

C Social and Economic Setting

1 Forest Zone of Influence

The Forest zone of influence, established early in the planning process (1981), is considered to be Grant and Harney Counties. Some respondents to the DEIS suggested that the Forest's zone of influence should be expanded to include adjacent counties (e.g., Baker, Umatilla, Wallowa, etc.) After evaluating the criteria which were used to determine the zone of influence, Grant and Harney Counties are still considered appropriate and the Forest's zone of influence will not be changed in this Final Environmental Impact Statement. In future planning efforts, the zone of influence will be re-evaluated and revised, if necessary, to reflect any changes in long-term, socioeconomic patterns.

The Forest's zone of influence is an area of magnificent scenery, remote, small communities, and a rural, western lifestyle found in few parts of the country today. Located in the Blue Mountains of eastern Oregon, Grant and northern Harney Counties cover an area of over 6,500 square miles, and are approximately 5 hours by car from Portland, Oregon, and 3 hours from Boise, Idaho, the two nearest metropolitan areas (Patterson, 1981).

Population of the area under consideration is about 15,000. The largest towns are Burns, John Day, Hines, and Prairie City with 1980 populations of 3,579, 2,012, 1,632, and 1,106, respectively. Other communities in the area are hamlets of several hundred or fewer people, and these are separated from each other by rather large distances. The nearest interstate highway, railroad passenger service, and airport with scheduled air service are over 2 hours away. The nearest scheduled bus service is located in Burns and Baker, each about 2 hours from John Day.

Over 60 percent of Grant County's population lives in the John Day Valley, within a 15-mile radius of John Day. This is the area where several major lumber mills are located and is considered to be the trade center for the county. Similarly, over 60 percent of Harney County's population resides in a 10-mile radius around the county's largest community, Burns.

Population growth has been generally slow but steady. Severe fluctuations have occurred in the past, and very recently. These fluctuations often parallel the health and viability of the national timber market. Population projections for the area indicate a future growth rate averaging less than 2 percent per year.

The economy is heavily resource-based, with logging and ranching as the principal sustaining industries. Federal, State, and local governments are also major employers in the area. More than half the area under consideration is publicly owned, and the majority of that is National Forest. Thus, the Malheur National Forest's resource use and management decisions can have a major effect on the economic welfare of the area.

a Communities and Lifestyles

There are 11 incorporated communities within the zone of influence in Grant and Harney counties. The largest of these are Burns (3,579) and John Day (2,012).

Institutions and establishments normally associated with small, western, ranching and logging communities are in evidence. Most towns have a post office, cafe, bar, grocery store, service station, equipment dealership, elementary school, and several churches. Many have several of the above establishments.

Each town's post office, grocery store, cafe, or bar (or a combination of the above) serves as not only a dispensary of mail, food, and drink, but also as a social center and meeting place for citizens in the area.

Several larger communities have, in addition to the already-mentioned establishments, such specialized institutions as police stations, government offices, high schools, libraries, museums, nursing homes, professional offices, motels, and a variety of other business establishments. But since the largest town has only about 3,500 people, there are few urban amenities.

Community structure in most towns in the area—especially the smaller ones—is generally cohesive, traditional, conservative, family-oriented, and based on primary groups. Usually each community is small enough that most residents know each other. Informal social control is strong, and law enforcement is minimal and needed infrequently. Community life often approximates that of a folk culture, with face-to-face contacts and personal interaction the dominant way of conducting personal and business transactions. Different occupational and socioeconomic groups exist and their members interact, especially in larger communities.

The number of people belonging to racial and cultural minorities in the two counties is small. The major exception to the predominantly Caucasian population is the tribe of Harney Valley Northern Paiute Indians living on a reservation north of Burns, and also in the community of Burns. These people are descendants of Native Americans who lived in the region for centuries and who traditionally hunted, gathered food, created tools, and lived in much of the Forest area.

While fewer of the local Pautes continue these practices than they did in the past, such activities are symbolic of their heritage and are of considerable importance to them.

