

Chapter 8: Gold Beach, Oregon

Photo: Julia Sizek

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Case study facts

Population (2020): 5,881

Location: Curry County, Oregon

Federal forest lands (4% of study area):¹
Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest, Gold Beach Ranger District,

Climate:

Average Annual High: 61.2 °F/Low: 46.9 °F
Annual Precipitation: 75.2 inches;
Snowfall: 0.0 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 8.1), literature review, and descriptive summaries of selected secondary data. All interviewees worked in, resided in, or had social or economic ties to the Gold Beach 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.

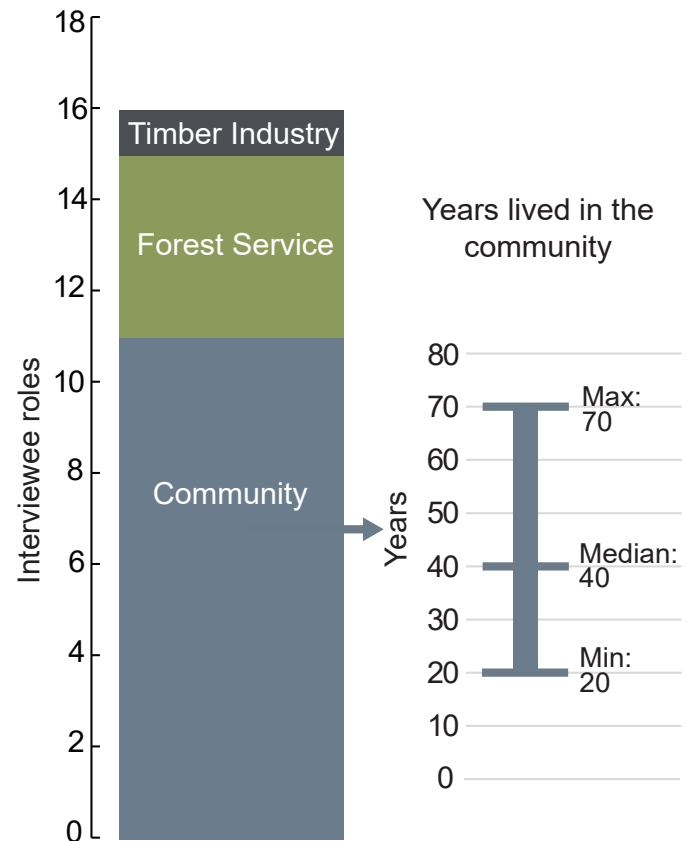


Figure 8.1. Graph of interviewees by role and number of years lived in the community. Our sample included 11 community members, four Forest Service employees, and one timber industry representative. Community interviewees lived in the study area for a minimum of 20 years, a maximum of 70 years, and a median of 40 years.

1. Curry County is comprised of 59 percent national forest. Only 4 percent of the national forest falls within the Gold Beach CCD boundary.

Study area and geography

The Gold Beach community case study focused on the Gold Beach Ranger District in the Rogue River-Siskiyou National forest. We spatially defined the study area as the Gold Beach census county division (CCD) of Curry County (Figure 8.2). The study area includes the City of Gold Beach as well as the unincorporated communities of Orphir, Nesika Beach, Wedderburn, and Pistol River along US 101. Wedderburn and Gold Beach are located north and south (respectively) of the mouth of the Rogue River. The City of Gold Beach is the county seat and is where the Gold Beach Ranger Station is located. National forest land comprises less than four percent of the Gold Beach CCD, however, the study area is circumscribed on the east (inland) by the national forest and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Curry County is comprised of 59 percent national forest. The study area also includes fragmented private forest as well as public forestlands managed by the US Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Forests in this region are comprised of diverse mixed evergreen forests including Douglas-fir, western hemlock, and Sitka spruce.

