



Rebuilding Vernonia: Tracking Community Vitality and Change in Rural Oregon

Amy Grotta

OSU Extension Service

OSU College of Forestry

Oregon State
UNIVERSITY

Session outline

- Community indicator projects – an overview
- Vernonia, Oregon – how we got here
- The Vital Vernonia Indicator Project
- University and community engagement - successes and lessons learned

What are community indicators?

A set of common measures that can be tracked to monitor the vitality of a community over time.

“scorecard”

Quality of life

“vital signs”

How are we doing?

“dashboard”

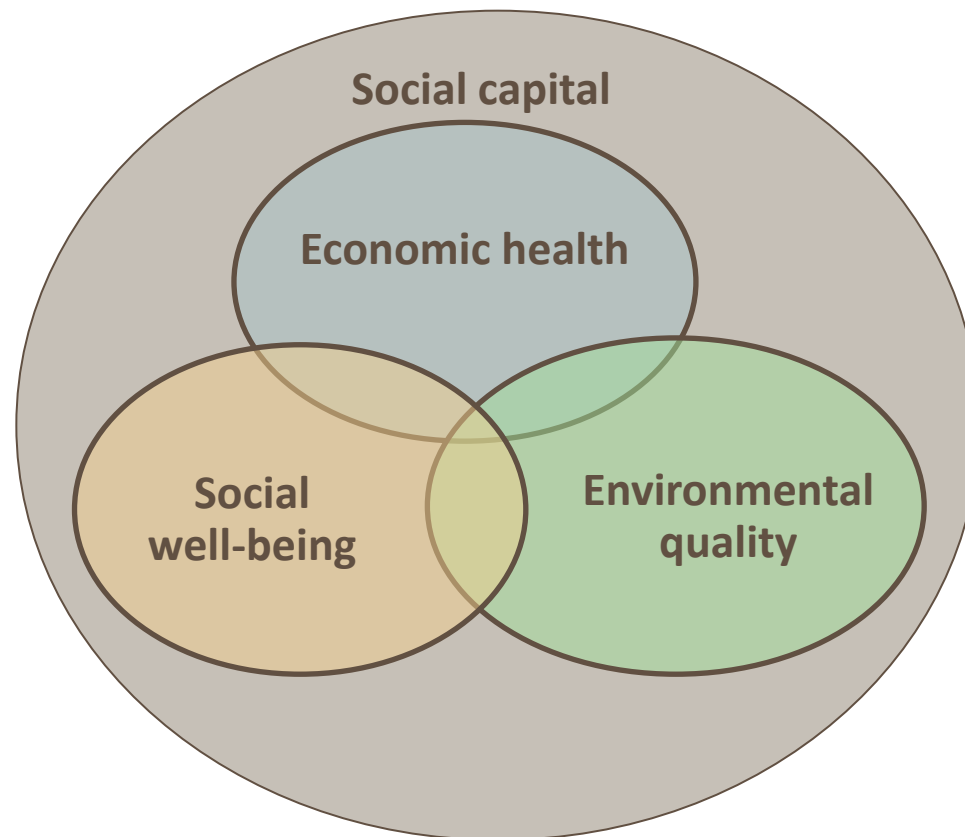
Are our community investments paying off?

Are people better off than before?

Often created in conjunction with a community visioning process.

Defining Vitality

Capacity to work productively together and realize positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes



Great Resource: www.communityindicators.net

[About CIC](#) | [Contact](#) | [Register](#) | [Login](#)



[Home](#) [About CIC](#) [2013 Conference](#) [Resources](#) [Communities of Practice](#) [Members' Corner](#) [Calendar](#) [Join CIC](#)



Community
Indicators
Consortium



[Register to get CIC News](#)

Indicator Projects

[Submit Your Project](#)

Listed here is a selection of indicator projects. CIC does not claim involvement or endorse any projects, but we find these interesting and informative. Use the submit projects button above to tell us about additional projects to include and notify us of broken links at database@communityindicators.net. Be sure to see the winners of the annual Community Indicators Awards program by looking at our [Awards page](#).

[Case Studies: Practices Supporting Community Health Assessment](#)

In addition to these indicator projects, CIC also hosts a Working Group on Integrating Community Indicators and Performance Measures. See the [CI-PM](#) section of our website for more information about the project and examples of places where Community Indicator Projects are being integrated with Performance Measures to improve the use of information in collaborative community decision-making.

