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Claremont McKenna College

**The 2016 Election Earthquake:
Pacific County and the Future of the Democratic Party in Rural Areas**

submitted to
Professor Jon Shields

by
Matthew Dayton

for
Senior Thesis
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To my friends – thank you for supporting me these past four years, and I look forward to a lifetime of friendship.

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Abstract

Pacific County was one of 206 counties nationwide to vote for President Trump in 2016 after voting for President Obama in 2008 and 2012. These counties were pivotal for Trump's victory in 2016, and will continue to be crucial in the 2020 election and beyond. This paper uses an ethnographic method to understand why Pacific County flipped to vote for a Republican after voting for Democratic presidential candidates every cycle since 1952.

My findings suggest that the shift began with the long decline of the natural resource industry in the area. As industry diminished, unions became weaker, and they could no longer stabilize political life in Pacific County. I argue that the new political reality opened the door for local libertarian-style Republicans to make a successful values-based argument to folks in the area. Rural resentment towards the state government and urban Democrats accelerated the shift rightwards, culminating in Donald Trump's success in Pacific County. This paper concludes by offering a series of recommendations to the Democratic Party as to how they can use Pacific County's example to more effectively communicate to rural voters and counteract these trends nationwide.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 Presidential Election came as a shock to many, particularly elites who questioned how so many people could vote for someone they considered manifestly unqualified for the highest office in the land. They were particularly surprised by the defection of otherwise reliable Democratic communities. Some 206 counties supported President Trump despite voting for President Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012. ¹ Many wondered why so many Obama voters would support Trump. After all, Obama and Trump have vastly different politics and personal temperaments, and Hillary Clinton ran as the person who would continue Obama's legacy. Furthermore, these 'super-pivot' counties had an outsized impact on the 2016 election: they cast only 5 percent of the popular vote, but accounted for 51 percent of the popular vote swing from Democrats to Republicans.² Just over half of the counties were in the Midwest, a vital battleground area where Trump victories in Michigan, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania helped carry him to victory in the electoral college.³

This thesis is a study of one 'super-pivot' county: Pacific County, in Southwestern Washington. Prior to 2016, it had not voted for a Republican for President since Dwight D. Eisenhower's first term in 1952. Pacific County voted for Walter Mondale in 1984 even though he lost in a national landslide to Ronald Reagan. The county has remained loyal to the Democratic Party even in years when Republican

¹ Scott Rasmussen, "206 Pivot Counties Voted Twice for Obama Then Switched to Trump," RealClearPolitics, March 23, 2017, http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2017/03/23/206_pivot_counties_voted_twice_for_obama_then_switched_to_trump_133408.html.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

presidential candidates have been unusually popular. That fact makes the county's support for Trump—who, unlike Reagan, did not win in a landslide, all the more curious.

To shed light on this mystery, I used an ethnographic method. I interviewed fifteen people in the area at length about their political, social, and cultural views. Unlike surveys, which impose scholars' interests on their subjects, I gave them the freedom to talk about what they think is important. I also interacted with people in their community setting, which was invaluable to get further insight into how rural politics actually work. It is much more face-to-face than in urban areas like Seattle, where I am from. Seemingly everyone in Pacific County knows each other, and there was a remarkable level of mutual respect shown between people of different political persuasions.

I first spoke to Matt Winters, a local newspaper editor in the area who knows the community well. From there, my sample snowballed as each new interviewee provided additional contacts. I took three trips to Pacific County in 2019 to conduct interviews in person, each one lasting between three and five days. I sat down to talk in people's homes and met in coffee shops. I also conducted interviews over the phone to accommodate busy schedules. Each interview was recorded, when allowed. I took detailed notes when recording was not an option. I transcribed each interview myself and edited them for clarity when needed. I also drew on other data, such as voter turnout, legal history, and unemployment number, to validate some claims and disprove others.

Trump's improbable victory in Pacific County was due to a cascade of events that have been quietly weakening the Democratic Party below the surface for decades. It began with the long decline of natural resources in Pacific County. Pacific County is historically a natural resource extraction-based economy, and its abundant forests, fish,

and oysters have enabled folks to make a living off of the land for generations. Those resources gave rise to prominent timber, commercial fishing, and oyster farming industries in the area. Each one, however, has faced serious challenges in Pacific County. The timber industry began to decline in the 1980s when a series of economic shocks, the most prominent of which was federal regulation of old-growth forests due to the presence of endangered owls and marbled murrelets, vastly diminished the timber production in the area. Mills closed, and workers were laid off. Commercial fishing and oyster aquaculture have also been in decline in Pacific County, thanks in part to state and federal environmental regulations.

The decline of these industries had a political consequence: It weakened the unions in Pacific County. The math is simple, fewer jobs has led to a diminishment in the ranks of fishing and logging unions. In Pacific County, as most places in the 20th century, unions were solidly Democratic. That allegiance with organized labor is how the Democratic Party got the nickname ‘the party of the working man.’ In the past, the unions sustained partisan identities and ensured local support for Democratic candidates for local and state office. The only necessary condition to run for local office was to have worked for a local company, belong to a union, and have a ‘D’ next to your name on the ballot. When one union member decided to step down from local office, they would hand off the position to one of their friends and do something else or retire. That cycle ensured Democratic political control of local office for generations, and that support transferred to Democratic candidates for state and national office.

The decline of unions, in turn, created new political opportunities for Republicans. For the first time in generations, Republicans had an opportunity to

mobilize local voters around cultural values, like gun rights, that had long been pervasive in the county. They also appealed to economic interests, especially the growing tensions between the environmental agenda of the Democratic Party and the local extraction industries. These new opportunists said that only Republicans would work on behalf of folks in Pacific County and fight for their values and economic interests. That shift happened contemporaneously with the national Tea Party movement.

These developments cultivated a rural resentment towards a Washington state government that did not act with Pacific County's interests in mind, which accelerated the rightward shift in the area. The state government pushed policies that rural folks felt actively harmed Pacific County, like banning pesticides to kill ghost shrimp. Furthermore, Democrats seemed to only represent the values of liberal urbanities in Seattle. Folks in Pacific County felt forgotten and abandoned by politicians from the same party that they had been voting for every single election cycle for generations. That frustration led folks in Pacific County to rebel against state Democrats and vote for a Republican congresswoman in 2010. They went on to cast their vote for Donald Trump in 2016.

It is undoubtedly true that Donald Trump, as a candidate, spoke to grievances against urban elites quite skillfully. It is no surprise that he, rather than another Republican, did well in Pacific County. Trump only succeeded, however, because of the chain of events described in this thesis.

This thesis gives insight into what Democrats must do in order to reconnect with rural voters across the nation. If they do not reconsider how they interact with rural areas, they will continue to struggle in places like Pacific County. That is a problem for

Democrats' electoral chances, and 'super-pivot' counties like Pacific County may decide the election again in 2020.

Chapter 2: The 2016 Election

This chapter describes the 2016 election earthquake in Pacific County, from the caucuses through the general election. As we'll see, there were signs of trouble before the general election, including evidence of a considerable enthusiasm gap between Trump and Hillary supporters. This chapter also places the 2016 election in historical context and establishes just how unlikely a Republican victory truly was given Pacific County's remarkable past loyalty to the Democratic Party.

The Democratic caucuses offered little indication that Pacific County would swing to Trump in the general election. Senator Bernie Sanders won Pacific County with a whopping 81 percent of the vote in the caucuses, one of the largest margins in the state.⁴ He was also supported by the county's local Democratic leaders. Frank Wolfe, the Democratic county commissioner, confessed: "I have to say, going into the election, I was a Bernie Democrat. I was very upset that Bernie did not make the cut." His support (and that of the local party more generally) was evident to many in the county, even people who aren't as politically engaged. As one observed, "In 2016, the entire Pacific County Democrats organization went for Bernie in the primaries. Before the election, they were everywhere in the area." That enthusiasm for Bernie was echoed in the rest of the state. In the 2016 primaries, Bernie won the caucuses 72%-27% overall.⁵ He won every single county in the state, and Hillary Clinton's best performance in a single county was a 20-point loss.⁶ Washington state allocated delegates according to the results.

⁴ Ibid.



⁵ "Washington Primary Election Results 2016," *The New York Times*, September 29, 2016, sec. U.S., <http://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/primaries/washington>.

⁶ Ibid.

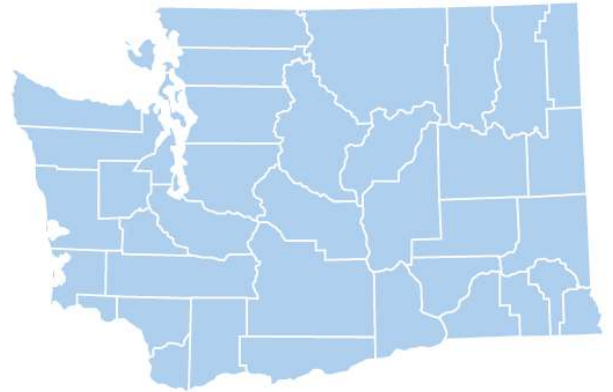
Figure 2.1: 2016 Democratic Primary Results in Washington.⁷

Sanders Sweeps Washington State By Large Margin

Washington State Dem. Primary Results, by County

Legend	Candidate	Votes*	Pct.	Delegates**
	Bernie Sanders	19,159	72.7%	74
	Hillary Clinton	7,140	27.1%	27

*Votes are represented as the number of legislative district delegates won.
 ** Delegates have yet to be officially allocated. The expected proportional allocation according to Washington Democratic Party rules is shown.



Analysis

- Only 34 of Washington's 101 pledged delegates at stake were officially allocated immediately after the caucuses. The remaining 64 will be allocated proportionally according to caucus results at the congressional level caucuses and the state convention (May 21st and June 18th respectively.)
- Clinton saw little support across the state, with her best county-level performance being a 20-point loss.

Washington state also hosts a Democratic primary almost two months later, in which Hillary Clinton defeated Bernie Sanders 54%-46%.⁸ Secretary Clinton actually won in Pacific County, 51%-49%. That is a somewhat surprising result, and it suggests that Bernie Sanders was not that popular outside of the activist community in Pacific County that is more likely to take time off of work to go and caucus for their preferred candidate. It does dovetail with results in the rest of the state, as Secretary Clinton won 20 of the state's 39 counties in the primary after winning zero counties in the caucus.

⁷ "2016 Washington State Democratic Caucuses Results and Voting Map," National Journal, accessed November 25, 2019, <https://www.nationaljournal.com/md/621669/2016-washington-state-democratic-caucuses-results-voting-map>.

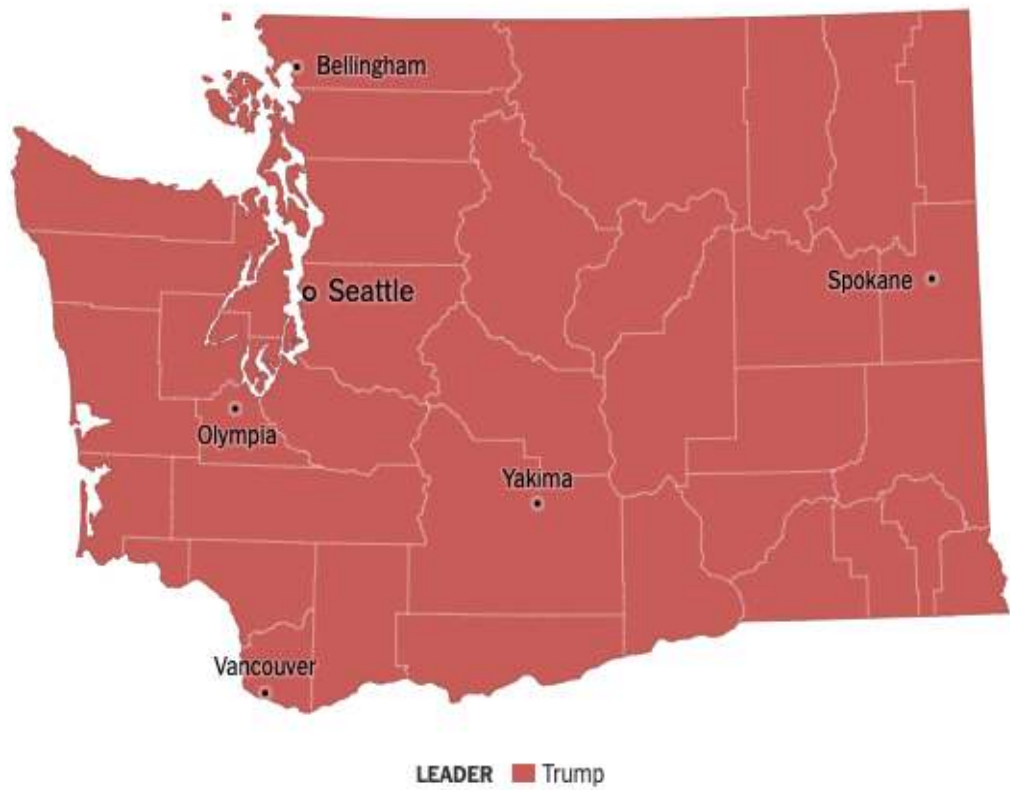
⁸ Jim Brunner, "Trump, Clinton Win Washington State Primary," *The Seattle Times*, May 24, 2016, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/wash-primary1/>.

Secretary Clinton was absolutely wiped out across the map. In the primary, she won more than half the counties and eked out a victory over Senator Sanders. The primary seems like a better way to accurately represent the preferences of the public, not just the political junkies that take the time to leave their job for a day and go caucus on behalf of their preferred candidate.

Meanwhile, the Republican primary was held on May 23rd, and every candidate had dropped out of the race except Donald Trump, though the others were still on the ballot. That makes it somewhat difficult to assess enthusiasm for Trump's candidacy. Even so, Trump did better in Pacific than in the rest of the state. While Trump won 75.8 percent of the vote overall,¹¹ he won 83 percent of vote in Pacific, with the remaining votes split between, in order of vote-share, Cruz, Kasich, and Carson.¹²

¹¹ *The New York Times*, September 29, 2016, sec. U.S., <http://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/primaries/washington>.

¹² *Ibid.*

Figure 2.3: 2016 Republican Primary Results in Washington.¹³

As the general election approached, there were signs that the Clinton campaign was in trouble in Pacific County. Hillary Clinton did not have the backing of the local Democratic party, which largely went for Bernie. Frank Wolfe remembered that people just did not want to vote for Hillary after Bernie lost in the primary, and that may have cost them by the time the general election rolled around. He argued that the local Party had to show more discipline in voting for Democrats up and down the ballot, even if members did not find the candidates that compelling. Frank spelled it out:

The biggest message out of 2016 that is being reinforced by local party members is ‘do whatever you want to in the primaries, do all of your

¹³ “Washington Primary Election Results 2016,” *The New York Times*, September 29, 2016, sec. U.S., <http://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/primaries/washington>.

squabbling there, but by the time it gets to the general election, *vote democrat*. I don't care who it is, *vote democrat*. Because what we had is people splitting their votes two or three ways, but if they voted for Democrats down the ballot, we would have won.

In contrast, there did seem to be some local enthusiasm for Trump's populist rhetoric.¹⁴ Doug, Karen's husband and a local Democrat, remembered that there were a lot of Trump signs decorating front yards and intersections in Pacific County, but not many Hillary signs. In hindsight, that was one of the first outward clues that something different was going to happen this time around. As he explained, "We saw all of these Trump signs, and we were like why aren't there more Democrat signs, but people just weren't putting them out." I noticed Trump signs as well, driving through Southwestern Washington on a separate trip in early 2016. There was one in almost every other yard, but not a solitary Clinton sign to be found. It looked more like the suburbs of Houston or Dallas than one of the bluest regions in the nation.

On Election Day 2016, Hillary Clinton won Washington state 52%-37%, and won all 12 electoral votes according to Washington's winner-take-all election rules.¹⁵ She gathered 1,742,718 votes overall, to 1,221,747 for Trump.¹⁶ That was not particularly surprising. Washington's population was estimated to be roughly 7,535,591 people in 2018. King County, which contains the Seattle-Tacoma metropolitan area, has 2,233,163 of those people, or ~30 percent of Washington's total population.¹⁷ King County also

¹⁴ William Yardley, "This Northwest Timber County Hadn't Voted GOP since Herbert Hoover. But Times Have Changed," *latimes.com*, accessed March 5, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-trump-timber-2016-story.html>.

