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## Florida's economy projected to have a slower recovery

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BRADENTON — Florida's economy is still far from recovery, according to a new state forecast.

The Florida Legislature's Office of Economic and Demographic Research projects unemployment will not improve until the fourth quarter of 2010.

The research office released a new forecast this month to revise projections after the state's unemployment level surpassed previous expectations released in a March forecast.

Previously, the state's unemployment rate was expected to peak at 10.2 percent in the second quarter of 2010 before declining. Florida reached a 10.2 percent jobless rate in May, and increased to 10.3 percent in June.

According to the new forecast, Florida's unemployment will hit 11 percent in the second quarter of 2010 before declining in the fourth quarter of 2010.

The new projection is well above the national unemployment rate of 9.5 percent, and well below Manatee County's 11.8 percent unemployment rate.

"Florida's economy is going to lag the recovery at the national level," said Stan Geberer, an associate at Fishkind & Associates, an economic and financial consulting firm based in Orlando.

The Federal Reserve projects unemployment will be 10 percent or higher by the end of this year before sign of improvement.

"At the national level, there seems to be an emerging consensus that we're sort of near the bottom, and by the end of the year the national economy may see some growth," Geberer said. "But because we're very dependent on growth and growth related to components such as home building, unemployment could continue to rise in Florida through the middle part of 2010."

Construction will rebound the slowest of all industries, according to the Office of Economic and Demographic Research.

The industry is not expected to see job gains until the first quarter of 2011, and job losses are expected to peak this quarter at 11.3 percent.

Alan Anderson, executive vice president of the Manatee Sarasota Home Builders Association, said employment's rebound in construction all depends on how quickly housing inventory can move off the market.

"It's going to be a direct relation to how much inventory we have," Anderson said. "I think as soon as that inventory gets down in what everybody would consider normal range then we're going to have a normal new home market, and with that will come jobs."

Home sales in Manatee County have seen some positive signs.

The Manatee Association of Realtors reported single-family home sales totaled 305 in June, an 8.9 percent increase from May.

In addition, there are 5,448 single-family homes on the market in Manatee County, compared to 7,075 a year ago, according to MLS listings.

"We're seeing some positive signs," Anderson said. "A lot of our members are hanging on, doing what they have to do to keep their doors open and stay afloat, and get in a good position for when the market does come back."

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