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In this issue of *Rural Connections* our authors discuss economic recovery in western counties, community-based organizations helping to revitalize forest communities in Oregon and Washington, preparing for disaster resilience in Oregon, county economic development in Utah, Nevada tourism, crowdsourcing climate data, New Mexico volunteers taking on water and vacant homes, sustainability in Guam, the use of microirrigation, and from beyond the West: creative farming.



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INTRODUCTION

In this issue...

BY DON E. ALBRECHT

We are very excited to present to you this issue of *Rural Connections*. As always, our goal is to share programs, insights, and information of exceptional research and outreach efforts to help our partners address significant issues confronting the individuals and communities of the rural West. The first article in this issue, by Emilia Istrate of the National Association of Counties, shows that the extent to which counties have recovered from the recent economic recession varies widely. [Read more.](#)



EXPLORING THE RURAL WEST -- THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY OF RURAL WESTERN COUNTIES

Sluggish and Uneven Recovery Across County Economies

BY EMILIA ISTRATE

2014 was a relatively good year for the U.S. economy. The U.S. GDP grew by 2.4 percent last year, which was better than 2013 (U.S. BEA, 2015). Last year, the U.S. closed the job gap created during the latest economic downturn and the national economy added jobs at a faster rate than in 2013 (U.S. BLS, 2015). But these national trends do not provide much insight into what is happening on the ground in specific regions of the country, especially in small communities. [Read more.](#)

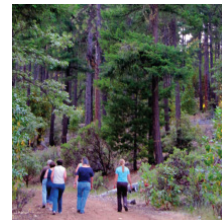


COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS HELP REVITALIZE FOREST COMMUNITIES IN THE U.S. WEST

CBOs Work to Bring About Interrelated Economic, Ecological, and Social Outcomes

BY JESSE ABRAMS, EMILY JANE DAVIS, HEIDI HUBER-STEARNES, AUTUMN ELLISON, and CASSANDRA MOSELEY

Rural communities that are or once were dependent on forest resources are found throughout the U.S. West. Many of these places were hard-hit by forest industry restructuring and federal land policy changes in the 1980s and 1990s (Charnley et al., 2008). In the aftermath of these changes, traditionally forest-dependent communities typically experienced high unemployment, social conflict, outmigration of working-age families, steep declines in the federal government workforce, and ecological consequences from a century or more of production-oriented forest management—in short, numerous far-reaching yet highly inter-related challenges. In the midst of this crisis many community leaders sought to transition to more sustainable and local natural resource models based on restoration and stewardship. [Read more.](#)

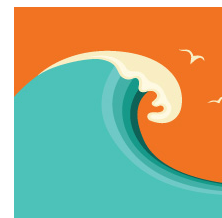


PREPARING FOR THE BIG ONE

Vulnerable Populations as Key Indicators of Community Resilience

BY LORI A. CRAMER

Experts are predicting a major rupture of the Cascadia Subduction Zone – a principle geological fault of the West Coast – sometime within the next 50 years. When that happens, it will cause an offshore earthquake at a magnitude of up to 9.0. After the ground shakes for about five minutes, a powerful tsunami will strike land. The New Yorker recently quoted a Federal Emergency Management Agency official as stating that after such a tremendous geological event, everything in Oregon west of Interstate 5 "would be toast" (Shultz, 2015). The event is expected to be similar to the 2011 Tohoku earthquake in Japan, which generated tsunami surges of 128 feet, killed more than 15,000 people, and displaced a



quarter of a million others. Although Oregon's population is smaller, the impact will be no less significant. [Read more.](#)

MICROIRRIGATION FOR SUSTAINABLE WATER USE

A Multistate Research Project to Conserve Water

BY ASHLEY HAWN

Humans have used irrigation to increase crop yields since the start of cultivation. Today, about 39 percent of all the fresh water used in the U.S. goes to irrigate crops (Perlman, 2015). The majority of irrigated acres, nearly 75 percent, are concentrated in the arid states in the western portion of the U.S., from North Dakota and Washington in the north to Texas and California in the south (Maupin et al., 2014). Water use in the West is critical to maintaining the nation's food supply. Geographically broad and diverse, the Western Region produces many of our major agricultural commodities. California alone produces almost 100 percent of our artichokes, walnuts, kiwis, plums, and garlic (Palmer, 2013). In total, the West accounts for 23.3 percent of the total U.S. farm gate value, which amounts to \$87.7 billion (WAAESD and WEDA, 2015). With many western states facing yet another year of drought conditions, it is no surprise that water conservation continues to be a pressing topic of research throughout the country. [Read more.](#)



