

Columbia County Long Range Planning Report

1970

Columbia County is located in the northwestern part of the state and is situated on the Columbia River between Portland and Astoria. It includes five small towns that have had over 100 years of timber-oriented harvesting and processing industry. Agriculture, forestry, and wood processing have formed the economic base of the community up to the present time.

The county is situated along the deep-draft channel of the Columbia River. It has numerous good industrial sites available, and is located to advantage for the concept of today's living—close to the "cultural advantages" of a metropolitan area, but remote enough to attract those interested in rural living. These "advantages" may be the very ones that give rise to some of the problems facing the residents of the county.

The following reports are the results of the fifth Long Range Planning Conference held in the County since 1924, and as in the past, it was sponsored by the Agricultural Planning Council and the Oregon State University Cooperative Extension Service. The material includes human resource development, natural resource development, industrial and public affairs.

This is a summarization of committee reports and recommendations. Background and statistical information along with full reports of each committee can be obtained from the Columbia County Extension Service, Courthouse, St. Helens, Oregon.

CONSUMER COMPETENCE

Columbia County's bankruptcy rate follows a national trend—up 350% in the past 10 years. County average is two filed per month, with average debts of \$3,000. Financial counseling is available on request from various financial institutions.

Teens are controlling large sums of money, and 15.7% of the county population is teens (1960 census). Of 240 teenagers surveyed, 33 control more than \$100 a month. Consumer skills and money management education in school curricula are limited.

Older citizens are susceptible to consumer frauds. Existing programs reach a small segment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

● Consumer-competence educational programs should be expanded in our schools, specifically in the junior and senior high schools. These programs should include purchasing of goods and services and money management, including the use of credit.

● Educational programs should be offered by the Cooperative Extension Service to young marrieds in the areas of purchasing goods and services and financial planning.

● Senior citizens should receive educational information about consumer frauds, with the Extension Service taking the responsibility for initiating this educational program.

● The Extension Service should extend consumer information to all families in the following areas:

1. Financial planning, including the use of credit.

2. Decision making as it relates to housing, home furnishings, appliances.
3. Knowledge of consumer products so that families can make intelligent consumer decisions.

HEALTH COMMITTEE

Columbia County health facilities include one 39-bed hospital, 92 beds available in nursing home care facilities, eight doctors, and ten dentists. The County Health Department includes one part-time doctor, three full-time nurses, three sanitarians, two psychology social workers, a part-time psychiatrist, and a part-time psychologist. One dentist reports finding a high rate of dental caries in Columbia County youth. A Rainier survey of children's diets indicated fewer than 10 percent were adequate. Physical fitness programs for youth and adults are limited.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create public awareness of current health programs available.
- Form community action groups and conduct educational programs on problems of environmental sanitation.
- Raise standards for food handlers—training in food service safety for church, Grange, and other organizations be given by Extension Service and the County Health Department.
- Work toward establishing a sheltered workshop for employment and training of physically and mentally handicapped persons—suggested projects include making over used clothing for families needing low-cost clothing.
- Establish more Alcoholics Anonymous chapters.
- The Extension Service should provide more nutrition education for homemakers, teens, and senior citizens.

FAMILY STABILITY COMMITTEE

The scope of this report includes four family-related areas: Juvenile Delinquency, Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Senior Citizens, and Early Marriage.

Juvenile Delinquency

Most serious of juvenile delinquent acts in Columbia County include larceny, vandalism, and illegal sexual involvement. The number of referrals in Columbia County Juvenile Department in three years includes: 1968-734; 1969-825; 1970-877. The average case load per month is steadily rising.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Work toward increasing the counseling staff of the Juvenile Department so that counseling services can include the child's family.
- Develop expanded counseling services for the community such as those provided by the County Mental Health Department.

