

Former lumber town rides digital wave to a comeback

The digital revolution gives Prineville a second chance

By **ANDREW SELSKY**
Associated Press

PRINEVILLE — It was not long ago that Crook County had five major lumber mills. Timber was king, and the rural Oregon county was the nation's top producer of ponderosa lumber.

But amid restrictions on harvesting from federal lands, logging started to free-fall around 1990. The county's mills began closing. The global recession hit a few years later. Unemployment soared to around 20 percent, the highest in Oregon.

"We had the sawmills close, and then the bottom dropped out of the economy. So, kick us when we're down," said Donna Barnes, Ochoco Lumber Co. accounting manager.

Now, the digital revolution is providing Crook County and its main town, Prineville, with a second chance.

Fifteen years ago, Facebook came looking for a site for its first wholly owned data center. The executives liked that the chilly night air at 3,200 feet above sea level could cool the servers, cheaply and in an eco-friendly way. They liked the 15-year abatement on property taxes, and the fact there was room to grow.

The California-based company completed a 300,000-square-foot data center in 2011. Within months, it began building a second. Facebook is now building a third on a bluff 400 feet above Prineville. Apple followed suit, and officials recently announced it will also build its third data center in the town of about 9,000.

The future looks sunnier. Unemployment is down to 6.8 percent.



Ochoco Lumber Co. employee Debbie Noland looks at an undated aerial photo of the lumber mill, which closed in 2001, in Prineville.

'Pendulum swings'

"We were overlogging in the '60s, and now we've been curbed," Prineville Mayor Betty Roppe said. "The pendulum swings the other way. And so we're trying to diversify jobs."

Logging is ingrained in Oregon's culture. A statue of an ax-wielding pioneer tops the state Capitol. Oregonians' favorite local novel is Ken Kesey's "Sometimes a Great Notion," about a logging family. Oregon's professional soccer team is the Portland Timbers, its logo a double-bladed ax over a forest-green background.

But the timber troubles that hit Crook County also affected much of Oregon and the West.

By September 2014, the pendulum had swung so far that Oregon's high-tech industry accounted for the same number of workers and share of wages as the forest sector did in the 1970s, the state Office of Economic Analysis

noted in a report. Most of Oregon's nearly 100,000 high-tech jobs are clustered in the "Silicon Forest" around Portland, said Joshua Lehner, an economist with the office.

That makes Prineville all the more remarkable. The town is a three-hour drive from Portland and light years from its liberal, hipster culture. Locals often wear cowboy hats and boots, not beanies and Birkenstocks.

Other former mill towns also have sought economic alternatives, with varying success. To create a high-tech outpost in the high desert, Prineville and Crook County leaders showed a willingness to cut through red tape.

"Our staff here are really good at bending over backward to help get things permitted," Roppe said.

The data centers spent about \$6 million for land that was owned by the town and county. In June, the town announced Apple's plans for a new 330,000-square-foot data

center and 70,000-square-foot logistics building, declaring on Twitter: "We love Apple!"

'We love Apple!'

So many construction workers are here that motels and RV spaces are usually filled up. Once the data centers are built, those workers will move on. But locals also are among those building the data centers, and they're being hired to operate, clean and guard them.

The tech giants agreed to pay 150 percent of customary wages in the county, Roppe said. Facebook initially employed around 35 people, and that number has swelled.

"Instead of 35 people, now there are 165 people," County Commissioner Ken Fahlgren said in an interview in the century-old, ivy-covered Crook County courthouse. "Every time they build a new building, they add another group of folks that work for them. We hope that they live here, buy homes here, bring their kids to



AP Photo/Andrew Selsky
Prineville Assistant City Engineer Mike Kasberger surveys progress on construction of a wetlands and wastewater treatment facility being built in Prineville.

school here, and we develop an economy around that."

Highlighting Prineville's resurgence, a wetlands is being built on the town's western edge that will increase its wastewater treatment capacity. Some of the water will be filtered and used by Apple to cool its servers.

On the other end of town, Ochoco Lumber is selling the land its mill once stood on, billed as prime real estate along Ochoco Creek. The mill closed in 2001. Only a small building is left that Barnes, the accountant, uses to manage the books of the company's operations elsewhere. On the walls are photos of the mill in full swing, depicting a bygone era.

"The data centers on the hill have been key to our redevelopment, so things look a lot more positive," Barnes said.

Prineville's metamorphosis is rare for a small town with an extractive-industry-based economy, said John M. Findlay, an American history professor at the University of Washington.

He cited as examples The Dalles, which hosts a Google data center, and Quincy, Washington, which hosts Microsoft, Yahoo and others.

"These successes take some imagination — communities have to be able to see past declining industries and envision new ones," Findlay said. They also require infrastructure and political support, such as tax breaks, he noted.

Other timber-dependent towns like Bend and Hood River have capitalized on outdoor recreation and craft breweries, and attracting retirees.

Trickle down

In Prineville, trickle-down benefits of the data-center boom are noted in the Taqueria Mi Tiendita, where customers include construction workers.

"We bought this shop eight years ago," said Lety Toledo, who co-owns the cafe with her husband. "Those were tough times, but we hung on. Now, it is better."

Lehner, the economist, cautions that the total number of jobs in the county is the same as in the 1990s. Some people left; others gave up looking for work, driving down the unemployment rate.

