

Chapter Four The Mill City/Lyons Community Resource Unit

Section One: Baseline Social and Economic Information

A. Community Description

Geographic Features

The Community Resource Unit of Mill City and Lyons includes Mehama and Gates, and encompasses the lower Santiam Canyon. The north line begins north of the Clackamas County line, taking in Big and Little Green Mountains and proceeding north of Mehama. The west line is west of Mehama where the elevation begins to rise. The south line extends into Linn County and incorporates the lower reaches of Thomas Creek. And the east line is between Gates and Detroit near the eastern edge of the Santiam State Forest. Figure Ten provides a map of the CRU.

"Mill City and Gates are one community except that Gates is much more anti-government."

People in this area have a strong attachment to the "canyon." Usually this means the area east of Mill City where the canyon walls begin to close up, but for many, the canyon begins in Mehama with the rise of elevation.

Mehama and Lyons are stretched out communities—much longer than they are wide—and flow from one into the other.

Settlement Patterns

Mill City was incorporated in 1947. In 1990, it had a population of 1539 which had declined to 1537 in 2000, a loss of 2%. Lyons was incorporated in 1958.

It contained 943 people in 1990 and 1008 in 2000, an increase of 6%. Gates was incorporated in 1957. It had 471 people in 1990 and 471 in 2000, a static condition (Census Data, Table Two).

These comments about settlement came from local residents.

"We moved here because land was cheaper than in Salem, and we like the area. It took me two years to get a local job that would support my family."

"Most people moved here to work in the remaining mill in town."

"This town [Mill City] will be like Idanha in ten years, a ghost town."

"Most new residents are from California and they commute to Salem."

"I moved here ten years ago to start a guide service into the mountains, but I haven't saved up enough money to continue with my plans."

"The town is filled with young and old people. I don't think middle-aged people can make it here. I have several friends that live in other areas of the state after being displaced from the mill."

"When kids get out of school, they leave. There is very little opportunity for employment for someone right out of high school in Mill City."

"There's a core group of people who live here, and then there's a group of people who come for some years and then leave again."

Much of the settlement in this area is dispersed. The natural beauty and the rural character are primary reasons that people reported moving to the area, and the value is to be out of nucleated settlements on some acreage. A strong value for this kind of settlement was expressed. At the same time,

"Interstate 5 is only 40 minutes away."

The Oregon Pacific railroad made possible the timber industry in the North Santiam Canyon. Reaching to Idanha, the railroad was the means for workers to get to the timber and for logs to make their way down (Canyon Life Museum, Gates). Figure Two is a photo of the railroad bridge near Mill City.

Publics

The Mill City/Lyons area is still struggling with the decline of timber. The communities are still made up of people who used to make their living in the timber industry. It also has a sizeable population of low-income people, not only those left behind in the timber decline, but those drawn in the previous decade because of cheap housing. In recent years, retired people have begun to move into the community.

"There are two kinds of newcomers. 'Transplants' are those from out-of-state, while 'implants' come from other parts of Oregon."

"This place calls us back. Over there, you see him? He used to date my good friend back in high school. He moved away too, and now he's come back."

"We have a lots of single parents and lots of families receiving aid."

The canyon areas are known for attracting retired people. Gates, particularly, is known for retired people, one person estimating that 70% of the population is retired. Seniors in the canyon have the reputation for being particularly independent.

"They don't want help even when they need it." [Social service professional]

In recent years, more ethnic diversity has been noted as Hispanics have sought work in the mills.

"I like the fact that there are now Mexicans and a couple of black families. If you have all the same type of person, things get boring. I think it has been good for the town."

"There are continual changes with Latinos here. I have a neighbor who would always speak poorly about Hispanics. I arranged for her to volunteer at an after-school mentor program where she teaches knitting. The class filled with Hispanic women and now I see how my neighbor's attitude has changed. The schools are not as sensitive as they should be either. Now there is a family history day and cultural awareness fair that happens every year in Mill City."

Networks

See Section Two.

Work Routines

Logging, farming, or working in one of the mills has been the mainstay of jobs in the Canyon since the beginning of European settlement. Merchants in the lower end of the canyon—Mehama, Lyons, Mill City and Gates—made their living by supplying upper canyon businesses and families. Some mining occurred on the North Fork and supported a hardy set of individuals who would winter each year in Gates. During its peak, large-scale activities kept the community going. The construction of the highway and the dam, as well as timber and logging employment, all paid family wage jobs that offered worker stability for many years.

