

# Chapter 11: Postscript



Photo: Heidi Huber-Stearns

*Michael R. Coughlan, Heidi Huber-Stearns, Stephanie Schneider, James Johnston*

## ***Comparing the 25- and 30-year monitoring efforts of communities in the NWFP area***

The Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) provided management guidance for 24.5 million acres across national forests and U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management (BLM) districts in Washington, Oregon, and Northern California (USDA Forest Service and DOI Bureau of Land Management, 1994). Over 1,200 communities (US Census designated places) exist within the Plan area, which spans a total area of over 58 million acres (Figure 11.1). The Departments of Agriculture and the Interior anticipated that rural, historically timber-dependent areas would face the most significant impacts from the NWFP. Consequently, the Forest Service conducted in-depth social and economic monitoring of rural, forest-based communities after 10, 25, and now 30 years of implementing the NWFP.

The USDA Forest Service Region 6 partnered with the Ecosystem Workforce Program (EWP) to conduct community case studies during the last two monitoring cycles. EWP conducted 10 case studies in 2018 (the 25-year mark, see Coughlan et al., 2025) and eight case studies in 2024 (the 30-year mark, this report) (Figure 11.1). The goal of these case studies was to assess changes in community well-being since the implementation of the NWFP and to provide local perspectives about the social and economic changes that have occurred as a result of implementing the NWFP.

The combined monitoring sample, of 18 rural communities with strong ties to nearby federal land managed under the NWFP, draws on a total of 326 interviews with community leaders, Forest Service staff, and representatives of the timber industry. Together, these case studies provide a rich representation of people's experience with social and economic changes associated with the NWFP. Our findings suggest that most of the sampled communities have struggled to reinvent themselves following employment shocks related to declines in timber supply (which were sustained under the NWFP) combined with shifts in timber-industry geography, corporate financial priorities, and automation. These trends evident in the 25-year monitoring case studies were confirmed by the 30-year case studies, despite our efforts to sample communities with higher potential for developing natural amenity-based economies.

---

Coughlan, M., Schneider, S., Huber-Stearns, H., and Johnston, J., (2025). Chapter 11, Postscript. In M. Coughlan, H. Huber-Stearns, & S. Schneider (Eds.). *The Northwest Forest Plan: 30 years of social and economic change in rural forest-placed communities (1994–2024)*. (Working Paper No. 125). Ecosystem Workforce Program, Institute for Resilient Organizations, Communities, and Environments, University of Oregon. <https://hdl.handle.net/1794/31412>



