

GEODC

Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation



Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2024-2029



UNIVERSITY OF
OREGON

Institute for Policy
Research and Engagement

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Executive Summary	- 1 -
Introduction.....	1
What is a CEDS?.....	1
Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation	3
District Profile.....	7
Background & Summary	7
Demographics.....	8
Resiliency Indicators	14
Regional Economy.....	33
Tribal & County Profiles	38
SWOT Analysis.....	60
Goals and Objectives.....	66
Goals for the 2024-2029 CEDS.....	66
Community Engagement Outcomes	67
Action Plan	70
Overview	70
Background & Methods.....	71
Action Plan Summary	72
Goal: Community Development.....	74
Goal: Regional Collaboration and Rural/Frontier Vitality	79
Goal: Business Support.....	83
Goal: Infrastructure & Resiliency	87
Regional Priority Projects.....	92
Other Resources.....	93

Acknowledgements

The Institute for Policy Research and Engagement wishes to acknowledge the following individuals for their contributions to this project:

GEODC Board of Directors

Tracy Hamby, President, Bank of Eastern Oregon, Pendleton
Jill Parker, Acting Secretary Treasurer, Old West Federal Credit Union, Pendleton
Dan Joyce, Judge, Malheur County
Rita Rosenberg, Umpqua Bank, Umatilla County
Stephanie Leon, Port of Morrow
Bill Hart, Judge, Harney County
Jim Hamsher, Commissioner, Grant County
John Doherty, City Administrator, Heppner

GEODC Staff

Susan Christensen, Executive Director
Tory Stinnett, Deputy Director
Christina Smith, Loan Officer
Rita Campbell, Accounting Specialist

CEDS Advisory Board

Susan Bower	Ryan DeGrofft	Jill Parker
Alana Carollo	Tracy Hamby	Taylor Rembowski
Erin Carpenter	Jim Hamsher	Denise Rose
Steve Chrisman	Tamra Mabbott	Feather Sams-Huesties
Jed Crowther	Keith MacGeagh	Brenda Smith
Kim Cutsforth	Didgette McCracken	Robert Waldher
Matt Davis	Kristen Nieskens	Lisa Weigum

CEDS Working Groups

Roadmap to Childcare Solutions

Lindsey Cochran	Tracy Kennedy	Feather Sams-Huesties
Dan Daltoso	Kitman Kienzle	Katie Siri-Murray
Keith MacGeagh	Brenda Profitt	Marsie Watson
Mark Morgan	Denise Rose	Suellen Whitlock

Water/Wastewater Infrastructure Strategies

Kim Anderson	Laura Gleim	Feather Sams-Huesties
Susan Bower	William Goss	Brandon Seitz
Ryan DeGrofft	Tamra Mabbott	Robert Walder
Chantal DesJardin	Mark Morgan	
John Doherty	Taylor Rembowski	

Resiliency Planning Coordination

Eric Bush	Richard Harriman	Taylor Rembowski
Tatiana Burgess	Dawn Hert	Melinda Todd
Grace Donovan	Carla McLane	

Other CEDS Contributors

Shannon Adair, Owner, 1188 Brewing, John Day
Dallas Fridley, Regional Economist, Oregon Employment Department
Nick Green, President, Catalyst Public Policy Advisors LLC
Lindsay Grosvenor, Oregon Food Bank
Tracy Kennedy, The Ford Family Foundation
Angela Lamborn, Harney Hub
Dolores Martinez, EUVALCREE
Misty Palmer, Grant County Senior Program Manager
Susan Weathers, Harney Hub
Tony Wendell, Regional Economist, Oregon Employment Department
Dallas Fridley, Regional Economist, Oregon Employment Department
Lisa Weigum, Community Counseling Solutions

Photo Credits

We thank the Eastern Oregon Visitors Association for providing access to their photo gallery; unless otherwise indicated, the photos in this document were taken from their archives. The EOVA Photo Shelter can be found here:

<https://eova.photoshelter.com/index>.

Institute for Policy Research and Engagement Research Team

Kim Thompson, Project Director
Aniko Drlik-Muehleck, Project Advisor

Student Researcher

Jenna Bryant, Research Associate

About the Institute for Policy Research and Engagement



**School of Planning, Public
Policy and Management
Institute for Policy
Research and Engagement**

The Institute for Policy Research & Engagement (IPRE) is a research center affiliated with the School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management at the University of Oregon. It is an interdisciplinary organization that assists Oregon communities by providing planning and technical assistance to help solve local issues and improve the quality of life for Oregon residents. The role of IPRE is to link the skills, expertise, and innovation of higher education with the transportation, economic development, and environmental needs of communities and regions in the State of Oregon, thereby providing service to Oregon and learning opportunities to the students involved.

The University of Oregon Economic Development Administration University Center (UO EDA-UC) is a partnership between the Institute for Policy Research and Engagement, the UO Department of Economics, the Oregon Small Business Development Center Network, and the UO faculty. The UO EDA-UC provides technical assistance to organizations throughout Oregon, with a focus on rural economic development. The UO EDA-UC seeks to align local strategies to community needs, specifically with regards to building an understanding of the benefits of sustainable practices and providing technical training to capitalize on economic opportunities related to those practices. The UO EDA-UC is partially funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration.

This project was funded in part by the U.S. Economic Development Administration through the University Center grant program (Award Number ED22SEA3030043).

In addition, funding from GEODC's EDA Planning Grant (Award Number ED23SEA3020008) also supported this project.



Executive Summary

What is a CEDS?

Every five years, GEODC updates the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), a planning document that guides economic development efforts through innovative and collaborative thinking. The 2024-2029 CEDS highlights priorities for the region and creates a blueprint that GEODC and its partners will use to pursue economic activities over the next five years.

What is GEODC?

Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation (GEODC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit designated by the EDA as the Economic Development District serving Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, and Wheeler counties. GEODC provides small business loans, drafts and administers grants, and coordinates economic development efforts in the region. Their mission statement: "To assist, support, and promote economic growth and development for businesses and communities within Eastern Oregon."

Organization of the CEDS

- Introduction
- District Profile
- SWOT Analysis
- Goals & Objectives
- Action Plan and Evaluation Metrics

Economic Resilience

Building resiliency is a key element of economic development work and is emphasized throughout the CEDS. The EDA defines resilience as an economy's ability to "anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from any type of shock, disruption, or stress it may experience." In Eastern Oregon, rural and frontier vitality and resilience may look very different than in urban environments.

Regional Profile

One of the largest Economic Development Districts in the country by land area, Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation (GEODC) proudly serves Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, and Wheeler counties. The region boasts a variety of natural landscapes, cultural heritage sites, and recreation opportunities. Two federally-recognized tribes - the Burns Paiute Tribe and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation - also call the region their home. GEODC works to support the region by upholding values of close-knit community, natural resource management, hospitality, and entrepreneurship in order to create a sustainable, evolving economy.

<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">Gilliam County</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Population*</td> <td>2,062</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Land Area†</td> <td>1,204 sq. mi.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Median Household Income‡</td> <td>\$51,705</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Gilliam County		Population*	2,062	Land Area†	1,204 sq. mi.	Median Household Income‡	\$51,705	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">Grant County</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Population</td> <td>7,418</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Land Area</td> <td>4,528 sq. mi.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Median Household Income</td> <td>\$51,100</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Grant County		Population	7,418	Land Area	4,528 sq. mi.	Median Household Income	\$51,100	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">Harney County</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Population</td> <td>7,600</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Land Area</td> <td>10,134 sq. mi.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Median Household Income</td> <td>\$42,095</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Harney County		Population	7,600	Land Area	10,134 sq. mi.	Median Household Income	\$42,095
Gilliam County																										
Population*	2,062																									
Land Area†	1,204 sq. mi.																									
Median Household Income‡	\$51,705																									
Grant County																										
Population	7,418																									
Land Area	4,528 sq. mi.																									
Median Household Income	\$51,100																									
Harney County																										
Population	7,600																									
Land Area	10,134 sq. mi.																									
Median Household Income	\$42,095																									
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">Malheur County</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Population</td> <td>32,981</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Land Area</td> <td>9,888 sq. mi.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Median Household Income</td> <td>\$47,906</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Malheur County		Population	32,981	Land Area	9,888 sq. mi.	Median Household Income	\$47,906	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">Morrow County</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Population</td> <td>13,010</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Land Area</td> <td>2,032 sq. mi.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Median Household Income</td> <td>\$61,659</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Morrow County		Population	13,010	Land Area	2,032 sq. mi.	Median Household Income	\$61,659	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">Umatilla County</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Population</td> <td>81,842</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Land Area</td> <td>3,215 sq. mi.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Median Household Income</td> <td>\$63,123</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Umatilla County		Population	81,842	Land Area	3,215 sq. mi.	Median Household Income	\$63,123
Malheur County																										
Population	32,981																									
Land Area	9,888 sq. mi.																									
Median Household Income	\$47,906																									
Morrow County																										
Population	13,010																									
Land Area	2,032 sq. mi.																									
Median Household Income	\$61,659																									
Umatilla County																										
Population	81,842																									
Land Area	3,215 sq. mi.																									
Median Household Income	\$63,123																									
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">Wheeler County</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Population</td> <td>1,533</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Land Area</td> <td>1,716 sq. mi.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Median Household Income</td> <td>\$46,648</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Wheeler County		Population	1,533	Land Area	1,716 sq. mi.	Median Household Income	\$46,648	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">7-County Region</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Population</td> <td>146,446</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Land Area</td> <td>32,798 sq. mi.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Median Household Income</td> <td>\$56,405</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	7-County Region		Population	146,446	Land Area	32,798 sq. mi.	Median Household Income	\$56,405	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">Oregon Statewide</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Population</td> <td>4,291,525</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Land Area</td> <td>95,996 sq. mi.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Median Household Income</td> <td>\$70,084</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Oregon Statewide		Population	4,291,525	Land Area	95,996 sq. mi.	Median Household Income	\$70,084
Wheeler County																										
Population	1,533																									
Land Area	1,716 sq. mi.																									
Median Household Income	\$46,648																									
7-County Region																										
Population	146,446																									
Land Area	32,798 sq. mi.																									
Median Household Income	\$56,405																									
Oregon Statewide																										
Population	4,291,525																									
Land Area	95,996 sq. mi.																									
Median Household Income	\$70,084																									

*PSU Certified Population Estimates (2023); †U.S. Census (2020); ‡ACS 5-Year Estimates Table SE:A14006 (2021)

Regional Economy

The region is heavily based in agriculture, natural resource management, transportation, warehousing, and manufacturing, as well as tourism, hospitality, and entrepreneurship. From 2021 to 2022, Information Technology and Professional Services grew the most in Eastern Oregon - 15.5% and 9.2% respectively. Mining & Logging and Manufacturing declined the most during this period, falling 3.7% and 1.9% respectively.¹ The region employed an estimated 57,509 individuals in 2022, an increase of roughly 3% since 2016.²

The region is predominantly White, with 34% of residents identifying as People of Color and 27% as Hispanic/Latino.³ Poverty and housing shortages pose issues for the region: in 2021, about 34% of renters were considered cost-burdened, meaning that they spent at least 30% of monthly income on rental costs.⁴ In many areas, demand for labor outpaces supply; aging and declining population rates pose concerns for the workforce. Developing innovative methods for training a skilled workforce and attracting residents will be crucial for long-term population maintenance.

Regional Workforce Highlights (2022)	
Top Sectors by Employment	Percent Employed
Total all government	24% (▼1%)
Trade, transportation, & utilities	20% (▲4%)
Education & health services	11% (▲14%)
Natural resources and mining	11% (no change)
Top Sectors by Wage	Avg. Annual Wage
Total all government	\$54,740 (▲28%)
Professional and business services	\$53,609 (▲12%)
Trade, transportation, & utilities	\$46,837 (▲26%)
Natural resources & mining	\$43,927 (▲27%)

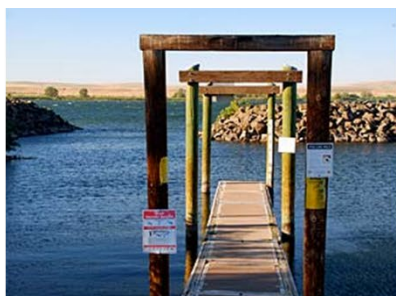
All data derived from the Oregon Employment Department's 2022 Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages. ▲ and ▼ denote rate of change since 2016. Note that inflation between 2016-2021 increased by 22%.

¹ OED Eastern Oregon Workforce Board Report, 2022

² OED QCEW, 2022

³ ACS 2021 5-Year Estimates Table SE:B04001

⁴ ACS 2021 5-Year Estimates Table SE:B18002



Credit: Gary Halvorson, Oregon Scenic Images

SWOT Analysis

We asked residents and community partners to identify key factors that influence economic development in Eastern Oregon.

Strengths

Land and infrastructure

- Availability of buildable lands
- Transportation networks/linkages

Variety of natural resources

- Renewable/green energy sources
- New natural resource economy

Variety in local culture and flair

Agriculture, food, and recreation industries

Access to grants and loans

- Federal and state grants
- GEODC loan services for small businesses

Support for economic development in communities and government

Weaknesses

Workforce infrastructure

- Family-wage job shortage
- Lack of affordable housing
- Childcare shortages
- Lack of skilled labor

Workforce supply

- Lack of diversity in employment opportunities
- Mismatch between employer needs and employee skills

Diverse sources of capital

Technical support for innovation

- Access to grant-writing or administration

Development infrastructure

Rural/frontier vitality

- Small tax base, limited local commerce

Opportunities

Expansion of local industry

- Tourism, leisure, entertainment
- Small-town and Main Street culture
- Unmanned Aerial Vehicles test sites
- Data processing centers

Business infrastructure

- Increasing demand for renewable energy
- Access to ports for transporting goods

Demographic changes

Access to regional development funding

Columbia Basin as alternative energy hub

Threats

Water Access

- Degradation of infrastructure over time
- Climate change and environmental shifts

Population demographics in Eastern Oregon

- Aging generations
- Lack of proximity to metro areas

Access to private financing

Increasing regulations

- Statewide Land Use Program
- Regulations for natural resource and land development

Goals & Priorities

The 2024-2029 CEDS Action Plan is organized around four broad goals that capture the economic development priorities of GEODC’s region. The areas of need and strategies to address these needs were identified through our community outreach efforts.

2024-2029 CEDS Action Plan *(continued on next page)*

Goal: Community Development		
Areas of Need	Strategies	Priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Supply • Affordable and Available Housing • Population Retention and Growth • Childcare Supply and Sustainability • Community Health • Technical Assistance and Capacity Support 	Develop a Roadmap to Childcare Solutions	High
	Promote Local Childcare Sustainability	High
	Enhance Visibility and Capacity of GEODC’s Core Services	High
	Increase Affordable and Available Housing Supply	High
	Support Workforce Education and Training	Other
	Seek Healthy Food Access	Other
	Create Pathways for Increased Technical Assistance and Capacity Support	Other
Goal: Regional Collaboration & Rural/Frontier Vitality		
Areas of Need	Strategies	Priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource-Sharing Networks • Training for Local Leadership • Community Readiness Assessments • Regional Coalition for Economic Needs • Tribal Funding Support 	Explore Local Planning Capacity through a Regional Planner Circuit Rider Model	High
	Increase Regional Resiliency Partnerships and Planning; Develop Regional Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan Templates	High
	Expand Capacity for Tribal Populations	High
	Produce Community Readiness Assessment	Other
	Enhance Regional Planner Training	Other

Goals & Priorities

2024-2029 CEDS Action Plan (continued from previous page)

Goal: Business Support		
Areas of Need	Strategies	Priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small Business Support • Emerging Industries • Main Street Revitalization • Cultivate a Regional Culture of Entrepreneurship 	Support Small Business	High
	Expand Culture of Local Entrepreneurism	High
	Embrace Emerging Industry Regionally	Other
	Increase Support for Main Street Projects	Other
Goal: Infrastructure & Resiliency		
Areas of Need	Strategies	Priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water/Wastewater/ Groundwater Infrastructure • Water Storage and Reuse • Equitable Broadband Access • Basic Utilities • Community NHMP Readiness • Resiliency Planning 	Support Local Aquifer, Reuse, and Water Storage Projects through CEDS Narrative and a Working Group	High
	Enhance the Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) 2023 Technical Assistance Resource Guide	High
	Explore Operator Circuit Rider Cooperative in GEODC's Region	High
	Increase Certified Drinking Water and Wastewater Operator Education in GEODC's Region	Other
	Increase Regional Broadband Access	Other
	Expand Regional Resiliency Planning	Other



Introduction

What is a CEDS?

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, or CEDS, guides economic development efforts in Greater Eastern Oregon through regional-based planning and collaboration. Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation (GEODC) is charged with updating the region's CEDS every five years in accordance with guidelines set by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA).

The CEDS process requires engagement with community leaders and stakeholders and reflects the priorities shared by Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, and Wheeler counties. It offers a blueprint by which to build capacity and leverage opportunities over the next five years.

The CEDS update process took place over ten months in collaboration with local and tribal governments, business owners, regional partners, ports, and other key stakeholders. GEODC partnered with the University of Oregon Institute for Policy Research and Engagement (IPRE) to conduct the research and collect the stakeholder feedback that informed the 2024-2029 CEDS update.

Why have a CEDS?

“Economic development planning - as implemented through the CEDS - is not only a cornerstone of the U.S. Economic Development Administration's (EDA) programs, but successfully serves as a means to engage community leaders, leverage the involvement of the private sector, and establish a strategic blueprint for regional collaboration.” - U.S. EDA



Vineyard in Milton-Freewater

The EDA identifies four “core factors” that should be used for the CEDS framework:

- **Economic Resilience:** A local or regional economy’s ability to “anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from any type of shock, disruption, or stress it may experience.”¹ Where possible, 2024-2029 CEDS goals and objectives seek to build up rural and frontier community resilience in Greater Eastern Oregon.
- **Climate Resilience:** A community’s ability to “anticipate, prepare for, and respond to hazardous events, trends, or disturbances related to the climate.”² Taking measures to strengthen our communities against long-term climate impacts - particularly in the context of infrastructure needs - has become a key consideration for economic development partners. The 2024-2029 CEDS addresses resilient infrastructure in the priority objectives assigned to water and wastewater and natural hazard mitigation plans.
- **Workforce Development:** Regional workforce conditions greatly impact economic prosperity and must be addressed in any CEDS update. The EDA emphasizes “employer-driven, place-based”³ workforce development efforts that involve coordination with key public, private, and educational stakeholders. GEODC draws on the expertise of the Eastern Oregon Workforce Board in establishing objectives around equitable workforce training initiatives. This objective has been added as a GEODC priority project in the 2024-2029 CEDS action plan.
- **Equity:** Community planning efforts should improve the lives of all residents, regardless of identity or circumstance - and yet our most vulnerable groups are often placed at a disadvantage. In the context of economic development planning, equity can be defined as “a set of strategies and targeted approaches to serve populations that may have been underserved by traditional methods.”⁴ Our CEDS document foregrounds the need for holistic, inclusive economic development efforts. The formation of the areas of need, CEDS goals & objectives, and priority projects (see *Action Plan* starting on page 70) were made in conjunction with an Advisory Group made up of community members in all seven counties in the GEODC region, as well as interviews with community stakeholders, the tribes, and representatives from locally identified vulnerable populations, including Hispanic/Latino residents and senior citizens.



Steens Mountains

Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation

In 1992, the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) designated GEODC as a federal Economic Development District serving Gilliam, Grant, Morrow, Umatilla, and Wheeler counties. In 2001, Harney and Malheur counties were added, and GEODC assumed responsibility for the EDA revolving loan fund. Every five years, GEODC is responsible for convening local stakeholders to produce a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the EDA. This document serves as the 2024-2029 CEDS.

GEODC has administered an EDA Revolving Loan Fund since the late 1980s. GEODC enhanced its portfolio of loan products by borrowing over \$4 million from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development to administer the Intermediary Relending Program. In addition, several small Revolving Loan Funds exist, each serving all or a portion of the GEODC region.

In May 2014, GEODC changed from a 501(c)(4) to a 501(c)(3) to seek a broader range of funding sources, including private foundations, and to provide tax deductions to the full extent of the law as charitable contributions.

GEODC has a diverse loan portfolio ranging from breweries to recreational RV parks and works closely with lending institutions in the district to provide gap financing. Since 2018, 29 businesses have accessed loan funds totaling \$3.9 million through GEODC.

GEODC improves economic conditions in the region in several ways, including:

- Providing small business loans
- Administering Community Development Block Grants for public agencies
- Securing grants for community projects (infrastructure, Main Street)
- Coordinating regionwide development and economic planning

History and Accomplishments

The last full CEDS update process took place in 2014. Since the 2014-2019 CEDS iteration, several high priority construction projects have been completed with the help of the CEDS prioritization and GEODC.

GEODC's mission statement

"To assist, support, and promote economic growth and development for businesses and communities within Eastern Oregon."

GEODC-secured funding for infrastructure projects completed:

- UAV Facilities, Improvements, and Flight Operations Equipment
- Interim UAV/Airport Hanger Facilities
- Regional Water Development & Restoration Project

GEODC-secured funding for technical assistance projects completed:

- Wastewater Facilities Master Plan Update/Analysis of Options
- Harney County Housing Roadmap
- Flood Relief for Small Businesses
- Product Development for Eastern Oregon Culinary & Agricultural Tourism



Coyote Business Park Fiber Optic Cable Installation (*CTUIR*)



Food Sovereignty Project Greenhouse (*Burns Paiute Tribe*)



Echo Ridge Cellars

Organization of the 2024-2029 CEDS

The CEDS document is organized into the following sections:

- **Chapter 1: CEDS Introduction**
 - GEODC introduction, organization of the document, and CEDS key terms.
- **Chapter 2: District Profile**
 - Summarizes characteristics of the GEODC region, including geographic conditions, demographic makeup, and key industries, as well as individual profiles for each of the seven counties and the region's two federally recognized tribes: Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, and Wheeler counties, the Burns Paiute Tribe, and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.
- **Chapter 3: Regional SWOT Analysis**
 - Highlights key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that will impact economic development efforts in the region over the next five years.
- **Chapter 4: Goals & Priorities**
 - Outlines the four broad goal areas for the 2024-2029 CEDS and key priorities that we identified in conversations with regional partners.
- **Chapter 5: Action Plan & Evaluation Metrics**
 - Describes the specific objectives that will move our regional priorities forward over the next five years; serves as a blueprint for economic development efforts in Greater Eastern Oregon. Includes the metrics that GEODC will use to track its progress over the next five years.
 - Demonstrates how each priority will be measured over time by GEODC to determine progress towards economic development goals in the region. The tracking sheet will be maintained as a living document by GEODC and evaluated annually during the 5 year cycle.
- **Other Resources**
 - Links to supporting CEDS supplemental reference documents.

Key CEDS Terms

Throughout this document, we use economic development terms to discuss trends, concepts, and issues. Please refer to the definitions below to understand our interpretation of these terms.

- **Affordable housing:** Typically, the federal government defines housing as "affordable" when the household is paying no more than 30% of their gross income on housing costs. Keeping housing costs below 30% allows households to afford other nondiscretionary goods and services. See *also*: cost-burdened households.

- **Cost-burdened households:** Households that spend 30% or more of their incomes on housing costs, such as monthly mortgage and rent payments.
- **Childcare desert:** An area where more than 66% of children ages 0-5 cannot get access to a regulated childcare spot.
- **Economic resilience:** Defined by the EDA as “an area’s ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major disruptions (i.e., ‘shocks’) to its economic base.”⁵ Economic resilience can be assessed through a variety of indicators; see our county profiles for some of these indicators.
- **Vulnerable or underserved populations:** Those with some shared group characteristic such as their race, ethnicity, age, health condition, or socioeconomic status that place them at a higher risk of experiencing inequitable economic or social outcomes compared to the population on average.
- **Community readiness:** The degree to which a community is prepared to act – undertaking a project, addressing an issue, or preparing for a change. Successful economic development initiatives often require that citizens be informed of, prepared for, and supportive of change, adaptation, and growth.
- **Circuit rider:** A technical assistance model where resources and funding of a roving service provider are shared and available locally to build community capacity.