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- Extension family life programs, churches, and P-TA's should all be included in a total parent education program.
- Encourage establishment of more foster homes and shelter homes.
- Work for better recreational facilities—including tennis courts and playground equipment. A total recreation program such as YMCA is recommended.
- Develop a better police youth relationship through programs including both groups.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Columbia County ranks 6th in Oregon counties in the seriousness of its alcoholic problems. Alcohol and drug abuse represents one-fifth of the Columbia County admissions to the Oregon State Hospital in 1967, indicating it as a significant problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider creation of a detoxification center as an alternative to arrest and imprisonment that provides medical, social, and rehabilitative services to help the alcoholic gain control.
- Education programs through Extension, churches, and other community organizations create community awareness of total effects of alcoholism.
- Increase support of local AA groups, the only active treatment program in Columbia County.
- Expand community awareness of the needs of youth for social, recreational, and vocational programs.

Senior Citizens

11.4% of Columbia County's population is 65 or over. This is more than 3,000 in number. The greatest problems of our aged include inadequacies in housing, medical care, transportation, incomes to face rising costs, and nutrition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a volunteer program with churches, social groups, and Extension units providing personnel to transport isolated seniors, visit and make phone calls to check safety.
- The Extension Service, through a series of educational programs should provide information on: nutrition, food buying, meal planning and preparation to include use of abundant foods; understanding medicare, insurance, financial problems; housing needs—remodeling to make house suitable for older persons; and consumer frauds.
- Encourage community participation by senior citizens and explore uses of their talents and contributions to community.
- Conduct a senior citizens survey to determine housing needs.
- Increase medicare certified nursing homes.

Early Marriage and Young Mothers

Columbia County's brides' average age is slightly lower than Oregon's, which is 19. Marriages contracted under 20 have higher divorce rates and include people with least job skills. Day-care facilities for children of working mothers are inadequate and below quality, with prohibitive costs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Family living education programs should be expanded in schools, churches, and the Extension Service, to reach young marrieds and teens considering marriage.
- The Extension Service should expand educational programs in homemaking skills for low income mothers and young mothers and couples.
- Work for adequate, licensed and supervised day-care centers. Young mothers might organize a baby sitting cooperative, giving each mother free time from her family.

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture occupies a relatively small percentage of the land of Columbia County—about 12 percent. Most of this 40 to 50 thousand acres is located on alluvial soils along the Columbia River and extends into valleys of tributaries. Some bench and hill lands are utilized for crops such as strawberries and pasture.

Increased forest enterprises have reduced farm land. A growing population and industrialization of the county has tended to break up many farms to create small, part-time farms and rural residences. Full-time farm operations have dropped from about 1100 to 300 in the past decade.

While most crops produced in the state can be grown in Columbia County, past emphasis has been on dairy and livestock operations. Small fruits, poultry, mink, and specialty crops such as peppermint, grass seeds, potatoes, and processing vegetables also have been major crops.

Dairying continues to hold a major roll in the agricultural economy, being second to meat animals in dollar income. The former hundreds of producers have decreased to a dozen dairymen, however, with extensive operations in terms of both investment and cow numbers.

Because the county is ideally situated for grass and forage production, beef and sheep hold key positions.

Of the fruit, vegetable, and seed crops, only strawberries continue as a crop of consequence. Low levels of management, coupled with problems of disease and competitive production factors, have decreased the number of operators producing varied farm crops.

Committee members note that Columbia County has both limitations and strengths as a result of the cool moderate climate of the area. Some crop possibilities may be limited, but others are enhanced. Transportation facilities are somewhat limited and Highway 30, the major state highway in the county, is carrying near capacity traffic loads. Limitations are present in the potential of flooding of substantial areas along the Columbia River and some tributaries. Diking and drainage helps to alleviate this danger, but it always looms as a threat.

