

# Oakridge, Oregon

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## NEAI Projects\*

Year	Applicant	Project	Funding Source <sup>1</sup>	Amount
1994	City of Oakridge	Greenwaters Pedestrian Bridge	Forest Service	\$203,000
1994	City of Oakridge	Mill Site Redevelopment/Rehab – purchase site	USDA, USFS	\$1,840,000
1995	City of Oakridge	Mill Site – Lookout Enterprises	USFS-OGDF	15,000
1995	Wilderness Woods Products	Wilderness Woods Products		45,000
1995	City of Oakridge	Jobs-in-the-Woods Demonstration Project	Forest Service	\$20,000
1995	City of Oakridge	Senior Center Study	HUD	\$10,000
1996	City of Oakridge	Industrial Park Clean-up	USFS-CAC	\$84,000
1997	City of Oakridge	Mill Site Redevelopment/Rehab – Build		\$404,000
1997	City of Oakridge	Building which houses Armstrong	USFS-CAC	\$32,000
1997	City of Oakridge	Industrial Park Marketing/Financial Plan	CDBG	\$158,000
1998	City of Oakridge	Industrial Park / Flexible Manufacturing Bldg..	USDA-Rural Development	\$1,050,000
2000	City of Oakridge	Water System Capital Improvement	OECD Approved/not recvd	\$3,200,000
<b>County Projects</b>				
1995 1998 2000 1996 1996 1996 1997 1998	Lane Council of Governments (LCOG)	<u>Intermediary Relending Program</u>  • Rosalina's • Les Schwab Tire Center • Five Rivers Family Practice Medical Clinic • W&J Towing and Repair • Creative Composites, Inc.	USDA-Rural Business Development Fund	\$3.5 mil     \$508,000
1994 1995 1996	LCOG	Capacity-building for Initiative	EDA RDF USFS-CAC	\$95,000 2,000,000 13,900
1996	LCOG	Entrepreneurial Business Project		\$75,000
1999	LCOG	Assessment of Industrial and Commercial Site in Lane County	Old Growth Diversification Fund	\$30,000

\* Project funding reflects initial loan and grant totals. Final funding amounts may be different.

1. Key to funding sources: USDA = United States Department of Agriculture, USFS = United States Forest Service, HUD = Housing and Urban Development, CDBG = Community Development Block Grant, OECD = Oregon Economic Community Development Department, CAC = Community Assistance Center, RDF = Rural Development Funds.

## Background Context

### History

Located at the base of the western slope of the Oregon Cascades, Oakridge was first settled by European-Americans in the late nineteenth century. Eugene, the closest metropolitan area, is a one hour drive over a two-lane mountain road. Oakridge became a base for the helper locomotives and a maintenance center when the Southern Pacific Railroad completed their line in 1926. In 1940, approximately 520 people lived in the town.

Pope and Talbot, which planned to manage its own large timber holdings for sustained yield, opened a timber mill in Oakridge in 1948. They competed for timber from the local national forest with a 25 year-old Hines Mill in the adjacent town of Westfir. While the railroad shut down its helper base and Hines declined, Pope and Talbot grew, eventually employing 500 workers. At the same time, the local Forest Service District Ranger Station expanded its employee base. Oakridge's population doubled during the 1950s and again in the 1960s, staying in the 3,500-4,000 range through the 1960s and 1970s before dropping to 3,000 in the 1980s.

The Hines Mill closure in 1978 hurt the isolated, local economies of Westfir and Oakridge. During that same year, Pope and Talbot began a modernization program that allowed their mill to maintain its production level with 200 fewer workers. These two major events contributed to a 15 percent unemployment rate in Oakridge in 1979.

During the fall of 1985, Pope and Talbot announced the layoff of all of their Oakridge employees. In December of that same year, they announced what they anticipated to be a permanent closure of the mill. Following several months of negotiations, the employees' union agreed to significant reductions in wages and benefits, allowing the mill to reopen in the spring of 1986 at lower production and employment levels (Hibbard 1993). In 1989, Pope and Talbot sold the 270-acre mill site to the Bald Knob Land and Timber Company, which kept about 100 workers employed. The mill continued a flickering

operation for one more year, and then closed in September of 1990. The mill buildings, machinery, and equipment were subsequently sold at a bankruptcy auction (Hibbard 1993). In May 1991, a fire consumed all that remained.

With the closure of the Pope and Talbot mill, Oakridge became a pilot site for the Oregon Community Initiatives Program, an Oregon Economic Development Department Project. Working with communities that experienced mill closures, this state program aimed to build community capacity and facilitate economic development by training residents in leadership and community problem solving. The Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) and the University of Oregon Planning Department provided staff and technical assistance for the training, the Rural Futures Forum, implemented by the Oregon Economic Development Department.

The group of residents that was trained became known as the Community Response Team. These individuals met every two weeks for one year to define community strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Community Initiatives staff helped the Response Team use the information from the economic base study and strategic plan to identify specific goals for the community, assist in identifying and obtaining appropriate funding, and work through bureaucratic and other barriers. The Oakridge City Council and the Oakridge-Westfir Chamber of Commerce adopted the plan as official policy.

According to a former city employee, these meetings have several important outcomes, including helping residents learn to work cooperatively. The city of Oakridge secured a land donation from Pope and Talbot to expand Greenwaters Park into the Greenwaters Rest and Recreation Area where they created the Yabes Memorial and a visitor's kiosk. In addition, the group solidified their community strategies to improve community appearance, enhance livability, and make land available for industrial development.

## NEAI Projects and Programs

### **CERT Process**

#### *Lane County*

Developed in 1945, the Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) is a voluntary association of local governments in Lane County, Oregon that serves the county, the 12 cities within the county, the public utilities, and other special districts. The LCOG has three divisions: Local Government Services, Regional Technology Services, and Senior and Disabled Services. The agency also serves as a regional planning, coordination, program-development, and service-delivery organization. Typically, LCOG has conducted or facilitated the multi-jurisdictional planning and program development necessary to solve problems or provide services.

