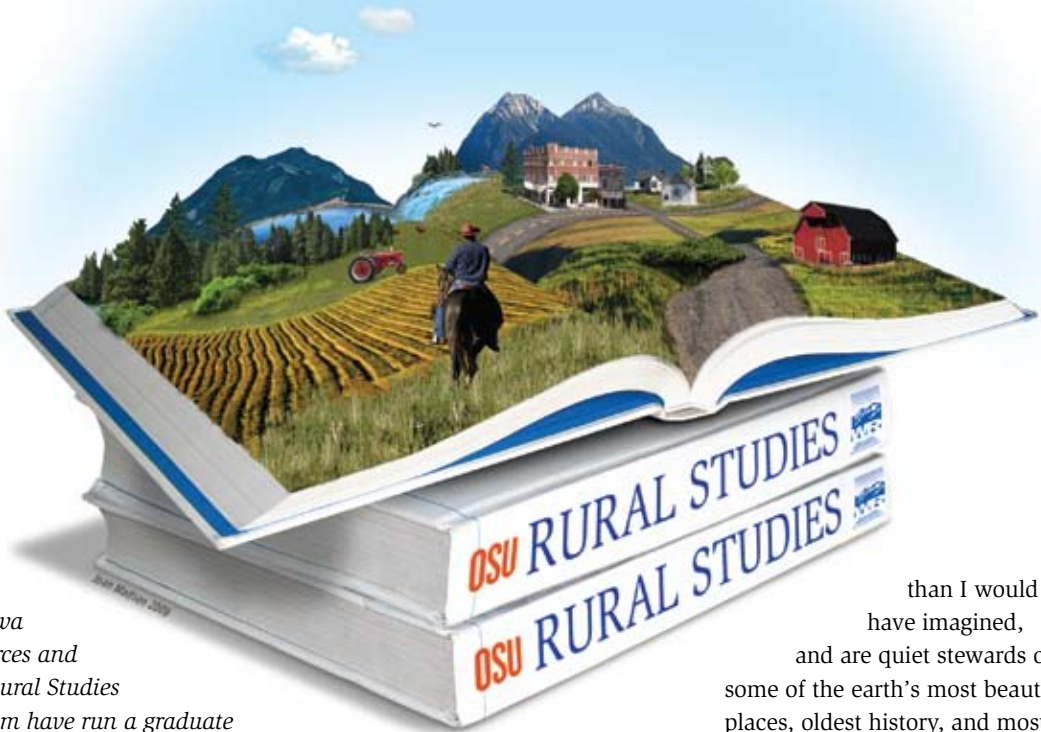


Quarterly Connection



Wallowa Resources and OSU Rural Studies Program have run a graduate seminar course for the past four years on the relationships between natural resources and community well being in rural Oregon. It provides students from diverse backgrounds with an interdisciplinary, experiential learning opportunity. Caitlin Bell, a participant in the September 2008 course, kindly allowed us to print this excerpt from her final exam.

I grew up in the suburbs of an old industrial city with a population of 300,000 and moderate cultural diversity. I attended an urban, all-girls private Catholic high school and spent half of my college years in the country's largest city. I thought that because I had lived in rural central New York, worked on a cattle ranch in remote northern California, majored in natural resource management, and wrote my thesis on landowner-wildlife manager conflict, that I would be prepared for a week in rural America. Nothing was farther

I learned, among many things, that rural residents are innovative, entrepreneurial, and warmly hospitable people who value community, simple living, and hard work.

—Caitlin Bell

from the truth. Over the past 2 weeks I was faced repeatedly with the formidable and humbling task of dismantling my assumptions and preconceptions and rebuilding knowledge from scratch. I learned, among many things, that rural residents are innovative, entrepreneurial, and warmly hospitable people who value community, simple living, and hard work.

They are culturally and socially varied, more accepting of diversity

than I would have imagined, and are quiet stewards of some of the earth's most beautiful places, oldest history, and most valuable natural resources. In many ways, they are the essence and the engine of this country dominated by urban citizens.

The most memorable moment of the class, for me, was on a farm when the landowner explained how he finally allowed Department of Fish and Wildlife personnel on his property, and was now managing for two endangered species. That moment, and many others throughout the eight days of travel, exposed me to current and local environmental and sociological issues. I was impressed and humbled by the breadth of responses to these challenges by rural residents, and how much they had accomplished already.