Still, he believes the labor force is poised to grow in coming years.

"The outlook is fairly bright for Crook County, particularly relative to much of rural America," he said.

Climate change may be turning gulls into cannibals

On island, a shift to angry birds

By **TRISTAN BAURICK**
Kitsap Sun

PROTECTION ISLAND, Wash. — Jim Hayward slips on a hard hat and pops open an umbrella before stepping into a storm of angry gulls.

Hayward, a seabird biologist based on Protection Island in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, is making his evening rounds through the largest gull nesting colony in the Puget Sound region. He's been monitoring this site since 1987, so he's used to the shrieking, the dive-bombing, the frequent splatterings of gull poop, and the pecking at his head, hands and feet.

What he's not accustomed to is the cannibalism, reported the Kitsap Sun. It's hard to watch: A fluffy chick straying a few yards from its nest is suddenly snatched up by its neck. Another hungry gull swoops in and bites at the chick's leg. The mother intervenes but is outnumbered. Her baby disappears under a frenzy of flapping and pecking.

Over the last decade, the gulls have shown a growing taste for their neighbors' eggs and chicks. The trend appears linked to climate change.

"It doesn't seem like a lot, but a one-tenth of a degree change in seawater temperature correlates to a 10 percent increase in (the odds of) cannibalism," said Hayward, a professor at Andrews University in Michigan.

Over the past 60 years, ocean temperatures have increased about 15 times faster than any other time over the past 10,000 years. As temperatures rise, plankton drops into deeper, colder water. Fish that feed on the plankton also drop lower. The surface-feeding gulls, which depend almost entirely on fish while nesting on Protection Island, can't find enough to eat.

"So they resort to feeding on their neighbors," Hayward said.

Bird paradise

Protection Island is a high-cliffed and nearly treeless swath of land near the mouth of Discovery Bay about 5 miles west of Port Townsend.

More than 70 percent of the region's seabirds nest on Protection — a fact that led to its status as a national wildlife refuge in 1982. The 380-acre island is home to the third largest colony of rhinoceros auklet seabirds in North America and one of the last two breeding sites in the Salish Sea for tufted puffins, which nest in holes burrowed into sandy cliffs.

The island's ecological value and the fragility of its habitat make it off-limits to the public.

Protection's only full-time resident is a caretaker employed by the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife. Hayward and his wife, mathematician Shandelle Henson, also of Andrews University, spend two months each summer studying the vast glaucous-winged gull population.

High temps, high cannibalism

It was Henson who answered the cannibalism question. Taking decades of Hay-

ward's data, she fed it into a computer model loaded with a range of climate and other environmental factors.

"We found that, over the last eight years, there's a 100 percent correlation between hot years and high cannibalism," she said.

She also found that gulls are beginning to synchronize egg-laying, possibly in response to cannibalism.

"On one day, we'll see a ton of eggs. The next day — hardly any," Hayward said.

Henson's hypothesis: "If there's a lot of eggs available all at once, there's less chance your own eggs will be taken," she said.

Gulls aren't picky eaters. They'll pluck a meal from a dumpster just as readily as a beach at low tide. But during nesting, their range is greatly reduced. They can't be gone for long from their nests and must rely on whatever the immediate area provides. Increasingly, the region's marine waters simply aren't providing.

Forage fish such as herring and sand lance — key food sources for salmon, birds and other marine animals — are



Tristan Baurick/Kitsap Sun

Biologist Jim Hayward shields himself with an umbrella while visiting a large gull nesting colony on Protection Island, a wildlife refuge in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, near Port Townsend, Wash. Hayward's research has found that climate change is triggering cannibalism among nesting gulls.

in decline. Fish accustomed to warmer water are moving in, but they pack less of a nutritional punch.

"Essentially, they're getting junk food," said Scott Pearson, an avian ecologist with the state Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Seaside fire impacts residents, kills cats

The Daily Astorian

SEASIDE — A fire at a Seaside apartment complex Friday afternoon impacted nine adults and a child and left six cats dead, authorities said. Another 20 cats were rescued.

Fire crews responded at about 4:30 p.m. and found smoke coming from the back of the six-unit complex in the 300 block of S. Edgewood Street.

Authorities said the cause of the fire is under investigation.

The American Red Cross Cascades Region assisted residents, who were unharmed, on Friday evening.

BONNEVILLE POWER ADMINISTRATION



You are Invited to Attend a Public Meeting

The Bonneville Power Administration invites you to attend a meeting to learn more about and discuss the proposed Wallacut Confluence Restoration Project in Pacific County, Washington.

Aug. 4, 2016, 6 – 8 pm
Ilwaco Community Building
158 1st Ave N
Ilwaco, WA 98624

Earlier this year, BPA conducted project scoping and asked for public input on the proposed project. A number of concerns were raised over how modifying an existing levee might affect flood risk to adjacent properties including the Vandalia neighborhood.

As part of the project design, hydraulic modeling was commissioned to determine changes in water depth and flow associated with the proposed project. We would like to share the results of this modeling with you and discuss any other issues that may be of interest or concern.

Please attend the meeting to talk with BPA representatives, project staff and the engineers who conducted the modeling. To read more about the proposed project online, visit: www.bpa.gov/goto/WallacutRiverConfluenceEstuary.

For Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations please call BPA toll-free at 800-622-4519.

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