

Chapter 4: Naches, Washington

Photo: Julia Sizek

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Case study facts

Population (2020): 8,586

Location: Yakima County, Washington

Federal forest lands (61% of study area):
Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest,
Naches Ranger District

Climate:

Average Annual High: 64.3 °F/Low: 37.3 °F
Annual Precipitation: 8.01 inches;
Snowfall: 20.3 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 4.1), literature review, and descriptive summaries of selected secondary data. All interviewees worked in, resided in, or had social or economic ties to the Naches 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.

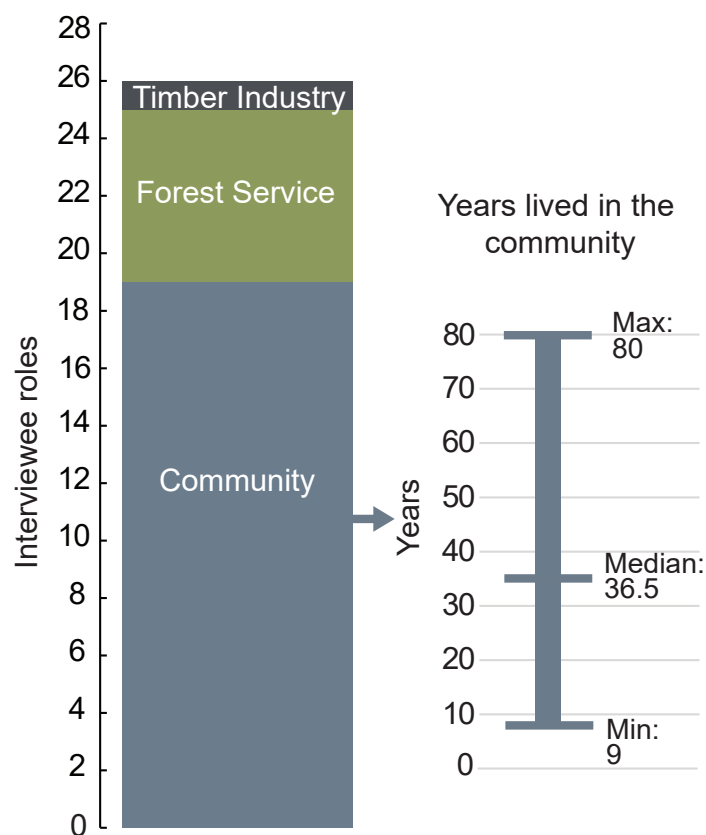


Figure 4.1. Graph of interviewees by role and number of years lived in the community. Our sample included 19 community members, six Forest Service employees, and one timber industry representative. Community interviewees lived in the study area for a minimum of nine years, a maximum of 80 years, and a median of 36.5 years.

Study area and geography

The Naches case study focused on the Naches Ranger District in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. We spatially defined the community as the Northwest Yakima Census County Division (CCD) (Figure 4.2). The Northwest Yakima CCD includes the town of Naches and the unincorporated area of Glead, as well as smaller settlements along US Route 12 (US 12) (White Pass) and State Route 410 (SR 410) (Chinook Pass) corridors. Naches is located along the Naches River, a tributary of the Yakima River that feeds into the Columbia River. The county seat is Yakima, which is located approximately 14 miles southeast of Naches. The Naches Ranger Station is located in the town of Naches. In addition to Forest Service-managed lands (61 percent of the study area), the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Department of Natural Resources all manage significant landholdings within the CCD. Forests in the study area are dominated by dry mixed conifer forests of Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, and grand fir, with some higher elevation mountain hemlock and subalpine fir.

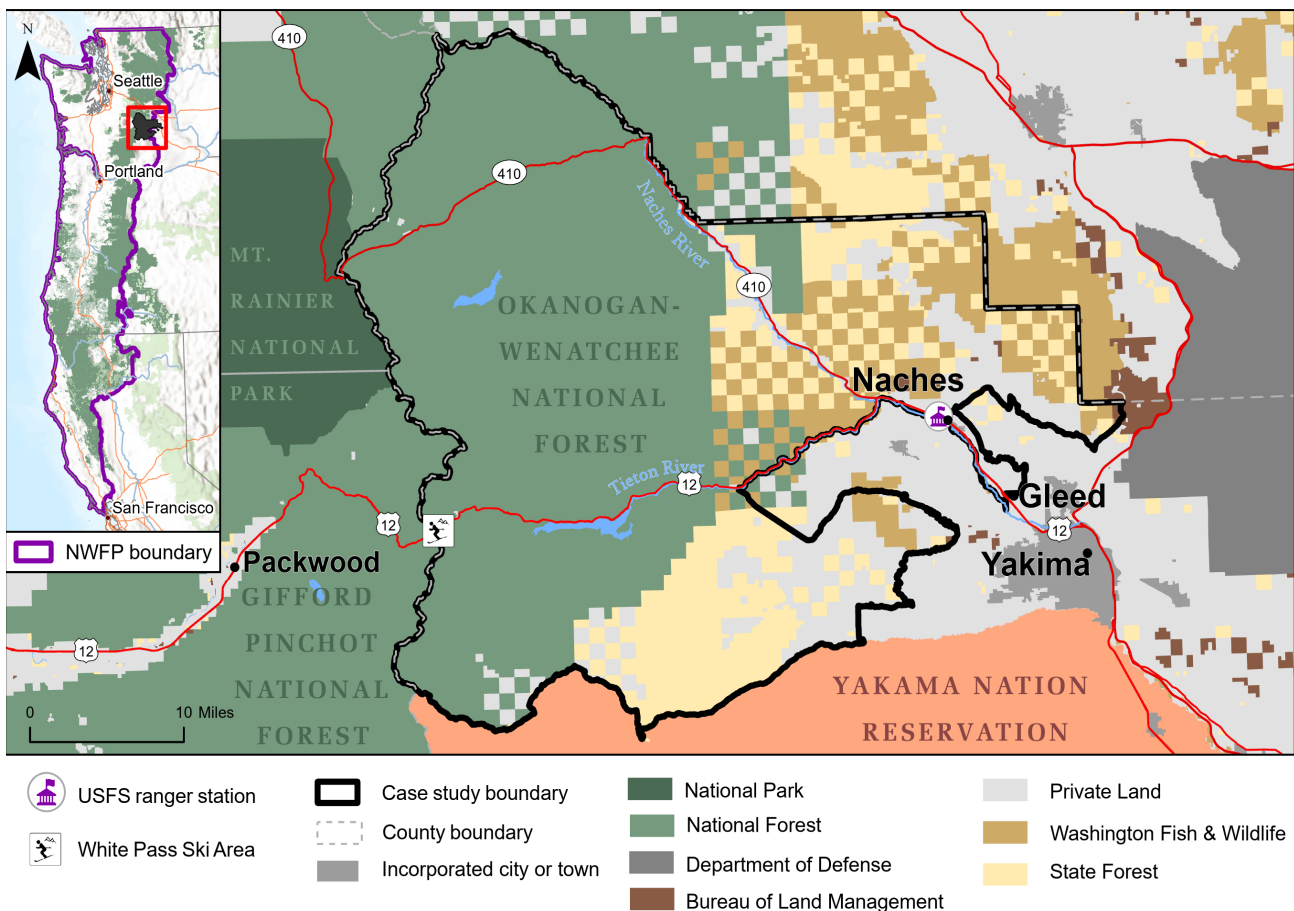


Figure 4.2. Naches study area. State forest managed by Washington Department of Natural Resources.

Shared sense of place

In terms of community character, interviewees from Naches felt that their town was socially and economically connected to nearby Yakima: “we’re not a big tourism [town]; we’re a bedroom community of Yakima.” Another interviewee stated that “the community itself [Naches] is basically now an agricultural

community or a bedroom community for Yakima.”