¹ U.S. Economic Development Administration. (n.d.). *Economic Resilience*. Retrieved on March 14, 2024 from <https://www.eda.gov/resources/comprehensive-economic-development-strategy/content/economic-resilience>.

² Ibid.

³ U.S. Economic Development Administration. (n.d.). *Workforce Development*. Retrieved on March 14, 2024 from <https://www.eda.gov/resources/comprehensive-economic-development-strategy/content/workforce-development>.

⁴ U.S. Economic Development Administration. (n.d.). *Equity*. Retrieved on March 14, 2024, from <https://www.eda.gov/resources/comprehensive-economic-development-strategy/content/equity>.

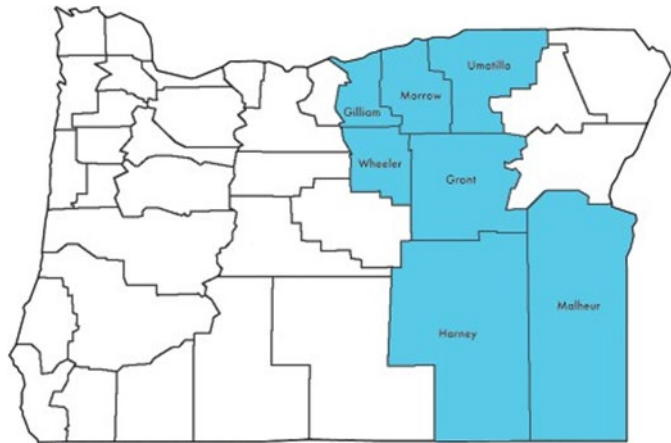
⁵ U.S. Economic Development Administration. (n.d.). *Economic Resilience*. Retrieved on March 14, 2024 from <https://www.eda.gov/resources/comprehensive-economic-development-strategy/content/economic-resilience>.

⁶ U.S. Economic Development Administration. (n.d.). *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs)*. <https://www.eda.gov/resources/comprehensive-economic-development-strategy?q=/grant-resources/comprehensive-economic-development-strategy#:~:text=Simply%20put%2C%20a%20CEDs%20is,of%20an%20area%20or%20region>.

District Profile

Background & Summary

Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation (GEODC) is one of the largest Economic Development Districts in the country by total land area. Comprised of seven counties (Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, and Wheeler) and thirty-nine incorporated cities, it makes up almost 33% of Oregon's land mass but only 3% of its population. The region borders three states - Washington, Idaho, and Nevada - and stretches 280 miles from north to south, totaling 32,798 square miles.



Geography

The GEODC coverage area is larger than 11 U.S. states. Compared to the rainy Willamette Valley and Oregon's coast, the region has a drier continental climate. The region boasts open rangelands, sprawling stretches of national forests, rugged peaks, and desert sagebrush. The high desert climate creates four distinct seasons, with hot, dry summers and cold, snowy winters. Some areas receive fewer than 10 inches of rain annually, in part due to a rain shadow effect caused by the Cascade Mountain Range to the west.⁶

Opportunities for outdoor recreation are plentiful, and visitor attractions include the Blue Mountains, Wallowa Mountains, Painted Hills, John Day Fossil Beds, and the John Day River, one of our nation's longest free-flowing river systems.

Umatilla County is the region's largest county by population, home to roughly 55% of all residents. About 13% of the region's population lives in Hermiston, the region's largest city. Major industries include transportation/warehousing, timber, agriculture, and tourism. The main transportation corridors are I-84, U.S. Route 395, U.S. Route 97, U.S. Route 26, U.S. Route 30, and U.S. Route 20.

Residents of Eastern Oregon share a deep-rooted pride in their rural/frontier lifestyle, which emphasizes land stewardship, close-knit community, open spaces, and living in close vicinity to nature. The region's tribes celebrate their hard-fought sovereignty and their ability to pass their rich heritage and cultural values down to future generations. The region's history and geographic environments have shaped the

local economy, brought tourism and culture as well as provided the natural resources that have served as major industry drivers. GEODC works to support these endeavors – through shared values and by leveraging the region’s geographic and cultural diversity and beauty – to create a sustainable and evolving economy.

Disclaimer: Data Limitations

We rely heavily on publicly available databases to understand trends and current conditions in the region. However, gathering data in sparsely-populated areas poses challenges: residents may be more difficult to reach, and sample sizes are typically much smaller, which may make data less generalizable to its representative population. Furthermore, most surveys are administered online, and rural areas are statistically less likely than urban areas to have broadband access, which can lead to uneven survey responses. Due to these factors, many of the statistics included in this document have a medium or large margin of error, which can make the data less reliable.

This report makes extensive use of the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), an ongoing survey that provides year-over-year data on community demographical information. The Five-Year Estimates from the ACS are "period" estimates that represent data collected over a period of time. The primary advantage of using multi-year estimates is the increased statistical reliability of the data for less populated areas and small population subgroups. Please note that in 2020, the ACS faced numerous data collection challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of those challenges, the ACS collected only two-thirds of the responses it usually collects in a survey year.⁷ Many of the ACS figures used in this document are ACS 2021 Five-Year Estimates, which include 2020 data. Headwaters Economics - another database used in this report - also relies on ACS Five-Year Estimates but provides reliability scores for their statistics based on coefficients of variation (CV). For our region, many statistics are rated as having "medium" (CV between 12%-40%) or "low" (CV higher than 40%) reliability, particularly for Gilliam and Wheeler counties, the least populous in the district.

Demographics

GEODC serves roughly 146,000 residents⁸ over its 32,700-square-mile region. On the whole, Eastern Oregon’s residents generally resemble statewide statistics in terms of age, gender, and race/ethnicity, though demographic makeup varies considerably among each of the seven counties. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2021 American Community Survey, 53% of the region’s population is male and 47% is female.⁹ [Table 1](#) depicts the estimated total population for each county in descending order. [Figure 1](#) depicts the approximate change in these populations over the last thirteen years. Every county except for Grant County has grown in size, with Morrow County experiencing the most pronounced growth.

Table 1: Official Population Estimates (2023)

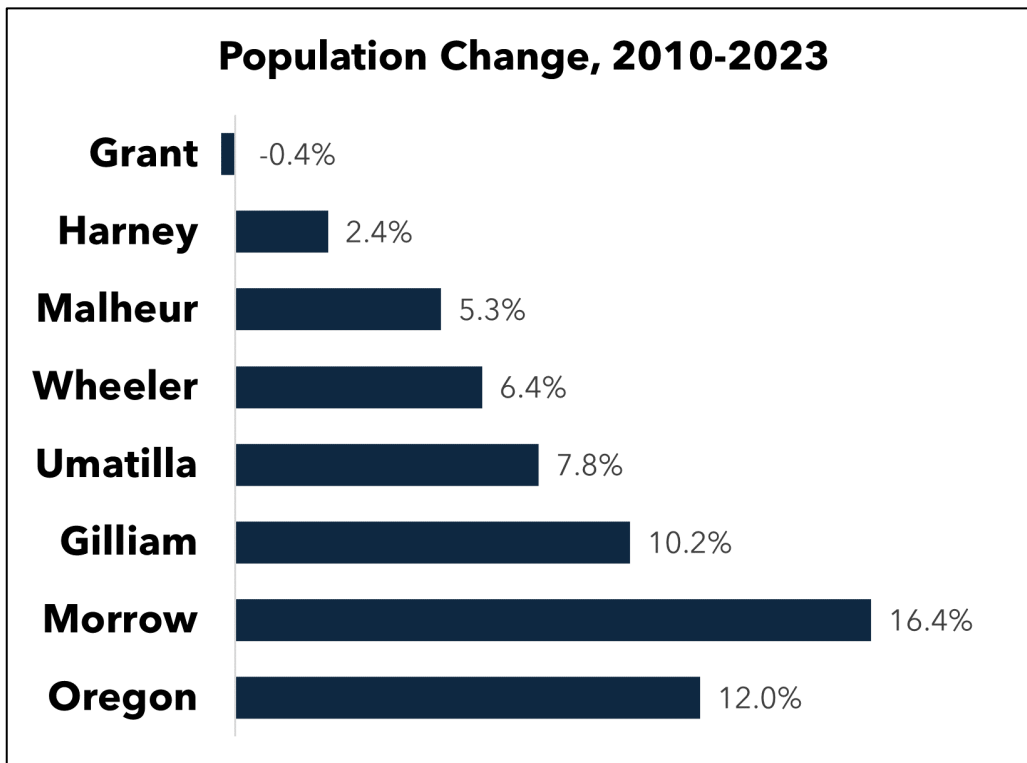
Geography	Total Population
GEODC Total Region	146,446
Umatilla County	81,842
Malheur County	32,981
Morrow County	13,010
Harney County	7,600
Grant County	7,418
Gilliam County	2,062
Wheeler County	1,533



Prodigal Son Brewery in Pendleton

Source: PSU Population Research Center Estimates (April 2023)

Figure 1: Population Change by County



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010) and PSU Population Research Center estimates (April 2023)

Age of Residents

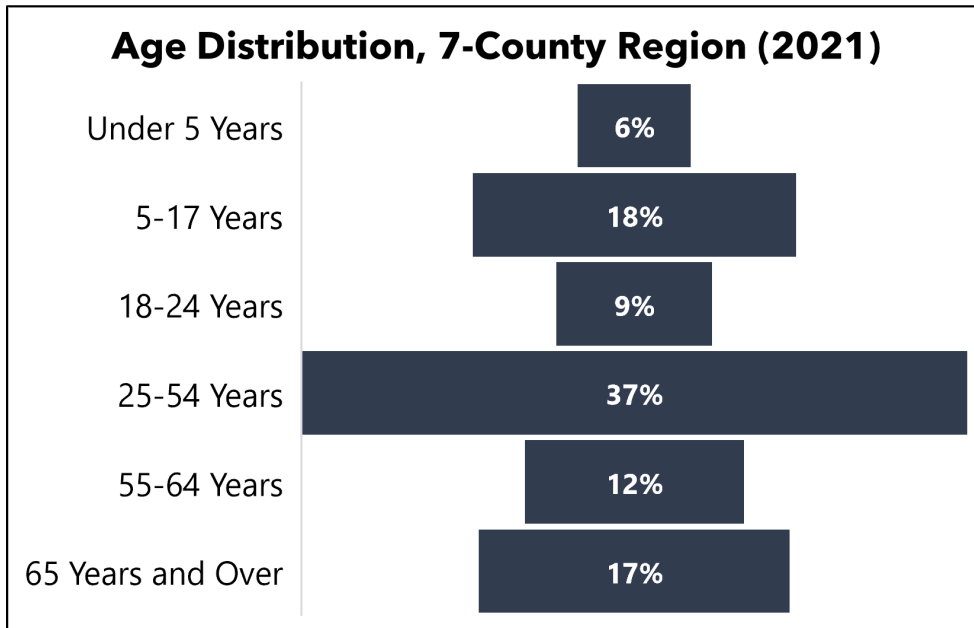
One in four (25%) residents are under the age of 18, while about one in three (30%) are over the age of 55.¹⁰ Thirty-seven percent of residents are of working age (25-55 years).

Though aging populations pose a concern for many rural areas in Eastern Oregon, Malheur, Morrow, and Umatilla counties skew slightly younger than statewide rates – more than 25% of residents are under 18, and fewer than 30% are over 55.

Conversely, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, and Wheeler counties skew slightly *older* than statewide averages – fewer than 20% of residents are under 18, and more than 45% of residents are over 55.

Elderly residents are among the region’s most vulnerable residents; unable to work and usually living on fixed incomes, they are especially sensitive to price fluctuations in home insurance and essential goods and services. In an interview with GEODC Deputy Director Tory Stinnett, a representative of the Grant County Senior Program voiced concerns that senior citizens struggle to consistently access affordable, nutritious meals, face limited options for recreation or social activities, and experience considerable shortages in well-trained in-home caregivers. Without these services, seniors find it difficult to remain in their communities as they age.

Figure 2: Age Distribution, GEODC Region (2021)¹¹



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Table SE: A01001. Age.

Race and Ethnicity

Eastern Oregon has slightly more racial and ethnic diversity than the state as a whole. Thirty-four percent of residents – roughly one in three – identify as a race or ethnicity other than White Alone, eight percentage points higher than the statewide average.¹² This statistic includes multi-racial residents and those identifying as Hispanic or Latino. However, the region remains predominantly White, with 66% of residents classifying as White Alone. Hispanic/Latino residents – some of whom may identify as White – represent 27% of the region’s population, concentrated primarily in Malheur, Morrow, and Umatilla counties.

Table 2: Total Regional Population by Race and Ethnicity (2021)

Race or Ethnicity	Total	Percent
White Alone	92,417	65.6%
Black or African American Alone	1,158	0.8%
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	2,620	1.9%
Asian Alone	1,106	0.8%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders Alone	240	0.2%
Some Other Race Alone	333	0.2%
Two or More Races	4,570	3.2%
Hispanic or Latino	38,452	27.3%

Source: American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table SE: B04001. Hispanic or Latino by Race (Collapsed Version)

By economic development standards, the Hispanic and Latino populations in Eastern Oregon are considered a **vulnerable group** that may find it more difficult than other groups to participate in community planning and advocacy processes due to socioeconomic status, language barriers, or because they have not been adequately welcomed into these processes. Economic development partners must make ongoing efforts to engage Latino stakeholders and ensure that, where applicable, projects and initiatives are inclusive of their needs. Providing translation services can go a long way toward inclusivity.

Table 3: Spanish-Speaking and English-Second-Language Populations highlights Spanish-speaking populations, a vulnerable group that overlaps considerably with Hispanic and Latino residents.

Table 3: Spanish-Speaking and English-Second-Language Populations¹³

	Percent of the Population Who Speak English "Less Than Very Well"	Percent of Population Who are Spanish-Speakers	Percent of Spanish Speakers Who Speak English "Less Than Very Well"
Gilliam	3.2%	5.6%	56.9%
Grant	1.2%	1.5%	64.2%
Harney	1.1%	3.8%	24.0%
Malheur	7.7%	24.0%	30.6%
Morrow	15.4%	33.7%	44.3%
Umatilla	7.5%	21.2%	33.5%
Wheeler	1.8%	4.0%	24.5%

Source: American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table S1601. Language Spoken at Home.
 *Note that this dataset excludes members of the population ages 5 and under.

Malheur, Morrow, and Umatilla counties have a significantly higher concentration of Spanish speakers than other counties in the region. Of course, not all native Spanish speakers have difficulty speaking English, but counties with higher concentrations of Hispanic/Latino residents should be especially mindful of adopting practices that are inclusive, and sensitive to the needs, of these individuals.

GEODC Deputy Director Tory Stinett spoke with a representative from EUVALCREE, a nonprofit that serves Hispanic and Latino residents in Grant, Malheur, Morrow, and Umatilla counties. According to this representative, Hispanic/Latino residents face barriers in accessing the following services: healthcare, financial assistance, and training to support small businesses and entrepreneurship, affordable housing, rent and utility assistance, healthy food options and SNAP program assistance, and childcare.

Tribal Populations

GEODC’s region is home to two federally recognized tribal populations: the Burns Paiute Tribe, based in Harney County, and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), based in Umatilla County. Though these tribes are sovereign, self-governing entities, they impact - and are impacted by - the economic activities in their vicinity, playing a crucial role in local workforce development and job creation.

The Burns Paiute Tribe, with fewer than 150 members living on the reservation, has faced challenges that plague many rural communities, including limited funding for economic development or infrastructure, an unmet demand for highly skilled workers, and childcare shortages. In an interview with GEODC Deputy Director Tory Stinnett, a member of the Burns Paiute Tribe expressed the desire to work with resource providers in the State of Oregon to better accommodate the Tribe’s unique needs. Without access to skilled workers and low-cost capital, the tribe has struggled to advance basic infrastructure projects that are vital to business growth. Often lacking the capacity to perform complex financial services, such as audits, the tribe has had difficulties in accessing loans or other means of financial support.

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), with 1,500 residents living on the reservation, is the single largest employer in Umatilla County and a key economic development player in the region. However, CTUIR still faces many barriers to growth and prosperity. In a conversation with GEODC staff, a representative from CTUIR named workforce development, the attraction and retention of industry and business, housing supply, and information-sharing as among the region’s greatest needs. Tribal groups would benefit from financial literacy and technical assistance training to support entrepreneurship and generational wealth-building.

In general, GEODC’s region would benefit from increased leadership and information-sharing practices that emphasize the unique needs of tribal entities. Communication and collaboration are key drivers of economic development but can be difficult to initiate in low-capacity, geographically dispersed environments. Additionally, the demand for labor currently outpaces the region’s supply of workers, and identifying ways to attract more

Map of CTUIR territory (provided by staff)



Future site of Tukwahone Culture and Heritage Center, Burns Paiute Tribe

residents to the area – such as promoting greater flexibility in the workplace and embracing remote/hybrid workplace settings – will be necessary to expand CTUIR’s workforce.

Resiliency Indicators

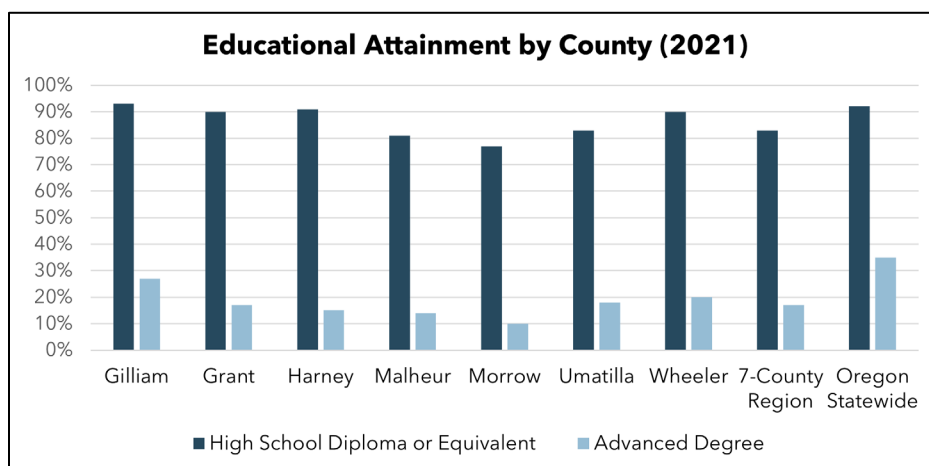
Education

The region currently has a low high school drop-out rate – just 3% – indicating that most students ages 16 to 19 successfully graduate.¹⁴ However, 17% of residents do not hold a high school diploma (or equivalent), a rate that is eight percentage points higher than the statewide rate.¹⁵ Similarly, just 17% of working-age residents hold an advanced college degree, roughly half the statewide rate. Stakeholders in the region have expressed that many areas face shortages in skilled labor, with more skilled jobs available than workers to fill them.

The region boasts two community colleges that support workforce training and development. Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC) in Pendleton (Umatilla County) serves over 900 students each year. Treasure Valley Community College in Ontario (Malheur County) serves over 1,100 students each year.

The Rural Engagement & Vitality (REV) Center, a joint partnership between Eastern Oregon University and Wallowa Resources, also provides opportunities to build the region’s skilled workforce through hands-on internship opportunities. The REV Center recently launched a pilot program to match college students with the City of Joseph (Wallowa County) to gain hands-on experience in land use planning. While not within GEODC’s geographic area, this program has great potential to be expanded throughout the region, with implications for increasing local planning capacity in the long term. REV partners are engaged with GEODC and have supported the CEDS *Resiliency Planning Coordination Working Group*.

Figure 3: Educational Attainment by County (2021)¹⁶



Source: American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table SE: A12002.

Population Forecasts

Eastern Oregon faces persistent challenges caused by out-migration and population decline. Portland State University’s Population Research Center predicts that the region will increase by a modest 9% between 2025 and 2045.¹⁷ In some counties, populations are expected to shrink slightly. Maintaining, and in some instances expanding, local population bases can contribute to the region’s economy by establishing a steady tax base, a robust workforce, and active community participation.

Table 4: Forecasted Change in Population by County (2025-2055)¹⁸

Population Base	Population Estimates				Percent Change, 2025-2055
	2025	2035	2045	2055	
7-County Region	146,037	153,252	158,420	162,304	11.1%
Gilliam County	2,068	2,159	2,230	2,288	10.6%
Grant County	7,231	6,979	6,517	6,152	-14.9%
Harney County	7,584	7555	7509	7514	-0.9%
Malheur County	32,874	35,040	36,641	37,643	14.5%
Morrow County	12,538	13,103	13,497	13,946	11.2%
Umatilla County	82,267	86,947	90,596	93,356	13.5%
Wheeler County	1,475	1,469	1,430	1,405	-4.7%

Source: Portland State University Population Research Center Population Forecasts (2022-2023).

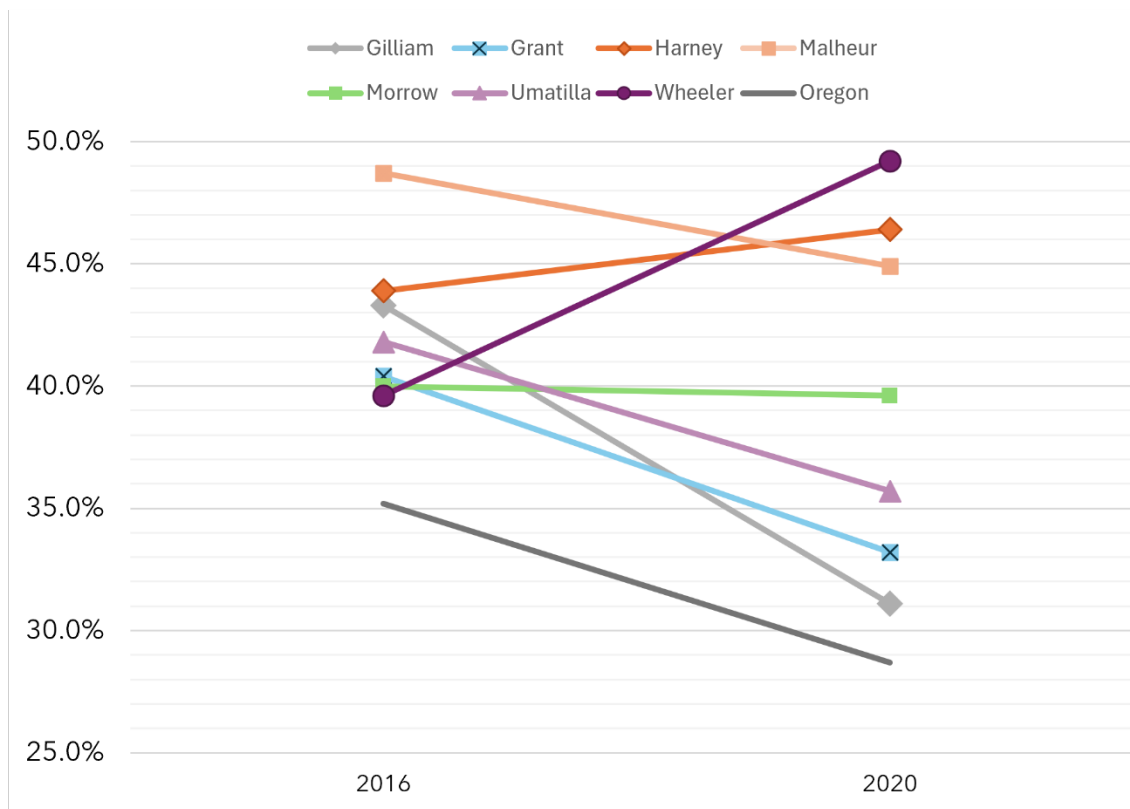
Wealth and Income

2021 American Community Survey estimates place the region’s Median Household Income at \$56,405, which is only 80% of Oregon’s statewide Median Household Income.¹⁹ Additionally, in 2021, 21% of households in the region received SNAP benefits,²⁰ a measure often used as a proxy for financial insecurity. By comparison, just 11% of households nationwide received SNAP benefits in 2021.