The Committee sees opportunity for improvement of agriculture in the county.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Institute land-use controls. Citizens of the county need to work with county and city planning commissions and other bodies of government to provide land use controls. This is a means of preserving the county's scenic beauty and open space by relieving the pressure of encroachment of urban dwellers, industry, rights-of-way, and the fractioning of farms. Extension and others may need to conduct educational programs to have an informed public.
- Improve marketing. Producers and the Extension Service should

work together toward improved market facilities, market channels, and general marketing procedures. Preliminary processing of commodities may be helpful in reducing weight or volume prior to shipment.

- Improve irrigation. Landowners should consider more extensive irrigation practices, and the Extension Service should conduct education programs aimed at this goal. Some shifts in cropping programs may result, but irrigation holds promise of greater per acre returns for operators.

UTILITIES & SERVICES

Study committee members conclude that the greatest needs for development in utilities and services fall in three areas, including transportation, water supplies (particularly domestic), and disposal of sewage and solid wastes. Communications and power services now reach nearly 100 percent of county residents, and committee members believe that the service companies now ministering to these needs will continue to keep pace with developments.

Transportation

A road plan for the county has been developed for the County Planning Commission by the Bureau of Governmental Research. Major road problems have to do with capacity, in that all roads are two lane and carry enough traffic to constitute a hazard. Many county roads are narrow, but the county adopted a policy in 1967 of no longer accepting a right-of-way less than sixty feet wide.

Columbia County has fifty-five to sixty miles of frontage on the Columbia River. This major transportation channel permits deep draft ocean vessels access to the Portland-Vancouver area and allows shallow draft barges considerably beyond that point on both the Columbia and Willamette Rivers.

Daily bus service between Portland and Astoria on Highway 30 does not meet the needs of the area. Consequently, its patronage is relatively small. There is no intra-county public transportation.

Water Supplies

Columbia County does not have adequate domestic water supplies to meet summer needs. Only three or four percent of annual precipitation occurs during summer months. As a result, stream flow is low at the time when demands are highest.

Studies of the geology of Columbia County's ground water supplies, and a review of logs of existing wells show little promise for improvement. The area generally lacks permeable geological formations capable of accepting a recharge from precipitation. Reports of the state engineer indicate that many wells are incapable of maintaining the full capacity shown by well drillers.

The quality of ground water varies greatly, with much of it carrying high levels of soluble iron. Consideration needs to be given to the possibility of developing storage water in the county or the use of water directly from the Columbia River to meet future needs.

Sewage, Garbage, and Solid Wastes

Sewage disposal facilities are generally inadequate in those areas of the county where they exist at all. St. Helens, Rainier, Clatskanie, and Vernonia have sewage treating plants, but not all of the local areas are covered by the facilities.

Only St. Helens has secondary sewage treatment.

Septic tanks serve most of the county, but many soils are inadequately drained for such facilities to perform properly. This situation

poses a land-use problem requiring that building sites be larger than would otherwise be utilized.

Garbage collection service in the county is incomplete, covering only the areas of St. Helens and Scappoose and the cities of Vernonia, Clatskanie, and Rainier. Open burning is practiced at all disposal sites except for the St. Helens-Scappoose area and surrounding territory, where private land fill is being used. Efforts by the County Sanitarian, County Planning Commission, Board of Commissioners, and others are being directed toward development of improved solid waste disposal sites.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Board of Commissioners implement a long-time county road plan.
- Port Commission and concerned agencies work to implement 40-foot Columbia River channel.
- Governmental and quasi-governmental bodies work toward area-wide domestic water distribution, utilizing the Columbia River if necessary.

COMMUNITY & RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The Community and Resource Development Committee considered youth and adult organizations, programs and participation, cultural facilities and events, informal education, and recreation for all ages.

Approximately 24% of the 6,712 school children in the county are served by Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and 4-H. Many young people also participate in programs offered by churches, lodges, and the schools. Most of these are in the under 12 age group.

There is a lack of cultural and recreational opportunities available locally for the teenagers and young adults. This contributes to their seeking employment and residences in other communities.

