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\$300,000 Economic Development Administration (EDA) Disaster Supplemental Grant Aims to Support Growth of Aviation Industry in Polk and Highlands Counties

BARTOW, FL (September 4, 2018) – Aviation and aerospace industry development in Polk and Highlands counties recently received a boost when the Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC) was awarded a \$300,000 U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) Disaster Supplemental Grant.

The impact from Hurricane Irma on Polk and Highlands counties added to challenges faced due to the region's lack of economic diversification and low wages and highlighted the need to bring in more resilient and higher wage jobs. "Aviation was identified as an emerging industry in the most recent five-year regional economic development plan for Highlands and Polk County and so this grant opportunity from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) is coming to us at the perfect time. It will allow us to foster the growth of the aviation industry, diversifying the economy and providing stable long-term job growth" stated Executive Director of the CFRPC, Pat Steed.

Highlands County Development Services Director, Benjamin Dunn stated, "This grant is an excellent opportunity to continue Highlands County's efforts to diversify our economy and enhance job possibilities in the aviation sector. This work will support other grants we are developing in partnership with the CFRPC which will provide strategic economic vision as we look to the future."

The CFRPC will use the grant funds to develop an Aviation Action Plan that will support the growth of the aviation industry in Polk and Highlands counties through the identification of the region's assets and opportunities and build on those assets while creating a collaborative network to support the growth of the aviation industry. Guiding the plan will be an Aviation Task Force, including local and regional partners in aviation, economic development, and education.

President of the Winter Haven Economic Development Council, Bruce Lyon, sees great potential in focusing on the emerging aviation and aerospace industries in Polk and Highlands communities. "With the right strategic planning and cooperative relationships between airports, economic development organizations, and private industry, we look forward to a plan that will facilitate economic resiliency in the region and provide more stable, high wage jobs."

For more information, contact the Central Florida Regional Planning Council at 863-534-7130.

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The Central Florida Regional Planning Council's (CFRPC) primary mission is to provide support to the citizens and local governments of our region and to seek ways to improve the quality of life of the citizens of the Heartland through technical assistance to local governments, transportation planning, emergency preparedness and economic development coordination in DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands, Okeechobee, and Polk Counties. For more information, go to www.cfrpc.org.