Timber

"There is just a skeleton crew left in the Mill City mill. The Lyons mill recently went from three shifts to one." Some people work at Norpac in Stayton, but usually that is in the summer when they put in extra shifts.

"It used to be that everyone had a wage earner in the timber community. Now, none does."

"About 15 years ago, there were 15-20 logging companies in the canyon. Now there are only two large ones and two small ones. Where

there used to be a logging truck going past every three minutes where the Gleaners are now, now there are maybe 5-10 trucks a day. There used to be 7 timber mills, now there are three. This means no taxes for schools, no art, no music, no home economics."

Local residents report the adjustments of workers to the decline of timber—they moved, they "don't work at all," or "get jobs in Portland and Salem and then spend their money there." This last point was raised by a significant number of people—they are aware that the emergence of commuting in a large geographic area has undercut their economy even more, making it very difficult for the small communities to sustain a viable business climate. The traffic flow in the morning is clearly downhill. A number of people have more than one part time job.

"The main industry changed from the mills to gathering secondary woods materials from the forest."

"Most people commute to work in Stayton or Salem. The town's few professionals commute from Salem to Mill City. Most of the teachers here do not live in town."

Residents openly worried if the Freres and Franks Lumber Companies were doing well. Most thought they were doing all right but knew the future was not certain.

Many businesses depend on recreation at Detroit Lake in the summertime. Hard times are December through as late as early May. Skiers don't stop and they don't spend money in the canyon, according to local businesses—"They maybe buy a cup of hot chocolate but that's it."

"We all depend on the Lake season for survival through the whole year. Last year, we all bought inventory like we always do to be ready for the boaters, but when the lake went dry, we couldn't sell our inventory."

"My husband worked in the mills till about 13 years ago. He found a job working with computers in Salem. We still live in Mill City and he commutes. Now he lost that job and may commute to Portland."

"A lot of people in Mill City commute to Norpac."

"People don't go up the canyon anymore. They work in Stayton or Salem."

The local business infrastructure of Mill City is in decline. Primary businesses are now a franchise grocery store and a chain drug store.

"Kellman's went out of business two years ago. The owner still lives in town but can no longer afford to keep the store open. He just couldn't compete with the superstores in Salem. But the store had strong ties to the community. The storeowner would have charge accounts for people unable to buy groceries when the timber industry began to decline."

One local manufacturer of pole furniture relies on the Forest Service to offer small pole sales. Typically, these sales attract the "teepee people" from central Oregon because they prefer green wood, then furniture people follow because they prefer dead material. Poles are handpicked. Finally, "fiber" people or firewood people go in for final salvage. The furniture manufacturers appear to have a diverse market across the country developed through personal relationships.

A number of people make a living in the area with small ranches raising a few cattle, apparently mostly for local distribution.

Support Services

The Santiam Canyon School District stretches from Mehama and Mill City up past Idanha and has about 700 students. Enrollments, while slightly up this year, have been steady or declining for some time. The school district is the fiscal agent for the elementary charter school started in Detroit with 28 students.

The Mill City/Lyons area has several different programs supporting adolescents, including night court, peer mentors, and parenting classes in English and Spanish.

Mill City had two clean up days recently, filling 20 dumpsters of trash and zeroing in on sections of town that needed cleaning up. The city must upgrade its water systems in the next few years and is seeking funding. (The Stayton Mail, 1/16/02)

Lyons is approving a new industrial park as well as 50 new lots for homes. Many residents commented on the loss of commercial and retail services in the community.

"Ten years ago, there used to be four beauty shops, now there's one. There used to be a bunch of grocery stores, now there is one. There used to be a True Value but it's gone. Six restaurants, now there are three. Two meat stores, now none. No auto parts stores." [Long time resident]

"Now people go to Stayton and Salem to shop."

The North Santiam Canyon Economic Development Corporation, located in Mill City, is devoted to increasing economic livelihood in the canyon. Started in 1992 as a subcommittee of the Chamber of Commerce, it became its own nonprofit corporation in 1996 (see Figure Three).

"These pubs used to be packed in the afternoons—people would come in and smoke. Since they did a smoking ban, they are nearly empty."

The food bank in Mill City was reportedly started by Seventh Day Adventists some time ago, and now is a "community project." Its location is central near the high school, fire and police departments, and city hall. At Christmas, three churches in Mill City compete to see who can raise the most food. The loser has to make dinner for the winners. Last year, they raised 6500 pounds of food. The churches also take turns opening and running the food bank. The food bank distributes 55-60 food boxes a month to about 200 people. About one in seven in Mill City was estimated to receive

food support. Mill City also has a gleaner's organization to assist low-income people.

