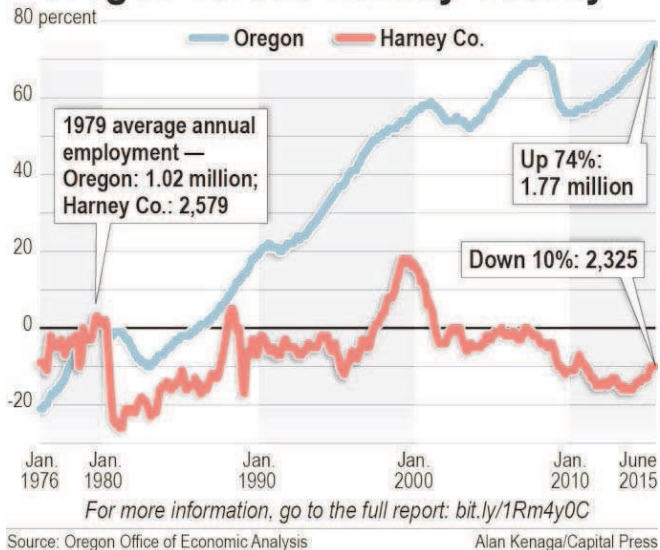


Employment growth since 1979: Oregon versus Harney County



While rest of Oregon grew, Harney County flat-lined

By ERIC MORTENSON
EO Media Group

Harney County, now the scene of a militia takeover, has been economically stagnant for nearly 40 years.

Residents and elected officials say that's the reality at the root of the area's muted support for the takeover, even as they disavow the militia's tactics.

While the rest of the state increased jobs 74 percent since the late 1970s, the number of jobs in Harney County dropped by 10 percent, according to a study by the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis.

The county has lost 99 percent of its wood products jobs since 1978, dropping from 768 to just six in 2014, analyst Josh Lehn said in a new report. "Relative to the late 1970s — just before the state went into the severe early '80s recession and timber industry restructuring — the number of jobs today in Harney County is 10 percent below back then," Lehn said. "Clearly, that is a really long time with essentially no growth."

Harney County residents know that first-hand.

County Judge Steven Grasty said there is a "feeling of despair" in the county due to job losses. Federal and state agencies, primarily the Bureau of Land Management, manage about 75 percent of the land in the county. Those agencies are so locked into process and so fearful of lawsuits from environmental groups that they become paralyzed and do no management at all, Grasty said.

As a result, many residents are no longer able to depend on logging, mill or ranching work to sustain themselves.

"We believe the wealth of a nation is based on its natural resources," he said. "We've lost access to natural resources, in particular, timber."

"Our community wants to be good stewards of the land," Grasty said. "When we managed the land it looked better than when the BLM does it. Because of rules and pressure from

special interest groups, it forces them to focus on single (wildlife) species and spend their dollars on planning rather than on the ground."

The decline of Pacific Northwest timber industry is an old story, but rural residents point out that nothing has replaced it, economically. The government's role is borne out by statistics: In Oregon, the federal government manages 60 percent of the state's forestland but produces only 12 percent of annual timber harvest, according to the Oregon Forest Resources Institute.

Harney County's population stood at 7,126 in 2014, a 4 percent drop since the 2010 U.S. Census. Since 1980, when the population was 8,314 and the job losses began, the county has lost nearly 1,200 people.

Those remaining represent an aging demographic, as young people seek opportunity elsewhere. As of 2014, 22 percent of county residents were 65 or older, compared to 16 percent statewide.

The county unemployment rate was 7.3 percent in November 2015, compared to the statewide average of 5.7 percent.

Bill Wilber, a retired rancher in Harney County, said a drumbeat of government action or proposals involving the federal EPA, BLM, state Department of Environmental Quality, sage grouse, "waters of the U.S." and other issues is tough for residents to take.

"It's continued rules and regulations that do everything to make it more difficult to make a living, to pay your bills educate your kids, pay your mortgage and lead a good life," Wilber said.

State Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario,

whose district includes Harney County, said the actions of the "Bundy bunglers" who took over the wildlife refuge should not diminish the "incredible problems" that dog rural residents.

Bentz said the Forest Service spends its budget fighting fires instead of preparing timber sales, and the BLM creates "study after study" and "haystacks of regulation"

"We believe the wealth of a nation is based on its natural resources. We've lost access to natural resources, in particular, timber."

