

2019 HARNEY COUNTY ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT





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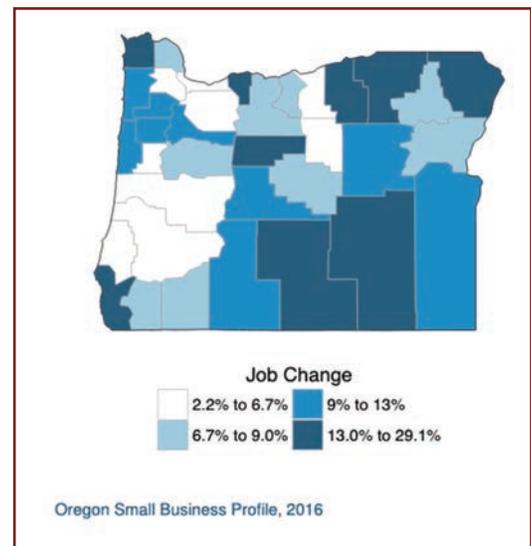
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ABOUT HARNEY COUNTY

Oregon's rural communities are flush with opportunity and boast bountiful natural resources, co-operative cultures, and tenacious resilience. Harney County is one such place - it teems with both resources and resilience. While remaining deeply rooted to this place and the past, many Harney County residents and organizations are also looking ahead, and the horizon remains as big and bright as the area itself.

Among Oregon's most sparsely populated rural counties, though, Harney County faces challenges to developing its economy. While natural resources abound, developing economic opportunity while respecting the integrity of the landscape and its many flora and fauna is one such challenge. Agriculture is the backbone of the local economy, yet is contributing to accelerated groundwater depletion that threatens future development. Rising costs, increasing regulation and a variety of other factors have completely eroded the formerly booming local timber industry. The final closure of the Louisiana Pacific lumber mill in 2007 led to employment and income shortfalls for which no large scale or single-source replacement has been found.



"In 1973, Harney County was the wealthiest county in Oregon as measured by per capita income. But more than 1,000 jobs vanished when Hines sold the mill in the early 1980s." -Oregon Business Magazine

These factors and more have led to the classification of Harney County as one of Oregon's top five Distressed Counties by Business Oregon. While the number of jobs in Oregon has grown more than 74% in the last 40 years, it has fallen in Harney County—there are 10% fewer living-wage jobs in the region now than in 1976 (Oregon Office of Economic Analysis, 1976-2016). Harney County's unemployment rate is 13.1%, almost double the state rate of 6.8%.

Yet, in Harney County, the possibilities feel limitless and there is a consistent message of "we can do this together" despite differences and fiercely-held independence.

Harney is also home to the federally-recognized Burns Paiute Tribal lands, and the Native American population of the region is more than double the state average. The Burns Paiute Tribe is comprised of ancestors from bands of 18 Northern Paiute tribes who shared the Great Basin culture. The traditional homelands of tribal members spanned 5,250 square miles from Nevada and California up to Idaho and across Central and Southern Oregon.

With a creative culture, energized new collaboratives and recent investments in entrepreneur-based economic development, many residents in Harney County believe the future is bright.

KEY FACTS

Harney County's total population is 7,195. Of these residents, 60% live in the county's two major cities (Burns or Hines).

Source: Census Reporter, 2017

Harney County is one of the largest and least densely populated counties in Oregon and the United States, with only 0.7 people per square mile.

Source: Census Reporter, 2017

The Burns Paiute Tribe has 402 enrolled members, over 50% of whom are under the age of 18.

Source: Burns Paiute Tribe, 2018

Harney County's median age is 46.2 years, about 20% higher than Oregon and 25% higher than in the United States.

Source: Census Reporter, 2017

In Harney County, 87% of residents identify as White (10% higher than the state of Oregon) and 3% identify as American Indian/Alaska Native (more than double the rate in Oregon state-wide).

Source: Census Reporter, 2017

Harney voters skew politically conservative. In the 2018 Oregon governor's election, 10% percentage of eligible voters voted Democrat, 4% percentage of eligible voters voted for a third-party candidate, and 46% percentage of eligible voters voted Republican. 40% did not vote. Harney County's midterm election turnout (60% of eligible voters) was 5% higher than the United States average.

Source: Harney County General Election Abstracts, 2018

Harney County's population is shrinking, with a 1.3% decrease occurring between 2010 and 2018.

Source: US Census Harney County Quickfacts, 2018

Many unique factors influence the entrepreneurial ecosystem of Harney County. Their combined effects defy many conventional strategies for economic development and moving beyond the present obstacles while fully leveraging the area's existing strengths, values and resources will demand creative, specific solutions. This assessment identifies the most recent county-level statistics and community feedback to highlight specific areas for improvement and possible solutions to spur new economic development, particularly development led by entrepreneurship and bolstered by a stronger entrepreneurial ecosystem.

ABOUT HIGH DESERT PARTNERSHIP

High Desert Partnership is a 501(c)3 nonprofit that brings people together to solve problems cooperatively through collaborative decision-making. The organization facilitates community roundtables and initiatives to ensure the health of the region's forests and wetlands, mitigate wildfire, create positive experiences for youth, and enhance the local economy. We believe collaboration—the simple practice of working together—is the best

way to find common ground solutions for the benefit of all. We create opportunities to listen and be heard. We foster understanding, build trust, and help forge unexpected relationships, following through with creative and innovative solutions to reshape 'business as usual' in Harney County. We call this the Harney County Way, and it's how we ensure our local economy, natural environment, and rural lifestyle can thrive for generations to come.

Working together isn't always quick or easy, but we're just fine with that—we're in this for the long-haul. The future of Harney County and preserving our rural way of life is counting on us to get this right. This Assessment is a tool to help that happen— so grab some coffee, pull up a seat, and let's get to work!

"Building consensus is slow work, but if you're going to fight about it, we don't have that time either." -Brenda Smith, High Desert Partnership Executive Director, National Public Radio