"Dr. Foster fixed up my leg for a fraction of the cost." [common]

Recreational Activities

See Section Three.

B. Citizen Themes and Issues Related to Community Life

Themes

"I like the close-knit feel of this community [Mill City]. Many people are related one way or another. It's not wise to say anything that you don't want getting around, because everyone knows and talks to one another."

"The community helped my family during a crisis a couple years ago. My sister got into an accident and almost died. The town came together and set up a bank account to pay for the hospital bills. The Elks, Shriners and the Fire Department began the account."

"It no longer feels like a community. The decline hit us so hard that most people are just into survival."

"Come in and sit down and don't worry about your shoes."

"There is a 'make-do' attitude here."

The feeling was expressed several times that canyon communities have not done well organizing together at the regional level.

"The communities are so focused on their own interests, they don't know what others are doing."

"These are insular communities."

Citizen Issues Related to Community

Many residents became visibly upset in discussing what they see as the decline of their community. The polarized nature of the timber debate left wounds that are still not healed.

"Mill City is in bad shape. Two years ago, the schools had a \$1 million shortfall. We depended on timber dollars. The Detroit Charter School helped take the pressure off."

"The last mill closed 2-3 years ago and then we noticed a lot of houses for sale. The mill closed in November and by February, 50 kids were gone from the elementary school."

"More and more laws are restricting what you can do with your property. It's a way that Californians can turn it into their state, all under this push toward 'beautification.'"

"Vandalism and petty theft are increasing. The Senior Center has been broken into twice in the last year."

"Kids are dropping out of school. We lost 27 staff positions at the high school, so as students reach 11th and 12th grade, there are no more electives to take. They get bored and drop out."

"Section 8 housing has been bad for the community because the tenants are not local but delinquents from Salem and the surrounding area. It has changed the dynamics of town."

"The school leaks and most of the industry have left the valley."

"We need an economic base, and an infrastructure for industry. They've done all sorts of studies about what could be done."

Section Two: Communication Strategies

A. Informal Networks and Communication

Gathering Places

Mike and Pegs in Mill City in the morning
Rosie's Coffee House and Deli; morning times are best and lunch;
Trio Tavern is an old logging bar west of Mill City used by mill workers.
Mountain Edge Café: for male loggers and mill workers.
Elk and Moose Lodges
Firehouse, Tuesdays 7 pm.
The Frontier Restaurant, Gates
The Senior Center, Mill City

The Red Barn in Lyons is a key social institution for integrating old and new in the community. Many long-time residents mingle regularly with newcomers in a way that has been a central means of absorbing new residents. Ex-loggers, those engaged in value-added production using forest products, and activists in the environmental movement all make use of this facility. Frequent food sharing and singing are events that bring people together.

"I found out later that they were loggers, but it was too late. I liked them, they became my friends, so I had to find a way to work with them." [Environmental activist]

The garden club, composed of about 8 women, meets every other week.
Churches have active networks.
The Gleaners regularly communicate.
Regular networks use the Tobacco Leaf. "Mike" is a communicator in touch with a wide segment of the community.

Key Community Contacts

Anita Leach, as a former Forest Service District Ranger and current community activist, is in a strong bridging position in Mill City. She could be

used to foster community-based approaches. She is currently with the Mill City Middle School.

Alan Girod, Santiam Sports Center; He is a resource for hunting and fishing activities. His wife, Sherry, is with Canyon Crisis Center and is well regarded in the community.

Carol Cree is a teacher that runs the "Shed Ed" program of outdoor education. Carol is a long-standing member of her community and represents a bridge between traditional timber families and newcomers.

Dave Halemeier, from the Forest Service, was mentioned by residents several times with appreciation for the community work he does.

Gary Swanson, Gates Fire Chief

Tim Kirsch, Mayor, Mill City

Mike Long, City Council

Gates Country Store, Sherry Rizer

The Moberg families (Gary, Terri, and Randy)

B. Formal Groups and Communication

Figure 12
Organizations With Interest in Public Lands In Mill City/Lyons

Organization	Contact Information	Mission
Save Our Lake	www.geocities.com/ saveourlake	Maintain water levels of Detroit Lake; organize businesses to work together.
Friends of Opal Creek	Mandy Summer 7 (503) 897-2921 OK to use name?	Outdoor education; showcase history; environmental quality; community development
North Santiam Canyon Economic Development Corporation	Mia Mohr 833 NW Santiam Blvd. Mill City, OR (503) 897-2295	Economic development
North Santiam Watershed Council	P.O. Box 855 Stayton, OR 97383 (503) 859-4341 nsantiam@open.org	Watershed restoration

Section Three: The Public Lands Perspective

A. Uses of and Orientation to Public Lands

Residents report a dearth of local recreation opportunities. In the past, people have tried to open up game centers for the kids, but inevitably, some of the kids would ruin it for the rest by bullying others or damaging the equipment.

