

Chapter 23 Springfield Community Resource Unit

Section One: Baseline Social and Economic Information

A. Community Description

Geographic Features

The Springfield Community Resource Unit consists of the metropolitan area of Springfield. It is bordered on the north by the beginning of the Mohawk Valley as well as BLM and Forest Service land a few miles from town, on the west by Interstate 5, a common division between Eugene and Springfield, on the south between city limits and Mount Pisgah, and on the east just beyond the neighborhood of Thurston. Figure 67 shows a map of the area.

Settlement Patterns

The City of Springfield originally began in 1849 when the Briggs family and other overland settlers started farming next to a spring. The settlement was incorporated in 1885. It is situated between two of Oregon's finest rivers—the Willamette and the McKenzie—before they join together a few miles north of the city. Springfield is a linear community, stretched out east to west but not very wide north and south. Historical settlement followed the entry into the McKenzie River Valley and today reflects the long standing ties between Springfield and the upriver areas. Long-timers consider Thurston, at the eastern end of the area, to be a separate community from Springfield, but today no separation exists physically, and practically speaking, it is one city.

"You drive and you drive and forget that you're still in Springfield."

Springfield's population was 46,196 in 1990 and 52,864 in 2000, an increase of 13% (Census Data, Table Seven). The population today is five times what it was in 1950.

