



Alachua County Climate Action Plan Chapter Summaries



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Introduction to the Climate Action Plan



What is the CAP?

The Alachua County Climate Action Plan (CAP) is a guide for responding proactively to local impacts from and vulnerabilities to climate change. The CAP lays out strategies and opportunities to protect our residents, natural resources, and local economy. It describes County programs and policies to implement these strategies today while also serving as a roadmap for future action. The CAP provides recommendations for building our community’s resilience to climate impacts and improving quality of life for all who call Alachua County home.

Engaged community organizations, local businesses, and citizens are essential to successful implementation of the CAP: they provide feedback, participate in climate initiatives and events, and carry out their own important climate work every day.

If you are reading this, you are part of the solution!

Why do we need a Climate Action Plan?

Florida is one of the states facing the greatest risks from climate change, yet it is also considered underprepared for them. The CAP helps address this gap.

Climate change refers to changes in the weather over a period of decades or longer, including altered temperature, precipitation, and wind patterns. These changes can produce extreme weather events and shift what we know as “normal” weather for this area. In recent years, the County has had record heatwaves, severe drought, dangerous wildfires, rare cold snaps, and major hurricanes. These types of extreme events are how we experience global climate change at a local level.

What is the CAP based on?

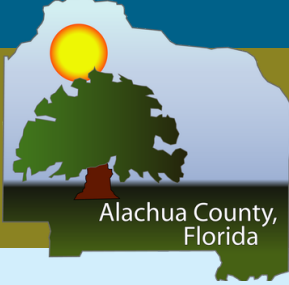
In 2024, the County completed a climate vulnerability assessment that evaluated the impacts of climate-induced threats to residents, infrastructure, natural resources, and the local economy. It identified extreme heat, heavy rainfall, and sea level rise as the primary climate threats driving outcomes of hotter days and nights, more wildfires, increased flooding, longer and more severe droughts, and influx of climate migrants to Alachua County from southern and coastal Florida communities. These outcomes, in turn, drive adverse impacts to human health, food supply, economic well-being, and natural resources.

The CAP helps strengthen our capacity to survive and thrive in a changed climate. It includes 8 topical areas, 39 goals, 54 strategies, and 184 action items that reflect opportunities for Alachua County to become more resilient, creating pathways to a safer, healthier, and more prosperous community.

This summary provides highlights to help residents understand the overall goals of the plan.

Agriculture & Food Security	Energy Security & Efficiency	Flood Management & Infrastructure	Heat & Health	Land Use & Transportation	Natural Resources & Conservation	Waste Management & Resource Recovery	Water & Aquifer Protection
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Chapter 1: Agriculture & Food Security



Why this matters

The food system includes everyone involved in growing, transporting, and consuming food. For this system to work well and withstand shocks over time, it depends on a careful balance of three factors: food must be affordable, farmers must earn enough to stay in business, and the weather must be predictable. Extreme events, like freezes that destroy crops, heatwaves that endanger outdoor workers, and hurricanes that halt food deliveries, disrupt this balance.

What's happening here?

Periods of drought, extreme heat, and flooding are expected to intensify and occur more often in our region, all of which can disrupt food production and supply chains. Addressing these problems can be costly to farmers, not only in terms of money but also in time, labor, and limited farm resources. Alachua County's CAP aims to support local farmers with resiliency strategies that also promote broad community access to affordable, healthy food.

The CAP prioritizes three approaches for a stronger future of agriculture:

Protect farmland

Strengthen local food markets

Support climate-smart farming practices

What does the CAP include?

The main strategies to improve the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of the local food system include:

- **Protecting farmland using conservation easements and targeted land strategies**
- **Growing the agricultural workforce and supporting entrepreneurship programs**
- **Strengthening connections between local farmers and consumers**
- **Supporting climate-smart farming that improves soil health, conserves water, and protects water quality**
- **Expanding on-farm use of organic waste compost as fertilizer**

Program Highlight

Alachua County participates in the American Farm Trust Land Transfer Navigator Program, which trains staff to assist farmers and ranchers in transferring their lands to the next generation and keeping the land in agriculture through conservation easements.

