

Chapter 5: Upper Hood River Valley, Oregon

Photo: Julia Sizek

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Case study facts

Population (2020): 3,276

Location: Hood River County, Oregon

Federal forest lands (74% of study area):
Mt. Hood National Forest, Hood River Ranger District

Climate:

Average Annual High: 61.1 °F/Low: 41.1 °F
Annual Precipitation: 30.4 inches;
Snowfall: 17.2 inches (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2021)

Approach

We conducted social and economic monitoring of eight rural communities (<15,000 residents) within the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) area. We used a case study approach involving analysis of qualitative interviews (Figure 5.1), literature review, and descriptive summaries of selected secondary data. All interviewees worked in, resided in, or had social or economic ties to the Upper Hood River Valley study area. Quotes in these reports are from interviews conducted in 2024. Each case study can be read as a standalone report. Chapter 1 provides a full introduction and methods including case study selection, interviewee sampling rationale, and secondary data analyses.

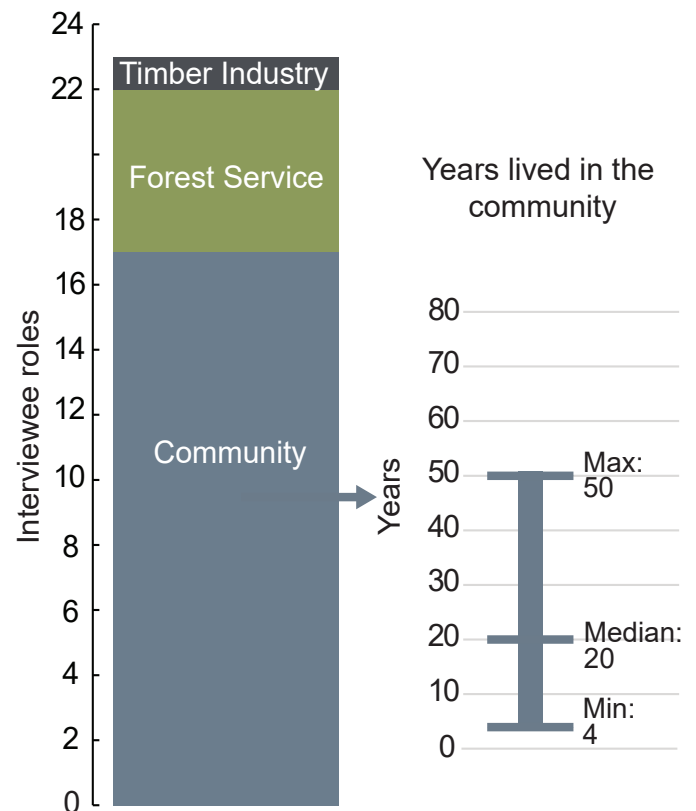


Figure 5.1. Graph of interviewees by role and number of years lived in the community. Our sample included 17 community members, five Forest Service employees, and one timber industry representative. Community interviewees lived in the study area lived in the community for a minimum of four years, a maximum of 50 years, and a median of 20 years.

Study area and geography

For the Upper Hood River Valley community case study, we focused on the Hood River Ranger District of the Mt. Hood National Forest. We defined the community spatially as the Parkdale and Dee census county divisions (CCDs) in Hood River County, Oregon (Figure 5.2). National Forest occupies 74 percent of the study area and Hood River County Forest occupies nearly 5 percent. The study area includes the unincorporated community of Dee and the census-designated places (CDP) of Mt. Hood (“Mt. Hood CDP”, 2020 population) and Parkdale (2020 population of 299) all of which are located on the north side of Mt. Hood, west of Oregon Route 35 (OR-35) along Oregon Route 281 (a secondary highway).¹

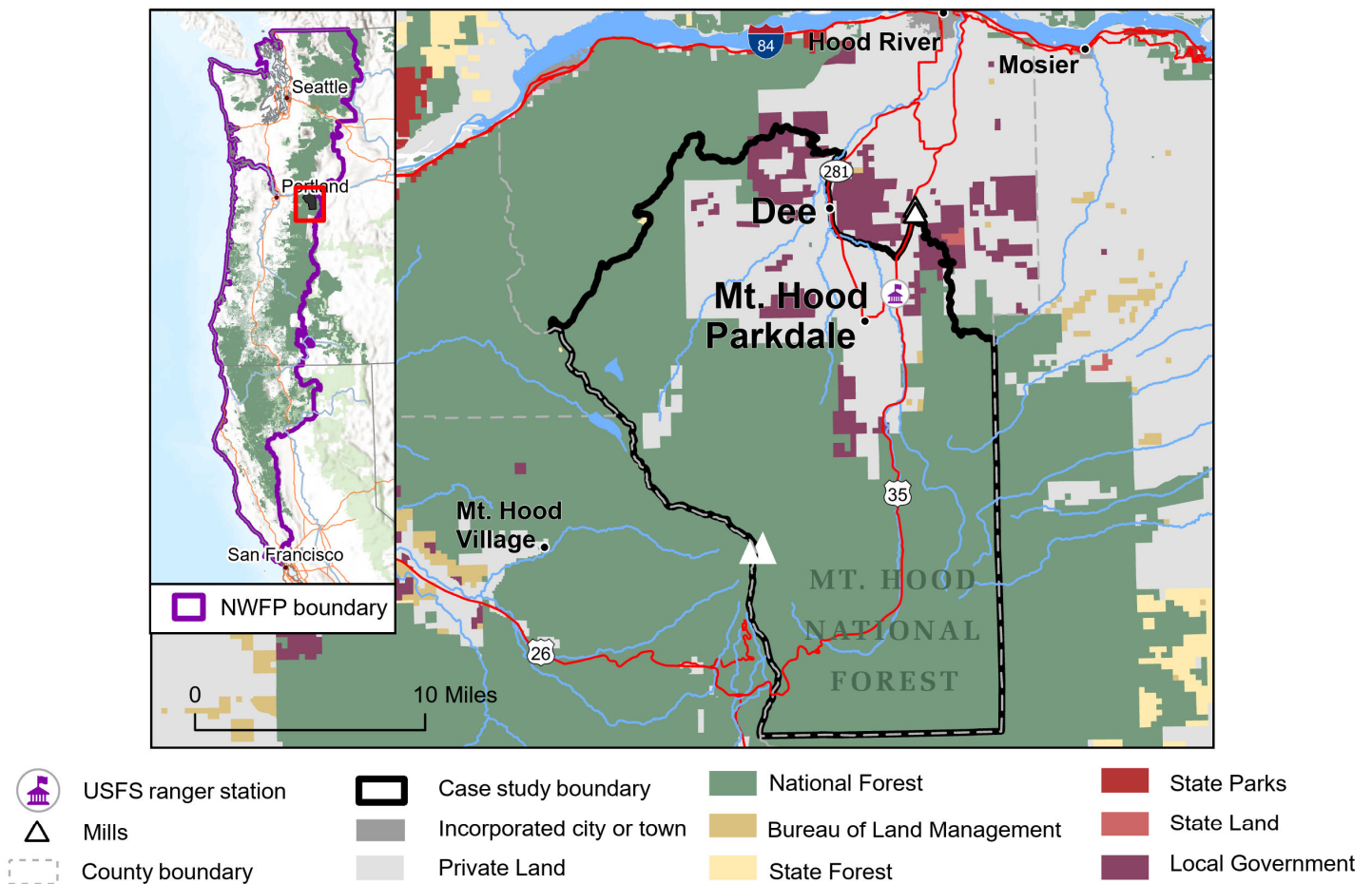


Figure 5.2. Upper Hood River Valley case study area.