Figure 67
Map of the Springfield Community Resource Unit

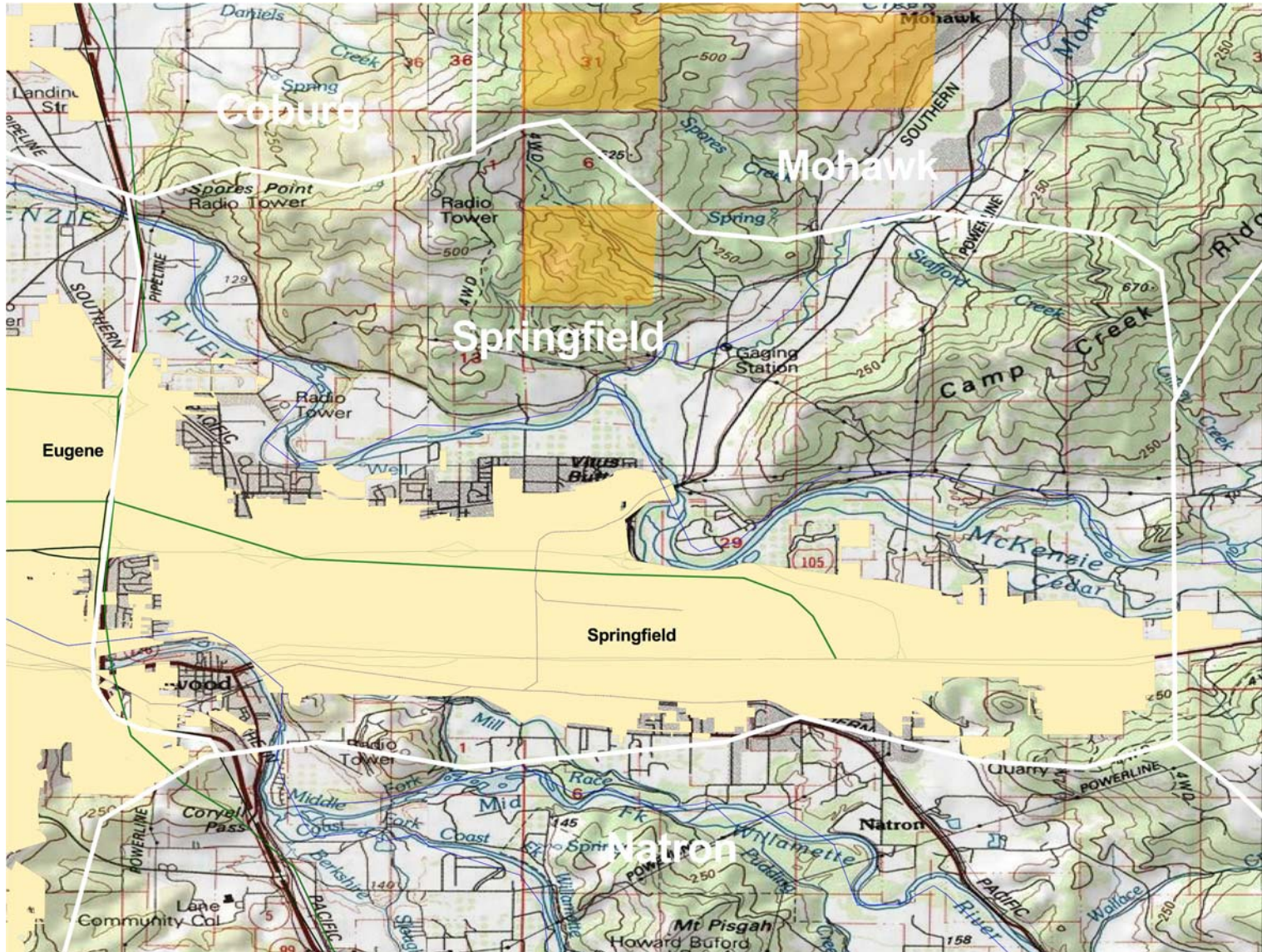
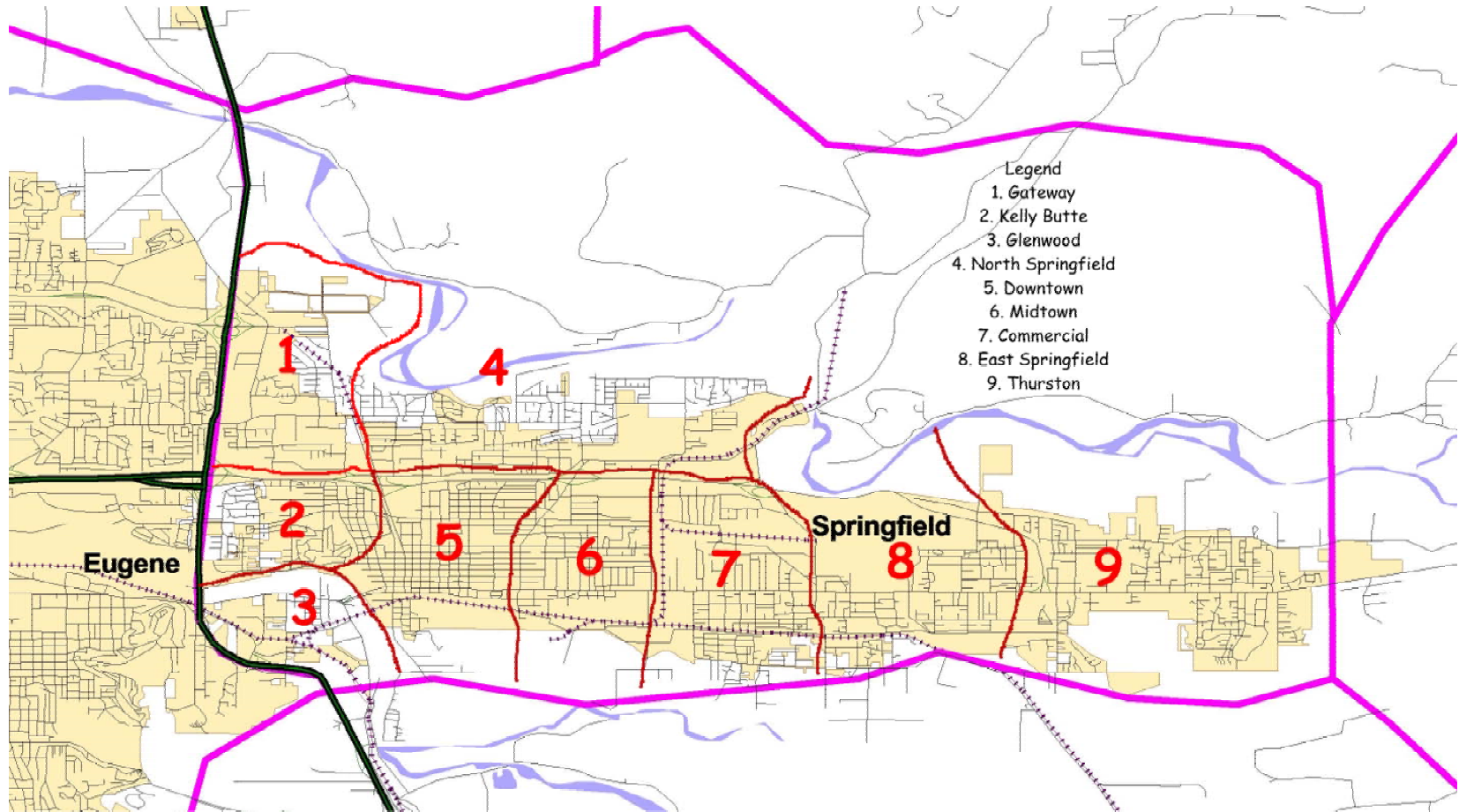