UNIVERSITY OF  
OREGON

## Key findings from the 25 and 30-year case studies

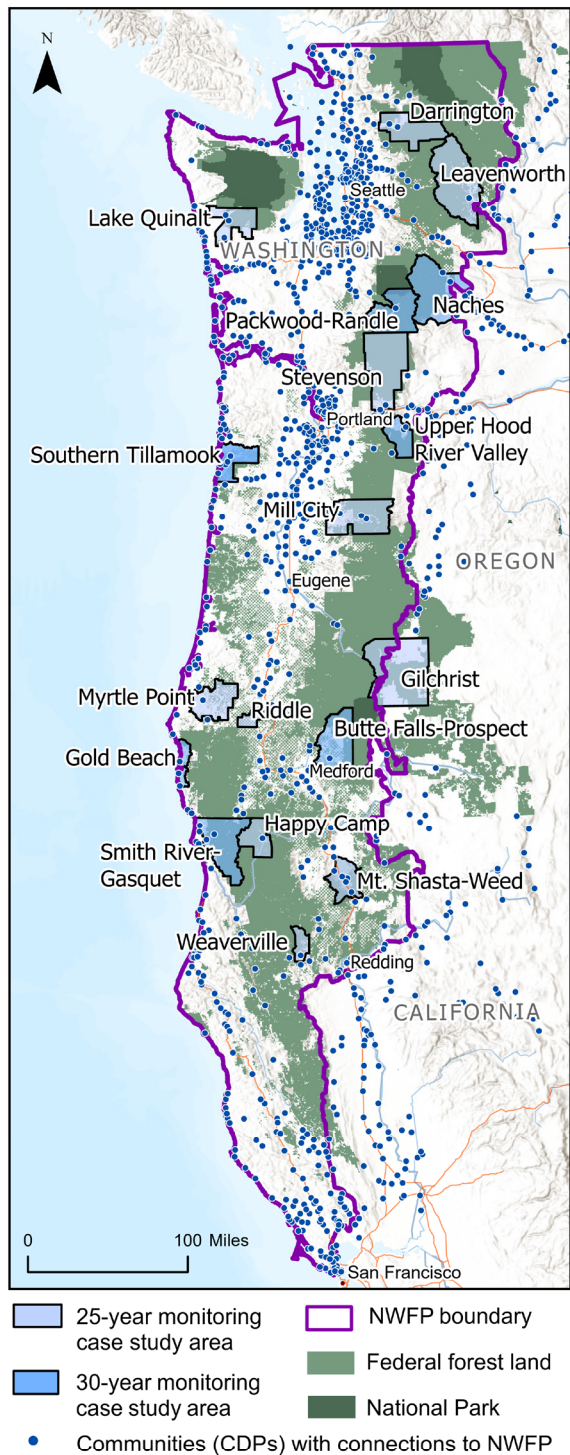


Figure 11.1. 25- and 30-year monitoring case study locations. NWFP area outlined in purple.

The 25-year monitoring classified the social and economic trajectories of case study communities into four categories: high amenity, diversified timber and recreation, natural resources dependent, and low amenity communities (Coughlan et al., 2022; Coughlan and Huber-Stearns, 2025)<sup>1</sup>. High amenity communities were those that successfully developed tourism and recreational amenity economies and continued on a trajectory of demographic and economic growth following the NWFP. Only one community fell into that category. This community had begun to reorient its economy as early as the late 1960s, shifting from timber dependence toward tourism. Diversified timber and recreational communities were those that retained woodproducts industries but also diversified their economy into other sectors, such as recreational amenities. Five communities that fell into that category. Three of those communities had suffered a decline or stagnation in their social and economic well-being, including aging demographics. However, these communities retained the potential to recover from the economic shocks they experienced in the wake of the NWFP. The other two communities in that category fared a bit better in terms of social and economic well-being because they were the seat for the county government. These county seat communities offered government employment opportunities and services that the other communities could not. Two communities fell into the natural resources dependent trajectory. Those communities experienced continued economic and demographic decline and continued to rely heavily on the wood products industry. Efforts to develop alternative industries or amenity-based economies in those communities were not yet successful. Lastly, two communities fell into the low amenity category. Those communities were isolated from metropolitan areas and major transportation corridors and experienced significant demographic decline. It seems unlikely that low amenity communities could restore former levels of social and economic well-being without significant external investments.

<sup>1</sup> High amenity = Leavenworth, Washington; diversified timber and recreation = Darrington, Washington, Stevenson, Washington, Santiam Canyon (including Mill City, Detroit, Idanha), Oregon, Gilchrist (including Crescent and Crescent Lake), Oregon, and Weaverville, California; natural resources dependent = Myrtle Creek, Oregon, Riddle, Oregon; low amenity = Lake Quinalt, Washington, Happy Camp, California.

For the 30-year monitoring, we purposively sampled formerly timber-dependent “gateway” communities that had clear potential for developing amenity-based economies. Rural, forest-based communities that develop economies based on natural or cultural amenities as alternatives to production-based economies may be more resilient to local economic shocks (Winkler et al., 2007). Consequently, we reasoned that sampling gateway communities would allow us to control for potential biases against “success stories” inherent in the 25-year monitoring that may have skewed our results toward communities with declining or stagnant social and economic well-being.

We found that the formerly timber-dependent gateway communities we selected offered a diverse set of local social and economic outcomes. Like findings in the 25-year monitoring, case study communities from the 30-year monitoring experienced extensive social and economic ups and downs related to the timber industry and forest management dynamics. These included mill closures, agency workforce reductions, and forest and ranger district consolidation, with rippling effects on local businesses and the services they provide. Some communities lost significant wood products manufacturing capacity before the adoption of the NWFP, and were already experiencing declines in social and economic well-being by the early 1990s.

Communities that had diversified economies prior to the NWFP were buffered from social and economic shocks associated with the changes in the wood products industries or other changes related to the NWFP. Economic activity associated with agriculture, tourism, and recreation proved to be significant in Naches, the Upper Hood River Valley, Southern Tillamook, and Mt. Shasta. Like the 25-year diversified timber and recreational community group, communities such as Packwood-Randle, Gold Beach, and Smith River-Gasquet were developing amenity based economic opportunities, but these industries primarily offered low-wage, low-skill service jobs that did not replace mill and forestry work.