Single adults need recreational and cultural facilities within the county. Social and cultural outlets are needed for senior citizens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Schools include tennis for girls in high school programs.
- County develop a drag strip to provide young people an opportunity to race off roads and highways.
- Park Commission expedite park development to avoid the increasing costs of later investment.
- Fair Board increase the amount of supervision and number of chaperones for dances and parties held for young people on county fairgrounds
- Increase the number of summer programs available to youth.
- Provide activities for single adults employed in the county.
- Provide more programs for the elderly.
- Continue the General Educational Development program for non-high school graduates.
- Include kindergarten in the schools of the county.
- Develop a county library system.
- Schools open libraries to adults and children evenings, especially during summer months.
- Offer more creative activities in art, music, crafts, dancing, drama, and science functions.
- Implement part-time or full-time employment of individuals to recruit leaders and organize clubs for youth programs.

FORESTRY COMMITTEE

There is little old growth to be found in Columbia County, but young stands are developing rapidly, covering more than 82 percent of the land area.

The commercial forest area of the county exceeds 342,000 acres. This acreage has tended to increase as marginal and fairly high quality farm land has been planted back to woodlands. Causes include soil bank programs and other incentives, including a practical matter of economics.

Ownership of forest lands is difficult to pinpoint because of shifts occurring between private owners. A survey conducted in mid-1968 showed more than 2,600 separate individual woodland owners paying fire patrol tax. Public ownership is relatively small at 8 percent. Corporate ownership encompasses 40 to 50 percent of the forested land. Two large commercial timber companies are active in the county. One is the E. P. Stamm Tree Farm of Crown Zellerbach located at Vernonia with an ownership of nearly 100,000 acres. The other is Longview Fibre Company centered in Longview and Kelso, Washington with an ownership of more than 60,000 acres. Although there are a few large individual holdings, most of the rest of the timber is owned by small woodland operators with less than 5,000 acres.

Douglas Fir is the most important species in Columbia County, being predominate on 89 percent of the saw timber acreage and the key species on 93 percent of the second growth of seedlings in stands. The major share of the remaining forest is red alder.

Because of easy access, Columbia County's forest lands were some of the first to be harvested. With the introduction of high lead logging and the logging railroad about 1910, production climbed sharply, reached its peak, and remained high during the 1920's. Production dropped in 1930 and, except for a temporary upsurge during World War II, continued to decline to a low in 1951. A general increase in harvest of wood products has occurred as second growth stands reach a marketable age and new and better markets are developed.

Woodland owners and operators in Columbia County are particularly fortunate in having a wide range of available markets. These include outlets for sawlogs in all sizes and lengths, poles and piling, peelers, pulpwood of all species in long lengths, and alder sawlogs. Outlets for some specialty products exist in the Portland area.

Numerous studies, including the Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Experiment Station reports, have classified Columbia County as one of the best growing places for timber in the Pacific Northwest. Site classes are predominately a high II and III, with some Site I.

Considerable land in the county is in a low state of production. This is especially true in small woodland holdings that are not intensively managed. Estimates show that the average *small woodland* is growing less than 300 board feet per acre annually, whereas yields of more than 700 board feet per acre would be expected. Brush and other ground cover were determined to be the principal reasons for understocking on small woodlands in one study. Studies show that smaller forest areas usually have been heavily logged and have less timber per acre. However, small woodlands generally have advantages of lower elevations, deeper soils, gentler topography, less fire hazard, shorter haul distance, and more flexibility as regards seasonal logging. At the same time, some well managed small woodlands are producing at levels that match or excel any to be found.