Figure 68
Map of Springfield Showing Neighborhood Resource Units



The neighborhoods of Springfield are shown in Figure 68. The Gateway, or Game Farm, area (Area 1, Figure 68) hosts a large concentration of lodging units, the largest shopping mall in the city, as well as a number of manufacturing facilities associated with the nearby Sony Disc Manufacturing plant. The area has many apartment complexes, many looking quite run-down. Residents talked about the changes created in Springfield as these numerous complexes were developed.

"These low income areas brought in crime and vandalism. Just in the last 5 or 6 years, things really began to change."

Downtown Springfield (Area 5) is an historic district, with many historical sites, museums, art galleries, antique stores and specialty shops, interspersed with professional offices, clinics and diners. Several art murals adorn older buildings.

North Springfield (Area 4) is comprised of middle-income single-family dwellings. Many areas within this neighborhood are well established with landscaping and well cared for houses. There are many areas without sidewalks and the streets are uneven which gives the impression that the neighborhoods were not fully planned out. Many recreational "toys" fill this area, especially recreational vehicles, most of which looked to be in good working condition.

East Springfield consists of many low income, small family dwellings, some with gravel cul-de-sacs, and some new, small modular homes. The industrial area is located here and contains Kingsford Charcoal and Sierra Pine/Weyerhaeuser facilities.

Growth is occurring mostly in the east, especially south of the McKenzie Highway and somewhat in the Gateway area.

"When I was a kid, my grandma used to know everyone in the neighborhood, but now she doesn't know anyone."

Figure 69
View of Willamette River and Mural from Springfield's Island Park



Publics

Springfield was born out of agriculture and timber. As the area has urbanized, and particularly with the downturn in timber production over the last two decades, these publics are less dominant today but still evident.

The Hispanic population continues to grow in absolute numbers and in proportion to the total population. They are located in clusters in specific locations in the community. They have become active in their own businesses in recent years. The census reveals that the Hispanic population increased 64% in the last decade, from 1305 to 3651 people (Table Seven).

Newcomers are moving to Springfield and are helping to fill the void of dislocated forest products workers. They are attracted by a lower cost of living and by a better quality of life. Many are still coming from California and Arizona. Many are retired but not all. Typically, out-of-state migrants

are drawn to Eugene because of its reputation for livability and "green" politics and then people trickle over to Springfield. Immigrants, according to local realtors, do not ask about industry, but worry about constant rain, and want safe areas. Despite Springfield's reputation in the area as not being safe, many out-of-state people believe it is a safe city and are attracted to it for that reason.

"Springfield benefits from Eugene's reputation."

"Springfield/Eugene is a laid back community. This is attractive to people." [Springfield realtor]

Networks

See Section Two.