"There's nothing to do for fun around here. _____ had his car broken into by _____. The guy just had too much leisure time on his hands."

"Locals like to go to the coast but most of the time they will camp either at Fisherman's Bend, Detroit Lake, or just inside the forest somewhere."

Most people in this area relate to public lands through hunting and fishing. It is such a prevalent activity that it barely comes up in conversation. Upon being asked, people say, "Of course," or "everyone" and other similar comments.

"Half the people in this area carry guns with them when they go into the forest."

"I don't think local people use public lands much. I'm constantly amazed at how little the children know of the forest. A lot of teenagers have never been to Detroit Lake."

"Four wheel driving is popular with teenage boys."

"Teenagers go out to Shepard's Lane [on Forest Service land] to party. It's just a few miles away."

The Forest Service currently does hydrologic education in schools that extends from near Salem up to the dam, combining education on the pristine upper reaches as well as the human impacts on the lower reaches. Some

individual mentoring happens as well, with kids and adolescents calling the Forest Service with questions, with some focus from youth on future training and careers.

"Everyone in the canyon is outside" [meaning that the population is very outdoors oriented].

"I take my family swimming on the North Fork, and we hike up by Breighenbush and Opal Creek. We've been here four years." [School administrator]

The schools have a program called Natural Resources Studies Program, popularly called "Shed Ed," whose planning began twelve years ago by community members wanting to promote outdoor education with kids. The district hired a teacher from a long-time logging family whom others say has done an outstanding job of motivating students and attracting diverse resources to accomplish the objectives of the program. The teacher reports that kids used to come to the program prepared for the woods because their families had a logging background.

"Now, none of the kids can even identify the trees behind the high school, and don't have the clothes necessary for field trips."

This program has been very well received in the community. Future activities include fire planning and education, and education in geographic information systems (GIS) and geographic positioning systems (GPS). As a result of the success of this program, Stayton has developed a nascent Natural Studies Program. These "Shed Ed" (Watershed Education) programs, partly sponsored through the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), have recently been approved for the CAM (Certificate of Advanced Mastery) certification for secondary education through the State Department of Education. This may mean that this pilot program can be used in other parts of the state. The Shed Ed program has an advisory group composed of local residents in Stayton and Mill City as well as local government representatives with interest in outdoor education.

Residents reported frequent forest management activities on their private lands, thinning, removal of slash for fire reasons, managing for certain species, and so on.

"The Mexicans, about 200 Vietnamese and the Russians each come into this area and pick mushrooms. These guys sweep the area and clear off all the mushrooms. A couple of years back there was some shooting between the groups."

The Oregon Raptor Center, Santiam Branch, is located in Mill City.

B. Themes and Citizen Issues Related to Natural Resource Management

Themes

"People don't count anymore. When ODOT [Oregon Department of Transportation] wanted to clear trees right by the highway, the Forest Service wouldn't let them. When beetles came through and there were a lot of dead trees, the trees couldn't be salvaged but had to lay where they had fallen."

Citizen Issues Related to Natural Resource Management

Economic Livelihood

"Plexus Mining was going to come up the canyon 7 or 8 years ago. Salem didn't want that to happen because it would pollute their water. That would have been 70 jobs we really needed."

"Many people still have wood stoves and it is becoming extremely difficult to get all the permits and still have it be cost effective."

"The Forest Service crews rarely work to full capacity. Instead of paying them for 'down time,' they could be doing community service in Mill City that does not have the tax base to support these services."

"The biggest challenge has been to get timber sales going. The Northwest Forest Plan locked about 85% of the land to logging but we still can't get to the other 15%. We are still getting challenged in court." [Public land agency]

"The low water at Detroit Lake last year really hurt because I had already bought inventory. I had to file for Chapter 13 reorganization."

Recreation

"A lot of the trails in this area were started by locals and we helped take care of them. Now we have to get a trail pass and pay money."

"I don't like the trail passes."