Although Columbia County has had an active farm forestry committee for more than 20 years and a county Small Woodlands Association has been organized recently, the number participating in these or statewide forestry groups is relatively small.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Extension Service and appropriate agencies give additional emphasis to all aspects of forestry education as a means of increasing management levels and economic returns to woodland owners.
- Vo-Ag instructors and 4-H leaders encourage forestry activities for youth.
- Extension forestry groups, etc., make special efforts to increase the number of forest tours—including groups such as ag classes, businessmen, and woodland owners, as a means of keeping nonwoodland owners aware of the contribution of forest lands to our economy.
- Owners should give special attention to:
 1. Site preparation.
 2. Consideration of origin of planting stock.
 3. Use of species other than Douglas fir for wet areas (hemlock) or south exposures (pine).
 4. Fertilization.
 5. Chemical thinning.
 6. Aerial spray for brush control and possibly diseases and insects in specific instances where justified.
 7. Controlling competitive species.
 8. Road improvement—especially in young stands when first merchantable.
 9. The merits and potentials of pruning.
 10. Selective harvest.
 11. Utilization of pre-harvest killing as based on recent research at OSU.
 12. Full knowledge of forest taxation laws.
 13. Encroachment of rights-of-way on forest lands.

EMPLOYMENT

Columbia County ranked ninth in percent of unemployed in the state in 1963 when labor force numbered 5,776. In 1966, the labor force was 9,196 with 456 actively seeking work. The committee feels its primary goal is to project some "whys" and advance some recommendations for alleviating the high level of unemployment.

Other organizations have studied this same problem and a number of their publications are pertinent.

A partial summation of these studies indicates a need to:

- Bring an awareness of the employment situation to county residents; perhaps through various interested community organizations, as well as the news media.
- Establish more direct communications between employers and the Oregon State Employment Service. Employers should keep them notified of job opportunities.
- Induce businesses and industries to provide additional employment opportunities—emphasize utilization of our youth and female labor force.
- Broaden education programs by: expanding vocational fields at the high school level and expanding adult educational programs.
- Utilize present government training and retraining programs such as MDTA (Manpower Development and Training), etc., and encourage participation in apprenticeship programs in the trade and industrial areas.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

New Development

A new pulse has been felt in the industrial development of the area in recent years. Shell Chemical Company has built a major plant and the state's first gasoline refinery will soon be built here according to news reports. The state's first nuclear generating plant is under construction and is scheduled to be on the line in Columbia County by 1974. These basic newcomers almost certainly promise other diversified related industries.

The Port of St. Helens has been active in industrial development and has published studies that are worthwhile to industries interested in the area. These studies indicate that industries such as chemicals, metals, and others that require large ground areas should be sought. Along with these would come some remanufacturing types of industry, so a twofold purpose would be accomplished. Industrial development will help solve the County's unemployment problem, broaden the tax base for better schools and public services, and increase trade and business.

Population growth in metropolitan areas decreases the amount of land available for growing crops and for low cost industrial development.

Since Columbia County cannot control metropolitan growth in other areas, we should recognize that this growth requires rock materials for construction purposes. We have the rock and the labor force to quarry, process, and deliver it.

Zoning

For proper and orderly development of Columbia County, the committee recommends county-wide land use zoning. In this way proper planning could be done for residential, industrial, commercial and recreational interests to live together with some degree of harmony.

The orderly growth of any community is dependent upon sound city and county planning programs. Pollution, congestions, and devaluation of property are the results of improper programs or no program at all. The first step would be to acquaint the people with the present problems and need for careful planning. The most vital factor in the success or failure in planning is community attitude.

Labor Market

A recent Chamber of Commerce study indicates that about 500 women would be available for work in such facilities as a clothing manufacturing plant. Most of these women are housewives, not classified as unemployed, but who have indicated their desire to augment the family income.

Improvement of Highway 30 will remove an obstacle that has hampered development of our entire area. This improvement should be expedited. A possible railroad merger should improve our position on rates and availability of cars.

In the field of pollution controls we should exercise extreme care for protection of our environment. Columbia County and the State should work with neighboring counties and states to reduce or abolish environmental pollution. It does no one good and our county harm if we drive existing and potential industries across the line to other areas that have less rigid controls over the same air and water.

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