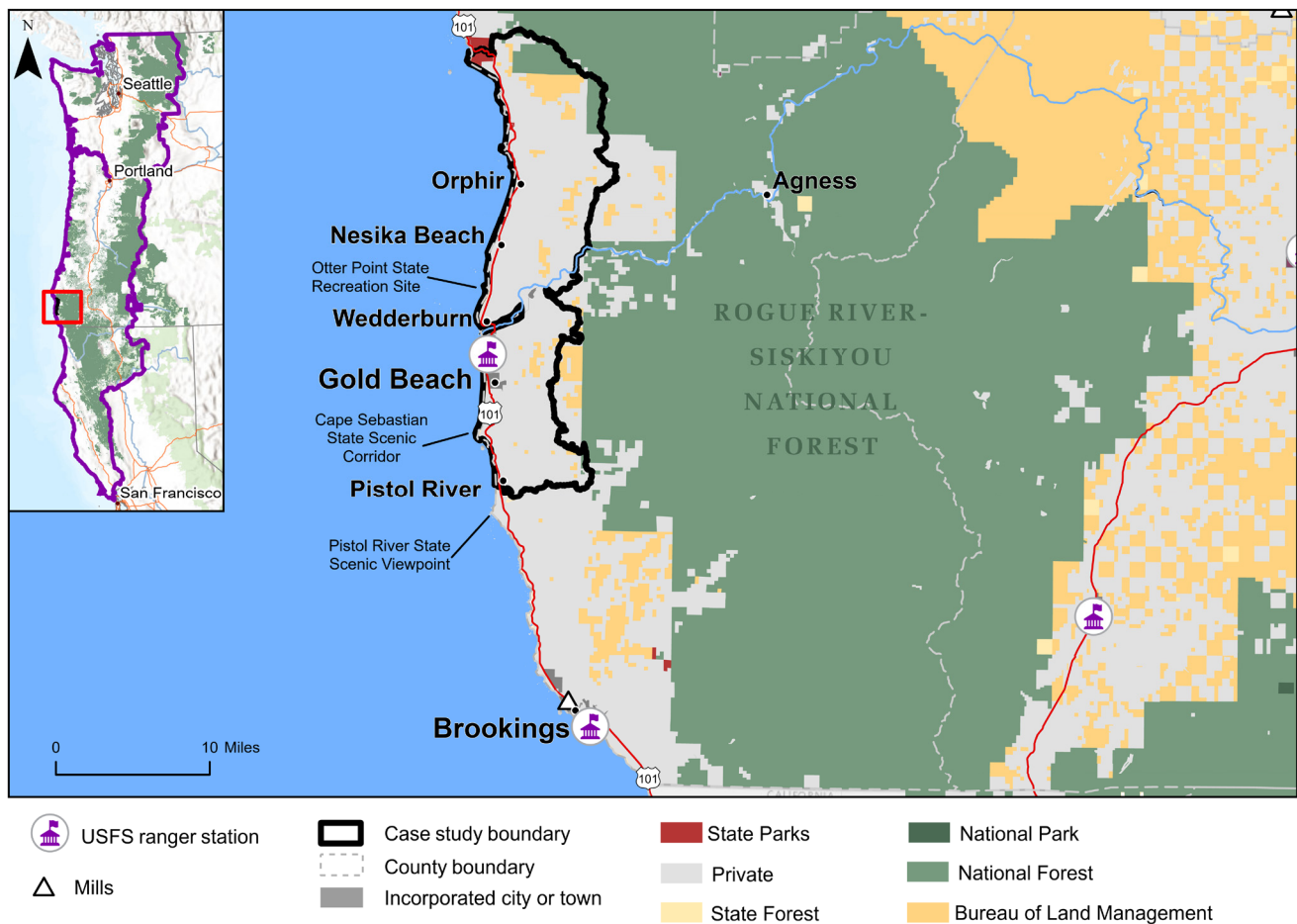


Figure 8.2. Gold Beach case study area.

Shared sense of place

Many interviewees characterized the study area as a retirement community. One interviewee suggested that “we have a lot of people that are old here, and so that means we have a lot of people who are not really in the job phase of their life.” Residents also noted that Gold Beach felt far removed from the rest of Oregon. As one interviewee put it, “We are out of the loop here ... so that's a big factor ... on whether people will live here or not.” Most residents of Curry County live within two miles of the coastline (Quinn, 1987).

Points of interest

Coastal State Parks

The 362 miles of publicly managed Oregon coastal beaches remain the most popular destination within the Oregon State Parks system. Coastal state parks saw a record-breaking total of 32.5 million day-use visitors in 2024 (Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, 2026). Coastal state parks within the Gold Beach study area include, from north to south, Humbug Mountain State Park, Sisters Rock State Park, Orphir Wayside State Park, Otter Point State Recreation Site, and Cape Sebastian State Scenic Corridor. Cape Sebastian State Scenic Corridor is a well-known spot for its scenic views and includes a walking trail started by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s that is still maintained today (Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, n.d.). Harris Beach State Park, just a 30-minute drive south from Gold Beach, was the coasts' most popular day-use area in 2023 with almost 1.8 million visitors (OregonLive, 2024).



Coast near Cape Sebastian

Rogue River

The Rogue River meets the Pacific Ocean just north of Gold Beach, Oregon. This area is popular for jet boating and fishing. Some commercial companies offer jet boat tours during recreation season. Fishing is also important to the region both culturally and economically.

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 the direct impacts of these events on the social and economic wellbeing of the Gold Beach 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.

Between 1989 and 1993,² timber harvest on the Siskiyou National Forest fell from a maximum of 242 million board feet (mmbf) to a minimum of 11 mmbf representing a 95 percent decline (Figure 8.3) (USDA Forest Service, 2025). Harvest rebounded slightly in the mid- to late 1990s, peaking at 56 mmbf in 1996, but continued to oscillate. In 2009, the Siskiyou National Forest merged with the Rogue River National Forest, but even after the merger, mean annual harvest volumes failed to exceed 38 mmbf.

2. USDA Forest Service cut and sold data reported in federal fiscal years.

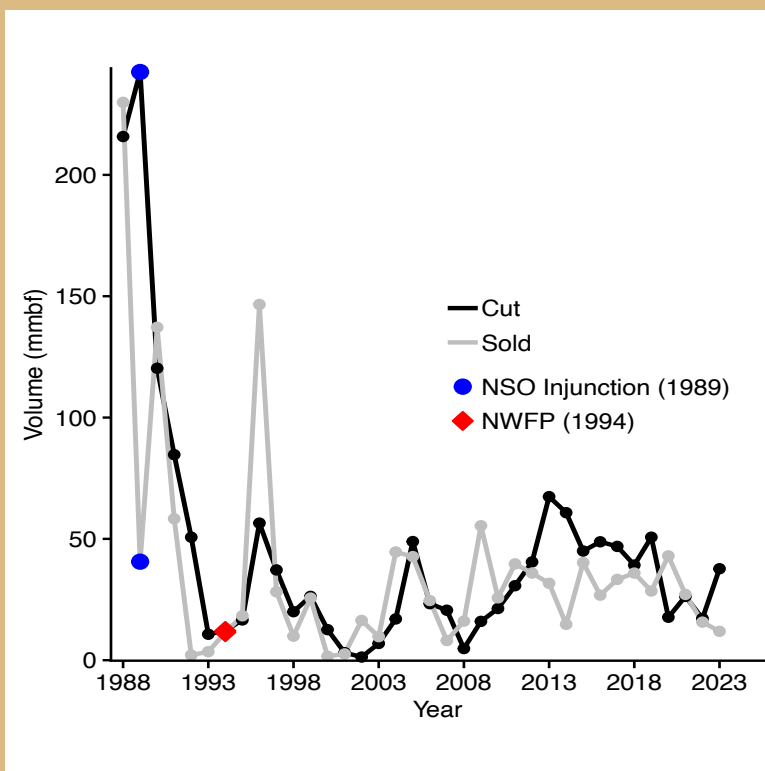


Figure 8.3. Line graph showing timber harvest and sales (“cut” and “sold” volume in million board feet) for the Siskiyou National Forest, federal fiscal years 1988 through 2008 and the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest, federal fiscal years 2009 through 2023. Landmark 1989 temporary injunction on timber sales in NSO (northern spotted owl) habitat in federal forests in the Pacific Northwest and 1994 implementation of the Northwest Forest Plan indicated by blue dots and red diamonds respectively (USDA Forest Service, 2025).

Interviewees in Gold Beach viewed the NWFP as having a significant impact in their area, with four community members stating that there was a negative view of the NWFP in the area, four stating a more neutral view, and one stating that some had positive views of the plan. Interviewees typically associated the NWFP with the northern spotted owl (n=6), timber (n=6), and land use (n=4). Some interviewees saw the NWFP as negatively impacting work in the forest and mills:³ *“I think there was an acute moment of contraction after the Northwest Forest Plan, because mills did close.”* Others recalled that the local mill in Gold Beach closed in the 1980s: *“there used to be a mill right up the river, a big mill that closed down prior actually to the Northwest Forest Plan and it closed down in the mid-1980s.”*

Interviewees did not associate changes related to tourism and housing with the Northwest Forest Plan. As one interviewee put it: *“I don’t think any of that’s [housing] tied to the Northwest Forest Plan, that’s tied to, you know, larger economics having to do with coastal communities that are making our real estate costs extremely high and attracting, you know, [to] outside industrial investors.”*

Pre-NWFP history

Settlement

Tututni people have lived in the Gold Beach area since time immemorial (Beckham and Hartmann, 1978). In the early 1850s, prospectors discovered placer gold in the sands of the Rogue River. As Euro-American settlers and miners encroached onto Tututni lands during this local gold rush, conflict ensued between the two groups.