Search Projects by the Following Criteria:

[Show List View](#) [Show Abstract View](#)

Member:

Yes No Both

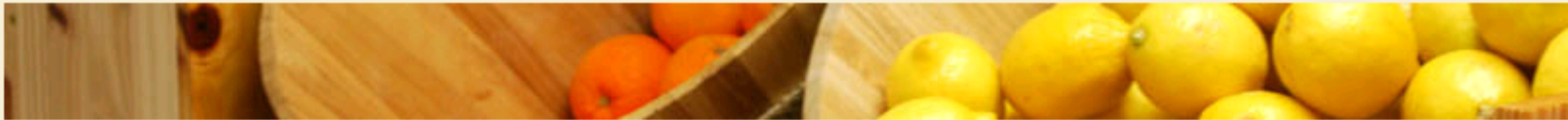
Geographic Scope:

Issue Area:

Active:

Yes No Both

Walla Walla Trends



Economic Vitality

A vibrant community is almost always rooted in a solid economic base. Without it, efforts to achieve excellence in all facets of community life will falter. This category covers many dimensions of a solid regional economy: Jobs, earnings, income levels, diversification of the economy and the distribution of income. Given their increasingly important role in Walla Walla, tourism and the arts also appear here.

2.1 Per Capita Personal Income	2.10 Employment Shares of the Top 4 Sectors	2.19 Population Below Poverty Level
2.2 Median Household Income	2.11 Average Annual Wage in Top 4 Sectors	2.20 Youth Below Poverty Level
2.3 Annual Taxable Retail Sales	2.12 Overall Average Annual Wage	2.21 USDA Supplemental Nutrition Program
2.4 Retail Trade Sales Per Capita	2.13 Emplmnt Concentration Top 5 Sectors	2.22 Population Receiving TANF
2.5 Assessed Value of Taxable Property	2.14 Number of Firms & Their Growth Rate	2.23 K-12 Free/Reduced Price Lunch Eligibility
2.6 Property Tax Roll	2.15 Market Value of Ag Sales	2.24 Number of Arts-Related Businesses
2.7 Residential Building Permits	2.16 Firms with 0-9 Employees	2.25 Total Direct Tourism Spending
2.8 Labor Force Size & Participation Rate	2.17 Unemployment Rates	2.26 Hotel Room Demand & Occupancy Rate:
2.9 Employment by Type of Employer	2.18 Income Distribution	2.27 Local Government Funding for Parks

People

Economic Vitality

Education

Environment

Health

Housing/Transportation

Public Safety

Compare

About Us

Newsletter

Press

Links





Erie Vital Signs

measuring community progress. inspiring community action.
A project of The Erie Community Foundation

SEARCH

[Home](#) / [About Us](#) / [News](#) / [Feeds](#)

Cultural Vitality

Community & Civic Engagement

The Economy

Regional Cooperation

Health

Environment

Pre K-12 Education

Brain Gain

-  Volunteerism
-  Offenses Committed & Arrests Made
-  Offenses Committed by Category
-  Voter Participation
-  Social Capital



[About Us](#)

[Success Stories](#)

[eNewsletter](#)

Success Story: Let's Move Outside

Latest News:

[5/14 • Full Story](#)

How We Help:

This man shows nonprofits that received *Helping Today and Shaping Tomorrow* grants

**Home**

Choose a Topic: A to Z

Health Department Programs

Site Navigation

- [Home](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

Health Department Divisions

- [Administration](#)
- [Animal Control](#)
- [Environmental Health](#)
- [Health Boards](#)
 - [Advisory Councils](#)
- [Health Promotion](#)
- [Health Services](#)
- [Partnership Health Center](#)

Missoula Measures Categories

- [Physical and Mental Health](#)
- [Social Topics](#)
- [Urban Environment](#)

Missoula Measures

What is Missoula Measures?

Missoula Measures consists of selected data, links and other information on scores of topics related to health and quality of life in Missoula, Montana. These data are updated regularly.

This website was developed Greg Oliver at Missoula City-County Health Dept.
[Definition of the project](#)

A good, quick source of several health measures for individual counties in the US can be found at: [Missoula County Health Rankings](#)



Why do an indicator project?

- Measure impact of activities; return on investment
- Develop shared measures for collective action
- Communicate with community
- Inform and prioritize targets for action

Audience Participation!!

Think and Share.

- What is an issue or goal your community is working toward?
- What indicator could provide evidence of progress toward that goal?
- How might the data be obtained?
- Who in your community has a stake/could be a partner?

Setting the Stage: Vernonia, Oregon



About Vernonia...