How can residents contribute?

Support the local food economy

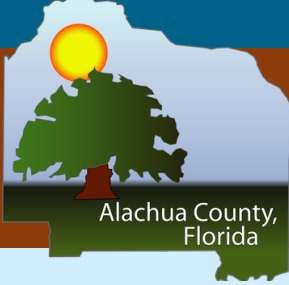
- Buy from local farmers and markets
- Dine at businesses that source locally

Reduce food waste

- Compost food waste at home and reduce excess waste

Give time and resources to help improve food security

- Volunteer at a local food bank or community kitchen to help neighbors access foods



Chapter 2: Energy Security & Efficiency



Why this matters

Energy-related emissions are the largest contributor to global climate change. They come from utilities and electricity generation, transportation, industry, agriculture, and commercial and residential buildings. Renewable energy sources (like rooftop solar) not only reduce emissions but are also an increasingly cost-competitive and reliable alternative to support our community's energy needs. Using energy wisely also saves money and makes our power system more secure during extreme weather events.

What's happening here?

Many Alachua County residents struggle to pay their utility bills, and this is made worse by extreme heat and cold snaps. When energy is used more efficiently, people can live more comfortably in their homes, save money, and be more financially secure.

Countywide, the best opportunities to reduce both energy emissions and cost burdens are: investing in renewable energy, and improving the efficiency of our homes, buildings, and transportation systems.

The CAP prioritizes three approaches for a more resilient energy future:

Expand energy efficiency and conservation

Invest in renewables and electrification

Build climate-resilient energy infrastructure

What does the CAP include?

Guiding strategies to reduce energy demand and improve energy security include:

- **Increasing solar panel installations on County buildings**
- **Improving home energy efficiency in energy-burdened communities**
- **Building a 100% hybrid and electric County vehicle fleet**
- **Expanding local electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure**
- **Making the energy system more resilient to extreme weather**

Program Highlight

Developed in partnership with the Community Weatherization Coalition and Rebuilding Together, the Alachua County Energy Efficiency Program funds up to \$15,000 per unit for energy-efficiency improvements to low-income rental properties.

How can residents contribute?

Save energy and money at home

- Get a free home "tune-up" from the Community Weatherization Coalition
- Set thermostats to 78° in the summer and 68° in the winter

When it's time to replace...

- Choose energy-efficient appliances and electronics
- Upgrade to clean, high-efficiency heating and cooling systems like electric heat pumps

Invest in renewables and clean energy

- Consider options like rooftop solar or community solar programs
- Choose a hybrid or electric vehicle as your next car or truck



Chapter 3: Flood Management & Infrastructure



Why this matters

Hurricanes, tropical storms, and severe thunderstorms are becoming more intense. At the same time, more development, buildings, and paved surfaces reduce the land’s ability to absorb and infiltrate rainfall while aging drainage systems are strained by increased stormwater runoff.

What’s happening here?

Neighborhoods near creeks and low-lying roads will experience more frequent and intense flooding, putting homes, roads, and utilities at risk. Stormwater runoff can pollute local waterways, damage cultural resources, and overwhelm infrastructure, increasing repair and recovery costs for communities. Flood control projects, while critical, can disrupt natural water flow and harm wildlife habitats.

The CAP prioritizes three approaches for greater flood resilience:

Improve infrastructure and floodplain management

Promote low-impact development

Communicate flood risks

What does the CAP include?