3. This term is used throughout to indicate any wood processing facility, including, for example, dimensional sawmills, shake mills, plywood and particleboard facilities, paper mills.

In February 1856, resisting pressures to relocate to reservations, Indigenous Tututni attacked Americans in Ellensburg. Known as the Rogue River War of 1855-1856, the conflict resulted in numerous Indigenous and Euro-American deaths (Beckham, 1971; Schwartz, 2022; Barganski, 2022). By June of 1856, Tututni and other Indigenous peoples were removed by the US Army and relocated to the reservation at Siletz, Oregon, two hundred miles away from their homeland (Beckham and Harmann, 1978). Today, Tututni descendants are members of the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians (Oregon), the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde (Oregon), and the Tolowa Dee-Ni' Nation (California) (Lewis, 2023).

The community of Ellensburg (renamed Gold Beach in the 1890s) was incorporated in 1853. In the decades following the Rogue River War, the community of Ellensburg grew around the gold mining industry. However, gold supplies did not last. The timber industry, dairies, and other industries, developed first to supply local mine-related demand, then expanded. Around 1900, there were over 400 dairies operating in Curry County (Massingill and Hoogesteger, 2002). In the late 1800s, commercial fishing began to grow as an industry as gold mining declined (Barganski, 2022). The first cannery opened in 1876 (“Gold Beach History,” n.d.). Salmon fishing peaked in 1908 before decreasing dramatically due to overfishing.

In response to diminishing fishing stocks, recreational fishermen in the Upper Rogue River succeeded in banning commercial fishing on the Rogue River in 1935 despite opposition from commercial fishing interests on the coast (Dodds, 1959). As a result, commercial fishermen on the Rogue River transitioned to ocean fishing. Although the fishing industry persisted for the next decades, it was greatly diminished. Gold Beach fishermen were highly susceptible to market fluctuations and changing local conditions in salmon and crab populations. These market downturns meant that many people left fishing for other livelihoods by the 1960s and 1970s (“Comprehensive Plan,” 1982). In 1982, the fishery in Gold Beach was considered the least productive of the three ports in Curry County and remaining commercial fish processing facilities there closed that year (“Comprehensive Plan,” 1982).



Boats near Gold Beach, 1940

The Siskiyou National Forest was established in 1907. Brookings, just south of the study area, was initially developed as a timber company town, constructed and designed in the 1910s by the Brookings Lumber and Box Company (Priester, 1994). However, the company focused its efforts on redwood timber in adjacent Del Norte County, California. In contrast to the rugged terrain of the Siskiyou National Forest and adjacent private lands, the redwood timberlands of Northern California were better suited to the railroad logging methods used at the time.

As early as 1925, municipalities and boosters saw tourism as part of the future of Oregon’s South Coast. For example, zoning rules passed in Brookings restricted the placement of mills to protect tourism and retirement opportunities (although the city lifted this restriction after World War II; Priester, 1994). The completion of the Roosevelt (101) highway in 1927 also opened new possibilities for the tourist industry (Long Range Planning, 1969; “Comprehensive Plan,” 1982).

By the 1960s, tourism was Curry County’s second-largest industry behind timber (Priester, 1994). However, there were relatively limited facilities to support increasing tourism. For example, in the

late 1960s, the county lacked a golf course and had no tourism-oriented organizations (Long Range Planning, 1969). Despite this, tourism was “vital” to the county, as noted by a county sheriff tracking river rescues in 1971 (Boice, 1971 q. in Quinn, 1987).

In 1968, 84 miles of the Lower Rogue River were designated as Wild and Scenic, impacting management of the river and eliminating dredging (USDA Forest Service, n.d.b). In the 1960s and 1970s, sportfishing became a widespread use of the Rogue River. In 1973, approximately 12% of all recreation in the count was fishing, indicating its relative importance (“Comprehensive Plan,” 1982).

Post-World War II timber industry

Logging had already begun to intensify in Curry County beginning in the 1930s (Massingill and Hoogesteger, 2002). After World War II, logging increased in the study area due to its vast stands of old-growth Douglas-fir (Priester, 1994). Between Pistol River, Gold Beach, and Ophir, there were at least 15 mills operating at some point during the mid-20th century (Massingill and Hoogesteger, 2002). As technologies such as trucks and chainsaws entered the industry, the social organization of timber harvesting transitioned from large, centralized operations (often tied to rail lines and large logging camps) to smaller, independent businesses, most often family owned. Known as “gyppos,” these independent loggers and small milling operations proliferated along the Oregon coast in the 1940s-1950s (Wells, 2006), logging old-growth timber in areas previously unreachable by railroad. One family-owned business was the Tamco mill, built in 1957 in Ophir, which specialized in veneer (Priester, 1994). Larger mill and plywood manufacturing operations also proliferated during the 1950s. In Gold Beach, for example, the California and Oregon Lumber Company (successor to Brookings Lumber and Box Company) opened a sawmill that operated from the 1950s-1970s (Boice, 2012).

By the early 1960s, smaller timber processing facilities in the study area and in Brookings (south of the study area) began to close and larger operations bought out small, independent mills as harvesters exhausted timber supply on private lands and became more reliant on federal lands (Long Range Planning, 1969). The five wood manufacturing companies that remained in Curry County included the Tamco Mill in Ophir and U.S. Plywood in Gold Beach in the study area, and three operations in Brookings: Agnew Timber Products, South Coast Lumber, and Brookings Plywood Corporation (Priester, 1994). Efforts to maintain and develop timber processing capacity also faced setbacks. For example, the Camac Veneer Company mill in Gold Beach burned down in 1959 and again in 1960 (Associated Press, 1960), and a proposal to build a pulp mill in Gold Beach was defeated because of the project effects the mill would have on Rogue River water quality (The News-Review, 1961).

By 1969, a Curry County report predicted a decline in the industry, noting that mill capacity was much greater than the capacity of forestlands to produce wood (Long Range Planning, 1969). This forecast turned out to be accurate: by the 1980s, South Coast was the main timber operator in the region and the only dimensional lumber mill in Southern Curry County (Priester, 1994). At the time, the mill was 95% supplied by federal timber and considered themselves to be dependent on foreign markets. With financial consolidation of the mills, wages dropped dramatically to two-thirds of their previous amount.