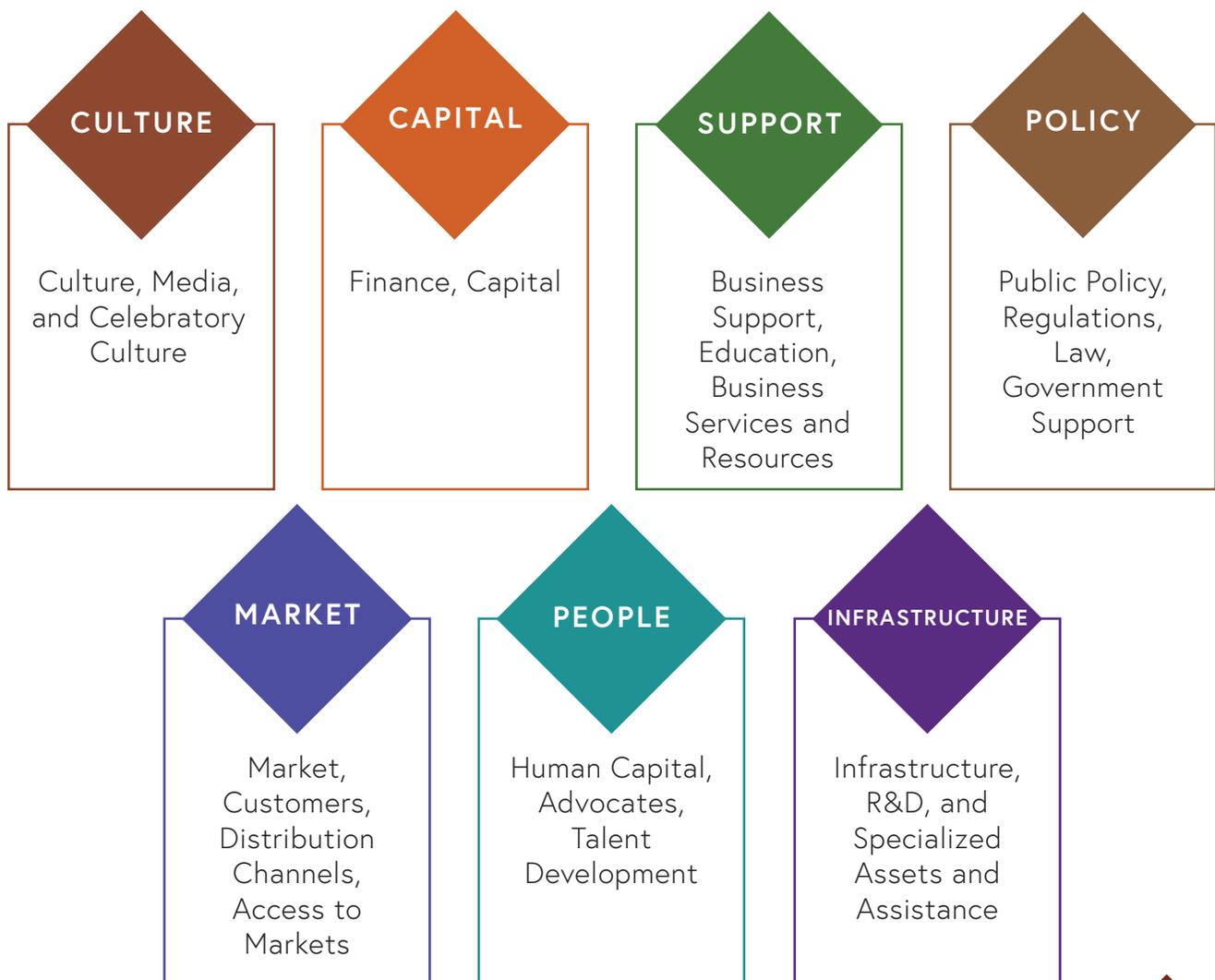
ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM FRAMEWORK

Entrepreneurial ecosystems are defined as "the factors that interact to create an environment that favors (or does not favor) entrepreneurial and small businesses development" (Rural Opportunity Initiative Factsheet, 2018). The objective of this entrepreneurial ecosystem assessment is to provide an overview of the conditions, resources, and regulations that influence the ability to start and operate a business in Harney County, Oregon.

"Each entrepreneurship ecosystem is the result of the hundreds of elements interacting in highly complex and idiosyncratic ways." – Daniel Isenberg, Forbes Magazine

Developed in partnership with the Business Oregon Rural Opportunity Initiative, this document is modeled after a state-based framework developed to holistically analyze the local environment in which businesses start up and operate. This assessment's categories were drawn from commonalities in previous entrepreneurial ecosystems utilized by Business Oregon and other regional partners including the Kauffman Foundation. These focus components build on the work of these hard-working allies and were selected in order to inclusively observe the Harney County economy in a format that allows each component to be assessed for strengths and weakness singularly and as they overlap with one another.

This framework has seven areas of focus:





ASSESSMENT FORMAT

This assessment focuses primarily on county level conditions, though also includes state-level factors as they apply. Each section provides a comprehensive reflection on the status of each Ecosystem Building Block within Harney County. Qualitative observations from community surveys have also been included to provide a full picture of economic life in Harney County.

The development of this Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Assessment was supported by a grant from Business Oregon's Rural Opportunity Initiative, awarded to High Desert Partnership in partnership with Harney County Court and Harney County Economic Development. The goal of Business Oregon's Rural Opportunity Initiative is to build capacity among rural communities as they strengthen entrepreneurship-based economic development. The initiative is intentionally structured to catalyze local opportunities that amplify local priorities and resources and create prosperity across rural Oregon; this assessment is the first in a three-phase plan to map, strengthen, and build access to Harney County's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

This document is intended as an internal resource, compiling the latest research available in combination with community input, to identify strengths and opportunities within the ecosystem that can be targeted to improve the environment for new business development and existing business expansion. For some components, major obstacles have been identified, and examples of recent community action to address these impediments are highlighted. For others, the lack of available information remains itself a barrier to progress, and this assessment suggests areas of research for further exploration.

In addition to the quantitative and demographic information, this assessment collected original data via community surveys and personal interviews conducted with key Harney County business, government, Tribal, and community leaders. Interviewees were asked to discuss each component of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Harney County from their perspective and to rank each component in relation to the others. Community feedback (and key highlighted quotes) represent personal input to provide a variety of perspectives about Harney County's economy.

In recent years, Harney County has been the recipient of a variety of resources (funding and otherwise) from the federal, state, and county levels. Each of these resources is tied to its own advisory and action committees consisting of local residents, success metrics, program components, and more. Many of these efforts have shared goals, which results in the community often coming together to answer questions, gather data, and move the needle forward on a multitude of initiatives. Yet, the data from, and results of, these meetings and initiatives can be disjointed, and are not always shared or accessible. This means it can be difficult for residents to see the impact of their work.

This report will serve as a central place where cross-sector, county-wide information can live (all in one place!) and be easily available to all. It will also help us collectively gauge, as a community, the success of our combined efforts. Overall, it is the aim of High Desert Partnership to consistently and at least annually update this document to 1) reflect new data, and 2) best support the efforts of community changemakers. By using this assessment tool to highlight improvement areas through the organization's collaborative decision-making framework, we as a community can make large-scale, innovative shifts to the Harney economic ecosystem.



KEY FACTS

The median household income in Harney County is \$39,504, about 2/3rds of the Oregon state median.

Source: Oregon Live, 2018; U.S. Census 2013-17

The median home value in Harney County is \$104,300, the lowest of Oregon's 36 counties.

Source: Census Reporter, 2017

The annual cost of living for a two-parent, two-child family in Harney County is \$82,789 per year, between \$10,000 and \$14,000 lower than metropolitan counties in Oregon.

Source: Economic Policy Institute, 2019

3.2% of residents identify as Native American, more than double the Oregon state population average.

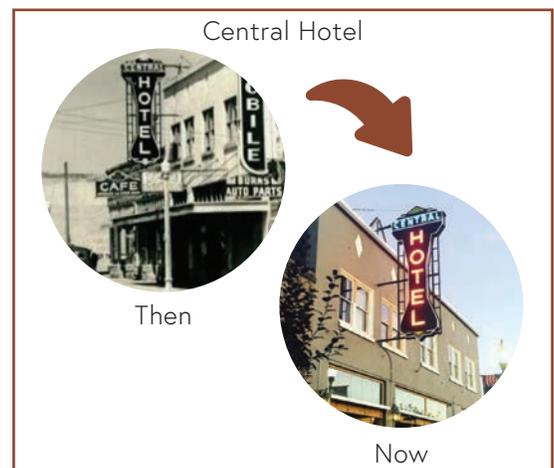
Source: Census Reporter, 2017

WHAT WE KNOW

STRENGTH

Main Street Revitalization

In May 2019, the Burns Main Street Task Force was awarded a \$200,000 grant from the Oregon State Historical Preservation Office to restore historic storefronts in city of Burns downtown area for new use. This grant follows a \$100,000 grant in 2017 supporting the successful renovation of the Central Hotel, a boutique hotel built in 1929 that had sat empty for 20 years. These recent efforts are supporting the tourism economy by providing additional places to stay and shop, with each success adding strengthening the local circular economy.