Interviewees suggested that the community’s small-town feel made it appealing to families looking to get out of Yakima. Along the US 12 and SR 410 corridors, Rimrock Retreat, Nile, Cliffdell, and Goose Prairie have mostly part-time residents with a few full-time residents. In 2024, there were approximately 500 recreation residences on land leased from the Forest Service between White Pass and Chinook Pass, as well as second homes and full-time private homes along private land on each of these roads (Residents of the Highway 410 and 12 Communities, 2005). In comparison to Naches and Gleeed, these areas are much more dependent on recreation and have not had a substantial timber industry presence since the 1940s or earlier.



Photo: Washington State Archives

Yakima Peak, Chinook Pass, 1920-1980

Points of interest

Mount Rainier National Park

At 14,411 feet, Mount Rainier is the tallest and most heavily glaciated peak in the Pacific Northwest. The mountain has been a major destination for tourists since it became the nation’s fifth national park in 1899. The park receives almost two and a half million visitors per year. The park is accessible from five entrances: Nisqually (southwest), Stevens Canyon (southeast), White River/Sunrise (northeast), Carbon River (northwest), and Mowich Lake (northwest). The Nisqually entrance is the most popular and provides access to Longmire and Paradise, the most popular destinations. Today, 97% of the park’s 236,381 acres are congressionally designated wilderness.

White Pass Ski Area

The White Pass Ski Area is located on both the Gifford Pinchot and Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests. The Yakima Valley Ski Club opened the White Pass Ski Area in 1953, two years after the road over White Pass was completed (Lewis County, 2024; Meyers, 2018). After twenty years of contestation, the White Pass Ski Area was expanded in 2008 (Lewis County, 2024). The lease covers 1,402 downhill acres and 11.2 miles of cross-country ski trails. The mountain is known for being a smaller, independently owned ski area (Donofrio, 2022; Thompson, 2024).

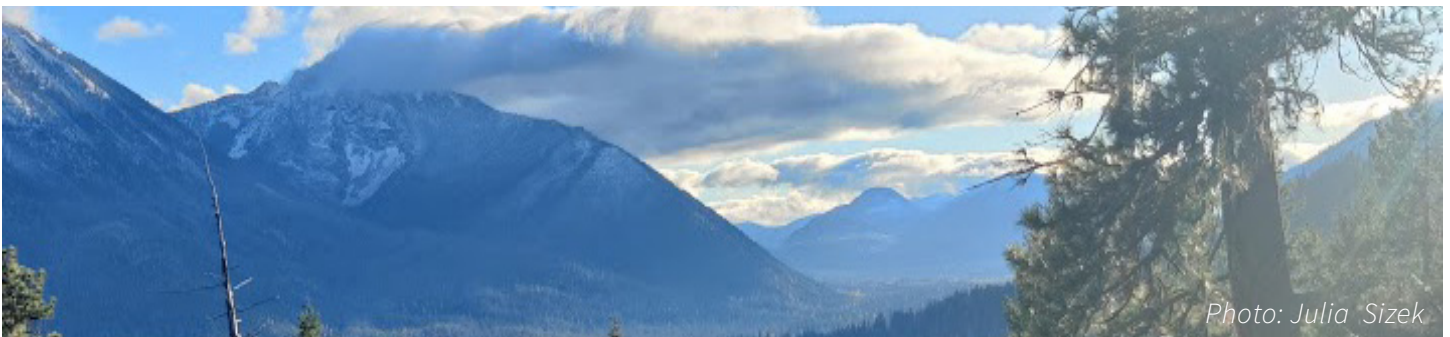


Photo: Julia Sizak

View from William O. Douglass Wilderness

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 Naches 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 well-being following 30 years of the NWFP.

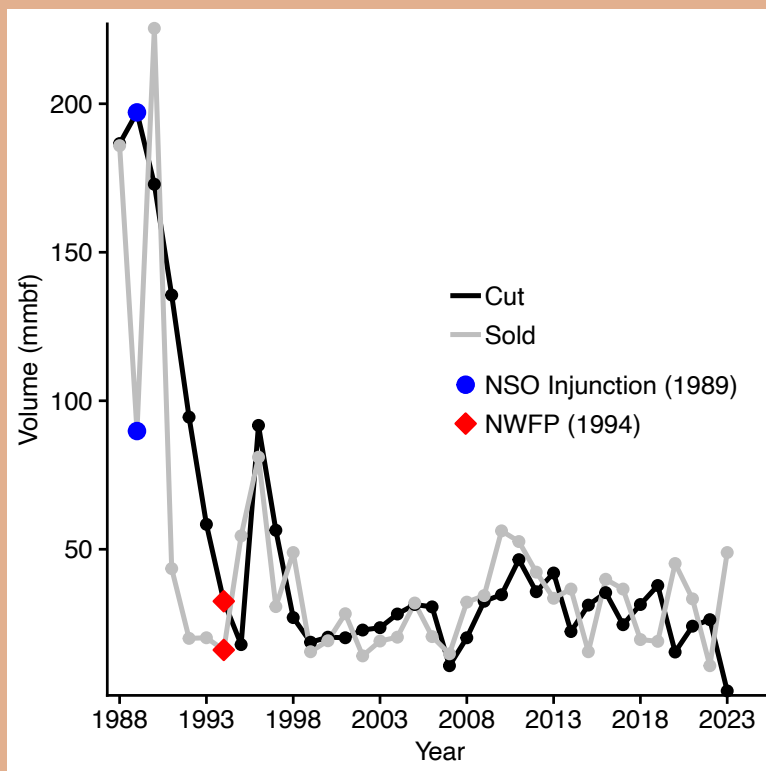


Figure 4.3. Line graph showing timber harvest and sales ("cut" and "sold" volume in million board feet) for the Wenatchee National Forest, federal fiscal years 1988 through 2008 and then the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest 2009-2023. Landmark 1989 temporary injunction on timber sales in NSO (northern spotted owl) habitat in federal forests in the Pacific Northwest and 1994 implementation of the NWFP indicated by blue dots and red diamonds respectively (USDA Forest Service, 2025).

In the late 1980s, timber from the Wenatchee National Forest supplied the Layman Lumber mill in Naches, as well as Boise Cascade's facility in nearby Yakima. Harvests on the Wenatchee National Forest fell from 197.1 million board feet (mmbf) in 1989 to 17.9 mmbf in 1995, a decline of 91 percent (Figure 4.3) (USDA Forest Service, 2025).¹ From 1996 to 2008, harvest volumes varied between 91.7 to 10.8 mmbf, averaging 30.9 mmbf annually. Both Layman Lumber and Boise Cascade ceased operations by 2006.

In 2009, the Wenatchee National Forest merged with the Okanogan National Forest and combined volumes averaged 29.5 mmbf annually through 2023. This mean annual harvest volume for the merged forests represented less than 10 percent of the combined Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forest harvest volumes for fiscal year 1989 (USDA Forest Service, 2025).

Community interviewees generally agreed that the NWFP significantly impacted the local timber industry in Naches. Four community interviewees directly associated

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

the NWFP with the loss of local mills² in both Naches and Yakima. As one community member succinctly stated, *“Layman’s [Layman Lumber, a local sawmill] closed because of the hoot owl,”* implying that logging restrictions associated with northern spotted owl habitat conservation caused the mill to close. Interviewees nevertheless saw Naches—and the Yakima Valley generally— as being resilient to these impacts on the timber industry because of the continued importance of agriculture in the study area. As one interviewee explained, *“I’m sure there was loss in revenue due to the timber... Maybe from taxes and forestry side of it, but the mill was not the predominant economic driver... for Naches and Yakima.”*

Previous analysis of social and economic characteristics of counties in the NWFP region found that in 1990, Yakima County’s dependence on federal timber was equivalent to the region’s overall dependence (Adams, 2025). Before the NWFP, the Naches Ranger District was a *“huge cutter... I think our [timber target] cut was 78 [mmbf], but we were cutting 110 [mmbf] there, which is way too much, I’ll admit, and we all knew it at the time and complained about it, but it went away to nothing. It just, poof.”*

Interviewees considered the Naches Ranger District to be ecologically distinct from other areas of the NWFP, and some interviewees noted that management strategies created for “west-side” forests were being inappropriately applied to “east-side” forests:³ *“you look at Washington, it’s a biodiverse area. So each forest is just going to be so different. Like, how you manage the Naches Ranger District is not how you’re going to manage [districts on] the Mount Baker Snoqualmie [National Forest].”* Interviewees also linked NWFP management strategies to changes in forest composition and wildfire behavior and management. As one interviewee put it, *“I know that the intent.... of the Forest Plan [NWFP], was to return the forest back to a natural [condition], some picture they saw in 1883... It has grown back up into a jungle, which is very, very hazardous to fight fire in. And that’s part of why these fires get so large.”* This view is consistent with the 2004 social and economic monitoring of the Naches community, in which interviewees linked then-current pest infestation, dead trees, and wildfire to forest policy (Dillingham et al., 2008).



