



**Prepared by 1000 Friends of Florida  
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## **Background**

In 2016, smart growth advocacy group 1000 Friends of Florida released the Florida 2070 project. This project established a baseline for land use in Florida, then projected what the state would look like in the year 2070 based on growth trends. In 2023, Sea Level 2040/2070 was developed as part of 2023's *Florida's Rising Seas: Mapping Our Future*. This effort is a GIS-based analysis focusing on the intersection between population growth, development patterns, and sea level rise in Florida. The 2040 and 2070 studies each include a baseline and two future scenarios. The Sprawl Scenario for each assumes that current patterns of development continue, and all high priority but currently unprotected natural lands are open for development. The Conservation Scenarios assume that priority natural lands will not be developed, and that future development will be more compact.

Based on data provided by the Bureau of Economic and Business Research at the University of Florida, Taylor County is not expected to grow in population between now and 2040. By 2070, however, the county's population is expected to increase a little more than a third to 28,800. (Table 1). Fortunately, the projected population expansion isn't expected to significantly increase the amount of developed land in Taylor County beyond today's urban areas.

Sea level rise is expected to result in inundation of a little more than 7% of the total land area of the county, with most of the inundation occurring in areas that are already protected through public ownership or conservation easements.

Although Taylor's landscape is not expected to change significantly between now and 2070, the studies demonstrate that there is a potential for Taylor County to ensure long-term preservation of environmentally sensitive and agricultural producing lands which could be susceptible to sprawl over the long term, if not appropriately protected.

## **Taylor County at a Glance**

As of the 2020 Census, Taylor County's population was 21,796. The median age was 44 years, slightly higher than the state average of 42.

**Economics**

The median household income in Taylor County in 2022 was \$46,239 whereas the median household income in FL was \$73,311.

The employment rate in Taylor County in 2022 was 37.7% compared with about 52% throughout the state.

**Education**

Although residents take pride in their educational system and have prioritized education in their visioning plan, Taylor County residents are much less likely to hold a bachelor’s degree than in other areas of the state -- just 13% compared to 34% statewide.

**Housing**

77% of Taylor County residents own their homes compared with an average of 68% in other counties across the state.

As recorded in the 2020 Census, there were over 11,000 housing units and more than 8,000 of those were occupied, predominantly by married couples and families.

**Diversity**

Taylor County is predominantly white, with roughly 1/3 of the population being minority population (African American or Hispanic).

**Leading Economic Sectors**

Retail and manufacturing are the leading employment types for Taylor residents. Just over 20% of the workforce is employed in the government sector.

**Table 1.** Population Projections 2040 and 2070

	2019 Population Baseline	BEBR (2023) Population Projection	Total Population Change	Percent Population Change
2040	21,569	21,500	-69	<1%
2070	21,569	28,800	7,231	33.5%

**Opportunities to Protect Rural Areas**

According to the USDA Census of Agriculture, Taylor County increased the amount of land in agricultural production by 57% between 2012 and 2017, more than doubling the market value of products sold and total farm-related income.

In 2019, approximately 20,655 acres, or 3% of the county’s land, was said to be in agricultural production other than timber and 517,007 acres, or 57%, were natural areas or timber. However, the majority of agricultural and natural lands in Taylor County are not protected through conservation easements or fee-simple holdings, meaning they are susceptible to potential development if they are no longer farmed or acquired for protection.

Unlike many communities in Florida where development pressure is decimating natural areas at a rapid pace, Taylor County has a unique opportunity to plan for growth within, and adjacent to, its existing urban areas, allowing natural and agricultural areas to remain rural. As noted in Vision 2060, a community planning effort with multiple stakeholders completed in 2008, this approach to growth management not only protects agriculture; it has the potential to protect the historic and urban significance of Perry, reduce commuting time, decrease emergency response time and is less expensive to build and maintain.

If natural and agricultural lands are paved rather than protected, the wide range of valuable environmental and economic benefits they provide will be lost. These benefits, known as ecosystem services, include recharging the underground water supply, reducing nutrient pollution in surface waters from stormwater runoff, mitigating flooding by absorbing stormwater, preserving wildlife habitat, enhancing biodiversity, and sequestering carbon. Beyond the environmental benefits, protecting undeveloped land also provides economic benefits, sustaining agriculture and its economic and lifestyle benefits, and expanding outdoor recreational opportunities for residents and tourists alike.

