

FLORIDA'S SPACE COAST IS WELL-POSITIONED TO DOMINATE THE FUTURE OF THE AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

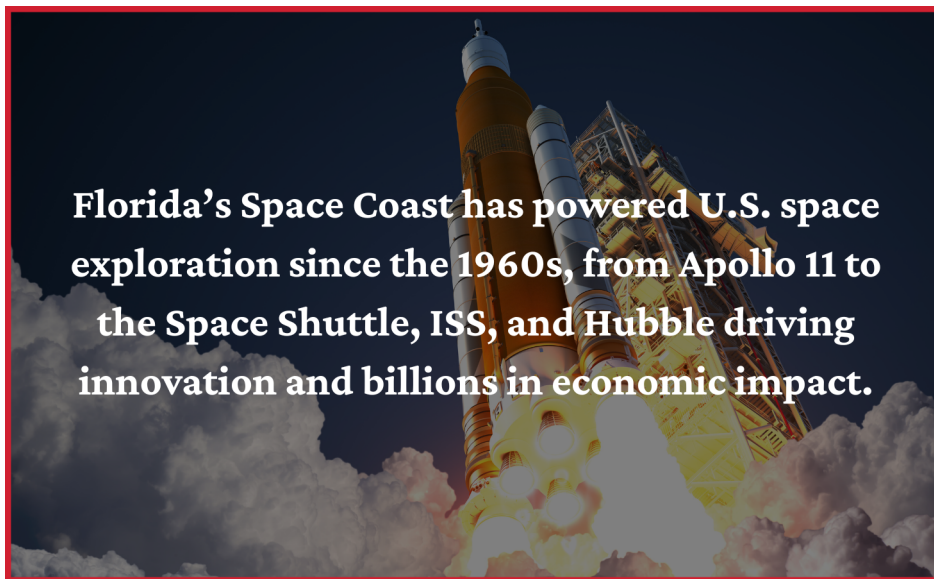
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INTRODUCTION

More than 60 years ago, in 1962, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) established a new space launch center in Cape Canaveral, Florida. Previously used as a missile testing center, it was 'reborn' as the Kennedy Space Center (KSC). KSC is known for being at the heart of NASA's operations, acting not just as a launch center but also as a center for innovation and discovery in the space industry.

Adjacent to KSC is the military base known as the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station (CCSFS). Both of these launch sites make part of the east coast of Florida a national landmark and a premier gateway to space. This region of Florida's east coast is called the Space Coast. The Space Coast has led to increased tourism in the state, increased job opportunities (especially in the high-tech manufacturing industry), higher Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and economic output for Florida. A large portion of this economic gain can be attributed to the partnership between KSC and CCSFS – jointly referred to as the Cape Canaveral Space Port.



Florida's Space Coast has powered U.S. space exploration since the 1960s, from Apollo 11 to the Space Shuttle, ISS, and Hubble driving innovation and billions in economic impact.

HISTORY OF THE SPACE COAST

The Space Coast established itself as an integral part of the country's achievements in the space race in the 1960s. While preparing for the lunar mission, Florida was a leader in the Project Mercury, Project Gemini, and Project Apollo missions. In 1969 Apollo 11 launched from the Kennedy Space Center and successfully put the first man on the moon, making the Space Coast the launch capital of the world. By the end of the 1960s, the Apollo program completed two successful manned lunar landings from the Space Coast.¹

In the 1970s, though innovation did not stop, the Space Coast experienced layoffs as manned launch missions lessened and the focus shifted to technology innovation and planetary science. New developments led to the Space Shuttle program in the 1980s. Space shuttles throughout the 1980s and 1990s were used to carry satellites to space, service them, and conduct scientific research in space. Both the KSC and CCSFS together launched dozens of space shuttles, helping fulfill the goal of an International Space Station (ISS) as well as NASA's first great observatory, the Hubble Space Telescope.²

Pushing boundaries in space exploration, literally and figuratively, the Space Coast became a hub for visitors and businesses in Florida. The infusion of NASA spending into the local and state economy generated an overall economic impact of more than \$4.1 billion in 2008, translating into 40,802 jobs, \$2.1 billion in household income, and \$103 million in state and local taxes.³ While advancement in the space industry was a boost to Florida's economy, investments in the NASA programs became too much to sustain, leading then-President Bush to halt shuttle launches in 2010.

The economic decline continued with then-President Obama's decision to shelve the Constellation Program, a human spaceflight program which designed to develop spacecraft and booster vehicles to replace the space shuttle and send astronauts to the International Space Station, the Moon, and possibly to Mars. The impact of these decisions was devastating to Florida. Florida's Space Coast experienced a loss of 10,000 jobs, and after the great recession this number tripled to 30,000 lost jobs and an unemployment rate of 12 percent in the region.⁴

1 NASA, "The 1960: From Dream to Reality in 10 Years," retrieved from <https://www.nasa.gov/history/the-1960s-from-dream-to-reality-in-10-years/>, accessed on October 2, 2025.