Photo: National Archives Catalog

Naches Ranger Station, 1957

2. The term “mill(s)” is used throughout to indicate any wood processing facility, including, for example, dimensional sawmills, shake mills, plywood and particleboard facilities, paper mills.

3. The term “west-side” is frequently used to talk about forest west of the Cascade divide and conversely “east-side” refers to forests east of the Cascade divide within the Pacific Northwest Region. Although the Wenatchee National Forest is an east-side forest, the entire forest is within the boundaries of the NWFP. It was additionally exempted from the 1994 21-inch rule that prohibited east-side national forests from harvesting of trees over 21-inches diameter (Hessburg et al., 2020).

Pre-NWFP history

Settlement

The peoples of the Yakama Nation have lived in the Yakima Valley since time immemorial. The confederated tribes and bands of the Yakama Nation include the Klikitat, Palus, Wallawalla, Wenatchi, Wishram, and Yakama Peoples (among others) (Wester, 2014). In 1855, the 14 tribes and bands signed a treaty with the United States, granting them a 1.3-million-acre reservation. The reservation, adjacent to the study area, encompasses much of the lower Yakima Valley, as well as areas to the west and south.

Euro-American settlement of the study area began in the 1860s with the arrival of sheep and cattle ranchers who drove livestock into the forests in summer and back to the valley in winter (Wissmar, 1994). Euro-American settlement of the Yakima Valley increased rapidly when the Northern Pacific Railroad reached Yakima in 1884 and crossed the Cascades in 1887, allowing significant expansion of ranching and agriculture (Drennan, 2013).

As a result of increasing agricultural demand for water in the late 1800s, private irrigation companies began to construct irrigation canals and ditches in the valley (Drennan, 2013). From 1909 to 1933, the Bureau of Reclamation built six major dams and extensive canals to provide irrigation for the Yakima Valley (Drennan, 2013). This irrigation scheme was successful in attracting additional settlers and increasing agricultural production in the region.

From 1880 to 1930, grazing was a more significant use of forest land than logging (Wissmar, 1994). Small-scale burning of meadows and shrublands by Indigenous peoples and Euro-American ranchers was common from the 1850s through the 1920s (Wissmar, 1994). This practice was criticized by the Forest Service and agriculturists, who thought it contributed to erosion and sediment in waterways (Wissmar, 1994). In 1905, a grazing allotment system partially resolved conflicts between farmers and livestock grazers by designating grazing areas (Gossett, 1964).

In 1910, elk were reintroduced to the forest following their extirpation in the 1880s (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2002). This reintroduction further limited grazing, as elk competed with livestock for forage (Gossett, 1964). Sheep and cattle grazing continued to decline in the early part of the 20th century. Wissmar (1994) estimated that by 1930, sheep grazing had declined by 90 percent from its peak around 1900.

The timber industry in the Yakima Valley initially developed to supply wood for fruit boxes (Mason and Lippke, 2009). As transportation improved and the railroad came to Yakima, the agricultural export market expanded, as did the demand for fruit boxes. In the late 1910s and into the 1920s, new road infrastructure along what would later become the SR 410 corridor enabled new investments in the timber industry, including the development of the Nile Mill and another mill in the nearby Rattlesnake Creek area, which burned down in 1921 (Gossett, 1979). In 1935, the Naches Sawmill opened. This mill processed ca. 15,000 board feet per day in 1936 and eventually increased production to ca. 60,000 board feet (MacNeil, 2023). In the late 1930s, the industry began to consolidate, with Cascade (later Boise Cascade) gaining an interest in the study area (Gossett, 1979).

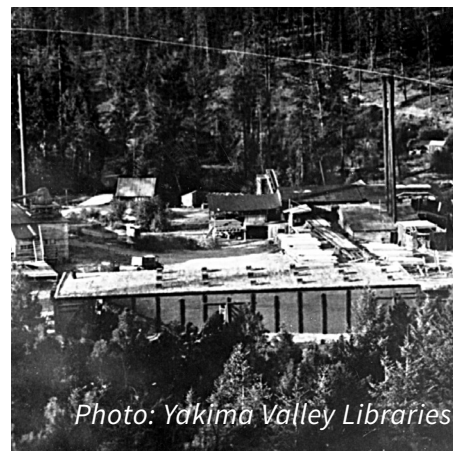


Photo: Yakima Valley Libraries
Nile Sawmill, 1931

Post-World War II timber industry

After World War II, logging and sawmilling became very important to the upper Yakima Valley, including Naches. Post-war logging was mostly on federal lands, as private lands had already been heavily logged by this time (Gosset, 1979). The primary species processed were ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir.

During the 1950s, two brothers opened Layman Lumber in Naches (Associated Press, 2006). In 1960, the mill employed around 100 people, including forest workers, and operated two shifts (MacNeil, 2023). Around 1962, timber harvests in the Naches area increased, but the industry began consolidating operations. In 1965, Boise Cascade (which also operated a mill in Yakima) closed its Naches sawmill and box factory, resulting in a loss of employment for more than 100 people (Wissmar, 1994). However, in 1981, Layman built a second mill in Naches west of US 12. This mill processed smaller diameter white fir, pine, and Douglas-fir (MacNeil, 2023).

Naches after the NWFP

Employment and industry

When asked about changes in local employment over the last 30 years, interviewees thought that employment opportunities had decreased (n=12) or had not changed (n=2). Twelve interviewees (46 percent) connected changes in employment to declines in the timber industry. However, seven interviewees (27 percent) mentioned the ongoing presence of agriculture, and five (19 percent) mentioned tourism as factors helping to insulate the community from the loss of timber industry jobs.

In 2006, Layman Lumber closed its operations in Naches. Mill owners blamed low timber supply for the closure (Associated Press, 2006); however, interviewees in 2024 also blamed the closure on poor management, outdated equipment, and ownership turnover after the original owner's death. One community member stated that the mill was never a source of high-income jobs for the community: *"working for the mill was only a lower-middle class job."* Around this same time, Boise Cascade's Yakima facility also started closing in stages—first, the large-log mill in 2004, second, the small-log mill in 2005, and third, the plywood mill in 2006 (Wilma, 2006; Dillingham et al., 2008).

Interviewees noted that the study area had other forestry workforce challenges. Specifically, the industry faced difficulties attracting new loggers and log truck drivers. As one person who worked in the industry noted, *"We work with one guy... he's a senior citizen.... there's a lot of reasons why it's not a job kids are going into anymore."* Another person familiar with the industry agreed: *"It's like the log truck drivers are age classing out and you're not getting in the next generation."*

As of 2024, Yakama Nation's Yakama Forest Products mill was the largest producer of wood products remaining in the Yakima Valley. The mill processes both large- and small- diameter logs (Dillingham et al., 2008). However, the mill primarily processes timber from the reservation's 480,000 acres of commercial forest (Fiander, 2024).

