

# Mississippi Gulf Coast Communities of Concern

Environmental Justice  
and Title VI analysis for  
transportation planning



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## **METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

The Gulf Regional Planning Commission (GRPC) serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organizations for the Gulfport-Biloxi, MS and the Pascagoula-Gautier, MS urbanized areas guiding transportation decision-making for the Mississippi Gulf Coast by performing tasks necessary to develop the region's federally required transportation plans and maintain its certification, ensuring that the region is eligible to receive federal transportation dollars.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations must provide a plan for identifying Communities of Concern using the guidance in Title VI and Executive Order 12898.

■ Title VI, which states that “no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance,” and

■ Executive Order 12898, “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations,” which amplifies the requirements of Title VI and states that federal agencies must identify and address “disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects...of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations.”

Communities of Concern are geographic areas of analysis that MPOs construct to identify populations that (1) are more likely to face negative consequences from infrastructure development and/or (2) are less likely to have equitable access to transportation services. According to suggested guidance from the US Department of Transportation, the process for identifying and addressing environmental justice communities across MPOs includes the following steps:

1. creating a demographic profile of low-income residents and people of color
2. documenting the level of community engagement
3. conducting the analysis and subsequent mapping
4. determining disproportionate/adverse impact on low-income residents and people of color
5. if those impacts are present, demonstrating how suggested plans, programs, and projects can mitigate them

## **DATA SOURCES**

### **Census 2020**

The 2020 Census National Redistricting Data Summary File contains summary statistics on population and housing subjects. Population counts for the total population and for the population 18 years and over are presented by race and by Hispanic or Latino origin, and for the total group quarters population by major group quarters type. The product includes one housing table showing occupancy status (occupied, vacant).

## EJScreen

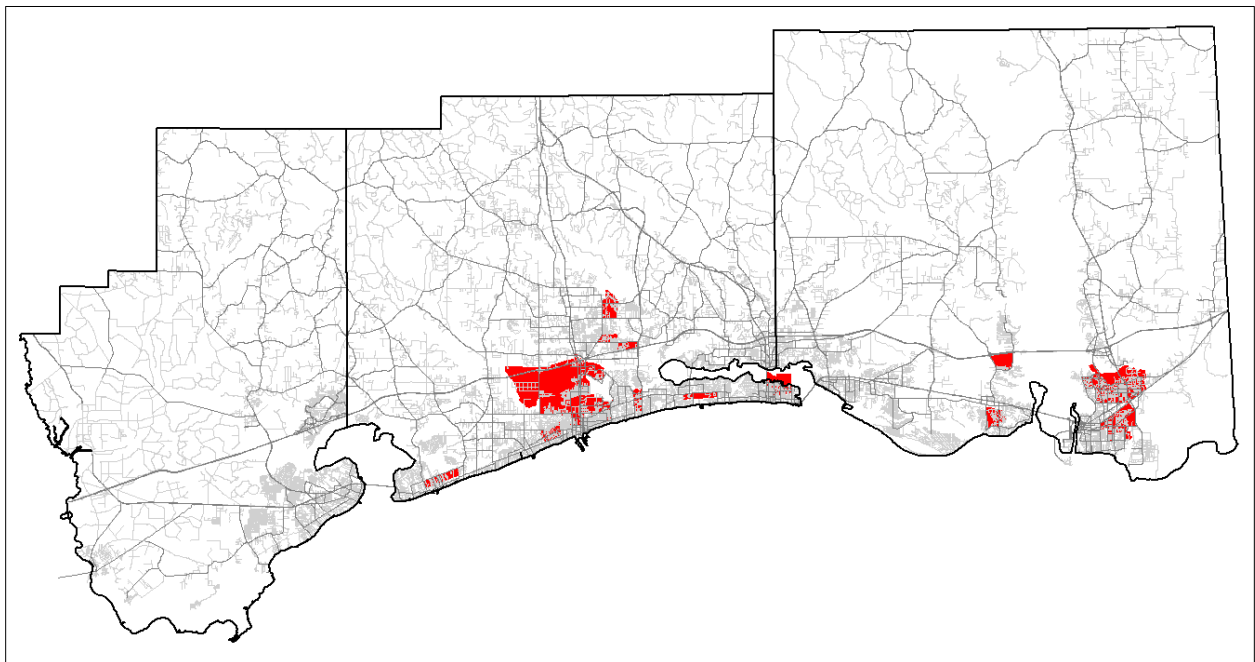
EJScreen is EPA’s environmental justice (EJ) screening and mapping tool that utilizes standard and nationally-consistent data to highlight places that may have higher environmental burdens and vulnerable populations. The tool offers EJ and supplemental indexes by combining environmental and socioeconomic indicators, using Census block groups as the basic geographic unit. The tool also provides a variety of powerful data and mapping capabilities that enable users to access environmental and demographic information across the entire country, at high geographic resolution, displayed in color coded maps and standard data reports. The socioeconomic data source is U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates (ACS 2021).