LCOG's Lane Economic Committee approves and prioritizes CERT projects within Lane County. Attempting to keep a geographic and organizational balance, LCOG has appointed 15 representatives from the private sector, government, and education to this committee. The CERT process, currently known as the Needs and Issues Inventory, accomplishes two purposes: "(1) it impels communities to prioritize projects; and (2) helps the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department with their planning by providing them with a list of communities' needs."

When the Lane Economic Committee (LEC) prioritizes and submits their top 15 projects, they attempt to secure representation from all communities that have submitted applications. Project evaluation criteria currently includes rural status, project readiness, leverage/match, job and economic impact, support of a strategic plan, community foundation building, and overall value. Projects that have been on the list for a number of years and with a high priority from their community tend to receive higher rankings. While the communities' own ranking generally holds at the county level (LCOG would rate an Oakridge water project receiving a top priority at the city level higher than the city's next priority), top priorities are not always funded because of cost concerns.

Smaller communities without a manager were often at a disadvantage. Despite mailing notices to 300 organizations that included all Lane County communities, watershed councils, nonprofits, and school dis-

tricts, some communities did not participate. "The mayor usually has a day job, terms change, and you have to get up to speed," one LCOG employee said. To help address these issues, the Economic Development Administration provided the LCOG \$95,000 per year between 1994 and 1998 to coordinate the CERT process and provide technical assistance to communities. These monies facilitated LCOG's provision of a broad spectrum of services including helping smaller communities without staff to fill out their forms, project and budgeting assistance, as well as grant writing. LCOG's technical assistance increased communities' understanding of the CERT process and helped ensure funding of several projects. However, more work devoted to improving grant writing and grant administration skills would have increased the communities' ability to obtain and implement CERT projects.

Despite sustained technical assistance needs and LCOG's continued funding requests to provide these services, their grant award decreased to \$3,000 annually in 1999. LCOG continued to provide technical assistance by securing \$40,000 from other sources. In an effort to continue this important assistance and offset LCOG's losses, the Regional Investment Board granted them \$20,000 for the CERT process. Deficit spending has forced the LCOG to decrease their support role in recent years. While this analysis does not extend to other communities within Lane County, decreased services most likely decrease the likelihood of unincorporated areas acquiring funding.

A former city official from Oakridge who served on the LEC felt that smaller communities, including his own, received appropriate allocations. "Communities gained confidence in us to be able to be fair and be sure that the communities really hurting got attention," he said. "In the past, when money was being handed out, Eugene and Springfield got most of the money because they had the political power to get it." He felt the CERT process helped even this out.

#### *Oakridge*

In 1991, the Community Response Team gained input from community members through a town hall meeting and developed a Community Eco-

economic Development Plan, which replaced the initial planning effort described above. Team members have formally updated this plan twice, in 1994 and 1998. They divided their recommendations into several categories: business development, quality of life, physical infrastructure, and workforce development. Each year the City Council and Administration used this plan as a basis to develop and formalize the prioritized CERT project list that they submitted to the LCOG.

Aware that a project must be on LCOG's priority list to receive CERT monies, Oakridge included as many projects on their list as possible. A former city employee who served on the Lane Economic Committee said that they often submitted projects they knew that the City would not receive or were not well thought out because it started the community thinking about possibilities. "If a funding source comes along, we have something to show and can jump on it," he said. Despite rankings and previous rejections, Oakridge continued to resubmit proposals year after year. According to LCOG, in 2000, Oakridge submitted more proposals than they ever had previously. While this strategy assured a large number of submitted projects and may have led to idea generation, it was inefficient relative to the number of projects funded.

Relative to other communities of its size, Oakridge, a small community with a city manager, received a large amount of grant money, particularly during the first funding cycle (1994). This is because they met funding criteria (scoring high on the list of distressed communities<sup>2</sup>), they were aggressive in seeking financial support, and they had an action plan in place. Despite early success with grant acquisition and continued support from the USDA-RD (\$1,050,000) for work in the Oakridge Industrial Park, the City did not receive any money in 1999 or 2000. An LCOG member felt that this reflected their need to ensure that all county communities received monies proportionate to their needs.

Community divisiveness interrupted the cyclical process of reconvening a Community Response Team to update the economic development plan in

2000. A mediator brought in by the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department to bridge communication gaps recommended instead that the update and the consensus-building session be postponed. As a consequence, city administrators developed the CERT priority list without community input. When Community Response Team members raised concerns about being excluded from their traditional role in implementing the economic development plan, the Oakridge city manager justified the decision by saying that planning needed to take a back seat to action.

### **CERT Projects**

#### *Greenwaters Pedestrian Bridge*

Begun as a conversation between the police chief and the city manager, this project used \$203,000 of Initiative funds from the Forest Service to build a pedestrian bridge that spans the Willamette River, connecting the Greenwaters Park with Forest Service land. The goal was to increase Oakridge's visibility among tourists and access to the Forest Service trail system. In general, residents are proud of the bridge, pointing to it as part of the reinvention that needs to happen to draw in businesses and improve Oakridge. This collaboration was an outgrowth of the community's search to diversify the economy, said one long-term resident. Since neither the county nor the Forest Service collects data directly related to bridge utilization, the effect of the bridge on tourism cannot be determined. Qualitative data, however, does suggest that residents use the bridge to access Forest Service lands.

#### *Senior Center Study*

In 1995, an Oakridge woman, active in case management with the LCOG, pushed the City to apply for monies to study the need for a senior center. A former city administrator said Oakridge officials thought this would help address the needs of seniors, a population that received limited services. The City secured a \$20,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), but focused on the Oakridge Industrial Park and never completed the

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2. "Timber distressed" communities were identified by OECD in Oregon using an index based on socioeconomic data.

project. The new administration learned about the Senior Center Study when they received a final deadline notice from the Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Unable to meet this deadline, the City returned the grant. The City has nonetheless continued to apply annually for funds for a senior, community, and/or youth center.

*Water Facility Improvement*

In 1992, Oakridge received a \$30,000 Community Development Block Grant to develop a water master plan. This plan evaluated the city's water system and assessed its needs associated with future growth and regulatory requirements. Based on this plan, Oakridge secured an additional \$158,000 of CDBG monies in 1997 to complete the final design for the water system improvement. This grant supported a consultant to work with the community to complete the design work, as well as the engineering and environmental assessments necessary to address compliance and capacity issues. Normally completed within 18 months, this project has yet to be finished. The City delayed the engineering work to determine the scope of the work that they were requesting. Limited financial and technical capacity eventually forced them to pursue work associated with compliance issues only.