Although the timber industry played a large role in the history of the Naches community, agriculture was the dominant industry. In Naches, interviewees mentioned Allan Brothers (fruit) and Rowe Farms (fruit packer) as the two largest private-industry employers in 2024. Because of the economy's stable agricultural foundation, many community members thought that the study area was more insulated

from changes in the timber industry in comparison to other communities in similar geographies. One interviewee suggested that:

“[Naches is] not like Bend, Oregon, where, when the mill shut down, there was nothing else...They had nothing, they needed recreation, they were absolutely desperate for something. Yakima's never had that desperation. So, recreation and things like, you know, the Forest Service and the timber industry, yes, they're, they're part of it, and everybody wants them, but ...they've never had that same make or break factor.”

However, some interviewees thought that the loss of timber revenues made the Yakima Valley more dependent on agriculture as an industry. As one interviewee surmised, *“when we lost the sawmills, that was big to the community... but the orchards are coming in and replacing that.”* While Naches is geographically a gateway to the nearby national forest and Mount Rainier National Park, interviewees from Naches proper did not understand themselves to be a tourism-dependent town. Nonetheless, interviewees from the SR 410 and US 12 corridors did view themselves as dependent on tourism. SR 410 (closed seasonally) connects Naches to Mount Rainier National Park (approximately 45 miles from Naches), while US 12 connects the study area to the White Pass Ski resort (approximately 40 miles from Naches).

Demographic and community changes

Interviewees thought that the largest demographic changes to the community involved new people moving to the valley and the continued growth of the Latine community. Between 2000 and 2020, the population of the Naches CCD grew by approximately 550 individuals (Table 4.1). During this same time period, the percentage of the population aged 25 to 44 decreased by 5 percent while the percentage of the population aged 65 or older increased by 10 percent.

Table 4.1. 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	8,029	7,968	8,586	Increased overall, but variable
Low-income population*	2,230	2,779	2,496	No clear trend
% Low-income population	28%	35%	29%	
Population aged 25-44	2,254	1,719	1,961	Decreased overall, but recovering
% Population aged 25-44	28%	22%	23%	
Population aged 65 or older	926	1,242	1,856	Increased
% Population aged 65 or older	12%	16%	22%	

*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.

Eleven interviewed community members agreed that, in 2024, new people were moving to Naches. These interviewees described new people as retirees (5), families (3), wealthy (2), and teleworkers (2). Three people mentioned that they thought new residents were coming from cities or urban areas. Interviewees thought that newcomers were attracted to Naches for various reasons, including the community's reputation of safety as well as their location as the *"last town before the mountains."*

While new people have been moving to Naches, community members disagreed as to how the structure of the community has changed over the last 30 years. Three community members thought that there was a decrease in the number of families with children, three thought there was no change, and one thought it had both increased and decreased.

Community member interviewees noted that younger adults have decided to stay in Naches or return to raise families. However, the rationale for younger people to return to where they grew up is different from in the past: *"it's not the same as it was before. People would come back to run, to run a family business, or they would stay to run a family business. Now, those same people that come back, they often want more than that...They do want some recreation...[and] social opportunities."*

The Yakima Valley has long had a large Latine community. Valley agriculturalists began recruiting Mexican workers through the Bracero Program during World War II, an agreement between Mexico and the US for Mexican workers to temporarily come to the US for agricultural work (Darian, 2006). According to interviewees, the program established a long-term relationship between Yakima Valley farmers and Mexican laborers. In the 1970s, the second wave of Mexican workers came to the valley, most from Michoacán. According to an interviewee, approximately a quarter of the school-age children in Naches are Latine.⁴ Many Latine families now take advantage of local forest amenities: *"it's the Hispanic community, which has grown dramatically here, has started to really use the mountains...just in the last seven or eight years, it's a lot more Hispanics up around Rimrock Lake [that are] camping."*

Housing and development

Twelve respondents agreed that both the availability and affordability of housing decreased over the last 30 years. Five interviewees specifically mentioned that the lack of available housing was a problem for Naches, and four interviewees discussed high costs of housing. Interviewees noted that many people perceive Naches as a highly desirable community to live in, whereas *"Yakima is tough—there's a fair amount of gang [activity] and crime."* However, interviewees suggested that housing availability was a significant issue deterring the community's growth: *"It's primarily how tight it [housing availability] is. There's people that are always looking to move out to Naches."* Four interviewees commented that houses in Naches did not stay on the market for more than a week before selling. Nonetheless, three interviewees noted that these increases in housing costs corroborated what they perceived as national trends.

In comparison to the town of Naches, the SR 410 and US 12 corridors had different housing issues. Along these corridors, recreation and summer homes were more dominant, whereas Naches had more full-time residents. Over the last few years, housing availability in these areas was further constrained by the rise of short-term vacation rentals. As one interviewee said, *"There's one that was ... full time residents, sold to somebody else, they used it as a rental, they sold it to a person who had the Airbnb next door, now it's an Airbnb."* An online search revealed 51 short-term rental homes in the study area as of October, 2024.

4. Naches Valley High School lists "Hispanic" students at 24.6% of total student enrollment: <https://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/ReportCard/ViewSchoolOrDistrict/103169>

There has been an ongoing debate in Naches about growth—while some residents supported the idea of increasing housing (via new construction) and revitalizing the downtown area, others worried that new development would compromise the town’s values or bring in lower-income residents. Interviewees in Naches frequently spoke of how they valued the town as a quiet and safe place: *“It’s a place where people care about each other, that you know, you don’t have to necessarily worry about crime...That’s kind of the allure.”*

This ongoing debate has played out at the level of town council elections in Naches. In the 2023 election, there was considerable turnover on the town council. Interviewees reported that this was the result of debates over new developments in the town. While the mayor at the time supported a new development, many locals rallied to oppose it. One resident was quoted in the paper as saying: *“Do we need to grow? Absolutely not. We’ve lived there for 40 years and there’s been no change”* (Martinez, 2023).

Community services

Interviewees mostly agreed that services (including restaurants, health care, gas stations, grocery stores, and personal or business services) had generally decreased in the study area (Figure 4.4 summarizes significant amenities). However, this decrease may be related to the study area’s proximity to Yakima which, as a metropolitan city, offers a wide variety of services.

Interviewees pointed out that downtown Naches suffered economically when US 12 was rerouted away from downtown in 1938. As a result of the reroute, new businesses opened along the highway, and the downtown area declined. When Layman Lumber closed in 2006, downtown businesses experienced another decline. In 2024, there were still many vacant storefronts. When asked about local businesses in the downtown area, interviewees most frequently mentioned Cot’s Peak Coffee, which is owned by a local church. There are also a few restaurants and bars in the study area. As one interviewee described, *“Naches has no shortage of drinking facilities.”* Interviewees thought that businesses in Naches had declined in quantity as well as the quality of products and services after the closure of Layman Lumber. For example, one interviewee mentioned a gas station by the mill that chose to raise prices to compensate for the decline in business rather than to find another business model.

One interviewee observed that businesses along the US 12 corridor had also declined. Of the three main businesses in that area, *“they’re multifaceted, right, they have trailers, RVs, the boat launch, some sort of food and beverage, often a little bit of a general store aspect... Out of those, only one of them is still operating more or less the way it always has ...The other two, one of them, the restaurant’s gone, it’s just boat launch and a little bit of RV, and that’s it. The other one-... they’re still doing the boat launch, but they don’t offer gas for boats anymore. And then down in ... Rimrock Retreat ... Tavern’s torn down. The motel has been completely rebuilt into second home residences, vacation residences. The [general] store, yeah, the store’s not a store anymore. The restaurant is barely surviving.”*

Along the SR 410 corridor, interviewees suggested that businesses had mostly remained the same over the last 30 years. While some businesses near Bumping Lake have closed, stalwarts like Whistlin’ Jack’s Outpost, Gold Creek Saloon, and The WoodShed Bar & Grill had remained. These businesses have been largely dependent on tourism in the summers, although some of them were popular with hunters in the fall and snowmobilers in the winter.