Pioneer farmers

Oregon American Sawmill

Timber culture

2010 Population:

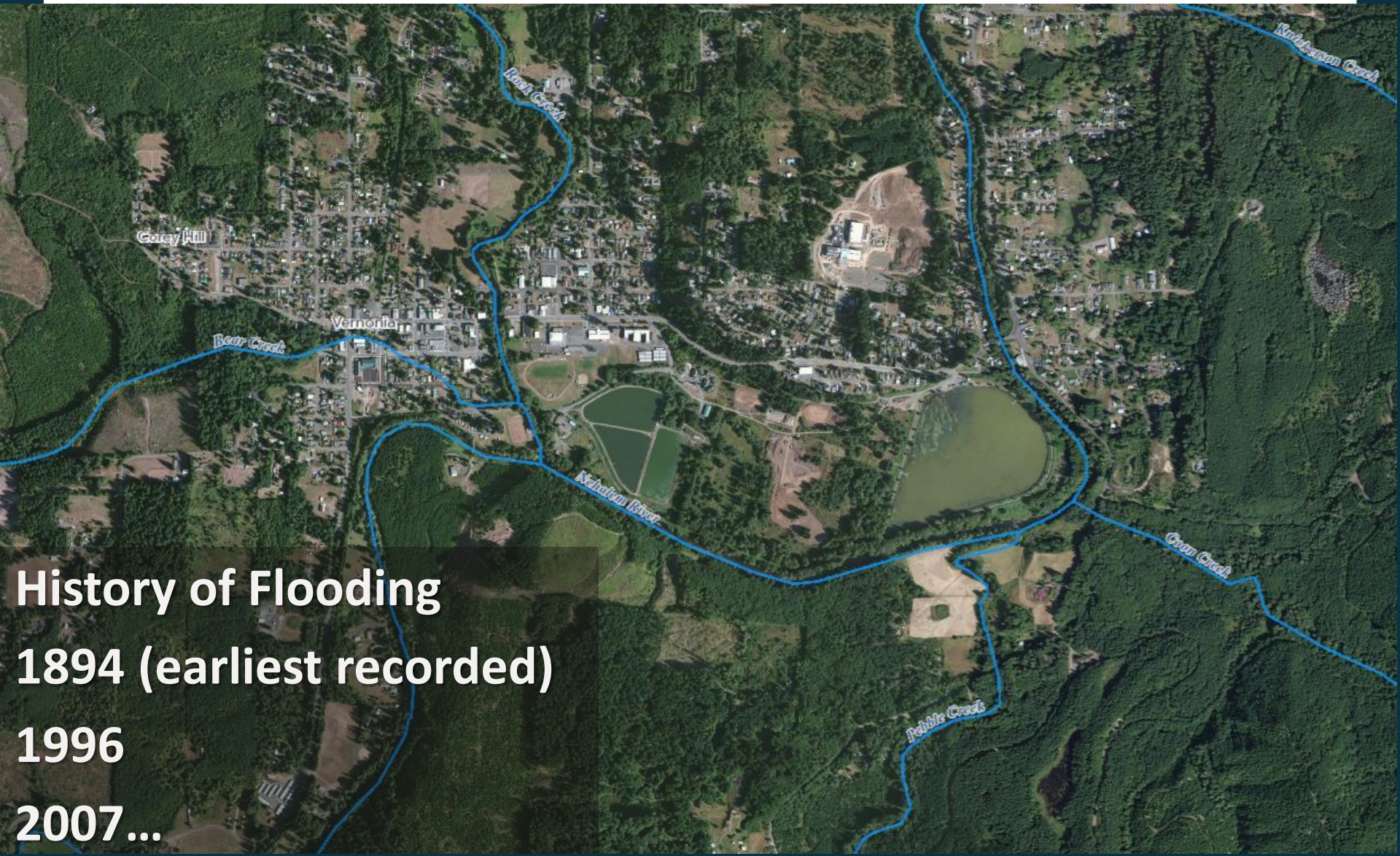
- 2,200 (city);
- 3,300 (zip code, 98 miles²)

1 hour commute to Portland

Banks-Vernonia State Trail



About Vernonia...



History of Flooding
1894 (earliest recorded)
1996
2007...