STRENGTH

Encouraging Inter-Business Support



Low immigration to the area contributes to an insular business community among workers and employers in Harney County. It has been noted by multiple respondents that businesses existing in the community long-term are strongly connected by personal and business relations, but new firms seeking to get their start often lack the trust of established owners and struggle to be accepted into the business community. These cultural barriers to entry are obstacles, but the tightly-knit business community of Harney has potential to be a strong asset if channeled effectively.

STRENGTH

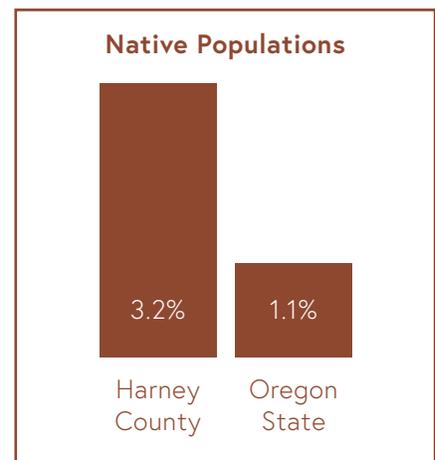
Helpful Local Allies

Many new entrepreneurs have a reluctant feeling about striking-out on their own. Among those surveyed, a majority of entities are authentically impassioned about helping new entrepreneurs. One of the biggest opportunities for those starting a new business is to seek out the information from existing government, nonprofit, and private sector support systems in Harney County.

OPPORTUNITY

Cross-Cultural Connections

One goal of the Burns Paiute Tribe's 2025 Comprehensive Plan is incorporating "significant improvements in our ability to demonstrate our culture to a broader audience as well as sustain our historically significant heritage for the future." This goal dovetails with High Desert Partnership's strong stance of inclusion for marginalized community members, and further work with the Burns Paiute will identify functional means of achieving success shared by Tribal populations.



OPPORTUNITY

Unifying Shared Interests

Among survey respondents, we found a strong desire for economic development strategies, but little consensus on what these are. A great opportunity for High Desert Partnership's collaborative decision-making is the development of strategic plans that unify the varied but overlapping visions for Harney's economic future.

OPPORTUNITY

Enhancing Celebratory Culture for Entrepreneurs



Harney County is home to recurring events that drive tourism dollars to the area. Many event organizers expressed unfilled vendor spaces at recent events: Working with these event organizers to enhance these events' support of small businesses in Harney's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem represents an opportunity to build more support into the region's existing cultural assets. Unfilled niches for event support also exist, event coordinators rely on companies outside Harney County for fair amusements and supplies.

LOOKING AHEAD

High Desert Partnership's BizHarney Entrepreneurship Initiative fosters the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in Harney County by supporting sustainable business start-ups with coaching, connections, and advocacy to regional policymakers. This assessment is one of BizHarney's first endeavors to unify available information to build collaborative economic support systems for the Harney community. High Desert Partnership will periodically update this assessment document to reflect new data, creating a foundational tool to support those working for Harney County's economic advancement.

ENTREPRENEURIAL EVENT CALENDAR

This table lists events within Harney County with vending opportunities for businesses. This list is designed to help small businesses find year-round market spaces for their goods and services.

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH
Opportunity to add an event!	Opportunity to add an event!	Opportunity to add an event!
APRIL	MAY	JUNE
<p>Harney County Migratory Bird Festival Multiple Locations MigratoryBirdFestival.com</p> 	Opportunity to add an event!	<p>Skull 120/60/30 Gravel Grind Race Location: Burns AdventureHarney.com</p> <hr/> <p>High Desert Fiddlers' Country Music Jamboree Location: Harney County Fairgrounds HighDesertFiddlers.com</p>
JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER
<p>Burns Bike Brew Location: Arrowhead Plaza, Burns BurnsBikeBrew.com</p>	<p>Demolition Derby Location: Harney County Fairgrounds Co.Harney.OR.US</p> 	<p>County Fair, Rodeo and Racemeet Location: Harney County Fairgrounds Co.Harney.OR.US</p>
OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
<p>Xi Delta Gamma Annual Harvest Festival, Chili Cook-off, and Apple Pie Contest Location: East Washington Street, Burns HarneyCounty.ChamberMaster.com</p>	Opportunity to add an event!	Opportunity to add an event!

This will be updated as new events with entrepreneurial opportunities are identified or developed.

KEY FACT

Business banking and finance options for Harney County include Bank of Eastern Oregon, Harney County Farm Bureau, Country Financial, SELCO Community Credit Union, Old West Federal Credit Union, Umpqua Bank, and U.S. Bank.

Source: Harney County Economic Development, 2019

WHAT WE KNOW

STRENGTH

Nonprofit Loan Options Financing New Infrastructure

In 2017 and again in 2019, Oregon-based Craft3 have provided loans of more than one million dollars to finance large-scale Harney County projects. Exploring a deeper partnership with Craft3 and other potential partners focused on improving community financial access could provide seed funding for a Harney County community financial institution capable of increasing capital availability for local businesses.

OPPORTUNITY

Increased Financial Support & Education

Several interviewees noted instances of local residents relying on financing from outside of the financial industry, including selling property or borrowing money from friends and family member to finance business expenses. This willingness of community members to support each other financially is a strong sign of community cohesion, though is most likely driven by a perceived lack of other options. This limits new business expansion and may offer an illusion of strong financing opportunities when, especially for those without the support of friends or family, those options are in fact minimal. There is also an opportunity for organizations supporting entrepreneurs to offer courses on financing and management to lessen entrepreneurs' reliance on alternative, often less stable, loan options.



In 2017 and again in 2019, Oregon-based Craft3 have provided loans of more than one million dollars to finance large-scale Harney County projects. Exploring a deeper partnership with Craft3 and other potential partners focused on improving community financial access could provide seed funding for a Harney County community financial institution capable of increasing capital availability for local businesses.

LOOKING AHEAD

The lack of specific local data on Harney County's financing and capital availability indicates an area for future research. Exploring options to finance new start-ups and business. Future initiatives might explore state- and nation-wide data on alternative financing options or consultation with regional community-founded credit unions to explore opportunities that would unite citizen sentiment for new financial options. Harney County Economic Development (HCED) currently helps community members leverage a full list of financial incentives and resources.

Regional, State, and Federal Financing Resources for Harney Businesses

Federal Programs

- \$ **Aggie Bonds:** financing to new farmers.
- \$ **Brownfields Redevelopment Fund:** incentives for development in contaminated areas.
- \$ **New Markets Tax Credits:** helps finance investments and create jobs in low-income communities.

Regional Programs (administered by GEODC)

- \$ **Regional Strategies Revolving Loan Fund:** financing for land/building acquisition, new construction, machinery, inventory, and supplies.
- \$ **SBA 504 Loan:** financing for major fixed assets including commercial real estate and equipment.
- \$ **Microbusiness Revolving Loan Fund:** up to \$20,000 financing for businesses.

Regional Programs (administered by GEODC)

- \$ **Native American Entrepreneur Revolving Loan Fund:** up to \$20,000 in financing for federally recognized tribe businesses.
- \$ **USDA-Intermediary Relending Program:** financing to create or retain jobs and businesses within distressed communities.
- \$ **EDA Revolving Loan Fund:** financing for 33% of project costs up to \$100,00 for business expansion and creation in distressed areas.