In 1985, Agnew Timber purchased the U.S. Plywood-Champion mill in Gold Beach and closed it indefinitely, laying off 300 workers in the process (Priester, 1994). That year, for the first time, “trade and services” employment surpassed wood products and manufacturing employment in Curry County. This transformation was controversial in the county, in part because many residents viewed the local economy as synonymous with the timber industry (Priester, 1994). When the U.S. Plywood mill burned

down in 1989, the Tamco Mill in Ophir (approximately 12 miles north of the City of Gold Beach) was the last remaining industrial-scale wood processing facility in the study area (Gold Beach CRT, 1993).

Mill closures were not a surprise to regional researchers, who had predicted a 35% decline in public timber production in the South Coast area as early as 1976 (Priester, 1994). Between 1963 and 1987, the Siskiyou National Forest reduced its annual allowable cut by 23.4 mmbf⁴ (Priester, 1994). In 1982, the comprehensive plan for the City of Gold Beach stated that the timber industry was already in decline, due to “declining timber supply, improved technology, poor transportation, and a widely fluctuating market” (“Comprehensive Plan,” 1982). Because extensive railroad lines were never developed in Gold Beach, mills historically shipped logs by sea. Approximately 90% of Rogue River commercial transportation consisted of log barges (Boice, 2012; “Comprehensive Plan,” 1982). Gold Beach’s port was also historically less active than the ports in Brookings and Port Orford, and usage declined when dredging ended on the Rogue River (“Comprehensive Plan,” 1982).



Photo: Oregon Historical Society

Gold Beach and Rogue River Mouth, 1930s

Gold Beach after the NWFP

Employment and industry

Interviewees in 2024 agreed that there had been a decline in forestry-related jobs. Most cited mechanization rather than Forest Service policies as a primary reason for this decline. The last wood processing facility in the study area, the Tamco Mill in Ophir, burned down and closed in 2000 (The World, 2000).

According to interviewees, as of 2024, the largest private employer in the study area was Freeman Marine (marine equipment), while the hospital, school system, and county government account for the largest public sector employment. Freeman Marine was also listed as the largest private sector employer in Gold Beach in 1993 (Gold Beach CRT, 1993). Among interviewees there was a sense that tourism and recreation jobs had increased (six interviewees commented on recreation job increases, and five commented on tourism job increases). In 2024, tourism attractions included jet boating, the beaches and mild summer climate, and festivals (including the Curry County Fair, Rogue River Salmon Derby Competition, and Clam Chowder festival) (Barganski, 2022).

4. Rogue River and Siskiyou National Forests merged in 2004 (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/rogue-siskiyou/learning/history-culture>).

Other important employment sectors in the area noted by interviewees included government jobs, agriculture, and the prison in nearby Pelican Bay, California. According to interviewees, some residents commute to work at the prison in Pelican Bay. Six interviewees mentioned the economic importance of recreational or commercial fishing, and four mentioned the importance of jet boat recreation along the Rogue River. Five interviewees believed that fishing had declined over time due to overfishing and market conditions.

As outlined in the history section above, by the 1980s, the timber industry in Gold Beach began to decline well before the implementation of the NWFP. However, by that time, infrastructure and services in the area suggest that the economy was already reorienting to support tourism and retirees. For example, a 1982 report documented the following amenity-related facilities: Rogue Bay Cannery Trailer Court (RV), Jot's Resort (Jet Boat), Rogue River Mail Boat Service (boats), Port of Gold Beach (boats), Sandy Camp (RV hookups), Gold Beach City Park (picnic, recreation), Gold Beach Travel Park (RV), Rogue Autel (RV), Curry County Fairgrounds (ocean access), and Buena Vista Ocean State Wayside (ocean access) ("Comprehensive Plan," 1982).

While some interviewees bemoaned the loss of natural resource industries, others thought that the nature of employment and income in the county had changed: *"The employment has shifted from resource use, ranching, fishing, and timber to retirement. Pensions are the biggest income in this county, and that's been true for a long time."* In some ways, this influx of funds was viewed positively by interviewees: *"Oh, it [retirement money and tourism] is the heart that keeps these communities alive. Without retirement money and tourism, it's Appalachia with a view."*

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Priester (1994) found that many locals complained about the role of retirees in local politics, as well as their impact on local housing prices. Many people thought that retirees were not contributing to the local community, as they would arrive and be involved briefly before either deciding to leave or becoming less involved in the community. In 2024, interviewees touted this demographic turnover as an asset: *"it's going to sound strange, one of our greatest renewable resources is people come and go."* Another noted that local governments *"should consider them [retirees] long-term tourists. They would stay for about seven years, and then they would get too old, and they would want to be someplace where there was better health care, or they'd want to live near their kids."*

Gold Beach has also made efforts to actively attract tourists. For example, interviewees commented that the transient lodging tax in Gold Beach supported tourism promotion in the area, including promoting local jet boat tours on the Rogue River. However, interviewees were divided as to whether Gold Beach had embraced tourism.

Interviewees noticed what they saw as positive changes in the community toward adopting a new identity:

Can I go back to the Northwest Forest Plan generally, and just say, I do feel like culturally, the communities have changed more towards, you know, adopting the identity of being like tourist, retirement communities, rather than being natural resource dependent communities.... there's a lot of common ground about ... wanting to protect the natural resources of our place, especially our rivers and our fish and things like that. And I have a sense that maybe 30 years ago, it would have been harder to find that common ground than it is now.

Some interviewees saw this change as a result of changing attitudes among longtime residents as well as an influx of new residents.

Demographic and community changes

According to US Census data for the Gold Beach CCD, the total population for the Gold Beach study area increased by over one quarter between 2000 and 2020 (Table 8.1). Low-income populations also increased by nearly 18 percent. Adults age 25-44 decreased overall, comprising 22 percent of the population in 2000 and 15 percent of the population in 2020. Retirement age populations increased from 23 percent to 31 percent of the population.

Table 8.1. 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	4,686	5,219	5,881	Increased
Low-income population*	1,695	1,924	1,998	No clear trend
% Low-income population	36%	37%	34%	
Population aged 25-44	1,013	811	903	Decreased
% Population aged 25-44	22%	16%	15%	
Population aged 65 or older	1,074	1,400	1,843	Increased
% Population aged 65 or older	23%	27%	31%	
*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.				