2007 Flood Damage

All K-12 School buildings, Health Clinic, Food Bank, Senior Center, wastewater treatment plant, both electric substations

1,100 homes (800 substantially damaged)



Rebuilding

- 2007 1 million hours of volunteer aid
- 2008 Oregon Solutions designation to rebuild schools
- 2009 \$13 million bond measure passed
- 2010 Vernonia Rural Sustainability Program (K-12) launched
- 2012 New schools open (\$40 million)
- 2014? Co-located health clinic, food bank, senior ctr, etc.



catalyst

The campaign for Vernonia's schools

catalyst : about

donate now!

■ Home

■ About

■ A community in need

■ Two historic floods in 11 years

■ An entire school district must be rebuilt

■ Campaign team

■ Creating the schools for the future

■ Approach

■ Innovative facilities

■ Project budget

■ Construction Webcam

■ **Economic and community impact**

■ Get involved

■ **DONATE**

Economic and community impact

Like many rural towns across the Northwest, Vernonia's schools are the heart and soul of its community, and in many ways the glue that holds it together. As the only large gathering place in the city, the school is the town's civic center. Its high school football team, the Loggers, galvanizes residents on Friday nights, and its wrestling team regularly reaches state competitions. In a town without a movie theater, the school's drama and band productions provide the arts and entertainment. The school also hosts many large events, including meetings, dancing, and much of the community's signature event, the annual Friendship Jamboree.

Vernonia's proximity to the silicon forest and its small-town charm have made it an attractive choice for families wishing to relocate. But several major residential development projects, including a new 67-lot subdivision, are stalled until the schools are rebuilt. The options for this attractive town center—with room for sustainable growth as part of the city's long range plan, and a vibrant economic future and burgeoning tax base for this community—are on hold without the schools.



How our Vernonia indicator project got its start

Vernonia Rural Sustainability Program development

2010 Mission Statement:

“The Vernonia Rural Sustainability Center will provide collaborative educational opportunities for K-12 students of Vernonia and the surrounding region as well as for higher education students and faculty. The Center will also serve as an economic development catalyst for Vernonia and the region with opportunities for workforce training and the development of new sustainable natural resources industries.”

Inputs

School district admin,
teachers, students

OSU Extension,
College of Forestry

\$40 million +

Green campus
facilities

Timber industry
partners

Ford Community
Leaders

Community health
board

Outputs

Improved K-12
curriculum

K-12 Service learning:
watershed projects

Community college
offerings

Woody biomass
utilization

Higher Ed: community
based research &
engagement

Community services
(food bank, clinic)

Outcomes

School district saves
on energy costs

Students gain job skills

Nehalem River health

Flood resilience

Social capital

Families choose to live
in Vernonia

Economic viability of
forestlands

How our Vernonia indicator project got its start

University Faculty Field Tour & Scoping Session

Research Topic:

\$40 million public/private investment over 4 years...

what is the impact on residents' quality of life and well being?

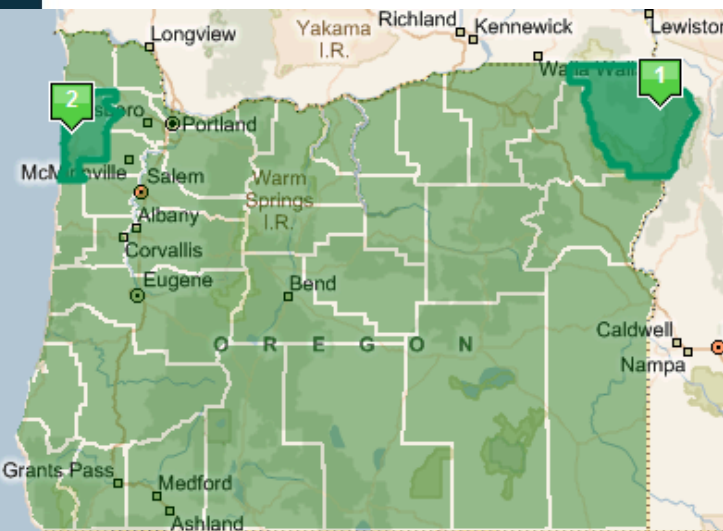


Community Indicator Projects in Rural Oregon



Guiding Questions:

- What are the indicators of community vitality?
- How vital are rural Oregon communities?