Statewide Programs

- \$ **Business Expansion Program:** an incentive program for existing companies expanding operations in Oregon or new businesses coming into the state.
- \$ **Business Retention Services Program:** consulting services to assist companies facing difficult times.
- \$ **Entrepreneurial Development Fund:** direct loans to help start-ups, micro-enterprises and small businesses expand or become established in Oregon.
- \$ **Oregon Business Development Fund:** fixed-rate financing for land, buildings, equipment, machinery, and permanent working capital.
- \$ **Oregon Capital Access Program:** helps lenders make more commercial loans to small businesses.
- \$ **Oregon Credit Enhancement Fund:** a loan insurance program available to lenders to assist businesses in obtaining access to capital.
- \$ **Oregon Industrial Development Bonds:** tax-exempt bonds issued by the State of Oregon.
- \$ **Small Manufacturing Business Expansion Program:** forgivable loans related to expansion projects for small manufacturing businesses.
- \$ **Eastern Oregon Business Development Fund:** long-term, fixed-rate financing for land, buildings, equipment/machinery, and permanent working capital.

This list will be updated as new financing and capital opportunities are identified or developed.

SUPPORT

BUSINESS SUPPORT, EDUCATION, BUSINESS SERVICES AND RESOURCES

KEY FACTS

In Harney County, 89.7% of residents have a high school diploma or higher, about the same as Oregon, and a little higher than the rate in the U.S. However, only about 19.2% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, about 3/5 the rate of Oregon and the U.S. as a whole.

Source: Census Reporter, 2017

There is an estimated \$457 million gap in school capital expenditures statewide in Oregon.

Source: Oregon Live, 2018

WHAT WE KNOW

STRENGTH

Success of Partner Incubator Models

Through the Rural Opportunities Initiative, High Desert Partnership has linked Harney County to several new partners, including Launch Pad Baker and Foundry Collective, who have had success creating small business incubator spaces for rural entrepreneurs. Adapting strategies from these partners to suit Harney County's local business community is being pursued to provide additional business support and resources to local start-ups. Creating a dedicated program to link entrepreneurs to existing business owners was identified as a shared priority of Burns Paiute Economic Development representatives, and implementing a start-to-launch support process provides a chance for municipal and Tribal organizers to collaborate.



OPPORTUNITY

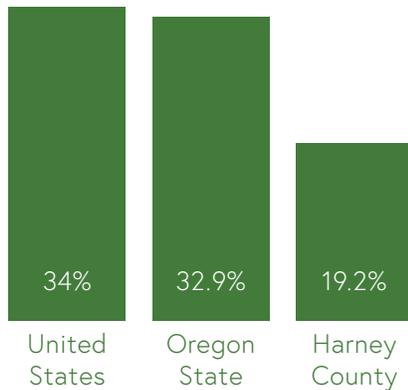
Overcoming K-12 School System Shortfalls

Residents express concern that Harney County has an underfunded school system, including classes only four days per week. This is not only a concern for current residents but a potential deterrent for prospective employees and employers looking to relocate. Education partners cite high turnover of teachers and administrative school staff. A concentration of residents with low incomes (or poverty "hot spots") poses additional challenges for Harney public schools.

OPPORTUNITY

Use Technology to Create Higher Education Opportunity

Percent of Residents with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher



Business leaders and government officials indicated that the biggest need is in skilled labor, followed by qualified and higher education workers. Local residents observe that a lack of higher education opportunities and living-wage jobs contributes to young people departing from Harney County, along with a median age above the state average. There is interest from both Treasure Valley Community College and Eastern Oregon University to expand support for university distance learning and online courses, which have the potential to improve access to education credentials for Harney County residents.

OPPORTUNITY

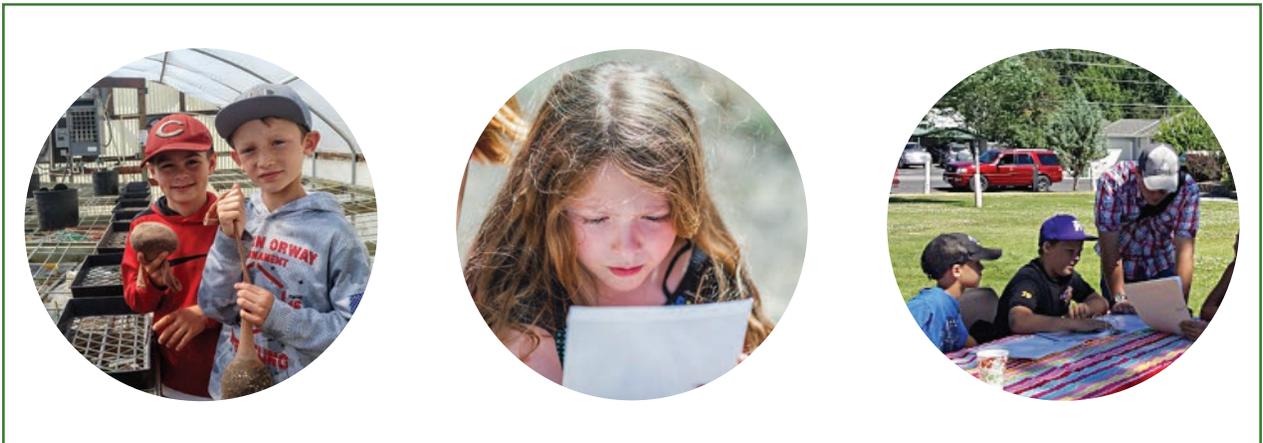
Create Flexible Pathways to Vocational Careers

A lack of contractors, electricians, plumbers, and other vocational careers can make it difficult for residents and other businesses to find certified labor. State regulation to certify professional tradespeople is prohibitive to new individuals pursuing vocational trades in Harney County, which has no trade schools and limited certified professionals required to train others. The county is serviced by one plumber and two electricians. This gap in certifiable vocational education in Harney County's entrepreneurial ecosystem requires further study and work in the future. There are emerging opportunities with Crane Union High School and Baker Technical Institute to offer career technical education.

LOOKING AHEAD

Developing Harney County's partnerships with other regional business service providers to strengthen nonprofit and community support of local businesses is a main priority of High Desert Partnership's work with **Business Oregon** and other community partners.

One tactic Harney County has employed is the new **Youth Entrepreneur Program**, developed by partners from Enterprise Oregon. This new High Desert Partnership Youth Initiative supported program launched in September 2019 and works with six high school juniors and seniors to teach business ownership basics. This weekly program meets twice a month, and is being piloted through the current fiscal year to help each youth entrepreneur develop their own business concept and understand what it takes to become a business owner. In subsequent years, High Desert Partnership will grow its youth programming through the Youth Initiative collaborative and discover new ways to connect early business skill building to higher education and further enterprise development support.



KEY FACTS

Harney County is facing a more than \$800,000 budget shortfall for 2020.
Source: Oregon Public Broadcasting, 2019

The median home value in Harney County is \$104,300, the lowest of Oregon's 36 counties.
Source: Census Reporter, 2017

Harney County Economic Development links business owners with a wide range of local and regional resources and incentive programs.
Source: Harney County Government, 2019

The Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation completed a 2019 Workforce Housing Road Map to provide recommendations for future housing development strategies in the county.
Source: Harney County Planning Department, 2019

Harney County Planning Department offers a flowchart to guide business owners through the Land Use permitting and application process.
Source: Harney County Planning Department, 2019

WHAT WE KNOW

STRENGTH

Shared Feelings of Non-Inclusion in State Policy

Many interview respondents expressed frustration with state-level regulation that is seen as inhibitory to rural economic development and formed without input from smaller rural communities. This stance is echoed by community members who attribute the downturn of the region's timber industry to increased state and federal environment protections. While this anti-regulation sentiment can be problematic for sustainable development, the shared feeling of non-inclusion in state-level decision-making also serves as a conversation starter and an opportunity for strength-in-numbers and across sectors to engage community owners to work together for common local interests.

