

# Study: Public land is good for rural areas

By Krista Langlois, High Country News

For many parts of the rural West – like Oregon’s Harney County, where timber jobs dropped 70 percent between 1998 and 2013 – large swaths of public land can feel like a burden. Counties rich in public land are often at the mercy of federal land managers, so when logging, mining or ranching dries up – either because of management decisions or shifts in the market – loggers, miners and ranchers can feel powerless. Watching young people flee to cities, it’s easy to conclude that federally managed lands impede economic growth.

A study by Montana nonprofit Headwaters Economics shows that’s not necessarily the case. Overall, rural Western counties with more federal land performed noticeably better by four key economic indicators than counties with less public land.

Though economic growth in rural areas is still far surpassed by urban growth, Western rural counties with the highest share of federal lands had on average faster population, employment, personal income and per capita income growth between 1970 and 2014 than those with less public land.

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