Upon completion of the engineering work, Oakridge will be eligible to apply for approximately \$600,000 for construction. In 1996, 1997, and 1998, the city applied for additional monies through the CERT process for their water system improvement project, which would assist the City in engineering and construction of capacity-building improve-

ments. In 2000, OR CERT assigned the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department (OECDD) as the lead agency, a precursor to receiving money through the Needs and Issues Inventory (formally, the CERT process). The OR CERT will continue to work closely with the City and make a final determination of the grant award, currently estimated at \$1.3 million, at the completion of the current work (i.e., the engineering and construction of compliance work). The two-year delay on their original project continues to raise questions about the technical capacity of Oakridge to complete the work and, most significantly, puts the City at risk of losing future funding toward completion of compliance work.

*LCOG Intermediary Relending Program*

The Lane Council of Governments received \$2,000,000 in 1995 and \$1,000,000 in 1998 from the USDA Rural Business Development Fund to begin an intermediary relending program. LCOG serves as the intermediary lending agent in Lane County, offering gap financing to rural businesses where other lenders are wary of providing loans because of the difficult economic conditions. LCOG works with applicants to complete their paperwork and find complimentary lending sources, but does not offer business assistance. LCOG provided \$506,000 in loans to five businesses within Oakridge (see Table 1), all of which have remained in business.

Edwin Weih, a physician's assistant, took a risk when he decided to open his own practice, the Five Rivers Family Medical Clinic, in 1996. Breaking from

**Table 1: Oakridge Businesses Receiving LCOG Loans**

<b>Business</b>	<b>Jobs Created</b>	<b>Loan Amount</b>	<b>Other Funding</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Year</b>
Rosalina's	4	\$46,600	\$15,500	Start-up	1996
Les Schwab Tire Center	5	\$150,000	\$240,000	Start-up	1996
Five Rivers Family Practice Medical Clinic	5	\$85,000	\$36,000	Start-up	1996
W&J Towing and Repair	4	\$140,000	\$154,000	Expansion	1997
Creative Composites, Inc.	7	\$85,000	\$25,000 to Oakridge	Relocation	1998



The entrance to the Oakridge Industrial Park.

another local practice, the loan that Weih received helped him to meet payroll for the first two years. With four full-time and one part-time positions, Weih has an annual payroll of almost \$250,000. According to Weih, approximately 75 percent of his patients have private medical insurance (he includes Medi-Care in this number); 10 percent are Oregon Health Plan and 15 percent pay out of pocket.

W&J Towing and Repairs owners used their LCOG loan to enlarge their business in 1997. When they bought a seven-bay shop, it expanded their capabilities and increased their gross receipts from \$30,000 to \$250,000 per year. Their business created four jobs and pays what they describe as an income that exceeds the average in Oakridge. Allen, the co-owner, discovered the loan program herself when conducting finance research. Allen said she could have secured a loan from a bank, but felt that the interest rate would have been prohibitive.

This program offered both a much-needed infusion of financial capital and, just as importantly, provided a dam against eroding community confidence. Tangible examples of success, these businesses provide needed services and increase community pride. Interviewed loan recipients felt that LCOG provides

excellent service. However, others in the community seemed unaware of this program.

### **Oakridge Industrial Site**

#### *Purchase and Infrastructure Development*

After watching the Hines Mill in West Fir turn into an unusable industrial site, Oakridge decided to purchase their local mill site in an effort to control the city's economic future. In 1994, Oakridge applied for every Oregon Rural Development dollar (\$300,000) available that year for this endeavor. When NEA monies became available, Rural Development encouraged the City to apply for Initiative funding. They did, and in 1994 the Shared Facility Steering Committee (a group of federal and state agency representatives) assisted the city of Oakridge in securing a \$1.8 million grant through the CERT from USDA-RD, the Forest Service, and EDA. The City spent \$850,000 to purchase the Bald Knob mill site from Lane County. Remaining funds paid for engineering and consulting fees, and covered expenses related to sewer, water, and storm drain system improvements on the site. This support helped the City leverage an additional \$700,000 from the county to pave one half-mile of site roads.

The pooling of federal, state, county, local, and private resources was for the purpose of creating an industrial park with businesses that would provide living wage jobs. An assertive city administration and active citizenry facilitated this jump-start for Oakridge. By working with the state to complete their economic development plan and participating on various committees at the county and state levels, Oakridge officials strategically positioned the City for further funding. "They were ready to use the million dollars when we (USDA-RD) had it," said an agency official. The capital commitment to Oakridge encumbered a sense of obligation from the initial funding agencies, which took the form of both further financial support and technical assistance. "When they bought the site, we felt obligated to go back in and try to do some improvements to make it closer to an economic engine, as opposed to a burned out mill site," said one agency representative.

In 1997, USDA-RD provided Oakridge with a \$350,000 grant to demolish two bays of an old lumber storage building and refurbish a building leased by Armstrong Wood Products. Armstrong had threatened to leave the industrial park if the City did not make their buildings more structurally sound. The City used this grant to provide a loan to Armstrong Wood Products to replace their leased building. At the end of the lease term and loan period, Armstrong Wood Products will return the building and the title will revert to the City. All parties agreed to the process, because USDA policy prohibited the provision of financial resources to a private entity.

Following recommendations from an LCOG report to build an occupant-ready building, Oakridge secured a \$1,050,000 grant from Rural Development in 1998 to construct a 10,000 square foot flexible manufacturing building to offer business space at modest rental rates. With the goal of enhancing marketability and promoting the industrial park, this grant also paid for engineering services, landscaping, signage, fencing, and additional site improvements.

In total, the Industrial Park received approximately \$5.5 million, with \$4.5 million coming directly from Initiative funds, as well as thousands of hours of technical assistance from economic development and environmental experts. Despite this assistance, the goal

to create 20 jobs immediately and an additional 50 jobs in the following two years was not realized. The 40 jobs associated with the completion of the flexible manufacturing building were not secured either. Eight residents currently work at companies located there.

