

Chapter 17 The Brownsville Community Resource Unit

Section One: Baseline Social and Economic Information

A. Community Description

Geographic Features

The Brownsville Community Resource Unit comprises the lower watershed of the Calapooia River. It includes the communities of Brownsville, Halsey and Shedd. The map of this area is shown in Figure 51.

Settlement Patterns

Brownsville was incorporated in 1876 but was among the first communities settled in Oregon. Early settlement occurred because of the attraction of lush grasses along the Calapooia River and the area had the first ferry built in Linn County. After a dam was constructed three miles upriver and a ditch, a series of facilities made use of the water resources—a grist mill, a woolen mill (for nearly a century), a sawmill, furniture factory and a tannery were established on the north side of the river (Linn County Museum). Brownsville has a strong agricultural background

Until the bridge went in 1939, Brownsville used to be divided into north and south, with the north developing and south not. To this day, the division is still alive with the southerners feeling like they do not get enough attention from the local paper.

Brownsville had 1293 people in 1990 and 1449 in 2000, an increase of 11% (Census Data, Table Four).

Figure 51
Map of the Brownsville Community Resource Unit

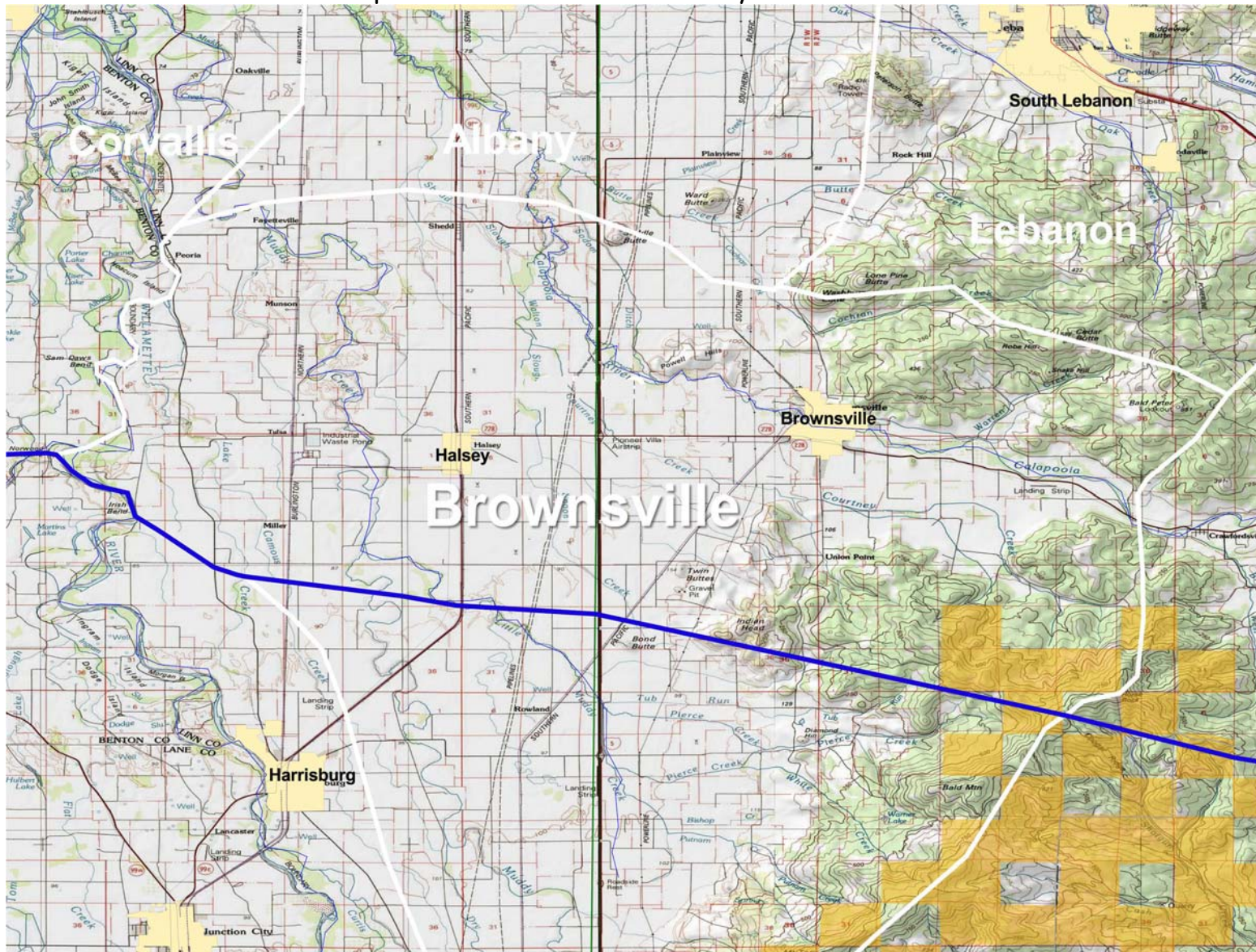


Figure 52
The Linn County Museum in Brownsville, Replete with Boxcars



Brownsville was described as a blue-collar working class town where “people care about each other and they care about the town.” It was also described as a bedroom community, especially for Corvallis but also Eugene, Albany and Salem.

“We came here because we yearned to have animals and grow vegetables.”

Settlement patterns described by residents include the tendency of people who were raised in the community to come back as mid-life adults. A recent pattern is for people who move away come back to Brownsville for their final days, appreciating the extended family that remains in town.