Since the Northwest Forest Plan, Curry County has continued to attract retirees in a continuation of pre-NWFP demographic trends. Of eleven community interviewees, eight specifically mentioned retirees as a group of new people moving in, and two mentioned remote workers or otherwise wealthy people moving to Gold Beach. Eight interviewees agreed that there were fewer families with young children in the area than there used to be, and that the predominant group of people in the county were described as older people. Only one interviewee mentioned lower-income groups moving to the area. Interviewees suggested that new people chose Gold Beach because of its perceived isolation, its natural resources and recreational opportunities, temperate climate, or the small-town feel. Interviewees noted that there were positive elements to living in Gold Beach, and therefore that the area *“is experiencing slightly less emptying out of rural areas than the national [average] would suggest.”*

With the influx of new retirees and other amenity migrants in the study area, some interviewees commented on how the composition of political views had changed, even though Curry County remains conservative overall. For example, one interviewee lamented the decline of what they described as a *“good old boy network”* way of doing business in the past: *“a lot of times, the people that move in they aren't in the timber industry, they're, I guess, they're more controlling, and they're not ... as good [of a] neighbor.”*

Another interviewee noted that they believed these demographic trends also negatively impacted votes on bonds and other county funding measures.

Housing

All community interviewees agreed that housing had become less affordable in the area and noted the likely causes as the influx of retirees and wealthy people, a lack of affordable and lower-income housing, and investment properties. Three interviewees noted that land use laws and Gold Beach's unique geography constrained opportunities for building in the area. Another noted that *"housing stock is low and has been low for decades."* Interviewees characterized the lack of affordable housing as *"a crisis" and "barrier"* to future growth and employment.

Seven interviewees noted the prevalence of vacation homes and second homes in the area, and they mentioned that this had a negative impact on housing and rentals. A common refrain was that property owners had converted long-term rentals to short-term vacation rentals, making it harder for lower-income residents to remain in the area. While many interviewees appreciated how short-term rentals increased the availability of homes for vacationers and tourists, they found that it did have a negative impact on availability and cost for long-term rentals. An online search revealed 265 short-term rental homes in the study area as of October 2024.

Both Curry County and Gold Beach have a permitting system for short-term rentals (STRs). In unincorporated Curry County, rentals are limited to areas zoned as residential or light commercial, and owners must have a permit and pay transient lodging taxes (Andrews, 2024). In Gold Beach, STR regulations are stricter, and new STR applications are limited in residential, non-ocean front areas, as city officials have determined that only ocean front areas do well enough to justify removing them from the rental housing pool ("Updated Regulations," n.d.). Similarly, STRs in Gold Beach are subject to transient lodging tax ("Updated Regulations," n.d.). One area, Sebastian Shores, has a particularly high concentration of vacation rentals, and has beachfront access ("Updated Regulations," n.d.).

Community services

Interviewees had mixed opinions as to how local services (including restaurants, health care, gas stations, grocery stores, and personal or business services) had changed. As one interviewee put it, *"restaurants come and go,"* but others noted that restaurant types were changing. One interviewee mentioned that local restaurants were shifting away from bars, likely because there are *"not as many loggers wanting to spend their paycheck at the bar,"* and another mentioned that new restaurants were *"tourism dollar-driven."* Interviewees did not notice big differences in grocery store access or quality, aside from closures and redistribution of services related to a Fred Meyer grocery store arriving in nearby Brookings. A county hospital (Curry General Hospital) was recently built in Gold Beach, replacing a 1950s-era facility that no longer met building codes (Foden-Vencil, 2015; McDuff, 2020). The new hospital was built on the site of the old hospital and lies within the tsunami zone, generating local controversy (Foden-Vencil, 2015). Current amenities are summarized in Figure 8.4.



Photo: Oregon Historical Society
Gold Beach post office, 1960

2 FULL SERVICE SUPERMARKETS

Gold Beach: McKay's Market and Ray's Food Place

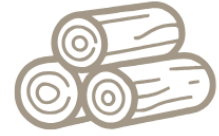


1 FOREST SERVICE RANGER STATION

Gold Beach Ranger Station, Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest



0 TIMBER PROCESSING FACILITIES



2 COMMUNITY HEALTH CLINICS

Gold Beach: Curry General Hospital and South Coast Health Center



3 POST OFFICES

Gold Beach: 8.5 hours, 5 days/week
Wedderburn: 4 hours, 6 days/week
Ophir: 4 hours, 6 days/week



1 LIBRARY

Gold Beach: Curry Public Library



Figure 8.4. Community amenities in the Gold Beach study area. Includes: two full-service supermarkets (other locations that accept SNAP benefits, such as gas stations or convenience stores, not included), one Forest Service ranger station, zero timber processing facilities, two community health clinics, three post offices, and one library.

Community governance

Multiple interviewees discussed issues in county government, including county funding, management, and the relationship between local officials and other levels of government. For example, interviewees noted that the county-level government had difficulties moving away from natural resource revenues, and that the county suffered financially from the decline in federal timber targets and the associated loss of timber revenues:

“We in Curry County, you may have read about it in the news before, had struggles with funding their county government to sufficient levels to provide very basic levels of service. And so county commissioners, in particular, are very reluctant to forego any potential timber receipts that they might get that amount of cash might keep some central service running, right.”

Others suggested that the county had not yet fully adapted to a new funding model: *“the county still expects to be funded by timber receipts and hasn't really adjusted.”* Except for a levy to fund the hospital, proposals to replace timber receipts in the study area have all failed to pass (Ackerman et al., 2016).

One interviewee commented that Curry County has been a region with *“a really anti-government sentiment due to some of the things from the Northwest Forest Plan,”* and another noted that local officials were often at odds with federal officials: *“the governments in these towns, tend to mistrust the federal government.”*

Community relationship with the Forest Service

Interviewees were divided when describing the relationship between the community and the Forest Service. Three interviewees described the relationship as positive, three as negative, and four described the community as divided—with some having positive relationships with the Forest Service and others having negative relationships. Additionally, three interviewees thought that much of the community did not have a relationship with the Forest Service. While the area was once *“dead center of the [spotted owl] situation,”* some interviewees noted that in 2024, attitudes toward the federal government and Forest Service were less contentious than they had been in the 1990s: *“When the Northwest Forest Plan first came into effect, people hated Forest Service people, and that's not the case anymore.”*



Gold Beach Ranger District

Two interviewees suggested that Forest Service staffing policies had negatively impacted the agency's relationship with the community. For example, one interviewee suggested that because of lower staffing levels, it was difficult for Forest Service staff to contribute to the local community. As one Forest Service interviewee put it, *“I think we have like 25 permanent employees here in Gold Beach. And that number used to be much closer to 150.”* Other interviewees noted that there has been high turnover in the district office more recently. One interviewee suggested that Forest Service employees were previously involved in the community, but high turnover had reduced the integration of Forest Service staff with the community. As a result, the agency had become a *“black box”* that the community no longer understood. For example, one interviewee stated that they'd had three different District Rangers in the last six years, and that this high turnover meant that *“by the time you know, develop that relationship, and they understand what's going on, then they're gone.”*

Conversely, other interviewees commented that they felt that the staff at the local district were more involved in the community than before, and voiced optimism about current staff with longer tenure on the district. Two interviewees were optimistic about the current District Ranger, in part because she was *“born and raised here.”* Agency employees also noted a recently improved relationship between the district and the community and attributed it to the efforts of the new ranger.