#### *Environmental Remediation*

Environmental remediation at the industrial park site has been an ongoing process and has required years of effort and hundreds of thousands of dollars. In 1995, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) provided the City with a \$100,000 loan for a brownfields assessment, which included the installation of monitoring systems. This prospective purchase agreement was one of the first intergovernmental contracts in which a government entity agreed to clean up a site that would provide public benefit in return for a limit of liability for the contamination. Oakridge will pay off the 20-year loan from the park's net profits.

The brownfields assessment detailed the site conditions allowing the Industrial Park to divide its 220 acres into 18 lots, from which they chose the cleanest areas for development. Initiative monies (\$138,000) secured between 1996 and 1997, facilitated site cleanup, including removal of underground storage tanks, a dip tank, contaminated soil, concrete and asbestos, as well as fuel recycling and demolition work. In 2000, DEQ facilitated an Environmental Protection Agency grant to complete some additional brownfields assessments. Results of this work will be released by the summer of 2001. Oakridge has relied on outside support for this work and environmental abatement has been slow. Nonetheless, approximately 75 percent of the industrial park has received the "no further action" status needed for development to occur.

#### *Business Retention and Development*

When the City purchased the mill site, they inherited J. Davidson Construction as a tenant. Davidson Construction had held a long-term contract with Bald Knob and, at the time, they specialized in building logging roads. Although Davidson Construction has received a few contracts to clean up the park, a company representative said that they had felt limited benefits from being part of the Industrial Park itself. Davidson Construction has 23 employees.

**Table 2. Advantages and Barriers to Locating Industry in Oakridge (LCOG, 1998)**

Advantages	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Known location for industry to locate</li> <li>• Located on one of them major east-west routes in Oregon</li> <li>• Few restrictions on types of businesses that may locate in the park</li> <li>• Available workforce</li> <li>• Low cost of living</li> <li>• Low fees</li> <li>• By leasing, businesses could avoid financing needed to purchase land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation and location</li> <li>• Perception of Oakridge as a declining community</li> <li>• Inability to own property within the industrial park</li> <li>• Potential geotechnical issues</li> <li>• Lack of a natural gas pipeline</li> <li>• Undefined development process</li> <li>• Lack of local building officials</li> </ul>

The other long-term Industrial Park tenant, Armstrong Wood Products, received various benefits from the Initiative. Bob Armstrong, who went to high school in Oakridge, started his business in 1978 and moved to the mill site in 1993. His business uses remanufactured lumber to make pallets and dimension lumber. Some community members refer to Armstrong Wood Products, which currently employs 60 people, as the only industrial park success. Residents referred to Armstrong and Davidson as hometown boys “done good,” and, although they noted that these businesses would likely have been just as successful if they had not been located in the park, Armstrong did benefit by moving into a building that had been built specifically for his operation and was available nowhere else in the community.

Within the next two years, three other tenants moved to the industrial park and benefited, at least initially, from the Initiative. Wilderness Woods Products used scrap cedar to make planters, birdhouses, and garden products. After receiving loans, help from a city-paid consultant to develop a business plan, grants for equipment, and working capital to jump start the business (\$45,000 of which was Initiative monies), the company developed contracts with Wal-Mart, Fred Meyer, and other home improvement stores. Wilderness Woods Products missed a sales season and could not meet its loan repayment and rent. The company employed eight-10 local people seasonally until it closed in 1998.

Lookout Enterprises milled specialty products from old growth timber. Using Initiative funds, the City loaned them \$10,000 for start-up costs. Using

wood from private lands, Lookout Enterprises planned to transition from logging to specialty milling for European markets. In business for two years before they closed, Lookout Enterprises employed 15 workers at their height and are currently re-paying their loan back at 50 cents on the dollar.

In 1996, Oakridge felt that it had enough useable lots to market the industrial park. They hired an industrial park manager and created an advisory board. LCOG initiated and completed two Initiative funded projects to assist the City with site marketing. First, they received \$75,000 from the EDA to complete the Entrepreneurial Business Project, an effort designed to attract and improve opportunities for employment in rural Lane and Linn Counties. This analysis determined that investments in occupant-ready industrial buildings would be a viable strategy to improve employment opportunities. Completed in 1998, the report detailed advantages and barriers to industrial development, as well as denoted ways Oakridge could encourage potential development within the Industrial Park (Table 2).

The LCOG received a \$30,000 grant from the Forest Service Old Growth Diversification Fund through OECDD to complete a report entitled *Industrial and Commercial Lands Assessment in Rural Lane County* in 1997. This report detailed community demographics, infrastructure, transportation, and environmental background. This information helped an Oakridge consultant to develop a target industry study and provided key components from which to focus marketing efforts.



## Oakridge, Oregon

In 1997, Oakridge secured a \$32,000 Forest Service grant to develop an Industrial Park Financial/Marketing Plan. By 2000, the City had not initiated work on this plan for several reasons: a change in city administration, continued work on the mill site, and limited marketing expertise. In 2000, Oakridge received a change in the grant terms, which allowed them to use the money for marketing implementation instead of planning.

The City began a concerted marketing effort in July 2000 upon the completion of the flexible manufacturing building. Oakridge signed lease agreements with two occupants in February 2001. Arm-N-Hammer Constructors, Incorporated, a local company, which erects steel buildings and framework, employs three people. Cozy Cruisers Manufacturing, Incorporated, manufactures a teardrop camper and relocated from Florence, Oregon to take advantage of Oakridge's labor pool. They utilized the city's Revolving Loan Fund and expect to hire five employees immediately and eight more within the year.

During 2000, the Industrial Park secured income for the community by providing services and land for companies (AT&T and Level 3 Com-

munications) supplying fiber optics and cell phone service. In an effort to meet AT&T deadlines, the city of Oakridge excluded themselves from bidding requirements through a special city council ordinance before contracting the construction of an \$85,000 cell tower. To facilitate state-of-the-art communications for "new and emerging" businesses (defined as 50 or less employees and with less than \$1,000,000 net profit), USDA-RD allowed the City to construct and own the cell tower. The cell tower cost the City \$85,000 to build, but they have estimated it will generate \$1.5 million in revenues for Oakridge over a 30-year period. In return, USDA-RD requested that the City provide a written explanation detailing how the cell tower would expedite recruitment of new and emerging businesses.