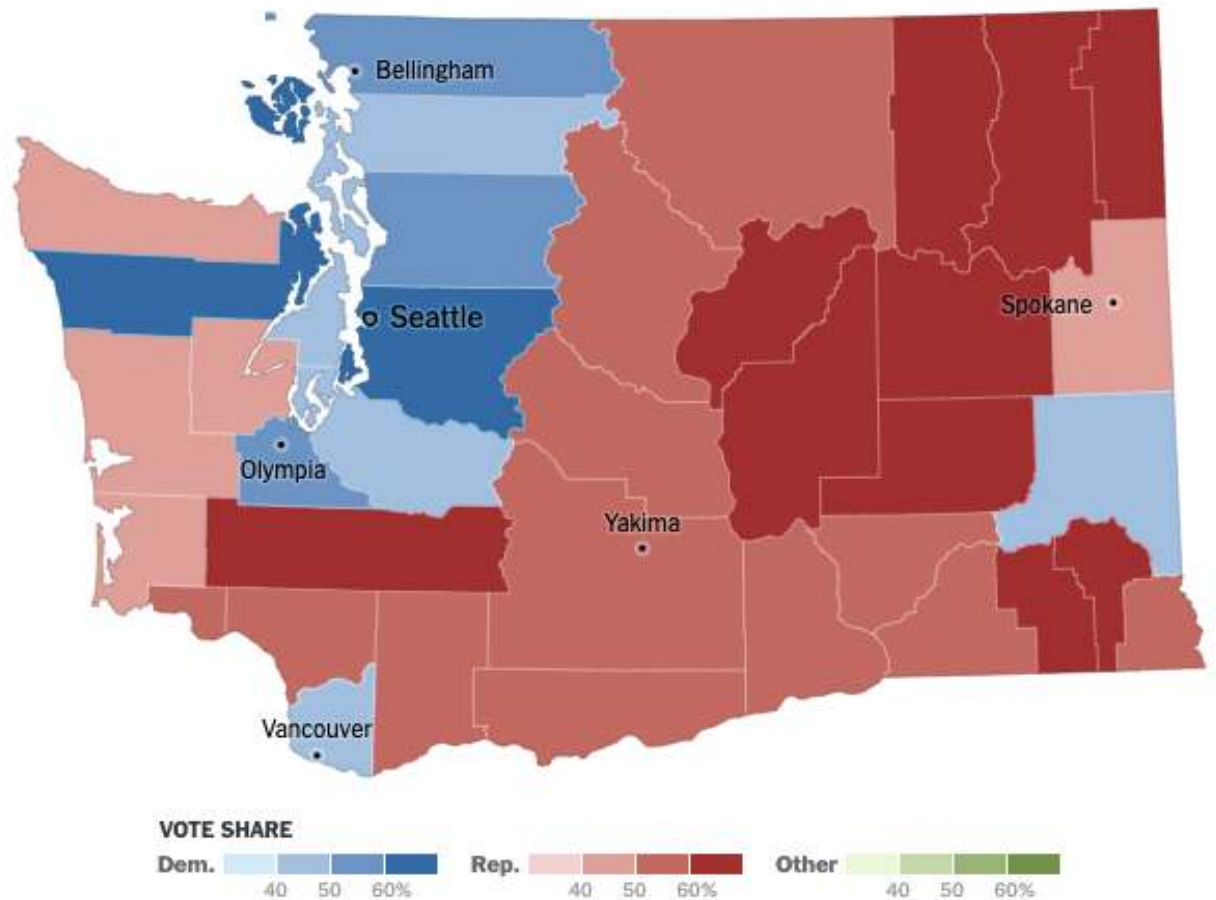
¹⁵ "Washington Election Results 2016," *The New York Times*, August 1, 2017, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/washington>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: King County, Washington," accessed November 20, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/kingcountywashington>.

leans heavily Democratic: Clinton won 69%-21% over Trump in 2016.¹⁸ That handicap is almost impossible to make up in other parts of the state. Clinton also won seven of the eight most populous counties in the state.¹⁹ These results highlight an urban-rural divide that has come to characterize political polarization in modern America.

Figure 2.4: 2016 Presidential Election Results in Washington, by county.²⁰



¹⁸ “Washington Election Results 2016,” *The New York Times*, August 1, 2017, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/washington>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

In Pacific County, Trump won 49%-42%, with a winning margin of 740 votes.²¹

This marked the first time that a Republican presidential candidate won Pacific County in 64 years. Interestingly, Pacific County split its ticket and voted for the Democratic incumbent Senator Patty Murray 55%-45%.²²

Historical Context

The last time that Pacific County voted for a Republican for President of the United States was when it went for Eisenhower in the run up to his first term in office in 1952 (Table 2.1).²³ Before that, Pacific County hadn't voted for a Republican since 1928, the cycle before Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first election to the Oval Office.²⁴ President Roosevelt is revered by many in Pacific County. It is not uncommon for older residents of the area to have a framed photo of the 32nd President in the entryway to their home.²⁵

Table 2.1: Presidential Election Results in Pacific County since 1932.²⁶

Year	Republican	Candidate	Democrat	Candidate	Third Party
2016	48.9% 5,360	Donald Trump	42.1% 4,620	Hillary Clinton	9.0% 992
2012	42.3% 4,499	Mitt Romney	53.7% 5,711	Barack Obama	4.0% 426

²¹ "Pacific County November 8, 2016 General Election," accessed November 20, 2019, <https://results.vote.wa.gov/results/20161108/pacific/>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Leip, David. *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://uselectionatlas.org> (November 24, 2019).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ William Yardley, "This Northwest Timber County Hadn't Voted GOP since Herbert Hoover. But Times Have Changed," *LA Times*, December 11, 2016, <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-trump-timber-2016-story.html>.

²⁶ Ibid.

2008	41.2% 4,555	John McCain	55.1% 6,094	Barack Obama	3.7% 406
2004	44.4% 4,634	George W. Bush	53.4% 5,570	John Kerry	2.2% 227
2000	42.5% 4,042	George W. Bush	51.4% 4,895	Al Gore	6.1% 582
1996	28.5% 2,598	Bob Dole	55.9% 5,095	Bill Clinton	15.6% 1,418
1992	24.2% 2,243	George H.W. Bush	49.6% 4,587	Bill Clinton	26.2% 2,422
1988	37.5% 3,073	George H.W. Bush	61.2% 5,017	Michael Dukakis	1.3% 110
1984	42.9% 3,613	Ronald Regan	55.6% 4,679	Walter Mondale	1.5% 129
1980	39.1% 3,132	Ronald Regan	46.5% 3,727	Jimmy Carter	14.4% 1,153
1976	37.8% 2,781	Gerald Ford	58.2% 4,278	Jimmy Carter	4.0% 291
1972	46.7% 3,349	Richard Nixon	50.0% 3,585	George McGovern	3.2% 232
1968	37.7% 2,491	Richard Nixon	56.6% 3,740	Hubert Humphrey	5.7% 374
1964	26.1% 1,789	Barry Goldwater	73.7% 5,056	Lyndon B. Johnson	0.2% 15
1960	45.5% 3,224	Richard Nixon	54.1% 3,837	John F. Kennedy	0.4% 29
1956	49.8% 3,799	Dwight D. Eisenhower	50.1% 3,824	Adlai Stevenson	0.2% 12
1952	50.2% 3,846	Dwight D. Eisenhower	49.3% 3,778	Adlai Stevenson	0.5% 39

1948	39.0% 2,749	Thomas Dewey	55.3% 3,902	Harry Truman	5.7% 401
1944	39.2% 2,419	Thomas Dewey	60.6% 3,745	Franklin D. Roosevelt	0.2% 12
1940	37.8% 2,704	Wendell Willkie	61.5% 4,393	Franklin D. Roosevelt	0.7% 48
1936	26.9% 1,732	Alf Landon	68.2% 4,395	Franklin D. Roosevelt	5.0% 320
1932	31.1% 1,737	Herbert Hoover	55.5% 3,099	Franklin D. Roosevelt	13.5% 752

In 1980, Pacific County, along with neighboring Grays Harbor, were the only two counties in Washington State to vote for Democratic Presidential candidate Jimmy Carter instead of Ronald Regan. Regan carried the state with 49.7 percent of the vote, vs 37.3 percent for Carter.²⁷ Even in 1984, which is remembered as a complete landslide for Regan on the national scale, Pacific County voted for Walter Mondale by 12.6 percent margin.²⁸ That election was the last in which Washington state collectively voted for a Republican.²⁹ This point gets hammered in again and again, but it cannot be overstated how much Pacific County was wedded to the Democratic Party. The Democrats were well-represented here, and it was basically a necessity to run as a Democrat in order to get elected to a local office.

²⁷ Leip, David. *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://uselectionatlas.org> (November 24, 2019).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Chapter 3: Decline of the Natural Resource Industry

First, this chapter will give an introduction into Pacific County and its different geographical regions. Next, it will tell the story of the natural resource industry in Pacific County, which has been in decline for decades, chiefly due to the globalizing economy and increased regulation by the state government. Together, they constitute a series of economic shocks that have caused the decline of timber, fishing, and aquaculture in the area. Logging was adversely affected by regulations protecting the northern spotted owl, and subsequently, the marbled murrelet. Fishing has been hard-hit by increased regulation of hatchery fish, as well as broader trends of more expensive housing for seasonal workers and consolidation of local businesses. Oyster farming operations are at risk because of a ghost shrimp infestation that is killing oysters, and the state government has barred business owners from fighting it with pesticides. That perceived overreach has driven resentment towards the state government. Locals relate that natural resources are the soul of Pacific County, and that soul is fading away. The result of this decline is a new social and political reality in Pacific County that has been a long time coming.

After a few initial phone calls with local journalists, I embarked on my first trip down to Southwestern Washington state in March 2019. As I made my way through the ex-urban sprawl of the Seattle, the strip malls gave way to farmland and pine forests. When Highway 8 terminated in the coastal town of Aberdeen, I had arrived in the stretch of Southwest Washington that I was set to study for the next nine months.

The truth is that not many people find this tiny part of the United States unless they are looking for it. It is hidden far away in the corner of the country, the kind of area that most people, once they were through making sure that they were supposed to be

thinking about Washington state, not Washington DC, would assume is home to trees, deer, and possibly Bigfoot. It is an area that has a limited national political voice, the bluest of blue Puget Sound region dictates how Pacific County residents will be thought of on the national stage. Its biggest municipalities would be considered small towns by most urbanites. Pacific County's population was 22,036 in 2018.³⁰ Most population centers in the area just have the staples: a grocery store, diner, motel, gas station, etc. There are also a couple of drive-up espresso shacks for early risers and people passing through. All of these businesses are set into the landscape; perched above the sea or surrounded by pine trees.

Pacific County is comprised of two distinct regions: North County and South County (see Figure 3.1). North County is historically been dominated by the logging industry, and it contains the seat of the local government. It also has a lot of agriculture and includes the South Bend-Raymond community, where I spent the majority of my time in the area. And although it is fairly conservative politically, it has historically supported the Democratic Party because of the influence of organized labor. As I learned from Matt Winters, editor at the *Chinook Observer*, "North county is, historically, logging county. It also has the seat of local government. It is also fairly politically conservative but has tended to learn Democratic because of unions."

South County, on the other hand, is more tourist oriented. The Long Beach Peninsula, the most striking geographical feature of the area, is a mecca for visitors from the Seattle and Portland areas, with its miles of beaches and quaint towns. The shellfish

³⁰ "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Pacific County, Washington," accessed September 5, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/pacificcountywashington>.

and fishing industries are also based there. The fishing boats operate out of the ports, and the oystermen ply their trade in the Willapa Bay. Willapa Bay oysters are famous, and local businesses export them all around the world. Frank Wolfe, a Democratic county commissioner representing the southern part of Pacific County, described his home district the following way:

The south end is more visitor/tourist oriented. The chief industries here are hospitality related and cater to those attracted by the beach and related activities. There is a thriving fishing and shellfish industry here also. A third of the county's permanent population lives on the Long Beach Peninsula, in the area including the city of Long Beach, and northward (my District). This area is also attractive as a retirement area. It has historically been fairly liberal, politically.

Figure 3.1: Map of Pacific County.³¹



³¹ S. Stevens and M. Winters, *Jailhouse Stories from Early Pacific County* (Arcadia Publishing (SC), 2016), <https://books.google.com/books?id=C-2atAEACAAJ>.

The economy in Southwestern Washington has been centered on natural resource extraction for generations. Jim and Jaime Walsh are a power couple in Pacific County. Jim is the Republican state representative for the 19th Legislative District, which includes Pacific County. Jaime is a local architect in neighboring Grays Harbor, and political activist for more libertarian causes. They both impressed on me just how important natural resource extraction is to the economic and cultural health of Pacific County. As Jim put it, “Pacific County is traditionally a natural resource extraction economy, which means commercial fishing and the timber industry.”

Timber

Historically, more than 90 percent of the Willapa uplands were forested and ripe for logging. Technological advances in steam engines in the late 19th century made logging a mainstay of Pacific County’s economy.³² Trees were cut down, transported to the Willapa River, and floated down the river to sawmill towns like South Bend. They would then be loaded on ships and exported to buyers. The railroads enabled people to travel west in order to search out economic opportunities in the shipyards, boosting local employment numbers. William E. Boeing, early aviation enthusiast and timber investor, found inspiration in the war for his fledgling airplane factory.³³ The needs of the timber industry took precedence in the state. There was no thought on preserving the forests, or even any idea that keeping the wilderness in pristine condition was a worthwhile pursuit. Logging companies were only constrained by the capabilities of their machines. This

³² Robert E. Ficken and Charles Pierce LeWarne, *Washington: A Centennial History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988). 123

³³ *Ibid.* 122

time, in the late 19th century and early 20th century, was a golden age for the timber industry in Washington

Post World War I, Washington remained the nation's leading lumber producer, but it's bellwether enterprise began to slow down in the early 1920s.³⁴ More lumber was produced in the state than could be sold for a profit.³⁵ While the Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s is especially known for the immense hardship that the dismal economic conditions inflicted on the American heartland, the Pacific Northwest was not sheltered from the collapse.³⁶ The total population of Pacific County had only rise by 0.5 percent in the proceeding decade to 15,928 people, and the unemployment rate had climbed to 6.8 percent by 1940.³⁷

Table 3.1: Pacific County population from 1860-2010, by decade.³⁸

Year	Population	% Change
1860	420	—
1870	738	75.70%
1880	1,645	122.90%
1890	4,358	164.90%
1900	5,983	37.30%
1910	12,532	109.50%
1920	14,891	18.80%
1930	14,970	0.50%
1940	15,928	6.40%
1950	16,558	4.00%

³⁴ Ibid. 122

³⁵ Ibid. 123

³⁶ Ibid. 120

³⁷ Sixteenth Decennial Census of the United States, 1940 Population, Volume II, Characteristics of the Population. (Washington, D.C. 1943)

³⁸ "Census of Population and Housing," United States Census, accessed November 12, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>.

1960	14,674	-11.4%
1970	15,796	7.60%
1980	17,237	9.10%
1990	18,882	9.50%
2000	20,984	11.10%
2010	20,920	-0.3%
2018	22,036	5.33%

Between 1929 and 1931, the per capita consumption of lumber declined by nearly two thirds in the United States. The sawmills of Washington, already on shaky ground because of the slowdown in the 1920s, were crushed by the new economic reality. Alex Polson, a lumber worker in Grays Harbor, lamented that “there are few in the world who have escaped Old Man Depression’s oppressive methods.”³⁹

In time, the economy improved, but the timber industry never returned to the unfettered dominance it enjoyed in the early 20th century. During a visit to the area in 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s motorcade stopped by a lawn where numerous school children were displaying a banner in support of the creation of Olympic National Park. Olympic National Park covers most of the Olympic Peninsula, and it includes the Olympic Mountains, as well as temperate rainforests and rocky coastline (Figure 3.2).