Forested lands, whether natural or for silviculture, are especially valuable for their benefits to water quality and quantity. They naturally purify water and gradually release it into waterways and the atmosphere. They also reduce erosion and sediment in waterways. Losing forested land means losing those benefits.

Based on project analysis, the mid-term planning horizon (2040) does not result in significant amounts of land being lost to development. Instead, prioritizing infill and utilizing land protection tools such as fee simple acquisition and conservation easements could result in an increase of 262,236 acres of natural land and 5,967 acres of agricultural land being protected, which represents more than half the county's total land (Table 2).

**Table 2. Land Types 2040**

	2019	% of Total Acreage	Trend 2040	% of Total Acreage	Alternative 2040	% of Total Acreage
Developed	31,146	4.63%	31,228	4.64%	31,228	4.64%
Protected Natural Land	96,831	14.40%	73,131	10.87%	359,067	53.40%
Protected Agriculture	15	0.00%	15	0.00%	5,972	0.89%
Agriculture	20,640	3.07%	20,639	3.07%	14,682	2.18%
Other	517,007	76.88%	511,885	76.12%	225,948	33.60%
2019 Open Water	6,830	1.02%	6,830	1.02%	6,830	1.02%
Sea Level Inundation: Protected Lands	0	0.00%	23,700	3.52%	28,592	4.25%
Sea Level Inundation: All Other Land Uses	0	0.00%	5,041	0.75%	150	0.02%
Total Acreage	672,469	100.00%	672,469	100.00%	672,469	100.00%
Total Land Acreage	665,639	98.98%	636,898	94.71%	636,897	94.71%
Total Open Water including SLR	6,830	1.02%	35,571	5.29%	35,572	5.29%
Total Sea Level Inundation	0	0.00%	28,741	4.27%	28,742	4.27%

**Table 3. Development Densities**

2019 Gross Development Density	0.69
Acres Needed to Accommodate 2070 Population	39,687 ac
Additional development at a 20% Higher Gross Development Density (Alternative)	0.77
Acres Needed to Accommodate Projected Population under higher development density	37,258

**Table 4- 2070 Land Types**

	2019	% of Total Acreage	Sprawl 2070	% of Total Acreage	Conservation 2070	% of Total Acreage
Developed	31,146	4.63%	39,687	5.90%	37,258	5.54%
Protected Natural Land	96,831	14.40%	52,787	7.85%	333,709	49.62%
Protected Agriculture	15	0.00%	15	0.00%	5,941	0.88%
Agriculture	20,640	3.07%	20,597	3.06%	14,674	2.18%
Other*	517,007	76.88%	504,390	75.01%	225,894	33.59%
2019 Open Water	6,830	1.02%	6,830	1.02%	6,830	1.02%
Sea Level Inundation: Protected Lands	0	0.00%	40,339	6.00%	47,910	7.12%
Sea Level Inundation: All Other Land Uses	0	0.00%	7,824	1.16%	253	0.04%
Total Acreage	672,469	100.00%	672,469	100.00%	672,469	100.00%
Total Land Acreage	665,639	98.98%	617,476	91.82%	617,476	91.82%
Total Open Water including SLR	6,830	1.02%	54,993	8.18%	54,993	8.18%