Grant regulations also prohibit grantees from giving away their property, stating that it must be sold for fair market value and the income returned to the granting agency or used to enhance the existing property. Despite this, Oakridge sold a small portion of park property to Level 3 Communications, a fiber optic company. Notified after the purchase had been finalized, USDA-RD permitted Oakridge to use



Armstrong Wood Products located in the Oakridge Industrial Park.

the revenue to further develop the industrial park, provided that these projects followed federal bidding processes.

### **Key Points**

The industrial park provides a good example of linked projects and agency partnerships. County, state, and federal agencies strategically utilized their resources to develop projects that built upon, folded into, or informed one another. “We tried to use our own programs in conjunction with each other, leveraging our dollars against their dollars trying to figure out where our programs would fit with their programs,” said one state agency representative. Departure of the city manager soon after he secured the Initiative package that allowed the City to purchase the mill site deprived Oakridge of key leadership. In addition, acrimony within Oakridge itself, due to a host of factors, reduced the success of this strategic work around the industrial site.

Despite the grant support, Oakridge staff and residents felt that restrictive grant terms blocked their ability to successfully recruit businesses and rebuild their economy. “Give us the money, but don’t tie the hands of the community,” said an Oakridge official. Yet state and federal agencies made considerable efforts to be flexible and adapt the changing community needs to assist Oakridge and help revitalize the local economy. The Forest Service allowed the City to delay contract deadlines with their marketing plan and significantly change the scope of work on projects after receipt of funds. USDA-RD allowed industrial park support to be utilized by a private entity through a low-interest loan from a Revolving Loan Fund and permitted Oakridge to sell a small parcel of park property outright with sale proceeds used to enhance the industrial park. The USDA-Oregon Rural Development office found its regulations clause requiring projects benefiting only small and merging businesses unduly prohibitive to some business recruitment efforts by Oakridge. They made an unsuccessful bid to have their Washington office consider granting “exception authority” to allow projects in the park that do not meet the small and emerging business definition.

Early technical assistance may have facilitated a

more timely completion of projects. For example, a target industry study completed during the cleanup and infrastructure development phase, instead of after the construction of the flexible manufacturing building, could have helped Oakridge be more focused in their development process, prioritizing projects that would have been the most likely to bring in businesses. Given their reliance on outside funding resources and the CERT funding process, which sought to distribute grant dollars equally throughout the county, the development and marketing of the park flowed in the only order it could have. “Before we could recruit anybody to the site, we needed to have a facility, and before we could build a facility, we needed justification. Before you can even go down the path to build a building, you need to have environmental remediation,” a former city employee stated.

### **Jobs-in-the-Woods**

Organized by the Ecosystem Workforce Program, through the University of Oregon’s Labor Education and Research Center in 1995, Oakridge became a demonstration site for the Initiative-funded Jobs-in-the-Woods (JITW) Program. The goals for the Oakridge JITW program included the following:

1. Employ 13 workers in family-wage jobs for six months and provide them with new forest management skills;
2. Complete essential forest management projects in a cost-effective and timely manner; and,
3. Demonstrate the capacity of a small community to effectively perform forest management work.

The City received \$20,000 from the Forest Service to serve as project administrators. Lane Workforce Partnership recruited dislocated timber workers. Oregon State University developed the curriculum, and the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management provided contracts. One of the project leaders said this non-traditional approach required faith. “On the face, it looked like we were retraining people to go back into failed industry,” he said. A Lane Work-

force Partnership employee agreed, noting that their agency was not supportive because they wanted people out of the wood products industry.

Despite their reticence, the Lane Workforce Partnership started recruitment when the city of Oakridge agreed to hire workers. After the interview process, eight people were hired. Participants, former mill and woods workers between the ages of 31 and 40, were paid to work four days in the field and to participate in one day of re-training activities per week. The workers were given a choice to participate in this program or enter a more traditional displaced worker program, which provided training in other fields. Most workers who chose JITW hoped to gain skills that would allow them to continue working in the woods.

The BLM and the Forest Service provided paid work by awarding the city of Oakridge contracts they withheld from competitive bidding. Classroom instruction, taught primarily by Oregon State University professors, covered safety, ecosystem science, stream ecology, watersheds, forest management, fire control and prevention, wildlife habitat, and contracting processes. An unpublished evaluation and interviewees reported that the instruction level was too high relative to the work they were doing. One participant, who had spent most of his life in the forest, felt that the information was not useful for

him, arguing that it would have better served a wild-life biologist.

Being in the classroom also increased some participants' perception of this program as a hand-out that gave them cursory industry experience. "Everybody there was used to working for a living, producing something," a participant said. "We didn't feel like we were working." Receiving only basic program information, other participants were unaware of the physical aspects of the job, such as clearing brush, and had no interest in pursuing the work afterwards. A crew supervisor said the hardest thing was keeping crew morale up because, "they just thought it was a few weeks of work and then 'see you later.'" Everyone completed JITW. One injury significantly increased the city of Oakridge's worker compensation rates, forcing the City to abandon the program. No other organization was willing to serve as the employer of record.

While participants did gain valuable skills and experience in ecosystem management, most did not become restoration contractors. One participant, however, felt that the program changed his life and exposed him to other types of work in the woods. Although he went on to become an independent contractor, work was scarce and intermittent, with long periods of unemployment. Unable to secure a living from contract work, he has recently switched careers, and now works as a mechanic in Eugene.

## **Current Socioeconomic Conditions and Effects of NEAI on Community Well-Being**

### **Community Well-Being**

Previous research on Oakridge describes a community with historical social and economic upheavals. Despite this literature, interviewees remember a town quite different before the mill closure in 1989. Respondents described Oakridge as an economically prosperous town where goal-oriented, hard-working residents could purchase anything they needed in thriving businesses that peppered the Highway 58 corridor and the uptown area. Respondents said community members were socially and politically active, with a strong sense of local pride, staunch commitment to their schools, limited social stratifica-

tion, and comfort with the way things were. Despite a larger population than today, community members felt that most residents knew each other and felt safe. One participant noted that rising and falling timber prices always created the economic struggle that comes with a one-industry town. Key issues at that time included wastewater treatment, water system improvement, emergency services, and establishment of public transit service to and from the Eugene area.