The Hood River Ranger Station is located in Parkdale, just south of Mt. Hood CDP. The county seat is the City of Hood River, which is located adjacent to the Columbia River approximately sixteen miles from Parkdale and twelve miles from Dee. The Columbia River corridor also provides residents of the Upper Hood River Valley with access to US Interstate 84, which connects the area to Portland and the Portland International Airport. National forest lands make up 74 percent of the study area. Forests in this region are dominated by dry and mesic mixed conifer forests of Douglas fir, grand fir, and western hemlock at lower elevations, grading to silver fir at higher elevations.

1. Population figures from (Rynerson, 2026)

Shared sense of place

The Upper Hood River Valley is known for its fruit orchards, farm tourism, and scenic views. Interviewees described Parkdale as *“a farming community with a big recreation segment.”* Parkdale residents proudly described the town as a *“strong, vibrant community that is extremely close-knit.”* Many interviewees believed that the strong sense of community protected Parkdale from unwanted changes: *“no one’s gonna be able to walk into this town and just take over.”* However, interviewees did note that there were divisions between new amenity migrants and long-term, generational residents. As one said about local change, *“the biggest changes are just the economic disparities between...the long-term locals, and the people that are coming in.”* Others thought that new residents didn’t understand local life: *“People that come to rural communities that have no understanding of the economics of a rural community,”* and that they often imagined the appeal of a small rural farm without acknowledging the difficult financial reality of farming. Despite the strong sense of community, interviewees also characterized the community as changing. While the area has retained its agricultural feel, interviewees thought that housing and cost of living had become less affordable. One interviewee mentioned that the area had taken an *“aspect of being like Sun Valley”* complete with absentee ownership and tourism-centric businesses in the downtown area.

In contrast to Parkdale, interviewees described Dee as residential, or *“just some homes”* rather than as a community or destination. Dee was also noted among residents for historically having a substantial population of Japanese Americans tied to the agricultural industry. In 2023 American Community Survey data (US Census), this population was too small to estimate (i.e. 10 persons +/- 100 identified as “Asian”).

Interviewees often contrasted the Upper Hood River Valley with the city of Hood River, which they saw as a *“yuppie, recreational, affluent community,”* or as *“getting gentrified.”* As one interviewee put it, Interviewees thought that almost all new residents in Hood River came to the area for its recreational opportunities: *“They didn’t move here to become orchardists, they moved here because they’re [wind] foiling, they’re skiing, they’re kayaking.”* In contrast, Upper Valley residents thought that *“recreation hasn’t really impacted [them].”*

Points of interest

Mount Hood

As Oregon’s tallest mountain, Mount Hood, is an active volcano and part of the Cascade Range. The peak reaches 11,225 feet above sea level (ft asl) and forms an iconic component of Portland Oregon’s skyline. The mountain attracts as many as 10,000 climbers per year (Hale, 2023).

Mount Hood ski areas

In the 1950s, Cooper Spur Resort (located approximately 8 miles due south of Parkdale) opened as a small ski area with two rope tows and beginner skier runs (Mitchell, 2005; “Cooper Spur Ski Area Opens,” 1971; Hunt, 2019). Mt. Hood Meadows ski area opened in 1967 on the southeast side of the mountain. The resort became Oregon’s second-largest and second-most-visited ski area (Mitchell, 2005). However, the two ski resorts are day use areas, mainly attracting skiers from Portland, and are not well-known ski vacation destinations. The Timberline Lodge at 6,000 ft (asl) on the southwest portion of the mountain is a National Historic Landmark and is Mount Hood’s most well-known ski resort.



Photo: Hood River History Museum
Cooper Spur Ski Area, 1967

Mount Hood Scenic Byway

The Mount Hood Scenic Byway is a tourist loop road first constructed in 1925. From Portland, the route can be circumnavigated in one day. The route passes through Parkdale and has been important for study area's development (Mitchell, 2005) and continues to attract tourists to the area.

The litigation era and the NWFP: a summary of local impacts

In the late 1980s, conservationists began to raise public awareness of the destruction of old-growth forest habitat by logging in the Pacific Northwest. Public protests and legal actions soon focused attention on the northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*), whose habitat was threatened. During the "litigation era", beginning in 1989 with a temporary legal injunction on federal timber sales in the Pacific Northwest and culminating with the implementation of the NWFP in 1994, timber harvest decreased significantly on federal forests in northern California, western Oregon, and western Washington. This section provides a summary of direct impacts of these events on the social and economic wellbeing of the Upper Hood River Valley study area. In the sections following this summary, we situate these impacts within the study area's pre-NWFP history (including settlement and post-World War II timber industry) and on-going changes in the community's wellbeing following 30 years of the NWFP.

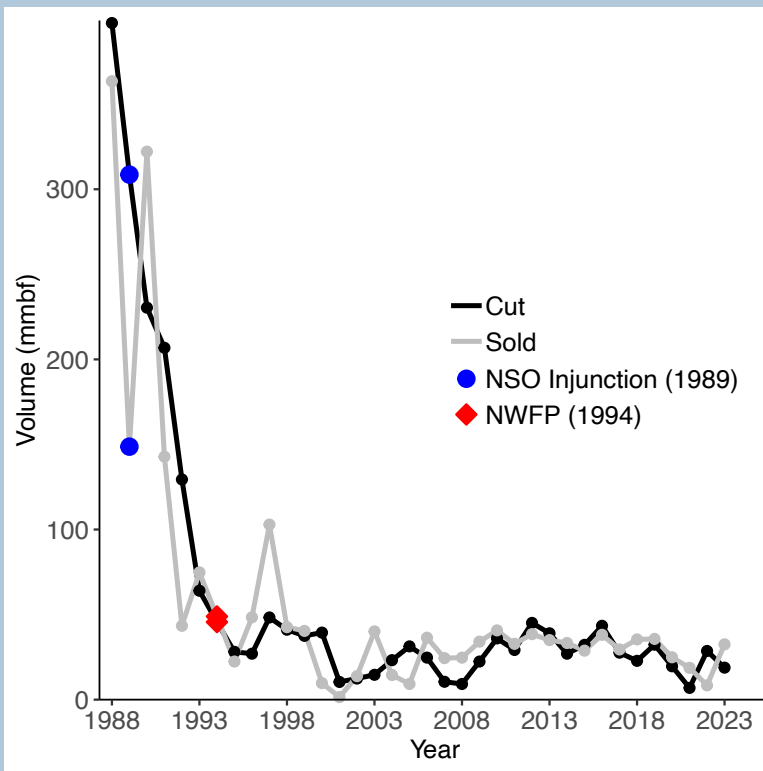


Figure 5.3. Line graph showing timber harvest and sales (“cut” and “sold” volume) in million board feet for the Mt. Hood National Forest, federal fiscal years 1988 to 2023. Landmark 1989 temporary injunction on timber sales in NSO (northern spotted owl) habitat in federal forests in the Pacific Northwest, and the 1994 implementation of the NWFP are indicated by blue dots and red diamonds respectively (USDA Forest Service, 2025).

Timber harvest on the Mt. Hood National Forest dropped 90 percent from a peak volume of nearly 400 million board feet (mmbf) in 1988 to 27 mmbf in 1996 (USDA Forest Service, 2025). From 1997 to 2024, annual harvest volume averaged 27.1 mmbf, ranging from 48.3 (1997) to 6.9 mmbf (2021, during the Covid 19 pandemic) (Figure 5.3).