I took copious notes on what conservation methods worked (landowner education, voluntary participation) and what didn't (blanket regulations, ultimatums, labeling the species a "risk" to the



Students atop Mt. Howard



Sixth grade students monitor stream substrate

continued from page 1

landowner). I was encouraged by the existence of groups of people who are passionate about their land, but also about being stewards of the land's non-human residents.”

This class was an inspiring introduction to the state I will

call home for the next two years, and an appropriate note to begin my first term as a future socio-ecologist.

For more information on this class go to: www.forestry.oregonstate.edu/communitiesandnaturalresources/

Aspirations of Rural Youth

By Devora Shamah and Brooke Dolenc

Two Oregon State University graduate students explored the aspirations of rural teens and young adults. One study examined how growing up in Wallowa County shaped goals and future decisions among high school students.

The second examined how the schools and communities prepared high school alumni to be successful living and working on their own.

What we learned

Current Students

Surveys were completed by 277 students in grades 9-12.

34% of students want to live in WC as adults

92% of students plan to continue their education beyond high school

Occupational aspirations range from professional athlete to mechanic, from doctor to teacher to business owner.

About 4% hope to make their living in careers associated with the county's identity: ranching, timber, or farming

20 juniors and seniors were interviewed.

- Youth appreciated the slower pace of life in WC as opposed to urban living
- Youth want to raise their future families in rural places
- Youth want more exposure to possible jobs
- Youth feel most comfortable applying to colleges they have visited whether for camp, a sports championship, or to visit a friend

Benefits of Rural living:

“It [Wallowa County] probably helped, it is a whole lot easier to get to know people in small communities and it is easier to think and make decisions where the speed of things is slower than in the city where everything is whoosh, whoosh.”

—male, junior

Alumni

An online survey was completed by 202 young adults who graduated from high school in Wallowa County between 1996 and 2007.

24% are living in WC

91% continued their education (78% at four-year colleges)

67% of participants have had continuous employment since high school

The majority of participating graduates felt supported by their Wallowa County high school and community.

83% felt well prepared for their first job after high school

75% felt well prepared to live on their own

64% felt well prepared for their college classes

Over 86% of participants felt adults in Wallowa County gave them help and support and felt like they mattered to people in the county

Over 75% of participants felt they belonged at their high school and felt comfortable talking to high school teachers about problems

What it means for Wallowa County:

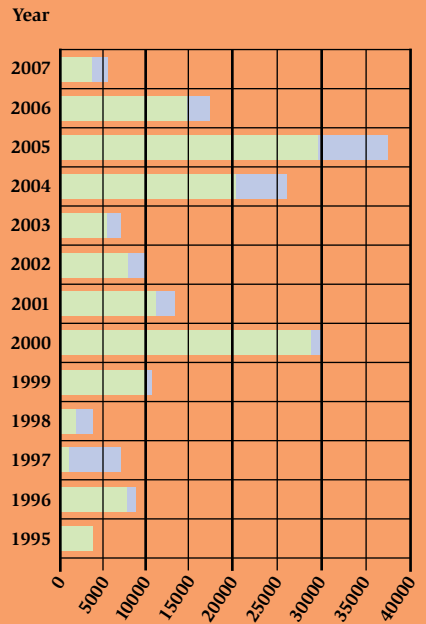
A majority of Wallowa County youth (high school students and alumni) reported doing well and appreciating the support they receive from their families, teachers, and community members.

Both studies suggest that more career exploration, access to advanced math training, apprenticeships, and college visits to give youth a sense of what college life is like would be helpful for future high school students.

For more information on the studies and the results contact: Devora Shamah (shamahd@onid.orst.edu) or Brooke Dolenc (dolencb@onid.orst.edu).

Acres Sold, 1995-2007 (20+ acre parcels)

■ Out-of-County Buyer ■ In-County Buyer



Shifting Land Ownership and Use in Wallowa County

By Jesse Abrams

I spent the summer of 2003 as a graduate student intern with Wallowa Resources, having never previously set foot in Wallowa County. At the time, my work was focused on policy analysis related to the federal "Competitive Sourcing Initiative," assisting Mark Porter's program in noxious weed management and helping Erin Melville with range monitoring.