STRENGTH

Shared Feelings of Non-Inclusion in State Policy

Harney County Economic Development takes an involved role in supporting Harney County's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The county's website links entrepreneurs to local and regional tools and programs for businesses, including tax incentives, a list of available commercial properties, connections to industry-specific resources, and one-on-one support. This support includes the Harney County Community Response Team (CRT), a group representing a wide range of organizations and professional associations in the region. The CRT holds public meetings monthly to record progress on specific initiatives that improve Harney's entrepreneurial ecosystem.



OPPORTUNITY

Strengthen Partnerships Between Tribes and County



Photo: Burns Paiute Tribe
Facebook Page

While respondents from the Burns Paiute Tribe and local government agencies report positive opinions of one another's work, both groups note that a lack of regular inter-agency communication has occasionally led to program redundancy and repeated efforts. There is potential to improve overall communications by developing working partnerships around specific programs that meet shared goals of the Native and non-Native regional populations. Collaborations between entities also expands the likelihood of funding from outside supporters to help continued development of Harney's entrepreneurial ecosystem in the face of current or potential county budget shortfalls.

OPPORTUNITY

Advocate to Suit State Law to Rural Circumstances

Part of the disconnect felt by Harney County citizens regarding regulation is a pattern of state-level "solutions" that do not account for rural realities. For example, land use regulation allows significant opportunity inside Urban Growth Boundaries (UGB) and very limited development outside. Harney County has less than 1,000 acres inside UGB and 6.1 million acres outside. The one size fits all approach does not work for us. We must be able to design what will work for our entrepreneurs without policy and regulation stopping us before we can start. In order to grow, we must not be limited to all unique business being inside our UGB. This demonstrates the need for Harney and similar communities to have more representation in statewide economic advocacy to achieve economic parity for rural communities.

LOOKING AHEAD

High Desert Partnership has identified many ways to make changes to how policy is implemented, and how non-local government entities can provide greater support for Harney County's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The Harney County Restoration Collaborative (HCRC), Harney Basin Wetlands Initiative, and Harney County Wildfire Collaborative, along with diverse partners that include many community members as well as those who share a love and concern for Harney County work to address the complex challenges of managing natural resources while also creating sustainable jobs that steward the county's natural resources.

Currently, Harney County "Restoration Approved" area restoration projects are bottlenecked at the U.S. Forest Service due to lack of funds and capacity at the national level, hindering the creation of government contracts that would create new, land-based jobs for Harney County residents while speeding the restoration of former timber forest ecosystems. Based on the model developed by the Lomakatsi Restoration Project in Ashland, The HCRC is working with Tribal partners and U.S. Forest Service representatives to develop a Stewardship Agreements System as a way to seek outside funding for restoration projects, giving momentum to partners and residents beyond the current limits of the Forest Service's budget.

These initiatives are currently working to:

- Secure funding and implement a plan to restore Malheur Lake and tributaries.
- Secure funding necessary to expand testing and evaluation completed by the Pueblo Pilot Project to prevent megafires and restore over 26,400 acres of sagebrush steppe rangelands in southeast Oregon.
- Develop a plan and secure funding to execute a collaborative climate change resiliency and habitat restoration strategy for 400,000 acres of sagebrush steppe.
- Secure funding to expand wetland restoration efforts to 10-15,000 acres of public and privately owned land to protect bird migration on the Pacific Flyway, including the northern pintail and canvasback ducks and greater sandhill cranes.
- Put in place needed MOUs and agreements with U.S. Forest Service to increase pace and scale of restoration projects in Southern Malheur Forest;
- Develop a plan for selling low-grade wood to reduce restoration costs.

Each of these projects support Harney County's land-based entrepreneurial ecosystem. This Assessment will be updated to share progress.

business oregon

In addition, partnering with Business Oregon's Rural Opportunities Initiative is actively linking Harney County with a statewide network of business service providers and community-level organizations in other rural communities. This ongoing, multi-year effort, in addition to creating practical solutions for rural entrepreneurs, aims to build a stronger coalition to advocate for policy that is flexible enough to meet the different needs of rural communities.



KEY FACTS

Harney's local economy reached a peak in the 1970s based on the success of the local timber industry. The decline of this industry has had a major impact on Harney County's markets. While the numbers of jobs in Oregon have grown more than 74% in the last 40 years, it has fallen in Harney County— there are 10% fewer total jobs in the region now than in 1976.

Source: Oregon Office of Economic Analysis, 1976-2016

Harney County Economic Development capitalizes on the region's placement on state and federal highways to attract warehousing and distribution-based businesses.

Source: Harney County, 2019

Agriculture comprises about 20% of the county's economy. 532 farms operate in Harney County, with an average size of 2,927 acres. Alfalfa hay (35% of total farm receipts) and cattle ranching (63%) comprise the majority of the agricultural market.

These statistics predate the federal legalization of industrial hemp in December 2018. Harney was Oregon's 3rd largest hemp producer in 2019, at 4,200 acres.

Source: USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service, 2017; Oregon Department of Agriculture, 2019

Harney's public natural land drives the local tourism market. For about 50% of non-local visitors, a visit to Malheur National Wildlife Refuge was the primary reason for the trip. Non-local visitors spent a median of \$52 per person, per day while visiting the area.

Source: U.S. Geological Service, 2011 (most recent)

A total of 59 retail and hospitality businesses operate in Harney, representing 29% of all firms.

Source: US Census Bureau Economic Census, 2012 (most recent)

WHAT WE KNOW

STRENGTH

Businesses in the Beautiful Landscape

The confluence of nature-driven tourism and geographic position between the regional hubs of Salem, Spokane, and Boise creates possibilities for recreational, agritourism, and adventure businesses to flourish in Harney's rugged landscape. Businesses focused on these niches are not identified in national economic census data and bear a deeper local inventory to explore ways in which economic development entities can support them. The Oregon State University Community Service Center prepared a 2017 report with findings on the state of the "New Natural Resource Economy", linked in the source list appendix at the end of this assessment.