Work Routines

Forest products facilities were among the first industrial facilities located in Springfield. The Southern Pacific Railroad Company built its depot in 1991. In 1902, the Booth-Kelly Lumber Company built an electric mill near the depot, after which the population surged to 4900 by 1914, as settlers were attracted to the booming timber industry. The proximity of the railroad and the high quality of local timber secured Springfield's destiny as a timber town. Timber production, as elsewhere in the state, really took off after World War II, as returning GIs fueled a housing boom.

The major employers in Springfield in 2000, with number of employees listed, are:

Springfield School District 19, education	1,374
McKenzie-Willamette Hospital	1,150
Symantec	850
Weyerhaeuser Company	511
City of Springfield	385
Rosboro Lumber	350
WalMart	340
Sony Disc Manufacturing, optical discs	276

Fred Meyer	250
Springfield Forest Products	194
(Source: Springfield Chamber of Commerce, March 2002.)	

As the above list attests, Springfield's economy is becoming more diverse. While in 1978, lumber and wood manufacturing comprised 81% of all manufacturing, the figure decreased to 45% by 1998. Non-manufacturing employment grew from 66% to 81% of total covered employment between 1978 and 1998, which is consistent with state and national trends (Springfield Environmental Scan, Lane Council of Governments, December, 2001). The current strengths in the economy are high-tech, forest products, and retail and commercial services.

In the past year, Springfield has lost a significant number of living wage jobs. Weyerhaeuser, McKenzie Forest Products, the hospital and several other manufacturing plants have downsized. The lack of jobs was a frequent topic of conversation during fieldwork.

Springfield is perceived by many people to be a working person's town. Despite the obvious development improvements and the successful efforts to diversify the town's economy, Springfield is still a working town. Many of the existing jobs are still timber related and those requiring little education. In addition, housing is oriented to blue collar workers and is among the most affordable in the area. Residents made a number of observations about these conditions:

- Springfield people have a reputation of having a strong work ethic. Residents place high value on being productive and hard working.
- Residents commonly commented that the economy is in a low spot, with few jobs available and many layoffs occurring. Many of the working taverns were busy with people in the middle of the afternoon.
- Many workers stated that they rely on the busses and JKA observed that they always seemed busy.

- Informal caretaking appears strong in this population. Exchanges of favors were witnessed on a routine basis—rides in cars, gas money, bus passes, food and other items.
- While the depressed job market has stressed the existing workforce, the affordable housing of the area has attracted many low income people that then have few job prospects. A blending of the “working poor” and the “welfare poor”, distinct categories in the past, may be occurring.
- The low income population is associated with drug and alcohol use.

Some comments from residents include:

“My husband and I were laid off at Weyerhaeuser in the mid-eighties. I went back to school and got trained to operate a bus. I know five other drivers that also worked in the timber industry.”

“I was laid off at McKenzie Forest Products a few weeks ago and I've been scrambling for work ever since. I've gone through every 'temp' agency in town. Now I'm going door to door asking people if they need yard work done.”

“I don't like living in my trailer park. It's really loud. There are always ambulances and police around. Too many fights. Cops always hassle you there, too.”

“These are bad times. There aren't many jobs out there. My mom and her friends were recently laid off from their mill jobs.”

“I've been clean for forty days, but now I'm doing meth again. If you drink vinegar before the piss test, probation won't find out.”

Springfield has a great number of second hand stores. A fair number has opened in the recent past. Some residents felt that this is linked to lower income people who sell basic necessities to get by, increased drug activity, or movement of stolen goods.

"You can't get jobs, and if you do, they don't pay anything."

"With all the layoffs and the mill shutting down, there has been a constant supply of good hard workers showing up at 5:00 a.m., looking for work." [Temporary labor agency].

"Everyone is stealing stuff because the police don't do anything. I'll smash the guy who stole my gun."

A few business people and city officials pointed to the emerging importance of people making a living on the Internet, what the literature calls "modem cowboys."

"Thanks to the Internet, people can move anywhere and work from home."