The American Community Survey's Ratio of Income to Poverty Level, using the Official Poverty Measure, identifies concentrations of poverty within communities. Individuals who score 2.0 or below are considered "poor or struggling."²¹ [Figure 4](#) depicts the percentage of total residents at or below this threshold. Between 2016 and 2020, Oregon's statewide poverty rate fell considerably by this measure. In GEODC's region, changes in poverty vary by county, with Harney, Malheur, and Wheeler counties having the highest concentration of individuals considered "poor or struggling" as of 2020. Note that this ratio is just one method for assessing poverty and that circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic may have impacted these figures.

Figure 4: Percent of Residents Identified as "Poor or Struggling" (2016-2020)

Percent of Residents Identified as "Poor or Struggling" (2021)



Source: American Community Survey Table SE: B13004. The Ratio of Income in 2016 to Poverty Level (Summarized) and Table SE: B13004. The Ratio of Income in 2020 to the Poverty Level (Summarized - top-coded at 2.00).

In [Figure 4](#) above, the percentage of residents considered "poor or struggling" increased in Wheeler and Harney counties, remained relatively unchanged in Morrow County, and declined in the region's remaining counties.

In most counties in the region, Median Household Income has outpaced inflation rates from 2016-2021. In [Table 5](#) below, Harney and Morrow are the only counties whose Median Household Income has not kept up with inflation rates during this period. *Please note* that smaller populations are more sensitive to fluctuations in data, and so these figures may have a larger margin of error than Median Household Income figures in more urban areas (see the *data disclaimer* on [page 8](#)).

Table 5: Median Household Income by County (2016-2021)²²

County	ACS 2016 5-Year Estimates	ACS 2021 5-Year Estimates	Percent Change, 2016-2021	Inflation, 2016-2021
Gilliam	\$40,556	\$51,705	27%	18%
Grant	\$40,193	\$51,100	27%	18%
Harney	\$38,431	\$42,095	10%	18%
Malheur	\$34,720	\$47,906	38%	18%
Morrow	\$54,441	\$61,659	13%	18%
Umatilla	\$49,287	\$63,123	28%	18%
Wheeler	\$33,400	\$46,648	40%	18%
Oregon Statewide	\$53,270	\$70,084	32%	18%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table SE: A14006. Median Household Income (In 2021 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars). Inflation is calculated using the CPI calculator from the Bureau of Labor Statistics

⁶ Eastern Oregon. (2024, February 21). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved on April 1, 2024, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Oregon#Geography.

⁷ United States Census Bureau. (2022, March). *Increased margin of error in the 5-year estimates containing data collected in 2020*. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/user-notes/2022-04.html>.

⁸ Portland State University Population Research Center. (2023, December 15.) *2023 certified population estimates*. Retrieved from <https://www.pdx.edu/population-research/population-estimate-reports>.

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table SE:A02001.

Sex

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table SE:A01001.

Age

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table SE:B04001. Hispanic or Latino by Race (Collapsed Version).

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2022 5-Year Estimates, Table S1601. Language Spoken at Home.

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table SE:A12003. School Dropout Rate for Population 16 to 19 Years.

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table SE:A12002. Highest Educational Attainment for Population 25 Years and Over.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Population Research Center, Portland State University. (2023, June 30). *Oregon Population Forecast Program: Population forecasts*. Retrieved from <https://www.pdx.edu/population-research/population-forecasts>.

¹⁸ Population Research Center, Portland State University. (2023, June 30). *Oregon Population Forecast Program: Population forecasts*. Retrieved from <https://www.pdx.edu/population-research/population-forecasts>. And Population Research Center, Portland State University. (2022, June 30). *Oregon Population Forecast Program: Population forecasts*. Retrieved from <https://www.pdx.edu/population-research/population-forecasts>.

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table SE:A14006. Median Household Income.

²⁰ Headwaters Economics. (n.d.). *Populations at risk: Combined counties*. Retrieved on October 12, 2023, from <https://headwaterseconomics.org/tools/populations-at-risk/>.

²¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table SE:B13004. Ratio of Income in 2020 to Poverty Level (Summarized: top-coded at 2.00).

²² U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table SE:A14006. Median Household Income (In 2021 Inflation Adjusted Dollars).

Eastern Oregon Childcare Deserts

Oregon families, especially those with infants and toddlers, struggle to find childcare for their children. In addition to their concerns about quality and affordability, families often struggle to find available childcare slots. *Supply* is a measure of how much childcare is available in a geographic region that families in that region could potentially access.²³ National experts define a childcare desert as a community with more than three children for every regulated childcare slot.²⁴ That is, in a childcare desert, 33% or fewer children in a community have potential access to a slot. There are six infants and toddlers for every one spot in most of Oregon and three pre-school age children for every spot.

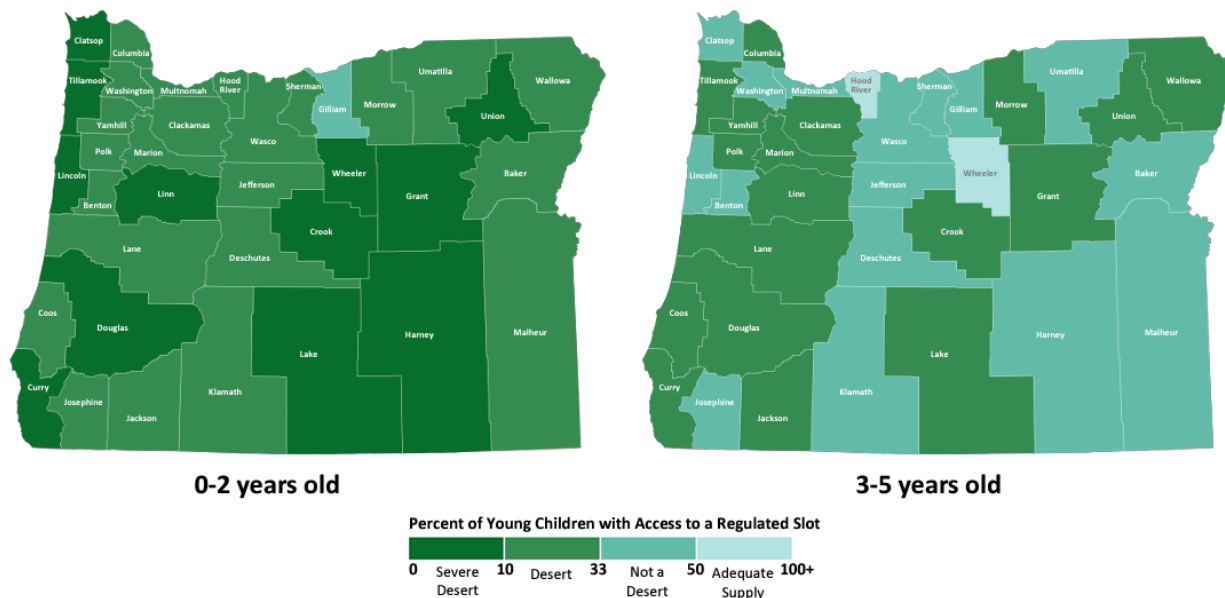
In [Figure 5](#) below, all of the GEODC region, except Gilliam County, is listed as either a “severe” or “regular” childcare desert for 0-2 year-old care. The 2022 data suggests a better outcome for 3-5-year-olds in all counties except Grant and Morrow; however, this does not mean childcare options are easily accessible and affordable.

Community professionals and the CEDS Advisory Group have chosen to form the *Roadmap to Childcare Solutions* Working Group to address childcare workforce development, business incentives, and industry sustainability in the next year. Additionally, GEODC and the Working Group are collaborating with Business

Oregon to address childcare infrastructure in Greater Eastern Oregon using the Childcare Infrastructure Program, legislatively appropriated in H.B. 3005, to address industry infrastructure and regional education providers. City government officials and community partners are increasing the childcare workforce supply, incentivizing private industry partners to contribute, and organizing advocacy efforts for funding.

Figure 5: Oregon Map of Children with Access to Regulated Childcare Slots by Age Group

Map 1: Percent of Young Children with Access to a Regulated Child Care Slot by Age Group



Source: "Oregon's Childcare Deserts 2020: Mapping Supply by Age Group and Percentage of Publicly Funded Slots." College of Health, 16 Dec. 2023, health.oregonstate.edu/early-learners/research/oregon-child-care-deserts-2020.

Note: 0-2 year olds include children birth through the end of age 2. 3-5 year olds include children 3 through the end of age 5.

3-5-year-old Harney Regulated childcare slots include slots in Certified Centers, Certified Family homes, Registered Family homes, and Exempt programs that have public slots.

Malheur Data Information: Access to childcare is calculated by taking the number of regulated childcare slots for young children as of December 2022 (Estimated Supply of Childcare in Oregon, Oregon Childcare Research Partnership, Oregon State University) and dividing it by the population of children in the community who fall in the age group (2022 Annual Population Report Tables, Portland State University Population Research Center).

Additional Findings from Community Engagement Efforts

Conversations with regional stakeholders reinforce the data described above, providing further evidence that Eastern Oregon is grappling with childcare deserts. In Wheeler County, formalized early childcare services are absent; Harney County has just one licensed childcare facility. Regional stakeholders worry that the lack of accessible childcare centers is a major deterrent for families looking to move to Eastern Oregon, hindering long-term population growth. For current residents, childcare deserts limit workforce participation for parents, which constrains family income levels and also contributes to the region's labor shortages. Furthermore, our stakeholders tell us that facility start-up expenses are prohibitively costly, preventing many would-be childcare providers from entering the market.

Where publicly subsidized Head Start programs exist, our stakeholders worry that they may unintentionally segregate children based on relative income level. Middle- and upper-income families are excluded from accessing Head Start services, which exacerbates existing disparities and reinforces social divisions that exist due to race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Additionally, Head Start hours do not typically mimic full workdays, limiting options for working parents.

Asset-limited, income-constrained, employed (ALICE)²⁵ populations are among the most vulnerable, excluded from publicly subsidized services while lacking the ability to adequately provide for these services on their own.



Who is ALICE?

Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) populations are defined as those individuals earning just above the Federal Poverty Level - too much to qualify for many public assistance programs, but not enough to make ends meet. ALICE may be the person stocking the supermarket shelves, driving ambulances, and performing other essential services in your community. Because of their income levels, ALICE households are forced to make difficult choices, such as foregoing quality childcare or healthcare services so that they can pay their rent. They are also more likely to be people of color.

²³ Childcare access is multidimensional, and many factors shape a family's access to care; supply is one factor. For more information of the different dimension of access see: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/ccepra_access_guidebook_final_213_b5_08.pdf.

²⁴ Malik, R., Hamm, K., Schochet, L., Novoa, C., Workman, S., & Jessen-Howard, S. (2018, December 6). America's childcare deserts in 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/12/06/461643/americas-child-care-deserts-2018/>.

²⁵ United for ALICE. (n.d.). *Who is ALICE?* Retrieved on April 27, 2024, from <https://www.unitedforalice.org/>.

Affordable and Adequate Housing

Housing access is consistently named as a major challenge in Eastern Oregon. Both residents and regional partners have said that shortages in affordable housing pose one of the greatest barriers to economic growth and prosperity in the region. Equally, market-rate and middle-income housing options are needed almost as much as low-income housing to attract and retain residents. The basic infrastructure systems needed to support housing development - contractors to build homes and tradespeople to install utilities - are difficult to access and tend to be located in higher-density population centers outside of the region, such as Bend.

Regional Rural Revitalization (R3), a local economic development consortium designed to bring small cities together in rural areas, is championing housing development in Eastern Oregon. R3, in partnership with GEODC, is working toward a goal of 400-500 new housing options in Eastern Oregon within the next 5-10 years. Re-igniting the construction and trade industries and allowing for new workforce housing while maintaining an “age in place” option for the area’s current population.

Vulnerable groups, including Hispanic and Latino populations, face additional barriers to accessible housing and often rely on support from government and nonprofit entities. A representative from EUVALCREE, a nonprofit organization serving Grant, Malheur, Morrow, and Umatilla counties, considers housing assistance to be one of their greatest areas of need. EUVALCREE has helped Latino residents pay their rent, utility, and gas bills, but these are stopgap measures that cannot address the underlying issues associated with high costs of living, low income, and a lack of existing infrastructure to meet community demand. As [Table 6: Median Home Value and Mortgage Costs \(2023\)](#) shows on the following page, mortgage costs have risen by about 8% in the last year, a rate more than double the rate of inflation over this period.



Pasture in Harney County (photo provided by GEODC)

Table 6: Median Home Value and Mortgage Costs (2023)²⁶

	Median Home Value, Q4 2023	Monthly mortgage payment for median-priced home, Q4 2023	Monthly mortgage payment for median-priced home, Q4 2022	Percent change in mortgage payment, Q4 2022 - Q4 2023	Inflation, October 2022 - December 2023
Gilliam	\$154,620	\$950	\$880	8.0%	3%
Grant	\$189,320	\$1,170	\$1,080	8.3%	3%
Harney	\$177,690	\$1,100	\$1,010	8.9%	3%
Malheur	\$191,360	\$1,180	\$1,090	8.3%	3%
Morrow	\$218,310	\$1,350	\$1,240	8.9%	3%
Umatilla	\$299,960	\$1,850	\$1,710	8.2%	3%
Wheeler	\$198,920	\$1,230	\$1,130	8.8%	3%

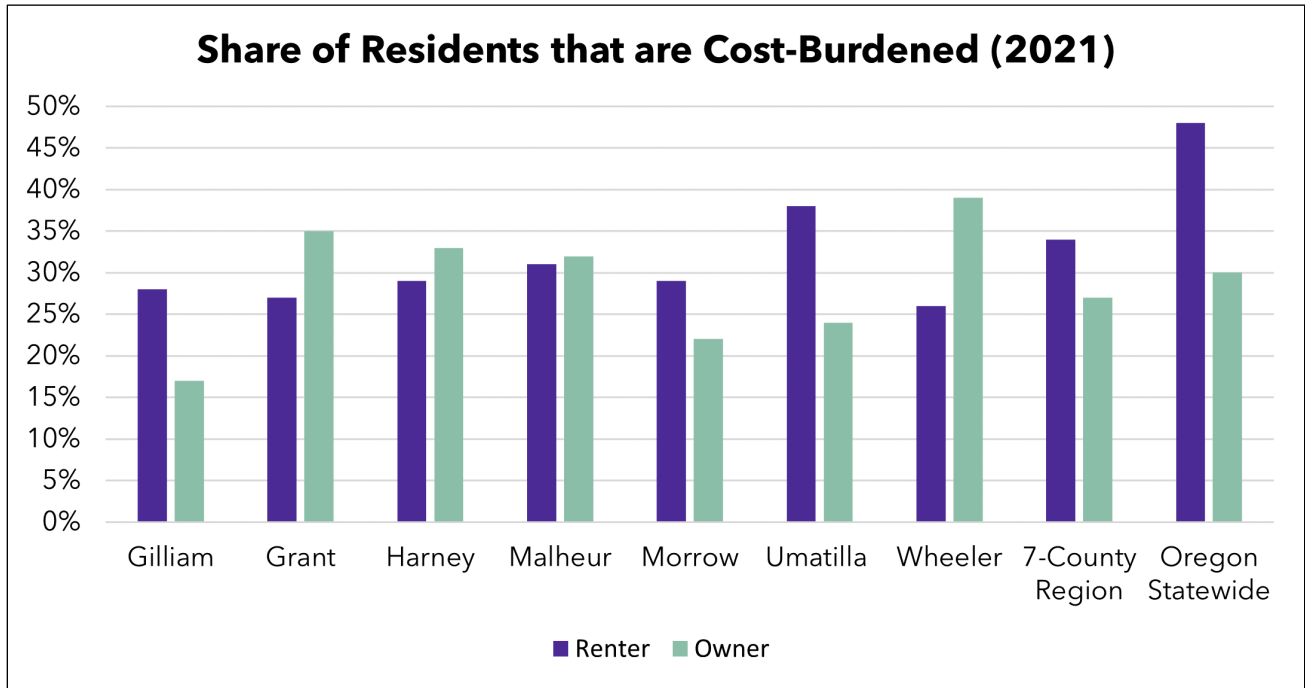
Source: National Association of Realtors. (n.d.). Inflation is calculated using the CPI calculator from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

On the following page, [Figure 6](#) depicts the share of renter-occupied units whose residents pay 30% or more of their income on rent, as well as the share of mortgaged households paying 30% or more of their income on monthly owner costs. On the whole, renters in Eastern Oregon fare slightly better compared to statewide rates, while the share of cost-burdened homeowners is roughly equal to statewide averages. Cost-burdened status is just one measure used to assess overall livability in a geographic area.



Downtown Burns, located in Harney County (photo provided by GEODC)

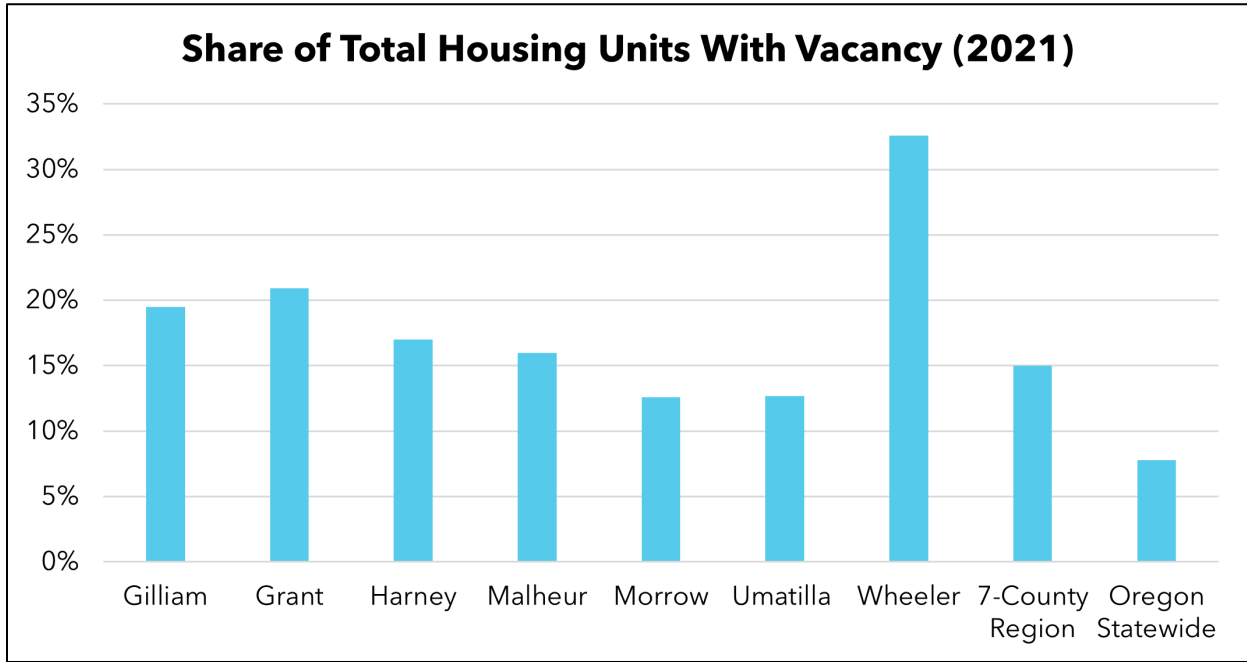
Figure 6: Share of Renters and Homeowners Spending 30% or More of Income on Rent or Mortgage (2021) ²⁷



Source: American Community Survey Table SE: B18002. Residents Paying More Than 30% or at least 50% of Income on Rent and Table SE: A10049. Selected Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income in the Past 12 Months (Dollars) for Housing Units with a Mortgage.

The region has a greater average share of vacant housing units compared to Oregon's statewide rates (see [Figure 7](#) on the following page). However, stakeholders have voiced the need for both affordable and market-rate housing options to support workforce growth and overall in-migration of new residents. In addition, housing vacancy rates do not reflect the *quality* of available housing, often a key factor in attracting new residents.

Figure 7: Share of Home Vacancies by County (2021)



Source: American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table SE: A10044. Occupancy Status

²⁶ National Association of Realtors. (n.d.). *County median home prices and monthly mortgage payments*. Retrieved on April 11, 2024 from <https://www.nar.realtor/research-and-statistics/housing-statistics/county-median-home-prices-and-monthly-mortgage-payment>.

²⁷ U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table SE:B18002. Residents Paying More Than 30% or at least 50% of Income on Rent and Table SE:A10049. Selected Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income in the Past 12 Months (Dollars) for Housing Units with a Mortgage.

Community-Based Water Planning

Communities in GEODC’s region are taking a place-based approach to water management to create efficiencies and conservation of systems that are vital to the region’s economy. Collaboration and discussion are centered around ground- and surface-water efficiencies. Water Management and Conservation Planning (WMCP) activities, including the creation of a water system master plan, are conducted at the municipal level and include the assessment of water supply conditions, with major implications for economic development.

Additionally, residents and professionals are concerned by the aging workforce in local Planner and Certified Water/Wastewater Operators. Many professionals in these vital positions are retiring or being pulled out of retirement to help small communities with safe drinking water and compliance needs. Therefore, succession planning in occupations such as Community Planners and Certified Drinking Water/Wastewater Operators is on the minds of professionals throughout the region.

Groundwater Research and Protection Initiatives

In conversations with local partners and stakeholders, GEODC has identified a growing need for initiatives that address groundwater *quality* and *quantity* issues in the region, particularly for communities within the Lower Umatilla Basin, which includes portions of Morrow and Umatilla counties. The Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area (LUBGWMA) Committee was established by the Department of Environmental Quality in 1990 to address high nitrate levels in groundwater samples.²⁸ Three decades later, groundwater quality and quantity concerns remain ongoing. As we continue to feel the impacts of climate change across the state, Eastern Oregon must consider long-term strategies for groundwater sustainability - this means both addressing contamination concerns and anticipating future demand. Economic growth and development will depend on reliable access to water for irrigation, industrial, and residential uses.



Recreational fishing in Eastern Oregon (photo provided by GEODC)

Much of GEODC's region experiences relatively low demand for wintertime water usage but extremely high demand in the summer, with residential, agricultural, and industrial use competing with the need to preserve fish stock and avoid harming local ecosystems. Aquifer Recharge (AR) and Aquifer Storage & Recovery (ASR) projects appear to be an increasingly attractive means of addressing seasonal fluctuations in water demand. ASR projects can store millions of gallons of water that go unused during reliably low-demand periods, allowing municipalities to gradually expand their overall groundwater capacity and meet future needs during peak-demand periods. For over a decade, the City of Pendleton has owned and operated five high-capacity ASR wells - the largest operating ASR program in the Pacific Northwest - that are used to capture surface water from the Umatilla River.²⁹ The City of Hermiston is currently in the process of obtaining a limited license for an ASR project and hopes to lead the way for other municipalities within the Lower Umatilla Basin. The Umatilla Army Depot has also turned to ASR to address a history of soil and groundwater contamination. GSI Water Solutions, Inc. supports many of these infrastructure projects through its consulting and engineering services.



Columbia River in Morrow Co. (Oregon Scenic Images)

GEODC can serve as a regional advocate for research opportunities that will build our collective expertise in groundwater systems management in Eastern Oregon. Institutions like Oregon State University have been involved in this research and will require ongoing funding sources to continue their work. Regional stakeholders have also recommended that private consultants support these efforts. The Lower Umatilla Basin has considerable water access via the Columbia River, which can be leveraged as a means to expand the capacity of groundwater systems

Water Reuse Strategies

Further research and support should also be lent to initiatives that address water reuse in Eastern Oregon. In particular, the Lower Umatilla Basin area houses numerous data processing centers that rely on water drawn from the Columbia River to cool their processing equipment. This water - referred to as "non-contact cooling water" - should be distinguished from other types of commercial wastewater because it is not contaminated during the cooling process, and therefore could be repurposed to irrigate agricultural land. The Westland Irrigation District in the Umatilla Basin, which includes the City of Umatilla, has had success diverting non-contact cooling water into a canal for local irrigation usage. The region hopes to

expand its existing Industrial Wastewater System by acquiring a permit for another canal that would collect and distribute non-contact cooling water, pending approval from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

With an expanded capacity for reusing non-contact cooling water, the City of Umatilla hopes to designate some of this water for residential use and local green spaces. These reuse projects can support economic development by increasing the overall water supply in areas that face high demand, ensuring that the needs of industrial partners, entrepreneurs, and residents alike can be met. They promote economic efficiency by replacing higher-cost, pre-treated potable water that has traditionally been used for public parks. Strategically reusing water can enhance community and climate resiliency and foster sustainable natural resource management practices.