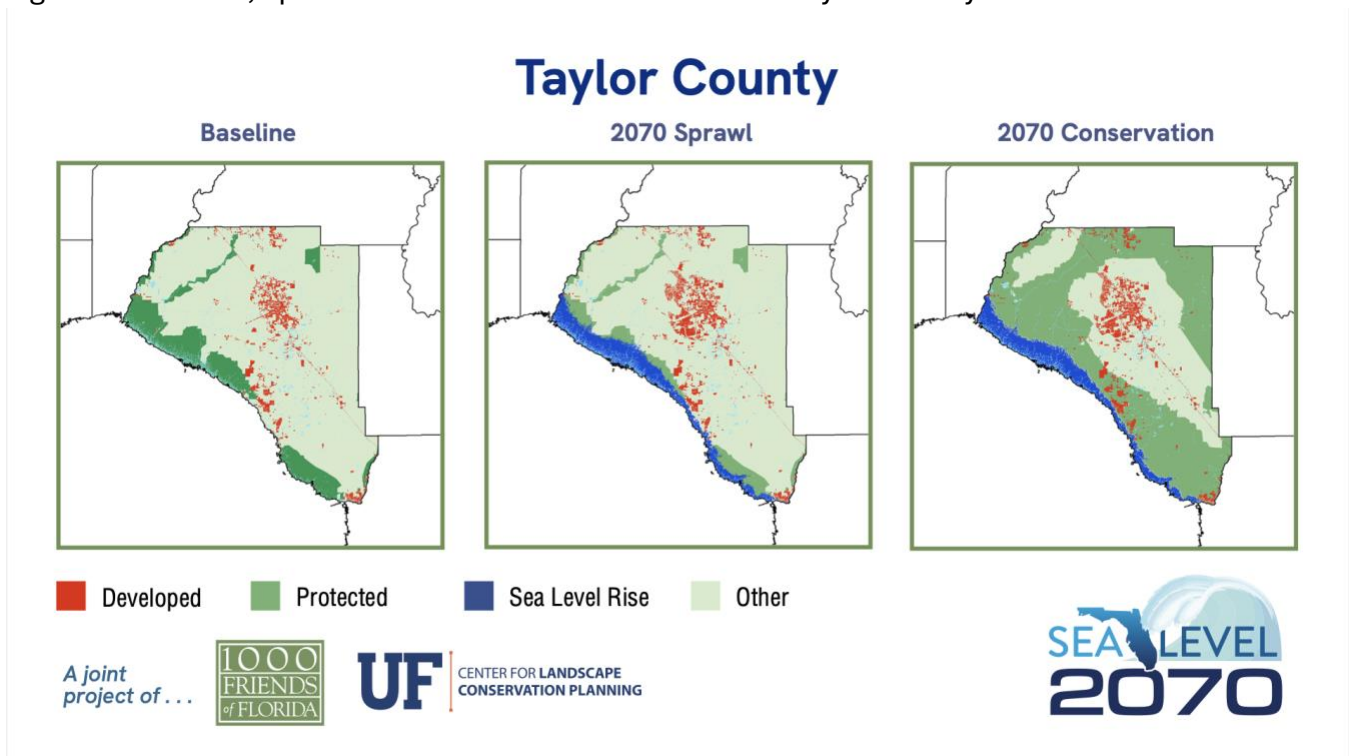
	2019	% of Total Acreage	Sprawl 2070	% of Total Acreage	Conservation 2070	% of Total Acreage
Total Sea Level Inundation	0	0.00%	48,163	7.16%	48,163	7.16%

## Sea-level Rise

The impact of sea level rise in Taylor County will be mainly observed on lands that are already protected, and generally located in northwestern coastal areas of the county. By 2070, approximately 7% of the county’s total land mass is expected to be inundated. Since only 14% (96,846 acres) of land is currently protected, this equates to a loss of almost half of today’s protected land area (Figure 1).

Recognizing that coastal areas are highly desired for new development, Taylor County’s existing coastal communities have the potential to grow faster than other areas of the county. Understanding the risks and considering enhanced development standards for this area will be essential to protect both the built infrastructure and the natural functions of these areas.

Figure 1. Baseline, sprawl and conservation scenarios for Taylor County in 2070.



## **Florida's Wildlife Corridor**

Florida has become recognized as a leader in land conservation funding. In recent years, state leaders have committed more than \$2B to land acquisition and management for the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

The Corridor is an 18-million-acre network of connected natural lands that runs from the Everglades to the panhandle, providing habitat for more than 130 imperiled species and recreational opportunities for Floridians and tourists. About one half of the Corridor is already protected through public ownership or conservation easements, but there are about 284,000 acres of undeveloped, unprotected land in Taylor County that are identified in the Corridor and potentially eligible to participate in Florida's land conservation programs through fee-simple acquisition or easement. Though some funds are planned to be available in perpetuity, the majority of the \$2 billion in allocations are not recurring, creating some urgency for landowners to take advantage of the opportunity to participate in the effort.