— Steven Grasty, Harney County Judge

in anticipation of litigation. The complexity of management rules becomes "crazily exaggerated," he said.

"Pretty soon nothing happens because the land managers are so busy trying to create a plan that's bullet-proof, and fail," he said.

Meanwhile, struggling rural

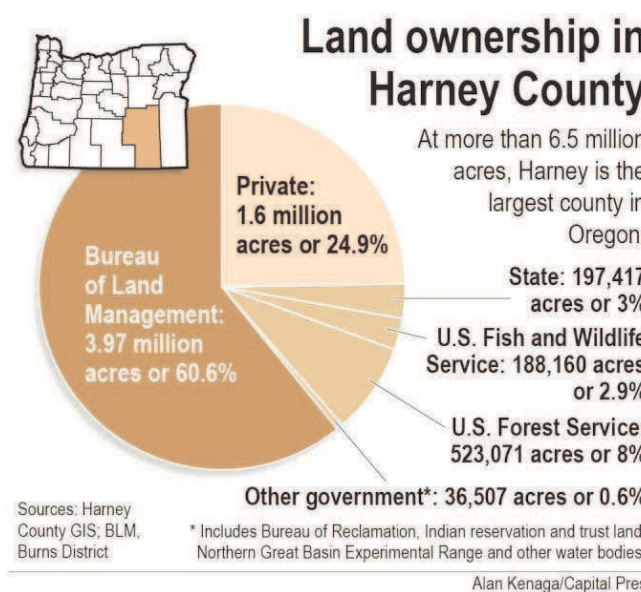
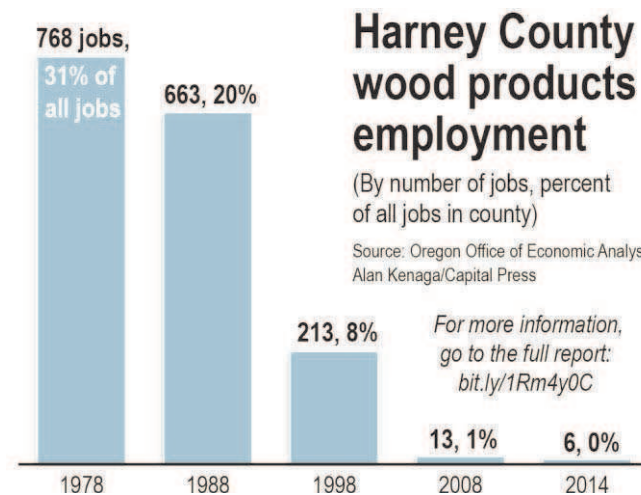
business owners are faced with such things as a state proposal to raise the minimum wage, Bentz said. Businesses operating in larger cities may be able to absorb the increase, but in rural Oregon, only businesses that are part of national chains will be able to pay it.

He said the small town of Halfway, in Baker County, needs \$4 million to build a sewage treatment plant as required under the federal Clean Water Act, but has no way to afford it.

Grasty, the Harney County judge, said economic problems in rural areas have ripple effects that might not be noticed elsewhere. If a ranch goes out of business, for example, the local firefighting association loses someone who's out on the ground and can spot problems early, he said.

Grasty said he's trying to put together an economic strategy for the county.

"People are so frustrated that they're slowly being undermined out of existence," he said. "We're not being heard. We're listened to, but not heard."



HERMISTON FFA team takes first in vet science

By GEORGE PLAVERN
East Oregonian

A team of five Hermiston High School students is headed to the 2016 FFA National Convention after winning first place in veterinary science at last month's state contest in Ontario.

It is the first time Hermiston FFA has ever competed in the vet science event. The team consists of sophomores Gissep Marin and Hannah Walker; juniors Tanna Osmin and Sevana Patrick; and senior Dru Walchli.

Hermiston FFA also took third place in agricultural sales at the state competition, which was Dec. 5 at Treasure Valley Community College. That team featured junior Shasta Jundt, alongside seniors Claire Wilson, Jessica Smelser and chapter President Emily Vandehey.

The vet science team beat out more than 15 others from around the state to earn top honors. They will travel to Indianapolis Oct. 26-30 for the national convention and expo, which draws more than 64,000 people from across the country.