Following implementation of the NWFP, recreation became the dominant resource management concern on the Mt. Hood National Forest (Kay et al., 2007). The number of employees on the Mt. Hood National Forest decreased from approximately 700 in 1991 to 240 in 2006 (Kay et al., 2007). Other changes on the Mt. Hood National Forest include the consolidation of seven ranger districts into four (Kay et al., 2007). As part of this consolidation, the Barlow Ranger District was merged with the Hood River Ranger District.

In 2024 and 2025, 13 of the 17 community members we interviewed described at least some familiarity with the NWFP. Seven interviewees thought that the NWFP reduced timber harvest, seven related the

NWFP to spotted owl conservation, five viewed the NWFP in terms of land use planning, and two associated the NWFP with the conservation of old-growth forests (some interviewees mentioned more than one category). Interviewees commented that the NWFP was locally controversial, especially as a nearby mill was *“falling on hard times, and it’s kind of related [to the NWFP].”* Interviewees also noted that mechanization of logging had impacted the timber industry in addition to the NWFP.

Since the adoption of the NWFP in 1995, Parkdale has become less of a timber community. As one interviewee put it, *“dislike and criticism of [the] extraction industry became very pronounced gradually from that [NWFP] time onward, and we became much more of a non-forest, non-timber community.”* Despite this shift away from timber, however, one interviewee mentioned that some community members still supported increased logging, and that the *“mentality still in the community is that [the Forest Service]...is just not cutting [timber].”*

However, other interviewees commented that they thought that a decline in timber production associated with adoption of the NWFP had a limited impact in the Upper Hood River Valley because of the *“more diversified economy”* including agriculture in the area, and timber production from county forest lands. As one interviewee put it, *“the limited amount of receipts that was probably coming off the [federal] timber from timber sales probably wasn’t felt as strongly in Hood River County because they had that [County Forest revenues].”*

In the immediate aftermath of the NWFP, the Forest Service gave a Rural Community Assistance grant to Hood River County (Mitchell, 2005). This grant helped the community initiate a development action plan for Parkdale with the goals of maintaining the community’s rural character and protecting farm and forest land uses (Mitchell, 2005). However, despite the loss of economic activity associated with federal timber and recognition of the need to plan for future economic development, interviewees participating in both the 10-year (Charnley et al., 2006) and 30-year socioeconomic monitoring work (presented here) suggested significant local resistance (i.e. “strong and opposing views”) to the idea of developing an economy centered on tourism or the attraction of amenity migrants such as wealthy retirees and remote workers.



Photo: Julia Sizek

Parkdale Work Center, Forest Service

Pre-NWFP history

Settlement

Since time immemorial, Wasco and Warm Springs peoples lived along the Columbia River and in the Upper Hood River Valley (McConnell, 2006). In 1855, several tribes signed a treaty to create the Warm Springs Reservation, which is located on the south side of Mount Hood (Kay et al., 2007). The descendants of these people now belong to the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs (CTWS). CTWS has rights on ceded lands in the Upper Hood River Valley, where they practice traditional harvesting, hunting and fishing (Kay et al., 2007). The Tribe also has off-reservation rights to fish in the Columbia Basin (McConnell, 2006).

Euro-Americans first settled the area around Parkdale in 1882, when homesteaders came to the east side of the Hood River (Page, 1927). Logging began on private lands in Hood River County as early as the late 1800s (Baron, 1957). In 1890, the Oregon Lumber Company (which later founded Dee) began buying land in the Hood River Valley. Starting around 1900, the Oregon Lumber Company began selling harvested lands to settlers. These sales included the present-day Parkdale townsite (Page, 1927).

Federal forest management of present-day Mt. Hood National Forest began in 1893 with the establishment of the Cascade Range Forest Reserve. The forest came under the purview of the the Forest Service in 1905 when it was transferred from the US Department of the Interior to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This same year, the Oregon Lumber Company constructed the Mt. Hood Railroad which ran between Hood River and Dee (Page, 1927; Abbott, 2023) and, in 1906, opened a sawmill and founded the settlement of Dee as a company town (Oberst, 2021). The mill soon supported approximately 250 people who worked in Dee. At the time, the Dee Mill was the largest mill in the Upper Hood River Valley. However, production was limited due to its dependance on federal timber supply (Baron, 1957). In 1909, the company expanded the railroad to reach Parkdale (Page, 1927). Eventually, this railroad line was used for transporting both fruit and timber, and for tourism (Page, 1927; Mitchell, 2005).

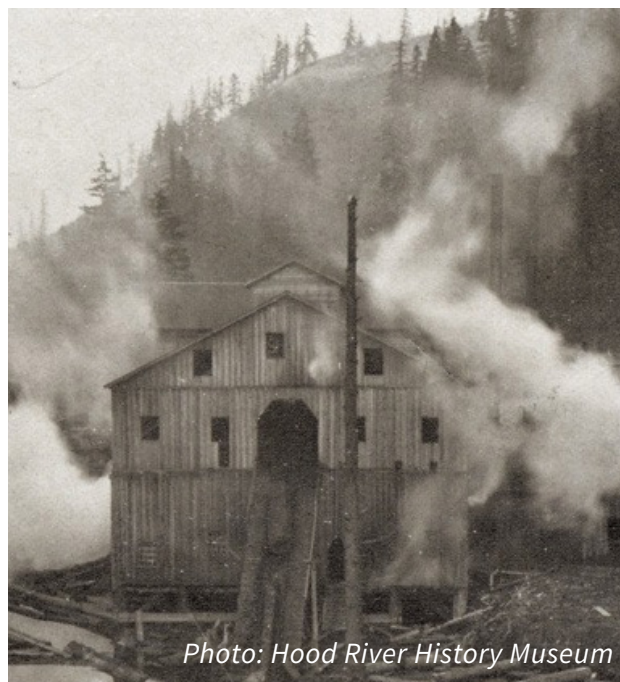


Photo: Hood River History Museum

Dee Mill

Fruit growing was also important to the Upper Hood River Valley. Farmers primarily grew apples, but pears, peaches, cherries, and strawberries were also important crops (Page, 1927). Early in the development of the valley's agriculture, landowners began hiring Japanese immigrants to clear fields. Landowners granted less productive plots of land to these immigrants in return for their labor. These new Japanese Americans soon gained recognition as strawberry farmers and apple growers (National Park Service, n.d.).

The Cascade Range Forest Reserve merged with the Cascade National Forest in 1908 and was renamed the Oregon National Forest (Mitchell, 2005). In 1924, it was renamed again as the Mt. Hood National Forest. Although some Portlanders advocated for Mount Hood to become a national park, this plan was quashed because of the timber, range, and mineral interests in the area (Mitchell, 2005).

A 1927 dissertation described the people of Upper Hood River Valley as follows: homesteaders who had not converted to commercial farming, a group of scientific apple farmers that had migrated from New England, farm laborers, Japanese American farmers, and timber industry workers (Page, 1927). There was dairying in the area as well. During this same period, there were four sawmills in the Upper Hood River Valley employing approximately fifty men. These men and their families were described as “transient” and as making “little contribution to community institutional life” (Page, 1927). Japanese Americans were similarly disparaged and faced considerable racism during the 1920s (National Park Service, n.d.).

By 1940, the county led the state with a fruit harvest at \$2.2 million per year (Pierce, 2007). Around 1942, pears overtook apples as the most popular fruit produced by acreage in Hood River County (Baron, 1957). During World War II, Japanese farmers were interned and faced considerable racism and hostility on their return to their lands after the war’s end (Bussel and Tichenor, 2017). The community of Hood River was famously hostile to Japanese American soldiers returning from the war (National Park Service, n.d.).