One community interviewee suggested that community members were often frustrated with the Forest Service, but for contrasting reasons:

“They're [community members are] super frustrated with them [the Forest Service], for different reasons, though. Like my frustration with them is because we're not getting enough recreation done, you know, or conservation is not as big of a priority as it should be, and they're spending too much money on fighting fires or logging or whatever. For other people, it's that they're not logging enough, and they're too focused on conservation, so they're frustrated there's not more timber coming out of the woods or something. So like, I think there's a ton of frustration with the Forest Service, but on both sides.”

Another interviewee characterized the different views of the Forest Service as a division between a *“loggers' mindset”* and an *“environmentalists' mindset.”* Similarly, some interviewees noted that overall

attitudes in the community had shifted away from resource use toward conservation.

We asked community interviewees about their views on Forest Service management priorities (Figure 8.5). A vast majority of interviewees (91 percent) suggested that they thought that managing for wildfire resilience was a high priority for the Forest Service. Community interviewees also thought that the Forest Service was prioritizing the incorporation of science (65 percent) and the incorporation of public opinion (55 percent). Fewer interviewees (46 percent) thought that the Forest Service placed community wellbeing as a high priority. Most interviewees did not think that the Forest Service was prioritizing management for climate change.

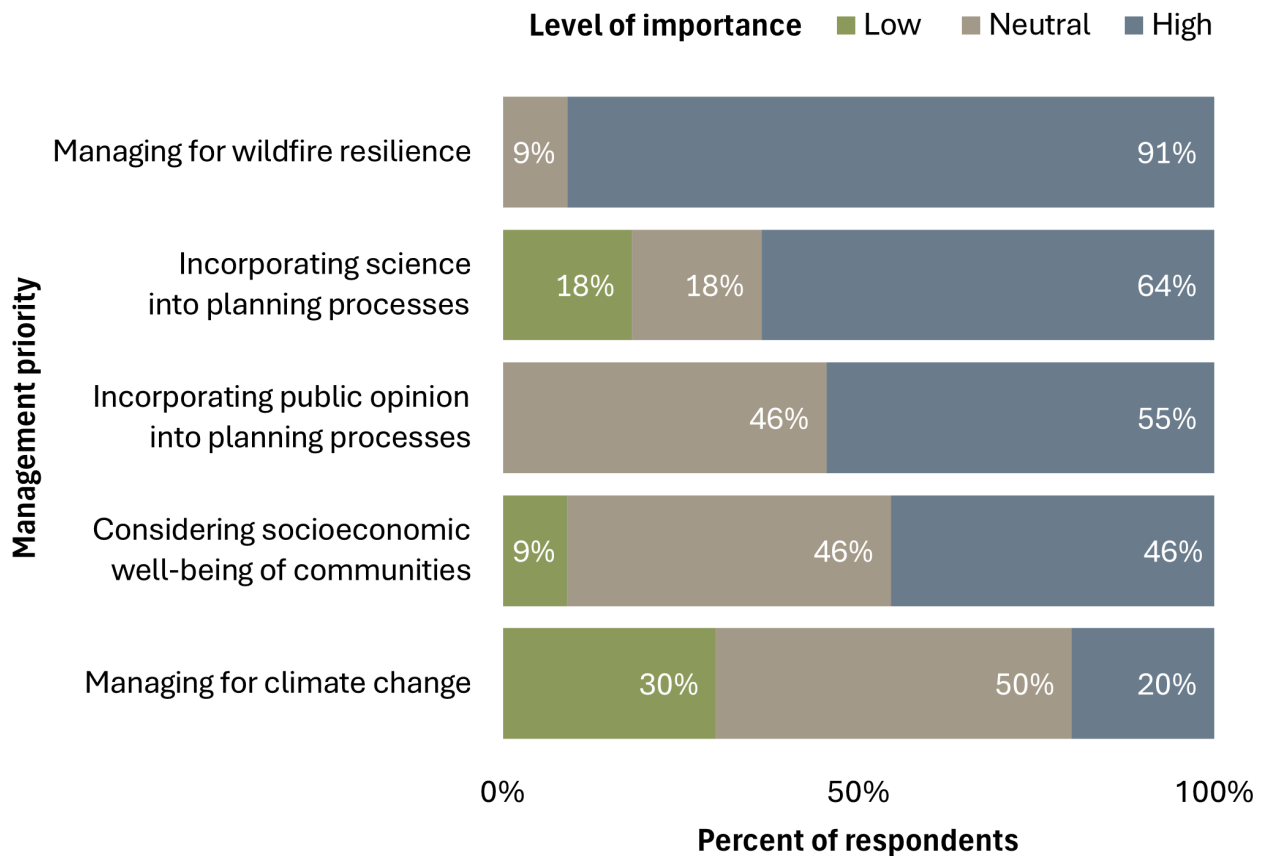


Figure 8.5. Community perception of Forest Service management priorities (n=11). Bar graph segments represent the percentage of interviewees indicating level of importance (Low, Medium, High) of each management priority.

Community relationship with national forest lands

Interviewees mostly agreed (90%) that hunting and fishing were highly important uses of the national forest and they were nearly unanimous that recreation more generally was of medium to high importance (Figure 8.6). Nearly 90 percent of interviewees also thought that forest management related water quality was an important resource for the community. Interviewees had less agreement about the importance of timber and non-timber forest products.