Despite winning in their very first year, Walchli said it wasn't easy. Vet science is a grueling event that includes a written test, essays, 15-minute presentation and math applications. Students must also be ready to identify more than 500 animal species, of which they will be tested on 30.

"We knew it would be hard, but we had no idea just the sheer number of things we'd have to memorize," Walchli said.

The team decided to take on the challenge in October, and practiced for two hours every day the week leading up to competition. As hard as they prepared, Walchli said they didn't expect to win.



Photo contributed by Leah Smith

Hermiston FFA won first place in vet science at the state competition Dec. 5 in Ontario. From left: Tanna Osmin, Dru Walchli, Hannah Walker, Sevana Patrick, and Gissep Marin.



Photo contributed by Leah Smith

Hermiston FFA took third place in ag sales at the state competition Dec. 5 in Ontario. From left: Shasta Jundt, Claire Wilson, Emily Vandehey and Jessica Smelser.

"I think we were all shaking for about 10 minutes after (the announcement)," she said with a laugh.

Things only get more difficult for nationals. Osmin said they will get back to practice soon, and are trying to get internships at a local vet clinic to stay on top of their game.

"We're really involved," she said.

The state agricultural sales team came in third out of 18 teams at Ontario. That's an

improvement over last year's fifth-place finish.

Leah Smith, Hermiston FFA advisor, said she was pleased with their overall showing at state, which provides real-world, hands-on experience for the students.

MILTON-FREEWATER Defendant claims money for sex lead to robbery, assault charges

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

A defendant in a Milton-Freewater kidnapping and robbery case told jurors the real crime was a prostitution deal that went south.

Trial began Wednesday in Umatilla County Circuit Court, Pendleton, for Skyler Ian Glasby, 27, of Dayton, Washington. Judge Lynn Hampton is presiding. Glasby and co-defendant John Adam Phillips, 33, of Walla Walla, have separate trials for kidnapping, assault, robbery and more. A third defendant, Samantha Kaye Noethe, 23, Kennewick, cut a deal with prosecutors in October and pleaded guilty to one count each of second-degree robbery and kidnapping.

The state has accused the two men of beating and robbing Andrew Litchfield, 31, also of Walla Walla, then taking him against his will early Sept. 1, 2015 in Milton-Freewater then kicking him out of a vehicle near Bennington Lake east of Walla Walla.

Glasby took the stand Thursday afternoon and told the jury of eight women and four men he made a mistake when he lied to a detective about his involvement in the events that night, but he was telling the truth now. Defense attorney Thomas Gray of Pendleton said Noethe testified for the state that she and

Phillips concocted a plan to beat and rob Litchfield, then brought in Glasby and later met to split up the cash.

Glasby told jurors Noethe lied, there was no plan, but he knew what went down.

The group met outside Milton-Freewater around 3:30 a.m. that morning. Phillips and Noethe are boyfriend and girlfriend, Glasby told the court, but she accepted money from Litchfield to "get a room together" at the Wildhorse Resort & Casino motel near Pendleton.

Glasby said he was going with them to gamble and, while he did not have a license, he drove Phillips' car and planned to take back roads to the casino to avoid cops. Noethe drove Litchfield in a second car. The groups stopped at a food mart, Glasby said, then hit the road.

Moments later, Glasby testified, Phillips got a call from Noethe, who wanted to break off the transaction with Litchfield when he made statements about raping her. Noethe pulled into the parking lot at Orchard Homes, apartments at 311 N.

Elizabeth St., Milton-Freewater, and Glasby and Phillips followed.

Phillips got out and told Litchfield to hit the road.

Glasby claimed, but Litchfield protested he already paid Noethe. Glasby said there was a confrontation and a police car cruised by.

Glasby said he hustled out of the car, fearful an officer would recognize him and arrest him for illegal driving. An angry Phillips returned, Glasby said, and they left, and he was again at the wheel.

Glasby told jurors he and his friend argued, so he pulled over and got out. By then it was around 4 a.m., and he walked away and called a friend. Kelly Haggerman testified she picked up Glasby around 4:30 a.m. and brought him to her place, where he stayed until around noon.

Glasby's trial wraps up Friday, and Phillips has a two-day trial starting Tuesday with Circuit Judge Christopher Brauer presiding. Noethe's sentencing is Thursday, Jan. 21, in Hampton's courtroom.



Glasby

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