As I worked and traveled throughout the area with Wallowa Resources staff and other local community members, they all seemed to be telling different versions of the same story: the county is changing. Patterns of land use, land ownership, and economic activity that had come to define Wallowa County for most of its history were shifting to something new and unfamiliar. Forest operations on the public lands had ground to a halt. Mills that once provided jobs with good pay and benefits had shut down. Home prices were escalating beyond the reach of most local residents. Farms, ranches, and forests that had belonged to local families for generations were being sold as those families moved away.

These conversations got me thinking about why and how rural communities change, and what challenges and opportunities arise when they do. Four years later, the start of a doctoral program and a fellowship opportunity through the Community Forestry and Environmental Research Partnerships program allowed me to return to Wallowa County to begin the process of answering these questions.

Through conversations with county commissioners, planners, economic development special-

ists, ranchers, timberland owners, and other community members it became clear that the issue of private land ownership change was important to the community, and that my research efforts could help provide information to assist in community planning, outreach, and stewardship activities.

The research project I've developed in collaboration with community leaders focuses on four primary questions:

- What is the past history of land ownership and use in Wallowa County?
- What changes in land ownership and use are underway, and what are their causes?
- How do these changes compare with changes in other rural places in the U.S. and around the world?
- How might these changes affect locally-driven resource stewardship activities, and how can the community play an active role in ensuring that stewardship continues?

I spent the summer of 2008 beginning the process of answering these questions through historical research, analysis of county property ownership data, and in-depth conversations with landowners of all types. These have included the prototypical "multi-generational rancher" and "absentee landowner from the big city," but they've also included a number of landowners who don't fit easily into these familiar categories. While the research has only just begun, it's already clear that there is a diversity of Wallowa County landowners, with a variety of reasons for owning land, sources of management information, and

land management philosophies. Landowners of all kinds are deeply concerned about taking care of the land they own, though opinions differ on what this means.

My research approach is to conduct this study in partnership with the community, so that the research objectives, methods, and analysis are driven by – and in some cases carried out in collaboration with – county residents and stakeholders. This project will continue for approximately a year and a half, during which time you can expect to find me presenting preliminary results, asking the community for feedback, and tracking down landowners, ranchers, loggers, second-home owners, outfitters, local history buffs and others. I invite anyone to contact me with questions, ideas, feedback, or resources of interest – you can reach me at 541-231-3556 or at jesse.abrams@oregonstate.edu.

Join Jesse for a presentation on his work at Toma's Conference Room on April 7, 2009 at 7 PM as part of Wallowa Resources guest speaker series

Coming Events

Spring WREN Fridays, March 13 through May 22; local 5th-8th graders will experience our natural and cultural resources first-hand in this all day program. Visit the website for more info and applications.

Spring OWL (Outdoor Wallowa Learning) for Joseph School's 4th-6th graders: May 4-7, 2009 on Wallowa Lake's East Moraine.

Watershed Festival Friday, June 26th, 2009; Wallowa County Fairgrounds in Enterprise; Celebrate our natural and cultural resources, enter the Pie Baking Contest, listen to live music, and enjoy a free hamburger/garden burger. See the website for more info and contest information.

Summer WREN Backpacking Trips in the Wallowas for 13-18 year olds: July 18-14 & August 10-16. Visit our website for more info and applications.

Summer field trips consist of several multi-day offerings, including a backcountry camping trip for all ages. Other trips will be offered in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, Elderhostel, High Desert Museum, and professional photographer Tom Bol.

Half and full-day outings will be offered again this summer: birding, hiking, photography, van tours, ranch visits, and geology tours are available throughout the summer. Check the field trips section of the Wallowa Resources website www.wallowaresources.org/fieldtrips.htm for details.

WR-Wallowa Mountain Institute FUNdraising River Trip on the Grande Ronde: June 19-21. Join us for a 3-day naturalist adventure. All proceeds go to WMI's youth education programming. Visit our website.

Please explore and enjoy our updated Website at www.WallowaResources.org

In addition to the articles presented here, Wallowa Resources is working on a broad variety of educational, range stewardship, natural resource, policy and watershed restoration projects throughout Wallowa County?

To find out more about what is happening at Wallowa Resources, just go to www.WallowaResources.org or call us at 541-426-8053 today!



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