

good use of it.

**PUBLISHER'S NOTE:** This article was written by Edward Jones for use by Edward Jones Financial Advisor - Sheila K. Smith, 25349 W. Newberry Road, in Newberry. Phone 352-472-2776.

## Florida Forest Service now accepting applications for Longleaf Pine Private Incentive Program

Published June 24, 2019 t 10:09 p.m.

**GAINESVILLE** -- Today (monday, June 24), the Florida Forest Service announced that applications are now being accepted for the Longleaf Pine Private Landowner Incentive Program. Applications will be accepted through Friday, Aug. 2.

The primary objective of the Longleaf Pine Private Landowner Incentive Program is to increase the acreage of healthy longleaf pine forests in Florida by assisting eligible, non-industrial private forest landowners with the long-term investment necessary to establish and maintain the valuable longleaf pine ecosystem.

"We are excited to expand the program this year to include all counties within the historical range of longleaf pine, providing assistance to more landowners across the state," said Jim Karels, State Forester and Director of the Florida Forest Service.

Longleaf pine forests are native to the southeastern United States and are among the most diverse ecosystems in North America. Longleaf pines provide high-quality wood products and are valued for their resistance to damage by insects, disease, wildfire and storms. Due to urbanization and conversion to other land uses, longleaf pine forests have been dramatically reduced and now cover less than four percent of their historical range. Florida is home to more than 2 million acres of longleaf pine ecosystems, which represents more than half of all current longleaf pine forests.

The Longleaf Pine Incentive Program offers incentive payments for the completion of timber stand improvement, invasive species control, prescribed burning, planting longleaf pine, establishing native plant understory and mechanical underbrush treatments. Private lands in the 58 Florida counties north of Lake Okeechobee are eligible. To learn more and access an application, visit [FloridaForestService.com](http://FloridaForestService.com) or contact your local Florida Forest Service county forester.

The Longleaf Pine Private Landowner Incentive Program is supported through a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation with funding from the Southern Company, USDA Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, Natural Resources Conservation Service, US Department of Defense, Halliburton Company and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Florida Forest Service, a division of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, manages more than 1 million acres of state forests and provides forest management assistance on more than 17 million acres of private and community forests. The Florida Forest Service is also responsible for protecting homes, forestland and natural resources from the devastating effects of wildfire on more than 26 million acres. Learn more at [FloridaForestService.com](http://FloridaForestService.com).

## Strong job gains in May help offset slight rise in unemployment rate

By Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC

Communications Manager

CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion

Published June 21, 2019 at 3:09 p.m.

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Across the state, with a handful of exceptions, the jobless rate nudged up ever-so-slightly in May, including in the CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion region where the unemployment rate was 3.9 percent – 0.2 percentage point higher over the month but 0.3 percentage point lower than the region's year ago rate of 4.2 percent.

According to the preliminary employment data released today by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, there were 7,900 unemployed in the region, 450 more than the previous month and 595 fewer than in May 2018.

The region's labor force in May was 204,096 – an increase of 2,705 over the month and 3,009 more than the same time last year. There were 196,196 employed in the region in May, up 2,555 over the month and 3,604 more than in May 2018.

"We certainly saw some increase in unemployment percentages, but most important is that the employment numbers and labor force have grown," said Rusty Skinner, CEO of CareerSource CLM. "It's encouraging to see more people coming into the labor force and see that they're getting jobs, just not at the same rate of unemployment. Still, it's a very good picture of a much stronger workforce."

Skinner added that the relatively low jobless numbers and increase in the number of those employed is a "very good sign when you factor in the seasonality" of college students returning to the area looking for summer jobs as well as education support personnel and teachers, off for the summer and seeking to supplement their income.

Levy County continued to hold the lowest unemployment rate at 3.6 percent, up 0.2 percentage point over the month; followed by Marion County at 3.7 percent, also up 0.2 percentage point; and Citrus County at 4.6 percent, up 0.3 percent point over the month.

Florida's not seasonally adjusted rate – a rate that matches how the region's numbers are measured – was 3.1 percent, up 0.2 percentage point over the month and 0.3 percentage point lower than May 2018.

Here's how the employment numbers looked for each county in the region:

- Citrus County's labor force expanded by 888 to 48,601, the number of employed increased by 739 to 46,379 and the number of unemployed rose by 149 to 2,222. Over the year, when the jobless rate was 4.9 percent, the labor force grew by 473, the number of employed rose by 598 and the number of unemployed dropped by 125.

- Levy County's labor force increased by 123 to 17,032, the number of those with jobs rose by 94 to 16,424 and the number of jobless was up by 29 to 608. That's virtually unchanged compared to May 2018, when the unemployment rate was 3.5 percent, with an increase of six in the labor force, one more employed and five fewer unemployed.

- Marion County's labor force grew by 1,694 to 138,463, the number of those with jobs rose by 1,422 to 133,393 and the number of unemployed increased by 272 to 5,070. Over the year, when the jobless rate was 4.1 percent, the labor force has expanded by 2,530, the number of employed has increased by 3,005 and the number of unemployed has dropped by 475.

Among Florida's 67 counties, the jobless rate rose over the month in 58, fell in three and remained the same in six. Citrus County returned to the highest rate, tied with Gulf, Hardee and Sumter counties; behind Gulf and Sumter counties; Marion County climbed one spot to hold the 12th highest rate, tied again with Glades County; and Levy County tied with Bay, Flagler, Indian River and Madison counties with the 14th highest rate. The lowest unemployment rate in the state was Monroe County at 2.1 percent.

The Homosassa Springs metropolitan statistical area, which includes all of Citrus County, tied with The Villages for the highest rate among Florida's 24 metropolitan statistical areas, while the Ocala MSA, which covers all of Marion County, tied with Panama City metro to hold the fourth highest rate.

Nonfarm employment for the Ocala MSA was 107,600, an increase of 3,500 jobs (+3.4 percent) over the year.

The Ocala MSA had the fastest annual job growth rate compared to all metro areas in education and health services at 5.8 percent (+1,100 new jobs for a total of 20,000 jobs). The metro area also had the third fastest annual job growth rate in government at 2.0 percent (+300 new jobs for a total of 15,200).

The following industries also grew faster in the metro area than statewide over the year: mining, logging and construction at 7.8 percent (+600 new jobs for a total of 8,300 jobs); manufacturing at 4.7 percent (+400 jobs for a total of 8,900); professional and business services at 4.3 percent (+400 new jobs for a total of 9,800); other services at 3.4 percent (+100 jobs for a total of 3,000); and trade, transportation and utilities at 1.7 percent (+400 new jobs for a total of 24,400).

The leisure and hospitality industry grew by 2.3 percent adding 300 new jobs for a



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