The mill closure escalated a cycle of decreasing economic prosperity, from which the City has not recovered. With a population of 3,063, Oakridge had high unemployment (13.9 percent) and a poverty

rate (21.1 percent) 31 percent higher than that of the county (14.5 percent). The top three industries that employed residents were: manufacturing and durable goods (208); retail trade (193); and agriculture, forestry and fishery (180). Oakridge's median household income (\$17,375) was almost one-third lower than that of the county (\$25,268) and their per capita income of \$9,202 was 27 percent lower than the county average of \$12,570. Fifty-five percent of the county residents were educated beyond high school compared to just under 40 percent of Oakridge residents.

Limited local employment opportunities led to an out-migration of residents with marketable skills, and residents commuting to other cities and states for work. Decreased demand for local services forced the closure of several businesses. Residents working to survive often had less time and energy to expend on community issues. Economic decline and resident impoverishment increased the demand for services from a city that was operating with a smaller tax base.

By 1994, the effects of the mill closure had set in, draining the community's economic base and continuing the dispersion of social and human capital. According to a local survey completed by the city of Oakridge, unemployment rates ran as high as 25 percent, and less than 50 percent of all adults held jobs. Lingering effects of the mill closure persist today. While residents appreciate the beautiful area around Oakridge, in general, they have less hope. One city employee said that residents were, "more reconciled to having to do something and have someone else do it for them, because they have not been able to do it themselves."

### **Current Socioeconomic Status**

In 2000, Oakridge had 3,148 residents, a seven percent decrease from 1990. Of those, 93 percent are white and five percent are Hispanic (Census 2000). As of September 2000, the five largest employers in Oakridge were the Oakridge School District (112), Armstrong Wood Products (60), Diamond Traffic Products (30), Oakridge Sand & Gravel, Inc. (30), and Davidson Construction (23). The City has seen a 23 percent decrease in business permits (from 176 to

135) in the past year. In January 2001, the Oakridge School District announced an impending lay off due to lower enrollment numbers, which have declined from 897 in December 1999 to 836 in December 2000. The number of elementary school students eligible for free lunch has remained fairly constant throughout the 1990s, generally hovering between 40 and 50 percent, although reaching 56 percent in 1996 and 1997.

### **Community Capacity**

#### *Human Capital*

The loss of local jobs has eroded Oakridge's population base. Younger residents and those with viable employment skills, including some of the community leaders, have left, seeking work elsewhere. One respondent compared the Oakridge residents within the city to a fluorescent light that lacks sections of the color spectrum—on the surface the community looks normal, but in reality it is missing key constituencies. "Recently, nothing has been done to increase local folks' ability to take over the roles of those who have left," he said. He gave an example of the Boy Scouts experience. Under the leadership of an Oakridge resident, scout membership increased from eight to 27, but when he left, "it fell in on itself." A resident who became active on the Industrial Park Advisory Board when he returned to Oakridge after working in California for 15 years said, "I shouldn't have to be doing this now," adding that he is angry that at his age (70s) he's doing community work that should be done by folks in their 30s and 40s. An active resident noted that changes in politics and resident participation required efforts to be repeated or reinvented, costing valuable time and further decreasing the community's faith.

The city manager who initiated the Community Response Team and who many folks credit with the early influx of Initiative money left Oakridge in 1995. Since that time, two city managers have come and gone. Despite an active advisory board and a competent director, the Industrial Park continues to struggle. According to a former employee, the city of Oakridge was inexperienced when it came to valuing property, recognizing cash flow, and knowing service and equipment costs. Ambitious even for a

community with three or four times its population, the Oakridge Industrial Park has challenged a city administration with limited large-scale industrial activity and construction experience. As a result, a city council member said that they “wasted a number of years not knowing how to do things,” adding that better direction and technical assistance would have created quicker, more tangible results. One city administrator agreed, “We were ill-prepared for a project of this magnitude. We needed some outside help to walk us through it. We took this project and floundered, because no one really knew what to do.” Smaller projects, such as the water system improvement, which is two years behind, and the still-to-be-completed senior center study, have also suffered. Despite technical assistance from funding agencies, the City has been slow to grow into all of its new responsibilities. The depletion of active community residents and the ongoing turnovers in administration, staff, and elected officials decreased the capacity of Oakridge to respond to all of the demands placed upon it and to increase, or even simply maintain, its level of local well-being.

### *Social Capital*

While the decline in Oakridge started before the start of the Initiative due to factors beyond the control of local residents, many residents attribute their negative attitude towards the industrial park and the Initiative in general to the lack of perceived tangible impact—both in terms of physical changes with the mill site and economic improvements in the community. In 1994, the city of Oakridge convinced residents that if the old mill site were turned into an industrial park it would bring economic stability to their community. In doing so, they fostered unrealistic expectations of a quick turnaround and a new employment base to replace the one lost by the mill closure. Two local businesses, employing approximately 85 people, have been at the industrial park since its inception. At least three other businesses have come and gone. Highly publicized recruitment efforts for Sykes, a technical assistance call center, and Alaskan Campers, each of which would have brought at least 100 jobs to the area, again raised expectations. Both bids were unsuccessful. Unreasonable expecta-

tions created frustration and anger, which expressed itself in an increasingly volatile conflict among residents. This mill site and industrial park conflict, mentioned by at least 70 percent of the respondents and recognized by many funding agencies, has at the time of this study resulted in decreased communication. The division is also manifested by the existence of two chambers of commerce and two local newspapers. Alienated by the conflict, many residents avoid community involvement.