A number of Hispanic businesses are seen scattered throughout the community, primarily eateries and markets. Many of these are new—city officials and residents said the emergence of Hispanic businesses is recent and welcome. Springfield also has a great many Hispanics operating businesses *ad hoc*, out of their car, home, or backpack. The extent of these operations is not known.

Support Services

Springfield's Willamalane Park and Recreation District, begun in 1944, is one of the oldest park and recreation districts in the state. It manages 680 acres of land in 31 park sites and has a wide range of open spaces. It has 5 recreation activity centers located throughout the City. It is also involved in outdoor education (see below).

The Springfield Utility Board provides water and electricity to city residents and reports that existing and planned facilities are adequate to meet future needs. (Southern Willamette Valley, A Profile of the Southern Willamette Valley Region, Region 2050 and Lane Council of Governments, April, 2001).

The Emerald Empire Art Association has been around since 1974. They bought an office space downtown as a step toward reviving downtown, and in April they moved into a huge three story historic building (the Gerlach building of 1909, at 5th and Main). Members have been renovating the building for some time and more work is needed. All members of the board are artists. The group received \$300,000 in revitalization money, a good part of it from Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Art Association is also involved in collaboration projects with the Springfield Museum.

The Springfield Museum is beginning to take a more active role in the community, networking with groups that they have not dealt with in the past. For example, they are considering hosting an art display in the museum and, in return, the art group will host a museum exhibit in its own building.

Another revitalization effort has been the purchase of the McKenzie Theater by a Springfield development group. It met every week for three years to plan for the restoration of the theatre. Contracts for the redevelopment have been let. The goal is to make it a community theatre.

The Lane Transit District is planning a new downtown transit station. In lieu of light rail, Eugene and Springfield have begun a Rapid Transit System, with support of federal dollars, the first leg of which will connect downtown Springfield with the Gateway area.

The City of Springfield has high-speed broadband Internet access, which officials believe has stimulate economic activity for residents.

The Cities of Eugene and Springfield, in conjunction with Lane County, developed a five-year strategic plan in 2000 for dealing with housing, homeless and community development. The plan permits both cities to receive HUD CDBG (Community Development Block Grants) monies to implement the plan. The plan revealed significant community needs in these areas, despite a fairly robust economy. In particular, the "cost burden" for renters is a major housing problem created by rising costs and low wage jobs.

Team Springfield is a city initiative comprised of local public service agencies, whose purpose is to share resources and develop joint community goals.

Springfield has been enterprising in using historic buildings. The Springfield Chamber of Commerce is located in the Springfield Railroad Depot, built in 1891. The City went through a massive community involvement effort to move the building and renovate it by 1990. The Springfield Museum and Main Street Gallery is located in the 1911 Oregon Power Company substation in downtown.

The McKenzie Sports Complex is planned for the Springfield Sports Center, a planned multi-use athletic facility.

City programs have been established to assist Hispanic families in integrating into the community. Business support, home buying, and cultural competency training on the part of the police, have all been undertaken.

With Springfield's depressed labor market, social service agencies reported increased demand for their services. Adult and Family Services stated, for example, that they have recently seen people who have never used their services coming into the office. Many people were established in the community with homes and had been working living wage jobs. They were used to a certain lifestyle. The benefits they receive from AFS are far below what they need to keep their level of living.

Springfield Filbert Festival occurs in August in Island Park, with entertainment, boating and Native American dancing. The festival builds off the historic growing of filberts in the area and includes the Dorris Ranch Living History Farm, begun in 1892 by the Dorris family along the Willamette River and now run as a Willamalane Park and Recreation facility with camps and other events. Other festivals include the Ukrainian Day Festival and Springfield Holly Days.

Recreational Activities

See Section Three.

B. Trends, Themes and Citizen Issues Related to Community Life

Trends

Downtown revitalization has been occurring steadily for the last five years. Residents hope that existing efforts will be sufficient to make downtown viable again.