³⁹ Ficken, 125

Figure 3.2: Olympic National Park in the modern day.⁴⁰

The President signaled his approval of the idea: “So, you boys and girls, I think you can count on my help in getting that national park, not only because we need it for us old people and you young people, but for a whole lot of young people who are going to come along in the next hundred years of America.”⁴¹ The park was created soon after in June 1938, and in a moment of great symbolic importance in Washington history, President Roosevelt added 187,000 acres to Olympic National Park in 1940.⁴² For nearly

⁴⁰ “Olympic National Park,” U.S. National Park Service, accessed November 12, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/olym/planyourvisit/gettingaround.htm>.

⁴¹ “Roosevelt Tours Olympic Peninsula -- A Reminiscence by Mary Lou Hanify,” accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.historylink.org/File/8693>.

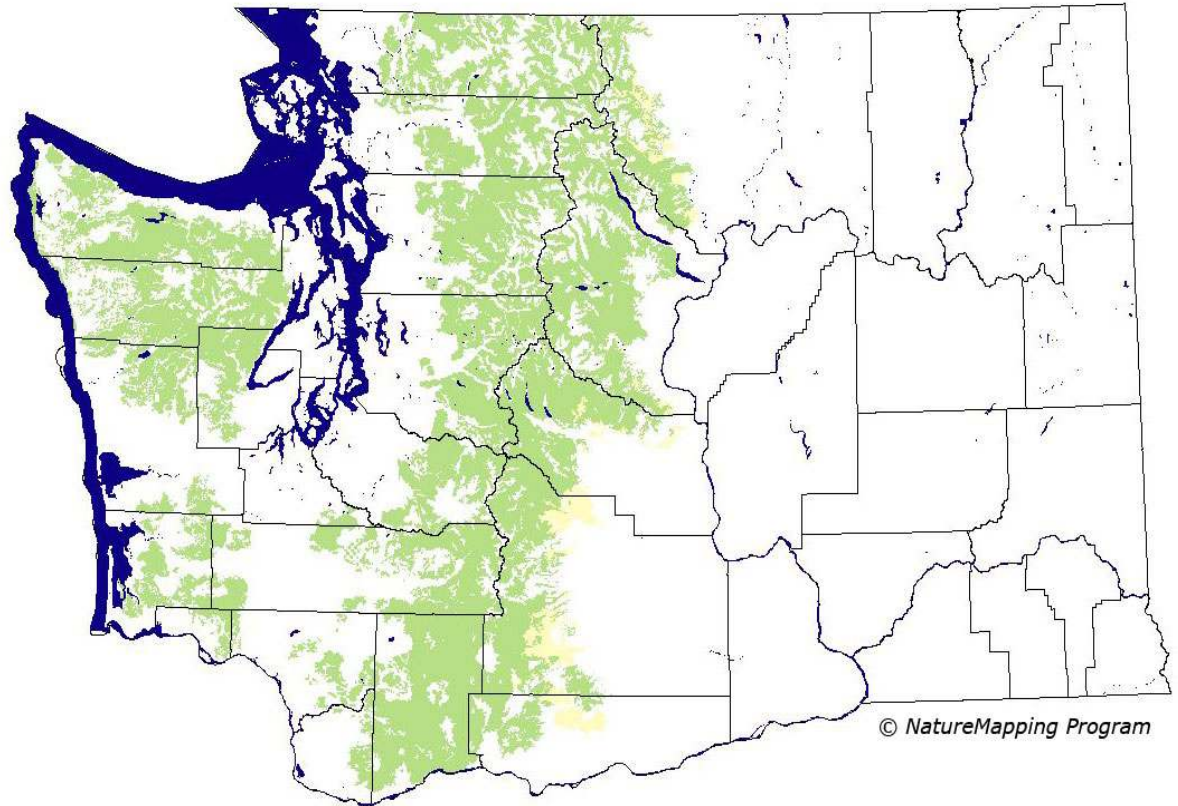
⁴² Ficken 125

a century, the desires and motivation of Washington lumbermen and the timber industry had taken precedence over all other concerns. Now, with the creation of a large wilderness preserve on the beautiful Olympic Peninsula, the concerns of environmentalists were now of equivalent importance. Things continued apace for the better part of the 20th century, but the nostalgia for the golden age of timber never quite disappeared from the residents of Pacific County.

The Spotted Owl Effect

Logging faced an even more formidable foe in recent decades: the northern spotted owl. It is alternately treasured as a denizen of old-growth forests or reviled as a job-killer and symbol of government overreach into local affairs. In Pacific County, it is much more the latter. In June of 1990, The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declared the Northern Spotted owl as endangered throughout its range. That range spread all over the Pacific Northwest, and into southern British Columbia, and included large tracts of public timberlands.⁴³ Once the spotted owl was listed on the endangered species list, logging was heavily restricted on that land.

⁴³ “Northern Spotted Owl,” National Wildlife Federation, accessed November 20, 2019, <https://www.nwf.org/Home/Educational-Resources/Wildlife-Guide/Birds/Northern-Spotted-Owl>.

Figure 3.3: Northern Spotted Owl range in Washington.⁴⁴**Spotted Owl** *Strix occidentalis*

Domestic timber harvests declined rapidly after those forests were declared off limits for logging on account of preserving habitat for northern spotted owls. Those protections were spelled out in the Endangered Species Act of 1973.⁴⁵ Between 1988 and 1996, timber harvests declined 87 percent on national forests and 38 percent overall nationwide.⁴⁶ The nosedive in timber production disproportionately affected Pacific

⁴⁴ "Spotted Owl (Strix Occidentalis)," NatureMapping Program, accessed November 25, 2019, http://naturemappingfoundation.org/natmap/facts/spotted_owl_k6.html.

⁴⁵ "OFWO - Northern Spotted Owl," accessed November 20, 2019, <https://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/articles.cfm?id=149489595>.

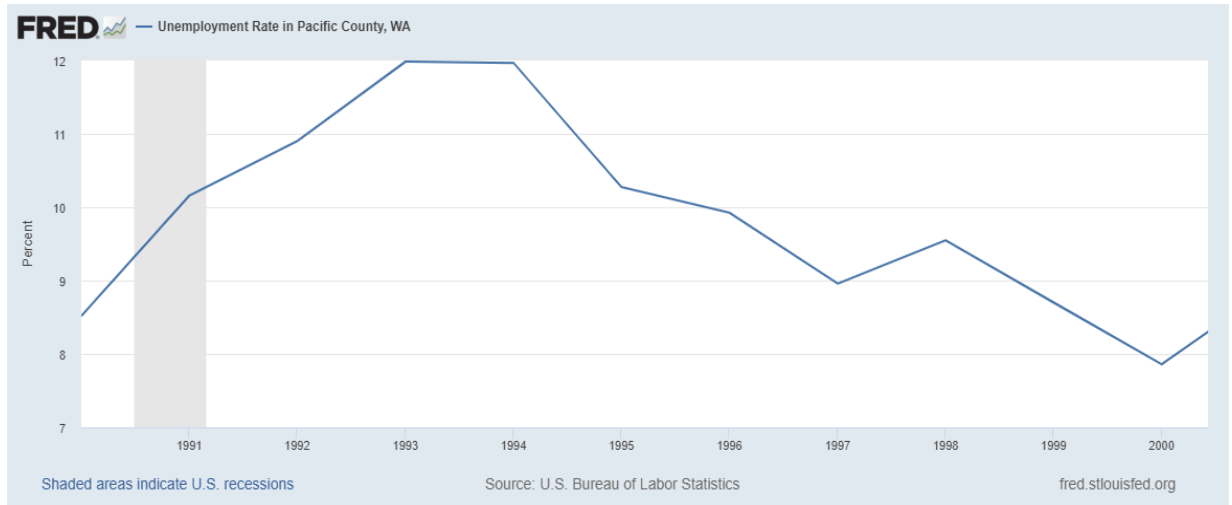
⁴⁶ Daniels, Jean M. "The Rise and Fall of the Pacific Northwest Log Export Market." Portland, OR: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, 2005. <https://doi.org/10.2737/PNW-GTR-624>.

County. The unemployment rate in Pacific County neared 14 percent by the end of 1990, with a total population of 18,882.⁴⁷ When I spoke to Jim and Jaime, their frustration with the state government and the way that Pacific County had been treated came through in the way they spoke about the endangered species issue. Jim explained that, “in the last 30 years since the Northwest Timber Plan and the Forest and Fish plan, and these are more formal ways of saying, basically, the spotted owl issue, the economy in Pacific County has been destroyed, it's been decimated.”

Since the implementation of the Northwest Timber Plan, Pacific County has been hard-hit by the decline in timber jobs. The calculation is simple: less timber stock equals fewer paying jobs. You can see this trend in the overall unemployment statistics for Pacific County in the 1990s (Figure 3.4).

⁴⁷ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Unemployment Rate in Pacific County, WA [WAPACI9URN], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/WAPACI9URN>, November 20, 2019..

Figure 3.4: Unemployment rate in Pacific County, 1990-2000. Calculated on an annual basis.⁴⁸



Interestingly, this negative feeling towards environmentalists does not appear to have lessened support for President Bill Clinton in the 1992 and 1996 presidential elections. In 1992, Clinton won Pacific County by a margin of 24.2 percent.⁴⁹ Voter turnout (percentage of registered voters who cast a vote) was high as well, at 82.25 percent.⁵⁰ Clinton made a campaign promise to find a negotiated solution to the battle between loggers and conservationists. In 1994, the Clinton Administration released a plan that would allow the timber industry to cut one billion board feet a year in old growth forests.⁵¹ That is one fifth of the harvest in the boom years of the 1980s.⁵²

⁴⁸ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Unemployment Rate in Pacific County, WA [WAPACI9URN], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/WAPACI9URN>, November 24, 2019.

⁴⁹ "1992 Presidential General Election Results - Washington," accessed November 20, 2019, <https://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/state.php?year=1992&fips=53&f=0&off=0&elect=0&minper=0>.

⁵⁰ Leip, David. *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://uselectionatlas.org> (November 24, 2019).

⁵¹ "The Owl and the President Win," *The New York Times*, December 26, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/12/26/opinion/the-owl-and-the-president-win.html>.

⁵² *Ibid.*

Environmentalists thought it was far too much, and loggers wanted to be able to cut down many more trees. In short, no one was happy.

In contrast to the seeming contentment with the Clinton Administration, there was a backlash against the Democrats in the 1994 House of Representative elections in the 3rd Congressional District, which includes Pacific County. Linda Smith, who ran as a maverick-style Republican, defeated Jolene Unoeld, an incumbent three term Democrat.⁵³ Smith ran against the Spotted Owl environmentalist movement, and she was successful in her anti-establishment attacks and backing of the wise-use movement and property rights.⁵⁴ She also received support from gun-rights activists, the religious right, and other familiar groups to assemble a winning coalition. In a familiar refrain, however, Pacific County still went blue. In this case, Unoeld won 60 percent of the vote in Pacific County.⁵⁵ Linda Smith had to run up big margins in other parts of the district to win her seat.

In the 1994 Senate election, Pacific County was again reliably blue. Slade Gordan ran as a Republican and won the seat with 56 percent of the vote.⁵⁶ Ron Sims, his Democratic opponent, only won four counties. One of them was Pacific County, the only one in southwestern Washington to go blue. Mr. Gordan ran on a platform of anti-environmentalism, supported opening more federal forestland to logging, and advocated for substantial alterations to the Endangered Species Act.⁵⁷ This seems like the perfect

⁵³ “Unsoeld, Jolene - Biographical Information,” Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, accessed December 6, 2019, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=U000017>.

⁵⁴ Larry Swisher, “Washington: Greens Storm the Suburbs,” October 14, 1996, <https://www.hcn.org/issues/91/2827>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

platform to win Pacific County for Republicans. That just did not happen. Pacific County was one of the most reliably Democratic counties in the nation. In 1996, despite seeming antagonism to the interests of loggers in Pacific County, President Clinton won Pacific County with a slightly higher margin than in 1992: 27.41 percent.⁵⁸ That was the highest margin of any county in the state.⁵⁹

The most likely reason for this trend is that partisan identities are very sticky, and they do not change easily.⁶⁰ Folks in Pacific County have deep-seated connections to the Democratic Party, and it was regarded as the group that would represent what people really cared about. Those sorts of identities do not change overnight. Jim Walsh, the State Rep for the 19th LD, alluded to this reality when he opined that “the county is gradually figuring out that the people of the political left have not been looking out for their interests, and they are frustrated. Least case scenario took them for granted. Worst case scenario, worked against their interests.” He said that he is glad that people are finally changing how they vote in 2019, but that “in a perfect information economy, people in Pacific County would have figured this out 20 years ago.” Again, Jim is a Republican, so the trend does work in his favor, but I got the sense that everyone felt this shift. It takes a long time to change your political affiliation, especially when it is closely related to your identity. That was, and is, the case in Pacific County.

Moving on, the Habitat Conservation Plan, which is a part of the previously mentioned Endangered Species Act, did the legwork of declaring what habitats are to be

⁵⁸ Washington Secretary of State, *Official Returns of the State General Election November 5, 1996* (Olympia, 1996)

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Bartle, John, and Paolo Bellucci. "Introduction: Partisanship, Social Identity and Individual Attitudes." In *Political Parties and Partisanship*, pp. 23-47. Routledge, 2014.

restricted and/or declared off limits for commercial logging. It impacted, and continues to impact, private and publicly held timberlands. As Jim put it:

The real pain is felt in public trust land. At the founding of the state, a significant percentage of timber growth land was assigned in public trusts for the benefit of school districts, small rural counties, and junior tax districts. And for the first 70-80 years, this public trust land was managed and harvested on a regular cycle, and the proceeds of the timber sales fed into local school districts, local counties, and library districts.

Most of the counties in the State surrendered their public trust timberlands to the state Department of Natural Resources. Pacific County gave over control because it makes things easier to have it managed by the state. The problem is that the county surrendered ownership of what they were going to do with their public land. Grays Harbor, however, did not shift control of their public-trust land to the state, and Jim would rather Pacific County had done the same: “Grays Harbor has always managed its own timberland, and as a result, they have continued to make a pretty good amount of money off of harvesting timber. They are in a better spot than Pacific, specifically. If they could go back in time and control their own land, they would in a heartbeat.”

Interestingly, Grays Harbor had similar political outcomes to Pacific County, at least on the national stage. Grays Harbor hadn't voted for a Republican candidate for president since Herbert Hoover in 1928. It flipped for Donald Trump in 2016.⁶¹ The shifting of public trust land to the state does not seem to have affected how it has voted on a national stage. For Pacific County, the public-trust land was the foundation for its timber industry. It was managed and harvested by local loggers, and it was regarded as a

⁶¹ Leip, David. *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://uselectionatlas.org> (November 24, 2019).

kind of public good. “That public trust land was what Pacific’s timber industry was primarily based in. The mills ran on trees felled on public trust land. The private mills did ok. When this was a boom town, and when Raymond was a boom town, it was because mills were processing trees from public trust land,” Jim explained.

Thus, local libraries and schools were funded by the timber sales from public lands, and the harvesting process supplied jobs to the area. Once those public trust lands were declared to be off limits to logging, the state government tried to offset some of the economic pain by allocating ‘encumbered lands money’ to Pacific County. Because the land is ‘encumbered,’ it is not completely the owners to do with it what they will. It is subject to regulation by the state Department of Natural Resources, so they compensate for that intrusion.⁶² This is useful for the county, but the value of those payments has declined. “They used to get 3-4 million dollars a year, now they get a few hundred thousand dollars,” Jim said. “It has hit them hard. The immediate fix would be to restore that money back, the long-term fix would be to put some of those trust lands back into production.”