The City Council approved the last economic development plan developed by the Community Response Team in 1998. Since then, a change in city administration has occurred. Residents elected a new mayor (a former City Council member) in 1998, and gradually replaced the City Council. In addition, a city manager resigned and was replaced. During his first year the new city manager pushed the City into an aggressive survival strategy which included implementing an industrial park marketing plan, selling industrial park land, pushing new zoning laws, and circumventing federal bidding processes to ensure timely construction of a phone tower, thereby assuring a lucrative AT&T contract. While these moves saved the City thousands of dollars in expenses and increased revenue, they have also increased tension and alienated some residents. Recognizing the extent of the conflict, Oregon Economic and Community Development Department funded the Rural Development Institute (RDI) to complete a consensus building process last spring. However, citing lack of commitment from the conflicting parties, RDI pulled out of the mediation process.

Chamber members and long-term participants in the Community Response Team feel frustrated that they have been shut out of the conversation about their city’s well-being and active participation in economic development implementation. A previous Community Response Team member said the city manager has openly criticized the plan and Response Team participants. Historically, the Chamber has implemented large sections of the plan geared towards increasing tourism, such as beautification projects and event sponsorship (the Fat Tire Festival). Unable to link increased hotel occupancy to these events, city administrators withdrew financial sup-

port from the festival, instead utilizing these monies for industrial park marketing.

During his 2000 State-of-the-City address, the mayor listed the economic development plan and the re-initiation of the Community Response Team as one of his top priorities. As of September 2001, there has been little work towards this. Energy invested in working against each other means residents are losing time and expending vital resources (human and social capital). This fundamental communication breakdown not only decreases the community's ability to internally address local issues, it furthers the image of a declining community and inhibits outside assistance.

### *Physical and Financial Capital*

Since the beginning of the Initiative, Oakridge has converted a burned out mill site into an operating industrial park. Dangerous structures have been demolished. Approximately 66 acres have been cleared of environmental hazards, making them available for use. Several infrastructure improvements have been completed, including roads, telephone, fiber optics, water, and sewage. A freshly painted water tower and inviting signage stand throughout the park. A new cell tower, already leased by AT&T, has the potential to bring in \$1.5 million for the City over a 30-year period. Finally, a 10,000 square-foot flexible manufacturing building divided into four substructures, each with an office and a restroom, was completed in July 2000. These are successes.

Given the increased shipping costs associated with their location and their depleted workforce, it is unlikely that Oakridge will attract one large manufacturing company capable of replacing all of the lost timber and mill industry jobs. As stated in their own Target Industry Study from April 2000, the City needs to focus on diversifying their economy with value-added products manufacturers and service centers. For the Industrial Park to accommodate these businesses, the City needs additional capital to renovate existing buildings and build new ones. In addition, Oakridge should be able to provide flexible incentive packages (including appropriate loan agreements), for those wishing to relocate to their community.

Filled to its current capacity, the Industrial park is still an underutilized asset that has the potential to

create more jobs. Without the park, and the heavily facilitated Initiative development, the City would have few options for industrial development and even fewer local jobs. Pointing to the 100 jobs located on the site as an example of its success, a former administrator said that without the Initiative, "there would have been no one working there. It would have been a contaminated wasteland with a fence that said 'do not enter.'" Another resident said, "The Initiative has created the potential for people to be productive again."

The Initiative also brought in financial capital. Revolving loan funds have located \$516,600 worth of working capital into the community, providing 25 jobs and insuring the viability of five businesses. Initiative monies have enhanced a fledgling City Revolving Loan Fund. This has increased the City's ability to partner with other businesses. For example, the City's recruitment packages within the past year have included these loans. Due to a high default rate and limited experience with managing loan funds, the city of Oakridge has turned over the Revolving Loan Fund's administration to LCOG. These changes, detailed above, still represent a significant increase in financial and physical capital.

### **Effects of NEAI on Workers**

Beginning five years after the mill closure, most Initiative funded projects happened too late to have a discernible impact on Oakridge's displaced timber workers. Many workers relocated to other areas with higher timber releases to continue doing the only work they knew. Others, more amenable to retraining, had already accessed JTPA and other programs. By 1996, unable to document a large enough population of primary timber workers, Lane Workforce Partnership (LWP) (formally the Southern Willamette Private Industry Council) secured permission to start serving secondary and tertiary displaced workers with their Initiative funds.

The LWP used Initiative monies to redevelop their programs specifically for dislocated timber workers. They began adapting curriculum in 1995 by developing short-term training courses, which focused primarily on computers. The LWP has also trained peer advisors who help to recruit new clients, and began classes in out-lying areas. For example, Oakridge High

School serves as a satellite for Lane Community College and offers an average of 16 credit and no-credit classes. An LWP employee specializing in displaced workers noted that NEAI monies paid for curriculum development, staff salaries, and training materials. Between 1994 and 2000, they provided services to 58 Oakridge residents, 25 of whom became employed while receiving services. Seven recipients found jobs in Oakridge. JTPA funds served almost twice as many Oakridge residents in 1994 (21), during the time of the JITW recruitment process, as in the next closest year, 1995 (11).

Two women said that their husbands, timber workers, were not amenable to retraining because they were used to being their own boss and felt too old to start anything new. In addition, switching fields often led to lower wages and, in turn, lower self-esteem. "It was kinda like getting punched in the belly," said a 48 year-old timber worker who recently switched to a new field after working his entire life in the forest. He added that retraining was intimidating. Others said that retraining programs were not accessible either financially or logistically, the latter because of the requirement to travel to Eugene for training.

During the early years of the Initiative, the LWP participated in the CERT process to receive funding to work with displaced timber workers. They developed and submitted a grant for the Workers and Families Subcommittee. Since the Department of Labor provided grants directly to dislocated worker programs, they viewed the CERT process as an added layer of paperwork with no benefits. Thus, worker-retraining programs were no longer included in the CERT in 1996, but continued to provide services.

For those who remained unemployed and in the community, the Jobs-in-the-Woods training program gave them an opportunity to receive training that was directly related to woods work. Limited availability of watershed restoration work and experience with con-

tracting decreased the likelihood of program graduates obtaining ongoing family-wage jobs in this field. In fact, only one person from the JITW training became an independent contractor. In 1994, the contract portion of the JITW program provided \$1.2 million to decommission logging roads to a local construction company, J Davidson's Construction. In a time when so few timber-related businesses survived, this company can contribute some of its success during its transition to non-timber construction to these contracts. Lacking federal hiring mandates, Davidson Construction did not specifically hire dislocated workers.