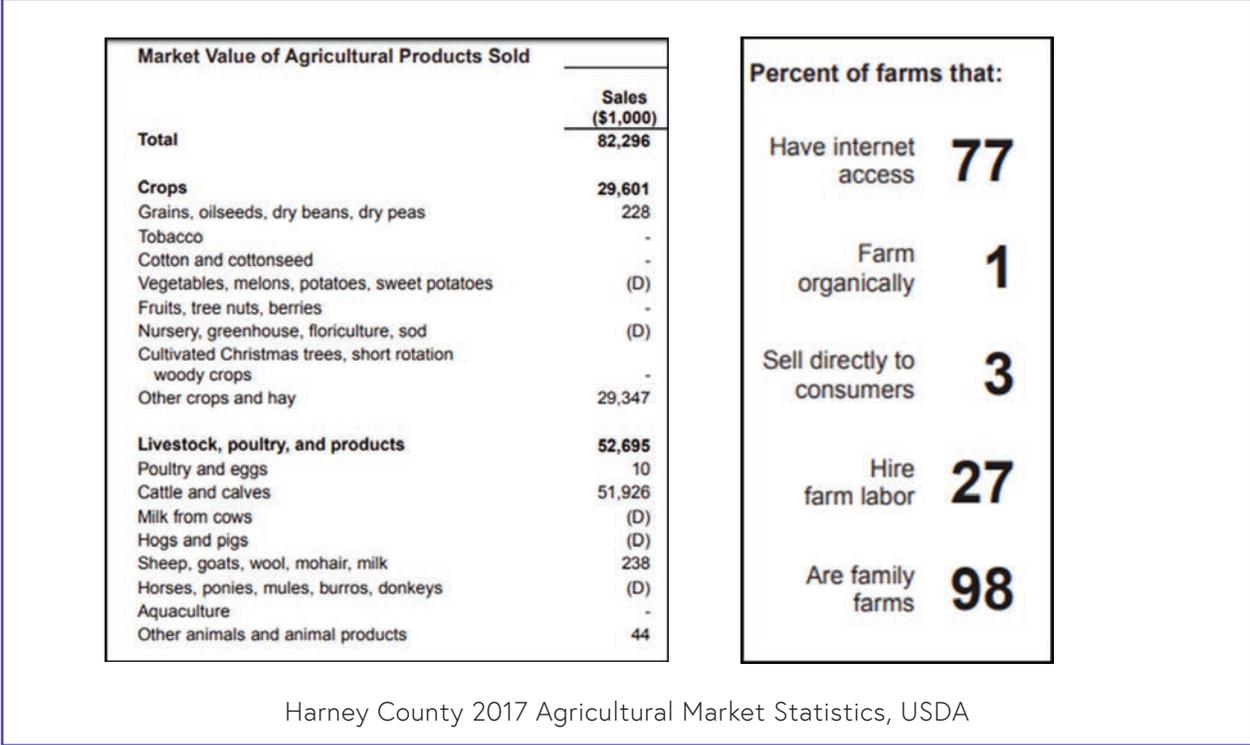
Pueblo Mountain by Autumn Larkins

STRENGTH

Diversifying Agriculture

The arrival of hemp as a large-scale alternative for Harney County agricultural producers holds great significance for diversifying agricultural production in the area and raising per-acre income for farmers. With an estimated \$40,000-\$50,000 an acre annual gross revenue (much higher than the estimated annual \$600-800 an acre for current leading crop of alfalfa hay production), the impact of this new market has yet to be fully realized in the Harney County entrepreneurial ecosystem. The Burns Paiute tribe has invested in a full-spectrum hemp extraction facility capable of processing hemp from the region and beyond into value-added products, increasing the local revenue and job opportunity potential for Harney's hemp economy. However, a moratorium on new agricultural wells in the area to curb groundwater resource depletion may impose limits to how quickly the industrial hemp industry can expand.

The USDA's most recent statistics note a strong predominance of large farms focusing on industrial commodity crop and beef cattle production. Support for further diversification of Harney County's agricultural markets through partnerships with the local Agricultural Extension has potential to unlock new food economy niches for local producers and improve the overall sustainability of Harney County's local food system.



"It's been a long time coming for the county to truly look at the ecosystem as a whole and figure out how we can be better." – Tracy Kennedy, Burns Paiute Economic Development Coordinator

OPPORTUNITY Groundwater Depletion as a Chance to Redirect

Alfalfa hay production has supported the region's economy, but groundwater depletion is beginning to impact the rate of new farm growth and total farm revenue. The full extent of this depletion has yet to fully play out, though High Desert Partnership plans to work with its agricultural partners to encourage new investment toward solutions. This threat to the stability of Harney County's traditional agricultural producers is a driving force of High Desert Partnership's work to spur alternative economic solutions.

OPPORTUNITY

Growing Coalition Support for Homegrown Solutions

Many respondents believe that waiting for another large outside corporation to bring jobs to Harney and replace the lumber economy of the past is no longer a feasible solution for the county. With the increased efforts of High Desert Partnership's partners and proliferation of new models for homegrown economic development, greater agreement is building around possibilities for new economic support models to help local entrepreneurs thrive in Harney.

OPPORTUNITY

Regional Co-Branding

Similar communities have created a regional branding certification to highlight the place-based, unique qualities of goods produced in their region. Over the last 20 or more years, there have been outstanding advances in Harney County toward implementing environmentally-sound, ecologically based ecosystem management throughout the region. There is an opportunity to commercialize, capitalize, and create access to new markets for businesses; enhance the desirability of visiting Harney County; and, explore the natural High Desert ecosystems and associated conservation-based agro-ecosystems.



A "High Desert Grown" certification could create new niches and market awareness for Harney County, utilizing the region's placement as a hub between population centers, its prominent natural beauty, and its role as a leader in ecologically based management of agricultural and natural working lands. A branding effort would create a strong demand for products made from these sustainably managed ecosystems and would open new local markets for goods and services. It would also support Harney County in continuing to become a destination and desired area from which to buy products nationally, and even worldwide.

LOOKING AHEAD

Development of new markets for businesses' was widely regarded by survey respondents to be among Harney County's highest priorities. Though obstacles exist, the region has plentiful opportunity to increase customer markets and business to business markets, as well as build access to government contracts to support business growth.

Available federal statistics regarding the Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism industry were found to be outdated. In-depth asset mapping of the region's economy by sector would provide local decision-makers stronger data from which to operate.



In partnership with the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Eastern Oregon Ag Research Center, High Desert Partnership has received five years of funding to facilitate the development of a Northern Great Basin Native Seed Production Cooperative. The development of this new entity will formalize the collaboration between High Desert Partnership, local producers, and agricultural support offices into a system to overcome bottlenecks in local seed supply needed for environmental restoration projects. This project will create infrastructure to procure bids for seed stock from government projects to combat invasive species and other restoration project in Harney and the surrounding region. It will also create new work with local growers producing and managing this seed stock, along with new markets that support ecological health.

In 2019, plans for this project have established the proposed primary functions. Uniting the interests of local producers and other community leaders in an equitable economic structure has enormous potential to add to the local entrepreneurial ecosystem; High Desert Partnership and ARS are currently engaging the community to develop the Cooperative's structure.

EXCERPT: NORTHERN GREAT BASIN SEED PRODUCTION COOPERATIVE PROJECT PLAN

Northern Great Basin Native Seed Production Cooperative Proposed Functions

Contracting – Buying & Selling

- Provide a forum for all contracting, especially Federal contracting and subsequent subcontracting with individual producers.
- Promote risk-limiting measures (e. g. payment by acre planted v. by seeds produced).
- Ensure native seed buyers and producers fully understand details of the contracts with respect to species, accessions, and timelines as a basis for planning.
- Review and approve production plans.

Site Evaluation

- Assist Landowners in identifying appropriate and potential sites for native seed production and collection.

Seed Collection

- Facilitate native seed collection and development of foundation seeds.
- Track and monitor seed accessions and landraces.
- Provide access to seed viability and dormancy testing.

Seed Processing, Storage and Delivery

- Provide access to/service for seed cleaning, processing, and packaging.
- Provide/foster state-of-the-art seed storage on a timeshare basis.

Production Systems

- Provide state-of-the-art knowledge about site preparation, planting, weed management, growing, harvesting, and species-specific propagation techniques.
- Monitor and provide oversight for meeting production timelines.