VOLUNTEER INGENUITY KEEPS WATER FLOWING IN BLUEWATER, NM

Rural Community Water Systems

BY TERRY BRUNNER

Jesse Gomez of Bluewater, New Mexico, is seldom seen these days without a dapper looking fedora. I strongly suspect he is the sharpest dresser in the entire Bluewater area. The truth is Jesse has been wearing many hats throughout his life. He's run an auto repair shop, worked for the State of New Mexico, and worked in the treacherous uranium industry – but those were just day jobs. Jesse moonlighted as a volunteer on the board of the Northwest New Mexico Action Program, overseeing Head Start and other vital assistance programs for citizens in a five-county area. Today, he is technically "retired" from the working world, but not really retired. His volunteer work keeps him very busy. Jesse currently serves as President of the Bluewater Mutual Domestic Water Users Association. [Read more.](#)



RURAL UTAH COUNTY EMBRACES AREA SECTOR ANALYSIS PROCESS

Targeted, Sustainable Economic Development

BY DON E. ALBRECHT and MARION BENTLEY

Historically, the residents of rural areas have been economically disadvantaged compared to their urban counterparts. In rural areas, incomes have been lower, poverty rates higher, and unemployment more extensive. These economic concerns have become even more pronounced in recent decades as the number of jobs in agriculture, the natural resource industries, and manufacturing, traditionally the primary employers of rural workers have declined (Albrecht, 2014). An added concern is that the rural economy has not rebounded from the great recession as quickly or completely as the urban economy (Hertz, et al., 2014). Seeking to address their struggling economies, many rural communities have initiated or strengthened their economic development activities. To assist communities in their economic development efforts, the Area Sector Analysis Process (ASAP) was created by a team of community development specialists from around the West (Harris et al., 2012). [Read more.](#)

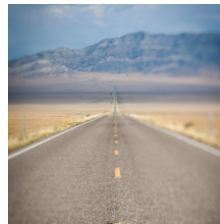


PONY EXPRESS TERRITORY OF NEVADA

The Road Less Traveled

BY ANDREA ROSSMAN

Who said the road would be lonely and that there are no points of interest along the way? LIFE Magazine did in their July 1986 issue. *"It's totally empty, says an AAA counselor. There are no points of interest. We don't recommend it. The 2878-mile stretch of U.S. 50, running from Ely to Fernly (sic), Nev., passes nine towns, two abandoned mining camps, a few gas pumps, and an occasional coyote. We warn all motorists not to drive there, says the AAA rep, unless they're confident of their survival skills."* With the mark of a pen and the published word, the road less traveled, would become just that, an odyssey of discovery for the brave few. Stark and spectacular, this bast terrain beckons the adventurer, as it did over a century and a half ago, when young men set out to deliver the mail Pony Express-style from St. Joseph, Missouri to San Francisco, California. Crossing thirteen mountain passes and dipping into the spacious valleys below, the Pony Express rider was indeed alone. With not a drop of water in sight, and a distance spanning out in front of the brave soul, Nevada's breathtaking purple mountain majesty left an impression upon a young lad delivering the mail cross country, for there is a spirit here that exists in this great expanse of open road, it was apparent then, and has endured now. [Read more.](#)

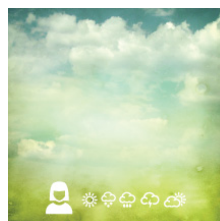


CROWDSOURCING CLIMATE DATA

Multistate Research and Extension Project Coordinates Volunteer Weather Observer Networks

BY SARA DELHEIMER

In 1997, a storm hit the city of Fort Collins, Colorado. While some parts of town had modest rainfall, other areas experienced more than one foot of rain over several hours. Five people died in the resulting



flash flood, and floodwaters caused an estimated \$200 million in damages (Colorado State University, 2012). Events like this are becoming more common. The recent floods in Texas and water restrictions in California due to widespread drought are reminders that precipitation fluctuations and extremes have serious impacts. Despite advances in tracking precipitation with satellites and radar, on-the-ground measurements are still needed to report and map precipitation. In 2008, scientists and educators from 17 universities and a handful of federal agencies joined forces to improve volunteer-weather observer networks. [Read more.](#)