Many Hispanics are moving into Springfield from Eugene, progressing from the very poorest of Eugene areas into the modest housing areas of Springfield. Hispanics are starting many small businesses in the community.

Newcomers are attracted by a lower cost-of living, especially housing.

Themes

"It used to be a logging town but now everybody's either retrained or gone."

"People don't want to leave the area."

"There's a strong work ethic in this community."

"People take care of each other around here."

"Springfield loves to congregate, to meet together."

"Sometimes Springfield people say they're from Eugene, but you'd never catch a Eugene person saying they're from Springfield."

Citizen Issues Related to Community Life

Economy

"Lack of a job market is the biggest challenge for Springfield."

"We can't keep business here."

"The downtown revitalization project needs support. The City has done well diversifying the economy but revitalization efforts need new energy to keep the momentum going."

Crime and Safety

"I got a job at Taco Bell and had to take a drug test. I was clean for 60 days, so nothing showed up."

"It's not safe here. There aren't enough cops and they suck." [Two young women]

"Target catches at least two shoplifters a day. Everybody knows not to park on that side of the mall."

"I had to leave Springfield when I was in high school to get away from the bad influences. All of my friends have been to jail or are in jail now."

Section Two: Communication Strategies

A. Informal Networks and Communication

Gathering Places

Rose's Diner on A Street. Like many restaurants in Springfield, it is decked out in 1950s décor. Professional and retired people gather there.

The Pump Café, 7th and Main, locals of all ages, many personal connections between patrons.

Fins Drive In, 41st and Main, an older establishment; elderly long-timers;

McKenzie Café, east Springfield, local regulars, especially on Saturday and Sunday mornings.

B. Formal Groups and Communication

Figure 70
Organizations With Interest in Public Lands in the Springfield Area

Organization	Address, Contact & Phone Number	Mission
Teen Center Willamalane Parks and Recreation District	Geoff Norman (541) 736-4540	Promotes an active population, especially with children and youth
Springfield Chamber of Commerce	Dan Egan 101 S. A St. Springfield, OR 97477 (746-1651)	Jobs and business development
Springfield Museum and Interpretive Center	Kathy Johnson (? 386) 590 Main 726-2300	
Eugene-Springfield Metropolitan Partnership	P.O. Box 10398 Eugene, Oregon 97401 (541) 686-2325 www.ESMP.com	Leads and coordinates economic development in the metro area

McKenzie Watershed Council	Jim Thrailkill P.O. Box 53 Springfield, OR 97339 (541) 687-9076 jimt@pond.net	Watershed restoration
Mohawk Watershed Council	Pally Kohl 91217 Donna Rd. Springfield, OR 97478 (541) 744-9614 kohl@pacinfo.com	Watershed restoration
Lane Council of Governments	Steve Gordon Natural Resource Specialist 99 E. Broadway, Suite 400 Eugene, OR 97401 (541) 682-4283	Regional planning and coordination; water quality and quantity; air quality

Section Three: The Public Lands Perspective

A. Uses of and Orientation to Public Lands

Springfield residents generally are more oriented to the mountains than the ocean. Their history was born of working in the woods and through ties to the McKenzie and Middle Fork watersheds.

The rivers become fishable when they become lower and clearer. That's when local supply stores get business when there is not a recession.

"The economy is sour and no one has jobs, so how are they going to buy fishing and hunting gear?"

Mountain biking is mainly a summer activity. People ride on the McKenzie trail and all along Highway 58 to Oakridge. The Flat Tire Festival outside of Oakridge is a popular event.

An assisted living facility, attracting residents mainly from Eugene and Springfield, reported that they take residents in a sixty-mile radius from Springfield. McKenzie is a favored location, and generally uncrowded places are preferred. The activities director makes reservations ahead of time with the Forest Service.

In the summer, Springfield's Parks and Recreation Department offers a teen challenge camp. It is outdoor-oriented and one day of the week is a field trip to the mountains or the coast, and one day is a volunteer/community service day. In the past, they have mended fences for a horse ranch and done riparian work on the McKenzie River. It is a ten week long program for 28 underprivileged kids. It is quite popular.