The Marbled Murrelet

The major issue used to be the spotted owl, and its placement on the endangered species list. Those previous restrictions are still utilized to protect the marbled murrelet, another endangered bird. marbled murrelets are small seabirds that exclusively nest in

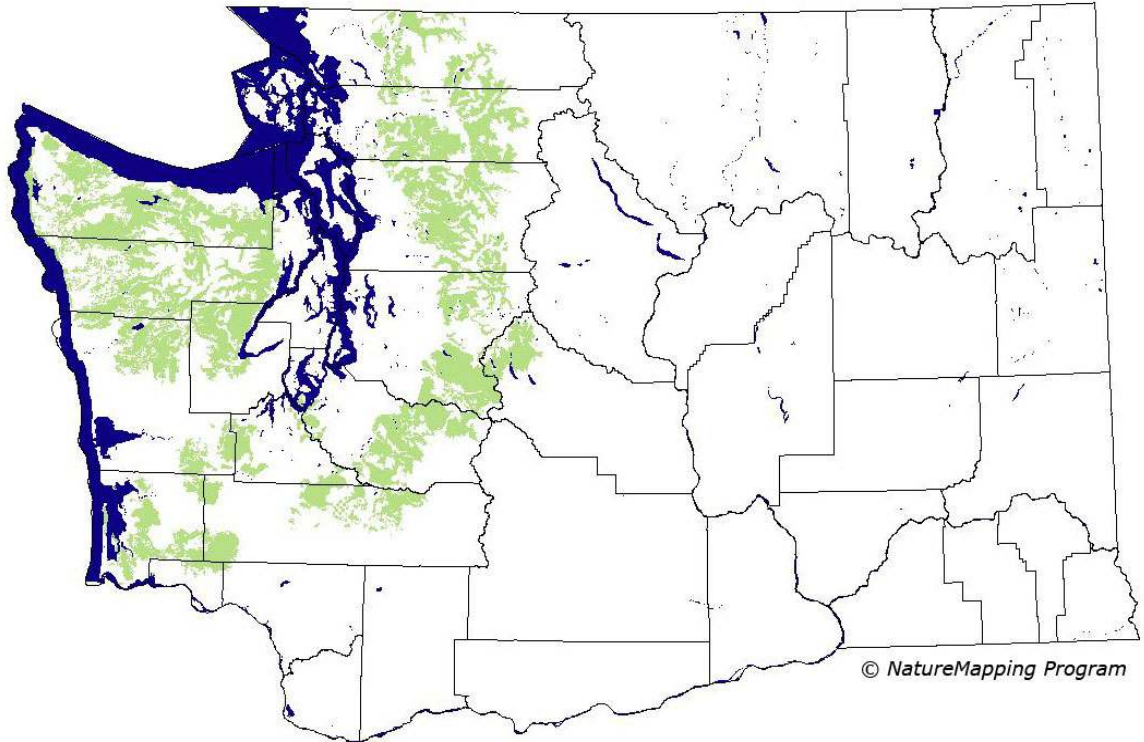
⁶² Scott Panitz, “Timber Counties Gain Revenue Compensation for Encumbered State Forest Lands,” *Chinook Observer*, February 20, 2012, https://www.chinookobserver.com/news/timber-counties-gain-revenue-compensation-for-encumbered-state-forest-lands/article_2c911bab-e968-5f2d-b60c-47a85b343b3c.html.

coastal or near-coastal old-growth forests.⁶³ Conservationists argue that state Department of Natural Resources lands are crucial for restoring murrelet populations, primarily because of the nesting habits of the birds. Murrelets do not build nests to raise their young, they instead lay eggs right on the branch itself.⁶⁴ Consequently, they rely on the kind of wide, thick, moss-covered branches that are found primarily in old-growth forestland. They are also known to travel up to fifty miles inland to nest.⁶⁵

⁶³ “Marbled Murrelet” *Conservation Northwest | Protecting, Connecting and Restoring Wildlands and Wildlife* (blog), accessed November 22, 2019, <https://www.conservationnw.org/our-work/wildlife/murrelet/>.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Figure 3.5: The Marbled Murrelet Range in Washington⁶⁶**Marbled Murrelet** *Brachyramphus marmoratus*

Frank Wolfe, a County Commissioner in Pacific County, ran as a Democrat for both of his terms in the position. Frank does not even try to cover up his contempt for the government's focus on this specific bird. As he put it, "the problem is that if the state comes in and takes the trees, and steal them from you, and you can't cut them because the Marbled Merlette lives there. Maybe. Possibly. It is a stupid little bird because when it lays an egg, it doesn't have a nest, it lays the egg on a big branch. That branch has to be on a big old growth tree."

⁶⁶ "Distribution Map - Marbled Murrelet (Brachyramphus Marmoratus)." Accessed November 25, 2019. <http://naturemappingfoundation.org/natmap/maps/wa/birds/WAmarbledmurrelet.html>.

Figure 3.6: A marbled murrelet nesting on a large branch in old growth forest.⁶⁷



As a result, a significant percentage of old growth timberland in Pacific County lies in the marbled murrelet's range. Jim looks at this issue as critical for understanding local politics in Pacific County. "You can't understand what is going on in Pacific County without understanding what is going on with the Marbled Murrelet Conservation Plan," he told me.

The frustration hinges on the state's solution of giving the County encumbered lands money instead of allowing them to harvest trees in the old-growth areas. Frank Wolf was particularly animated about the issue. "Pacific County is being asked to put aside perfectly good timberland that we use for income and jobs," he said scathingly. "There is a mill over in Raymond that employs 250 people, and you need to have trees going through it. If you don't, those jobs go away, those people go away, and that mill closes down, and we are done. It will never open again."

⁶⁷ "Marbled Murrelet," National Park Service, November 21, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/redw/learn/nature/marbled-murrelet.htm>.

Encumbered Lands Money vs. Jobs

The issue is the jobs. The money is useful, and necessary, but it does not fully replace having functioning mills in the area. The identity of the area is based on timber jobs, and they perform a social function, in addition to an economic one. William Julius Wilson's discussion of the social consequences of the absence of employment in *When Work Disappears* is useful here. His book was written about the plight of the urban poor, but it is applicable to Pacific County as well. Formal work is important because "in the absence of regular employment, a person lacks not only a place in which to work and the receipt of regular income but also a coherent organization of the present — that is, a system of concrete expectations and goals. Regular employment provides the anchor for the spatial and temporal aspects of daily life."⁶⁸ Work provides structure for all aspects of life, and that structure is crucial for a community. Just as Frank was saying, just giving money to Pacific County does not replace all of the mental and social benefits of gainful employment. Logging, and other resource extraction industries are integral to Pacific County's view of itself. Money can't replace that.

In a somewhat familiar refrain, globalization is taking away work from traditional industries like manufacturing and natural resource extraction. Wilson elaborates on this further: "With changes in technology and the globalization of the economy, knowledge-based industries are growing more rapidly than other industries in the economies of western nations. While many educated workers benefit from these changes, the demand for low-skilled workers has plummeted to the lowest depths in human history."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Wilson, William J. "When Work Disappears: New Implications for Race and Urban Poverty in the Global Economy." *Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion* 17 (November 1998), 3. doi:10.1080/014198799329396.

⁶⁹ Wilson, 11

Educated urbanites tend to view the rise of the so-called ‘information economy’ as a good thing. It certainly is, for the kinds of people that work at think tanks or big tech firms. It makes economic sense for the US economy to become more specialized in professional services and technology, and export lower-skilled work to countries where labor is cheaper.

This shift is decidedly less of a good thing for lower-skilled workers that have spent their whole lives working in timber, and other labor-intensive industries. Jim and Jaime Walsh, libertarian-style Republicans, emphasized how important it is for people to feel connected to their home, as our conversation makes clear.

Jaime: You can say that is how the land is related to some sort of national feeling. The nation is defined by land, these are all land-based types of industries. They are not something that you can send to China, like manufacturing.

Jim: Well, growing the trees. Tragically, we are sending the trees over to China for manufacturing. We would like to get some of that back.

Jaime: Right, but you still have to cut them down here.

Jaime: You talk about some sort of nationalism versus internationalism, I think that the land is very important.

Hillbilly Elegy, J.D. Vance’s memoir about growing up in Appalachia, focuses on a similar attachment to place and county. J.D. Vance grew up in a fractured household, and eventually moved in with his grandparents, Mamaw and Papaw, who stabilized his life and enabled him to join the Marines, graduate from Ohio State, and end up at Yale Law School. Vance’s grandpa worked for Armco Steel (later called AK Steel), and both grandparents felt an intense attachment to the company. Vance remembered that his “Mamaw used to say that ‘Armco built this fucking town.’ She wasn’t lying: Many of the

city's best parks and facilities were bought with Armco dollars."⁷⁰ The company also employed thousands of people living in Middletown, and those people earned a good wage that put them solidly in the middle class, even though they lacked a formal education.⁷¹ That investment in the people of Middletown was reciprocated by Vance's Papaw. Even after "most American car companies transitioned away from steel-bodied cars, Papaw would stop at used-car dealerships whenever he saw an old Ford or Chevy. 'Armco made this steel,' he told [J.D]."⁷²

For people in Mamaw or Papaw's generation, Armco was an important institution, and it engendered loyalty amongst its current and former employees. For those people, "Armco was an economic savior - the engine that brought from the hills of Kentucky into America's middle class."⁷³ That sense of loyalty to a job, and a way of life, is similar to how some folks in Pacific County talked about natural resource extractive industry. Logging companies provided good jobs, and they enabled people to live and work in an honorable way. The land is the soul of Pacific County, and that is not so easily forgotten by the folks that lived and worked on it.

On one of my visits to the area, I spent a Saturday evening walking through Raymond, a town that once thrived off of timber booms. There is a sense of quiet there, of stillness. There was no one around to socialize during their time off of work, and the few bars that were open did not have many patrons. Of course, that may just be a part of small-town life that I am not familiar with, but the life in Raymond still seemed

⁷⁰ J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), 58

⁷¹ Vance, 58

⁷² Vance, 61

⁷³ Vance, 60

somewhat stagnant. Any cars driving on the main road did not turn off in the town, they looked to be just passing through the downtown core. There were run-down houses just off the main drag, and in one particularly poignant scene, a church building displayed a sign that read ‘new beginnings,’ with abandoned buildings arrayed in the background.

I walked to the riverfront park in the middle of town, where I was the only person around. The signs illustrating the ecology and industrial history of the town were steeped in nostalgia. One sign that focused on the wildlife of the river used flowery language like “the texture of the streambank reminds us of an elegantly woven garment of green with many moving parts, sequined by the silver glitter of riffles caught by the sun.” That sign, in and of itself, is not particularly noteworthy. It is the sort of glorification of local beauty that is relatively common in the Pacific Northwest. The more interesting aspect of the park is that the next sign over discusses the history of logging in the area in similar terms. It reminisces about the years when Raymond was a hub for logs floated down the river from the Willapa Highlands, which were then processed by the mills in town. Then, the social life of the town was alive and dynamic, and the products were then shipped from the port to eager buyers all around the world. That reliance on natural resource extraction exists in harmony with the glorification of local nature. The focus is on jobs, and the good that honest work in the mills does for both the workers themselves and the community as a whole. As Frank rued, “The problem with that is, while the county likes the revenue, that isn’t our skin in the game. But we need the mill more. We need the 250 jobs, more. If you leave the trees, you can give us all the money in the world, the jobs will still go away.”

Timber companies have developed a reputation, particularly in urban areas, of corporations that go in, clear-cut their way through forestland, and then move onto the next section. That is not the case here, or at least, it is not the way that Pacific County tends to think about resource extraction. It is a give-and-take with the land. This sentiment that people from Pacific County are responsible stewards of their own natural resources, and do not need the state government coming and telling them what to do, will come up over and over again. Doug is Karen Spackman's husband, and he is involved in local natural resources industry, particularly with fishermen and oyster farmers. He is a politically engaged Democrat and knows a number of past and present elected officials quite well. Doug recounts a story that emphasizes this point. As he recalled:

One of our previous County commissioners ran as a Democrat, though he wasn't really one. He was proud of having cut the last big timber off of Long Island as a logger. He used to say that 'we don't want to preserve this as a playground for people in Seattle, we need to extract the resources from it.'

This undercurrent of irritation and anger against 'Puget Sound,' as a catch-all term for urban folks and an elitist state government, is very important to understand what is going on in Pacific County. Frank expresses it another way when he questions why folks in Pacific County have to give up their jobs and resources instead of Seattleites. "Why do I keep having to harp every year to keep this timber mill open, and why is it that Puget Sound isn't having to do something to support the marbled murrelet?" he asked. "Oh, that's right, they cut all of their trees down a hundred years ago! So why are we stuck covering for them?"

Commercial Fishing

In 2012, Pacific County was the fourth-most fishing intensive local economy in the United States by share of total earnings.⁷⁴ It represented 4.6 percent of the local economy, and only trailed a few counties in Arkansas and Maine in terms of the local reliance on fishing as a source of wealth.⁷⁵ The value of Pacific County’s fishing industry was \$2.3 million, which was the lowest of the top 11 local economies on the list by a significant margin. Knox County, Maine, which had the third most fishing-intensive economy, one spot above Pacific County, was valued at \$54.2 million.⁷⁶ As with timber, this paints a picture of a small, but critical industry in a slow decline.

Table 3.2: List of most fishing-intensive local economies by share of total earnings, 2012.⁷⁷

Area	State	Percent	Value (in millions)
Petersberg Census Area	AK	18.9%	\$24.4
Knox County	ME	5.6%	\$54.2
Hoonah-Angoon Census Area	AK	5.3%	\$2.3
Pacific County	WA	4.6%	\$13.7
Washington County	ME	3.9%	\$22.0
Dillingham Census Area	AK	3.7%	\$6.1
Del Norte County	CA	3.2%	\$14.9
Prince of Wales-Hyder Census Area	AK	2.7%	\$3.4
Kenai Peninsula Borough	AK	2.4%	\$35.9
Curry County	OR	2.4%	\$7.8
Lincoln County	OR	2.3%	\$21.4
Ketchikan Gateway Borough	AK	2.2%	\$12.6
Franklin County	WA	1.8%	\$30.8

⁷⁴ Melissa S. Kearney et al., ‘What’s the Catch? Challenges and Opportunities of the U.S. Fishing Industry,’ (Brookings Institute, 2014), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/whats-the-catch-challenges-and-opportunities-of-the-u-s-fishing-industry/>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Kearney et al., 2

Commercial fishing is a vitally important piece of Pacific County's economy, and according to Guy Glenn, it is under threat by several worrying trends: consolidation of businesses, housing shortages, and state policy. Guy Glenn is the port manager at the Port of Ilwaco, and he is a long-time advocate for small businesses in the area. He gave me a great perspective on environmentalism and natural resource preservation from commercial perspective. First, he emphasized that consolidation of salmon fishing operations has created a more difficult business environment for both new and old players in the market. He explained:

Another issue is salmon... we used to have 200 charter boats, now we have 20 or so. This is over thirty to forty years. There used to be a lot more fishing opportunity for salmon, and it is just... salmon was an entry level fishery for entry level fisherman, and now there is hardly any commercial salmon delivered here anymore.

When the ability of a region to sustain a number of healthy businesses declines, it is natural for the existing businesses to dig in and cut their costs by combining operations. That way, one poor season will not sink a fishing operation, as costs can be sustained and spread out over the whole operation. This trend is worrying for Guy, who recounted how "there is a current trend of consolidation into larger companies throughout the natural resources industry, and if the permits go somewhere else, that will just continue. Things end up being more concentrated, and then it is harder to get into the industry."

When businesses consolidate, the remaining large firm tends to define and support a community. In Ilwaco, where Guy works, that firm is Jesse's Ilwaco Fish. My own experience walking through the town on a Monday morning highlighted that point. I departed at 9am to go hunt down breakfast and coffee in the town, and there was hardly a soul in the part of town next to my inn. As I walked the few blocks to a roadside coffee

shop, I noticed a steady stream of one pickup truck after another headed to the big processing plant down by the water. As I meandered by, there were men operating heavy machinery and otherwise working to rev up the operation for the day. It was the only place in town where I noticed that level of activity. Again, this is only my experience of a place on one specific day, but it seemed that the plant was a central hub for the town. Guy is worried about what would happen if the plant closed down. As he noted:

In Seattle or Olympia or other areas, you can lose a business and there is enough capacity to withstand the blow, but down here, if we were to lose Jesse's Ilwaco Fish it would be devastating for our port. We wouldn't be able to justify keeping the channel open. They use 30% of the town's water, and their processing plant in Chinook uses up to 50% of the public water. We don't have much else. Ilwaco and Chinook direct employment is 6-7% of the county's direct employment.