## COMMUNITIES OF CONCERN

### Minority (Census 2020)

This analysis was performed using 2020 Census “P1 Race” (Total Population) data. To arrive at the percentage of minorities in each Census Block Group GRPC used the following formula:  
*P0010001 Total Population – P0010003 White alone / P0010001 Total Population \*100.*

The average minority percentage for Gulf Coast Census Block Groups is 35%. Using this threshold, too many block groups were identified. GRPC made the decision to raise the threshold to 65% to focus on the highest areas of minorities.

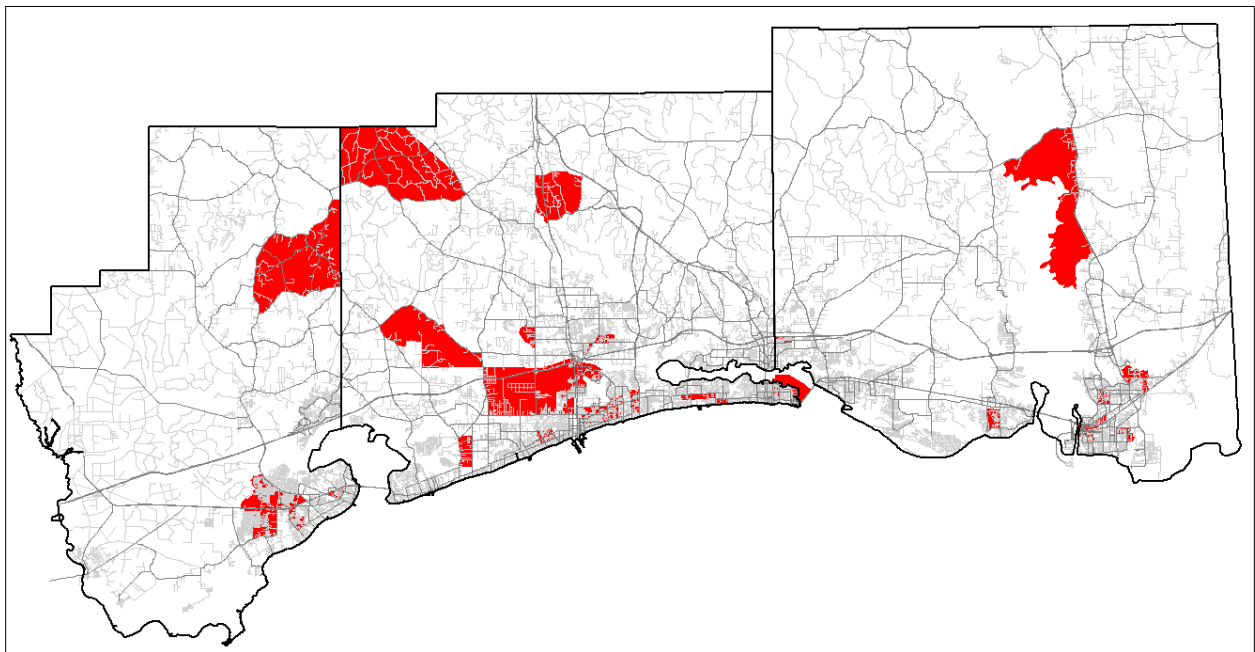


### Low-income (EJ Screen)

Low-income is defined as a household whose income is less than or equal to twice the poverty level. For example, a household of four with a reported \$40,000 total annual income is lower than twice the poverty threshold of \$52,992 (\$26,496 is the poverty threshold defined by the U.S. Census Bureau for 2020). This household will fall into the category of “low income” in EJScreen. The poverty level is updated by the U.S. Census Bureau annually and varies by family size and composition. The poverty level is a national number and the same across all geographic regions. To accommodate differences in the varying costs of living across the United States and other factors, EJScreen uses twice the poverty level to capture low income households especially in high cost areas. The rationale for using twice the poverty threshold rather than just the poverty threshold includes the following considerations:

- The effects of income on baseline health and probably on other aspects of susceptibility are not limited to those below the poverty thresholds.
- Many studies in various fields use 2x poverty.
- When using twice the poverty threshold, the number or percent low income happens to roughly equal the number or percent people of color in the United States.

The average low-income household percentage for Gulf Coast Census Block Groups is 37%. Using this threshold, too many block groups were identified. GRPC made the decision to raise the threshold to 65% to focus on the highest areas of poverty.

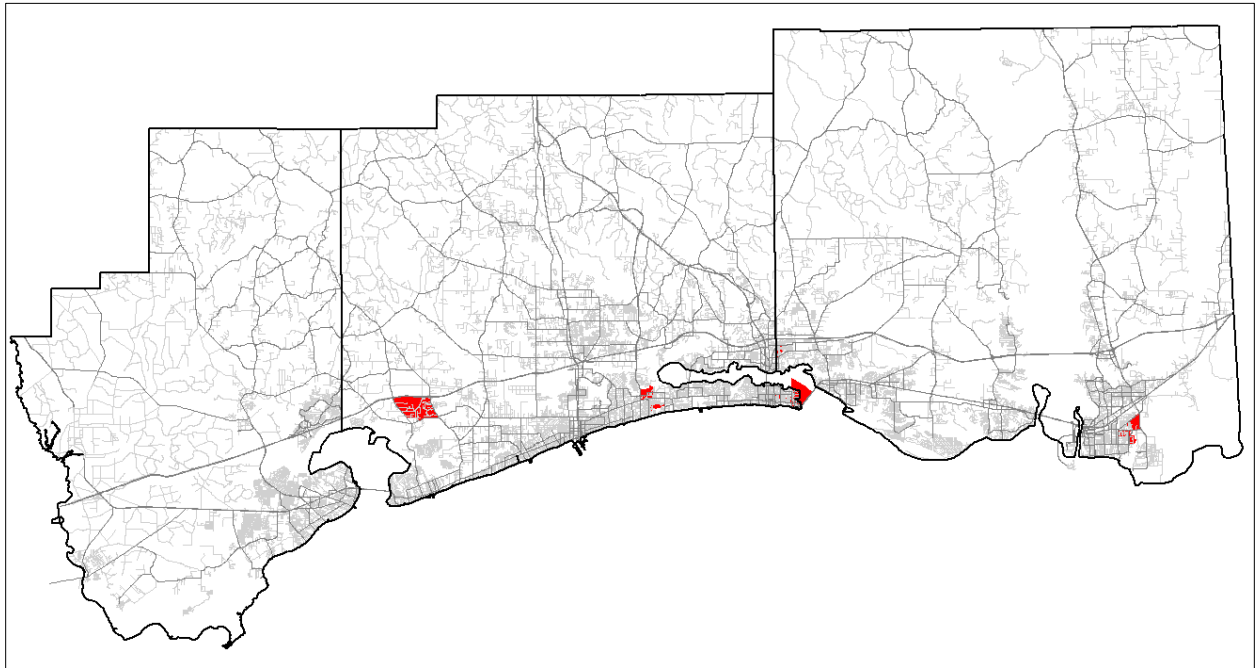


*Census Block Groups with 65% or more of households that are low income.*

### Limited English Speaking Household (EJ Screen)

A limited English speaking household is defined as a household in which no one age 14 and over speaks only English, or speaks a non-English language and speaks English “very well” as reported in the U.S. Census Bureau’s ACS. The percent of limited English speaking households is used instead of the actual number of limited English speaking households because percentages account for possible differences among population sizes and make block groups comparable.

The average percentage of limited English households for Gulf Coast Census Block Groups is .15%.



*Census Block Groups with .15% or more of households that are limited English speaking.*