2 NASA, "The 1990s: International Flair and Understanding the Solar System," retrieved from <https://www.nasa.gov/history/the-1990s-international-flair-and-understanding-the-solar-system/>, accessed on October 2, 2025.

3 NASA, "Economic Impact of NASA In Florida FY 2008," released 2009.

4 Florida TaxWatch, "One Giant Leap: The Economic Rebound of the Space Coast," retrieved from <https://floridataxwatch.org/Research/Blog/one-giant-leap-the-economic-rebound-of-the-space-coast>, accessed on October 1, 2025.

RELAUNCHING FLORIDA'S SPACE COAST

As the Space Shuttle program ended and the economy slowed, the board and leadership at Space Florida⁵ implemented a new strategy aimed at reviving the state's aerospace industry and reducing dependence on large federal aerospace programs. Space Florida set out to diversify Florida's aerospace industry and build the depth of its industry supply chain across a number of technology and manufacturing areas. Under Space Florida's leadership, the Space Coast transitioned from a government complex to a vibrant commercial, market-driven enterprise that could also support federal government missions.⁶

Space Florida opened the door to new ideas and a broader experience in the aerospace industry of Florida, making it easier to launch new aerospace ventures. The key to Space Florida's success has been its ability to bring to bear private sector capital needed to acquire, modernize, and re-purpose aged and underutilized federal assets and infrastructure. An era of new investments and innovation started due to the work of Space Florida.

A 2019 Florida TaxWatch economic commentary titled "*The Economic Impact of a Rebounded and Revitalized Space Program on Florida's Space Coast*," describes the impact of private companies on Florida's Space Coast. Companies like SpaceX and Blue Origin began revitalizing historic launchpads on the Space Coast to develop and launch commercial spacecrafts. Startups like Firefly and Relativity closed deals to refurbish the launchpads and research facilities.⁷ Private defense companies like Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and Northrup Grumman also partnered to continue private, commercial space travel.

From 2010 to 2017, a total of 49 new private projects with a capital investment of 1.68 billion were completed, creating around 8,700 new jobs in the region. The following year, from 2018 to 2019, 37 new space-related companies created nearly 7,640 jobs on the Space Coast.⁸ In the same time period (2010 to 2018), the city of Titusville – located across the river from the Space Port, experienced a tax base increase of \$400 million.

The residents of Florida's Space Coast experienced an economic rebound in 2020, with a successful astronaut mission by SpaceX. A SpaceX capsule carrying two NASA astronauts successfully splashed down in the Gulf of Mexico (now Gulf of America), concluding a historic mission of returning astronauts to the ISS.⁹ An additional achievement for KSC, this mission also represented the first successful crew flight by private space companies aiming to transform space travel into a cost-efficient, commercial alternative.

The impact of Florida's Space Coast has continued to increase in the 2020s. Florida's aerospace economic impact averaged \$172 million annually from 2007 to 2011, \$487 million from 2012 to 2016, and \$520 million from 2017 to 2022.¹⁰ Notable large-scale projects started in 2020 were the SpaceX Dragon capsule – planning to send a manned spacecraft to Mars by the end of the decade, and Blue Origin – selected to advance NASA's Artemis program to return astronauts to the moon by 2024.¹¹ This past decade has revitalized KSC and the CCSFS in terms of amalgamating space exploration and U.S. defense.

KSC reported 790,000 visitors spending a total of 39.1 million in 2021. It had a direct economic impact of \$2.9 billion in sales on Florida's economy.¹² Space Florida, the state's aerospace economic development agency, reported \$5.5 billion in capital investment among its 150 ongoing projects in 2022. The Cape Canaveral Space Port logged more than 55 launches and 1.2 million pounds of payload to orbit.¹³

5 Formed in 2006 by combining three existing space entities — Florida Space Authority, Florida Space Research Institute, and Florida Aerospace Finance Corporation — into a single organization, Space Florida is the state's aerospace and spaceport development authority.

6 Frank DiBello, "Space Florida – Gateway to an Interstellar Future," ROOM Space Journal, Issue #1 (23), 2020.

7 Florida TaxWatch, "The Economic Impact of a Rebounded and Revitalized Space Program on Florida's Space Coast," September 2020.

8 Space Florida, "Space Florida's 2018 and 2019 Annual Reports" retrieved from <https://www.spaceflorida.gov/about/annual-reports/>, accessed on October 10, 2025.

9 BBC News, "NASA SpaceX crew return: Dragon Capsule Splashes Down," retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-53621102>, accessed on October 10, 2025.

10 Space Florida, "\$5.9 Billion Economic Impact on Florida's Economy," retrieved from <https://www.spaceflorida.gov/news/space-florida-5-9-billion-economic-impact-on-floridas-economy>, accessed on October 23, 2025.