## **Wildlife Viewing and Fishing as Part of Florida and Local Economy**

Taylor County is uniquely situated to expand its outdoor recreational opportunities while still preserving the character and natural setting that make it special to those who live here. As of 2017, outdoor recreation contributed about \$25 billion to Florida's economy, as well as more than 200,000 jobs. Passive opportunities, such as wildlife viewing, contributed more than 20% of those funds.

Recreational boating and fishing are obvious sectors that could be enhanced to diversify Taylor County's economy.

## **Growing from Within**

By embracing policies in response to growth that encourage more compact development in urban areas, rather than low-density, automobile-dependent development in rural areas, leaders in Taylor County can provide constituents an array of benefits. Denser urban neighborhoods oriented toward people rather than cars will attract and support more businesses, creating new opportunities for residents living in municipalities to walk or bike to work, shopping and restaurants, encouraging healthier lifestyles and reducing daily transportation expenses. Lessening dependence on car travel will reduce local air and water pollution. Compact urban development will generate the revenues to enhance and expand other public services. It will increase the efficiency of those services, and slow their cost increases, helping to keep a lid on local taxes.

## Community Feedback- Survey

To invite locally generated ideas for policies that would promote sustainable growth in Taylor County, 1000 Friends of Florida hosted a listening session and separately invited residents to participate in a survey to understand perspectives related to population and economic growth within the county. Among survey responses, most people indicated that balancing natural resource protection with economic opportunities was a high priority, along with promoting excellence in educational, medical, employment and recreational opportunities.

This is consistent with findings of the county's Vision 2060 report, which highlighted the community's desire to provide educational and employment opportunities that would allow the next generation of Taylor Countians to remain local.

The respondents to our survey, like the contributors to the 2060 report, also expressed a deep appreciation of the county's natural landscape. Most respondents said that fishing and boating were their top outdoor activities and almost everyone agreed that the outdoor industry is extremely important. For some, protecting hunting and fishing opportunities was more important than protecting agriculture.

Local residents are concerned about the 2023 closure of two pulp mills, which were among the county's top employers, and the impact it will have on the economy. In addition, some expressed concern that the closures would result in loss of land dedicated to silviculture that would ruin the "small-town feel" of the local community.

**Policy Recommendations** To promote an economically prosperous future for Taylor County that capitalizes on its considerable environmental assets while preserving its quality of life and rural character, we offer the following policy recommendations:

- Establish locally financed land conservation programs to leverage federal, state and private funds to preserve natural and agricultural lands from development and protect critical lands buffering water bodies. In lieu of a local funding program, a focused effort should be placed on connecting landowners with land trusts and other organizations to assist in maximizing opportunities to participate in state funded conservation programs.
- Discourage development in areas without adequate water and sewer infrastructure. Policies that allow for the proliferation of septic systems not only encourage sprawl but have the potential to lead to long-term water quality issues and are more costly in the long run. Septic-to-sewer conversions are increasingly being implemented to counteract the effects of under-treated wastewater in urban and suburban areas across the state. Such projects are costly and often difficult to implement. Being proactive about wastewater collection and treatment reduces costs and protects water quality.
- With the vulnerability of the region to sea level rise, flooding and other climate- change impacts, make adaptation strategies a regular consideration in any changes to land development regulations. Land development regulations should reflect best practices



related to building in the coastal environment. Establish an affordable housing policy to provide for Taylor County's workforce.

- Conduct a thorough review of the recommendations of the Vision 2060 effort and incorporate remaining policies into the county's comprehensive plan.
- Allow for higher densities in existing urban areas to accommodate increased population and alleviate development pressure in rural areas.
- Participate in Florida's Main Street program, a technical assistance program that focuses on revitalizing historic downtowns and encouraging economic development alongside historic preservation.
- Invest in public spaces to provide a sense of place and opportunities for passive recreation such as wildlife viewing, photography and paddling.