This plays back into local politics. Dredging the port is a crucial task to keep the waterways open. Basically, dredging is a process by which sediments and debris is removed from the bottom of the harbor.⁷⁸ It is necessary because sedimentation, the natural process of sand and silt washing downstream into the body of water, gradually leads to a buildup of material in the bottom of the harbor.⁷⁹ There is a catch: Dredging is enormously expensive (relative to other routine infrastructure tasks in Pacific County), and it must be done by the Army Corps of Engineers. That means federal funding, and Guy meets with Representative Jamie Herrera-Butler's people fairly frequently, as well as staffers for Senators' Maria Cantwell and Patty Murray. Relationships with politicians

⁷⁸ "About Dredging," European Dredging Association, accessed November 22, 2019, <https://www.european-dredging.eu/Dredging>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

are crucial for businesses in the area. “What happens if we don’t get federal funding for the channel to be maintained?” Guy asked rhetorically.

That funding is critical to keep private sector jobs in the area, but the housing market creates further challenges to the fishing community in Pacific County. Work in the fishing industry is seasonal, as it is in other natural resource extraction industries. In a place like Pacific County, where more affluent urbanites tend to purchase second homes, that can create a more difficult rental market for locals. “We have housing issues here, for people in the workforce, some of our housing needs to be seasonal,” Guy explained. “But the second-home people have driven up the rental market, and people that can actually live here and work find it difficult to do so.”

Folks might want to move to Pacific County, or those that grew up here might want to stay and work near their home, but it is difficult to make a go of it in private employment. Thus, the industry suffers as well. The data backs up Guy’s observations. 76.3 percent of housing units in Pacific County were occupied by their owners, and that percentage has steadily increased by 1-2 percent yearly for the last few years.⁸⁰ That is way over the national ownership percentage of 63.9 percent. The data suggests that wealthier urban folks are buying homes in the area and reducing the available unit for rental by seasonal workers. In addition, Pacific County ranks above nearby Lewis County (68.8 percent) and Grays Harbor County (66.1 percent), both of which boast similarly structured economies.⁸¹

⁸⁰ “Pacific County, WA - Housing Data” accessed November 22, 2019, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/pacific-county-wa#housing>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Guy's claim does not seem as strong, however, once the pricing of homes in Pacific County is taken into consideration. From July through September 2018, the median price of a home rose 10.9 percent compared to the same time period a year earlier.⁸² However, Pacific County homes remain among the most affordable in Washington. In King County, an average couple can only come up with 71 percent of the income needed to buy a house priced at the median level.⁸³ In Pacific County, the same hypothetical couple would have 156 percent of the funds necessary to qualify for an average home mortgage. Pacific County is relatively affordable.⁸⁴ In order to reconcile this apparent contradiction, it seems that jobs in the natural resource industry may just not pay enough to compete with public sector jobs, and therefore even the seeming affordability of the housing market does not trickle down to the seasonal natural resource extraction workers.

That trend runs contrary to popular thinking about rural industry, which goes something like this: traditional manufacturing and natural resource jobs are gone, and they aren't going to come back, so rural areas need to pivot to new sources of employment. In Pacific County, that isn't entirely true, at least to the people actually working there. They would love to have more people working, it's just that those people can't afford to live there. "It is hard for our seafood industries to have enough employment because people can't live here and work," Guy explained.

⁸² "County Housing Market Strong in Summer 2018," Chinook Observer, January 7, 2019, https://www.chinookobserver.com/news/local/county-housing-market-strong-in-summer/article_97746f60-12ac-11e9-9ace-fb4017b39b10.html.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Taking a job in the fishing industry is risky, as well. If the catch isn't good, or falls below expectations, then the worker is out of luck. The reasons as to why the haul is not as bountiful can be completely out of human control. The weather may be poor, machinery could malfunction, there could just be fewer fish than before. The list goes on and on. Guy noted:

There are a lot of unknowns when thinking about taking a job in the natural resources industry - weather, climate, whether there is going to be an algae bloom. Are you going to want to take that job, or take a government job where you get a paycheck every two weeks, healthcare, et cetera?

Government jobs offer better job security and more stability in day to day living, but if everyone works for the government, then it is to the detriment of the heart and soul of the local culture: natural resource extraction. Locals perceive that unfair state policies compound the problems with business consolidation and housing market difficulties. Though he is a relatively soft-spoken man, Guy seemed palpably annoyed when discussing the state government and its overbearing presence:

It is becoming more and more difficult for any natural resource-based industry to operate because there are just more regulations, more barriers to entry... most farming/fishing industries, the median age of a business operator is in the 60s or something like that. It is hard for young people to get into it. That is one of our concerns, how are we going to keep people here?

The local perception is that there just isn't as much fish as there used to be. Guy emphasized that other infrastructure projects in the state caused Pacific County's new reality, but it still hurts, nonetheless. "The dams were put in, and they benefited a lot of the state, and our whole region and the hatcheries were put in for mitigation," Guy

explained. “We don’t have a problem with the dams, they are needed for our region, it is what made us attractive for businesses, but when they pulled funding for hatcheries, fish numbers went down.”

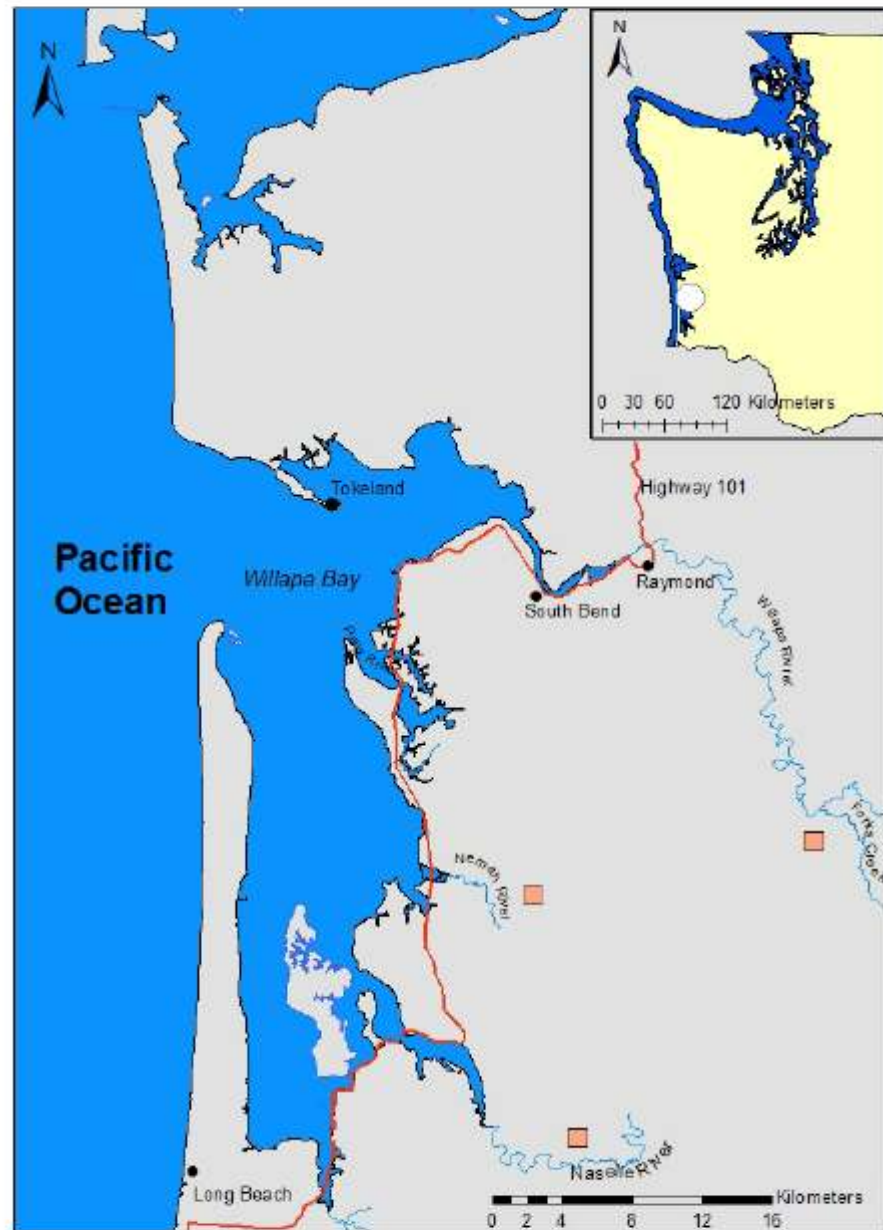
Frank is a little less charitable about the reasons behind the decline of the salmon population in Pacific County’s waterways, and he places the blame squarely on a familiar culprit: The State Government’s overreach on ecological regulation. “They were concerned that the hatchery fish were polluting the genes of the wild fish population, but they did a study and found that there was already a crossover for pretty much every salmon, so they just sort of threw their hands up. We used to have salmon here, remember! Again, state policies,” Frank thundered.

This is another scenario for the reader in which, if you look at it through a pure environmentalist lens, Pacific County’s views on sustainability and tending to the natural ecosystem tend to seem slightly confusing. More traditional ecologically minded people might say that wild salmon runs are important in and of themselves. They are how nature used to function and replacing them with hatchery-caught fish tends to degrade the health of the waters in the area. There are undoubtedly people that hold similar views in Pacific County, but the tenor of the place is that, again, it is a give-and-take with the environment. Hatchery salmon are important because they serve human needs, as well as environmental functions. The focus is on the economics, and how the lifeblood of a place is dependent on abundant natural resources. As Guy explained: “In terms of voting, that is an issue where a lot of the more urban people who aren’t tied into natural resources have different viewpoints from people on the coast. I think that, if we did not have this

year, where we had a pretty good run of Coho salmon, it makes a huge difference for our port. There were 70,000 fish in our quota this year, and that keeps businesses going.”

The Oyster Debacle

Throughout Pacific County, frustration and annoyance with the state government has been shaped by the ghost shrimp infestation in Willapa Bay. When Pacific County residents talked about the issues surrounding timber and fishing industry, it was more with a resigned air. It seemed like the decline of the industry had been accepted, and all that was left was to try to mitigate the worst of the damage and try to retain the soul of the place. This is not so with the ghost shrimp infestation and its effect on oyster growers. The anger is palpable, and it has an edge of loathing.

Figure 3.7: The Willapa Bay.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ C.E. Ashbrook et al., "Evaluate Selective Fishing in the Willapa River, a Pacific Northwest Estuary," *Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife*, July 2007, 78.

The oyster industry provides a livelihood for many business owners in the Willapa Bay, as well as being a point of pride for residents of the area. Willapa Bay is the largest producer of farmed shellfish (mostly oysters) in the entire United States.⁸⁶ It is the largest employer in Pacific County and has been the backbone of the county's economy for generations. It is responsible for more than 2,000 family wage jobs, and more than \$100 million in annual economic output.⁸⁷ It is hard to overstate how important the industry is to Pacific County, both economically and culturally. It is crucial to how Pacific County folks view themselves and take pride in their home. "Some of the oyster operations down here are in their sixth generation or more," Frank observed.

The problem begins with how oysters are cultivated. Oysters tend to live and grow in the tide flats, which are alternately submerged and exposed to the air. They grow until they are ready to be harvested by local business owners, and then they are collected from the muddy bottom and prepared for consumption.

⁸⁶ Dean Takko, "Shellfish Farming, the Lifeblood of Pacific County, Faces Extinction," *The Seattle Times*, December 13, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/shellfish-farming-the-lifeblood-of-pacific-county-faces-extinction/>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Figure 3.8: Oysters growing on tidal flats in the Willapa Bay.⁸⁸



While Willapa Bay oystermen have a history of overfishing the oyster population, they have been much better in recent decades because of their shared self-interest in maintaining the health of the oyster population, as well as the health of the Bay ecosystem overall.⁸⁹ As a result, though the Willapa Bay is a center of natural resource extraction, it is also one of the most pristine estuaries in the country.⁹⁰ A lot of credit for the remarkable stewardship of the Bay can be traced to the oyster farmers themselves. That sense of responsibility, as well as continued success in environmental preservation,

⁸⁸ Molly Soloman, “Willapa Bay Oyster Farmers Struggle As Shrimp Population Booms,” *Chinook Observer*, accessed December 2, 2019, https://www.chinookobserver.com/news/local/willapa-bay-oyster-farmers-struggle-as-shrimp-population-booms/article_964e638e-96ac-11e9-909d-877cd2414423.html.

⁸⁹ Michael De Alessi, “Oysters and Willapa Bay,” *Competitive Enterprise Institute*, March 1, 1996, <https://cei.org/studies-other-studies/oysters-and-willapa-bay>.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

is at the heart of the oyster growers' fury with the state government for overreaching and telling them what to do in their own Bay.

The problem is the ghost shrimp, also known as burrowing shrimp. The shrimp are normal, they have always been around in the Willapa Bay. They are these little crustaceans that burrow into the tide beds as part of their natural behavior.⁹¹ That wouldn't be so much of a problem, except that their population is absolutely exploding. As a result of the increased presence of the shrimp, the Bay's mudflats are becoming unstable.⁹² Think of a Jenga puzzle. If you destabilize the bottom of the tower enough, as shrimp do when they burrow through the mud, then the whole thing falls down. As a result, the oysters drown in the kind of mud soup that is created by the erosion of the Bay floor.

Local Pacific County residents place blame for the current situation squarely at the feet of the State government for perceived regulatory overreach. They point to state practices that have enabled the burrowing shrimp to hit their current population heights. "Burrowing shrimp are not an invasive species, they are natural. But the fact that they are taking the place over, that is an artificial situation that has been set up by state practices," Frank pointed out.

The dams on the Columbia River, previously mentioned by Guy Glenn, are important to meet the electricity needs of the Pacific Northwest as a whole, but they have had a devastating effect on salmon runs in Pacific County. Snowmelt water no longer runs down the river in the spring because of the dams. Those gushes of water used to

⁹¹ Molly Solomon, "Washington's Oyster Industry Threatened By A Booming Shrimp Population," June 18, 2019, <https://www.opb.org/news/article/washington-willapa-bay-oysters-ghost-shrimp/>.

⁹² Ibid.

flood the Bay and posed a threat to all freshwater intolerant species like burrowing shrimp. Frank pointed out that:

They also built dams on the Columbia River, and when they did that, we don't get spring gushes of water flowing down the river anymore. Those gushes flood the offshore ocean water, which would mean that during the tide cycles, freshwater would come into the bay, which would kill the shrimp, which are not freshwater tolerant.

Sturgeon are another important factor in the health of the Willapa Bay, as they are a natural predator of ghost shrimp. These fish are relics from the time of the dinosaurs - Green Sturgeon populations have persisted in North America for more than 200 million years. Sturgeon are incredibly long lived - they do not reach maturity until age 15, and can live to be 70 years old.⁹³ They tend to spend most of their life in the ocean, travelling back through estuaries, like Willapa Bay, and migrating up rivers to spawn in the late spring and early summer.⁹⁴ Sturgeon have been very hard-hit by human activity. Overfishing of the sturgeon population for caviar (sturgeon eggs) has been devastating for populations around the US, and Willapa Bay is no exception. Frank cites the overfishing of sturgeon as evidence of yet another foolish state policy, and the current situation will be very difficult to change. "The fishing of the sturgeon, which are very long-lived... they can't be brought back very easily. It is a multi-century project. But state practices enabled them to be fished out, and guess what, they are the natural predator for the burrowing shrimp. They would dig them out of the bottom."