Planning for metropolitan regional parks and open space (Eugene and Springfield) is coordinated through the Lane Council of Governments, which is fostering development of a vision and acquisition strategies for identified areas.

Springfield has received several Forest Service grants. The most prominent one was a \$2 million grant for the Booth Kelly building. Springfield has also received Forest Service monies to purchase land as part of the Forest Legacy program, which fits into the Open Space Initiative. The initiative is a new project to protect rivers, ridges, and other natural assets between Springfield and Eugene. The large parcel of land dedicated to this project lies between the two communities.

In 2001, the City of Springfield applied for a \$600,000 grant through the USDA State and Private Forestry Economic Action Program to explore the possibility of creating a "Natural Resources Campus" of federal, state, and local offices engaged in natural resource management. The idea is to create a "one-stop citizen-centered" facility to improve citizen access, interagency coordination, and agency objectives (Natural Resources Campus Technical Study [NRCTS] for Springfield, Oregon, City of Springfield, February, 2001).

"We have not seen any real commitment by the Forest Service. Right now it's just talk."

B. Citizen Issues Related to Natural Resource Management

Citizen Issues

General

"I've never known a Forest Service person to be involved in this community, except in an official capacity. How come they are not members of the Chamber or some of the civic organizations?" [City official]

Outdoor Education

"It would be nice to see the Forest Service work with the kids on a two or three week project so they could see a beginning and ending." [Springfield Parks and Recreation Department staff]

Recreation

"In the winter, there are too many fallen trees on the trails. Not too many people mountain bike in the winter, though!"

"It's awful that you have to pay to basically play in your backyard now." [Referring to the Northwest trail pass]

"The lower McKenzie is used less by fishermen than the upper. People might enjoy the experience more if they weren't so bunched up."

"There are plans to add a high speed chair lift and to develop the mountain for mountain biking in the summer up at Willamette Pass. They'll have to cut some trees to do it, so it likely to take a lot of years to get approval. If the Forest Service could speed up its decision making process, it would sure help some of these communities." [City official]

Forest Management

"I don't like to see clearcuts along the road. I never saw that as a kid."

"The trees are disappearing from areas that the public can easily see. When we logged, it was in remote areas." [A group of retired people]

"Logging should not be stopped completely, especially the brown and down trees. Blown trees are a waste of natural resource if they are left on the ground."

"What is the Forest Service doing if even the downed trees are not being cut?"

Forest Service Location

The mayor of Springfield reported positive feedback from the public during open events in which the concept of the Natural Resources Campus was described. "I'm glad you're here and looking for ways for the Forest Service to partner with the City," he said. He described

the City as waiting for the “dust to settle” on the move of the federal courthouse to Springfield, which is now apparently underway.

“The Forest Service presence in Springfield would help facilitate the City’s redevelopment and its renewed focus toward the river. Although the Forest Service has expressed little interest in education, we hope an interpretive center of some kind would be provided for visitors.” [Springfield mayor]

C. Management Opportunities

The Forest Service could respond to urban interests in outdoor education. Springfield has existing programs with which coordination could occur.

City officials indirectly suggested that Forest Service personnel involve themselves more in civic organizations in the community. Such involvement would be a great way to understand community interests independent of more formal settings. If the Natural Resource Campus idea develops, this kind of engagement is essential.

The Willamette Forest Discovery Team should investigate any potential sites for a Natural Resource Campus. Local stories about the parcels, prior uses, and ideas from citizens about the structuring of the facility should be identified prior to any public hearings. Moreover, key networks and caretakers should be identified early. Public statements about the facility should reflect the cultural language picked up in discovery and should include responses to any citizen issues. The goal should be to integrate the facility with its surroundings and with current City direction, so that it is seen as a contribution and not as an intrusion.

The final chapter of this report contains recommendations for the Willamette Forest to consider in creating better and wider ties with its urban areas.

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