Wagon of apple crates through downtown, 1907

The fruit produced in Hood River County was sold internationally as early as the 1950s, with one-third of fruit produced in that decade exported to Sweden, the United Kingdom, and South America (Baron, 1957). However, in the 1970s, Hood River County’s agricultural sector was hit hard by a combination of high inflation and stagnant economic growth, and apple and pear sales dropped (Pierce, 2007). In 1984, Diamond Fruit Growers closed its Parkdale facility, so farmers sent their produce elsewhere (Mitchell, 2005).

Tourism was also important in the early history of the area. The Cloud Cap and Cooper Spur Inns located on the mountain’s east side, near Parkdale and Dee, were among the most popular recreation areas on Mount Hood in the early 1900s. However, both lost business when the Timberline Lodge was constructed on the mountain’s west side (Baron, 1957). The Cloud Cap Inn closed in 1940 (Baron, 1957). As tourists shifted from the east side of the mountain to the west, tourism in the Upper Hood River Valley declined even as overall tourism around Mount Hood increased in the 1950s (Baron, 1957).

Post-World War II timber industry

By the 1950s, the forestry sector was second to agriculture in its importance to Hood River County (Baron, 1957). From the 1950s through the 1980s, there were three timber mills operating in the Upper Hood River Valley area (Charnley et al., 2006): the Oregon Lumber Company mill in Dee, the Hanel Lumber Company mill just north of Parkdale at the intersection of US-35 and Neal Creek Road (later known as the “upper mill” or “upper Neal Creek mill”), and the Neal Creek Lumber company mill in Odell (later known as the “lower mill” or “lower Neal Creek mill”). The main source of timber for local mills was the Mt. Hood National Forest, as most of the private land had already been logged (Baron, 1957). Consequently, the Upper Hood River Valley mills were forced to compete over the federal timber supply.

The smallest operation, the Hanel Lumber Company mill, was constructed in 1952 (Neumann-Rea, 2014). By the mid-1950s the mill employed 35 men and processed approximately 40,000 board feet per day (Baron, 1957). The Neal Creek mill employed 60 men and processed approximately 60,000 board feet per day. By contrast, the Oregon Lumber Company mill in Dee employed 300 men at that time (Baron, 1957).

In 1958, the Hines Lumber Company purchased the Dee sawmill and company townsite and dismantled the houses (Abbott, 2023). Champion Lumber later purchased the mill and operated it until its closure in 1984 (Mitchell, 2005). In 1986, the Dee sawmill was purchased and reopened by Dee Forest Products.

Champion Lumber also obtained the lower Neal Creek mill in Odell. In response to an economic recession in the early 1980s, Champion Lumber closed the lower mill (Pierce, 2007). The lower mill remained closed until it was purchased by the Hanel Lumber Company and reopened in 1983. This mill depended entirely on large diameter, long logs (up to 40 feet in length) from the national forest, but by the 1980s trees of that size were in short supply. The Hanel Lumber Company deemed it too costly to retool the mill to process smaller logs, and the company eventually decided to close the mill and use the site as a log yard. Hanel Lumber continued to operate the upper mill into the 1990s (Pierce, 2007).



Photo: Hood River History Museum

Oregon Lumber Company logging, 1900

Upper Hood River Valley after the NWFP

Employment and industry

Community members interviewed in 2024 described the Upper Hood River Valley today as predominantly agricultural with tourism and timber as secondary industries. When asked about employment opportunities in the area, interviewees responded that local employment opportunities had increased (6), decreased (3), or increased in some sectors and decreased in others (3). Interviewees noted that the agricultural industry was still strong in the Upper Hood River Valley, even as aspects of the industry had shifted to encompass agritourism and orchard-based businesses like fruit stands and a cidery. Indeed, interviewees described agriculture as *“a big part of the work”* in the Upper Hood River Valley.

In the 1990s, area leaders decided to revitalize horticulture by investing in an existing agricultural research station and cold-storage modernization. In 1993, merchants and growers joined together to establish the “Fruit Loop,” a 45-mile self-guided driving tour through Hood Valley orchards (Mitchell, 2005). As of 2024, the Diamond Fruit Packing Plant remained open in Parkdale, though some other facilities have been consolidated (Doxsee, 2023). Interviewees described farming activities in 2024 as being approximately 80% pears, with some apples, blueberries, cherries, and other fruits. Interviewees noted how the Fruit Loop remained a popular way for tourists to experience the Upper Hood River Valley. It was also noted that, in the agricultural sector, employment had changed. Orchardists switched from having undocumented employees to having employees under the H-2A foreign labor visa program. Additionally, there has been a noticeable increase in new orchard owners, some of which don’t yet understand the requirements of farming in the area.

Interviewees thought that logging had declined as an industry over the last thirty years, specifically within the study area. Some interviewees compared the local decline in the timber industry to similar changes that had happened throughout the state. One interviewee suggested that, *“the biggest change [in the study area] has been...the diminishment of logging.”*

Interviewees also noted that there was less milling and selling of lumber than in previous decades. As one interviewee put it, “*timber is not what it was.*” By 1994, when the Forest Service implemented the NWFP, there were only two mills still operating: the Hanel Company’s upper Neal Creek mill and the Dee Forest Products mill.

In 1995, the Hanel Lumber Company sold the upper Neal Creek mill to Morgan Lumber Company. Bob Hanel, son of Hanel Lumber Company founder Sterling Hanel, formed Hanel Development Group which cut timber and built forest service and private roads (Neumann-Rea, 2014). The business retained property at the lower mill site in Odell.

In 1996, the Dee Forest Products mill was destroyed by a fire and was not rebuilt (Mitchell, 2005; Abbott, 2023). Interviewees also recalled that large amounts of snowfall following the fire cemented the mill’s closure by damaging the remaining unburned structures at the mill site. In the mid-1980s, a group of local investors from Hood River had purchased the Dee train line (the Mt. Hood Railroad) that had served the sawmill and converted it to a tourism train (Mitchell, 2005; Mt. Hood Railroad, n.d.). As of 2024, the Mt. Hood Railroad continued to run as a round-trip scenic tour train from Hood River, through Dee, to Parkdale.

In 1996, Morgan Lumber Company sold the upper mill to Quality Veneer and Lumber, which closed it in 2000 due to financial troubles (Pierce, 2007). In 2001, the upper mill was purchased by High Cascade International Corporation, but the company did not reopen the mill until 2004 (“Upper Hanel Mill,” 2004). At this time, a portion of the lower mill site was converted into a window-making facility (Pierce, 2007). In 2014, the Hanel Development Group, still in possession of some of the lower mill site in Odell, sold the remainder of the lower mill property to the Port of Hood River.

The NWFP 10-year social and economic monitoring study found that some mill workers left the area after the mill closures, while others found replacement jobs in the fruit industry, manufacturing, trucking, service industries, or odd jobs (Kay et al., 2007). In 2024 and 2025, interviewees noted that many families of loggers now either work in construction or in the orchards, had started small businesses, or had left the community.

In 2024, the only operating lumber mill in Hood River County was Mt. Hood Forest Products, which had taken over the upper Neal Creek mill after the bankruptcy of the previous owners (Neumann-Rea, 2020). Mt. Hood Forest Products currently advertises that they “produce over 175 million board feet of Pacific Northwest Douglas-fir dimensional timber annually” (Mt. Hood Forest Products, n.d.). However, none of this timber appears to have been sourced from the national forest.