⁹³ NOAA Fisheries, "Green Sturgeon" September 17, 2019, <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/green-sturgeon>.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

A study looking at whether sturgeon limit ghost shrimp populations reached a similar conclusion. The authors say that “declines in shrimp predator populations, including sturgeon, have been suggested as one reason for unexplained increases in shrimp populations.”⁹⁵ They looked at the contents of the sturgeon's stomachs to see if they were preying on the shrimp, and if so, where they were eating them in the Bay. They concluded that “even at current population levels, sturgeon and/or other predators may be having top down control effects on shrimp populations outside aquaculture areas.”⁹⁶ That is good news! That implies that sturgeon are a positive presence in the Bay and trying to bring back its population should improve matters.

The catch is that the sturgeon are not eating the shrimp that actually live in the oyster beds. Instead, sturgeon are creating feeding pits elsewhere in the estuary, and the authors “suspect that the lack of similar feeding pits in oyster aquaculture beds is related to the presence of oysters themselves and perhaps the low density of other prey including burrowing shrimp in these areas.”⁹⁷ So the claim that overfishing of the sturgeon population is responsible for the current problem is true insofar that sturgeon lower the overall shrimp population, but they do not have an effect on shrimp presence in the oyster beds themselves.

The ghost shrimp have been a problem since the 1950s. The oystermen started to use a pesticide called carbaryl to carefully kill the shrimp. Carbaryl was phased out in 2002, however, after a lawsuit was brought against the practice by environmental groups

⁹⁵ Brett R. Dumbauld, David L. Holden, and Olaf P. Langness, “Do Sturgeon Limit Burrowing Shrimp Populations in Pacific Northwest Estuaries?,” *Environmental Biology of Fishes* 83, no. 3 (November 2008): 284, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10641-008-9333-y>.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 293

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 293

that alleged the pesticide was damaging the health of the Bay.⁹⁸ Frank was frustrated that the pesticide was banned from use. “There is a way to stop it, you use a chemical to carefully kill the shrimp. It is easy and safe, they have been doing it for over 60 years,” he observed.

The oyster farmers had to search for another solution to the problem, and they ended up coming up with a neurotoxin called imidacloprid.⁹⁹ The industry had collectively spent millions of dollars in research and development of this new method, as well as extensive testing to determine the environmental impact of using the neurotoxin in the Bay. In 2015, the shellfish industry got approval from the Washington Department of Ecology to spray 2,000 acres of their tidelands with the stuff.¹⁰⁰ Frank seethes when he describes what happened next:

They spent a couple of million dollars of their own money to come up with another possible pesticide. The permit was on the table, and a group of people in Puget Sound and called the governor’s office and said, ‘we are against the use of chemicals in pristine bay waters.’ They knew nothing about the chemical, the shrimp, or the oyster industry.

Guy agreed with Frank’s assessment of the problem; he ruminated that the rejection of the permit was not driven by science as much as misguided political pressure. “Do you believe the science, or do you believe the emotions?” he asked rhetorically. Guy went on to say:

With the ghost shrimp in the bay, they have been using a control method for many years, it had a lot more impact on the environment then this new

⁹⁸ Dean Takko, “Shellfish Farming, the Lifeblood of Pacific County, Faces Extinction,” *The Seattle Times*, December 13, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/shellfish-farming-the-lifeblood-of-pacific-county-faces-extinction/>.

⁹⁹ “Willapa Bay Oyster Farmers Struggle As Shrimp Population Booms,” accessed November 24, 2019, <http://archive.kuow.org/post/willapa-bay-oyster-farmers-struggle-shrimp-population-booms>.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

one, and the oyster growers went through all of this testing and studying costing millions of dollars, and when it's the end of the road when Ecology is going to sign off on the permit, it gets on social media and things change.

The oyster growers reapplied for the permit, but it was rejected again by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the grounds that “imidacloprid is a persistent broad spectrum pesticide that will kill nearly all benthic (bottom-dwelling) organisms on the acreage directly treated.”¹⁰¹ That is a fancy way of saying that the new pesticide kills almost everything living in the oyster beds, not just the shrimp. The legislature continued with bills to allow the oyster farmers to spray pesticides on the oyster beds regardless, but approval was relatively slow going.

The controversy intensified when Danny Westneat, a popular *Seattle Times* columnist, published an article in February of 2019 eviscerating the plan as “too-crazy-to-be-true.” His point was that imidacloprid, the new neurotoxin, is too dangerous to use in a pristine wildlife sanctuary. When imidacloprid was used in a field trial conducted by the National Marine Fisheries Service, they observed that “of the 141 Dungeness crabs they counted in a sample area, 93 were dead.”¹⁰²

Folks living in Pacific County are pretty hopping mad about this whole situation. They think that the implication that Pacific County residents, particularly oystermen, do not care about the health of the bay is insulting and borderline disrespectful. Matt Winters editor at the *Chinook Observer*, a local newspaper that covers events on the Coast, was

¹⁰¹ Westneat, Danny, “Disbelief over State Plan to Spray Neurotoxin into Oyster Beds,” *The Seattle Times*, April 28, 2015, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/disbelief-over-state-plan-to-spray-neurotoxin-into-oyster-beds/>.

¹⁰² Westneat, Danny, “Politics Has Science on the Run — and Not Just in the Other Washington,” *The Seattle Times*, February 6, 2019, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/politics-has-science-on-the-run-and-not-just-in-the-other-washington/>.

the first person that I called to get a preliminary understanding of the area. He summed up this sentiment nicely:

Oyster people are a pretty environmentally conscious group. They guard water quality and work to prevent a lot of industrial development near there. They force repairs of failing septic systems, et cetera. Everyone gets a lot of joy from wildlife in the bay, everyone loves the wildlife sanctuary regardless of political affiliation. They feel entitlement in the place, they and their ancestors have lived there for generations.

He also argued that Danny Westneat's column was just irresponsible "rabble-rousing." Folks in Pacific County also think that the original decision by the State Department of Ecology approved their request in a scientifically rigorous way, and the reaction by Puget Sound and state elected officials is irrational and harmful. Frank sees it as a very black-and-white issue: "The bay will be lost, it will become a quagmire of ghost shrimp, because a bunch of chemophobes in Puget Sound, where there are a lot more votes than there are down here, turned the state government against us. Again, there are reasons why we don't trust Puget Sound down here."

Dean Takko, the state senator representing the 19th legislative district (including Pacific County), wrote a column making many of the points that locals emphasize. His main argument centers around the adverse economic impact of the State Ecology Department pulling the permit: "shellfish farmers' inability to treat their beds has cost \$50 million over five years, and the continued lack of control of the infestation threatens to reduce shellfish production by 90 percent in the coming years."¹⁰³ He goes on to lay out the timeline of the state permit, and argues that the argument against using pesticides

¹⁰³ Takko, "Shellfish Farming, the Lifeblood of Pacific County, Faces Extinction," *The Seattle Times*, December 13, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/shellfish-farming-the-lifeblood-of-pacific-county-faces-extinction/>.

in the bay does not rely on science.¹⁰⁴ The tone is that of outrage tinged with resignation. As the thinking goes, Pacific County just does not have enough votes to convince ‘Puget Sound’ to consider their economic well-being over the environmental concerns of the urban elite. This sentiment is summed up in the column: “Because I’m talking about rural Pacific County in remote southwest Washington, state officials feel perfectly content to look the other way as our jobs, businesses and our entire rural economy tremble in the balance.”¹⁰⁵

Folks in Pacific County feel betrayed by a state government that appears to have allowed their way of life to slip away. The most frustrated I ever heard anyone in an interview was when Jim summed up the response to ghost shrimp problem in stark terms:

Given the trouble that the oyster fishers are having in the Willapa Bay, particularly the ghost shrimp infestation of their oyster beds, and the current governor’s pathetic betrayal of those small business owners, and there is a viciousness to his veto of any of the effort that we have tried to direct their way... whether policy, or by budget, that is just inexplicable. Clearly that governor and his staff have written off Pacific County. That’s a choice that this governor has made, which his predecessors also made, perhaps to a less egregious extent.

Doug was much more soft spoken about the issue, but his concern for buddies working in the shellfish industry was obvious in his tone when he argued that Pacific County is being harmed by overreach from a state government that just doesn’t care about the area as much as more populated parts of the state. As he observed: “Burrowing shrimp is a sharp focus, it shows that these people in Seattle don’t care, they just care about their bottom line in terms of votes. You get people saying that ‘we want to resist

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

the control of Seattle. We know how to manage our resources; we have been doing it for hundreds of years.”

As we wrap up the story of the decline of natural resource extraction in Pacific County, I want to impress on the reader to remember rural folks’ sense of alienation from a state government that seemingly does not care about their economic livelihood. Their views are backed by data, the unemployment rate in Pacific County was 7 percent in 2019, which was the second highest of any county in the state.¹⁰⁶ It is difficult to feel charitable towards the state government when you see and feel the degradation of the local economy. The people who work in natural resources in Pacific County feel that distance very keenly. “There is a disconnect between people that go to the store and buy their food, and everything is at a distance,” Guy said resignedly. “But when you are the one that is trying to grow a crop, or harvest oysters or go fishing or manage a timber company, it is different. We can’t expect everyone to understand what that is like, but the challenges in the way we are evolving makes it challenging. So many people have become disconnected from that.”

The sense is that Seattle just cares about their own environmental sensibilities, no matter what the cost to locals. That prioritization of untouched natural landscapes is seen as unrealistic, as well as profoundly paternalistic and hypocritical. This tendency to blame things on urban elites that do not understand their way of life is undoubtedly influenced by the past. Folks in Pacific County see the State government as ‘out to get them,’ so when new problems arise, like the ghost shrimp issue, they are very

¹⁰⁶ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Unemployment Rate in Pacific County, WA [WAPACI9URN], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/WAPACI9URN>, November 24, 2019.

predisposed to see it as yet another instance of the same thing. The state government is at it again, so it seems to Pacific County residents. That worldview has serious implications about how Pacific County will vote going forward, which will be discussed throughout the rest of this thesis. Locals like Guy struggle to make sense of the state's environmentalism. As he explained:

It is nice to think about restoring the habitat to prehistoric times, but when you look at all of the development that has gone on the coast... All of these things that we appreciate now, it's like, why are you going to make a private landowner that has done a good job with their land? Why are you going to restrict what they can do with their land while you let development go on in Puget Sound?

This feeling translates into the voting habits of people in Pacific County. This shift towards a politics that blames liberal urban elites for overreach into local affairs is undoubtedly an important factor in the area's shift to the political right in recent years. In an important sense, the rest of this thesis tries to understand what happens when the soul of a resource extraction community fades away. Jim was definitely part of this wave. He was elected on a more populist message that argues that people are just as important as birds and fish. "The GMA are horrendous, growth restricting regulations," he told me. "The fact the legislators not from this area force this legislation on people makes them very mad. The fact is that a growth-oriented, populist message will resonate with people who have been given the short end of the stick for 30 years. Until the political left can figure out how to provide a growth-focused message, they will continue to struggle"

To close this chapter, I will leave the reader with this quote from Guy Glenn, who poignantly summarizes the consequences of the battle over natural resource extraction:

On Sand Island (within view from office) we have one of the largest Cormorant colonies on the west coast, and they are a natural predator of juvenile salmon. So, it's like, for a rural community like this that relies on salmon, you have all this stuff, you gotta save the cormorants and the turins, you've got to save the sea lions, we have to save the salmon. But at what cost? Now we have twenty charter boats rather than two hundred, and each of those charter boats has two-three family wage jobs on it. You take 90% of the jobs out of a community, where does that leave you? You keep pulling pieces out, like a Jenga game, it's going to be so fragile. The economy has recovered in recent years, but what is going to happen when it goes down again?

Chapter 4: The Weakening of Unions

The decline of natural resource industry in Pacific County not only affected economic outcomes for folks in Pacific County, it has also reshaped local politics. As the county's extraction industries collapsed, so too did the unions that sustained partisan identities and encouraged local support for Democratic candidates. An emboldened libertarian-style Republican minority also mobilized and seized new opportunities in the wake of union decline, which came to fruition in the new millenia. Some Democrats saw the 2016 election as the result of a series of missteps, which may be true, but the fact that a misstep or two could flip the county to the Republican column underscores just how far right Pacific County has drifted in recent times. The decline of local unions disrupted the long-standing political equilibrium in the area, and Republicans took advantage.

Nansen Malin, who leans to the conservative side of things, told me that the social and political life in Pacific County has been extensively shaped by labor unions. Labor unions, of course, tend to lean Democratic in their political preferences.

In Pacific County, a major story is that of very strong labor union groups. Finnish groups, also known as Wobblies, controlled the unions around here. That included cannery unions, fishing unions, and logging unions. Those groups also had a socialist background. That is important because the union people hated Republicans. That is still very much a mindset, although it is going away.

Nansen also emphasized the degree to which the 'D' next to the name in a local ballot mattered. "Before, you had to have union support to be elected to a local position. That meant you had to be a Democrat in order to win an election. The only qualification that mattered was working for a local company, and running as a 'D.' Since 1970, we did not have a county commissioner that ran as a Republican until the 2016 elections."

Amber Rosewood, a native of southwestern Washington that ran the local Democrat's coordinated campaign for the 19th Legislative District in the last election cycle, is a fierce advocate for liberal policies. She agreed with Nansen, and further emphasized the people running for local elected office had to have the Union support in order to get the position. The unions supported their candidate, and in return the candidate would advocate on behalf of working people in the local natural resources and manufacturing sectors. They enabled industry to have a voice in politics on a county and state-wide level. As she observed, "Every single union in the area was represented... we vote for moderate, older Democrats, we have been doing that for 40 years. We have a good old boy network like nobody's business."

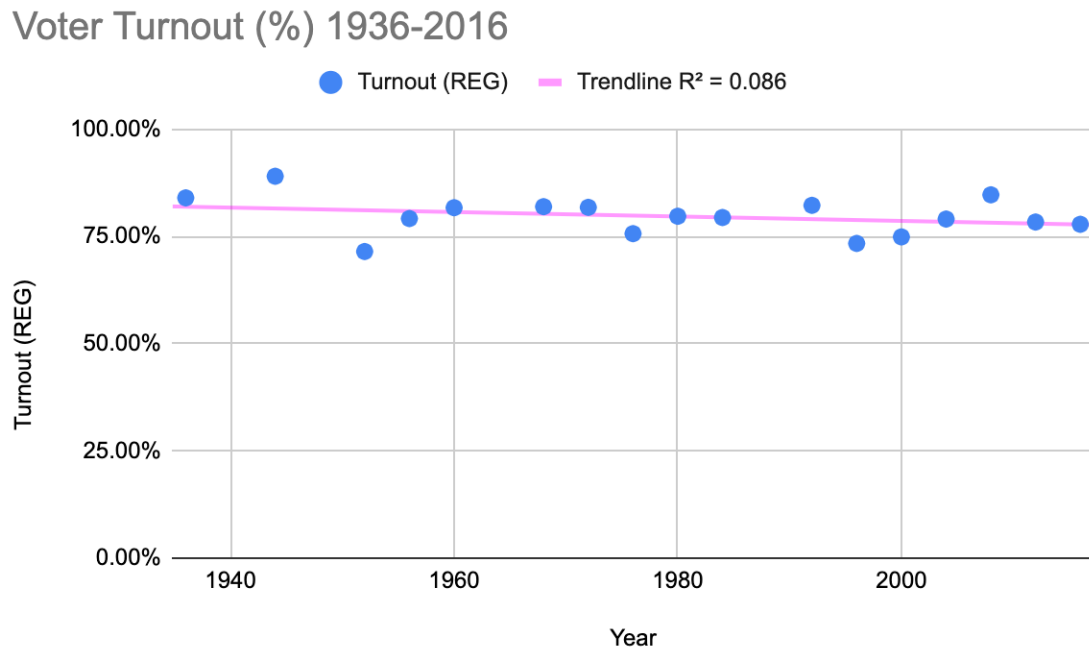
When natural resource industry was still the dominant job-creator in Pacific County, it was always in folks' best economic interest to vote for Union members for local office. Those elected officials would support local industry and ensured that the economic engine of the county remained relatively free from outside interference. Those union members also shared the same values as people from Pacific County, it was an ideal fit, at least to a significant percentage of folks in Pacific County.