Vital Tillamook Indicator Project
Vital Wallowa Indicator Project
2009

Project Approach

Community-based participatory research

STEP 1

Assemble Project

STEP 2

Develop Indicators of Vitality

STEP 3

Collect Indicator Data

STEP 4

Assess Vitality

STEP 5

**Disseminate Findings, inspire
action**

Project timeline

2010 – 11	Exploratory work, identifying community partners
Spring – Summer 2012	Gathered and reviewed strategic planning documents; extracted community goals & visions; compiled “menu” of indicator data sources
Fall 2012	Advisory committee formed – monthly work sessions 1st, 2nd and 3rd drafts of goals & indicators
Winter – Spring 2013	Final indicator set developed Community surveys developed
Summer 2013	Summer intern hired Data collection
Fall 2013	Complete data collection Draft report
Winter 2014	Publish report Community forums – “moving to action”

Indicator Framework

Livability and Community Engagement	5 goals, 9 indicators
Youth and Education	4 goals, 8 indicators
Economy	6 goals, 11 indicators
Health and Well-Being	4 goals, 6 indicators
Natural Resources	5 goals, 10 indicators

...more “bottom up” than “top down”

Indicator Data Sources

Secondary

- U.S. Census, American Communities Survey
- State agencies
- Local sources (school district, city of Vernonia, Oregon Healthy Teens Survey)

Primary

- Four surveys (household, student, business, community organization)
- Advisory Committee members

Some example indicators

**Short-term
(output)**

**Long-term
(outcome)**

**Primary data source
(survey)**

**Secondary data source
(census, government)**

Livability and Community Engagement

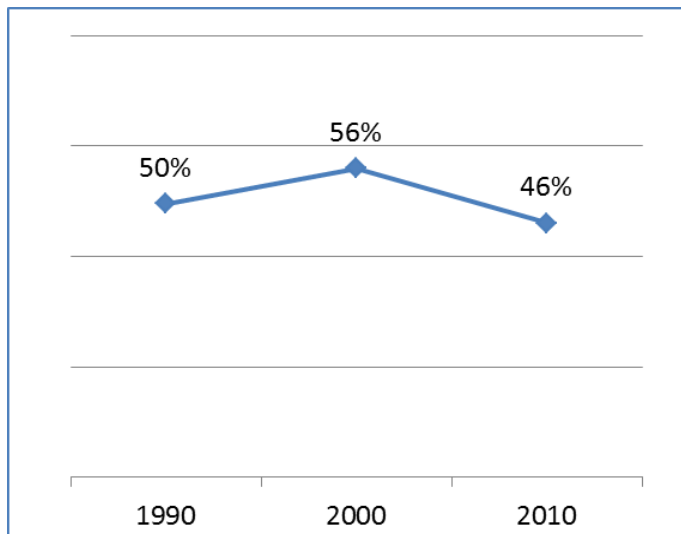
Goal: Vernonia is a desirable place to live.

Secondary data source

Indicator: % of households with children under 18

Source: U.S. Census

Result: 46% (2010)



Primary data source

Indicator: Percentage of adult residents that grew up in Vernonia, left, and then returned by choice to live there as an adult

Source: Household Survey

Result: 19% (2013)

Economy

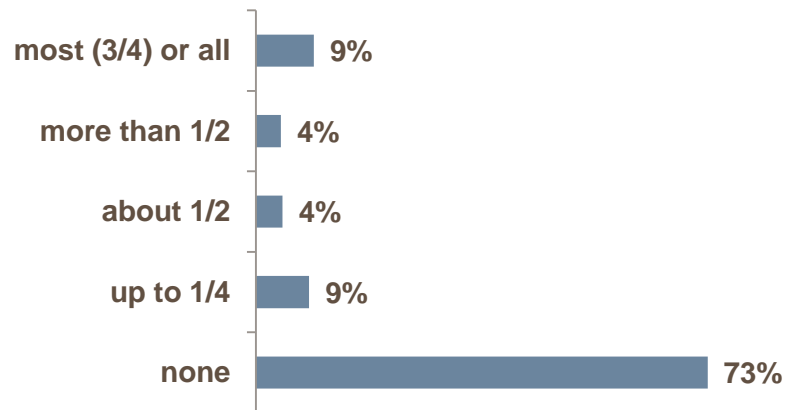
Goal: Natural resources contribute to Vernonia's local economy.

Primary data source

Indicator: % of households where some income comes from natural resources related activity or services

Source: Household survey

Result: 27%



Secondary data source

Indicator: 5-year investment in stream restoration projects in the Upper Nehalem watershed

Source: Oregon Water Resources Inventory

Result: \$2.64 million (2007-11)



Health and Well Being

Goal: Residents have access to the health care services they need.