In addition to the County’s active floodplain management program, building codes, and ongoing infrastructure upgrades, key flood-resiliency strategies in the CAP include:

- **Improving stormwater and flood infrastructure**
- **Developing an Alachua County Watershed Masterplan**
- **Reducing risk by adopting smart rules for building near flood-prone areas**
- **Promoting low-impact development practices that capture and infiltrate rainfall on site**
- **Improving and expanding information (models, maps, accessible data, and alerts) for communicating flood risks**

Program Highlight

Sweetwater Wetlands Park in Gainesville is a constructed wetland that functions as a natural filtration system for stormwater runoff before it enters Paynes Prairie, while also providing green space, wildlife habitat, and a valuable recreational amenity.

How can residents contribute?

Sign up for text alerts

- AlachuaCountyReady.com and Alert Alachua send severe weather alerts to keep you informed

Protect your property

- Consider purchasing flood insurance for properties that are vulnerable to future flooding

Manage runoff at home

- Direct roof downspouts to a rain barrel, landscape beds, or the yard (away from paved driveways and sidewalks)
- Install a rain garden to capture and infiltrate stormwater on-site



Chapter 4: Heat & Health



Why this matters

Nationally, heat is the leading cause of weather-related deaths. Humidity on top of heat makes it even harder for the body to cool itself, amplifying the risk of heat-related illness. Warmer conditions also allow mosquitoes and ticks to expand their ranges, spreading vector-borne diseases.

Heat-related climate changes can also heighten anxiety, aggression, and other mental health disorders. Our physical and mental states are interconnected, so these adverse outcomes driven by climate change feed one another and compound human health impacts over time.

What's happening here?

Built-up areas with few trees, limited green space, and lots of buildings and paved surfaces hold more heat than natural areas. This “urban heat island” effect is why cities experience even higher temperatures than less developed rural areas. Infants, older adults, and people without adequate cooling and hydration are at greatest risk from heat-related illness. Younger generations are especially vulnerable to climate anxiety — fear and stress about climate impacts — but people of all ages can benefit from learning to cope with these added pressures.

The CAP focuses on three approaches for protecting human health in a warmer world:

Increasing awareness of heat risks

Preventing the spread of vector-borne diseases

Expanding mental health resources

What does the CAP include?

The County monitors vector-borne diseases through its Department of Health and provides mental health support through its Crisis Center. Strategies prioritized in the plan include:

- **Increasing heat safety awareness**
- **Expanding cooling centers countywide and sharing clear information on how to access them**
- **Preventing vector-borne diseases with education, monitoring, and school health training**
- **Boosting County services for climate-related mental-health impacts**

Program Highlight

The Alachua County Crisis Center won the 2025 National Association of Counties Achievement Award for the work of their >100 volunteers. They offer 24-hour telephone crisis and counseling services, including support for climate-induced stress.

How can residents contribute?

Educate yourself on heat safety

- Know the signs of heat exhaustion and stroke
- Locate cooling centers near you by searching “Alachua County Extreme Heat”

Prevent the spread of disease vectors

- Drain standing water to reduce mosquitoes from multiplying around your home

Ask for help

- Contact the Alachua County Crisis Center at (352)-264-6789
- Find peer support by connecting with local climate organizations such as Climate Café



Chapter 5: Land Use & Transportation



Why this matters

Humans have altered around three-quarters of Earth's land surface within the last 1,000 years. Converting land for human use damages its ability to store carbon in soil and trees, infiltrate rainwater to replenish the aquifer, and support plant and animal life. Urban development and associated transportation demands can create urban sprawl, which increases vehicle congestion, fuel use, and emissions. Expansive paved surfaces in urban areas trap heat and increase stormwater runoff, contributing to hotter temperatures, greater flood risk, and poorer downstream water quality.

What's happening here?

As Alachua County's population grows, we need more homes and transportation options to support people's needs. Sprawling development patterns beyond urban centers can lead to loss of farmland and forests, longer commutes, and more dependence on automobiles, generating more emissions. In contrast, compact, mixed-use neighborhoods and multi-modal transportation options can lower infrastructure costs and fuel expenses, protect natural resources and wildlife habitats, and improve human health.

