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Embargoed: Hold for Release 1:30 p.m., March 16, 2006

Treasure Coast to Boom Toward 2030: Will it be Promised Land or Paved Paradise?

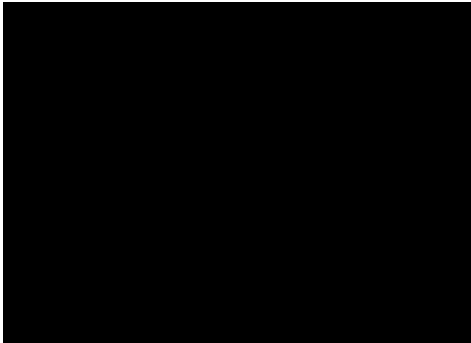
The Treasure Coast and the broader South Florida region have equal chances of becoming the Promised Land, Paved Paradise, Economic Divide, or Devastated Wasteland in the year 2030, according to the latest regional report card released by the Center for Urban and Environmental Solutions (CUES) at Florida Atlantic University.

By 2030, the Treasure Coast—Martin, St. Lucie, and Indian River counties—will grow by 50 percent to more than 729,000. More than 154,000 new homes must be built in the next 24 years to accommodate them.

The area will become more diverse and grayer, with the elderly the most represented age group.

The broader South Florida region, stretching from the Treasure Coast to the Florida Keys, will swell by 42 percent to 8.4 million, roughly the size of the Chicago area today. The overall region will become more evenly diverse with Hispanics accounting for the largest percentage of the population with 39 percent vs. 37 percent for Anglos and 21 percent Black.

“The Treasure Coast is well-positioned to address the issues of the future, thanks to the fine work done by the Committee for a Sustainable Treasure Coast,” says James Murley, J.D., director of CUES and former secretary of community affairs for the State



of Florida. “Their principles and action steps have created a model for the rest of South Florida to create a sustainable environment, achieve economic diversity and prosperity, and enhance the quality of life.”

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 Treasure Coast Boom		
	2000-2004	2030
Population	490,682	729,330
Elderly (65+)	24%	37%
Hispanic	8%	11%
Housing units	147,000	301,000

- **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 prosperous but at the expense of the 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.

“The Treasure Coast and South Florida are holding their 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 greatest 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 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 Growth Challenges	
Water Supply	↓
Environment	↔
Housing	↓
Mobility	↓

“The Treasure Coast is at a crisis point,” says Melissa Meeker, former chair of the Committee for a Sustainable Treasure Coast and Florida operations manager for Tetra Tech EC. “Unless we can get together as one region...the quality of life we value will soon be a memory.”

Though the region’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

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

participation have increased. Declining crime rates among young people indicate an improving situation.

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.

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.

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

“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.

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