Equipment Sharing

- Acquire and offer expensive, but essential, seed-production equipment on a timeshare basis.

Consulting, Recommendations, Research, Reporting

- Provide educational and technical consulting services for growing native plants.
- Test new propagation and plant growing strategies.

PEOPLE

HUMAN CAPITAL, ADVOCATES, TALENT DEVELOPMENT

KEY FACTS

Harney County has a median age of 46.2 years, about 20% higher than Oregon and 25% higher than the U.S. as a whole. In addition, 22% of people in Harney County are 65 years or older, about 1.5 times the national rate.

Source: Census Reporter, 2017

In Harney County, 17.5% of persons live below the poverty line, much higher than Oregon and the U.S. as a whole. According to the Oregon Department of Human Services, 31% of the Harney County population lives in a high poverty hotspot.

Source: Census Report, 2017; Oregon DHS, 2015

Of working age residents, 56.9% of workers are employed in private enterprise, and 27.8% are employed by the government.

Source: U.S. Census, 2013-2017

In 1980, the Hines Lumber Company began laying off workers after the loss of a bid for federal timber. By February 1981, Harney County unemployment was over 30%. Today, unemployment in Harney County is at 13.1%, almost double the state average of 6.5%.

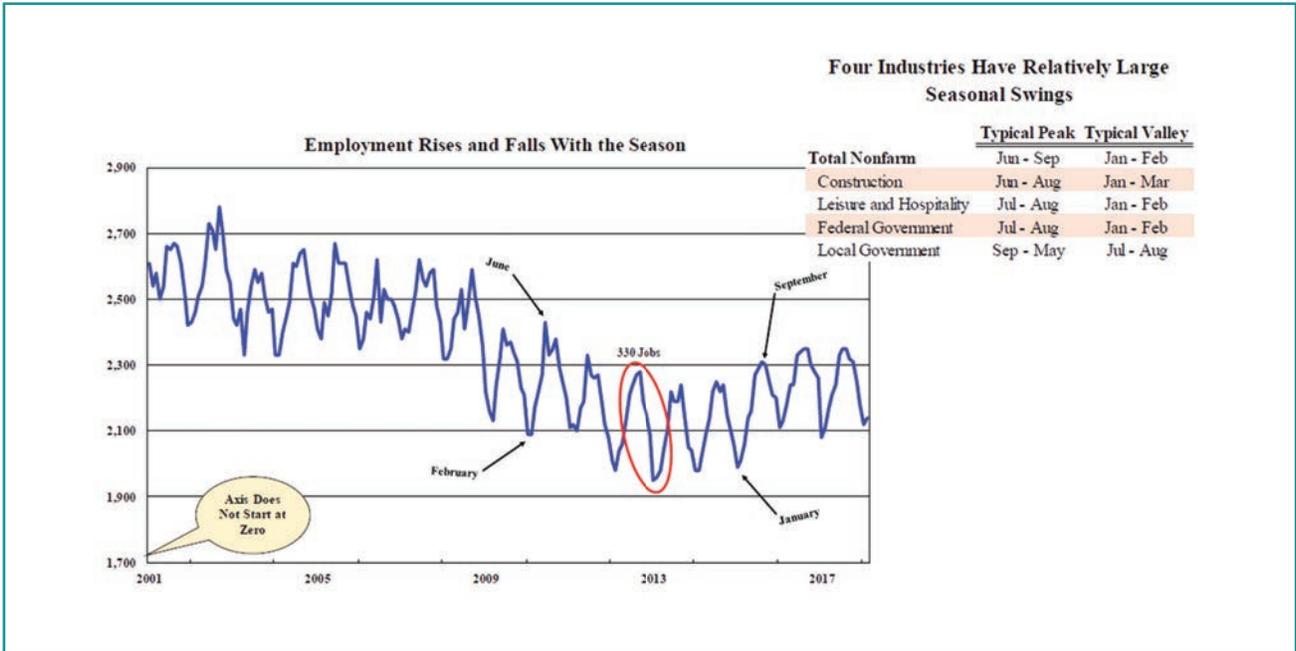
Source: Oregon Encyclopedia, 2018

WHAT WE KNOW

STRENGTH

Robust Seasonal Employment Cultures

Employment in Harney County's major sectors rises and falls seasonally. Beyond seasonal tourism, agriculture, and hospitality jobs, survey respondents noted a strong culture of fluctuating government employment opportunities available in the region. Regional agencies including the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service all employ crews of firefighters to control seasonal wildfires. These positions provide living-wage employment for 8-9 months of each year for close to 50 County residents, supplemented in the off months by entrepreneurial pursuits and unemployment benefits. Incubating off-season entrepreneurialism for fire crew workers and other seasonally employed residents has potential to help account for yearly fluctuation and stabilize income and employment.



STRENGTH | Value-Added Advantage in the Hemp Industry

Regulatory action to slow groundwater depletion may limit the development of Harney's local hemp industry, but the investment by the Burns Paiute tribe into a large-scale hemp extraction facility provides opportunity to process hemp products from material grown outside the county, creating a value-added hemp export market that allows Harney to derive economic value from the hemp economy beyond farm production.

OPPORTUNITY | Remote Work Opportunities

The growing availability of at-home and remote work could benefit the area's entrepreneurial ecosystem by appealing to remote workers interested in Harney's low cost of living. Workforce recruitment campaigns focused on this niche could also help develop Harney County's base of skilled workers providing financial, legal, consulting, and other business support services. Additional technological infrastructure required to support remote workers is a worthwhile area for future, specific exploration.

Focusing on the long-term, High Desert Partnership's **Youth Changing the Community initiative** works with local schools and Harney County 4-H to create opportunities for youth. By building positive experiences in their hometown, this initiative gives youth a sense of pride and opportunities to shape Harney to support their future. The new initiative's first youth-led action focused attention and civic investment to rehabilitate local Juniper Skate Park to provide more avenues for healthy and positive recreation. This also helps develop Harney's future leaders through entrepreneurship training, career connections, and more.



Participating youth at the Juniper Skate Park, 2019

LOOKING AHEAD



High Desert Partnership's 2019 Field Tech crew. Work focused on managing Malheur Lake and flood-irrigated wet meadows to provide food for migrating water birds and sustainable economic return for ranching families.

To provide career development and summer work opportunities for Harney County young adults, High Desert Partnership has begun facilitating annual field tech positions to support its collaborative conservation work. Six summer techs were employed in 2019; these tech positions provide high school and college students with real-world experiences in natural resource jobs and further the goals of the Harney Basin Wetlands Initiative and High Desert Partnership's other collaborative initiatives.

Harney Basin Wetlands Initiative partners are working on solutions for the ecological and economic challenges that face land and water management in the Harney Basin through funding from the **Oregon Watershed Enhancement** Board and other partners. This successful program is being expanded to create more work opportunities that directly involve local young adults in the area's environmental restoration efforts.

"This is a way to show there's actually quite a bit of opportunity here in the natural resource management realm and gives students a little glimpse at the jobs they could potentially have." - Benjamin Cate, High Desert Partnership Ecological Coordinator

High Desert Partnership also hosted a new series of entrepreneur support events in 2019. The inaugural Opportunity Knocks sessions brought together 13 local entrepreneurs for an open-ended forum to discuss how High Desert Partnership can best support local enterprise development. High Desert Partnership is working with regional and local partners through the **BizHarney Initiative** to develop a series of regular opportunities to engage this new working group of entrepreneurs in 2020 and beyond.