0 FULL SERVICE SUPERMARKETS



1 FOREST SERVICE RANGER STATION

Naches Ranger Station,
Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest



0 TIMBER PROCESSING FACILITIES



1 COMMUNITY HEALTH CLINIC

Naches Medical Clinic



1 POST OFFICE

Naches Post Office:
8.5 hours, 5 days/week



1 LIBRARY

Naches Library



Figure 4.4. *Community amenities in the Naches study area. Includes: zero 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, one community health clinic, one post office, and one library.*

Community governance

Interviewees noted that the municipal government in Naches played an important role in determining the town's development. They also mentioned the importance of other civic groups in Naches, including an exceptionally active Lions Club. Other interviewees noted how the local volunteer fire department was a center of activity, both in Naches and in Nile. Although these civic groups were active, some interviewees felt that Naches lacked entrepreneurs willing to revitalize the downtown area. Others mentioned the hope that a new town council would succeed in revitalizing the community.

Community relationship with the Forest Service

In 2024, six interviewees thought that the relationship between the community and the Forest Service was negative. As one interviewee put it, *“people here are not appreciative of the federal government.”* However, two interviewees said that the relationship was positive, two indicated that it was non-existent, and four mentioned that the relationship depended on the district ranger, a position that experiences frequent turnover.

Community interviewees conveyed that they believed high turnover and hiring practices within the Forest Service had a particularly detrimental impact on the Naches Ranger District. Five interviewees commented

that they thought the local Forest Service district was understaffed. Some interviewees thought that the district had an inability to recruit new employees who were effective. For example, one interviewee noted that, after a particularly effective employee retired, *“they hire two people to take his place, and neither one of them could do anything.”* Interviewees noted that specialists who left would sometimes not be replaced, leading to further issues in implementing projects. Interviewees also noted that high turnover in upper-level staff meant a constant change in priorities at the district: *“And the problem with the Forest Service is that people come and go, and then different attitudes show up. Some are better than others.... Like this one believes in bats [conservation], and this one believes in horses [equestrian activities], and this one believes in motorized [recreation].”* According to interviewees, this turnover had a negative impact on ongoing projects in the district, including agreements with motorized recreation groups that frequently conduct trails and roads projects. One interviewee mentioned that some of these staffing challenges might have contributed to past discussions of consolidating the Naches and Cle Elum Districts of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests.

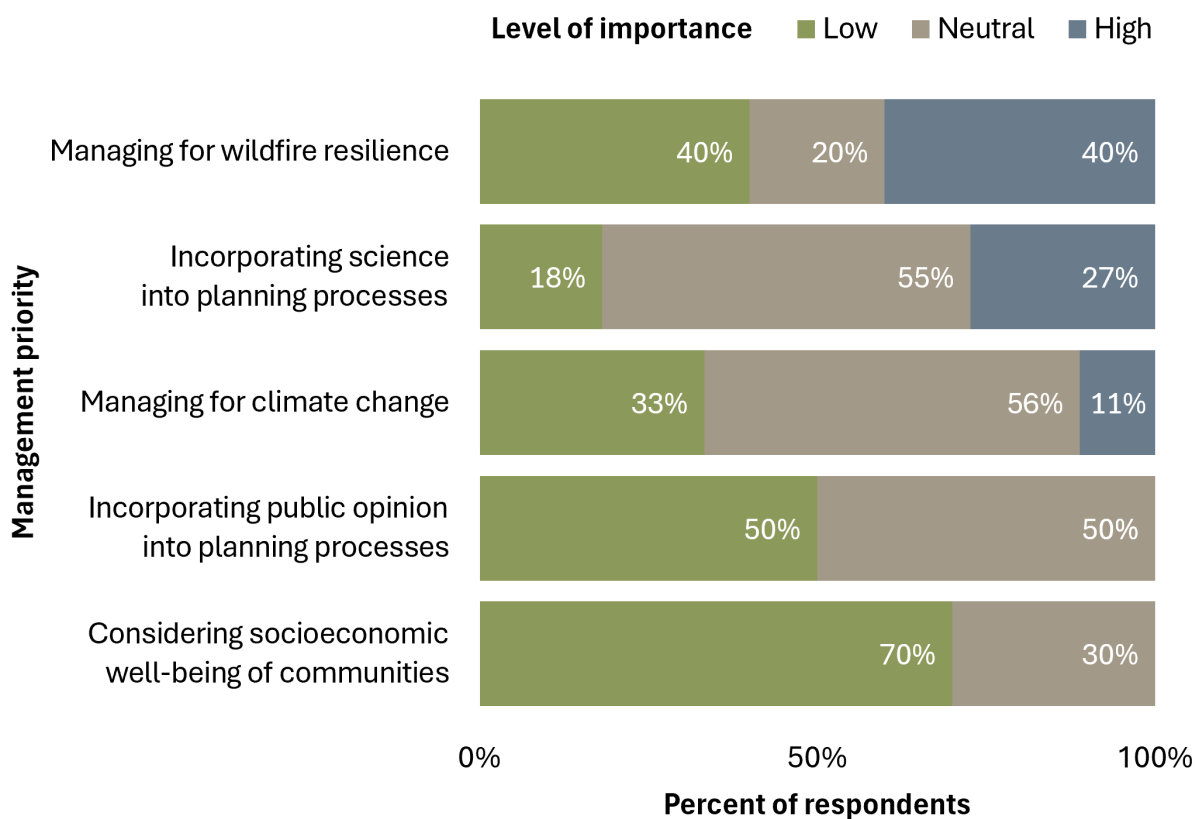


Figure 4.5. Community perception of Forest Service management priorities (n=11). Bar graph segments represent the percentage of interviewees indicating level of importance (Low, Medium, High) of each management priority.

We asked community interviewees about their views on Forest Service management priorities (Figure 4.5). Interviewees thought that the socioeconomic well-being of local communities was either a low priority or rating public opinions into the planning process was also a low priority for the Forest Service while the other half thought that the Forest Service was neutral about public opinions. Interviewees did not think that the Forest Service was prioritizing climate change, and only 27 percent thought the agency was incorporating science into its planning process. While only 40 percent of interviewees thought that the Forest Service was prioritizing wildfire resilience, this was the highest ranked of all the management priorities we asked about.

Checkerboarded landownership and forest collaboratives

In previous socioeconomic monitoring of the Naches area conducted in 2004, the checkerboard landownership pattern was listed as a major challenge in the study area (Dillingham et al., 2008). These lands created management issues during the early 2000s since landownership changes section to section (1 square mile or 640 acres) from state or federal government to timber industry (e.g. Boise Cascade and Plum Creek). The Tapash Sustainable Forest Collaborative was founded in 2003, in part to address *“a crisis of Plum Creek [Timber Company] starting to sell off their private lands”* in an area of checkerboard land ownership. One of Tapash’s goals was to solve checkerboard management challenges through a land transfer of 10,400 checkerboarded acres from Plum Creek Timber Company to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Corrao and King, 2016). However, the Tapash Collaborative faded in importance with the resolution of these checkerboard issues.