Hood River County also manages forest lands that generate county revenue (Charnley et al., 2006; Baron, 1957). In 2006, the county managed approximately 31,000 acres of forest lands and generated approximately half of the county’s budget from timber proceeds (Charnley et al., 2006; Kay et al., 2007). Interviewees noted the unique nature of the large amount of county and industrial timberlands in the area. One interviewee estimated that, in 2024, approximately 30-40 percent of county revenues came from timber harvests on county lands.

In recent years, the share of recreation and tourism in the study area’s employment and small business patronage have increased (Charnley et al., 2006). Interviewees noted that Mt. Hood Meadows Ski and Summer Resort (Mt. Hood Meadows) was a significant employer for the local community. Many interviewees also thought that the Mount Hood ski areas attracted visitors from Portland who then

visited Parkdale businesses. Although OR-35 (which connects Hood River to Mt. Hood Meadows) does not pass directly through Parkdale, interviewees did not think that this negatively impacted tourism: *“I feel like more people know that Parkdale is not that far off [Route] 35 and they have found the brew pub.”*

However, the potential for developing tourism and recreation in the study area did not seem to be a shared value for the community. For example, a 1997 community land use planning process in Parkdale revealed negative local attitudes toward tourism (Mitchell, 2005). In the planning process, Parkdale residents said things like “Leave everything as is, tourists can stay in Hood River,” and “Just leave us alone! Just look at what you’ve done to Hood River with your tourism. You’ve ruined our small town” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 90). The NWFP 10-year social and economic report indicated that interviewees continued to be concerned about the rise of tourism, including the proposed expansion of the Cooper Spur Ski Resort (Kay et al., 2007).

Conflicts over ski resort expansions have deep roots in the Upper Hood River Valley. For example, in 1977, study area residents opposed a proposal from Mt. Hood Meadows to change zoning to allow for commercial use and vacation condominiums (Kay et al., 2007). Despite this opposition, the county commission approved the development. However, locals appealed the decision to the state commission, which doomed the proposal (Kay et al., 2007). Later proposals to develop the area in 1981 and 1991 also failed, and plans for on-site housing were finally abandoned in 1995 (Kay et al., 2007). In 2002, Mt. Hood Meadows began purchasing land around Cooper Spur with the idea (first proposed in 1977) to develop a major ski resort near Parkdale to replace the old Cooper Spur resort (Katauskas, 2002; Wilson, 2025a). The proposal met substantial resistance from residents, in part because of the impacts that increased development could have on land values and agricultural lands (Associated Press, 2004). The NWFP 10-year social and economic monitoring report noted that while some interviewees expressed concern about the expansion of the Cooper Spur Resort or about transitioning to a recreation- and tourism-based economy, others were supportive of recreation to expand local economic opportunities (Kay et al., 2007). Some community members supported a land trade instead of developing the old Cooper Spur. This idea would have allowed expansion of the existing Mt. Hood Meadows footprint (Associated Press, 2004). After a court case, a land exchange was settled to preserve the north side of Mount Hood and to expand development near Government Camp, though as of 2025, the dispute was not completely settled because of disagreement over land values and Meadows’ potential plans to expand Cooper Spur Ski Resort (Wilson, 2025b).

Interviewees confirmed that the proposal to expand the Cooper Spur Ski Resort had been controversial in the Upper Hood River Valley. Some interviewees thought that Mt. Hood Meadows had not been *“a fair and honest player in the game,”* and that the Forest Service had been pressured into making a favorable deal with Mount Hood Meadows rather than completing the land swap preferred by the local community.

Locals have opposed other efforts to develop tourism as well. Interviewees described continued efforts to support farmland and prevent farmland conversion to other uses like housing or tourism-related development such as golf courses. For example, between 2013 and 2021, the owners of the Dee Mill site proposed to build a hotel and event venue on the former mill site but faced local opposition and failed to begin construction; they decided to sell the land instead (Oberst, 2021). However, interviewees also noted a generational shift in attitudes toward developing a recreational or tourist amenity economy: *“If you talk to people who have been here longer, they’d say, ...they wish they [tourists] would go away. But I think more of the middle-aged to younger folks recognize how important it is economically, and a lot of them work in that industry.”*

Demographic and community changes

Interviewees thought the main demographic changes in the area were: new people moving to the area and an increase in a year-round Latine population. Interviewees uniformly noted that there were new people moving to the Upper Hood River Valley, and characterized new residents as: wealthy (n=13), teleworkers (n=6), retirees (n=5), amenity migrants (n=2), families (n=2), and “city people” (n=2).

According to US Census data for the Parkdale and Dee CCDs, the total population in the Upper Hood River study area has increased by about 15 percent since 2000 (Table 5.1). Low-income populations did not show a clear trend but ranged from 33 to 42 percent of the total population. Populations aged 24 to 44 declined over the 2000-2020 period from 28 to 24 percent.

Table 5.1. US Census and American Community Survey demographic estimates for 2000, 2010, and 2020. See Appendix D for complete citations.

	2000	2010	2020	Trend
Total population	2,852	2,865	3,276	Increased
Low-income population*	1,166	951	1,383	No clear trend
% Low-income population	41%	33%	42%	
Population aged 25-44	810	794	795	Decreased
% Population aged 25-44	28%	28%	24%	
Population aged 65 or older	310	346	506	Increased
% Population aged 65 or older	11%	12%	15%	
*For low-income population, 2010 is an ACS 5-year estimate for 2008-2012 and 2020 is an ACS 5-year estimate for 2018-2022.				

During the 1990s, many retirees began moving to the Upper Hood River Valley (Charnley et al., 2006). Interviewees thought that this change had continued to take place since that time and that the new wealth in the area had *“displaced people in the lower half of the income level in the county.”* Indeed, between 2000 and 2020, the proportion of population aged 65 and over increased relative to other age groups from 11 percent to 15 percent. In addition to these newer people, interviewees thought that other high-income earners were moving to the area. As one described Parkdale’s new residents, *“maybe a third retired people, a third wealthy people who don’t need to work but maybe work on a non-profit or something, and then a third people that are maybe employed in the tech sector or schools or government.”* However, these observations were not reflected in the US Census data.

Since the implementation of the NWFP, there has been an increase in Latine residents in the Upper Hood River Valley (Kay et al., 2007). Though many Latine workers at the orchards had historically only

stayed seasonally, the NWFP 10-year social and economic monitoring noted that in the mid-2000s Latine residents lived in the area full-time. US Census data for the study area CCDs suggests that changes in this population have been modest to insignificant since 2000 with the Latine population comprising 33 percent of the population in 2000 and 37 percent of the population in 2020 (See Appendix A for data citations). Nevertheless, interviewees commented that there were more Spanish-speaking students in the school, and that there was a permanent population of agricultural workers and others who had opened grocery stores and other services targeted toward Latine people.

Housing and development

Interviewees (n=14) thought that the availability and affordability of housing had decreased. Ten interviewees mentioned that they thought second homes or short-term rentals were impacting housing availability, and four mentioned that there was little or no housing available for workers. An online search revealed only 3 short-term rental homes in the study area as of October, 2024.

Interviewees thought that increasing competition for existing homes had made it harder for new residents to come to Parkdale. While some housing was being built in 2024-2025, interviewees thought that most of it was high-end housing. One interviewee mentioned that it's *"becoming harder and harder to actually attract [working] people from out of the area because of housing."* Some interviewees noted that they would not be able to move into the area because of the significant price increases of housing: as one person put it, *"If I had to move today, I couldn't live here."* Others mentioned that it was difficult to keep staff at local small businesses because of limited housing: *"[Parkdale] is a very tiny town, and there is no affordable housing unless someone personally has a house that they rent out at an affordable rate."*

Mt. Hood CDP (within the Parkdale CCD) underwent a planning process in 2006. Community members answered a survey addressing the changes they'd like to see in the zoning of their area. The community was quite divided, with approximately 60 percent of community members asking for zoning changes, either to facilitate development within the existing business area or to allow for more types of businesses (Hood River County, 2006). The other 40 percent of community members did not want zoning to change in the area. Respondents to the 2006 survey mentioned that they moved to Mt. Hood CDP because Hood River was changing too much. Others thought that Parkdale, rather than Mt. Hood CPD, should be developed further (Hood River County, 2006).