The bulk of the money spent to develop the Oakridge Industrial Park contributed to temporary and ongoing jobs for at least 83 residents. The intermediary relending loans provided to local businesses accounted for 25 new jobs. Some of the employees benefiting from these positions were likely dislocated timber workers. Although representing a fraction of the jobs lost when local timber production ceased, these positions have allowed several community members to remain in Oakridge, a community for which they have strong attachment.

For those who remained, but were unable to secure full-time, family-wage jobs, their experiences have been more frustrating. Many who owned homes were forced to leave their families and work elsewhere for months at a time, returning only for weekends or vacation. With guarded optimism, one resident said that the impact of the Industrial Park has not been realized. "There are still people waiting for opportunity," he said. "They used to work in the mill and now they work odd jobs." A focus group member noted, "I think it's hard living in a community where we are so down. They want to see something that gives them hope that there's jobs around the corner." And while many residents point to the Industrial Park as their hope for the future, they also said, "We have been waiting for a long time for jobs."

## Patterns and Themes

### The Need for Adequate Staffing

It was unrealistic to expect a city manager with limited staff, a small tax base and all of the responsi-

bilities of an incorporated city to successfully manage the day-to-day activities of a city and to develop an industrial park. Limited resources prohibited the city

of Oakridge's ability to hire a full-time industrial park manager with large-scale industrial experience, which, in turn, limited the City's ability to streamline the mill-site development process. A full-time industrial park manager, the equivalent of a city department head, would have hired contractors as needed to provide marketing consultation. Throughout the years, the city managers (none of whom had industrial park experience) have dedicated an inordinate amount of time to this process, often to the detriment of other city programs.

### **The Importance of Diversification**

Despite the Community Economic Development Plan's outline of diverse economic strategies, Oakridge focused on the industrial park as their primary, and often only, community revitalization effort. By working on this project in isolation from other potential capacity-building activities, the City missed an opportunity to utilize the organizational efforts of the Community Response Team to secure funds for CERT identified priorities from funding streams outside of NEAI. The focus on the industrial park to the exclusion of other community issues and priorities forced residents to see local success only in terms of the economic base that would be provided by the park. The announcements of grant awards and industrial park plans fostered unrealistic expectations among residents, which, in turn, fueled disappointment and tension when these

expectations/results were not realized. This tension produced ongoing community conflicts, increased frustrations and created an environment of apathy among some community members. Keeping residents informed about the time needed for environmental remediation and the barriers to recruiting large industries to the site may have encouraged the pursuit of other options and improved community well-being.

### **Pilot Testing and Stake-holder Involvement**

Conceptualized to help woods workers remain in the forest, Oakridge's JITW program failed to transition dislocated workers into other forest-based employment. A more thorough evaluation of the Sweet Home JITW model preceding Oakridge's implementation would have assisted in appropriate program changes. These would have increased the likelihood of successful JITW implementation in Oakridge (training formats were later identified as a barrier to implementation in the Sweet Home project). Engaging the target population in program development would have helped the administrators gain a more realistic picture of participants' expectations and needs, increased the likelihood of recruiting appropriate participants, facilitated the development of more accessible curriculum, and created local buy-in. Most importantly, this program trained people to compete in a market place that did not exist at the time of program implementation.

## **Conclusion**

Despite substantial Initiative investment over the past seven years, Oakridge has had considerable success with environmental remediation in its industrial park but limited benefit in terms of creation of new jobs. Residents' expectations for immediate jobs and a return to the "boom days" were not met. Progress on industrial park development has been slower than desired, due in part to limited staff resources, lack of expertise, and a high turnover in city administration. Given the magnitude of the industrial park work, including demolition, site cleanup, and construction,

the long-term benefits will undoubtedly take longer. There are a number of residents who have chosen to stay in the community and remain optimistic. Focus group participants envision that 10 years from now, Oakridge will have a thriving industrial park that has created at least 100 family-wage jobs, the benefits of which will trickle down to other local businesses. Citizens felt that the area's natural beauty would remain one of the community's biggest assets and that improvements in their city's appearance will be made to match that of the natural landscape.



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Oakridge, Oregon

### **Interviewees**

Bob Warren	Oregon Economic and Community Development Department, Regional Development Coordinator
Bob Armstrong	Owner, Armstrong Wood Products
Bud Fischer	USDA, Director of Rural Business Cooperative Service
Charles Spencer	Ecosystem Workforce Program Director
Cindi and Gary Yeager	Oakridge Residents
Cynthia VanZelm	Lane Council of Government Staff
Dave Davidson	Co-Owner – J Davidson Construction
Dick Culbertson	Former Mayor
Don Hampton	Oakridge Mayor
Edwin Weih	Owner, Five Rivers Medical Center
Greg Wilder	City Administrator
Jerry Skodahl	Independent Contractor
Jim Anthony	Industrial Park Advisory Board Member
Jim Zelenka	Former LCOG employee, OECDD staff
John Milandin	Oakridge Industrial Park Manager
Larry Roberts	Owner/Editor Dead Mountain Echo
Linda Holly	Former Forest Service Worker, Small Business Owner
Marilyn Daniels	Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
Mike McAlvage	Former City Administrator
Mike Solt	Oregon Economic and Community Development Department
Steve Dignam	Lane Council of Governments staff
Steve Gennett	Former Industrial Park Manager
Sue Bond	City Council Member
Val Standley	Lane Workforce, Dislocated Worker Program
Wes Hare	Former City Administrator

### **Focus Group**

Vicki Bates	Former waitress at Timber Jim's Restaurant
Linda Cutsforth	Former employee at Pope and Talbot Mill
Regina Gardner	Teacher
Kathleen Camerer	Former owner of Timber Jim's Restaurant
Judy Hampton	Oakridge High School Principal
Mary Gustafson	Postal employee
Sandy Schroeder	Siuslaw Valley Bank
Barbara Phipps	Owner, Diary Queen
Kimberly Pattee	Marketing Assistant, Oakridge Industrial Park