Food processing centers located at the Port of Morrow also face challenges regarding the safe storage, disposal, and potential reuse of commercial wastewater. These challenges will require new, innovative programs for collecting and treating wastewater and for protecting groundwater conditions. Again, these challenges intersect with economic development concerns, such as community livability and industrial activities. The region would benefit from collaborative efforts to broaden our knowledge of groundwater and wastewater management.



Overview of the City of Boardman (provided by POM Employees)

²⁸ LUBGWAMA Committee. (n.d.). *History*. Retrieved on April 28, 2024, from <https://lubgwama.org/home/>.

²⁹ GSI Water Solutions, Inc. (n.d.). *Pendleton ASR program*. Retrieved on May 3, 2024, from <https://gsiwatersolutions.com/portfolio/pendleton-asr-program.html>.

For a list of local water and wastewater infrastructure projects that are currently underway in Eastern Oregon, contact GEODC to access their Infrastructure Priority Project List. Because this list will change substantially over time as projects evolve, GEODC has chosen not to include it in the CEDS.

Harney County Water Resource Management

To the south, Harney County has taken a place-based approach to managing water resources by forming the Harney Community-Based Water Planning (CBWP) Collaborative, comprised of diverse stakeholders including ranchers, farmers, businessowners, Tribal representatives, and public officials. The Harney County CBWP [Collaborative](#) is working to identify strategies to address both current and future water needs in the county.

Lingering COVID Impacts

The Institute for Policy Research and Engagement (IPRE), Oregon Economic Development Districts, and Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) members met in September 2020 to brainstorm and coordinate a strategy on the next best steps forward for COVID-19 recovery efforts. RARE members around the State of Oregon interviewed 10-15 stakeholders each in their region. These interviewees provided information about how communities have dealt with the effects of COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 to the time of the interviews in January and February 2021. Their findings are highlighted below.

Eastern Oregon followed similar trends of COVID-19 impacts that were seen across the United States; these include:

- Black, Indigenous, and People of Color were affected disproportionately
- Childcare shortages
- Significant impacts on tourism, hospitality, food, and beverage industries
- Mental health concerns

Trends that are region-specific and rural-specific to Eastern Oregon include:

- Under employment - businesses looking to hire, but no workforce
- Lack of broadband access
- Issues with regulations on shutdown orders for areas with small populations and low number of COVID-19 cases

Key Themes

Throughout the interview process, it became evident that regional challenges or barriers may impede economic resilience and recovery. These challenges appeared in the majority of interviews, regardless of sector or industry. They can be considered “wicked problems” because they are inextricably linked to many other challenges, making them very difficult to address. Solving wicked problems requires flexibility, a

long-term resource commitment, and a strategy that builds capacity within a community to address the issue.

The key themes do not reflect all of the needs expressed by stakeholders during the interview process, but are aspects that were expressed most often by the interviewees. These themes include:

- Workforce Development
- Barriers to Housing
- Barriers to Technology
- Inequality
- Health and Wellness
- Information and Communication Sharing

Other Resiliency Indicators

In this section, we offer additional measures that we use to qualitatively assess regional resiliency. These indicators provide additional context for regional conditions and, when taken holistically with the demographic makeup and industrial conditions described in this chapter, can help us understand how well-equipped the region is to withstand or recover from unanticipated shocks, economic setbacks, or natural hazards.

Risk from Natural Hazards

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Risk Index - which assesses the overall likelihood of natural hazards occurring in a geographic area - rates all seven counties as having either a "relatively low" or "very low" risk of damage from natural hazards.³⁰ On average, ice storms, cold waves, and landslides pose the greatest risk to the region.

In conversations with our stakeholders, we have found that many small communities lack the capacity or expertise needed to adequately update their Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan (NHMP) documents, which may reduce community preparedness for, or resilience to, natural disasters. GEODC's *Resiliency Planning Coordination Working Group* has discussed strategies to support local planning capacity (see [Working Group Outcomes](#)).

The risk from wildfires in the Pacific Northwest continues to grow, and Eastern Oregon is no exception. Driven by climate change impacts, the wildfire season has become longer and more intense. An increasing number of Oregonians live near forests, rangelands, and other areas of dense growth known as the wildland-urban interface (WUI). While counties in GEODC's region score either "relatively moderate" or "relatively low" for wildfire risk on FEMA's National Risk Index, communities will still benefit from mitigation and preparedness efforts to reduce the impact and severity of

a potential fire. Home hardening and defensible space practices can lower wildfire risks in the WUI.³¹

Flood insurance changes also pose a concern for the region (see [SWOT Analysis](#)). For example, in June 2023 a landslide caused by flooding damaged a local ranch in Jonesboro, an unincorporated area near Burns in Harney County. The ranch struggled to access federal support because landslide debris is not technically classified as a “flood” under FEMA insurance regulations. Stakeholders in the region worry that these stories will become increasingly common in the area, as wildfires thin ground cover and destabilize hillsides. Climate change will also likely impact surface water levels in high desert areas, depleting non-replenishing groundwater sources that are used for irrigation.

Risk from Health Emergencies

The Center for Disease Control and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Resistance Social Vulnerability Index (CDC/ATSDR SVI) helps emergency planners identify potentially vulnerable communities – those at higher risk before, during, and after public health emergencies due to their socioeconomic status, racial or ethnic minority status, or household characteristics.³² The SVI is determined using U.S. Census data. In 2020, GEODC’s scores along this Index varied considerably by county: Gilliam, Grant, Harney, and Wheeler scored “low” or “low to medium”; Morrow scored “medium to high”; and Malheur and Umatilla scored “high.”³³ A higher score indicates a greater degree of social vulnerability to potential health emergencies, as well as increased vulnerability to natural hazards.

According to U.S. Census Data provided by Headwaters Economics, 17% of residents in Eastern Oregon live with some kind of disability.³⁴ An estimated 7% of residents are not covered by health insurance, roughly comparable to nationwide coverage rates.³⁵

Quality Nutrition Access and Food Deserts

Poverty, income inequality, and rural environments have combined to create food deserts in much of Eastern Oregon. Where communities are small and diffuse, residents often drive hours to reach a full-sized grocery store. In conversations with stakeholders, the lack of high-quality, affordable, and consistently available food emerged as a common issue for the region. Senior citizens and minority groups, such as Hispanic/Latino populations, are more likely to face economic barriers to accessing nutritious food sources.

According to our stakeholders, the COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted the region’s healthy food supply. Before COVID-19, the City of John Day had the largest greenhouses in Eastern Oregon. Now, these greenhouses are inactive. Opportunity exists for a new entity to revive the program and greenhouses, which would create jobs and regional resiliency.

In an interview with GEODC staff, a representative from the Oregon Food Bank named economic development as a key driver of food accessibility: expanding and supporting small business activities can raise wages and increase access to high-quality food. Public services, such as food banks, should consider developing local food hubs to support communities. In addition, the state should work to expand SNAP eligibility, ensuring that all residents, regardless of immigration status - often among the most vulnerable - can access these benefits. These efforts would help the region become more self-sustaining and less reliant on food shipments from outside sources, such as Portland.

Broadband Access

In Oregon, 92.2% of people have access to 100Mbps broadband, ranking 24th among all states.³⁶ The only county in GEODC's region close to matching Oregon's statewide broadband access numbers is Umatilla County, where 80% of residents have access to broadband at 100Mbps. Most other counties have just 60-69% of the population covered at this speed range. Grant and Harney are at 53% and 57% respectively, meaning that a little more than half of residents have reliable internet access.

With the influx of broadband access funding and several key projects in the area, access will begin to change. GEODC is working on a broadband project with Harney County. Broadband Technical Assistance (BTAP)³⁷ money was accessed in Malheur and Wheeler counties. Rally Network is working in Morrow County to improve broadband access and in Grant County access is currently being improved through Long Creek, as well as a forthcoming project in Monument. During the 2024-2029 CEDS period, Gilliam and Morrow will be connected from the northwest and Wheeler from the west with a redundant fiberoptic ring for community resiliency. Catalyst Policy Advisor Nick Green believes that opportunity exists for the co-location of regional and county plans to further broadband access efforts in Eastern Oregon.

Figure 8: Link Oregon Network Map: High Speed Fiber Broadband



Source: Link Oregon Network Map Updated 2023

³⁰ Federal Emergency Management Agency. (n.d.). *National Risk Index*. Retrieved on December 7, 2023, from <https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/map>.

³¹ Federal Emergency Management Agency. (2023, June). *Marshall Fire Mitigation Assessment Team: Homeowner's guide to reducing wildfire risk through defensible space*. https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_marshall-fire-mat-homeowners-guide-defensible-space.pdf.

³² Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Resistance. (2022, October 26). *At a glance: CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index*. https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/placeandhealth/svi/at-a-glance_svi.html.

³³ Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Resistance. (2022, December 1). *CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index (SVI): Overall SVI Oregon: Statewide comparisons by county, 2020*. Retrieved on November 18, 2023, from https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/placeandhealth/svi/interactive_map.html.

³⁴ Headwaters Economics. (n.d.). *Populations at risk: Combined counties*. Retrieved on October 12, 2023, from <https://headwaterseconomics.org/tools/populations-at-risk/>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Broadband Now. (n.d.). *Oregon internet coverage and availability in 2024*. <https://broadbandnow.com/Oregon>.

³⁷ Business Oregon. (n.d.). *Welcome page: Broadband Technical Assistance Program: State of Oregon*." www.oregon.gov/biz/programs/BTAP/Pages/default.aspx.

Regional Economy

GEODC’s regional economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, farming and ranching, transportation, warehousing, and manufacturing (related to agriculture and farming). In some areas of the region, tourism, leisure, and hospitality establishments are also a strong part of the overall economic structure. The region has seen some innovative industries emerge in recent years: Pendelton is home to several Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) projects, and the region boasts the [Rural Engagement and Vitality \(REV\) Center](#), a regional innovation hub that partners with educational institutions to expand resources and opportunities in rural Eastern Oregon. The REV Center is currently developing the inREV Regional Innovation Hub, a program that will help small and medium-sized businesses in Northeast Oregon access technical assistance, capital, networking, and other resources, with the goal of nurturing both long-standing and innovative industries in the region.³⁸

This section of the CEDS will walk through the highlights of the current economic landscape of the 7 counties covered by GEODC (Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, and Wheeler counties).

[Table 7](#) below shows the overall growth and declines found in Eastern Oregon industries compared to Oregon statewide from 2021 to 2022, from the Oregon Employment Department’s Eastern Oregon Workforce Board Report. The largest growth and decline numbers are bolded in the figure. Information Technology and Professional Services grew the most in Eastern Oregon at 15.5% and 9.2% respectively, whereas Mining and Logging and Manufacturing declined the sharpest at 3.7% and 1.9 % from 2021 to 2022. However, Information (4.8%) and Professional Services (4.8%) grew faster than the state overall, and the decline in Logging was less steep compared to overall statewide decline (-4.5%). Manufacturing, Health Services, and Transportation and Warehousing were the only industries that declined in Eastern Oregon while growing in other areas of the state.



Grant County Cattle

Table 7: Eastern Oregon Industries by Growth or Decline, Compared to Statewide Growth (2021-2022)

EO Growth Industries	Change in Eastern Oregon		Change in Oregon Statewide	
Leisure and hospitality	520	8.5%	23,500	13.4%
Local government	460	3.8%	8,900	4.2%
Professional & business services	310	9.2%	12,100	4.8%
Construction	230	8.6%	4,500	4.0%
Retail trade	190	2.1%	1,400	0.7%
Information*	130	15.5%	1,700	4.8%
Financial activities	60	3.2%	900	0.9%
Wholesale trade	40	2.0%	2,000	2.7%
Other services*	20	1.1%	2,700	4.6%
State government	10	0.3%	500	1.2%
EO Industries in Decline	Change in Eastern Oregon		Change in Oregon Statewide	
Manufacturing*	-90	<i>-1.1%</i>	6,500	3.5%
Education and health services	-90	<i>-0.9%</i>	4,700	1.6%
Transportation, warehousing, & utilities	-40	<i>-1.0%</i>	1,900	2.5%
Mining and logging*	-10	<i>-3.7%</i>	-300	-4.5%
Federal government	-10	<i>-0.6%</i>	-700	-2.5%

Source: Oregon Employment Department Workforce Board Report, 2022

Note: * Manufacturing Excludes Harney; Mining and Logging Excludes Harney, Malheur, and Umatilla; Information, and Other Services Excludes Morrow. Bold numbers are top growing industries and italicized negative numbers are in decline.

Industry Concentration in Eastern Oregon

A location quotient (LQ) is a measure of industry or employment concentration that can help reveal competitive industries in the region. Location quotients are ratios that allow an area's distribution of employment by industry, ownership, and size class to be compared to a reference area's distribution.

The U.S. is used as the reference area in [Table 8: Employment Concentration in Eastern Oregon \(2018\)](#) below. If an LQ is equal to 1, then the industry has the same share of its area employment as it does in the nation. An LQ greater than 1 indicates an industry with a greater share of the local area employment than nationwide.³⁹

As depicted in [Table 8: Employment Concentration in Eastern Oregon \(2018\)](#), the largest employment numbers in Eastern Oregon (in 2018) show up in Agriculture, Food, and Beverage at 3,351. Fruit and vegetable preserving had the highest employment and location quotient (industry concentration) at 788 and 56.93. This means that in 2018, Eastern Oregon had an industry concentration 56 times that of the US in fruit and vegetable preserving. Other crop farming had the second highest location quotient at 36.55 (36 times bigger than the US). Vegetable and melon farming, Support for crop farming, and Cattle ranching had high industry concentrations in Eastern Oregon. Data processing had the highest average wage amongst competitive industries in the region at \$203,000.

Table 8: Employment Concentration in Eastern Oregon (2018)

Industry	Employment	Location Quotient	Average Wage
Agriculture, Food, & Beverages			
Fruits and vegetable preserving and specialty	3,351	56.93	\$43,524
Other crop farming	788	36.55	\$36,852
Vegetable and melon farming	931	29.35	\$41,236
Support activities for crop production	2,400	20.69	\$30,906
Cattle ranching and farming	951	17.49	\$39,756
Oilseed and grain farming	297	15.77	\$38,283
Fruit and tree nut farming	630	9.98	\$23,688
Other animal production	68	9.98	\$40,007
Other food manufacturing	574	7.46	\$39,714
Dairy product manufacturing	209	4.15	\$50,401
Misc. nondurable goods merchant wholesalers	368	3.27	\$59,931
Alcoholic beverage merchant wholesalers	115	1.67	\$48,971

Industry	Employment	Location Quotient	Average Wage
Wholesale Trade and Warehousing			
Warehousing and storage	1,086	2.78	\$41,477
Machinery and supply merchant wholesalers	350	1.46	\$46,675
Petroleum merchant wholesalers	153	1.27	\$47,958
Forest & Wood Product			
Support activities for forestry	88	14.28	\$42,150
Logging	169	10.10	\$43,854
Sawmills	285	9.01	\$47,969
Other wood product manufacturing	196	2.47	\$43,907
Travel Trailers & Campers			
Motor vehicle body and trailer manufacturing	669	11.82	\$39,303
Data Centers			
Data processing, hosting, and related services	256	2.24	\$203,867
Mining			
Nonmetallic mineral mining and quarrying	167	5.023	\$50,876

Source: Business Oregon Manufacturing Report, 2018. Reference document.

³⁸ REV. (n.d.). *REV Newsletter, Fall 2023, vol. 1 no. 1*. <https://www.revcenter.org/newsletter0101>.

³⁹ "https://www.bls.gov/cew/about-data/location-quotients." BLS, www.bls.gov/cew/about-data/location-quotients.

Innovation in Greater Eastern Oregon

Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Systems in Pendleton

Pendleton’s airport is the largest between Portland and Boise and boasts the only federally subsidized air service in the Pacific Northwest. Several aviation mechanics and agriculture spraying operations call the airport home.

Since 2013, the airport has become one of the nation’s premier testing and development centers for UAS (drones). The Pendleton UAS Range’s mission includes revitalizing a rural airport, stimulating economic development, attracting and creating tech jobs, inspiring a local workforce, and creating a sustainable industry cluster. The UAS test site supports 500-1000 UAS ops per month, with 50-150 full-time employees and an average wage of \$65,000 a year.⁴⁰

GEODC-funded projects highlight improvements in the UAV facilities and flight operations equipment since the completion of the previous Comprehensive Economic Development Plan.

Eastern Oregon’s inRev Innovation Hub

Eastern Oregon’s future-ready workforce starts with the Regional Innovation Hub. Supporting local entrepreneurs will help Eastern Oregon with economic diversity and health. New business growth and industry expansion are a role of the hub. Another role is to anticipate demographic shifts and respond.

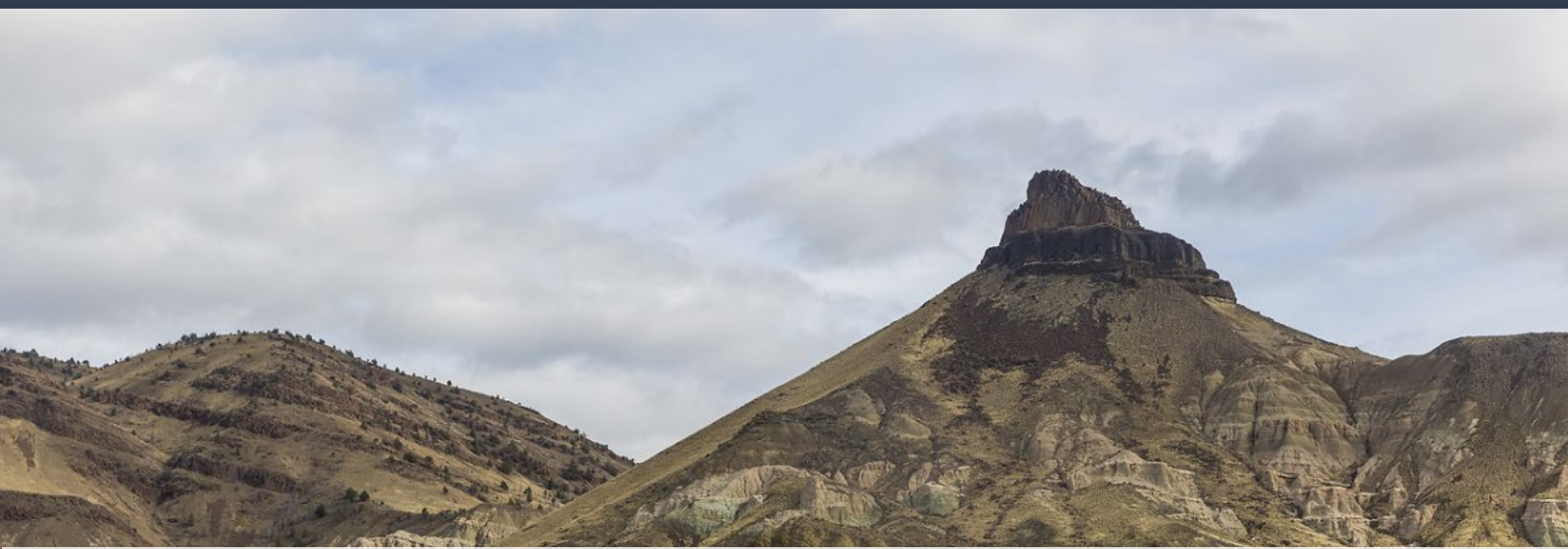
The inRev Innovation Hub focuses on emerging science and technology-based sectors and the application of science and technology innovation within traded sectors where rural communities can create a competitive economic advantage, such as agriculture and food, forestry and wood products, and additive manufacturing.

inREV aims to build an innovation-based ecosystem tailored to Northeast Oregon’s socioeconomic and geographical considerations and targets industries where talent acquisition, workforce retention, and workforce training and development can happen. Recently, the Regional Rural Revitalization (R3) obtained \$1.5 million to collaborate with entrepreneurs in Eastern Oregon. Support for emerging industries and the culture of entrepreneurship was chosen by the GEODC advisory board as priority business support goals in the 2024-29 CEDS.

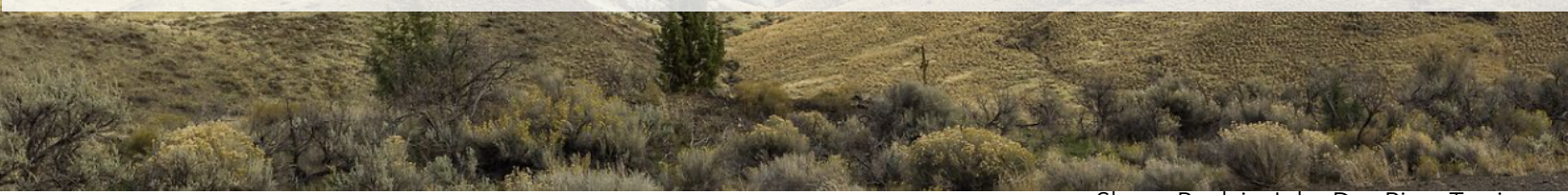


Photos provided by Pendleton UAS partners

⁴⁰ Pendleton UAS Range. (n.d.). *Pendleton Unmanned Aerial Systems Test Range: Home*. www.pendletonuasrange.com.



Tribal & County Profiles



Sheep Rock in John Day River Territory




Bikers in John Day River Territory



Purple Ridge Lavender Farm Festival in Hermiston

Regional Snapshot: Eastern Oregon Population Centers

Listed below are 2020 population estimates for all incorporated cities in GEODC’s region as designated by the U.S. Census Bureau. An asterisk denotes a county seat.

