing costs, though environmental sustainability has been achieved.
- **Devastated Wasteland** is a total breakdown of environmental sustainability and economic prosperity—a likely scenario if the Everglades project fails and a major hurricane devastates the area, as Katrina did on the Gulf Coast.

A special feature on hurricanes shows the potential damage that natural disasters can play in South Florida’s long-term future, especially in light of the so-called 20-year cycle of increased activity. Agriculture and business losses could have significant impact.

South Florida’s Report Card

In addition to looking ahead, *Charting the Course* measures how the region is doing in three key areas—people, place, and prosperity—since CUES first created the regional report card in 2001 and did a check up in 2004.

“South Florida is holding its own,” says Allan Wallis, Ph.D., an expert on measuring regional indicators and associate professor at the University of Colorado at Denver. “While the economy is looking pretty good, low wages create disparities in household income. Civic engagement continues to increase—meaning people are willing to take action on issues important to them.”

Of most concern is the environment. The report’s “Place” section shows down arrows for three out of four indicators. The water supply is a concern, housing prices are

↓ South Florida Growth Challenges	
Water Supply	↓
Environment	↔
Housing	↓
Mobility	↓

soaring, congestion costs have risen 70 percent in the past 10 years, and recent hurricanes have eroded miles of beach though progress continues towards restoring the Everglades ecosystem.

↔ South Florida People	
Social Equity	↓
Education	↔
Civic Engagement	↑

Though South Florida’s population continues to grow at unprecedented rates, the quality of life for its residents is a mixed bag. The disparity in household income indicates a growing divide

between the haves and have nots, school performance is improving though high school graduation rates continue to lag behind the rest of the state, and voter registration and participation have increased. Declining crime rates among young people indicate an improving situation.

“In the next 20 years, we could go in two directions,” says Daniella Levine, executive director and founder of the Human Services Coalition. “We could move toward Balkanization in terms of class

divisions, or we could move toward becoming a place that is more cosmopolitan by embracing our cross-cultural diversity and our agility in dealing with change.”

Playing a role in changing all of that is South Florida’s prosperity. Economic indicators have improved since the last report in 2004. The region is producing jobs at a faster rate than the nation (though not the state), and it is attracting new ventures and building capacity in biotechnology. The biggest concern is that most of the job growth has been in lower paying jobs and the ability of wages to keep up with escalating living expenses, especially housing. Almost all of the experts and opinion leaders interviewed for the report cited education as the key to improving the area’s competitiveness.

↑ South Florida Prosperity	
Job Growth	↑
Wage Growth	↔
Competitiveness	↑

“Education is number one—equal funding is necessary as an influx of population continues,” says Ralph Marrinson, chairman of the Regional Business Alliance. “We are the testing laboratory for the nation as we grow in diversity... we are no longer competing with Tampa and Orlando but are competing internationally.”

Experts and opinion leaders from across the region offer their analysis, predictions, and commentary in each section of the report. Each section also compares South Florida’s competitiveness with other Florida regions.

As the Treasure Coast—comprised of Martin, St. Lucie, and Indian River counties—is one of the fastest growing areas of the nation, a special focus on that subregion dissects the origins and measures the impact of continued growth. By 2030, those three counties will need 154,000 new housing units.

“As its predecessors have been, this report will be used by government, civic, and business leaders to identify the region’s strengths and weaknesses and to measure progress on critical issues,” says Lenore Alpert, Ph.D., assistant director of research and project manager. “The scenarios will help our leaders see the consequences of not preparing for the future.”

Charting the Course: Where is South Florida Heading? was funded by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. For more information, visit www.macfound.org.

The Center for Urban and Environmental Solutions, originally founded in 1972 as the Florida Atlantic University/Florida International University Joint Center for Environmental and Urban Problems, is focused on regional thinking and action to identify problems and to develop workable solutions facing urban regions. For more information, visit www.cuesfau.org.