Other tribes (Middle Oregon, Walla-Walla, Umatilla, and Cayuse Tribes) located along the Columbia River and in Central Oregon also used portions of the Forest. Their interests remain similar to those described for the Paiute Tribe.

Since the mid-1850's there have been various treaties, executive orders, statutes, court decisions, and commission adjudications granting certain rights and privileges to American Indian citizens. These rights include such things as hunting, fishing, and gathering roots and berries. A summary of these significant actions directly or indirectly associated with reservations, and treaty rights and privileges, is contained in Appendix H.

The American Indian Religious Freedom Act ensures that the right to practice traditional religions and gain access to religious sites will not be infringed upon. It does not convey exclusive use nor does it grant free use of Forest products. Protection of these rights and management of the Forest remain a concern to the Forest Service and the various tribes.

As members of local communities and area residents, these people share the same interests in, concerns about, and ties to the Forest as other local residents.

b. Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values

Residents of the area retain many social values characteristic of the early American West. These values include an affinity for the outdoors, independence, and freedom from control and regulation. These deep-rooted values were forged during an era of abundance and unrestricted use of natural resources. Values and economic history of the area have a strong bearing on local attitudes toward use and management of the public lands and natural resources.

At times, the Forest Service may be seen as a relative newcomer to the area, interfering with past practices, promoting change, and brandishing the power of the Federal Government. At other times, the National Forests are seen as great assets to the area.

Many newcomers to the area share the values held by native residents. This is reinforced by the employment opportunities that are generally limited to occupations in agricultural and timber industries. Newcomers with professional occupations, and others not moving

to the area for employment in these industries, value the small-town, rural lifestyles and values present here

Others, "nontraditional immigrants," generally reject the commodity-production philosophy toward use of the Forest's resources held by the local majority. They tend to value these resources primarily for what they provide in nonconsumptive attributes, rather than in terms of consumptive goods

As the local majority and power structure, the native residents tend to stress the concept that Forest activities should be primarily influenced by the needs and desires of the local majority. The opposing view holds that management of the Forest should be more responsive to national needs and values. These views tend to reflect influence centers with which each group is familiar and successful.

Local disagreements about practices and resource management stemming from deeply held beliefs and values will continue in the future. How disruptive those disagreements will be depends on the advocates' ability to find a common ground for agreement, compromise, and mutual understanding.

All points of view are represented by local residents and there is more commonality than is often perceived. It is just as wrong to place all native resident or members of specific occupational groups on the extreme commodity-production end of the land use scale as it is to place all "nontraditional immigrants" on the extreme preservationist end of the scale.

In general, local communities, while adjusting to change, are cohesive, sharing a common consciousness of hard work, independence, control over one's life, and an intimate relationship with the outdoors.