Gilliam County		Malheur County		Umatilla County		
Condon*	711	Ontario	11,645	Hermiston	19,696	
Arlington	628	Nyssa	3,198	Pendleton*	17,107	
Lonerock	25	Vale*	1,894	Umatilla	7,363	
Grant County		Adrian	157	Milton-Freewater	7,151	
John Day	1,664	Jordan Valley	130	Stanfield	2,144	
Prairie City	909	Morrow County		Pilot Rock	1,328	
Canyon City*	703	Boardman	3,828	Athena	1,209	
Mount Vernon	548	Irrigon	2,011	Weston	706	
Seneca	199	Heppner*	1,187	Echo	632	
Long Creek	173	lone	337	Adams	389	
Dayville	149	Lexington	238	Helix	194	
Monument	115		<th>Wheeler County</th>			Wheeler County
Granite	38		Fossil*	447		
Harney County			Spray	139		
Burns*	2,730	Mitchell	138			
Hines	1,645					

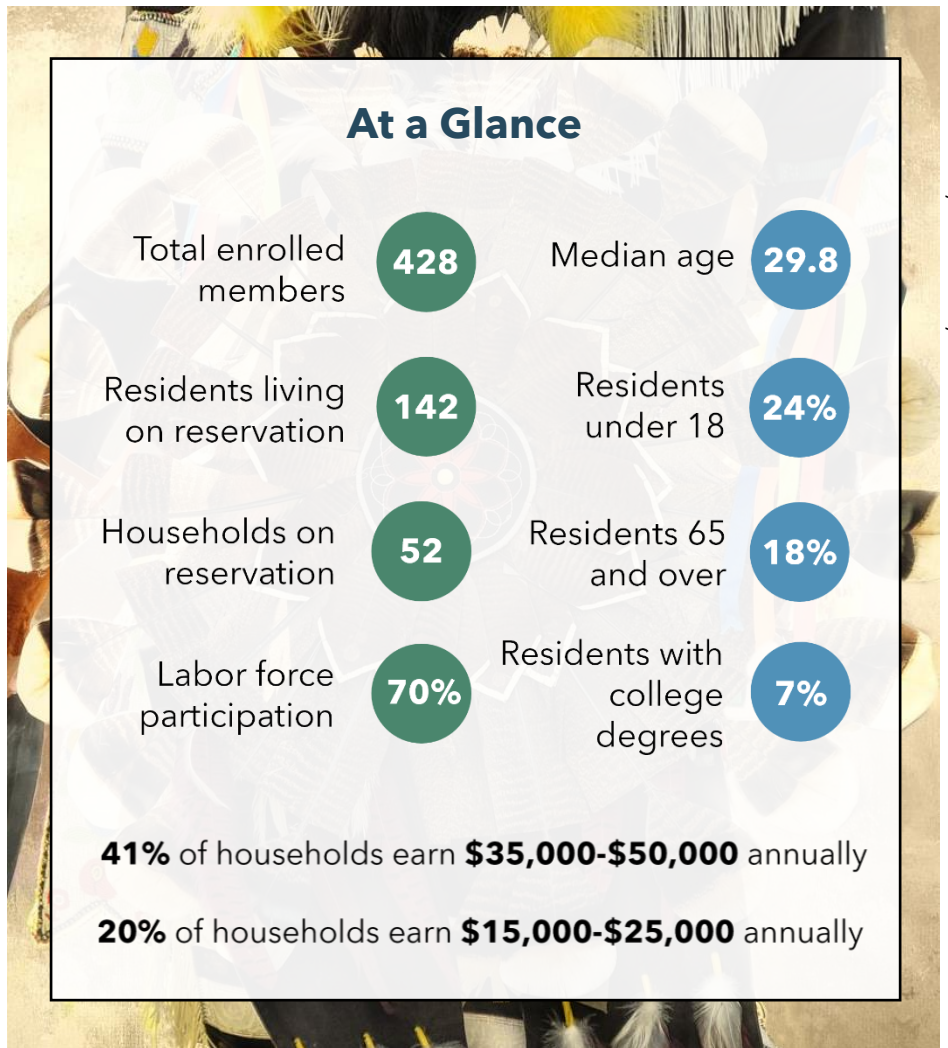
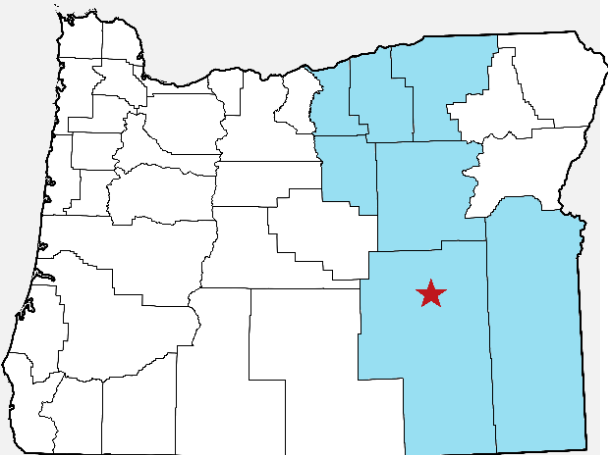
THE BURNS PAIUTE TRIBE

Tribe Overview

The Burns Paiute Tribe is a federally-recognized tribe based in Harney County, Oregon. The tribe's economy is founded on a variety of industries, including agriculture, gaming, and tourism. The tribe plays a key role in economic development for Harney County - especially for the City of Burns, which neighbors the Burns Paiute Indian Reservation. Though the Burns Paiute greatly value their economic self-sufficiency, they have also strived to build relationships with city, county, state, and federal partners to expand employment opportunities, promote cultural preservation, manage natural resources, and support local economic development activities.

Geographic Context

The tribe's geographic region is sparsely populated, and members are well-acquainted with rural living: residents frequently make the over-two-hour drive to Bend for shopping, construction, and health-care. The City of Burns offers a small commercial hub for basic needs. The region experiences a high desert climate, with hot, dry summers and cold, snowy winters.



Economic Development Highlights

The tribe's 2024-2029 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) includes several exciting opportunities for economic development, including:

- expansion of agricultural operations
- emphasis on tourism as a key industry
- improvements to housing infrastructure
- investment in natural resource and wildlife management programs
- development of a new casino and resort

The Burns Paiute Indian Reservation and surrounding land area are rich in raw natural resources that can be used for infrastructure and energy projects, such as wind, solar, hydroelectric, and even geothermal. Opportunities for outdoor recreation abound.

**All information taken from the Burns Paiute Tribe's 2024-2029 CEDS.*

THE CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF THE UMATILLA INDIAN RESERVATION

Tribe Overview

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) consists of three unified tribes: the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla. Together, the three tribes signed a treaty with the U.S. government in 1855 to secure their rights to fish, hunt, and live on unclaimed lands.[†] Today, CTUIR has become an economic engine for Umatilla County, with a diverse economy rooted in 13,000 acres of agricultural land, a successful casino and resort that employs nearly 1,000 individuals, and land in Umatilla, OR known as the Wanapa Industrial Site. However, CTUIR continues to face challenges common to Eastern Oregon, including a shortage of affordable housing, an aging population that places strain on the workforce, and challenges finding skilled workforce, as well as the attraction and retention of employees.

Geographic Context

The reservation is located near Pendleton, OR. The tribe owns approximately 172,000 square acres, or 273 square miles, of land. The area experiences a high desert climate with snowy winters and hot, dry summers.

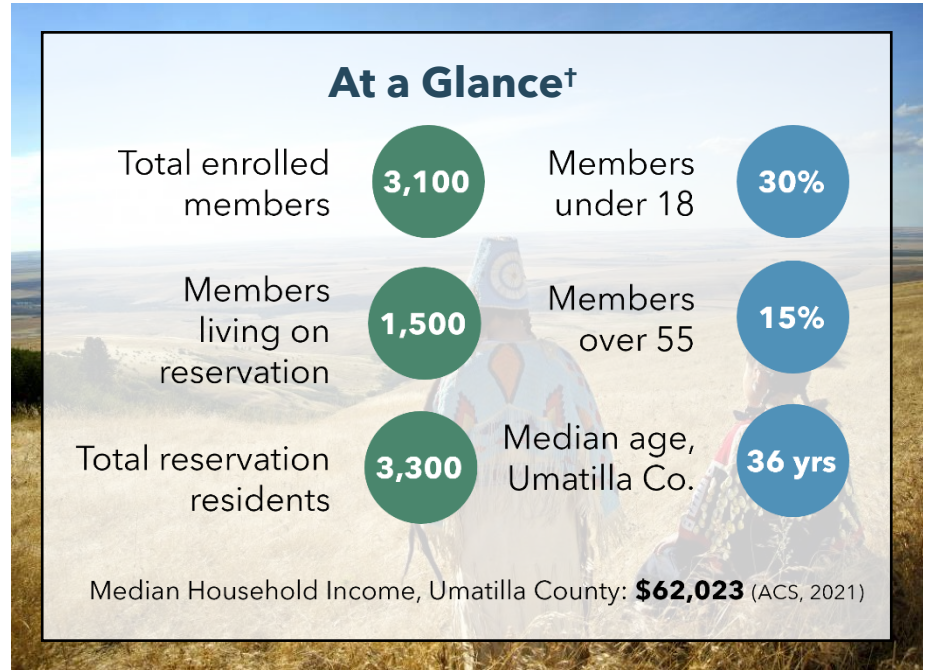
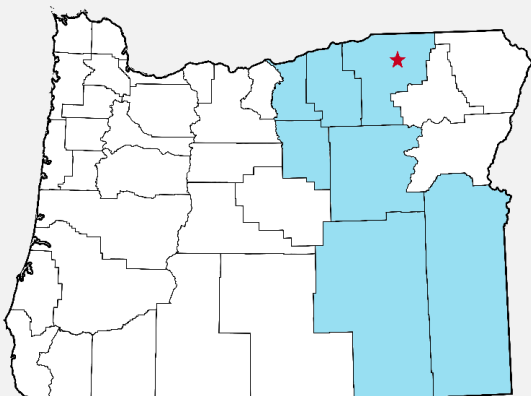


Photo credit: Columbia Insight / Walters Photographers

Economic Development Highlights

As one of the largest employers in Eastern Oregon and the largest employer in Umatilla County, CTUIR is a regional leader in economic development. Employees travel to work from Union, Walla Walla, Morrow, and Umatilla counties, some by way of the Tribe's Kayak Public Transportation System. The tribe manages the Coyote Business Park - a certified shovel-ready site with over 200 acres ready for development - and Cayuse Technologies, a solutions provider for governments and businesses.

Opportunities to Leverage

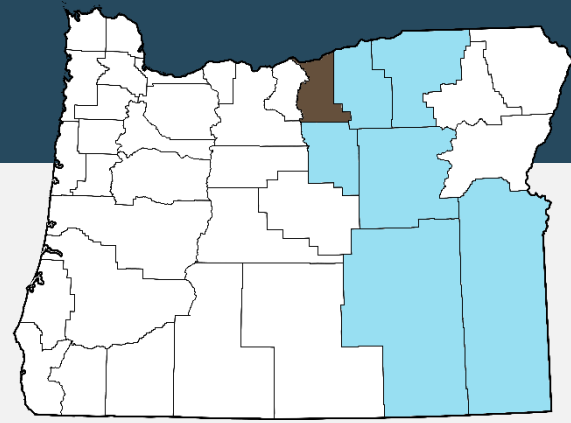
- Workforce training partnerships under creation by CTUIR
- Small business development resources available through Nixyaawii Community Financial Services (NCFS)
- Blue Mountain Community College mechatronics and industrial maintenance programs
- Unmanned Aerial Systems test range at Eastern Oregon Regional Airport
- Growth in the transportation, distribution, and logistics (TDL) industry
- Emerging industries such as regenerative agriculture and renewable energy

**All information taken from CTUIR's 2017-2021 CEDS unless otherwise stated.*

[†]This data taken from CTUIR's website on March 7, 2024.

GILLIAM COUNTY

Situated in the heart of the Columbia Plateau wheat area, Gilliam County is home to the Port of Arlington and much of the Shepherd’s Flat Wind Farm, one of the largest in the world. With elevations ranging from 285 feet in Arlington to over 3,000 feet near Condon, the county offers unique tourism opportunities, including access to the John Day and Columbia Rivers. Residents take great pride in the frontier lifestyle.



County Snapshot

Population:
2,062
 (2023 estimates)

Land Area:
1,204 sq. mi.

Median Household
 Income:
\$51,705
 (2021)

Largest Population Centers

Condon	711 residents
Arlington	628 residents
Lonerock	25 residents

Population Highlights

Population under 18.....	17%
Population over 65.....	30%
BIPOC residents.....	13%
White residents	87%
Hispanic/Latino.....	5%
American Indian or Alaskan Native.....	2%
Black residents.....	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander.....	0.7%

ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Compares key demographic statistics to statewide rates

Metric	Gilliam Co.	Oregon
⚠️ Cost-burdened renters	28%	48%
Cost-burdened homeowners	17%	30%
⚠️ Residents w/o broadband access	39%	5%
Uninsured residents (health)	4%	7%
SNAP recipients	15%	15%
Residents with disabilities	16%	14%
English-second-language	3%	10%
⚠️ Residents in mobile homes	18%	7%
Bachelor’s degree or above	27%	35%

Resiliency Indicators

Gilliam County’s population is expected to grow by a moderate 7.8% between 2025 and 2045, while Oregon’s population is projected to grow by 17.4% during this period. 47% of residents are over 55, while only 31% of all Oregonians are over 55. 93% have a high school diploma (or the equivalent).

31% of residents are determined to be “poor or struggling” based on American Community Survey’s ratio of income to poverty level; the county’s median household income is 74% of the state’s rate. Though the region has been working to expand broadband access, many Gilliam County residents continue to lack access at 100 Mbps.

GILLIAM COUNTY

Workforce Statistics

Private avg. wages earned: \$62,662 (2022)

▲ Up **47%** from 2017

95% of state average for private industries (\$65,389)

Labor Force Participation Rate: 55.1% (2021)

Ranked 25th of 36 Oregon counties

Statewide LFPR: **62.3%** (2021)

Total employment: 944 (2022)

▲ Up **16%** from 2017

Unemployment rate: 4.1% (2023)

▲ Up from 3.8% in 2018

Unemployment statewide: **3.7%** (2023) (OED)

Total Real GDP: \$259,848,000

Utilities (51% of private industry GDP)

Agriculture, forestry, hunting, and fishing

(23% of private industry GDP)

BEA, 2021, private industry by county

Economic Characteristics

The area is heavily based in agricultural work, with an average farm size of 3,999 acres. Wind, wheat, and cattle are among the county's primary products. Though the county's high rate of self-employment translates to a low unemployment rate, a small and aging population can pose long-term threats to workforce retention.



Hay rolls along Highway 19

Gilliam County 2022 Covered Employment: Largest Industries

Professional & business services



29%

All government



28%

Trade, transportation, & utilities



16%

Health care & social assistance



10%



6%

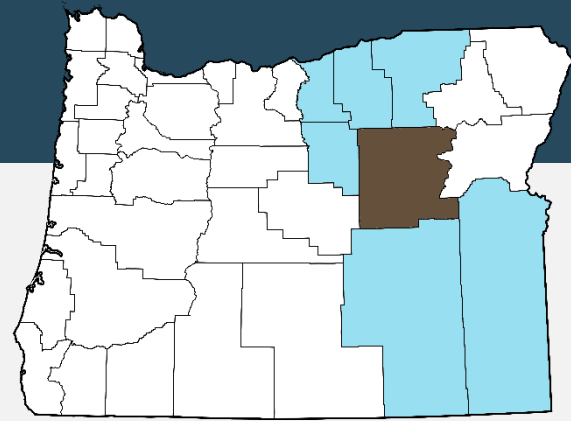
Natural resources & mining

Source: Oregon Employment Department, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2022 Annual

Note: OED has excluded Construction, Manufacturing, Information, and Unclassified sectors from their largest industry calculations for Gilliam County.

GRANT COUNTY

One of Oregon's ten "frontier counties," Grant County has topography ranging from grassland steppes to rugged, alpine peaks. The county's nine incorporated cities are widely dispersed. Roughly two-thirds of county land is federally-owned. The Grant County CyberMill, with locations in Seneca and Prairie City, offers shared workspaces and high-speed internet to support residents and small businesses. Oregon State University's Extension Service provides opportunities for youth education, workforce training, and community involvement.



County Snapshot

Population:

7,418

(2023 estimates)

Land Area:

4,528 sq. mi.

Median Household

Income:

\$51,100

(2021)

Largest Population Centers

John Day	1,664 residents
Prairie City	909 residents
Canyon City	703 residents
Seneca	199 residents

Population Highlights

Population under 18.....	18%
Population over 65.....	30%
BIPOC residents.....	0.02%
White residents	90%
Hispanic/Latino.....	4%
American Indian or Alaskan Native.....	1%
Black residents.....	0.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander.....	0.8%

ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Compares key demographic statistics to statewide rates

Metric	Grant Co.	Oregon
Cost-burdened renters	27%	48%
⚠️ Cost-burdened homeowners	35%	30%
⚠️ Residents w/o broadband access	45%	5%
Uninsured residents (health)	8%	7%
SNAP recipients	15%	15%
⚠️ Residents with disabilities	25%	14%
English-second-language	1%	10%
⚠️ Residents in mobile homes	23%	7%
⚠️ Bachelor's degree or higher	17%	35%

Resiliency Indicators

Grant County faces challenges common to frontier communities, including a sparse and declining population, an aging workforce, and a lack of funding opportunities for public services. The county's population is predicted to fall by about 10% between 2025 and 2045.

In 2021, 33% of the county's residents were designated as "poor or struggling" based on the American Community Survey's ratio of poverty level to income. Notably, this figure is down from 40% in 2016 and roughly equal to state averages.

GRANT COUNTY

Workforce Statistics

Private avg. wages earned: \$39,855 (2022)

▲ Up **27%** from 2017

61% of state average for private industries (\$65,389)

Labor Force Participation Rate: 52.8% (2021)

Ranked 28th of 36 Oregon counties

Statewide LFPR: **62.3%** (2021)

Total employment: 2,539 (2022)

▲ Up **3%** from 2017

Unemployment rate: 5.1% (2023)

▼ Down from 6.9% in 2018

Unemployment statewide: **3.7%** (2023)

Total Real GDP: \$154,283,000

Finance, insurance, real estate, rental, leasing
(33% of private industry GDP)

Agriculture, forestry, hunting, and fishing
(17% of private industry GDP)

BEA, 2021, private industry by county

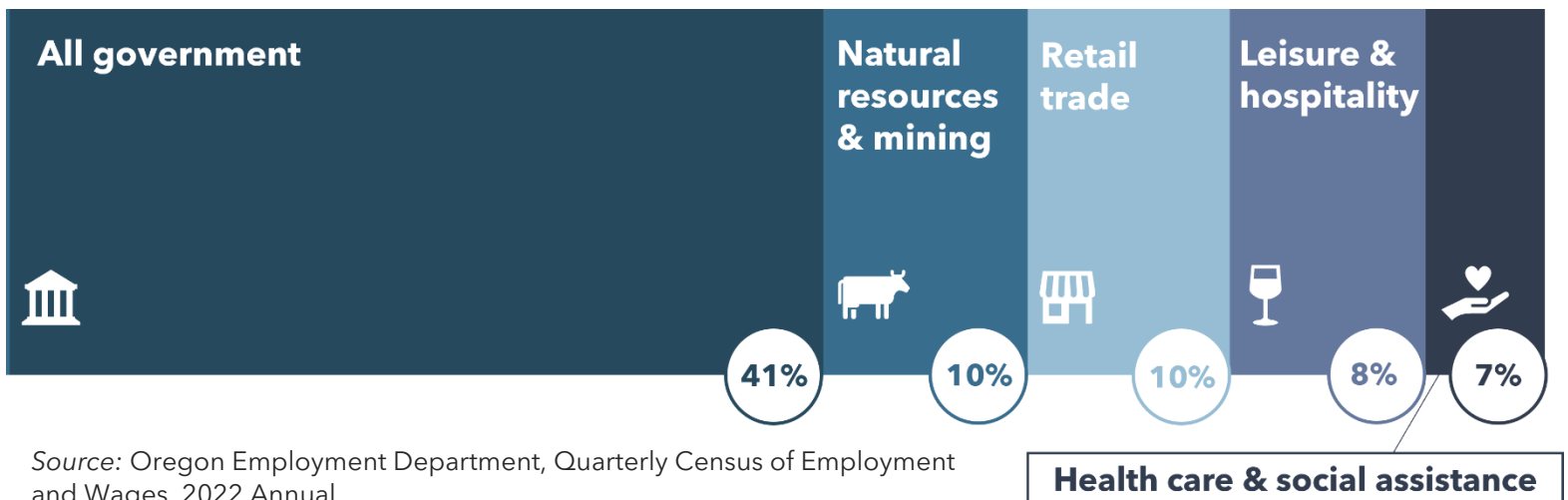
Economic Characteristics

The county's share of public lands plays a role in local employment, creating government-sector jobs in land-, resource-, and forest management. Private-sector use of forest products also accounts for many jobs, although a recent decline in this industry has impacted the labor force. Cattle is the county's primary agricultural export. Like most of Eastern Oregon, the average wage for private-sector industries is low, at just two-thirds of the statewide average.



Grant Co. Chamber of Commerce

Grant County 2022 Covered Employment: Largest Industries

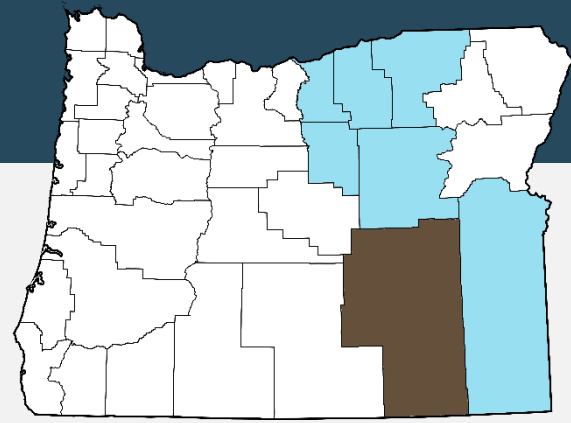


Source: Oregon Employment Department, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2022 Annual

Note: OED has excluded Manufacturing, Financial Activities, and Unclassified sectors from their largest industry calculations for Grant County.

HARNEY COUNTY

Oregon's largest county by land mass, Harney County has its roots in a natural resource economy. The county is sparsely populated; roughly two-thirds of county land is owned by the federal government. The Burns Paiute Tribe has an established presence in the Burns-Hines area, where most residents are concentrated. The county's high desert climate offers many landmarks for outdoor enthusiasts, including Malheur and Harney lakes and the sprawling, 9,700-foot-high Steens Mountain.



County Snapshot

Population:

7,600

(2023 estimates)

Land Area:

10,134 sq. mi.

Median Household

Income:

\$42,095

(2021)

Largest Population Centers

Burns	2,730 residents
Hines	1,645 residents
Burns Paiute Reservation	142 residents

Population Highlights

Population under 18.....	20%
Population over 65.....	24%
BIPOC residents.....	14%
White residents	86%
Hispanic/Latino.....	6%
American Indian or Alaskan Native.....	1%
Black residents.....	0.8%
Asian/Pacific Islander.....	0.3%

ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Compares key demographic statistics to statewide rates

Metric	Harney Co.	Oregon
Cost-burdened renters	29%	48%
⚠ Cost-burdened homeowners	33%	30%
⚠ Residents w/o broadband access	28%	5%
Uninsured residents (health)	6%	7%
⚠ SNAP recipients	23%	15%
⚠ Residents with disabilities	20%	14%
English-second-language	1%	10%
⚠ Residents in mobile homes	21%	7%
⚠ Bachelor's degree or above	15%	35%

Resiliency Indicators

Though overall population rates in rural Eastern Oregon have been in steady decline, Portland State University's Population Research Center predicts no significant change to Harney County's population between 2025 and 2045. With its population centers roughly two hours by car from the nearest major city, the county's residents face barriers to accessing high-quality nutrition and retail services.

In 2021, 46% of residents were determined to be "poor or struggling" based on the American Community Survey's ratio of income to poverty level. The county's median household income falls at just 60% of the state's rate (ACS SE:A14006).

HARNEY COUNTY

Workforce Statistics

Private avg. wages earned: \$35,613 (2022)

▲ Up **22%** from 2017

54% of state average for private industries (\$65,389)

Labor Force Participation Rate: 60.7% (2021)

Ranked 11th of 36 Oregon counties

Statewide LFPR: **62.3%** (2021)

Total employment: 2,682 (2022)

▲ Up **12%** from 2017

Unemployment rate: 4.2% (2023)

▼ Down from 5.8% in 2018

Unemployment statewide: **3.7%** (2023)

Total Real GDP: \$208,001,000

Agriculture, forestry, hunting, and fishing

(45% of private industry GDP)

Finance, insurance, real estate, rental, leasing

(17% of private industry GDP)

BEA, 2021, private industry by county

Economic Characteristics

Harney County's unemployment rates are low and its labor force participation roughly equal to statewide rates. However, average wages across private-sector industries are also quite low, amounting to just over half of statewide averages. While the average annual wage for private industries increased by 22% between 2017 and 2022, inflation during that period also increased by 22%, resulting in no net change for the county's private sector wages.

Historically, ranching and timber have formed the backbone of economic activity in the county, and while reductions to federal forest harvests have caused the timber industry to decline, cattle and sheep ranching remain prominent. The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management employ a significant share of the population.