In 2023, as part of the Parkdale Unincorporated Community Plan, community members discussed the need for more housing for workers, including condos. In 2024, one community interviewee summarized the process as being largely about *"trying to find land or opportunities to develop more worker housing, affordable housing."* A further analysis found that up to 21 dwelling units could be constructed in Parkdale (Doxsee, 2023). However, as of 2023, development in Parkdale was significantly limited by the capacity of its wastewater treatment plant (Doxsee, 2023).

A survey of residents associated with the 2023 planning process included questions about the kinds of housing respondents thought should be added to Parkdale. Survey respondents indicated a need for single-family homes (69 percent), accessory dwelling units (42 percent), duplexes (32 percent), and apartments or condominiums (19 percent) (Doxsee et al., 2023). In 2024, community interviewees noted that housing development remained somewhat controversial among residents. Many were opposed to additional development in the area, even as they recognized the importance of affordable housing and housing for workers in Parkdale.

Community services

Interviewees thought that the number of services in the area had either increased (n=6) or had not changed (n=6) over the 30-year period since the NWFP was implemented (one interviewee thought that services had both increased and decreased, and one interviewee thought that services had declined). Interviewees noted that some of the community services were highly dependent on local entrepreneurs. For example, a local farmer bought the grocery store and hardware store and decided to improve it for the community. This means that *“local people in the area go buy their produce there, rather than driving clear to Hood River.”*

Historically, Parkdale residents have relied on Hood River for services. In 2024 and 2025, interviewees noted that Hood River had always been the *“community hub”* for the area, and that Parkdale and Dee residents would have to go to the area for some services like health care. Figure 5.4 summarizes significant community amenities.

Six interviewees thought that the schools suffered from a lack of funding. Of those, four thought this was connected to the head counts of students in school. Two connected it to consistent insecurity of funding from timber sales and the Secure Rural Schools funding. Interviewees also noted that there had been some consolidation of schools in the area, especially in the upper levels of school.



Figure 5.4. Community amenities in the Upper Hood River Valley study area. Includes: zero full-service supermarkets (other locations that accept SNAP benefits, such as gas stations or convenience stores, not included), zero community health clinics, one post office, one library, one Forest Service ranger station, and one timber processing facility.

Community capacity

In 2024 and 2025, eleven interviewees noted that local community groups like Thrive Hood River and the Mount Hood Town Hall successfully addressed local problems such as land use disputes and the needs of agricultural producers. Interviewees also commented that groups in the Upper Hood River Valley had been

successful at acquiring grants for agricultural and water projects. Others noted how businesses had joined together to begin ventures like the Fruit Loop.

Community relationship with the Forest Service

Of the nine interviewees who described the current relationship between the community and the Forest Service, five interviewees described the community as being divided about its relationship with the Forest Service. One interviewee described the relationship as positive, and three described it as negative. Three additional interviewees thought that there was little interaction between the Forest Service and the community. Three interviewees noted that there had been a positive change in the relationship between the Forest Service and the community, and that this was a result of *“considering the bigger picture of the lands that they manage,”* including both recreationists and the timber industry.

The NWFP 10-year social and economic monitoring report revealed community members’ thought that the Forest Service lacked the transparency and decision-making authority that it had previously (Kay et al., 2007). Those interviewees mentioned that the Forest Service had a poor record of forest management, and residents no longer trusted the agency. In 2024 and 2025, some interviewees repeated that sentiment, as one interviewee noted, *“people...who are in the know, I think, generally don’t think the Forest Service is managing their lands well.”* Other interviewees mentioned specifically that *“old-timers or local families see the Forest Service as very dysfunctional,”* whereas new residents had more positive opinions of the agency. Some interviewees thought that the Forest Service was not doing much work on the landscape: *“it’s difficult to see that there’s much work being done [by the Forest Service].”*

We asked community interviewees about their views on Forest Service management priorities (Figure 5.5). Most interviewees (79 percent) thought that the Forest Service was prioritizing management for wildfire resilience. Interviewees also thought that the Forest Service prioritized incorporating public opinions into its planning process (71 percent). A majority (57 percent) also thought that the Forest Service prioritized the socioeconomic well-being of local communities.

Fourteen interviewees were familiar with the Hood River Forest Collaborative, which was initiated in 2011 (Hood River Forest Collaborative, n.d.). Interviewees had different perspectives on the forest collaborative and its role and relationship with the Forest Service. For example, one interviewee mentioned that they thought the collaborative was *“totally anti-logging of any kind”* and *“recreation-oriented,”* or were part of organized non-profits with specific interests instead of members of the public. Interviewees involved in the collaborative thought that it helped shape projects as *“the discussions we had in the group... changed aspects of the project.”* Others thought that the collaborative helped bring additional funds to the Forest Service, particularly in getting grants for wildfire mitigation in the study area. While some interviewees thought that the collaborative had increased the pace of management projects, others were skeptical and thought that projects



Photo: Julia Sizak
Parkdale Community Center

on the Hood River side of the ranger district were particularly prone to litigation. As one interviewee put it, *“It’s a challenging place to collaborate, because we’re in Portland’s backyard.”*