More recently, the collaboratives involved with the Naches Ranger District have been the Naches Forest Partnership and the Trail and Wilderness Interest Group, the latter of which has been around since at least 2004 (Dillingham et al., 2008). According to one interviewee, the Naches Forest Partnership is *“representative of motorized recreation clubs..., wildlife groups, conservation groups, fish folks. So, you know, it's a true collaborative. It's representative of all users.”* The perceived efficacy of this group appears to have changed over time. One interviewee thought that the partnership was not particularly effective: *“they partner with [the Forest Service], really only at the level to tell [the agency that they are] doing a crappy job.”*

Community relationship with National Forest lands

Naches residents have diverse uses for national forestlands. Interviewees ranked hunting and fishing, recreation, and water as the most important aspects of their use of national forest lands (Figure 4.6). As one interviewee stated: *“If you can do it in the mountains, it's done in the Little Naches. Whether it's mining in the rivers and mushrooms and hiking and wilderness and huckleberries and horses and cross-country skiers and snowmobilers, and it's all done in the Naches area, all of it. That's why it's been so difficult to do anything with on this National Forest [Motorized Vehicle] Plan.”*

Recreation

Interviewees noted that the following types of recreation were the most popular: motorized vehicle use (n=12), water recreation (8), hunting (7), hiking (7), fishing (7), camping (5), and skiing (4). Scenic attractions include White Pass Ski Area, Rimrock Lake, Bumping Lake, Boulder Cave, and Naches Peak. There are three wilderness areas, which one interviewee described as follows: *“the Goat Rocks is all REI, William O. Douglas is all hunters, and Norse Peak is nobody,”* which was their description of the different types of people or activities associated with three wilderness areas: Goat Rocks is popular with hikers and backpackers; William O. Douglas with hunters, and Norse Peak receives few visitors. Interviewees agreed that the national forest’s recreational opportunities attracted both new residents and visitors to the study area, and one Forest Service employee commented that they thought of the district predominantly as a recreation forest, rather than favoring timber production or other uses.

Visitor use of the Naches Ranger District increased during the pandemic. Interviewees described this increase as overcrowding and noted that it caused conflict and strained recreational staffing capacities. One interviewee noted that “*people [were] pulling guns on each other over campsites.*” Other issues related to ongoing recreational use included campground maintenance. As a result of recreational overcrowding, the Forest Service implemented a reservation system at the popular Boulder Cave Recreation Area (City of Yakima, n.d.).

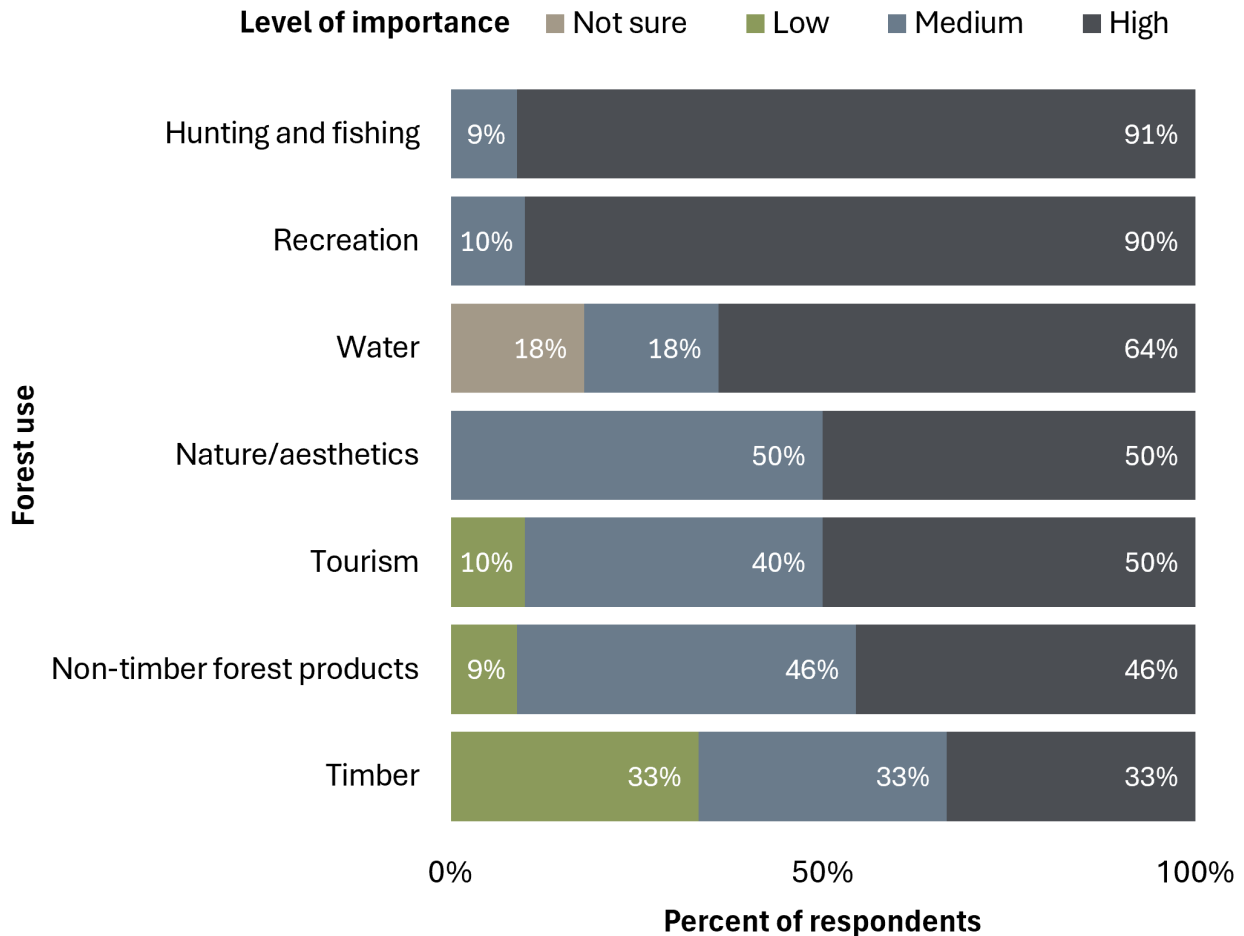


Figure 4.6. Importance of national forest uses to community (n=11). Bar graph segments represent the percentage of interviewees indicating level of importance (Not sure, Low, Medium, High) of each forest use to the community.

Recreation residences

“Recreation residences,” referred to locally as cabins, on the Naches Ranger District have long constituted most of the special use permits on the district. Recreation residences are “privately owned cabins located on National Forest System Lands that are part of the Special Use Permit Program” (USDA Forest Service, n.d.), and they are often set up in clusters—sometimes known as “recreation residence areas”—not dissimilar from a modern subdivision. Recreational homesites on forest lands were set up in 1919 (Gossett, 1979). Typically, lots along US 12 and SR 410 had electrical and telephone services but did not have water or sewage connections. However, some areas along SR 410 had no services.

Recreational residences in Naches were typically used from late spring through early fall (Healy, 1991). In 2024, interviewees claimed that the Naches Ranger District had the highest number of recreation residences of any national forest ranger district. A 1971 government report stated that the Naches Ranger District had the highest concentration of second homes in the state, with 455 homes on 320 acres of Forest Service Land (Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation, 1971).

Comparing recreation residence owners on national forest lands and commercial second-home owners on private lands, a 1971 report estimated that approximately 60 percent of recreation resident lessees' primary residences were in the immediate vicinity of their recreation residence (Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation, 1971). One 2024 interviewee, a part-time Naches resident and recreational cabin owner, stated that *"50 to 60 percent of the cabin owners are from Yakima. We have a large ownership out of Seattle area... I'm gonna say 25 percent out of Seattle, and then they're just scattered all over the place."*

In 2024, Forest Service interviewees were concerned about recreation residences being susceptible to wildfires. Because the land is leased from the Forest Service, there are limits on what residents can do to clear trees and debris from the property, and many recreation residents believed that they are unable to manage the property because they lack land ownership. A program from the local Resource Conservation District has encouraged residents to remove brush from the areas around their homes and has provided free chipping services. This program has grown since the Norse Peak (2017) and Schneider Springs (2021) fires. Recreation residences have also been an issue for firefighting because the Forest Service is obligated to protect these cabins even if local cabin owners do not conduct clearing: *"like during Schneider Springs [fire], when resources were limited, you know, we Forest Service] had to divert a ton of resources to structure protection for all those rec[reation] residences."*

Off-highway vehicles and roads

In the Naches Ranger District, both summer and winter off-highway vehicle use has been an important use of the national forest, and off-highway vehicle groups hold special use permits for sanctioned events.