Short-term (output)

Indicator: Number of hours/year that a primary care clinic is open in Vernonia

Source: Advisory Committee

Result: 120 (2012-13)



Long-term (outcome)

Indicator: Percentage of Vernonia adults that say they have access to the health care services they need

Source: Household Survey

Result: 55% (2013)

Environment and Natural Resources

Goal: The Vernonia Rural Sustainability Program is successfully contributing to positive environmental and educational outcomes.

Short-term (output)

Indicator: % of VSD teachers doing service learning or project-based learning related to natural resources

Source: VSD

Result: 100%



Long-term (outcome)

Indicator: Days/year that Nehalem River temperature exceeds standard for fish

Source: Oregon Dept of Fish & Wildlife

Result: Pending

Indicator: % of students that say they take pride in their school or community

Source: Student Survey

Result: 74%

Community and Student Engagement

Communities and Natural Resources

An Inter-disciplinary, Experiential Learning Opportunity



Graduate Course Objectives

1. Learn from community leaders.
2. Learn and apply social science concepts.
3. Sharpen listening, thinking, communication skills.
4. Foster dialogue between OSU and rural communities.

Course instructors of record: John Bliss, Kate MacTavish

Communities and Natural Resources

An Inter-disciplinary, Experiential Learning Opportunity



Methods

- Reading, seminars, discussion, writing
- Interviews and conversations
- Community meals, events
- Forest, farm, ranch, mill tours
- Service projects



Communities and Natural Resources Class

2012 Schedule (Tentative/Condensed)

Tuesday, Sept. 4	Corvallis
What's this all about? Key theoretical foundations, class logistics	
Wednesday, Sept. 5	Corvallis
Land tenure and resource management in the Coast Range	
Thursday, Sept. 6	Vernonia
Forest health and community health	
Friday, Sept. 7	Vernonia
Sustaining rural communities: schools, bioenergy, healthcare, and football	
Saturday, Sept. 8	Vernonia
Community service project, free time	
Sunday, Sept. 9	Vernonia to Wallowa County
Through the Gorge, over the Great Basin, to the Wallowa Valley	
Monday, Sept. 10	in Wallowa County
The role of the non-profit, non-governmental sector in rural development	
Tuesday, Sept. 11	in Wallowa County
Demographics in rural Oregon: youth, ethnic diversity, migration	
Wednesday, Sept. 12	in Wallowa County
Cohabiting planet Earth: Humans, Salmon, Cattle and Wolves Community service project	
Thursday, Sept. 13	in Wallowa County
Synthesis	
Friday, Sept 14	Return to Corvallis
Date TBD	Class Potluck

Walkabout, Listen, Observe, Discuss



Service Learning – Developing Draft Indicator Framework



Sharing



...conferences once the
...merge together

People's feelings are
ached here often if their
be recent "Growth"

**BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL &
SUCCESSFUL NATURAL RESOURCE
EDUCATION PROGRAM**

Study Goals on the program

- recognition of the education program
- all of interests, professional field's higher education philosophy
- Inclusion in grants and projects (not community center)
- recognition in collaboration with other communities
- include students coming in per natural resource course
- include opportunities for future communication
- Survey students of this program and report back

**CREATE A VALUE-BASED NATURAL
RESOURCE ECONOMY**

A multifaceted ecosystem

- create value added products from natural resources
- all of local who produce value added products
- value markets
- regulate 2000 ownership (area)

Graduate student reflection:

“The indicator project was one of the most informative activities of the course.

This project was especially important in helping to ground what we learned about, through interactions with residents and in the readings, in a real world experience.

The goals, indicators, and supporting data helped me think about building community capacity at a local level using a thoughtful, measurable approach.”

University Engagement – What worked

For students:

- Immersion
- Time for reflection
- Meaningful service-learning project

For instructors:

- Relationship building
- Clear roles & responsibilities
- Planning

For community partners:

- Engagement that is relevant and serves an authentic need
- Students that were checked in

Audience Participation!!

Consider your role within your university.

Is there an opportunity for you to engage in this work of community indicators?

How so?

How might community indicator projects intersect with the work that you do (teaching, advising, research, service-learning)?

Project supporters – Thanks!

OSU Extension Service - Columbia County

OSU Rural Studies Program

The Ford Family Foundation

City of Vernonia/Vernonia Prevention Coalition

Vernonia School District and Aaron Miller, Principal

Lena Etuk

Shawn Morford

John Bliss

Kate MacTavish

VVIP Advisory Committee: DeAnna Pearl, Scott Laird,
Nicholas Welch, Donna Webb, Bill Langmaid, Jack
Harvey, Bill Haack