"I moved here ten years ago to start a guide service into the mountains, but I haven't saved up enough money to continue with my plans."

"We want access to Fisherman's Bend campground in the winter. It is the closest camping site for Mill City residents."

"Another rumor going around is that the Forest Service intervened and prevented Kane's Marina from cutting down a few trees to expand its parking lot. Apparently they already had a special use permit but the Forest Service said they had to do a Forest Plan Amendment—a much more difficult and involved process. They should be supporting the town's policy of promoting tourism and recreation."

"Detroit Flats should be better marked and more accessible for tourists."

Roads

"The Forest Service is not taking care of the roads, so they become passable. Now we can't access the places where we fish and swim, like

High Lake Road. They are planning on the area to become like Bull Run Reservations. All the roads are gated and the area is closed off to residents."

"There are rumors going around town that the Forest Service is not permitting loggers to cut down unsafe trees by the roadside and that this policy has caused the closure of Highway 22 several times."

Special Forest Products

"I used to collect pinecones but it's too dangerous anymore. I've heard of violent acts toward people stepping on the turf of other collectors. Local women here used to make a livelihood—shitake mushrooms, bear grass, other things, but now ethnic people from out of town have taken over."

"I like the independent life style that mushrooming affords. It's getting hard to make a living at it because all the gates are closing off access. Foreign markets are declining also because of competition from Eastern Europe. In the last ten years, production here has dropped by at least 70%."

Special forest products gatherers pointed out that gate closures are more significant for them than for other forest users. Hunters, for example, can go elsewhere, but gatherers in many cases have had special spots for generations and cannot easily go somewhere else. One buyer in the Gates area stated that in a recent year, he had purchased 60,000 pounds of chanterelles from local residents. At \$2.50 a pound, that was \$150,000 that went into the local economy. Local gatherers almost always refer to mushroom picking as "Christmas money" and they include retired people, working people who pick on weekends, forest enthusiasts, hunters, and disabled people. Buyers of special forest products typically educate people about the ecology and etiquette of picking.

"The Forest Service is not always right about the chanterelle season. I often find mushrooms a month before or a month after the season they set. Their policies around burns are not appropriate either. Since

mushrooms will not return the year following a burn, it is important to harvest as many as possible.”

“The BLM permits for mushrooms cover three square miles. That’s not realistic—it’s too small for a commercial picker.”

One special forest product is marijuana. Residents reported that marijuana growing is a common use of nearby forested lands. People have to be cautious about where they hike because of the risk of coming upon a marijuana patch.

“There is a marijuana growing problem here. It’s not just one kind of person. It can be kids or older pros. There’s an eleven year old ‘pusher’ in the elementary school.”

“Loggers are starting to come across marijuana crops while out in the forest. My buddy found a thousand starter plants last year.”

Opal Creek has been an area that has received local, regional, and national scrutiny with regard to management decisions. It was very clear from discussions that local residents view this area as very special, both because of its natural resource values and because of its long history that involved ancestors of present residents. It seems that Friends of Opal Creek has been an effective means to understand and channel the many interests of citizens in this area.

C. Management Opportunities

Communication Opportunities

Educate local communities on how trail pass revenues are used.

Consider partnership programs of trail maintenance between the Forest Service and local residents, providing no cost trail passes to volunteers. This strategy would reinforce the stewardship value already present.

Continue to promote hydrologic education, combining education of upper pristine reaches with human-induced effects at lower elevations.

Action Opportunities

The Forest Service could foster attempts to link people who have similar, emerging interests with regard to the recreation economy. For example, one retired Forest Service person related how he has reluctantly gotten into the business of guiding people on the trail system or advising them where to go because of his knowledge of the trail system. At the same time, the issue section described a woman who moved to the area to get into guiding but has not yet made the transition. Connecting these two people and providing business support services could foster business incubation.

"Take the giant green bus to take locals on guided hikes and 'pit projects.'"

"Invite the community to the ranger station when there are in-service days for computer training. Offer technical assistance for the school's computer programs. Mill City schools are still doing time sheets by hand. It would be a great help to the administration to get forms on the computer and be able to process things paper free."

"The Forest Service should connect with the schools before putting things up for auction. They are like the First World and the schools are like the Third World."

"The Forest Service could provide technical help with writing grants. In the past, the Forest Service donated radios for a local triathlon. This type of relationship could be expanded upon."

"There could be more relations between the YCC [Youth Conservation Corps] and the Forest Service. Mentoring relationships between Forest Service professionals and children could be created."

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