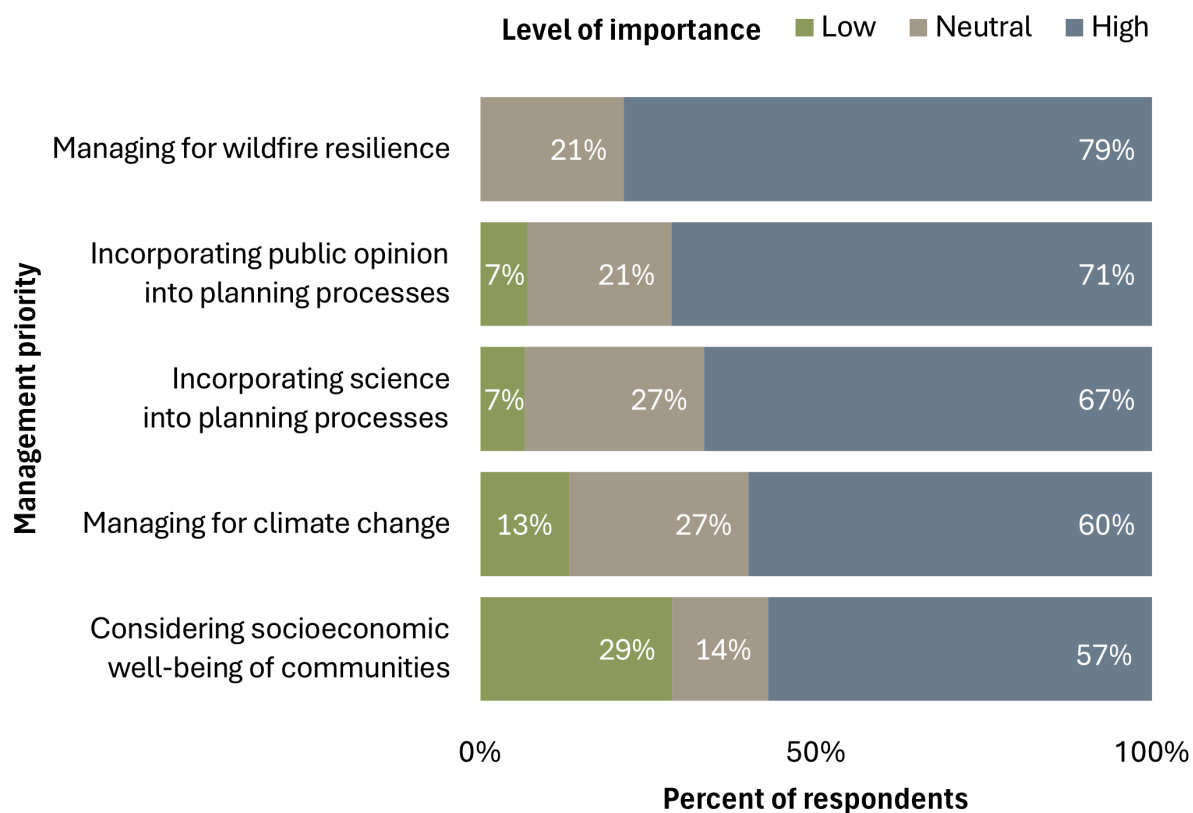


Figure 5.5. Community perception of Forest Service management priorities (n=15). Bar graph segments represent the percentage of interviewees indicating level of importance (Low, Medium, High) of each management priority.

Community relationship with national forest lands

In the NWFP 10-year social and economic monitoring report, interviewees noted that they enjoyed the clean water, clear air, and scenic vistas of the area, as well as the quiet. The forest amenities were part of the reason why they lived in the area (Kay et al., 2007). The scenic values of the area were so valued by residents that one described living in Parkdale in this way: *“We live in a postcard.”*

In 2024 and 2025, interviewees unanimously characterized nature/aesthetics and recreation on the national forest as having a high level of importance (Figure 5.6). Water was also ranked highly by 93 percent of interviewees, and hunting and fishing were additionally of high importance to 67 percent of interviewees. Interviewees ranked tourism, timber, and non-timber forest products as least important.

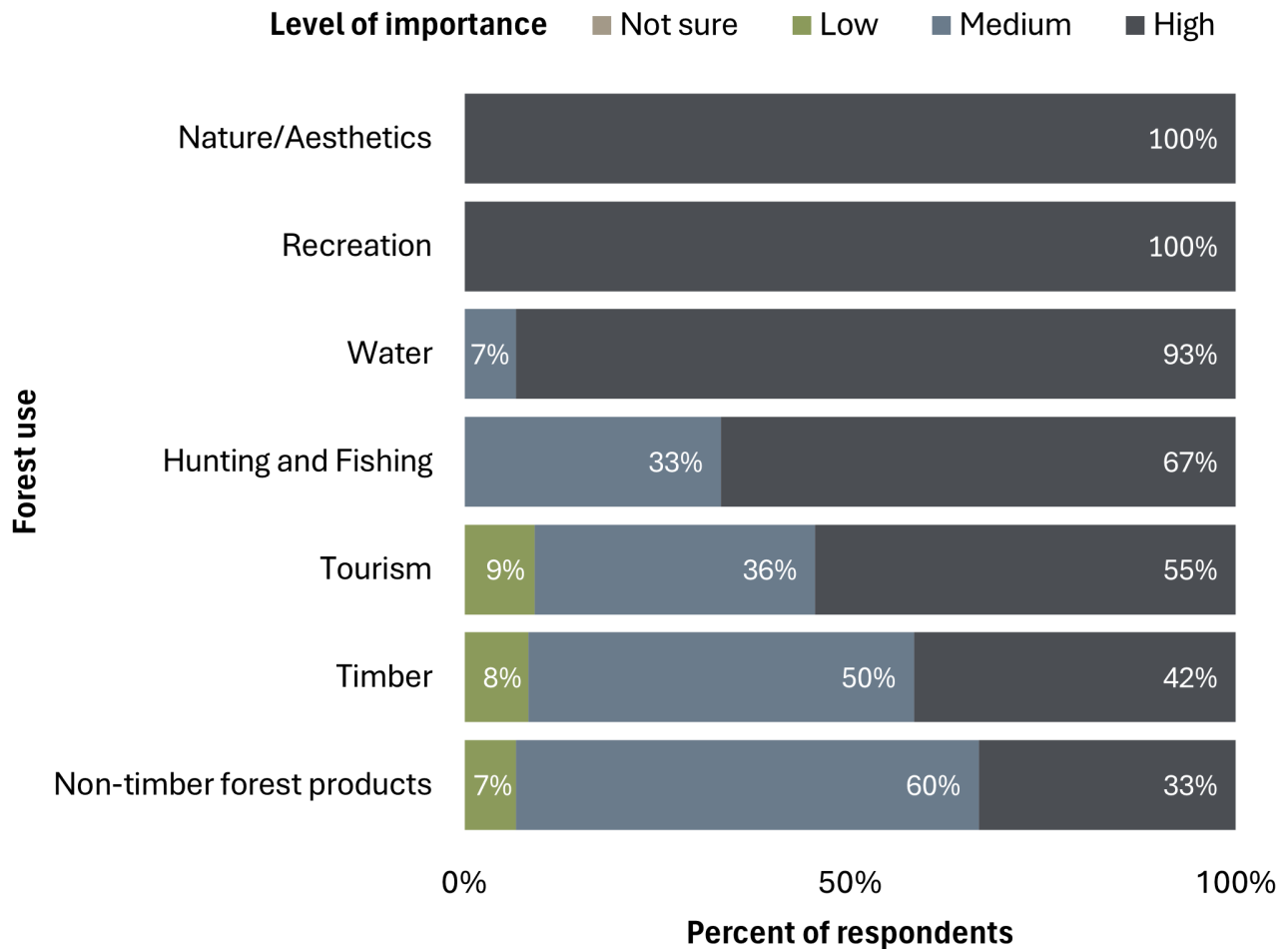


Figure 5.6. Importance of national forest uses to community (n=15). Bar graph segments represent the percentage of interviewees indicating level of importance (Not sure, Low, Medium, High) of each forest use to the community.

Recreation, roads, and trails

Interviewees mentioned that the most popular outdoor recreation activities were: hiking (n=13), mountain biking (n=12), skiing (n=11), off-highway vehicle use (n=6), camping (n=5), fishing (n=3), and water-based recreation (n=2). While recreation is often associated with Portlanders, interviewees noted that there was a strong tradition of ski racing in the local community, and that many local farmers had long participated in ski racing and other activities. As one interviewee put it, *“they’re old school farmers that would ski race in the winter...they were also climbers and hikers.”* Interviewees in 2024 and 2025 suggested that the increasing popularity of the Mount Hood area for tourism and recreation continued to be a divisive issue for local communities. For example, the local search and rescue organization was strained by the increasing demand to rescue recreationalists from Mount Hood. Interviewees also noted that areas like Teacup Nordic, which is located on the southeast side of the mountain near Mt. Hood Meadows, had become increasingly popular. Interviewees noticed that specific areas, including certain campgrounds, had become more popular without being able to increase their capacity. For example, interviewees commented that some areas *“like [Mt. Hood] Meadows...and Timberline...[are] five times as crowded as they were 20 years ago.”*

Interviewees were also concerned about national forest access. For example, some interviewees noted that the Forest Service roads *“are in really bad shape”* because of a decrease in logging, and that there had also been some roads closed due to wildfires. Interviewees noted that there have been more increased

recreational demands on local trails recently, and that more maintenance was needed to meet these demands.