2 Economic Setting

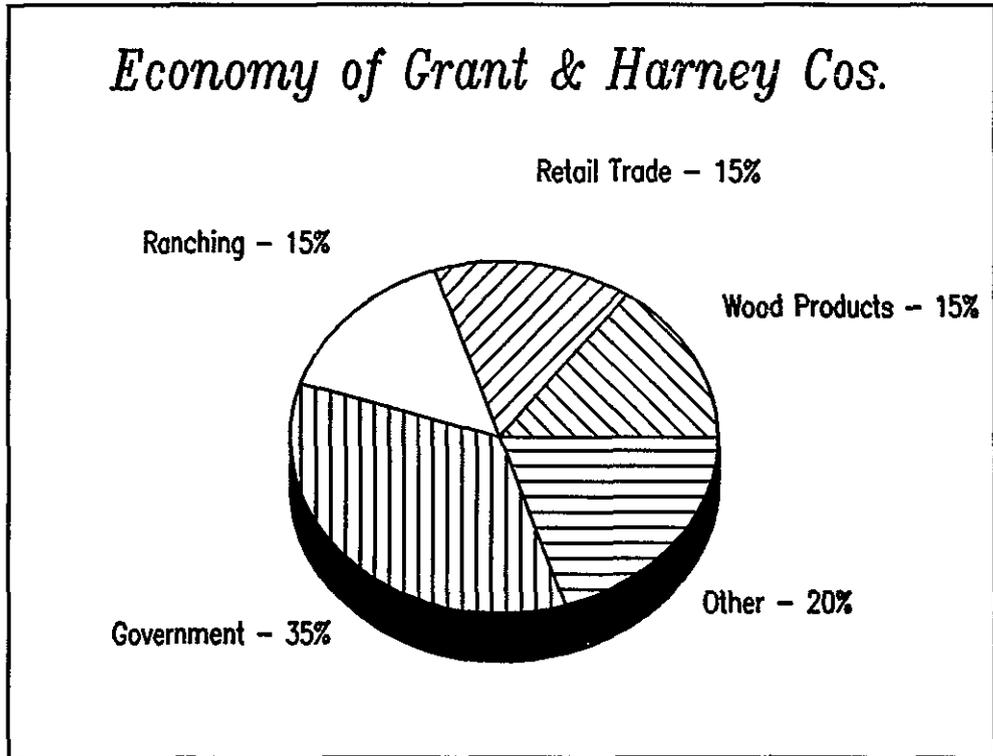
The principal private sector industries in Grant and Harney Counties are timber, livestock, and retail trade. These three sectors account for approximately 45 percent of total area employment. The other major sector of the economy is government (local, State, and Federal), accounting for 35 percent of the area's employment (see Figure III-6).

a *Timber Industry*

The lumber and wood products sector is a major contributor to the economic welfare of the area, providing about 15 to 20 percent of total area employment. Many local businesses derive a large portion of their sales from timber industry employees and their families.

The timber industry is subject to severe fluctuations in the timber market. Recent events serve to illustrate local economic hardships which can occur as a result of depressed timber markets, excess inventories, and high interest rates.

FIGURE III-6: Estimated Percent Employment, by Economic Sector, for Grant and Harney Counties



Unemployment rates in Grant and Harney Counties have been chronically high in the recent past (early 1980's), primarily due to a depressed timber market. Unemployment rates in both counties have at times been above 20 percent annually during the past 8 years. However, current monthly unemployment rates (1989) are currently much lower, at 4.2 percent (Harney County average for August 1989) and 3.5 percent (Grant County average for October 1989). This displays the abrupt changes that have occurred in the timber markets over the past several years. Current employment in timber-related jobs is virtually at a historic high level.

A major factor affecting stability of the lumber and wood products work force in the Forest's zone of influence is the level of ponderosa pine harvests. Ponderosa pine lumber is not closely tied to the housing market and does not have to compete with dimension-type lumber imported from Canada. The continued availability of ponderosa pine from the Forest is believed to be strongly tied to the continued economic viability of many local mills.

Information pertaining to local mill capacities and historical cut-and-sold volumes is presented in the Timber Demand section of this Chapter.

b. Retail Trade

The retail trade sector provides year-round employment slightly less than in the lumber and wood products (15 percent). To some extent, it is broader based than might be normally found elsewhere. No community is large enough to support a large discount chain, so many independent merchants are required to provide goods and services. Total sales and profits in this sector are highly dependent on other sectors of the local economy.

c. Livestock Industry

Livestock grazing on the Forest is a long-established use. Area ranches provide steady, year-round demand for many basic goods and services offered by local businesses.

During the past 10 years, a national trend toward fewer ranches and lower agricultural employment, in conjunction with increasing herd sizes on the remaining ranches, has occurred. But in Grant and Harney Counties, approximately one-half of all ranches have less than 200 cattle. Small operations prevalent in the zone of influence are more susceptible to downward trends in the livestock industry. Consequently, some smaller operations are being purchased by larger, more efficient operations

At the present time, the livestock-producing sector accounts for approximately 15 percent of total area employment and 10 percent of total wage and salary income.