11 Supra, see footnote 7.

12 NASA, "Kennedy Space Center – Economic Impact Scorecard FY 2021," March 2022.

13 Space Florida, "Leading in Space Commerce and the Future Lunar Economy," <https://www.spaceflorida.gov/news/press-release-space-florida-leading-in-space-commerce-and-the-future-lunar-economy>, accessed on October 23, 2025.

In 2024, the private data company Lonestar Data Holding partnered with Space Florida and successfully stored and transmitted sample data to and from Intuitive Machine's Nova-C Lunar Lander, marking a significant advancement in space-based data solutions.¹⁴ The Space Port dominated in 2024 with a record-breaking 90 launches, transporting 2.6 million pounds to space – leading America in the global space-earth economy. KSC and CCSFS together closed out 2024 with 187 ongoing projects valued at \$6.8 billion.¹⁵

2025 AND BEYOND

Standout ongoing projects from Florida's Space Coast include Amazon Kuiper – aiming to deploy a constellation of low Earth orbit satellites to provide high-speed internet access globally from space; Intuitive Machines Lunar Missions – aiming to deliver scientific and commercial payloads to the moon; and Sierra Space's Dream Chaser – aiming to be used in resupply missions to ISS with the ability to land on a conventional runway, a unique addition to space transportation.

Florida also plans to strengthen its position as a key player in the aerospace industry with the establishment of critical military and space operations within the state. The U.S. Space Force has established its permanent Space Training and Readiness Command (STARCOM) headquarters at Patrick Space Force Base in Florida. This facility will house 350 personnel, including 69 officers, 49 enlisted members, and 132 civilians.¹⁶ These new projects yet again prove that Florida's Space Coast is unmatched in its potential for the growing space economy.

NASA alone has an economic impact of \$8.2 billion in economic output from its agencywide operations in Florida. It supports more than 35,000 jobs and bring in more than \$286 million in state tax revenue.¹⁷ As of April 2025, the first full-scale satellite launch from Amazon's project

Kuiper was successful.¹⁸ In the most recent, in October 2025, Space Coast hosted its 89th orbital launch of the year – on track to beat last year's record of 90 launches.¹⁹

According to Space Florida, the Space Coast must prepare to support transporting 5,000 metric tons of cargo annually to space by 2035.²⁰ The opportunity for public and private infrastructure development in the space economy in Florida is constantly growing. The Florida legislature recognizes this and passed two bills in the 2025 legislative session to support infrastructure improvements and developments that will prompt growth in the space industry in Florida:²¹

- Senate Bill (SB) 1516 creates the International Aerospace Innovation Fund, which will provide further grants that Space Florida will disseminate and must include at least one aerospace company or organization based in Florida and consist of a partnership that involves at least one of the following: an international aerospace company; a university, space agency; or research institute; and
- SB 1662 will enable the provision of state grant money for spaceports and other space industry-related planning or construction of facilities on seaport property that are necessary or useful for advancing the space industry in the state and provide an economic benefit to the state.

Both statutes took effect on July 1, 2025.

To conclude, Florida's legacy in the space industry, ongoing innovations, and capital investments solidify its position as a leader in the space industry. Florida has made the investments in its spaceport system to well-position the Space Coast to dominate the future of the aerospace industry as NASA and other countries plan for the next era of space activity.

14 SRT, "Florida's Launchpad: The Rise of the Space Industry in Florida," retrieved from <https://spaceresourcetech.com/blogs/articles/florida-s-launchpad-the-rise-of-the-space-industry-in-florida?srsId=AfmBOopUw8PlsXstY4V5omaPrd8mrVBzSoWEdc71kBq4hZcMy2DZChR>, accessed on October 22, 2025.

15 Space Florida, "From Earth to Orbit: Florida Setting the Standard for Aerospace Commerce in 2024 and the Future," retrieved from <https://www.spaceflorida.gov/news/from-earth-to-orbit-florida-setting-the-standard-for-aerospace-commerce-in-2024-and-the-future>, accessed on October 23, 2025.

16 Supra, see footnote 14.

17 NASA, "State Economic Impact – Florida," October 2024.

18 Space Florida, "First Full-Scale Launch for Amazon's Project Kuiper," retrieved from <https://www.spaceflorida.gov/news/space-florida-first-full-scale-launch-for-amazons-project-kuiper>, accessed on October 23, 2025.

19 Richard Tribou, "SpaceX Launches Space Coast's 89th Mission of the Year," retrieved from <https://phys.org/news/2025-10-spacex-space-coast-89th-mission.html>, accessed on October 29, 2025.

20 Supra, see footnote 15.

21 Holland and Knight, "Spaceports in Florida: New Federal and State Provisions Will Create Development Opportunities," retrieved from <https://www.hklaw.com/en/insights/publications/2025/07/spaceports-in-florida-new-federal-and-state-provisions-will-create#:~:text=Aerospace%20Innovation%20Fund,Partnerships,of%20or%20potential%20for%20commercialization>, accessed on October 29, 2025.

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