The CAP prioritizes two approaches to improve land use and transportation resiliency:

Promote low-impact development with mixed uses and higher densities

Increase options and infrastructure for walking, biking, and bus rapid transit

What does the CAP include?

Building on strong sustainable development and transportation elements in the Comprehensive Plan, Alachua County aims to reduce land use and transportation impacts from urban development and private vehicles by:

- **Encouraging compact, mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods**
- **Supporting diverse and accessible biking, walking, and public transit options**
- **Planning safe routes for cyclists and pedestrians**
- **Protecting farmland, critical ecosystems and natural areas from urban sprawl**

Program Highlight

Alachua County's 2040 Mobility Plan ensures new development helps pay for transportation projects that improve sidewalks, bike lanes, transit access, and safer streets.

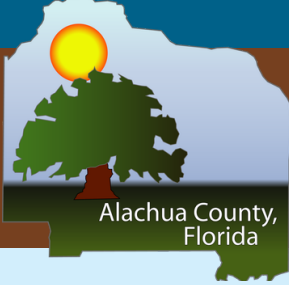
How can residents contribute?

Stay engaged

- Attend local planning meetings to shape the way the County and its cities and towns develop to protect the natural resources that are important to you

Use low-impact transportation

- Choose biking, walking, e-biking, or traveling by bus when and where possible



Chapter 6: Natural Resources & Conservation



Why this matters

Just like people, natural areas and ecosystems face increasing challenges to surviving and thriving in a changing climate. Rising temperatures, more intense rainfall events, and extended periods of drought can destroy and degrade natural resources and the benefits they provide, such as shade, flood protection, wildlife habitat, and carbon storage. Urban development pressure and poor land management practices can compound and accelerate adverse impacts to humans, including hotter days and nights and increased wildfire, flooding, and public health risks.

What's happening here?

Alachua County's springs, forests, wetlands, and prairies are treasured natural resources that support our local economy, air quality, water quality, and community health. Population growth and associated land development, habitat loss, invasive species, and pollution pose the greatest threats to these natural resources. As weather intensifies and wildfires become more frequent, plant and animal biodiversity — a key indicator of ecosystem resilience — is lost while infrastructure and human populations are also threatened.

The CAP focuses on two approaches for enhancing natural resource resiliency:

Protect and restore natural areas, trees, and landscapes

Improve capacity of lands to withstand and buffer human risks from climate impacts

What does the CAP include?

Alachua County has a strong history of natural resource protection and is already conserving ecologically significant land and waters countywide, but there is more to protect. In addition to continuing to support existing programs, priority natural resource strategies include:

- **Protecting 30% of County land and freshwater by 2030 and 50% by 2050**
- **Developing an integrated Community/Urban Forest Management Plan**
- **Expanding the number of trees and biodiversity of tree canopy**
- **Encouraging landscaping that enhances soil health, saves water, and supports native wildlife and pollinator species**

Program Highlight

Alachua County Forever, the County's land conservation program, has protected over 36,000 acres of land since its founding in 2000, generating economic benefits while protecting water quality and reducing wildfire and flood risks.

How can residents contribute?

Join conservation efforts

- Participate in tree planting and clean-up events
- Volunteer for local environmental programs or apply to serve on a County or City advisory committee

Create habitat at home

- Diversify your yard and reduce input needs with native plantings
- Create drought-tolerant landscapes that invite and support wildlife and pollinators



Chapter 7: Waste Management & Resource Recovery



Why this matters

Municipal solid waste, and especially food waste, is a large source of greenhouse gases. Methane and carbon dioxide are emitted from landfills as organic material decomposes. Daily truck traffic that collects, hauls, and delivers solid waste for screening and landfill disposal also generates vehicular emissions. As population and resource demands grow, waste streams will continue to grow as well, increasing disposal costs and harmful emissions. Rather than going to waste, organic material can be diverted for beneficial uses like composting.

What's happening here?