In the winter, snowmobiles are a popular use of the national forest lands. Snowmobiles allow for access to Chinook Pass during wintertime closures, and snowmobilers can access areas like Crystal Mountain Ski Resort. Over time, snowmobiling has been declining in popularity—across Washington, there were 38,331 registered in 2002, whereas there were only 18,434 registered in 2024 (Washington State Parks, 2024). Three Sno Parks near Yakima were closed during the 2024-2025 season due to budget issues (Thompson, 2024). One community member commented that they thought the closure was related to lack of funding for Forest Service personnel to monitor and groom Sno-Park areas.

In the summer, off-highway vehicle use was also popular, in part because some uses have been allowed on the Naches Ranger District that were not allowed on the neighboring districts on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. However, a unique problem for the Naches Ranger District and the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest was that it lacked a travel management plan as of 2024. Such a plan identifies a cohesive strategy for the road system, including identifying roads to close and designating roads for different uses. The lack of a plan made it more difficult to manage use and deter behavior that would ordinarily be regulated under the management plan.

The lack of a travel management plan has long been identified as a major issue in this district. As one community member stated, *"every forest supervisor that we get to meet that comes here says... 'One of the*

things on my to-do list is we're going to get this travel management plan done.'" Despite this, as of 2024, the plan had not been completed. The same community member mentioned that *"you can't make everyone happy... when they come down to put one [a travel management plan] in this area, it'll get challenged, either those that want things all closed, you know, if they don't get their way, they're going to go legal,"* thus implying that there is a high risk of litigation upon the plan's completion. Other interviewees voiced frustrations about what they saw as the arbitrary nature of road closures, which they attributed to the motivation of one district specialist. Another interviewee suggested that, without a travel management plan, it is more difficult to manage and enforce laws and regulations on national forest lands.

Previous NWFP social and economic monitoring in the Naches area conducted in 2004 discussed issues related to summer off-highway vehicle use and checkerboard ownership. For example, the Forest Service does not allow non-street legal vehicles to use established forest roads, whereas the state restricts motorized use to established roads in designated areas (Dillingham et al., 2008).

In addition to these road-related issues, interviewees suggested that a lack of trail maintenance has caused *"frustration with things [maintenance] not happening fast enough."* Both Forest Service employees and community members reported that members of the public sometimes do their own maintenance on national forest lands. For example, the Forest Service has documented more than sixty instances where chainsaws have been used to clear trails in wilderness illegally.

Water

Due to the history of large-scale irrigation projects in the Yakima Valley (collectively known as the Yakima Project), agricultural water rights have been a contentious issue within the study area. The Yakima Project provides irrigation water to over 450,000 acres of agricultural land in south-central Washington. Bumping and Rimrock Lakes serve as significant water storage for the Yakima Project. The tributaries that feed these reservoirs have their headwaters in the Naches Ranger District. However, interviewees associated water management with the Bureau of Reclamation and irrigation districts more than with the Forest Service.

In 1981, the Yakima Project began what was described by multiple interviewees as the "flip-flop" operation, when they switched flows from the Cle Elum Dam to the Tieton and Bumping dams to improve fish habitat (Bureau of Reclamation, 2012). This change was a result of a court case from the Yakama Nation regarding salmon habitat (Dillingham et al., 2008). The flip-flop also provides benefits to commercial white-water rafting within the study area (Dillingham et al., 2008). As one person familiar with rafting on the Naches noted, *"[I] don't know that any other river we run... the same amount of people within like, a three-week span."*



Photo: Library of Congress
Downstream face of Tieton Dam

In 2012, the Yakima River Basin Integrated Water Management Plan was finalized (Bureau of Reclamation, 2012). The final adjudication of water rights in the Yakima Basin was determined in 2019 in the Ecology v. Acquavella case, which had been in progress since a 1977 drought (Ferolito, 2021). The plan includes fish passage for some areas, including Bumping, Rimrock, and Clear Lake in the Naches Ranger District (Bureau of Reclamation, 2012).

The Yakama Nation holds some of the most senior water rights in the basin (dating to the 1855 treaty) and continues to be actively involved in water policy and management, particularly with respect to issues that might impact its treaty rights. The 2019 Yakima River Basin water adjudication protected both the Nation's irrigation rights and the right to maintain instream flows for fish (Ottem, 2008).

Non-timber forest products

Interviewees suggested that firewood, Christmas trees, and mushrooms were the most important non-timber forest products on the Naches Ranger District. One interviewee explained, *"firewood's huge here ... Christmas trees are huge here ... and then, after we have a big fire, [its] commercial mushrooms."*

Non-commercial firewood permits are free and are quite popular. As one interviewee commented, *"we've got people cutting up on the forest all the time. I think it's a great way to get fuel off the forest. I certainly support it. And I mean, it's free, so you just pick up your permit, and you can get five cords or something with a permit."* Commercial fuelwood harvesting is also significant. One interviewee noted that, *"when the firewood season is open, there's all kinds of trucks coming down [from the mountains] with firewood."* Unlike many other districts, commercial fuelwood sales on the Naches Ranger District are not clearly indicated in Forest Service timber sale (Timber Information Manager) data from 2013-2023 (USDA Forest Service, 2023). However, Forest Service Cut and Sold data show that the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest sold 2.3 mmbf of commercial fuelwood in 2023. This amount was significantly lower than the national forest's 10-year annual average of nearly 5.2 mmbf.

Between 2013 and 2019, Forest Service Cut and Sold data show the number of Christmas trees sold annually on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest was fairly consistent with an average of approximately 6,100 per year. Since 2020, Christmas tree numbers were either very low or not reported (USDA Forest Service, 2025).

Interviewees suggested that commercial mushroom picking was also popular on the Naches district. One interviewee reported that, *"people certainly go up and harvest the hell out of mushrooms and, yeah, sell them wherever."* Another interviewee suggested that *"people can't wait to go get mushrooms."* Cut and Sold reports show that between 2013 and 2023, the commercial mushroom harvest on the Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest has been highly variable, ranging from nearly 92,000 gallons in 2013 to 530 gallons in 2023 (in 2020 and 2021 mushrooms were not recorded) (USDA Forest Service, 2025).

Lastly, one interviewee suggested that berry picking used to be popular, but forest management practices have made them scarce: *"it used to be Labor Day was Huckleberry picking time, but the forest is so overgrown that there's very few huckleberries anymore."*

Timber

Between 2013 and 2023, the Naches Ranger District timber program had only limited economic impacts within the study area (USDA Forest Service, 2023). During this period, the district sold 25 timber sales with a total volume of 94.7 mmbf for \$13.5 million. While eight of these sales were purchased by seven different businesses based in Naches, those sales represented less than 0.2 percent of total volume sold. Nearby Yakima Forest Products purchased nearly 25 mmbf from the district using both conventional and stewardship contracts. However, most of the remaining timber sold was purchased by businesses based in communities between 175 and 275 miles away from the study area.

Wildfire and other forest disturbances

Fire is a frequent and important ecological process in eastern Cascade landscapes. For example, in the Nile Creek area, median fire return intervals are estimated to be as frequent as every seven years (Everett et al., 2000). While Indigenous fire stewardship maintained open forest structures through frequent, low severity cultural burning, early Euro-American settlers considered *“the forest...an enemy in the path of farming,”* and set more severe forest fires to increase cropland (Gossett, 1979, p. 305). Ranchers also frequently set fires in the study area to improve range conditions, but these practices were curtailed as grazing regulations accompanying allotments prohibited fire use for range improvement. The Forest Service set up fire lookouts in the 1930s in response to frequent forest fires and a particularly large 1927 fire (Gossett, 1979).