Photo: Oregon Historical Society

Fishing on the Rogue River

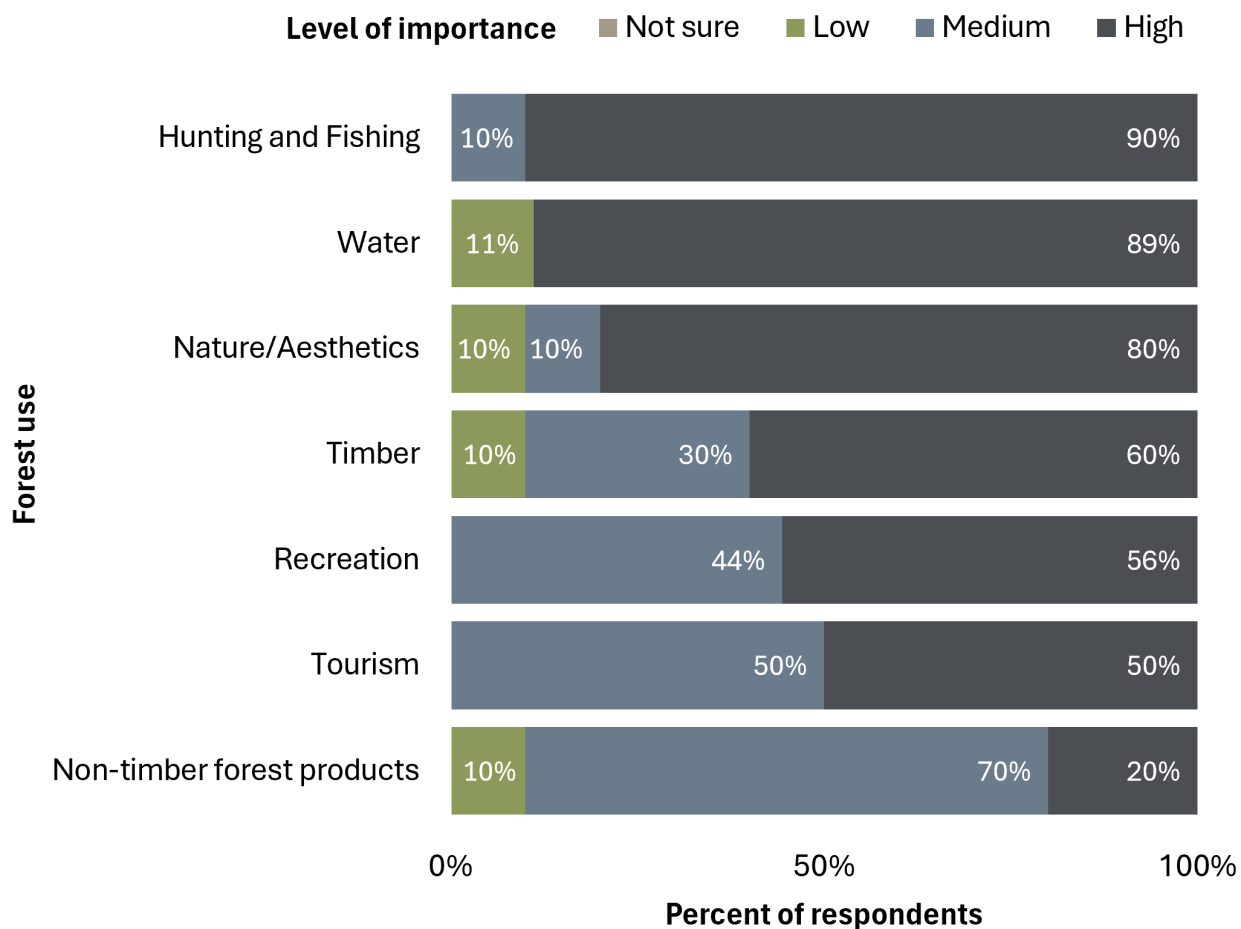


Figure 8.6. Importance of national forest uses to community (n=10). Bar graph segments represent the percentage of interviewees indicating level of importance (Not sure, Low, Medium, High) of each forest use to the community.

Recreation and roads

Interviewees saw recreation as a growing interest for locals. However, one interviewee mentioned that more new people were taking advantage of recreational opportunities, whereas they thought long-time residents did not participate in local recreation opportunities. The most popular types of recreation mentioned by community members and agency employees were mountain biking (n=7), hiking (n=6), water recreation (n=3), fishing (n=2), off-highway vehicle use (n=2), camping (n=2), and hunting (n=1). Popular recreation areas noted by interviewees included the Rogue River, the beach, and multiuse trails by Agness (Fritsche Cabin and Pine Grove). As one interviewee noted, “Obviously, fishing is huge. ...I mean, people live here because they like to recreate here.... there's always people swimming and out hiking and enjoying the woods. A lot of hunting.”

Both Forest Service staff and locals agreed that services at recreation sites, road maintenance, and Forest Service presence in the forest had declined. In turn, this caused frustration among long-time members of the community who recreate, hunt, and fish in the forest. Four community interviewees and an agency employee pointed to the need for road and trail maintenance as among the top issues for the community. As one interviewee noted, “to [take part in] recreation, to do hunting and fishing, like, we really need those roads and access to our forests, otherwise, we're not able to [do] those recreation activities on our forest.” Lack of road maintenance was not only seen as a problem for community access but also understood

by the community to present risks for wildfire management. Finally, interviewees voiced that complaints about roads were often tied to complaints about a lack of timber harvesting, as timber harvest requires road improvements.

Timber

Between 2013 and 2023, a total of 15 timber sales on the Gold Beach Ranger District averaged around 3,000 thousand board feet (mbf) (excepting three small sales of less than 50 mbf) (USDA Forest Service, 2023). Bid values for those sales totaled nearly \$3.4 million. Although these timber sales were not purchased by operators based within the study area, 10 out of the 15 sales went to a business based in nearby Brookings. Other sales went to businesses in Myrtle Point, Coos Bay, and Roseburg, Oregon.

Ninety percent of interviewees suggested that national forest timber was of medium to high importance to the community. However, when asked about how increasing timber harvest on the national forest might impact the community, one interviewee noted that, *“most of the [local] mills are closed so they can only process so many logs. So even if they were allowed to go get more, I don't think they could do that much more than they're already doing. ... So unless someone builds a new mill, there's no point in cutting more trees down.”* Another interviewee suggested that *“there's a thought prevalent in a lot of the community, that logging is the answer ... but it's used as code ... to say that the Forest Service hasn't managed the forest.”*

Non-timber forest products

Most interviewees ranked non-timber forest products as having a medium level of importance to the community. However, as one interviewee stated, “there's definitely a lot of people that ... forage for [their] families. And then also the industry that is around foraging, both for food products and for the floral industry”. Interviewees reported that the most common non-timber forest products were mushrooms (n=6), pine boughs (n=1), and sword ferns (n=1).