Surveys from just a few of the initial participants give an indication of the business needs Opportunity Knocks will support:

What do you hope to get out of this Opportunity Knocks event?



KEY FACTS

Broadband internet availability is lower than comparable Oregon counties; only 70.9% of Harney County households have access.

Source: U.S. Census Quickfacts, 2018

In 2019, Burns received a walk score of 72 (very walkable) and bike score of 61 (some infrastructure). Hines received a walk score of 16 (car-dependent) and a bike score of 52 (some infrastructure).

Source: Walk Score, 2019

In 2019, the American Society for Civil Engineers gave Oregon a C- grade for overall infrastructure, including D+ for dams, D+ for energy, D+ for levees, and D- for wastewater.

Source: Infrastructure Report Card, 2019

Oregon's Department of Water Resources announced in 2015 that it would not be issuing any new permits for agricultural groundwater wells in Harney County because of concerns about groundwater depletion. In effect, this is a moratorium on new agricultural wells. In addition, concerns over spring flooding have been an issue discussed by city council.

Source: OPB, 2015; Burns-Times Herald, 2017

Harney County is one of the fastest warming counties in both Oregon and the nation.

Source: Washington Post, 2019

Burns, Oregon: WalkScore Highlight

Very Walkable

Most errands can be accomplished on foot.

Walkable Points of Interest

- Historic Central Hotel
- High Desert Park & Recreation



WHAT WE KNOW

STRENGTH

Ecosystems Resilient to Threat of Wildfire

The Harney County Wildfire Collaborative unites diverse partners with a stake in preventing and suppressing the threat of catastrophic wildfires in both critical sagebrush steppe ecosystem habitat and dry pine forest and restoring these lands to be resistant and resilient to potential wildfire. This initiative, formed in December 2014, has helped secure outside funding to support wildfire reduction and reduce the burden fires pose to Harney County's public utilities. High Desert Partnership plays a facilitation role to help ranchers and other partners share the expense, planning, and implementation of coordinated fire safety measures.



STRENGTH

Early Success with Biofuels

One new infrastructure commodity, biofuel heating, is beginning to emerge in Harney County. The **High Desert Biomass Cooperative** was formed in 2016 to purchase and manage a new, sustainably-fueled heating system for Harney County Circuit Court, Harney County Sheriff's Office, Harney County Jail, Slater Elementary, and Symmetry Care—a mental health and addiction care center. The new installation has led to an 80% reduction in fuel costs, and has since attracted new outside funding to transition additional public facilities to renewably-sourced energy.

OPPORTUNITY

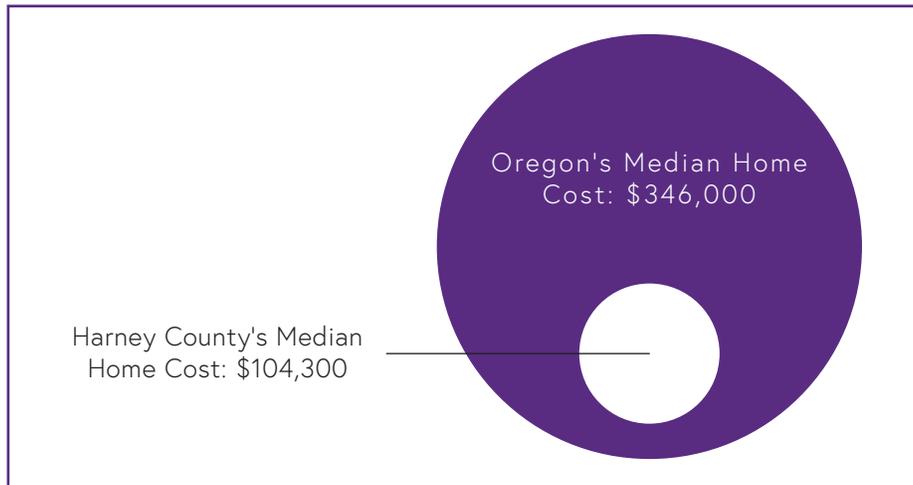
Improving Computer and Internet Access

The lack of widely available high-speed internet was a repeated concern cited by community members, accompanied by a desire for greater access to more office space, computers, printers, internet, and administrative resources. Developing a community technology hub offering co-working spaces for entrepreneurs is a potential opportunity to target with future grant requests submitted by High Desert Partnership and its partners. Harney County's recent designation as a federal Opportunity Zone, providing new tax breaks to help businesses invest in infrastructure development, supported this opportunity. A new agreement with MiWave, a local internet service provider business, is designed to increase broadband service availability for businesses and homes.

Many survey respondents agree addressing issues within the Harney County housing market would have long term positive effects on community entrepreneurial prospects, quality of life issues, and customer base sustainability.

The low availability of rentals and homes for sale has become a big problem – both markets are so tight they are influencing people's decision to stay in, or move to, Harney County. The community needs moderate wage housing to attract essential professional service providers, add needed additional housing inventory, and address an unbalanced frontier rural housing market. Harney County's housing market and construction sector challenges prohibit a healthy inventory of homes across the price spectrum, preventing housing options from meeting the needs of young adults, families, and the area's growing senior population.

Strengthening and balancing Harney County's housing market has recently become a local priority, and must be addressed to ensure overall community sustainability and livability, as well as to support business expansion opportunities.



Changing climate, groundwater depletion, and rural flight position Harney County at a turning point. With a collaborating citizenry and a strong sentiment for new economic solutions, Harney has the potential to lead regional efforts in transitioning to sustainable economic structures that take climate change into account.

LOOKING AHEAD

A recent technical assistance study, The Harney County Workforce Housing Road Map 2019, identified a target goal of building five new \$200,000 - \$250,000, 3-bedroom, 2-bathroom houses each year for five years within city urban growth boundaries in Harney County. This path would address specific housing inventory needs as well as reset the local housing inventory to a healthy market supply. Exploring options to help support construction contractors overcoming barriers around capacity and profitability will be key.

Future initiatives plan to:

- Map and link existing community initiatives focused on water usage, housing for seniors, and other vulnerable groups, and main street revitalization.
- Help certify local contractors to perform energy analysis, asbestos abatement, and other needed certifications to meet housing goals.
- Identify and list the types of housing blight in Harney communities to determine remedies.
- Explore best practices in other rural Oregon communities (e. g. City of Bend's "Cottage Cluster" code) for applicability to Harney County, among other solutions.

Statewide, Oregon received a poor grade for its infrastructure. Very little county or regional infrastructure information exists or has been released, nor has information on how Harney County budget shortfalls will impact anticipated future maintenance and new development. Additional research to compile local government infrastructure planning and priorities is needed.



UPDATING & MAINTAINING THIS RESOURCE

To maintain this Assessment as a current resource for entrepreneurs and service provider, this document is designed to be updated annually by High Desert Partnership and its BizHarney collaborative, and as significant changes to Harney County's entrepreneurial ecosystem occur. Annual updates will allow the document to remain a relevant guide for economic work in the region, be a catchall for activities, and build continuity between past, current, and future progress.

To suggest an update, please contact Brenda Smith, Executive Director at brenda@highdesertpartnership.org.

WITH GRATITUDE

Thank you to everyone who has contributed time, energy, and input to making this assessment possible, including those who were interviewed during the creation of this report!

Business Oregon, Rural Opportunities Initiative

The Burns Paiute Tribe

The Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation

Harney County

Harney County Economic Development

Kelley Nonprofit Consulting

Sheley, Jordan, BizHarney Coordinator 2018-2019



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