IMAGINE GUAM HELPS CITIZENS PLAN FOR ISLAND SUSTAINABILITY

A Challenge Initiative to Support Shore-to-Shore Cooperation

BY PETER R. BARCINAS



The idea of human sustainability being under threat reminds us that our environment is constantly at risk, and strategies and resources are prone to changes that contribute to shaping a community's desired quality of life whether we are "receptors or drivers of environmental change" (Beniston, 2010). To advance these discussions in Guam, the University of Guam's Center for Island Sustainability hosted the 6th Regional Conference on Island Sustainability. The 2015 conference theme, "Building Resilient Island Communities," touted conference goals on building conservation best practices and wise use of indigenous resources. Other themes included advancing climate change solutions, addressing invasive species, and managing smart growth that enhances Guam's economic security. [Read more.](#)

SEEING THE POTENTIAL IN VACANT HOMES

A Rural Returnee's Plan to Spruce Up Her County

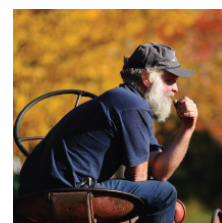
BY TERRY BRUNNER



Driving on the western edge of the Great Plains in Northeast New Mexico my car felt a little like a rowboat adrift in a great ocean of grass. It got a little lonely on that cool November morning as I drove for 45 miles on Highway 56 between Clayton and Springer and didn't spot another human being. So I was eager for some company as I pulled into Annette's Cafe in Roy, New Mexico, to meet my friend, Mary Libby Campbell. Mary is someone I like to call a "doer." She is always doing something and working to make things happen in her community. We discussed many local issues over lunch, but our main focus was on housing. You hear a lot of talk these days about bringing industry and jobs to New Mexico but if there's not adequate housing for folks, it just isn't going to work. [Read more.](#)

BEYOND THE WEST: LINKING CREATIVE FARMING TO ECONOMIC MOBILITY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NEW ENGLAND

BY KATHLEEN LIANG



Successful community development strategies often involve a creative mindset and an entrepreneurial spirit, which lead to improvement of economic mobility for an individual, a family, or a cluster of people who seek improvement of their income, social status, or quality of life. In recent years many individuals, families, and enterprises in the U.S. have been challenged by recession, financial instability, and volatile domestic and international markets. Significant job loss in manufacturing sectors has pushed many communities out of prosperity and optimism. A series of surveys were funded by the USDA to explore how off-farm jobs interface with increasing volume of diversification and contribute to economic mobility for farm households and others in communities in New England (Liang, 2015). [Read more.](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

DON E. ALBRECHT

Director
Western Rural Development Center
Utah State University

EMILIA ISTRATE

Director of Research and Outreach
National Association of Counties

JESSE ABRAMS

Faculty Research Associate
University of Oregon

EMILY JANE DAVIS

Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist
Oregon State University

HEIDI HUBER-STEARNES

Postdoctoral Scholar
University of Oregon

AUTUMN ELLISON

Faculty Research Assistant
University of Oregon

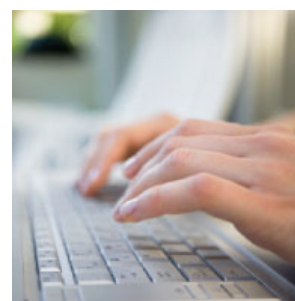
CASSANDRA MOSELEY

Director, Ecosystem Workforce Program and Institute for a Sustainable Environment
University of Oregon

LORI A. CRAMER

Associate Professor
Oregon State University

ASHLEY HAWN



Account Executive
Agriculture in America/global

TERRY BRUNNER
New Mexico State Director
USDA Rural Development

MARION BENTLEY
Director, Extension Center for Business and Economic Development
Utah State University

ANDREA ROSSMAN
Director, Eureka County Cultural, Tourism, and Economic Development
Chair, Pony Express Territory Nevada

SARA DELHEIMER
Impact Writer, Multi-state Research Program
Colorado State University

PETER R. BARCINAS
Program Leader, Communities, Youth, Families, Food and Nutrition
University of Guam Cooperative Extension

KATHLEEN LIANG
Professor
University of Vermont

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