The agricultural industry, primarily ranching, has a stabilizing influence on local communities. Effects of the ranching sector on local economies may be found more in terms of social stability and local leadership than in terms of significant economic benefits

d *Government*

The largest segment of the area's economy is government (local, State, and Federal), accounting for about 35 percent of area employment and income. Future levels of Federal government expenditures and employment are highly unpredictable, with reductions in both being a distinct possibility. Declines in the government sector could have a significant impact on the area's economy

The Malheur National Forest plays an important role in the fiscal health of Grant County. Malheur National Forest "25 Percent Fund" payments account for 35 to 40 percent of Grant County's total budget

Malheur National Forest payments to Harney County are much less significant, comprising approximately 5 percent of that County's total budget

e *External Influences*

While activities on the Forest do not directly affect daily lives of people beyond the Forest's zone of influence, they are important for various reasons. There are three major activity-oriented groups likely to be impacted by management decisions: firewood gatherers, big-game hunters, and recreationists

Certainly, these activity groups also include local residents, however, they represent the main types of activities on the Forest engaged in by people from other areas

Nonlocal firewood gatherers come principally from the Vale/Ontario (Oregon) and Nampa/Caldwell/Boise (Idaho) population centers, approximately 180 miles distant. Nonlocal hunters tend to come from the Willamette Valley in Oregon. This is particularly true of mule deer and elk hunters

Recreationists can be divided into three groups: dispersed, nonmotorized recreationists, dispersed, motorized recreationists, and wilderness advocates. Motorized recreationists tend to be local residents. The other two categories include almost half local residents and about half other-Oregon residents, with only a few visiting from southeast Washington and California and even fewer from other states

3 State and County Planning

City and county comprehensive management plans in Oregon are designed to carry out Statewide planning goals. One purpose is to incorporate the plans and programs of various governmental units into a single management tool for the planning area. The State governmental body responsible for reviewing county comprehensive plans is the Oregon Land Conservation and Development Commission

County plans recognize the National Forest as "Primary Forest," "timber grazing," or similar designations. Although counties do not have responsibility for regulating use on Federal lands, the Forest Service and county governments coordinate planning efforts

to avoid conflicts. The alternatives discussed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement are generally compatible with local governmental plans (see further discussion in Chapter IV).

Following are pertinent Statewide planning goals (paraphrased) to which county plans must adhere (Oregon, State of, 1980):

- Goal No. 1 "To provide for citizen involvement in planning "
- Goal No. 2: "To establish a planning process and policy framework."
- Goal No. 3: "To preserve agricultural lands."
- Goal No. 4: "To conserve forest lands for forest uses "
- Goal No 5: "To conserve open space and protect natural and scenic resources "
- Goal No 6: "To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, and land resources in the State "
- Goal No. 7 "To protect life and property from natural disasters and hazards "
- Goal No. 8: "To satisfy the recreational needs of the citizens of the State and visitors "
- Goal No 9. "To diversify and improve the economy of the State "
- Goal No 10: "To provide for the housing needs of citizens of the State "
- Goal No 11: "To plan and develop a timely, orderly, and efficient arrangement of public facilities and services to serve as a framework for urban and rural development."
- Goal No 12. "To provide and encourage a safe, convenient, and economic transportation system "
- Goal No. 13 "To conserve energy "
- Goal No. 14: (Not applicable to the Malheur National Forest)
- Goal No. 15: "To provide for an orderly and efficient transition from rural to urban land use "

Cooperation and coordination with State and local weed control organizations was accomplished through development of the Malheur National Forest Noxious Weed Control Plan, which the Forest Plan will adopt. The objective of the plan is to cooperate with Federal, State, and local agencies, organizations and individuals to achieve effective management of noxious weeds, including inventory, control measures, and program monitoring. The plan should place noxious weed management emphasis on those areas where cooperative efforts are underway, such as organized weed control districts. Efforts are directed to those infestations where management actions will be the most effective in preventing or reducing the spread of noxious weeds considered to be the greatest threat to economic, environmental, social, and other values. The Forest will cooperate fully with State, County, and Federal officials in implementing regulations and laws and, within budgetary constraints, to control, to the extent practical, noxious farm weeds on all National Forest System lands.