Wikipedia Commons

Harney County 2022 Covered Employment: Largest Industries

All government



38%

Retail trade



14%

Leisure & hospitality



12%

Private education & health services



9%



8%

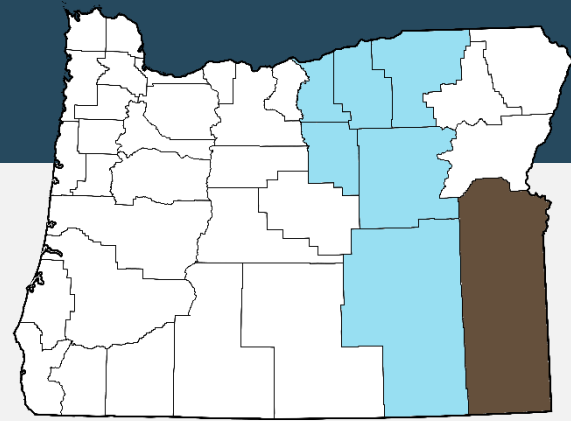
Natural resources & mining

Source: Oregon Employment Department, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2022 Annual

Note: OED has excluded Manufacturing and Unclassified sectors from their largest industry calculations for Harney County.

MALHEUR COUNTY

Malheur County is Oregon's second-largest county by land mass; rangelands make up 94% of its total land area, and 72% of county land is owned by the Bureau of Land Management. More than half of its population is clustered in the Western Treasure Valley region, along the border with Idaho. Roughly one-third of its population is Hispanic or Latino. Treasure Valley Community College, located in Ontario, offers opportunities for education and workforce training.



ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Compares key demographic statistics to statewide rates

Metric	Malheur Co.	Oregon
Cost-burdened renters	31%	48%
⚠ Cost-burdened homeowners	32%	30%
⚠ Residents w/o broadband access	32%	5%
Uninsured residents (health)	11%	7%
⚠ SNAP recipients	27%	15%
Residents with disabilities	15%	14%
English-second-language	8%	10%
⚠ Residents in mobile homes	15%	7%
⚠ Bachelor's degree or higher	14%	35%

Resiliency Indicators

The county faces persistent poverty, exacerbated by an undereducated workforce and a lack of high-paying employment opportunities. An estimated one-third of households are cost-burdened, and housing shortages limit population growth. In 2021, 45% of residents were determined "poor to struggling" based on American Community Survey's ratio of poverty to income.

According to 2022 American Community Survey data, 24% of the county's population speaks Spanish; of that group, 31% speak English "less than very well." Language barriers can deepen existing inequalities and make participation in economic development initiatives more challenging.

County Snapshot

Population:

32,981

(2023 estimates)

Land Area:

9,888 sq. mi.

Median Household

Income:

\$47,906

(2021)

Largest Population Centers

Ontario	11,645 residents
Nyssa	3,198 residents
Vale	1,894 residents
Adrian	157 residents

Population Highlights

Population under 18.....	25%
Population over 65.....	16%
BIPOC residents.....	40%
White residents	60%
Hispanic/Latino.....	35%
American Indian or Alaskan Native.....	1%
Black residents.....	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander.....	1%

MALHEUR COUNTY

Workforce Statistics

Private avg. wages earned: \$40,186 (2022)

▲ Up **26%** from 2017

61% of state average for private industries (\$65,389)

Labor Force Participation Rate: 57.9% (2021)

Ranked 17th of 36 Oregon counties

Statewide LFPR: **62.3%** (2021)

Total employment: 12,855 (2022)

No significant change since 2017

Unemployment rate: 3.7% (2023)

▼ Down from 4.4% in 2018

Unemployment statewide: **3.7%** (2023)

Total Real GDP: \$907,463,000

Finance, insurance, real estate, rental, leasing
(16% of private industry GDP)

Agriculture, forestry, hunting, and fishing
(14% of private industry GDP)

BEA, 2021, private industry by county

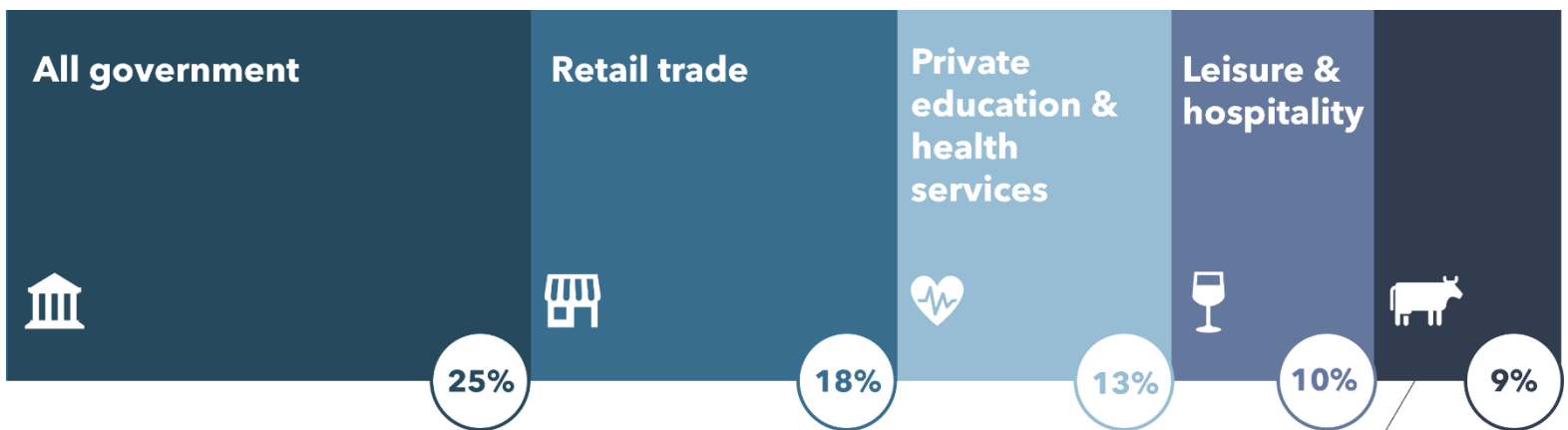
Economic Characteristics

The county's economy has long been agriculture-based: potatoes, onions, wheat, and cattle are among its largest exports. Due to its proximity to a large population base in Canyon County, Idaho, many workers commute to the county from out-of-state. While Oregon's higher minimum wage attracts many employees from Idaho, it can also deter local businesses from settling in the county. And, though unemployment remains low, many jobs offer low wages and no benefits. The county possesses mineral resources that could be used for lithium mining in the future.



Oregon Public Broadcasting

Malheur County 2022 Covered Employment: Largest Industries



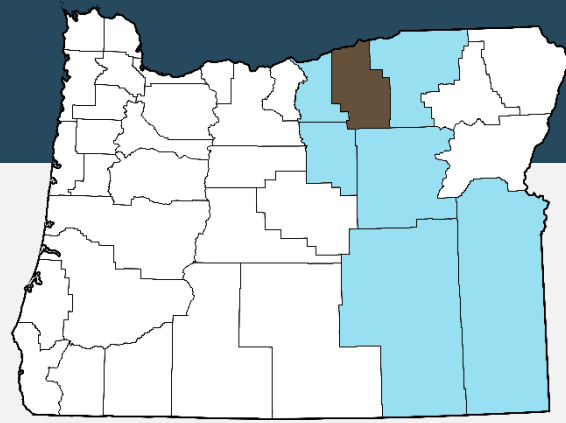
Source: Oregon Employment Department, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2022 Annual

Note: OED has excluded Unclassified sectors from their largest industry calculations for Malheur County.

Natural resources & mining

MORROW COUNTY

Though one of the smaller counties in the region, Morrow County has flourished in recent years. The county's land is mostly dry and flat, made up of rolling plains and broad plateaus, with the Columbia River along its northern border and the Blue Mountains to the south. Much of this land stands available for agricultural or industrial use. The Port of Morrow, in Boardman, serves as a gateway to the Pacific Northwest and Pacific Rim markets.



County Snapshot

Population:
13,010
(2023 estimates)

Land Area:
2,032 sq. mi.

Median Household
Income:
\$61,659
(2021)

Largest Population Centers

Boardman	3,828 residents
Irrigon	2,011 residents
Heppner	1,187 residents
lone	337 residents

Population Highlights

Population under 18.....	27%
Population over 65.....	16%
BIPOC residents.....	42%
White residents	58%
Hispanic/Latino.....	38%
American Indian or Alaskan Native.....	0.3%
Black residents.....	0.5%
Asian/Pacific Islander.....	1%

ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Compares key demographic statistics to statewide rates

Metric	Morrow Co.	Oregon
Cost-burdened renters	29%	48%
Cost-burdened homeowners	22%	30%
Residents w/o broadband access	30%	5%
Uninsured residents (health)	8%	7%
SNAP recipients	18%	15%
Residents with disabilities	16%	14%
English-second-language	15%	10%
Residents in mobile homes	34%	7%
Bachelor's degree or higher	10%	35%

Resiliency Indicators

A significant portion of Morrow County residents are Hispanic or Latino. An estimated 34% of residents speak Spanish, and of those Spanish-speakers, 44% speak English "less than very well." Language barriers can limit participation in economic and community development activities.

The county's population is expected to grow by 8% between 2025-2045, according to Portland State University Population Research Center estimates. In 2021, 40% of residents were determined "poor or struggling" according to the American Community Survey's ratio of poverty to income. Though the northern portion of the county enjoys high-speed internet access, many areas to the south have limited broadband access.

MORROW COUNTY

Workforce Statistics

Private avg. wages earned: \$65,049 (2022)

▲ Up **27%** from 2017

99% of state average for private industries (\$65,389)

Labor Force Participation Rate: 62.9% (2021)

Ranked 9th of 36 Oregon counties

Statewide LFPR: **62.3%** (2021)

Total employment: 6,406 (2022)

▲ **11%** increase since 2017

Unemployment rate: 3.5% (2023)

▼ Down from 4.2% in 2018

Unemployment statewide: **3.7%** (2023)

Total Real GDP: \$1,270,527,000

Agriculture, forestry, hunting, and fishing

(28% of private industry GDP)

Utilities

(22% of private industry GDP)

BEA, 2021, private industry by county

Economic Characteristics

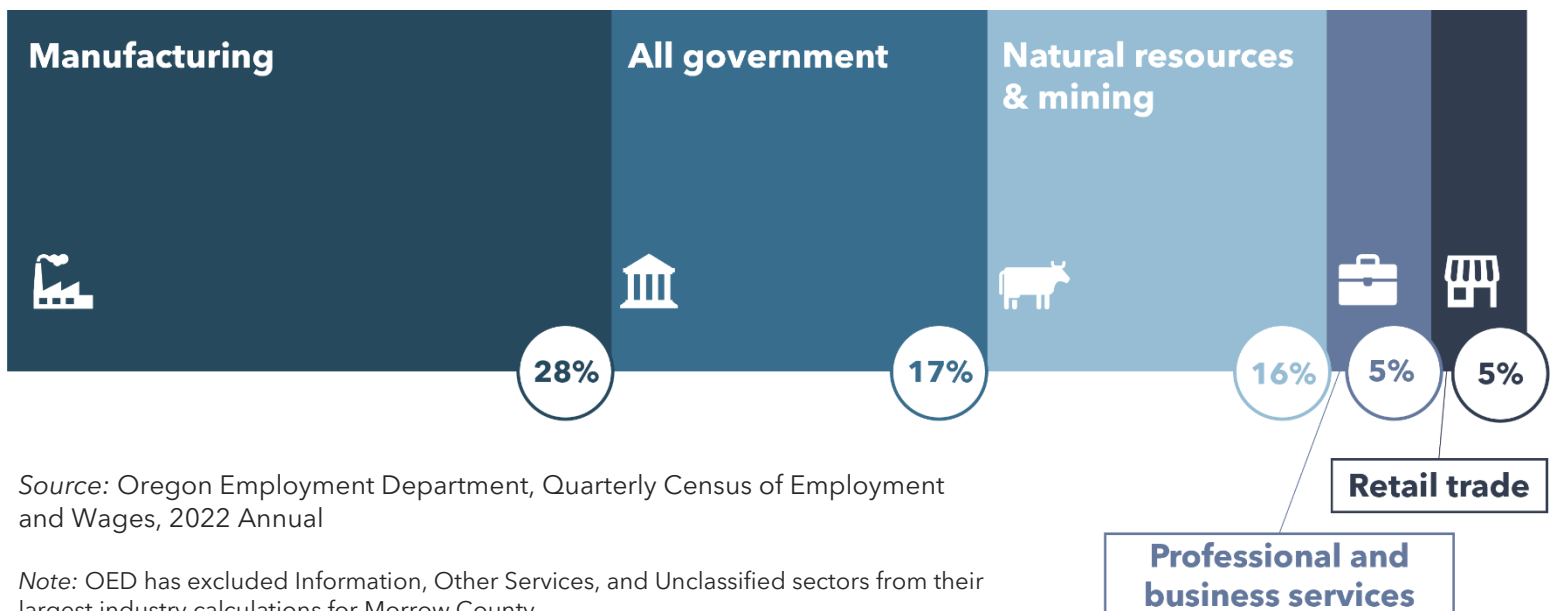
Morrow County has seen rapid growth over the past two decades, driven mainly by the Port of Morrow, the state's second-largest port based on tonnage and an economic powerhouse. The county's average private wage is the highest in the region, equal to the statewide average.

The county's food processing industry, located primarily in Boardman, has proved a stabilizer during economic uncertainty. Amazon data centers have also generated employment opportunities in recent years. Other major industries include manufacturing, timber, energy, and agricultural products. County lands yield irrigation farming in the north, cattle ranching in its central regions, and timber products in the south.



Port of Morrow

Morrow County 2022 Covered Employment: Largest Industries

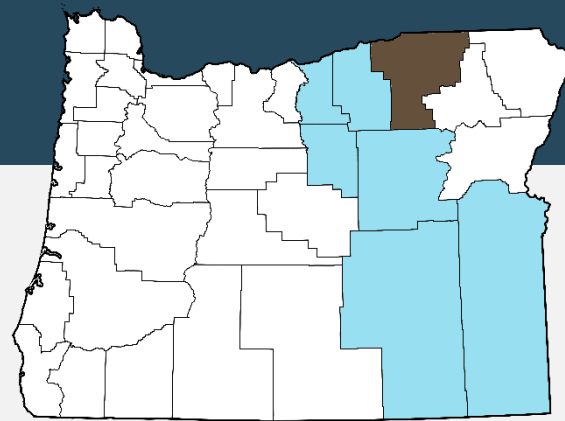


Source: Oregon Employment Department, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2022 Annual

Note: OED has excluded Information, Other Services, and Unclassified sectors from their largest industry calculations for Morrow County.

UMATILLA COUNTY

The most populous county in the district, Umatilla County is located at the intersection between I-84 and I-82, along the bend of the Columbia River. The western end of the county had seen rapid population growth over the last decade; Hermiston and Pendleton are two of the largest cities east of Bend. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation are based near Pendleton, with over 270 sq. miles of land and 1,500 tribal members.



County Snapshot

Population:

81,842

(2023 estimates)

Land Area:

3,215 sq. mi.

Median Household Income:

\$63,123

(2021)

Largest Population Centers

Hermiston	19,696 residents
Pendleton	17,107 residents
Umatilla	7,363 residents
Milton-Freewater	7,151 residents

Population Highlights

Population under 18.....	25%
Population over 65.....	15%
BIPOC residents.....	36%
White residents	64%
Hispanic/Latino.....	28%
American Indian or Alaskan Native.....	3%
Black residents.....	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander.....	1%

ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Compares key demographic statistics to statewide rates

Metric	Umatilla Co.	Oregon
⚠️ Cost-burdened renters	38%	48%
Cost-burdened homeowners	24%	30%
Residents w/o broadband access	9%	5%
Uninsured residents (health)	6%	7%
⚠️ SNAP recipients	20%	15%
Residents with disabilities	17%	14%
⚠️ English-second-language	8%	10%
⚠️ Residents in mobile homes	16%	7%
⚠️ Bachelor's degree or higher	18%	35%

Resiliency Indicators

Relative to its neighbors, Umatilla County has seen concentrated growth in its economy and communities. Portland State University's Population Research Center predicts that the county will grow by 10% between 2025 and 2045. Though educational attainment lags behind statewide rates, Blue Mountain Community College offers workforce education opportunities.

However, many residents still face economic insecurity: in 2021, 36% were determined "poor or struggling" according to the American Community Survey's ratio of income to poverty level, and housing costs remain high relative to income. The county has greater racial and ethnic diversity than most of the region, with a significant Hispanic population.

UMATILLA COUNTY

Workforce Statistics

Private avg. wages earned: \$47,957 (2022)

▲ Up **33%** from 2017

73% of state average for private industries (\$65,389)

Labor Force Participation Rate: 64.0% (2021)

Ranked 6th of 36 Oregon counties

Statewide LFPR: **62.3%** (2021)

Total employment: 31,758 (2022)

▲ **3%** increase since 2017

Unemployment rate: 4.1% (2023)

▼ Down from 4.8% in 2018

Unemployment statewide: **3.7%** (2023)

Total Real GDP: \$2,528,064,000

Utilities

(17% of private industry GDP)

Finance, insurance, real estate, rental, leasing

(16% of private industry GDP)

BEA, 2021, private industry by county

Economic Characteristics

The county has a diverse labor force, with much of its employment concentrated in agriculture, manufacturing, transportation, and food processing. Access to water along the Columbia River and low-cost energy has aided industry growth; the county generates considerable power from electricity, natural gas, and wind farms. Efforts are underway by the Columbia Development Authority to convert the Umatilla Army Depot into an industrial park. The Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) industry offers great potential for future economic growth for the region. However, demand for both skilled and unskilled labor remains high, placing pressure on communities to expand their housing and infrastructure.



Stataline Wind Farm

Umatilla County 2022 Covered Employment: Largest Industries

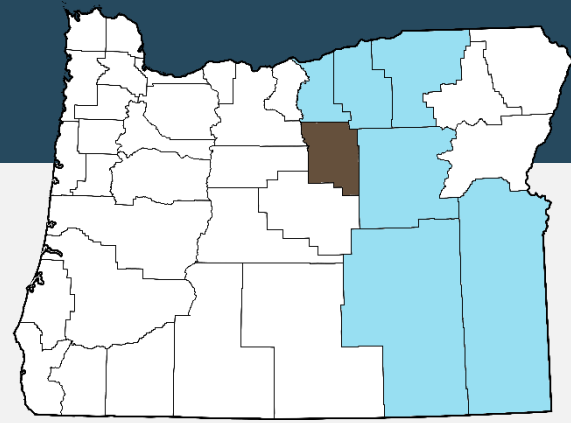


Source: Oregon Employment Department, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2022 Annual

Note: OED has excluded Information and Unclassified sectors from their largest industry calculations for Umatilla County.

WHEELER COUNTY

As the district's most sparsely populated county, Wheeler County boasts a wealth of public lands and avenues for outdoor recreation. Portions of two National Forests, two units of the John Day Fossil Beds, and the Painted Hills lie within its borders. The county's rugged canyons and public lands limit agricultural growth but present opportunities for the travel and tourism sectors.



ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Compares key demographic statistics to statewide rates

Metric	Wheeler Co.	Oregon
Cost-burdened renters	26%	48%
⚠️ Cost-burdened homeowners	29%	30%
⚠️ Residents w/o broadband access	48%	5%
Uninsured residents (health)	6%	7%
SNAP recipients	18%	15%
⚠️ Residents with disabilities	22%	14%
⚠️ English-second-language	2%	10%
⚠️ Residents in mobile homes	20%	7%
⚠️ Bachelor's degree or higher	20%	35%

Resiliency Indicators

The county grapples with an aging, declining population: in 2021, one in three residents were over 65. Economic development efforts must identify ways to attract younger demographics - particularly families and start-up businesses - in order to fight this decline.

In 2021, 49% of residents were determined "poor or struggling" based on the American Community Survey's ratio of poverty to income. From Fossil, residents are a two-and-a-half hour drive to Bend or a two-hour drive to Hermiston.

*Note that demographic and economic data may be less reliable for counties with small populations.

County Snapshot

Population:

1,533

(2023 estimates)

Land Area:

1,716 sq. mi.

Median Household Income:

\$46,648

(2021)

Largest Population Centers

Fossil	447 residents
Spray	139 residents
Mitchell	138 residents

Population Highlights

Population under 18.....	19%
Population over 65.....	32%
BIPOC residents.....	18%
White residents	82%
Hispanic/Latino.....	10%
American Indian or Alaskan Native.....	0.1%
Black residents.....	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander.....	0.7%

WHEELER COUNTY

Workforce Statistics

Private avg. wages earned: \$34,739 (2022)

▲ Up **31%** from 2017

53% of state average for private industries (\$65,389)

Labor Force Participation Rate: 58.3% (2021)

Ranked 14th of 36 Oregon counties

Statewide LFPR: **62.3%** (2021)

Total employment: 325 (2022)

▲ **4%** increase since 2017

Unemployment rate: 2.9% (2023)

▼ Down from 3.4% in 2018

Unemployment statewide: **3.7%** (2023)

Total Real GDP: \$23,455,000

Finance, insurance, real estate, rental, leasing
(40% of private industry GDP)

Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting
(13% of private industry GDP)

BEA, 2021, private industry by county

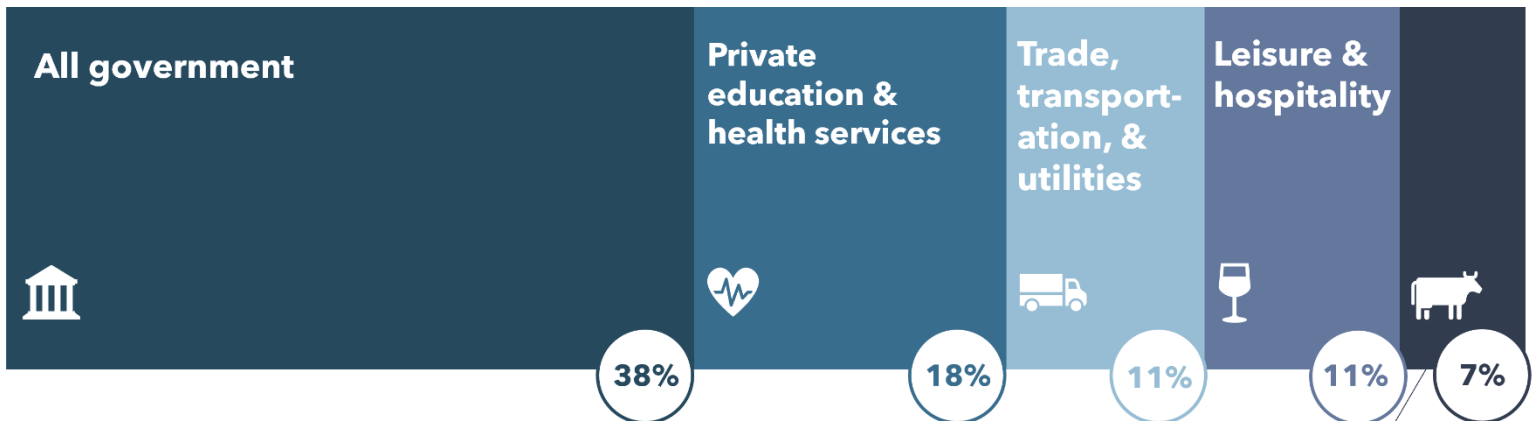
Economic Characteristics

Average wages across private industries in the county are very low, at roughly half of the statewide average. Most small businesses struggle in such a sparsely-populated area. However, the county has the potential to host small-scale manufacturing startups, with lower costs of living than nearby populations centers such as Bend. Agri-tourism business models could allow farmers and ranchers to diversify their income sources.



Canoeing on the John Day River

Wheeler County 2022 Covered Employment: Largest Industries



Source: Oregon Employment Department, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2022 Annual

Note: OED has excluded Construction, Manufacturing, Information, Financial Activities and Unclassified sectors from their largest industry calculations for Wheeler County.

Tribal and County Profiles: Supplemental Materials

Glossary of Key Terms

- *Cost-burdened households*: Those households that spend 30% or more of their incomes on housing costs, such as monthly mortgage and rent payments.
- *Resilience*: Defined by the EDA as “an area’s ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major disruptions (i.e., ‘shocks’) to its economic base.” Resilience is subjective, but can be assessed by studying a variety of demographic and economic conditions that may indicate higher levels of community vulnerability.
- *SNAP*: Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, a commonly used proxy for financial vulnerability within households.