The entities by-pass the communities of this unit—the mainline railroad, Highway 99, and most recently, Interstate 5. As a result, the Brownsville unit remains one of the least developed areas in the Willamette Valley.

Publics

Brownsville has a range of people that make up the community including commuters, blue-collar workers, professionals, artists, agriculturalists, and "little pockets of intellectual stratum" like authors, radio personalities, and a maker of porcelain figurines.

Traditional people, those who have lived and worked in the community for a long time, tend to be conservative. There are still a number of pro-logging folks around, upset by the spotted owl decisions and the changes they brought.

Newer people tend to be more liberal, educated, professional in their employment, and computer literate. Newcomers are accused of trying to change things.

"We get people in town who come here and like our little town, but who often say, 'If you only had this or that, then it would be perfect.' These folks miss the point."

A large Mennonite community, mostly grass-seed farmers, lives in the area.

Networks

See Section Two.

Work Routines

Mills have been part of Brownsville history from the beginning, with early settlers building flour mills to service the area. The Brownsville Woolen Mills was a presence in the community for nearly a century, providing employment and valley wool in the area until it was destroyed by fire in 1955. The lumber mill was the first economic force that came to exist in Brownsville.

This area is diverse but rural in its activities—logging, farming, and livestock raising. Most of the ranches in the area are hobby operations oriented to horses.

James River has a paper plant in Halsey that employs 600 people. The wood products mills in Lebanon and Sweet Home, as well as LinnGear, a manufacturer of gears and sprockets in Lebanon, employ several hundred people, including Brownsville residents. The Georgia Pacific facility in Halsey employs 437 people.

The economic level of families is dropping, according to local officials.

Many small local businesses still make up the economic base of the community.

Support Services

"Parents and Pals" is a "wonderful" support group for parents and a play group for pre-schoolers. Kids and youth are an active topic of conversation and is a primary reason why people say they like the community.

"Yeah, I lent my car to the kids and they brought it back 3 days later." [laughter from all]

Informal caretaking is a strong element of community life.

"After the windstorm of February 7, _____ and a friend drove around with a chainsaw, making sure people's driveways were open."

"_____ has Hot Wheels races for the kids upstairs in his shop. Kids love it."

Clubs in Brownsville include a garden club, a croquet club, a women's study group, a poker group (Men's Redistributing Wealth Club), and a cronies group. "Pioneer Picnic is Oregon's oldest continuing celebration," states the Brownsville web site. It was first held in Crawfordsville in 1887, and it has been held in Brownsville ever since. Local events also include a women's sports' event each winter. Linn County Museum operates in the town, displaying pioneer photos and artifacts in four railroad boxcars. "Sharing Hands" is a thrift store and food bank for lower income residents.

Recreational Activities

See Section Three.

B. Themes Related to Community Life

Themes

1. "The people here are genuine."

"You can go to the Post Office in your 'jammies' and no one cares."

"I love the sense of community. I can see the boundary and edges in my mind. It's real."

2. "Everybody knows everybody." Many residents referred to the efforts people make to get to know each other. It is clear that "neighboring" is a key community value. In one group conversation, a 5th generation resident stated,

"Neighbors all know their neighbors, with the exception of a guy who moved across from my farm about 7 years ago. I went to introduce myself, took some food, but they wanted nothing to do with me. They keep to themselves."

After the gentleman said this, a woman jumped in and said,

"Yeah, I have one of those, too. Everyone knows everyone except for them."

3. "We're still the same." Brownsville people have a reputation for valuing the fact that the community has looked the same for years, that "it's like stepping back in time." Most business buildings were constructed in the early 1900s and even earlier. The town also has many historic homes that are featured in the promotional material put out by the town. The movie, "Stand by Me" was filmed in Brownsville, and symbolizes the nostalgic image people have of the town.

Section Two: Communication Strategies

A. Informal Networks and Communication

"It's so small, communication happens all the time, in small storefronts and on the street."

Gathering Places

Saddle Butte Coffee Shop

Corner Café

The pharmacy

Brownsville Saloon, visited on weekends by "Up-scale bicyclists and motorcyclists."

The Calapooia River, Mill Race and Pioneer Park are favorite spots for locals.

The gym

The Post Office, "everybody has a PO box", with bulletin board

Key Community Contacts

The Brownsville Fire Department is a key communication method used in the community.

B. Formal Groups and Communication

Figure 53
Organizations With Interest in Public Lands in the
Brownsville Area

Organization	Contact Information	Mission
Calapooia Watershed Council	Peter Jensen Meets Brownsville Library	Watershed restoration

Section Three: The Public Lands Perspective

A. Uses of and Orientation to Public Lands

People in Brownsville are said to do lots of hiking, skiing, hunting, fishing, canoeing, and kayaking. For weekend get-aways, people go to the campgrounds of the Sweet Home Ranger District. The Willamette River is used for boating, fishing, and other recreational activities. The civic centers of the nearby urban areas are also valued and used by residents.

B. Citizen Issues Related to Natural Resource Management

Citizen Issues

Recreation

"People don't like the Recreation Fee Demo. It's confusing and inconvenient. It is annoying when you get to a site only to find out that you need a permit."

"People don't mind paying the fees—it's just the lack of information about how to do it."

Forest Management

"The Forest Service needs to hire more people to do the specialty wood products because that is going to be the way of the future. The average Joe cannot afford to pay for the required insurance. The permit requirements for harvesting are too stiff." [Owner of specialty wood shop]

C. Management Opportunities

This is still a very traditional area. The Forest Service can strengthen its role with the Watershed Council and recruit labor from this area for forest restoration work.

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