Without waste diversion, reuse, and composting infrastructure investments, more solid municipal and food waste will continue to be sent to the New River Regional Landfill 35 miles north of Gainesville. A key objective to minimize waste and maximize resource recovery is to shift from this linear process to a "circular economy": a system in which fewer raw materials are consumed for production of goods, and more goods remain in use through recycling and repair.

The CAP prioritizes two approaches for sustainable waste management:

Reduce waste generation at the source in homes and businesses

Expand diversion and resource recovery programs and infrastructure

What does the CAP include?

Alachua County is working toward developing a circular economy by expanding recycling, composting, and reuse programs. It is also investing in local composting businesses and encouraging waste reduction through education and outreach. Future strategies include:

- **Setting a goal to reduce solid waste countywide**
- **Supporting local businesses that repair, reuse, or recycle materials**
- **Expanding composting and recycling options across the county for both residents and businesses**

Program Highlight

The Alachua County Zero Waste Grant supports innovation and development of waste reduction programs. Second-round grant recipients include Lost and Found GNV LLC, O-Town Compost, Inc. and The Repurpose Project, Inc.

How can residents contribute?

Reduce waste on the front-end

- Reduce consumption of single-use plastics
- Buy products made from recycled materials

Dispose of waste properly

- Compost food scraps and yard waste at home
- Drop off food scraps and organics at a local compost center like UF Compost Cooperative, a County Rural Collection Center, or community garden
- Follow proper recycling guidelines

Shop secondhand

- Buy pre-owned thrift or consignment clothing and household goods



Chapter 8: Water & Aquifer Protection



Why this matters

Land conversion and climate change have disrupted patterns of how water cycles through Earth systems. A warmer atmosphere leads to higher evaporation rates, which can drive increased intensity and frequency of rain events. Periods of extreme heat and drought will also be more common and last longer. At the same time, coastal impacts of climate change (like sea-level rise) are causing more Floridians to migrate to Alachua County, increasing water supply demands. Given our dependence on groundwater to meet these freshwater needs, water quality protection and conservation strategies are vital.

What's happening here?

These broader changes to our local climate and community will lead to increased irrigation of agricultural crops and home landscapes, more fertilizer use, greater water demand, and fluctuations in groundwater levels. Collectively, these activities deplete water supplies and degrade water quality. Adaptation projects and water quality restoration projects are much more costly than practicing conservation and protecting water resources on the front end.

The CAP focuses on two approaches for water resource protection:

Protect the health of our waterways by reducing pollution

Preserve freshwater supply by reducing groundwater pumping

What does the CAP include?

The County's Water Quality Code and Landscape Irrigation Design Standards are a strong foundation for reducing pollution and protecting water supply. CAP strategies that build on this foundation include:

- **Helping more water soak back into the aquifer**
- **Setting water-saving standards for new development**
- **Expanding and improving water-quality monitoring**
- **Encouraging landscapes that need minimal irrigation, fertilizer, pesticide, and herbicide inputs**

Program Highlight

The County's water programs combine outreach, incentives, and regulation to help residents connect individual behaviors with protection of our shared lakes, creeks, rivers, and aquifer. More than a tagline, "My Yard, Our Water" drives meaningful change.

How can residents contribute?

Minimize landscape irrigation

- Replace turfgrass with native plants and less "thirsty" groundcovers
- Operate irrigation systems only as needed

Reduce personal pollution

- Skip herbicides and fertilizers, embrace wildflowers and native "weeds"

Minimize household use:

- Replace water-wasting fixtures with low-flow showerheads and toilets
- If you face a financial barrier to making these upgrades, visit the Community Weatherization Coalition at communityweatherization.org



Cover Image: "Great Egret Preening" by Shyla Brunson
Back Page Image: "Hummingbird in Flight" by Vivienne West
Artwork submitted to the 2026 "Saving My Alachua" Environmental Art Contest

Published June 2026