Back in the day, so to speak, those "Union men" would assume local positions, like county commissioner or State House Rep, and then endorse one of their Union buddies to take the same job after they were ready to retire (or do something else). It was a chain that led to Democratic control of county-level political office for generations. This worked great for Democrat electoral prospects, while unions were still around. As we learned in the last chapter, however, natural resource industry has been in a steep decline in the area. There are just fewer jobs in natural resource extraction in Pacific

County, and that has led to fewer union members. As a result, they do not have the same political and social clout that they used to.

Unions used to provide social, political, and economic security in Pacific County. Those unions aren't as active as they used to be, and that decline has had a substantial impact on the kinds of people that win elections in Pacific County. More specifically, it has opened the door for candidates to run as Republicans in Pacific County. Amber emphasized this point: "We have older white men that are serving in those positions, then they do not do anything to cultivate the bench and bring younger leaders into the fold. They expect that those new candidates will come from the Unions like they always have, but Unions are declining. Members aren't running for offices anymore... we lose our pool."

The data does back up this claim about unions providing political stability in Pacific County. Unions should drive voter turnout, as the union machine turns out its members and their families to vote for the union's preferred candidate. Over time, voter turnout (as expressed by the percent of total registered voters that participated in a given election) has generally declined in Pacific County since 1936. Turnout was lowest in 1952, which makes sense because Eisenhower won Pacific County that cycle, and Democrats may have stayed home due to lack of excitement about either candidate. If that cycle is removed, then the overall negative trend is even more pronounced.

Figure 4.1: Scatterplot of voter turnout in Pacific County, 1932-2016.¹⁰⁷

I will include the data in a table as well, just to give the reader some hard numbers on the overall trends. Some data was not kept by the Washington Secretary of State's office, so those years are marked as not available (N/A). Turnout was highest in 1944, at 89 percent, which makes sense given President Franklin D. Roosevelt's popularity in the area. Interestingly, turnout hit its second highest point when President Obama ran for his first term in 2008. Turnout was remarkably high in 2008 nationwide, and "more than 130 million people turned out to vote[...] the most ever to vote in a presidential election."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Leip, David. *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://uselectionatlas.org> (December 4, 2019).

¹⁰⁸ Andy Barr, "2008 Turnout Shatters All Records," *Politico*, November 5, 2008, <https://www.politico.com/news/stories/1108/15306.html>.

Table 4.1: Voter turnout in Pacific County, 1932-2016.¹⁰⁹

Year	Turnout (% Votes Cast of Total Registered Voters)
1936	83.99%
1940	N/A
1944	89.03%
1948	N/A
1952	71.48%
1956	79.17%
1960	81.70%
1964	N/A
1968	81.94%
1972	81.78%
1976	75.65%
1980	79.71%
1984	79.41%
1988	N/A
1992	82.25%
1996	73.37%
2000	74.89%
2004	79.05%
2008	84.70%
2012	78.36%
2016	77.83%

Others agreed with Amber's point about the decline of unions and the resulting dearth of Democratic candidates for local office that fit the old mold. Although Karen Spackman and her husband Doug have only been living in Pacific County since 2004,

¹⁰⁹ Leip, David. *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://uselectionatlas.org> (December 4, 2019).

they are deeply involved in local politics and have had friends that have been in the area for a very long time. They relayed the common wisdom: “In the past, North County had been the seat of the Democratic party, and it was because of the labor movement. And when those mills started to close, the labor influence became diluted in North County.”

Modern Political Shift

Locals generally agree that the current shift to the right in Pacific County sometime during Obama’s first term, though it did not show up in the ballot box until 2012. Karen Spackman served as the chairwoman of the Pacific County Democrats from 2012-2016. She argued that the area has changed drastically in the last decade and a half, both in terms of political viewpoints as well as political party affiliation. “I think there have been dramatic changes in people’s views,” she observed. “When we moved here in 2004, you could not get elected to a local position in Pacific County if you were not a Democrat.”

In the past, Pacific County had some Democrats that would be scarcely recognizable to the national Democratic Party today. Wes Cormier, a Republican county commissioner in neighboring Grays Harbor county, remembers some of his friends that ran as Democrats in Pacific County: “I think your blue-dog Democrats, and he is strong on guns, but on other issues he is more left, and he always gets elected with strong numbers. Those Democrats are going away because they are getting kicked out by the party system. They do well in elections, if they would run, but the entrenchment is in the party system.” Doug remembers the same thing: Democrats that did well in Pacific County but do not line up with the national party's stance on issues like guns,

environmentalism, and regulation of industry. It was the “Union Men” that won around here, and those guys were focused on local jobs and were very supportive of the natural resource industry. “Also, we had some elected people that would maybe not be Democrats in other areas,” he noted.

It is important to remember that Pacific County Democrats are not necessarily like the national stereotype of a Democratic politician. It is very common, in today’s political climate, for Republicans to negatively compare their local opponent to Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez from the 14th District of New York.¹¹⁰ Representative Ocasio-Cortez, or AOC for short, has upset the status-quo after her defeat of 10-term incumbent Joe Crowley in the House election last year. She ran on a Green New Deal, Medicare for All, a federal jobs guarantee, and abolishing the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). She is a Rorschach test of our time and is as vilified on the Right as she is celebrated in more progressive circles.¹¹¹ Elected Democrats in Pacific County do not share the same goals as AOC, though local Republicans do try and paint them that way.

Teresa Purcell recounted how local Republicans spent time and money trying to convince voters that voting for Carolyn Long instead of Jim Walsh in the 2016 US House Rep election was the same as voting for Nancy Pelosi (another favored Republican punching bag) or AOC herself. “Republicans are spending tons of money trying to

¹¹⁰ Zack Beauchamp, “Conservative Media’s War on AOC Is Hammering Her Poll Numbers,” Vox, March 28, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/3/28/18285533/aoc-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-poll-favorables-media>.

¹¹¹ Charlotte Alter, “‘Change Is Closer Than We Think.’ Inside Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s Unlikely Rise,” *Time*, March 21, 2019, <https://time.com/longform/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-profile/>.

convince people that voting for Carolyn Long is the same as voting for Nancy Pelosi, or that voting for a local council person is the same as voting for AOC,” she told me.

Jim and Jaime Walsh gave me a Republican’s perspective on the shift that began in the late 2000s, and they were not focused on the Obama Administration or any specific Democratic policy positions, as I thought they would be. Instead, they identified the groundswells of the current wave as beginning in the inter-party turmoil that came to define the Tea Party movement in the early 2010s. As Jim explained:

Well, Matt, it did not begin in 2016. You have to go back to 2008, and that wasn't because of Obama. It was because of the inter party turmoil on the national level because of the Ron Paul insurgents. I know that I got involved in 2008 because of McCain going back and suspending his campaign to vote for the AIG bailout. People don't really get involved in politics unless they feel like their party has somehow left them or abandoned them.

Jaime agreed, and she further pointed out that this kind of political engagement on the right was driven by a feeling that her values were not represented in the old Republican party. She was driven by a feeling about where the party should go from there. “The party was leaving ideals that I thought was important, like self-determination and individual rights and liberty by bailing out this big corporation,” she told me. “It also seemed like it was signaling Democrats, who seemed like they were going to win with Obama, a very strong candidate, that it was time to cash in for all of your interests”

These new involved locals began trying to push their ideal of a more libertarian, values-oriented Republican Party. That led to an embrace of Ron Paul on a local level in the 2008 election season. Ron Paul is a libertarian, and he does tend to emphasize the kind of isolationist, leave-me-alone mythology of Pacific County. It has always prided

itself on rugged individualism, and that meshes well with libertarian ideas, as the following conversation shows:

Jim: The local party was pretty much taken over by reform-minded, libertarian Ron Paul supporters. We elbowed out the more establishment-types.

Jaime: Socially minded, conservative people.

Jim: So, by 2008 the Republican part of the state had become much more Libertarian. More reform minded. That helped get county commissioners elected in Grays Harbor.

Wes Cormier made a similar point about the appeal of the Republican Party locally. He ties it more to classic tropes about Democrats (i.e. that they are radical socialists), but the point is much the same: the local Republican Party offers a values-based counterweight to the Democrats, and that is a winning formula in Pacific County. “Fifteen years ago, Republicans were talking about welfare reform, they aren’t talking about that now!” Wes exclaimed. “They aren’t talking about the debt or the deficit. Whereas the left is talking about more socialism and stuff like that, that maybe conservative-minded people who would have voted Democrat fifteen years ago are now saying ‘that’s not for me,’ so they are willing to vote for a populist Republican.”

Recent Electoral History

Karen gave me a Democrat’s perspective on the recent political pendulum swing to the right in Pacific County with a focus on the candidates themselves. President Obama won Pacific County with a 14 percent margin in 2008 over the McCain/Palin

Republican ticket.¹¹² Healthy numbers for Pacific County, if a little bit down from the 20 percent margins that the last winning Democratic President, Bill Clinton, enjoyed in the area. Brian Baird represented the 3rd Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives beginning in 1999 and was broadly well-liked in the area. He was a former Chairman of the Department of Psychology at Pacific Lutheran University in the Puget Sound area, and has authored three books on the subject.¹¹³ He retired in 2010 after serving for 10 years, and Karen was not thrilled with how he voted against the Affordable Care Act before he left office. “It was the stupidest thing that I ever saw him do.”

The seat was up for grabs during the 2010 midterm elections, and it was contested between Danny Heck, a candidate with left-ish views, and a series of Republican challengers. Jamie Herrera-Beutler, a former staffer for Rep. Cathy McMorris-Rodgers, got the highest share of the vote among the Republican candidates, and advanced to the general election against Heck.¹¹⁴ She won the general election by a 6 percent margin, carrying the blood-red Lewis County by huge margins to make up for weaker performances in Pacific County and Grays Harbor. Heck won Pacific County, but only by an 8.5 percent margin over Herrera-Beutler.¹¹⁵ That is the closest a Republican had come to winning Pacific County in recent memory. Karen was visibly frustrated when she recalled that election, and she thought that Heck did not have a good strategy to pick up

¹¹² Leip, David. *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://uselectionatlas.org> (November 24, 2019).

¹¹³ “Brian Baird - Biographical Information,” Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, accessed November 24, 2019, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=b001229>.

¹¹⁴ Lauren Dake, “Herrera Beutler Charts Own Course,” *The Columbian*, July 6, 2014, <https://www.columbian.com/news/2014/jul/06/jaime-herrera-beutler-miracle-baby-congress/>.

¹¹⁵ “Congressional District 3,” accessed November 24, 2019, <https://results.vote.wa.gov/results/20101102/CongressionalDistrict3.html>.

the seat. “Danny Heck did not run as Democrat at that time, even though people still broadly liked the Democratic Party. It was weird.”

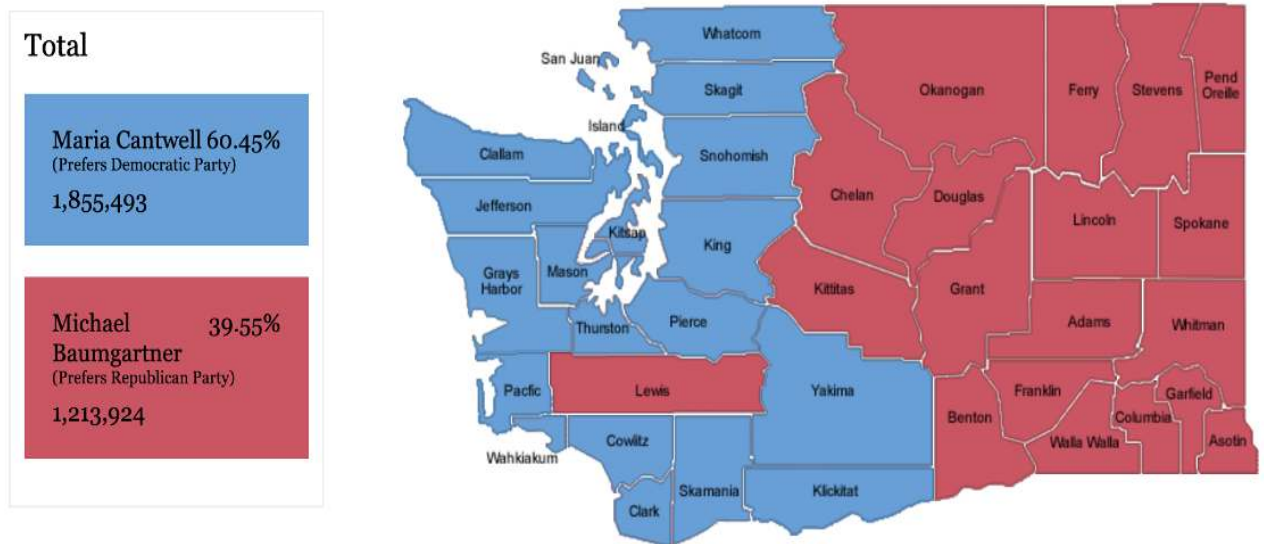
Representative Herrera-Beutler was elected as part of a nationwide red wave in the 2010 elections, in part driven by resentment against President Obama’s agenda for the previous two years. Herrera-Beutler was one of 95 new House members elected that November, which was the largest freshman group in 72 years. Of those 95 new members, 87 were Republicans.¹¹⁶ The 3rd Congressional District, including Pacific County, was swept along in the tide. This election had lasting consequences, particularly because 2010 was a redistricting year, and the red wave enabled Republicans to redraw the district maps in Washington state.

Karen was also exasperated that the Democrats did not run a good candidate in 2012, when Representative Herrera-Beutler had not accomplished much in her two years in office (according to Karen), and President Obama won by a 54%-42% margin at the top of the ticket in Pacific County.¹¹⁷ In addition, Senator Maria Cantwell won reelection in Washington State, and she carried five of the six counties in the 3rd Congressional District.¹¹⁸ She only lost Lewis County, which is to be expected given the previously cited politically right majority there.

¹¹⁶ Howard Buck, “Herrera Beutler Takes Oath as 112th Congress Convenes,” *The Columbian*, January 5, 2011, <https://www.columbian.com/news/2011/jan/05/112th-congress-convenes-boehner-elected-speaker/>.

¹¹⁷ Leip, David. *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://uselectionatlas.org> (December 4, 2019).

¹¹⁸ “2012 Senate Election Results,” *The New York Times*, November 6, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2012/results/senate.html>.