Between 2013 and 2023, the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest sold an average of 11,000 gallons of mushrooms per year resulting in a total revenue of over \$322,000 in permitting fees (USDA Forest Service, 2025). Cut and sold reports data from 2006 to 2008, prior to the merger of the two forests, show that the Siskiyou National Forest accounted for approximately 95 percent (total \$358,000 over three years) of the mushroom permit sales between the two forests, suggesting that commercial mushroom harvest may have been more important on the Siskiyou portion of the forest. As one interviewee told us, *“mushrooms are a pretty big deal in the fall,”* and another interviewee noted that *“people value their mushrooms.”* However, another interviewee suggested that things had more recently changed for commercial mushroom harvest, *“the value in the mushrooms is gone. They were shipping them overseas, and that's where they were making their big money. But that's [no longer the case], so the value has is severely decreased.”*

Sword ferns were not reported in the 2013 to 2023 cut and sold reports for the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest. However, the 2013-2023 total for limbs and boughs was over \$22,000. The previous decade saw total limbs and boughs proceeds of \$34,670 for the Siskiyou National Forest. One interviewee noted a decline in the collection of non-timber forest products, *“You know it used to be, you would see little Toyota trucks with like this mound of cedar boughs and moss that would have been picked, and you would see people just staggering out of the forest with, like this gargantuan backpack filled with [special products]- you don't see that much anymore.”*

The fuelwood program on the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest is the most lucrative of the non-timber forest products (USDA Forest Service, 2025). For the 2013-2023 year period, the forest sold \$154,000 worth of fuelwood permits. Christmas trees are also popular. The national forest sold \$107,000 worth of Christmas tree permits during the 2013-2023 period.

Wildfire and other forest disturbances

The increasing prevalence of large fires in southern Curry County has worried community members. When prompted to discuss recent disturbances in the forest, ten of eleven interviewees mentioned wildfires, including the Biscuit Fire (2002, nearly 500,000 acres), Chetco Bar fire (2017, over 190,000 acres), Klondike Fire (2018, over 175,000 acres), and the Flat Fire (2023, 34,000 acres). Interviewees also saw wildfire playing an increasingly significant role in the agency management priorities and the community perception of the agency's mission, as one agency interviewee stated: *"we're probably looked at as firefighters or an agency managing fire more than at any point in our history."* A community member added that they saw this as a fundamental change in the agency's mission: *"I would probably argue that's their highest priority that they have right now.... They've gone from an agency that sells logs to an agency that is trying to keep a forest from burning up."*

Of these recent fires, the Chetco Bar Fire (2017) stood out to interviewees. Community members thought that it *"rattled people and ... had people worried about the Forest Service."* The fire started in wilderness, and its approach toward Brookings was driven by the Chetco effect, a weather phenomenon where easterly winds push drier air toward the ocean (Urness, 2017). Because of poor access, firefighter danger, and wilderness regulations, little suppression was conducted early in the Chetco Bar Fire (Urness, 2017). Community members felt that *"when a forest fire starts here, ... the Forest Service doesn't move fast enough."* Because of the poor conditions and winds, however, other community members did not blame the Forest Service for their inability to suppress the fire in earlier stages. Many interviewees thought that Curry County residents were lucky not to lose Brookings in the fire. One elected official stated that: *"The loss is frankly incalculable, and we want our government to tell us what happened"* (Urness, 2017).

One of the largest issues of the Chetco Bar Fire was communication, which has been improved in more recent fires. As one interviewee stated, *"I don't think they talked about their tactics enough with the community for the community to feel comfortable with the way the fire rolled out."* In comparison, the same community member stated that the more recent fires (Flat Fire and Anvil Fire, 2023) went more smoothly for the Forest Service, both because of the improved firefighting conditions as well as better communication. During the Flat and Anvil Fires, the Forest Service held community meetings and discussed specific tactics they were using, rather than general assurances that they were fighting the fire. As one community member said: *"[It] wasn't just like, we're fighting this fire, it was like, we're gonna go over to this road and we're gonna back burn down here."* The Forest Service also focused on protecting areas in the Wildland-Urban Interface near Agness: *"I know that they were visiting people's houses, making sure that they were prepared, that they had defensible space, putting ... little portable water tower kind of things on properties, so they could help fight fire and stuff they needed to."* These two strategies—focusing on communities and individual property-owners, and communicating specific fire strategies—were seen as key to building community trust.

Other concerns listed related to wildfire on federal forests included: a desire for salvage logging, concern about smoke impacts, concern that firefighting had overtaken other parts of the agency's mission, and desire for increased fire suppression.

Community futures

In terms of the relationship between the community and the National Forest, community members saw certain current trends continuing. For example, most interviewees envisioned increasing tourism and recreation alongside more dramatic impacts of climate change and severe wildfires. Moving forward, community members wanted to see more maintenance and fire-related work done on the forest and more engagement between the Forest Service and the community. One interviewee said: *“I hope to report back in 10 years that we’ve been more successful in protecting old-growth and providing resilience on the landscape, maybe through active management.”* One way community members saw a possible future was through increased community participation in planning and working with the Forest Service: *“It has to be local. It has to be the tribes. There has to be a wide range of people who are familiar with the forest, who have knowledge of the forest, to know ‘this is what we need to do here,’ and ‘this is,’ you know, ‘the plan for it.’”*

Conclusions and case study highlights

Throughout the post-WWII era, the timber industry dominated the economy of Gold Beach and the national forest supplied the majority of timber to local industry. Geographical constraints imposed by the Ocean and the Oregon Coast Range as well as the growing scarcity of old-growth timber forced local industry to compete for timber supply. In the 1980s, capital consolidation and losses imposed by external events (e.g., the early 1980s recession) and local mishaps (mill fires) severely diminished processing capacity with the study area and surrounding communities. By the time the NWFP was implemented, logging and wood processing were no longer the primary industries in Gold Beach. Nevertheless, some residents considered the NWFP to be a major obstacle to recovering timber processing capacity in the area. Interviewees also blamed the NWFP on Forest Service staffing changes that additionally impacted community well-being.



Photo: Julia Sizak

Boats along the mouth of the Rogue

Gold Beach key forest management takeaways

- Most mills in the study area closed due to market conditions even before the implementation of the Northwest Forest plan. Consequently wood processing capacity is limited to existing infrastructure in adjacent communities.
- Road access remains important to residents of the Gold Beach area. Residents value forest access for hunting and other recreational activities such as biking or hiking.
- Non-forest products such as mushrooms remain moderately important culturally and economically.
- The Forest Service could focus on improving their relationship with the community through better communication. Residents appreciated outreach and improved communication in the most recent Flat and Anvil fires. Offering specific, accessible information to residents can increase trust.
- Reduced Forest Service staffing and high turnover has strained agency-community relationships.
- The community has struggled to replace funding for public services that was lost due to NWFP-related reductions in federal timber harvest and associated receipts.



Gold Beach, Oregon, 1935-1945

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Photo: Julia Sizek

Near Cape Sebastian

For full report, visit:

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