Source Citations

Listed below are source citations for the statistics used in the CEDS county profiles. They have been organized to reflect the order in which they appear in the profiles.

Table 9: Economically Vulnerable Populations Data

Data Point	Source	ACS Table Number (where applicable)
Cost-burdened renters	U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2021 (5-Year Estimates).	SE:B18002. Residents Paying More Than 30% or at least 50% of Income on Rent
Cost-burdened homeowners		SE:A10049. Selected Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income in the Past 12 Months (Dollars) for Housing Units with a Mortgage
Residents without broadband access (at minimum 25 Mbps)	Broadband Now. (n.d.). Internet service providers in Oregon. https://broadbandnow.com/Oregon .	n/a
English-second-language residents	U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2022 (5-Year Estimates).	S1601. Language spoken at home
Residents without health insurance	Headwaters Economics. (n.d.). <i>Populations at risk: Combined counties</i> . Retrieved on October 12, 2023 from https://headwaterseconomics.org/tools/populations-at-risk/ .	n/a
SNAP recipients		
Residents with disabilities		
Mobile home residents		
Educational attainment: Residents with a Bachelor’s degree or above	U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2021 (5-Year Estimates).	SE:A12002. Highest Educational Attainment for Population 25 Years and Over

Table 10: County Snapshot Data

Data Point	Source	ACS Table Number (where applicable)
Population estimates (countywide)	Population Research Center, Portland State University. (2023, July 1). Population estimates for Oregon and counties: Certified estimate. https://www.pdx.edu/population-research/population-estimate-reports .	n/a
Population estimates (for cities)	United States Census Bureau. (n.d.). <i>QuickFacts: Oregon</i> . Retrieved on October 2, 2023 from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/ .	n/a
Land area		
Median Household Income	U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2021 (5-Year Estimates).	SE:A14006. Median Household Income (In 2021 Inflation Adjusted Dollars)
Race and ethnicity		SE:B04001. Hispanic or Latino by Race (Collapsed Version)
Age		SE:A01001. Age

Table 11: Resiliency Indicators Data

Data Point	Source	ACS Table Number (where applicable)
Population forecasts	Population Research Center, Portland State University. (2023, June 30). <i>Oregon Population Forecast Program: Population forecasts</i> . Retrieved from https://www.pdx.edu/population-research/population-forecasts .	n/a
Age	U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2021 (5-Year Estimates).	SE:A01001. Age
Educational attainment		SE:A12002. Highest Educational Attainment for Population 25 Years and Over SE:A12003. School Dropout Rate for Population 16 to 19 Years
Poverty level		SE:B13004. Ratio of Income in 2020 to Poverty Level (Summarized - top-coded at 2.00)
FEMA National Risk Index	Federal Emergency Management Agency. (n.d.). <i>National risk index</i> . Retrieved on December 7, 2023 from https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/map .	n/a

Table 12: Workforce Statistics

Data Point	Source
Average wages, all private industries	Oregon Employment Department: Quality Info. (n.d.). <i>Employment and wages: Covered employment and wages (QCEW): [County Name Here], 2022 annual.</i> Retrieved on October 2, 2023.
Labor Force Participation Rates	
Total employment	
Unemployment rate	United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. (n.d.). <i>Labor force data by county, 2022 annual averages. Local area unemployment statistics: Tables and maps.</i> Retrieved on October 10, 2023 from https://www.bls.gov/lau/tables.htm#cntyaa .
Total real GDP, all private industries Top two sources of GDP by industry sector	Oregon Regional Economic Analysis Project (REAP). (n.d.). Real gross domestic product by industry, 2017-2022. Retrieved from https://oregon.reaproject.org/data-tables/gsp-a900n/ .
Average farm size	United States Department of Agriculture. <i>2017 Census of Agriculture: State and county profiles, Oregon.</i>
2022 Covered Employment Bar Chart	Oregon Employment Department. (n.d.). <i>Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2022 Annual.</i>

SWOT Analysis

SWOT Methodology

In 2023, the Institute of Policy Research and Engagement (IPRE) conducted a community survey on behalf of GEODC to determine community goals and strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to Greater Eastern Oregon. 122 community members participated in the online survey. A link to the full list of 2023 questions and a summary of the results can be found in the section titled "[Other Resources](#)," found at the end of this document. Additionally, GEODC started a SWOT analysis in 2019. Both documents were compiled in this section to form the 2024-2029 document.

The community survey asked respondents to rate the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements, or to identify a descriptive statement as a "strength," "opportunity," "weakness," or "threat." As a general observation, very few of the statements received a uniform assessment. Most statements generated a range of responses; what one respondent considered a strength or opportunity, another respondent identified as a weakness or threat. IPRE believes that this variation in the survey's results is consistent with the geographic range and diversity of economic conditions within GEODC's region. That said, this lack of uniformity creates challenges in developing a SWOT analysis that reflects the conditions of all communities in the region.

General Community Perceptions Survey

The survey revealed key insights into many community members' attitudes towards, and understanding of, economic development. The following goals and objectives were then given to the GEODC advisory committee and working groups to form an implementation framework (action plan) for the 2024-2029 Comprehensive Economic Development Plan.



What is a SWOT?

A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis provides an overview of a region's economic context and a framework for identifying its goals and priorities. Strengths and weaknesses include internal factors and current conditions that greatly influence the region's economic activity; opportunities and threats represent potential external factors that may impact the region in the future.

Survey takeaways:

- **Economic Development is Important to Stakeholders in the Region.** 89% of stakeholders believe that economic development is very important or extremely important to their region. This number is slightly down from ninety-two percent in 2019.
- **A significant share of stakeholders were unfamiliar with the CEDS.** Close to half (45%) of respondents indicated that they were unaware of the GEODC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document before receiving the survey. This number was 4% lower than in 2019.
- **Around half (47%) of respondents indicated they had used the CEDS in their economic development activities.** Of those, 40% found it extremely or very useful, 41% found it moderately useful, and only 13% found it slightly useful. Only 2 respondents (5%) indicated it was not at all useful. These numbers show improvement from 2019 where only a third found it extremely or very useful.
- **A significant number of respondents believe that the region is currently unequipped to withstand or recover from a shock.** 49% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that the region can recover or withstand a shock. Close to a third (32%) agree that it can, while 19% neither agree nor disagree.
- **A majority of respondents feel that their communities are not economically resilient enough.** A large number of stakeholders believe that their communities lack proper infrastructure systems (45%), business continuity plans (60%), strategies to support supply chains (52%), and integration with other local, regional, and state planning activities (48%) to properly weather emergencies and disasters.



A drone flying over a vineyard in Echo (photo provided by GEODC)

GEODC and IPRE representatives also conducted a series of one-on-one interviews with stakeholders in the region and combined the findings from these interviews with the community survey data. This SWOT analysis represents the themes that emerged across these sources.

Strengths

Strengths provide the region with a competitive advantage.

Four overall strengths from the 2023 survey include the availability of buildable land, business support for economic development, the size and magnitude of the agriculture and food industry, and the quality and capacity of the road networks in Greater Eastern Oregon.

Land & Infrastructure

- Availability of buildable industrial land and commercial sites
- Connectivity to highways and transportation linkages
- Quality and capacity of the road networks
- Infrastructure for freight transportation

Natural Resources and Unique Communities

- Unique cultural flairs of towns/areas
- Natural resources & management
- Renewable Energy

Ag, Food, and Recreation Industries

- Size and magnitude of agriculture and food industry
- Outdoor recreation opportunities

Access to Grants and Loans

- Access to federal and state grants
- Small business support through GEODC loan services

Support for Economic Development

- Business, community, & government support for economic development

Farmer's Market in Hermiston



Rugged countryside near Heppner

Weaknesses

Weaknesses to economic development in Eastern Oregon are conditions that limit or reduce the area's potential for economic growth. These constraints represent challenges that should be evaluated and addressed, if needed, to develop a more competitive business environment.

The consensus among stakeholders is that a lack of workforce infrastructure and supply along with regional capacity are weaknesses in the region. Federal agency support for economic development was rated as a slight weakness and access to capital for municipalities, businesses, and entrepreneurs was rated as a weakness along with access to grant administration and writing assistance.

Workforce Infrastructure

- Availability of family-wage jobs
- Availability of affordable housing
- Availability and affordability of childcare
- Availability of skilled labor
- Availability of public transportation options

Workforce Supply

- Availability of diverse employment opportunities
- Skill mismatch in the current workforce
- Entrepreneurial development

Diverse Sources of Capital

- Access to infrastructure financing
- Access to capital

Technical Support for Innovation

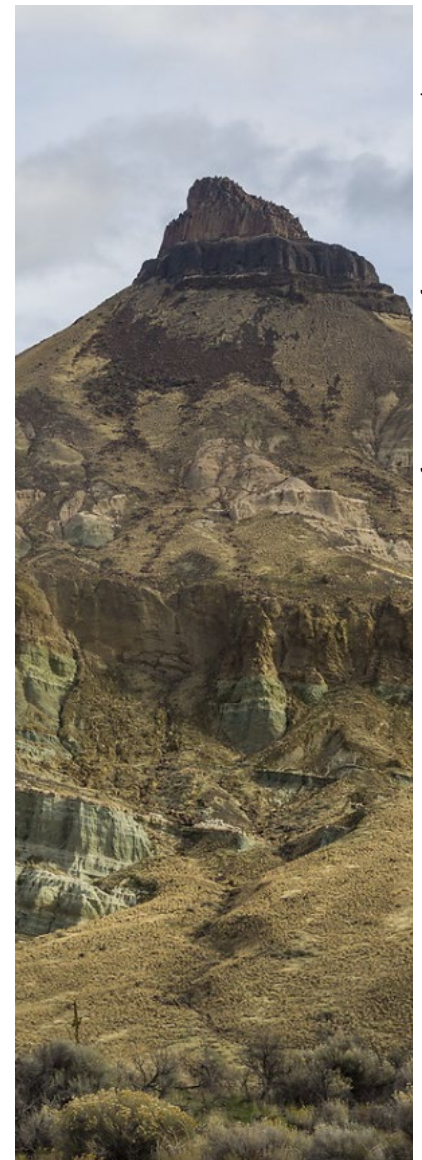
- Access to grant administration and writing assistance
- Support for economic development from federal agencies

Development Infrastructure

- Availability of infrastructure sites with capacity
- Availability of commercial airline services

Rural/Frontier Vitality

- Low populations, which create small tax bases and small workforce populations, constraining economic activity
- Limited local commerce options for healthy food options
- Limited workforce availability and skill mismatch



Sheep Rock, John Day River Territory

Opportunities

An opportunity is an external factor that provides promise or is likely to contribute to a region's success in the future if capitalized on.

Building on the natural strengths of the region, GEODC identified opportunities for creating and continuing economic growth and expansion. Four opportunity categories include the expansion of local industry, a strong business infrastructure, Oregon immigration and educational attainment, and access to new regional funding streams.

Expansion of Local Industry

- Food and beverage
- Tourism/travel/entertainment
- Capitalizing on unique small-town cultures (e.g., Main Street development)
- Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
- Distribution centers
- Data processing centers
- Appeal and access to natural resources
- Small business support services
- Workforce development

Business Infrastructure

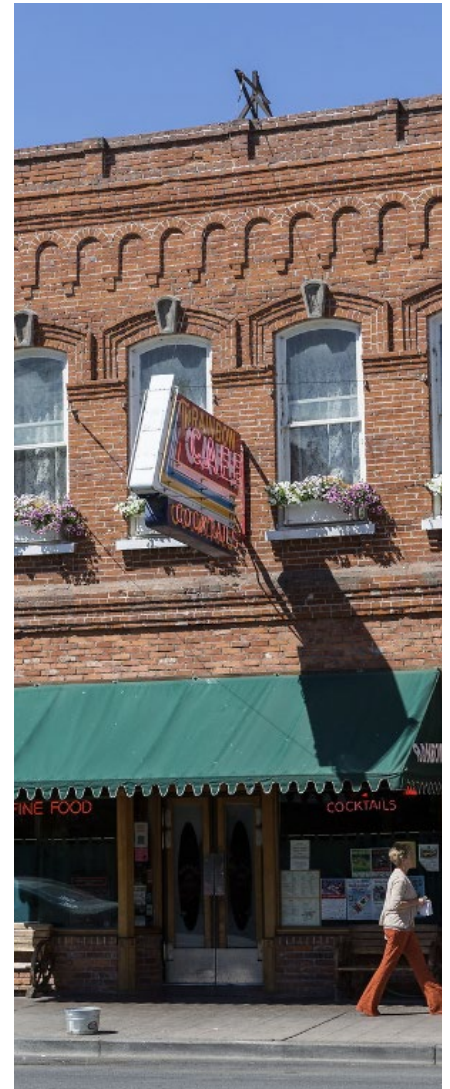
- Increasing demand for renewable energy
- Access to ports for transporting goods
- Access to broadband
- Rail reload center in Malheur County
- High desert biomass/biofuels and alternative energy sources
- Columbia Basin could serve as the Pacific Northwest hub for alternative energy

Demographic Changes

- In-migration to Oregon
- Increases in enrollment in higher education institutes

Access to Regional Development Funding

- Availability of federal and state funding for regional development
- Access or ability to use natural resources for economic development



Rainbow Café in Pendleton

Threats

Threats represent potential challenges that will likely hinder economic development in the future if left unaddressed. Some threats have been designated as “slight,” meaning that, while they should be acknowledged, they pose less concern for community stakeholders and survey participants.

Four themes threaten economic growth and expansion in the district: water access, population demographics, access to private investment, and increasing land use and environmental regulations.

Water and Wastewater Infrastructure

- Access to water/sewer
- Failing infrastructure in small towns
- Inadequate planning
- Changes in the environment, decreasing water availability
- Outside perception (slight)
- Employment shifts to service industries (slight)

Population Demographics in Eastern Oregon

- Shifting life expectancy (slight)
- Lacking proximity to metro areas
- Aging baby boomer generation
- Migrating youth
- Housing costs

Access to Private Financing

- Scarcity of private investment for regional development

Increasing Regulations

- Restrictive state, and local land use policies (slight)
- Inflexible zoning (slight)
- Lengthy local land use permitting processes (slight)
- Barriers to development on public land
- Restrictions on wetlands, protected lands, and natural resources



Balm Fork in Morrow County (Oregon Scenic Images)

Goals and Objectives

Goals for the 2024-2029 CEDS

We have organized our CEDS Action Plan around four broad goals developed through engagement with stakeholders in Greater Eastern Oregon, with specific strategies nested within each goal category. Together, these goals capture the economic development needs of GEODC's region. We have made these goal categories intentionally broad to make them applicable to a wide range of community needs and strategies.



Community Development

Help our communities flourish by supporting workforce, childcare, housing, and healthy living initiatives.



Regional Collaboration & Rural/Frontier Vitality

Ensure that our community leaders and regional partners are working together to support the unique needs of rural and frontier environments.



Business Support

Reduce administrative burden and prohibitive costs for the many businesses that drive employment, innovation, and culture in our local economies.



Infrastructure & Resiliency

Make our communities more resilient to natural hazards and unplanned economic shocks by collaborating on water, wastewater, broadband, and other infrastructure projects.

Community Engagement Outcomes

The following sections outline findings and key themes that emerged from our community engagement efforts. These findings helped us form the four CEDS goals and many of the strategies listed in [Chapter 5: Action Plan](#). The regional community survey, which was created and disseminated by IPRE, revealed many of the priorities that informed both our [SWOT Analysis](#) and our subsequent engagement efforts. The Working Groups proved highly informative in guiding the CEDS Action Plan.

Regional Community Survey Results

The 2023 regional community survey helped us identify themes and priorities among residents of Eastern Oregon. The most popular goal selected in the survey was to “Support the Needs of Rural Areas,” with 94% of respondents selecting *strongly agree* or *agree* with this category. The second most popular goal was to “Advance Economic Development Activities that Provide a Range of Employment Opportunities,” with 93% of respondents selecting *strongly agree* or *agree*. The rest of the goals are ranked as follows:

- Support Infrastructure Assistance to Communities: 92%
- Provide Technical Assistance to communities and support capacity-building efforts: 89%
- Foster Collaboration on Projects of Regional Significance: 88%
- Partner on Efforts to Increase Availability of and Access to Broadband: 84%
- Partner to Improve Workforce Training and Education: 82%
- Build on the Region’s Entrepreneurial Culture and Assets: 80%
- Strengthen the Region’s Resilience against Climate-Related Impacts through Resilience and/or Mitigation Projects: 55%

Other goals that respondents valued include:

Workforce/Housing Development: There is a desire to address the intertwined challenges of workforce and housing availability in the GEODC region. The focus should be on prioritizing workforce housing, considering goals for recruiting individuals and supporting rural communities by repurposing existing infrastructure for sustainable development.

Collaboration: Collaboration needs to be expanded. GEODC communities need to have their individuality and unique needs recognized while also promoting targeted strategies for flexible and equitable development based on the specific opportunities and challenges in different communities.

Working Group Outcomes

GEODC, with facilitation support from IPRE, organized these CEDS Working Groups in March and April of 2024. These groups will continue meeting to continue brainstorming regional solutions for complex problems. Early outcomes from these three groups are described as follows:

Roadmap to Childcare Solutions

As part of the 2024-2029 CEDS implementation process, GEODC organized a *Roadmap to Childcare Solutions* Working Group - comprised of residents and regional stakeholders - and facilitated two virtual workshop sessions to discuss strategies that might address the region's childcare deserts. The group identified several possible approaches that warrant further study and consideration:

- Employ outside consultants to lend their expertise and conduct feasibility studies for communities without formalized childcare centers (e.g., Harney County)
- Identify sustainable, long-term funding sources for childcare centers
- Leverage existing state funds for Early Childcare Facilities Infrastructure administered by Business Oregon
- Develop an educational "pipeline" for early childhood educators and service providers by working with higher education institutions in the region
- Advocate for the Oregon State Legislature to expand funding opportunities for childcare needs
- Identify means of leveraging regional funding sources, such as Community Development Block Grants, for childcare purposes
- Build a "roadmap" to guide aspiring childcare service providers through the start-up process

Resiliency Planning Coordination

The second workgroup that was formed based on areas of need identified by the CEDS Advisory Group was the *Resiliency Planning Coordination* Working Group. This group was made up of local-level community planners, as well as representatives from the Rural Engagement & Vitality (REV) Center and the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD). GEODC facilitated two virtual workshop sessions to discuss strategies that might address regional planning needs, including support for low-capacity local planners and channels for increased collaboration across the region. The group identified several possible approaches that warrant further study and consideration:

- Establish a resource center to house a variety of shared local/regional planning services: project management, technical assistance, grant writing, model code development
 - Work with Eastern Oregon University, the REV Center, and other educational institutions

Chapter 4: Goals and Objectives

- Leverage training placement programs, such as RARE and the REV pilot program
- Create a circuit rider model to support low-capacity municipalities
- Compile a “menu” of resources for community planners, including a library of model planning documents that can be used as examples
- Create “plug-and-play” models for planning documents for increased efficiency
 - For instance, creating a template that allows planners to place an NHMP directly into Chapter 7 of their Comprehensive Plan
- Identify solutions for building more stable long-term funding sources to support Senior Centers

Water/Wastewater Infrastructure Strategies

The third group identified based on our areas of need was the *Water/Wastewater Infrastructure Strategies Working Group*, comprised of residents and regional stakeholders. GEODC facilitated two virtual workshop sessions with this group to discuss strategies that might address the region’s water/wastewater needs. The group identified several possible approaches that warrant further study and consideration:

- Create a “menu” of resources to share with local administrators and planners, including relevant training modules
 - Partner with the Rural Assistance Community Corporation (RCAC) to access their training library and potentially create a new training module if necessary
 - Address foundational gaps in local-level infrastructure and economic development expertise
- Identify regional solutions to address the high summertime demand for water
 - Pursue strategies such as Aquifer Storage and Recovery, Aquifer Recharge, non-contact wastewater cooling storage and reuse, and other means to build sustainable water infrastructure systems (*see the section titled “Community-Based Water Planning” on page 25 of this document*)
- Create channels for resource-sharing between cities; build networks that allow cities with greater capacity to support low-capacity municipalities
- Establish and facilitate quarterly or semi-regular meetings with this group to continue discussing regional solutions for water/wastewater infrastructure needs and to share resources

Next Steps

With GEODC’s support, these Working Groups will continue meeting to champion goals and outcomes for the region regarding childcare availability and affordability, regional planning and resiliency, and water/wastewater infrastructure strategies.

Action Plan

Overview

How will we advance our four goals in the GEODC region? The CEDS Action Plan outlines the specific strategies that GEODC and its partners will undertake during the 2024-2029 CEDS cycle; think of this as the framework that will guide our efforts over the next five years.

The Action Plan is organized around the four CEDS goals established in Chapter 4 – *Community Development, Regional Collaboration & Rural/Frontier Vitality, Business Support, and Infrastructure & Resiliency*. For each of these goals, the plan includes several components:

- **Areas of Need:** Specific issues or challenges in our region that are associated with this goal area, as identified by community stakeholders.
- **Strategies:** A list of the individual strategies – or projects – that GEODC and its partners will use to address these identified areas of need.
- **Priority Level:** CEDS strategies are listed in order of priority: “*High*” priority indicates that GEODC is directing a substantial proportion of its resources and energy towards a strategy, while “*Other*” indicates that the strategy is valuable to the region, but may require long-term planning and heavy involvement from community partners. Many of the organizations in our region, including GEODC, face limited capacity, making it impossible to advance every identified area of need simultaneously. We use these priority levels to help direct our focus and align our efforts around the strategies that we are best equipped to tackle based on resources, expertise, and support from our community partners.
- **Evaluation Metrics:** For each goal area, we identify the measures that GEODC will use to evaluate regional conditions and progress over time. Some metrics will be tracked annually, but most will be collected at the beginning and end of the CEDS timeframe (2024-2029).



Signpost for Hotel Diamond, located at the base of the Steens Mountains (photo provided by GEODC)

Background & Methods

We developed the Action Plan through several forms of community engagement, including:

- Our regional community survey and accompanying SWOT analysis, conducted by UO's Institute for Policy Research and Engagement in Fall 2023,
- A 2023 community economic needs survey,
- A 2023-24 survey of the region's infrastructure project needs,
- A series of informational interviews with regional stakeholders, including members of vulnerable groups,
- Workshops with our CEDS Advisory Group, also consisting of regional stakeholders, and
- An assessment of the demographic and industry conditions in the region using statistical data from regional, state, and national sources, as outlined in [Chapter 1: District Profile](#).

Through these methods of engagement, we identified the region's Areas of Need - key issues that impact economic development or opportunities to enhance resiliency, equity, and vitality in Eastern Oregon. We also collaborated with our community stakeholders to create a list of strategies to address these issue areas. The Implementation Framework summarizes our strategies.

Developing Our Areas of Need

Beginning with our survey results and stakeholder interview findings, we created a list of themes to share with our CEDS Advisory Group. In a workshop session, the Advisory Group discussed these themes and identified relevant objectives for GEODC to pursue. GEODC narrowed these objectives further based on capacity, organizational scope, and interest from stakeholders. From this process emerged three working groups: *Roadmap to Childcare Solutions*, *Resiliency Planning Coordination*, and *Water/Wastewater Infrastructure Strategies*. Other priorities that emerged from our community engagement have been carried forward as items that GEODC will monitor but that GEODC does not have the capacity or expertise to pursue on its own.

Action Plan Summary

This table offers a high-level summary of the priorities and strategies for the 2024-2029 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, as identified through our community outreach efforts and GEODC’s Advisory Group.