Like most of the 25-year case study communities,



the 30-year communities faced significant challenges in terms of affordable, high-quality housing. Amenity-based economic activity across the case study communities also had indirect effects on the housing market. For example, a growing trend in which high-income outsiders purchase vacation homes or rental properties has had negative impacts on housing access for working people across the sampled communities. As evidenced in Packwood-Randle, these changes can transform the character of rural communities in ways that are not always welcomed by long-time residents. Gold Beach provides another example where the attraction of retirees to the community has shifted local demographics and had ripple effects on the community’s development priorities.

In 2020, the Santiam Canyon case study (25-year monitoring) experienced a wind-driven wildfire event. Over 1,600 structures were lost and five people were killed in the Beechie Creek and Lions Head fires (Headwaters Economics, 2020; The Oregonian, 2020). Although some interviewees from the 25-year monitoring mentioned wildfires, interviewees in the 30-year monitoring made clear that wildfire and forest management related to wildfire mitigation were of increasing concern. In many of the case study communities, recent wildfire seasons provided a catalyst for raising awareness about wildfire risk. National forests comprise a large percentage of the area burned near these communities. Future changes in forest management will need to specifically address forest resilience to wildfires and climate change more broadly to align with community priorities and concerns.

## Future NWFP management and policy

After thirty years of implementation, there have been significant changes in policy governing BLM lands in the NWFP area, but no significant adaptation of the NWFP on national forest lands.

In 2016, the BLM signed Records of Decision (RODs) for Resource Management Plans (RMPs) for western Oregon, removing the 2.5 million acres of BLM-administered lands from the NWFP. The BLM contends that the new plans will “maintain strong protections for the northern spotted owl, listed fish species, and water resources while offering predictable and sustainable outcomes for local communities from tourism, recreation, and timber harvest” (Bureau of Land Management, n.d.).

The Forest Service still operates under the NWFP. In December 2023, the Forest Service began an amendment process by publishing a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register (USDA Forest Service, 2023; OFR, 2022). The agency noted changing social and ecological conditions over the past 30 years, including climate change, increasing extent and severity of wildfire, declining forest health and habitat quality, and unrealized economic opportunities for rural communities. The agency also noted a need to amend the plan to be inclusive of Tribal concerns and perspectives since the NWFP does not currently contain any provisions explicitly considering Tribes or meeting the agency’s Tribal trust responsibilities. In September 2023 the Secretary of Agriculture established the NWFP Area Federal Advisory Committee (FAC) to “provide advice and recommendations on landscape management approaches that promote sustainability, climate change adaptations, and wildfire resilience while providing for increasing use of and demands from National Forest System lands in the Northwest Forest Plan area” (Federal Register 87 FR 69249). Between 2023 and 2024 the FAC committee developed a set of recommendations for an amendment to the NWFP, which informed the agency’s development of a draft environmental impact statement for the proposed amendment that was released in November 2024



(USDA Forest Service, 2024). The Forest Service originally intended the FAC to run for two years, but in early 2025 President Trump issued Executive Order “Commencing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy,” which directed the termination of several Federal advisory committees, including the NWFP FAC (Exec. Order No. 14,217, 2025).

The FAC recommendations represent the largest effort to date to modernize the NWFP, and adapt it to changing ecological, social, and economic conditions. The FAC included 6 recommendations for: “incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge into planning, project design, implementation, and meeting the agency’s trust responsibilities, while protecting confidentiality and preventing appropriation”, wildfire resistance and resilience, and better anticipation of climate impacts to promote forest ecosystem’s capacity to adapt to climate change. (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2024). The FAC also recommended protecting remaining moist forest old-growth forests from logging while facilitating forest restoration treatments to increase forest resilience to fire, drought, and insects in dry forest types. The FAC additionally made recommendations to “Support Carbon Sequestration and Storage, Designate and Steward Community Protection Areas, and Remove Barriers for Adaptive Management” (FAC, 2024).

In late March 2026, the Forest Service announced that based on over 3,400 public comments it received on the November 2024 draft environmental impact statement, it would be conducting additional analysis and alternatives for amending the NWFP, especially focusing on the “need for a more comprehensive approach to increase wildfire resilience, address restoration needs, and advance active management, while continuing to protect species. The agency will analyze additional options, including updates to forest type definitions, clarity on commercial timber opportunities, and refinements to Survey and Manage requirements,” (USDA Forest Service, 2026). This will be conducted under USDA National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) rules (as updated in July, 2025), anticipating updates for public comment in Summer 2026, and a final environmental impact statement and record of decision in early 2028 (USDA Forest Service, 2026).