Water

Interviewees noted that water from the national forest (and its management by the Forest Service) was particularly important for Upper Hood Valley residents. In part, this importance stems from the significance of water quality and supply for the valley's orchards and other agricultural endeavors.

Timber

Over the last decade (2013-2023), timber sale volume at the Hood River Ranger District (USDA Forest Service, 2023) represented approximately 17 percent of Mt. Hood National Forest timber sales, but little, if any, of this economic activity directly benefited the local economy. Businesses that purchased timber sales from the Hood River Ranger District during this time were all based outside of the study area. However, one company located within 10 miles of the study area boundary purchased timber sales in 2017 and 2018 with volume totaling 1.6 mmbf (approximately 3% of sale volume during this period). Other timber sales were purchased by companies based in nearby Carson, Washington and Molalla, Oregon. The most distant purchaser was based over 200 miles away in Elgin, Oregon.

Non-timber forest products

Both Forest Service and community interviewees who commented on non-timber forest products gathered in the area mentioned that locals gathered mushrooms (n=14), berries (n=11), firewood (n=6), Christmas trees (n=5), bear grass (n=3), salal (n=1), limbs and boughs (n=1).

According to Forest Service Cut and Sold reports from 2013 to 2023 (USDA Forest Service, 2025), the commercial fuelwood program was the most lucrative non-timber forest product program for the Mount Hood National Forest, generating a total of \$269,455 for the ten-year period. However, fuelwood sales have declined (or were sometimes misreported) since 2017. Christmas tree permits generated nearly \$50,000 from 2013 to 2019, but data appears to be missing after 2020. Commercial mushroom permits show more consistent reporting over the ten-year period, totaling nearly \$50,000 for 28,000 gallons with annual proceeds averaging \$3,843. Limbs and boughs generated over a total of \$26,000 while salal generated \$21,000 for the 2013-2023 period. Ferns and dry cones were reported only occasionally and generated a total of \$2,500 and \$240, respectively. Fruits and berries were not reported for the Mount Hood National Forest.

Wildfire and other forest disturbances

Interviewees who mentioned disturbances in the forest almost all mentioned wildfire (n=14). Many interviewees reported that they had previously believed that the forest was resistant to fire. One interviewee noted that the area *“used to be called the asbestos forest, even though on the east side, it's shaped by fire.”* Recent fires have changed that perception.

When asked about how wildfires had impacted the local community, interviewees mentioned evacuations (n=5), damage to local trails and roads (n=4), increased wildfire smoke in the area (n=3), decreases in tourism

(n=3), negative impacts to agriculture (n=1), and mental health concerns (n=1). Interviewees mentioned the Eagle Creek Fire (2017) as an example of a fire that significantly impacted the community.

The fire was started by a teenager who set off fireworks during a burn ban (Woolington, 2017). It burned approximately 50,000 acres over a three-month period. While the fire did not burn any structures in Upper Hood River Valley, eight interviewees mentioned that the Eagle Creek Fire was a *“wake-up call.”* Other local impacts from the fire included poor air quality due to smoke and evacuation alerts in some neighborhoods. Interviewees also noted that the Forest Service made efforts to specifically engage the Parkdale community during the fire, including hiring local vendors to supply food to firefighters and suppression support staff.

Interviewees (n=7) thought that the Forest Service managed previous wildfires as best they could with limited resources. Interviewees also commented that they thought the Wildfire Crisis Strategy designation in the area was a result of the *“recognition about this area being a bullseye”* for wildfire mitigation needs. Although interviewees generally had favorable opinions about the Forest Service response to wildfires, some were more negative. These community members believed the agency inappropriately let acreage burn rather than suppressing fires.

Interviewees also mentioned that they felt that the area is now *“sort of a tinder box.”* As a result, more Upper Hood River Valley residents had begun home hardening projects, and local programs like Firewise were gaining popularity. Eleven interviewees (including agency interviewees) mentioned fire mitigation actions in the community, including work by the local electric co-op, the Oregon Department of Forestry, the Soil and Water Conservation District, and local fire districts. Interviewees also noted that there were Community Wildfire Protection Plans and that some neighborhoods were pursuing Firewise designations. As one interviewee put it, *“the community as a whole has upped their game a little bit”* with respect to wildfire mitigation.



Mt. Hood Forest Products and Restaurant

Interviewees also mentioned that the local Forest Service office had been involved in conducting fire mitigation activities. While seven interviewees thought the activities were not at a sufficiently large pace and scale, interviewees were generally aware of Forest Service fire mitigation activities including thinning (n=10), fuel breaks (n=3), roadside clearing (n=2), and prescribed burns (n=2). Some of these fire mitigation activities were associated with the designation of the Mt. Hood Forest Health and Fire-Resilient Communities priority landscape under the Wildfire Crisis Strategy, which allowed the district to *“hire more staff, to basically increase the pace and scale of the projects that we were already implementing,”* according to one agency interviewee.

Community futures

When asked about the next ten years, interviewees noted that they anticipated the following: increased wildfires (n=7), increased recreation (n=4), changes in housing (n=3), potential changes in agriculture (n=3), continued impacts of climate change on water and temperature (n=3), and changes in the Forest Service (n=2).

Interviewees were insistent that Parkdale specifically would retain its strong community identity by resisting efforts from outsiders and newcomers to change the area. However, some did see possibilities for change, especially in areas that were not restricted by the limitations of Parkdale’s wastewater treatment system.

Interviewees saw fire and climate change as driving local ecological change moving forward. As one put it, “[the next ten years] are gonna be really fire-driven.” Interviewees did see some hope in fire mitigation efforts, as one mentioned that they hoped they would see a “nice, lovely mosaic of landscape—trees that’ll be resilient [to fire].”



Photo: Julia Sizak

Downtown Parkdale

Conclusions and case study highlights

Our results align with previous social and economic monitoring of the Upper Hood River Valley (Kay et al. 2007). For example, Charnley et al. (2006) reported that their interviewees noted that a declining timber supply and litigation against the Forest Service since the implementation of the NWFP had negatively impacted the community. Interviewees from the ten-year monitoring also believed that if the NWFP had functioned according to plan, sawmills in the Upper Hood River Valley would not have closed in the 1990s. However, interviewees also thought that competition from regional and international markets had negatively impacted local mills during that decade (Charnley et al., 2006).

At the same time, the study area's economy was buffered from the declining forestry sector by revenue from its robust county forest, its agricultural industry, and its potential for further developing tourism. Despite local resistance to development, the study area remains attractive to tourists and amenity migrants such as retirees and teleworkers who contribute to the local economy and tax base.

Upper Hood River Valley key forest management takeaways

- Prior to the NWFP, the timber industry in the study area was highly dependent on federal timber. NWFP harvest cutbacks and shifts in markets contributed to local decline in the timber industry.
- The study area has a strong agricultural sector based on fruit orchards, which buffered the impacts of the NWFP and absorbed some displaced workers.
- The scenic and aesthetic qualities of the national forest were unanimously important to interviewees. Forest managers may want to avoid activities that detract from the scenery or otherwise conflict with those values.
- Wildfire resilience was an increasing concern to community members and some interviewees thought that the Forest Service was not working at an appropriate pace and scale to mitigate the potential severity of wildfire.
- Given the popularity of recreation on the Mount Hood National Forest, community members were interested in seeing more maintenance of forest roads and trails.
- Some community members were not interested in developing an economy centered on tourism or amenity migration.

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Photo: Julia Sizak

Orchard in Parkdale

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



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