Goal: Community Development		
Areas of Need	Strategies	Priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Supply • Affordable and Available Housing • Population Retention and Growth • Childcare Supply and Sustainability • Community Health • Technical Assistance and Capacity Support 	Develop a Roadmap to Childcare Solutions	High
	Promote Local Childcare Sustainability	High
	Enhance Visibility and Capacity of GEODC’s Core Services	High
	Increase Affordable and Available Housing Supply	High
	Support Workforce Education and Training	Other
	Seek Healthy Food Access	Other
	Create Pathways for Increased Technical Assistance and Capacity Support	Other
Goal: Regional Collaboration & Rural/Frontier Vitality		
Areas of Need	Strategies	Priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource-Sharing Networks • Training for Local Leadership • Community Readiness Assessments • Regional Coalition for Economic Needs • Tribal Funding Support 	Explore Local Planning Capacity through a Regional Planner Circuit Rider Model	High
	Increase Regional Resiliency Partnerships and Planning; Develop Regional Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan Templates	High
	Expand Capacity for Tribal Populations	High
	Produce a Community Readiness Assessment	Other
	Enhance Regional Planner Training	Other

Chapter 5: CEDS Action Plan

The Action Plan Summary continues below.

Goal: Business Support		
Areas of Need	Strategies	Priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small Business Support • Emerging Industries • Main Street Revitalization • Cultivate a Regional Culture of Entrepreneurship 	Support Local Business	High
	Expand Culture of Local Entrepreneurism	High
	Embrace Emerging Industry Regionally	Other
	Increase Support for Main Street Projects	Other
Goal: Infrastructure & Resiliency		
Areas of Need	Strategies	Priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water/Wastewater/ Groundwater Infrastructure • Water Storage and Reuse • Equitable Broadband Access • Basic Utilities • Community NHMP Readiness • Resiliency Planning 	Support Local Aquifer, Reuse, and Water Storage Projects through CEDS Narrative and a Working Group	High
	Enhance the Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) 2023 Technical Assistance Resource Guide	High
	Explore Operator Circuit Rider Cooperative in GEODC's Region	High
	Increase Certified Drinking Water and Wastewater Operator Education in GEODC's Region	Other
	Increase Regional Broadband Access	Other
	Expand Regional Resiliency Planning	Other

Note: Some high-priority strategies were selected by GEODC's CEDS Working Groups; other priorities will be promoted by GEODC but may be pursued or championed by other community resources due to lack of capacity or scope at GEODC.

Goal: Community Development



Help our communities flourish by supporting workforce initiatives, solutions to childcare, the expansion of affordable housing options, and other strategies that will encourage long-term population retention.

Areas of Need

Our community members and partners identified key issue areas that should be addressed to support long-term regional growth. We use the strategies listed below to target many of these areas of need. Like any organization, GEODC must make decisions about where to focus efforts based on expertise and capacity, some areas of need may be addressed by other regional partners.

Areas of Need
Childcare Supply and Sustainability: Our stakeholders consistently name childcare as a major barrier to workforce participation and a financial stressor for parents. Quality childcare also makes communities more attractive to new residents. The advisory group also worried about the sustainability of programs.
Affordable and Available Housing: Many residents are cost-burdened or struggle to access quality housing within their budgets. Housing options are limited regionally as well.
Technical Assistance and Capacity Support: Across the board, many areas of need intersect with a high demand for technical assistance, resource-sharing, and capacity support for local communities, which are often understaffed and under-resourced.
Workforce Supply: Many rural areas face aging, and declining populations and need creative solutions to expand their labor pools and match residents with employment opportunities.
Community Health: Many rural communities are functionally food deserts that struggle to consistently access quality, affordable nutrition.
Population Retention and Growth: The region is experiencing out-migration trends; while residents may not always desire explosive growth, communities must find ways to maintain or expand their workforce and tax base by enhancing quality-of-life conditions.



Goal: Community Development

Help our communities flourish by supporting workforce initiatives, solutions to childcare, the expansion of affordable housing options, and other strategies that will encourage long-term population retention.

High Priority Strategies

Strategy: Develop a Roadmap to Childcare Solutions				
<i>Develop a regional childcare “how to” roadmap to increase the supply of affordable childcare providers and spots in Greater Eastern Oregon</i>				
Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Childcare Supply and Sustainability; Workforce Supply	GEODC	GEODC, REV, Education partners, Community Partners, Tribes, Private Industry, Ford Family Foundation, Business Oregon, Nonprofits, Local Government	Short-term	Regional

Strategy: Promote Local Childcare Sustainability				
<i>Develop an advocacy plan for GEODC regional childcare stability</i>				
Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Childcare Supply and Sustainability	GEODC	GEODC, REV, Education partners, Community Partners, Tribes, Private Industry, Ford Family Foundation, Business Oregon, Nonprofits, Local Government	Short-term	Regional



High Priority Strategies, continued

Strategy: Increase Affordable and Available Housing Supply				
<i>GEODC will be an active participant in the Regional Rural Revitalization Consortium (R3) programming to increase affordable and available housing solutions in the Greater Eastern Oregon region.</i>				
Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Affordable and Available Housing	R3, GEODC, Tribes, counties, cities	Business Oregon, Community Housing Partners, Local Government, Private Industry	Long-term	Regional

What is the Regional Rural Revitalization (R3) Consortium?

Oregon House Bill 3138 created the Regional Rural Revitalization Consortium (R3) in Burns, Lakeview, and John Day. This agency facilitates public-private developments and joint efforts between rural Oregon cities to address chronic infrastructure, housing, and government innovation deficiencies. The R3 approach was developed as a regional initiative designed to include other rural Oregon communities facing similar challenges.

R3 is a strategic partnership for GEODC with a mission is to increase workforce housing supply and “support age and place-based housing where older residents can age in place,” according to Nick Green, President of Catalyst Public Policy Advisors LLC. The initiative seeks to create 400-500 new houses in Eastern Oregon over the next 5-10 years, reigniting local construction and trades industries while securing affordable workforce housing and supporting older residents.

Strategy: Increase Visibility and Capacity of GEODC’s Core Services				
<i>Boost the visibility of GEODC’s grant writing and technical assistance services across the region through dedicated marketing and relationship-building tactics.</i>				
Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Technical Assistance and Capacity Support	GEODC	GEODC	Short-term	Regional



Other Strategies

Strategy: Support Workforce Education and Training

Strengthen Eastern Oregon workforce pipeline for key industry needs.

Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Workforce Supply	REV, Education Providers	Eastern Oregon Workforce Board, GEODC, Higher Education Partners, Private Industry, local Workforce Partners, Tribes, Business Oregon, Baker Institute	Long-term	Regional

Strategy: Seek Healthy Food Access

Ensure that rural communities have access to high-quality, low-cost nutrition.

Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Community Health	Local Community Food Partners	GEODC, Community Food Partners, Tribes, Private Industry, Ford Family Foundation, Business Oregon	Long-term	Regional

Strategy: Create Pathways for Increased Technical Assistance and Capacity Support

Work with regional partners to increase the support available to local nonprofit organizations and other key service providers throughout the region.

Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Technical Assistance and Capacity Support	GEODC	Community partners, Tribal partners, Ford Family Foundation, Business Oregon, nonprofit organizations, local government	Long-term	Regional



Evaluation Metrics

GEODC will use these metrics to evaluate progress toward the strategies listed above. Some metrics will be collected annually, but most will be collected twice during the CEDS cycle: once in 2024-2025 and once in 2029.

Metrics (all strategies): The metrics described below are all measures of success that can be measured in a CEDS 5-year plan.

Strategy	Metrics:
<i>Develop a Roadmap to Childcare Solutions</i>	<i>A “how to” roadmap is created by regional collaboration and shared locally in the GEODC region.</i>
<i>Promote Local Childcare Sustainability</i>	<i>A regional sustainable childcare model created and delivered to GEODC-identified lobbyists in 2025.</i>
<i>Increase Affordable and Available Housing Supply</i>	<i>Increase in regional shovel-ready sites. Increase in funded Wastewater/water projects. Increase in planned housing projects regionally.</i>
<i>Enhance Visibility and Capacity of GEODC’s Core Services</i>	<i>More municipalities know how to access GEODC business support services. Increased GEODC partnership in local communities.</i>
<i>Support Workforce Education and Training</i>	<i>Increased number of graduates in targeted workforce training programs from local educational institutions.</i>
<i>Seek Healthy Food Access</i>	<i>Increase in supply of healthy food providers in communities of need.</i>
<i>Create Pathways for Increased Technical Assistance and Capacity Support</i>	<i>Increase in number of services that community partners can access; improvement in sentiment among partners that capacity has grown.</i>

Goal: Regional Collaboration and Rural/Frontier Vitality



Rural and frontier areas face unique barriers to collaboration that must be overcome through sustained relationships and targeted, creative efforts.

Areas of Need

Our community members and partners identified key issue areas that should be addressed to support long-term regional growth. We use the strategies listed below to target many of these areas of need. Like any organization, GEODC must make decisions about where to focus efforts based on expertise and capacity, some areas of need may be addressed by other regional partners.

Areas of Need
Resource-Sharing Networks: When small communities are spread across a large geographic region, forming, and maintaining collaborative relationships can be challenging. Our stakeholders have expressed a persistent need to pool resources and work together on capacity-building.
Regional Coalition for Economic Needs: Communities feel that there should be a regional voice in terms of legislative advocacy of rural and frontier needs in Greater Eastern Oregon
Community Readiness Assessments: Economic development stakeholders can advocate for growth and innovation, but local communities may lack the necessary staffing, readiness, or infrastructure to support change. Regional stakeholders should assess community readiness - both in cultural and formal capacity - before taking on development projects.
Tribal Funding Support: The region’s tribes - the Burns Paiute and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation - have unique economic development needs that often aren’t captured in regional planning efforts.
Training for Local Leadership: Elected officials, local leaders, and the government need educational resources to train them for government positions and community planning.



Goal: Regional Collaboration & Rural/Frontier Vitality

Rural and frontier areas face unique barriers to collaboration that must be overcome through sustained relationships and targeted, creative efforts.

High Priority Strategies

Strategy: Explore Local Planning Capacity through a Regional Planner Circuit Rider Model				
<i>Develop a plan and identify funding for a regional planning circuit rider (local roving, shared technical provider).</i>				
Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Resource-Sharing Networks	GEODC	Business Oregon, community partners, Tribes, private industry, contractors, RCAC, DLCD, DEQ, The Ford Family Foundation, EDA, and local government	Short-term	Regional scope, supporting local communities

Strategy: Increase Regional Resiliency Partnerships and Planning; Develop Regional Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan Templates				
<i>Increase local planning capacity by sharing best practices and templates for common planning documents including Natural Hazards Mitigation Plans (NHMPs).</i>				
Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Resource-Sharing Networks	GEODC	Business Oregon, community partners, Tribes, private industry, local contractors, local governments, RCAC, DLCD, DEQ, Ford Family Foundation, EDA	Short-term	Regional scope, supporting local communities



High Priority Strategies, continued

Strategy: Expand Capacity for Tribal Populations				
<i>GEODC will provide increased staff support for Tribal development needs and recognize the unique tribal capacity needs surrounding economic development.</i>				
Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Resource-Sharing Networks	GEODC	Burns Paiute and CTUIR Tribes	Long-term	Harney and Umatilla counties

Other Strategies



Strategy: Produce a Community Readiness Assessment				
<i>GEODC will develop a community readiness assessment tool for use in community need requests.</i>				
Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Community Readiness Assessments	GEODC	Local government and community partners; IPRE	Short-term	Local Communities

Strategy: Enhance Regional Planner Training				
<i>GEODC will support and promote existing leadership training for Community Planners in partnership with local educational institutions.</i>				
Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Training for Local Leadership	Eastern Oregon University	GEODC, REV, Business Oregon, RCAC, community colleges, private industry, LOC, AOC, Ford Family Foundation	Long-term	Regional, State



Evaluation Metrics

GEODC will use these metrics to evaluate progress toward the strategies listed above. Some metrics will be collected annually, but most will be collected twice during the CEDS cycle: once in 2024-2025 and once in 2029.

Metrics (all strategies): The metrics described below are all measures of success that can be measured in a CEDS 5-year plan.

Strategy	Metrics:
<i>Explore Local Planning Capacity through a Regional Planner Circuit Rider Model</i>	<i>Funding is identified and a process developed; Increased support to local communities.</i>
<i>Increase Regional Resiliency Partnerships and Planning; Develop Regional Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan Templates</i>	<i>More local communities have updated NHMPs in 2025.</i>
<i>Expand Capacity for Tribal Populations</i>	<i>Tribes have increased access to GEODC support and planning circuit rider program.</i>
<i>Produce Community Readiness Assessment</i>	<i>A tool is developed by GEODC.</i>
<i>Enhance Regional Planner Training</i>	<i>Education partnerships are identified and pathways to Planner training are shared.</i>

Goal: Business Support



Businesses are a major engine for economic prosperity and innovation in the region, supporting local culture and livability. GEODC seeks to ease the burden that small businesses face when dealing with start-up, scaling, and maintenance costs.

Areas of Need

Our community members and partners identified key issue areas that should be addressed to support long-term regional growth. We use the strategies listed below to target many of these areas of need. Like any organization, GEODC must make decisions about where to focus efforts based on expertise and capacity, some areas of need may be addressed by other regional partners.

Areas of Need
Small Business Support: Small businesses are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks and need support with administrative duties, access to capital, and other resources.
Emerging Industries: Eastern Oregon has the potential to be a playground for a diverse set of economic activities, both established and innovative, such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicle test sites, Agritourism, high desert biomass, and more.
Main Street Revitalization: A flourishing main street can capture local culture and flair, attract visitors, and support local businesses. Capacity, funding, and resource availability currently pose barriers to downtown development in many localities.
Cultivate Regional Culture of Entrepreneurship: According to our 2023 regional community survey, 80% of respondents support economic development initiatives that “build on the region’s entrepreneurial culture and assets.” Identifying opportunities to strengthen this culture of innovation and hard work will create a more hospitable environment for businesses.



Goal: Business Support

Businesses are a major engine for economic prosperity and innovation in the region, supporting local culture and livability. GEODC seeks to ease the burden that small businesses face when dealing with start-up, scaling, and maintenance costs.

High Priority Strategies

Strategy: Support Local Business				
Provide local small businesses with access to capital, and connection to resources needed to retain a healthy economy in Greater Eastern Oregon.				
Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Small Business Support	GEODC; local, regional and state economic development partners	SBDC, workforce partners, Tribes, private industry, education providers, community partners, Business Oregon, Travel Oregon, Chambers of Commerce, EOVA, local nonprofits, innovation hubs	Short- and mid-term	Both local and regional in scope

Strategy: Expand Culture of Local Entrepreneurism				
Support economic development initiatives that “build on the region’s entrepreneurial culture and assets.” Identifying opportunities to strengthen this culture of innovation and hard work will create a more hospitable environment for businesses.				
Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Cultivate a Regional Culture of Entrepreneurism	GEODC; local, regional and state economic development partners	SBDC, workforce partners, Tribes, private industry, education providers, community partners, Business Oregon, Travel Oregon, Chambers of Commerce, EOVA, local nonprofits, innovation hubs	Long-term	Both local and regional in scope



Other Strategies

Strategy: Embrace Emerging Industry Regionally

Continue to support and promote emerging industries such as UAV in Pendleton and the culture of regional entrepreneurship.

Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Emerging Industries	GEODC; local, regional and state economic development partners; innovation hubs	SBDC, workforce partners, Tribes, private industry, education providers, community partners, Business Oregon, Travel Oregon, Chambers of Commerce, EOVA, local nonprofits	Long-term	Region and local communities

Strategy: Increase Support for Main Street Projects

Support new and existing Main Street Projects, such as Nyssa’s plan to renovate a downtown building, as well as the Pendleton Downtown Association’s project to increase and improve lodging options.

Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Main Street Revitalization	GEODC; local, regional and state economic development Partners; Main Street organizations	SBDC, workforce partners, Tribes, private industry, education providers, community partners, Business Oregon, Travel Oregon, Chambers of Commerce, EOVA, local nonprofits	Long-term	Both local and regional in scope



Evaluation Metrics

GEODC will use these metrics to evaluate progress toward the strategies listed above. Some metrics will be collected annually, but most will be collected twice during the CEDS cycle: once in 2024-2025 and once in 2029.

Metrics (all strategies): The metrics described below are all measures of success that can be measured in a CEDS 5-year plan.

Strategy	Metrics:
<i>Support Small Business</i>	<i>Increased number of businesses retained with support dollars or capacity assistance from GEODC.</i>
<i>Expand Culture of Local Entrepreneurism</i>	<i>Increased number of start-up businesses; more entrepreneurship training programs; increased access to start-up funding in the GEODC region.</i>
<i>Embrace Emerging Industry Regionally</i>	<i>Increased local business access to local entrepreneurial resources and increased/enhanced industry located regionally.</i>
<i>Increase Support for Main Street Projects</i>	<i>Increased funding and/or number of projects in Greater Eastern Oregon. Support the full or partial completion of the Whittier Hotel for Steens Mountain Brewing and Public House, as well as Pendleton Downtown Association’s project to increase and improve lodging options.</i>

Goal: Infrastructure & Resiliency



Robust, well-maintained infrastructure systems promote community resiliency and readiness. Emphasizing the need for utilities, water, and wastewater projects; broadband access; and natural hazards readiness will strengthen our economies and enhance our quality of life across the region.

Overview of Areas of Need

Our community members and partners identified key issue areas that should be addressed to support long-term regional growth. We use the strategies listed below to target many of these areas of need. Like any organization, GEODC must make decisions about where to focus efforts based on expertise and capacity, some areas of need may be addressed by other regional partners.

Areas of Need
Water/Wastewater/Groundwater Infrastructure : Our partners have expressed that many of our local water, wastewater, and groundwater systems are in dire need of replacement or updating. These projects can be cost-prohibitive for municipalities. Also in short supply are locally Certified Drinking Water and Wastewater Operators. Positions are going unfilled in rural and frontier communities and current professionals are retiring.
Water Storage and Reuse: The region’s high-desert climate and reliance on irrigation can create high summertime demand for water; municipalities should pursue creative strategies to store, recover, recycle, and reuse water.
Equitable Broadband Access: While the region has made great progress in expanding broadband coverage over the past decade, many residents - especially in unincorporated areas - still face barriers to reliable internet access.
Basic Utilities: Our region needs new housing, but many areas lack the fundamental utility systems to support development, such as water, power, and sewer systems.
Resiliency Planning: Communities struggle to adequately plan for economic downturns or build resiliency due to a lack of skilled workers, low capacity, and other barriers.
Community NHMP Readiness: Building natural hazard readiness and community resiliency lies at the forefront of economic development and can be supported through the creation and maintenance of resilience planning tools, such as Natural Hazards Mitigation Plans, to help prepare for future shocks or disruptions.



Goal: Infrastructure & Resiliency

Robust, well-maintained infrastructure systems promote community resiliency and readiness. Emphasizing the need for utilities, water, and wastewater projects; broadband access; and natural hazards readiness will strengthen our economies and enhance our quality of life across the region.

High Priority Strategies

Strategy: Support Local Aquifer, Reuse, and Water Storage Projects through CEDS Narrative and a Working Group				
<i>Continue CEDS Infrastructure Working Group to provide a collaboration place to share local best practices and coordination of aquifer, reuse, and storage needs and projects.</i>				
Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/ Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Water/Wastewater/ Groundwater Infrastructure; Resiliency Planning; Water Storage and Reuse	GEODC	Business Oregon, OHA Drinking Water Services, EDA, DEQ, DLCD, GEODC, community partners, Tribes, private industry, and local municipalities	Short-term	Region

Strategy: Explore Operator Circuit Rider Cooperative in the GEODC Region				
<i>Develop a local model for a regional, roving Certified Drinking Water/ Wastewater Operator Circuit Rider (shared, contracted technical capacity provider).</i>				
Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/ Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Water/Wastewater/ Groundwater Infrastructure; Resiliency Planning	GEODC	Business Oregon, OHA Drinking Water Services, EDA, DEQ, DLCD, GEODC, community partners, Tribes, private industry, and local municipalities	Short-term	Region

Chapter 5: CEDS Action Plan

Strategy: Support Enhancement of the 2023 RCAC Technical Assistance Resource Guide

Support further refinement of the 2023 [Rural Community Assistance Corporation \(RCAC\) Resource Guide](#) to deepen technical assistance information provided to capacity-constrained rural and frontier planners.

Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Water/Wastewater/ Groundwater Infrastructure; Resiliency Planning	RCAC	GEODC, Business Oregon, EDA, DEQ, DLCD, GEODC, Ford Family Foundation, community partners, local Emergency Managers, Tribes, private industry, and local municipalities	Short-term	Region

Other Strategies



Strategy: Increase Certified Drinking Water and Wastewater Operator Education in the GEODC Region

Support local workforce development of Certified Drinking Water/Wastewater Operators through education institutions in Eastern Oregon.

Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Water/Wastewater/ Groundwater Infrastructure; Resiliency Planning	REV and other higher education partners in Eastern Oregon	Higher education partners, workforce partners, economic development partners, GEODC, community partners, Tribes, private industry, and local municipalities	Long-term	Region



Other Strategies, continued

Strategy: Expand Broadband Access in the GEODC Region				
<i>Support efforts to expand broadband fiber and redundancy in Gilliam, Harney, Morrow, and Wheeler counties.</i>				
Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Equitable Broadband Access	Business Oregon, local governments, R3 Consortium	GEODC, community partners, local internet service providers, Tribes, private industry, and local municipalities	Long-term	Region

Strategy: Expand Regional Resiliency Planning				
<i>Develop NHMP templates to help rural and frontier municipalities complete/ update NHMP plans.</i>				
Area of Need	Lead(s)	Partners/Key Players	Timeline	Geography
Resiliency Planning	Local and Tribal governments	GEODC, state and federal governments, R3 Consortium	Long-term	Region



Evaluation Metrics

GEODC will use these metrics to evaluate progress toward the strategies listed above. Some metrics will be collected annually, but most will be collected twice during the CEDS cycle: once in 2024-2025 and once in 2029.

Metrics (all strategies): The metrics described below are all measures of success that can be measured in a CEDS 5-year plan.

Strategy	Metrics:
Support Local Aquifer, Reuse, and Water Storage Projects through CEDS Narrative and a Working Group	More collaboration is happening in the region around water use, reuse, and storage. Best practices are shared more widely in the region. A process is developed for season water storage.
Explore Operator Circuit Rider Cooperative in GEODC’s Region	A plan to support a water circuit rider is established, and a sustainable funding plan is in place. Increase in water/wastewater projects in the region.
Enhance the RCAC Technical Assistance Guide	Funding is secured to enhance the guide. More technical assistance resources have been added to the 2023 guide.
Increase Certified Water Operator Education in GEODC’s Region	The education program is established. Educational entities are enrolling students locally.
Expand Regional Broadband Access	Increased funds allocated to local municipalities in the GEODC region for broadband projects.
Expand Regional Resiliency Planning	More cities have NHMPS in Greater Eastern Oregon. Local plans are updated.

Regional Priority Projects

In 2023 and 2024, the Institute for Policy Research and Engagement sent out a link to all GEODC county emergency managers and local leaders requesting an inventory of priority projects for the CEDS process. Thirty-six projects were added by local municipalities. The list will be stored and maintained by GEODC, as it is a living document, subject to change as needs arise. Contact Tory Stinnett, GEODC Deputy Director, if you would like to make additions to this list.



Bull in Harney County (photo provided by GEODC)



Pastureland in Harney County (photo provided by GEODC)



Tree farm near Boardman (Oregon Scenic Images)

Other Resources

Use the links below to access several supporting documents that informed the creation of the CEDS. These documents provide additional context about demographic and industry factors driving economic development in Eastern Oregon.

[COVID-19 Pandemic Report](#)

[2023 GEODC CEDS Community Survey](#)

[2023 Oregon Employment Dept. Eastern Oregon Workforce Board Report](#)

[Oregon Regional Competitive Industries Report \(for Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla and Wheeler Counties\)](#)

[2018 Business Oregon Manufacturing Report](#)

[Travel Oregon Eastern Oregon Visitor Profile](#)

In addition, use the following links to find the webpages of many key partners and collaborators that helped shape this CEDS document. This is not an exhaustive list.

[Business Oregon](#)

[Eastern Oregon Workforce Board \(EOWB\)](#)

[Eastern Oregon Visitors Association \(EOVA\)](#)

[EUVALCREE](#)

[The Ford Family Foundation](#)

[Harney Hub](#)

[High Desert Partnership](#)

[Oregon Employment Department](#)

[Rural Community Assistance Corporation \(RCAC\)](#)