## **Work Cited**

- Bureau of Land Management. (n.d.). Resource management plans for western Oregon. U.S. Department of the Interior. <https://www.blm.gov/programs/planning-and-nepa/near-you/oregon-washington/rmps-westernoregon>
- Coughlan, M. R., Adams, M. D., Huber-Stearns, H., Kohler, G., & Rhodeland, A. (2022). Socioeconomic trajectories of 10 rural federal forest-based communities in the American Pacific Northwest. *Society & Natural Resources*, 35(1), 38-58.
- Coughlan, M.R, Huber-Stearns, H., Adams, M.D.O, Kohler, G., and Rhodeland, A. (2025). Chapter 4: Comparative Case Study of 10 Nonmetropolitan, Forest-Based Communities in the Northwest Forest Plan Area. In Grinspoon, Elisabeth (tech. coord.). Northwest Forest Plan—The first 25 years (1994–2018): socioeconomic monitoring results (General Technical Report PNW-GTR-1019). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station. <https://doi.org/10.2737/pnw-gtr-1019>.
- Coughlan, M.R and Heidi Huber-Stearns (2025). Chapter 5: Socioeconomic Trajectories of Nonmetropolitan, Forest-Based Communities in the Northwest Forest Plan Area. In Grinspoon, Elisabeth (tech. coord.). Northwest Forest Plan—The first 25 years (1994–2018): socioeconomic monitoring results (General Technical Report PNW-GTR-1019). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station. <https://doi.org/10.2737/pnw-gtr-1019>.
- Exec. Order No. 14,217, 90 FR 10577 (2025, February 19). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/25/2025-03133/commencing-the-reduction-of-the-federal-bureaucracy>
- Federal Advisory Committee (FAC). (2024). Northwest Forest Plan Amendment: Federal Advisory Committee Recommendations to the U.S. Forest Service. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/media/30640>
- Headwaters Economics. (2020). Structures Destroyed by Wildfires. Headwaters Economics. <https://headwaterseconomics.org/natural-hazards/structures-destroyed-by-wildfire/>
- Office of the Federal Register (OFR). (2022, November 18). Federal Register, 87(222). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/11/18/2022-25184/the-northwest-forest-plan-area-advisory-committee>
- National Environmental Policy Act (Interim final rule; request for public comment), 90 FR 29632. (2025, July 3). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/07/03/2025-12326/national-environmental-policy-act>
- The Oregonian. (2020, November 12). Oregon wildfire deaths: Lives lost in historic 2020 fires. OregonLive. <https://www.oregonlive.com/news/2020/09/oregon-wildfire-deaths-list-of-lives-lost-in-historic-2020-fires.html>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. (2023, December 18). Region 5 and Region 6; California, Oregon, and Washington; forest plan amendment for planning and management of Northwest forests within the range of the northern spotted owl (Federal Register Document No. 2023-27742). Federal Register, 88(241). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/12/18/2023-27742/region-5-and-region-6-california-oregon-and-washington-forest-plan-amendment-for-planning-and>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2024, November 15). Northwest Forest Plan Amendment. Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Forest Service, Portland, OR.
- USDA Forest Service (2024, November). Northwest Forest Plan amendment: Draft environmental impact statement (Vol. 1 Chapters 1-5). <https://usfs-public.app.box.com/v/PinyonPublic/file/1700454836831>
- USDA Forest Service. (2026, March 30). Forest Service announces next steps and updated timeline for Northwest Forest Plan amendment. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r06/newsroom/releases/forest-service-announces-next-steps-and-updated-timeline-northwest-forest>



Photo: Heidi Huber-Stearns

Cedar Flats, Washington NWFP FAC field tour

For full report, visit:  
<https://hdl.handle.net/1794/31412>



Questions? Contact  
[mcougla@uoregon.edu](mailto:mcougla@uoregon.edu)



**EDITING AND REVIEW** | Stephanie Schneider

**FUNDING** | Funding for this monitoring provided by USDA Forest Service Region 6, agreement number 23CS11062756039

**LAYOUT/DESIGN** | Sean Hamling

We extend our thanks and appreciation to interviewees who shared their experiences with us.