Interviewees considered fire to be among the most important, if not the most important, management issue for the Forest Service. As one Forest Service employee mentioned: *“fire drives everything, and that's actually the only time we do have, I think, a really good relationship with the community is we're heroes, and we put out fires, stop people's houses from burning. The rest of the time we're kind of, maybe, maybe not, villains, but not everybody's favorite people.”*

Two recent large fires were frequently mentioned by interviewees: the 2021 Schneider Springs Fire and the 2024 Retreat Fire. The Schneider Springs Fire began on August 4, 2021 as a result of lightning ignition and burned 113,689 acres, with the vast majority (103,320 acres) on national forest lands and the remainder mostly on Washington Department of Natural Resources lands (USDA Forest Service, 2021; Contreras et al., 2021). The fire burned along the SR 410 corridor, impacting places like Nile, Cliffdell, and Goose Prairie. Because the fire began while the Forest Service was at Preparedness Level 5, there were limited resources across the agency to fight the fire. Community members thought that the Forest Service handled the Schneider Springs Fire *“very poorly,”* and residents of Nile were particularly upset with perceived mismanagement. Referring to the Schneider Springs Fire, one interviewee reported that: *“we lost a ton of late successional reserve⁵ forest, that we had not done anything [treatments] in because it was [northern spotted] owl habitat. Well, now it's all gone.”* However, after the fire, one Washington DNR official stated that around two-thirds of the fire burned at a low intensity (Zucco, 2022). The fire did burn through some areas that had been previously thinned and prescribed burned, like the Angel Underburn Project in Rattlesnake Creek. These treatments were apparently effective at mitigating fire severity (Zucco, 2022). After the fire, one interviewee suggested that another issue for the local municipal water district concerned water quality decline due to increased soil erosion from the burned areas, resulting in a high amount of soil particles being dissolved in the water (i.e. high turbidity). As a result, the local water treatment facility had to shut down: *“it turned the river literally black overnight, and there was no way we could treat it.”* While this problem was solved locally through voluntary water conservation, future fire-related erosion events could imperil the water system.

The 2024 Retreat Fire began when a propane tank exploded at a cabin in Rimrock Retreat. The fire burned over 45,000 acres along the US 12 corridor (Johnson, 2024). Small unincorporated areas along US 12, including both recreation residences and year-round residences, had to evacuate and at least two cabins

5. Naches has both late successional reserve (LSR) and managed late successional areas (MLSA). LSRs are identified based on old-growth conditions and as habitat for old growth related species like the northern spotted owl. In these areas, limited management is possible (1994). MLSAs are Managed Late-Successional Areas, similar to LSRs but these are fire-adapted landscapes where fire hazard reduction treatments are permitted in order to reduce risk of complete stand destruction (USDA Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, 1994).

were lost (Johnson, 2024). Tieton and Cowiche were briefly at risk of burning (Square, 2024). During the fire, landslides and debris damaged a 114-year-old irrigation canal that provided water to members of the Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District, a private irrigation district serving agricultural users (Metcalf, 2024). According to interviewees, the district then limited water delivery to approximately 40% of normal supply. At a cost of \$240 million, major repairs on to the canal may include a retrofit to cover and protect it from future landslides (Franklin, 2024). Additionally, US 12 was closed for several weeks during the firefighting, which locals thought displaced recreation to the SR 420 corridor. There were also impacts on local popular trails, including the Tieton River trail, some of which were burned during the fire (Thompson, 2024). Overall, however, community members seemed more satisfied with the firefighting on the Retreat Fire, which one interviewee attributed to the heavier investments in aerial firefighting. Current (2024) planning efforts to mitigate wildfire risk on the South Fork of the Tieton River include a collaboration between the Naches Ranger District and the Yakama Nation. Interviewees familiar with the Naches Ranger District mentioned that this project was seen as *“the most important project”* for the local district.

Findings from the Northwest Forest Plan ten-year social and economic monitoring suggested a local need for education about the role of fire in the local ecosystem (Dillingham et al., 2008, 41). Our 30-year monitoring results suggested that public understandings of fire and the Forest Service’s approach to fire management have shifted. While many interviewees in 2024 discussed their perceived need for the continuation of fire suppression policies, most interviewees wanted to see more fire mitigation efforts that include activities like prescribed burning.



Photo: Julia Sizek

Highway 12 Corridor, 2024

Air quality

Yakima County has longstanding air quality issues because of its geography, high prevalence of wood burning in the winter, and summer wildfires (Yakima Regional Clean Air Agency, 2015). For example, as early as 1868-1870, Yakima Valley settlers reported smoke settling in the valley during the summers. In 1967, the county began regulating local air quality through the Yakima Regional Clean Air Agency. Air quality measures have directly impacted management on Naches Ranger District. After a lawsuit in Yakima County, the Naches Ranger District was under court order to review its firewood program because of the negative impacts of wood burning on air quality in the Yakima Valley (Devlin, 1990). Interviewees in 2024 suggested

that air quality regulations made it difficult for the Naches Ranger District to complete prescribed burns. As one person put it, *“we have an extra layer of, I’m gonna say, bureaucracy for a lack of better term, in air approval for smoke.”* One interviewee suggested that even though it is well known that large wildfires decrease air quality in the summer, Yakima Regional Clean Air Agency regulations have cancelled or postponed preventative measures such as prescribed burns.

Despite measures to control smoke, Yakima County’s air quality has continued to decline since 2015, mostly because of summer wildfires. In 2024, Yakima was ranked as the city with the 12th worst air quality for both short-term and long-term particle pollution (American Lung Association, n.d.). Smoke also has negative impacts on agricultural crops. Hops growers have reported *“smoke taint,”* a term coined in 2020 to refer to how hops got a smoky taste after being exposed to wildfire smoke during harvest or during the drying process (D’Anella, 2024). Because smoke taint does not always appear immediately after crops are harvested, it can be challenging for growers to ascertain how the flavor has been impacted—sometimes until after the beer has been brewed. As one interviewee put it, wildfires have been *“causing a lot of economic and environmental damage to our [agricultural] products.”* One interviewee directly linked the fires and impacts on agriculture to the NWFP: *“When you [can] lose entire crops of fine wine grapes because they were smoke tainted, all because a plan [NWFP] decades ago changed the entire course of an industry and land management.”*

Community futures

When asked what changes the next ten years might bring to Naches, seven interviewees anticipated recreation and tourism continuing to be important issues in the community. Interviewees expected that additional recreationists would move to the Naches area. Interviewees hoped that the Forest Service would increase funding for recreation to meet the level of use on the district, and that this increased recreation funding might result in more open roads and improved maintenance of roads and facilities. Moving forward, some interviewees saw Naches’s potential as a recreation hub: *“Yakima and Bend are both right on the foothills of the same range, but Yakima is just far enough out... And so the same appeal that drew, and they’re not necessarily retirees, but folks to Bend [Central Oregon] is the same description that people give like, ‘oh yeah, we love living in Naches.’”*

Three interviewees anticipated that housing would become a more significant issue for the community as debates over housing developments and growth were already dominating public discourse. Other concerns for the community’s future included wildfire risk (n=3) and climate change (n=1).



Naches Information Center, 2024

Conclusions and case study highlights

In the wake of the NWFP, the Naches study area experienced significant impacts to its timber industry, including the closure of wood processing facilities in Naches and Yakima. Although the timber industry specifically blamed the closures on the decline in federal timber supply, interviewees suggested that other factors also played a role. However, the community was insulated from significant impacts to its wellbeing due to the diversity of its economy, including a significant agricultural sector. Recent demographic changes include a growing Latine population and an influx of younger amenity migrants attracted by recreational opportunities and the small town feel of the community.

Naches key forest management takeaways

- Wildfire mitigation was a top concern for the community. Interviewees were largely supportive of increasing the use of prescribed fire on the national forest.
- There is a need to develop new- or make more explicit existing- policies and protocols for fuels management and other wildfire mitigation actions around recreation residences within the national forest.
- Recreational development in the forest was important to community members.
- Community members continue to be interested in the development of a travel management plan for national forest roads.
- The community perceived negative impacts from Forest Service staffing policies, including those that encourage position turnover.



Layman Lumber Company Mill Site, 2024

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Photo: Julia Sizek

Tieton River along Retreat Fire Scar, 2024

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