Figure 4.2: 2012 Senatorial Election Results in Washington, by county.¹¹⁹

Although he has been a Democrat for a long time, Doug did seem appreciative of some of the work that Representative Herrera-Beutler had done since she has been in Washington DC. In particular, he thinks that she has done good work on behalf of the fishing and oyster farming community, which has upped her standing in the eyes of the folks that we talked about last chapter. Doug has also worked in the fishing industry. As he concluded:

She has been very attentive to the marine fishing community... some longtime Democrats that I work with probably voted for her. She put her name on the bill to fund the dredging of the small ports, which were at risk of disappearing if they could not be dredged. The ports still have to compete for it, but now there is a small pile of money that is earmarked for ports

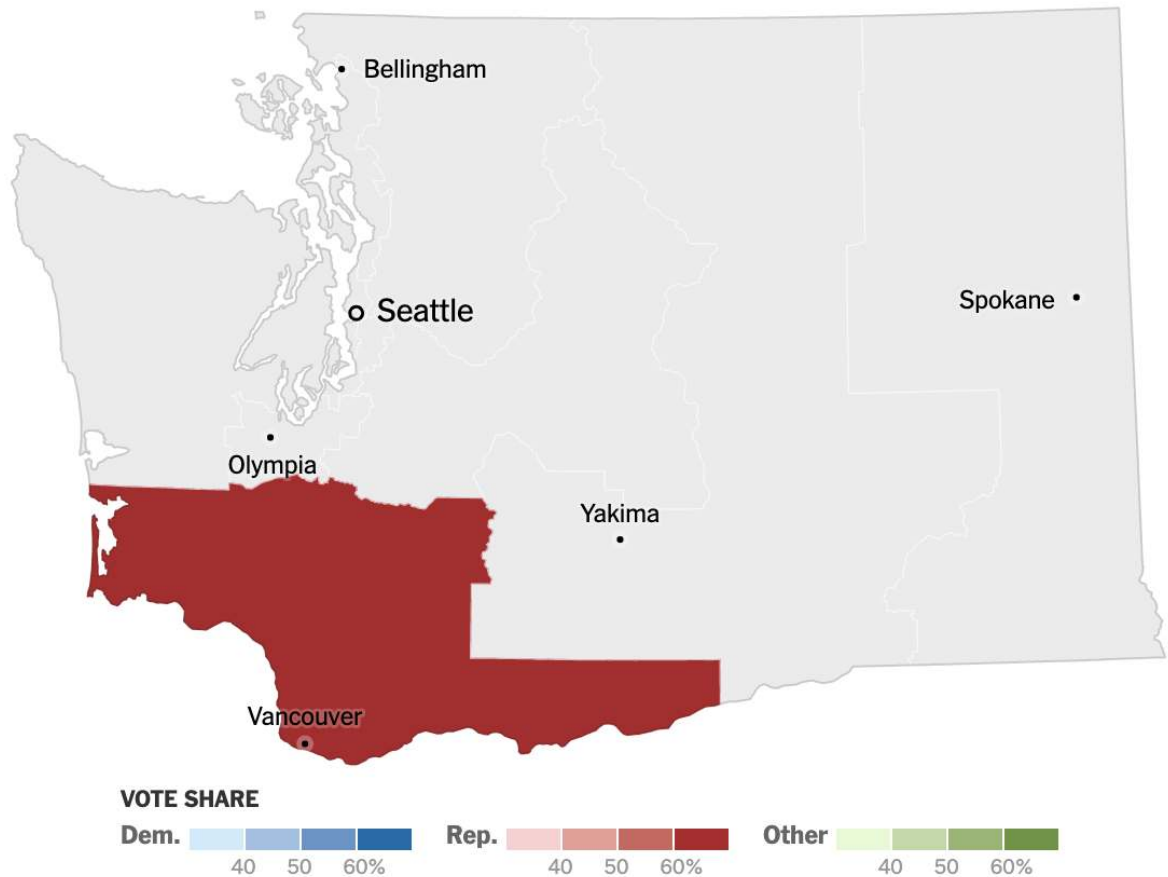
In 2014, Pacific County finally voted for a Republican for national office.

Representative Herrera-Beutler won reelection with a resounding 23 percent margin in

¹¹⁹ “2012 U.S. Senator General Election Results,” Washington Secretary of State, November 27, 2012, https://results.vote.wa.gov/results/20121106/US-Senator_ByCounty.html.

the 3rd district, and Pacific County joined its neighbors in voting for her by an 11 percent margin (55%-41%). I thought that this election would have been a big deal, and people would have brought it up to me as an example of the turning tides in Pacific County, as well as a bellwether for President Trump's eventual victory in the county. Interestingly, it never really came up. It seems that it was regarded as a one-off by Democrats and could be explained away by a combination of a bad Dem candidate and a strong incumbent that has done good work for the natural resources industry in the area.

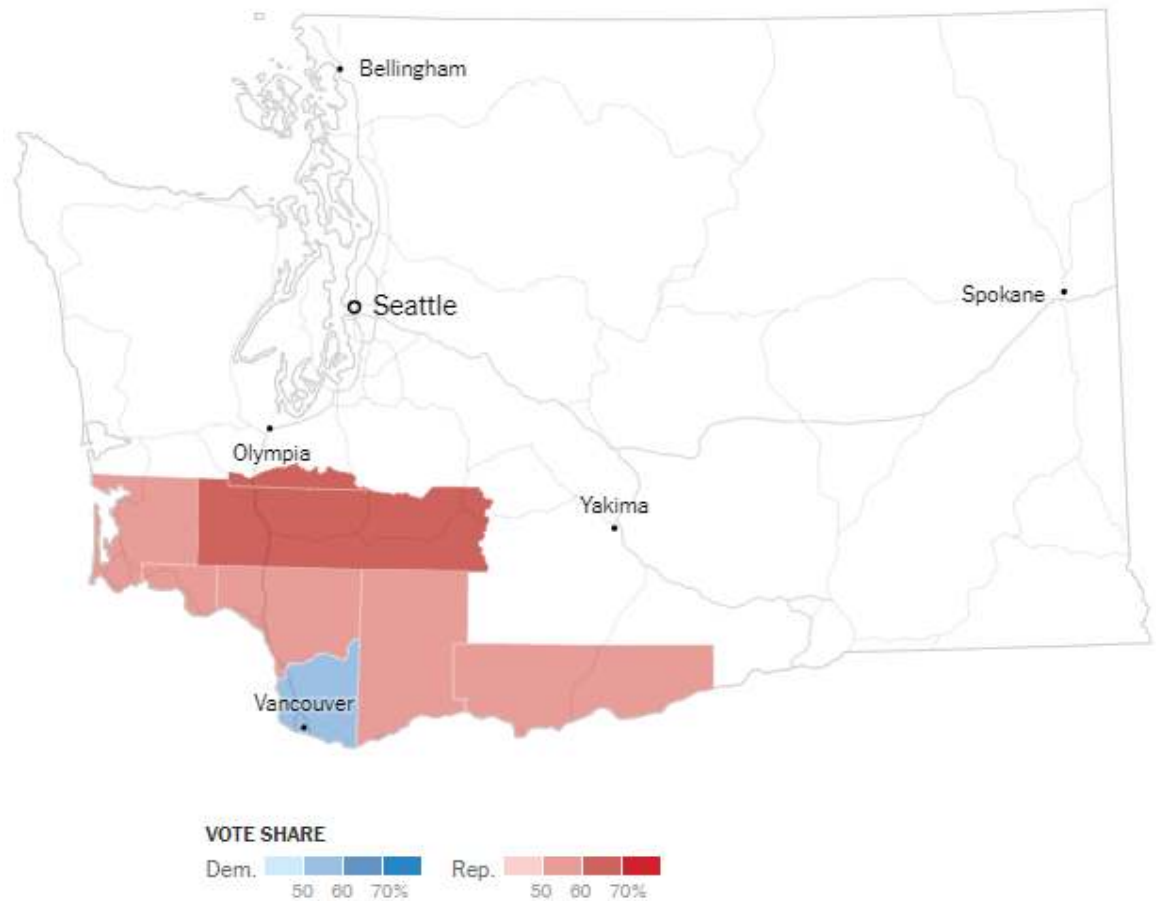
Jamie Herrera-Beutler won resoundingly in 2016 over Jim Moeller by a 61%-38% margin, a victory that was probably amplified by the energy surrounding Donald Trump. She won 59%-41% in Pacific County.

Figure 4.3: 2018 House of Representatives election results in the 3rd District.¹²⁰

Representative Herrera-Beutler continued to win reelection in 2018, defeating a consensus strong challenger in Carolyn Long. Pacific County continued its trend of going red in House elections, as Herrera-Beutler won 53%-47%. She won every county but one in the district, including a triumph in Pacific County by just over a hundred votes out of nearly 11,00 cast.

¹²⁰ “Washington U.S. House 3rd District Results: Jaime Herrera Beutler Wins,” *The New York Times*, November 8, 2016, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/washington-house-district-3-herrera-beutler-moeller>.

Figure 4.4: 2018 House of Representatives election results in the 3rd District.¹²¹



Complacency Argument

While local Republicans believe a resurgent, values-based Republican party is just better at representing people in Pacific County, some Democrats tend to think their woes are due to as a series of missteps. They chose bad candidates, or they did not ring enough doorbells. In this view, the 2016 election was disastrous for Democrats, yes, but it was a result of complacency more than anything else. This argument showed up sparingly

¹²¹ "Washington Election Results: Third House District," *The New York Times*, January 28, 2019, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/results/washington-house-district-3>.

in my interviews, and I do not think that it tells the full story, but I want to spell it out in order to show that some folks don't see 2016 as a huge, massive turning point for Pacific County. This argument fits in with the decline of unions, because it shows how complacent Democrats had allowed themselves to become. Missteps matter in areas where there is party parity, not where one party is the dominant force, so this focus on minor mistakes is itself an admission that politics in Pacific County have changed drastically. For generations, no Republican Presidential candidate had much of a chance at winning in the area, so it did not matter as much what local Democrats did to drum up support in the run up to election day. That was not true in 2016, and it shows how competitive the political landscape had become in Pacific County. The local political apparatus had grown lazy, and it had a more difficult time responding to changing views from the electorate.

No Democrat thought that absolutely nothing had changed in the past decade or two, but they thought that the change hadn't been so pronounced that Pacific County would vote for Donald Trump, of all people. Karen Spackman one of the people that seemed to view local politics along this line. She spent a lot of time working with the local Democratic Party, and she was its chair for a period of time. It makes sense, then, that she would believe in the ability of the local Party apparatus to make Pacific County blue again. As she observed, "The corresponding thing is that the energy on the other side is a lot stronger than it was. That's part of what killed us in 2016. The people that always vote, voted, but people were complacent."

Karen remembered that there were some warning signs about the election that in hindsight should have set off some warning lights among local Democrats. Specifically,

there just wasn't the enthusiasm that she was accustomed to in the local events. Again, this came across to me as more pedantic cycle-to-cycle stuff. The exact same thing could be said about a race where Democrats just did not have a good candidate, or something similar. Something similar surely had happened in the 60 years since a Republican candidate for President won in Pacific County. Karen seemed regretful as she recounted how local politics events did not go as well as she was hoping:

Karen: We tried to do some events, one in North County and one in South County. We had three of the Supreme Court candidates down, Erin Frasier. In South County, we got Cyrus Habib (the Lieutenant Governor). A few years ago, we had Bob Ferguson at the crab feed, and people really like him.

Doug: We did not get as many local people at these events, which was surprising.

And that did not set off alarm bells, even though it maybe should have?

Doug: Yeah

The Democrats also have a problem with the districting in the area. The quick summary is that the nation-wide redistricting after the 2010 midterm elections made things more difficult for a Democrat to win in the 3rd Congressional District. It no longer contains Olympia, the state capital that tends to vote heavily Democratic, and now encompasses blood-red Lewis County, which is about as far-right libertarian/Republican as it gets.¹²² Nansen pointed out that “Also, redistricting happened in 2010. That meant that Lewis, which was and is a Democrat-free zone, is now part of the 3rd District. That makes things much harder for a Democrat, because the Republican will almost certainly run up big numbers in Lewis County.”

¹²² “Washington State Redistricting Commission,” accessed November 20, 2019, <http://www.redistricting.wa.gov/maps.asp>.

Lewis county is inland, agricultural land. It is also remarkably conservative on both cultural and economic issues. It is pro-gun rights and pro-religious freedom. Matt Winters, editor at the Chinook Observer, agreed with Karen's assessment: "Gerrymandering is a problem for the 3rd district, has been arranged in such a way that Republicans can pull it off with support for deep red Lewis County," Matt observed. The redistricting has certainly made things more difficult for a Democrat to do well in the 3rd congressional district, but just using the redrawn maps to explain the local shift to supporting more Republican candidates is not sufficient to explain the change in political preferences in the area.

Gwen Brake is a schoolteacher and activist that lives on the Long Beach Peninsula in Pacific County. She more to the left on the political spectrum, which makes sense from someone that lives on the Peninsula. The Peninsula is part of South County, and it is more liberal than the northern part of Pacific County. It attracts quite a few retirees from more liberal areas, which is why it tends to vote bluer. This is the opposite trend from other areas with a large number of retirees, most famously Florida, which tend to vote more conservatively and favor the Republican Party.

Karen Spackman: In South County, there was an influx of retired people on the Long Beach Peninsula. You would expect that to be a more conservative influence, but it is not in Pacific County.

Doug: That part of the county has been the more consistently liberal area, it's because the retirees are from Seattle, Portland, and California.

Gwen also gave a post-mortem of the 2016 election that focused on how Democrats were just coasting along and did not retain the same energy that enabled them to win in the first place. She thought that the local Democratic Party had declined, and that they were not forward-thinking in their plan to keep Pacific County blue. It is

important to keep in mind that Gwen is an activist. During the interview, her passion for liberal causes and helping those less fortunate was immediately apparent. She is not afraid of making anyone angry, and she is not the type to mince words. For you, the reader, just read her account while keeping in mind that politics is not her main area of focus; she sees it as a means to achieve her activist goals of equality and fairness.

Whether or not you agree with her point of view, Gwen Brake is a beacon of energy and persistence. She is fighting for what she believes in, and her energy does not seem to have waned in her retirement years. “It seems to me that the Democrats were asleep, Gwen said, frustration and resignation coloring her words. “When we moved here 20 years ago, it was a solid, forefather Democratic Party. Everyone in it looked like they were stalwart characters that could stand on a corner and represent the Democratic philosophy.”

Things changed, and the original people who had guided the local Party and kept everyone involved and engaged, lost interest or passed away. As Gwen recalled, “It was a diverse mix of people, and I think, over time, the interest dropped off. Some of the founding members had moved, died, lost interest, or weren’t interested in running for office anymore.” According to Gwen, the local Democratic Party did not really know what it stood for anymore, and the result was a kind of apathy. That stagnancy caught up to Democrats in 2016, when they were faced with a different kind of candidate that could appeal to working-class folks in Pacific County with both a values-based and economics-based approach. The cohesion and energy that the Democrats had enjoyed was gone, and Donald Trump was able to win Pacific County because of that lack of energy to keep Democrats in office. “The Party kind of shifted, and it became a less cohesive group,”

Gwen added. “In my mind, without a direction except to maintain the status quo. At first, we were all active Democrats, and the party shipped into ‘actively maintaining structure.’”

Republicans see a seismic shift, Democrats see a relatively minor errors, and little reason why things cannot swing back the other way. Neither side, however, sees a return to unfettered dominance by one political party. I agree more with the “seismic shift” perspective, mostly because of the sheer unlikeliness of Pacific County ever going red based on historical voting data. Pacific County consistently voted for Democratic candidates for President by double-digit margins. It does not seem like one bad election year could change that, even one where the Democratic candidate was particularly weak. A seismic shift had to occur in order to even make this a competitive election. That is the decline of natural resources and, consequently, union influence in Pacific County

The political landscape in Pacific County was altered by the decline of unions in the area. The people I interviewed remembered that candidates for local office had to belong to a union and run with a ‘D’ next to their name. Now, as the decline of natural resources wreaked havoc on the economic and social landscape in Pacific County, unions no longer had the pull that they once did. As a result, conservative Republicans making a values-based argument are much more able to convince folks to consider voting Republican, a trend that we have seen over the past 15-20 years. Some local Democrats see the 2016 election as the result of local political missteps, and while there may be some truth to that, that one-sided lack of enthusiasm in one election cycle could flip the county shows just how much Pacific County has turned away from Democrats. Local Republicans are aided by animosity towards the state government, which is controlled by

Democrats. That sort of individualistic, ‘don’t want to be told what to do by a bunch of people from Puget Sound,’ viewpoint is the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Rural Consciousness

The political landscape in Pacific County has shifted enough to enable Republicans to successfully make values-based arguments to voters. In recent elections, however, it isn't just that Republicans have developed a better message. The Democrats that dominate the state government are perceived to have shifted away from the kinds of politicians that Pacific County traditionally supported. Republicans have benefited from persistent resentment towards urban Democrats, whom folks in Pacific County view as elitist, out of touch, and unrepresentative of rural people. Rural folks perceive urban people to be actively ignoring rural communities. Both local Democrats and Republicans voiced serious frustration with the Democrat-controlled state government, and their views towards 'Puget Sound' makes it very difficult for them to vote for Democrats up and down the ballot.

Katherine Cramer's *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* provides a framework to examine how local perceptions of urban bias in the state government continues to push folks in Pacific County towards the Republican party through three lenses: perceptions of power, values, and fairness. As Cramer argues, rural-urban tensions are not just about policy disagreements, they are "rooted in something even more fundamental: ideas about who gets what, who has power, what people are like, and who is to blame."¹²³ Thus, rural folks feel as though they are not getting their fair share of things. They think of themselves as

¹²³ Katherine J. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 5.

good, hard-working Americans who pay their taxes on time, and the only thing they get in return are charges of ignorance and racism.¹²⁴

Elites often misunderstand how rural people think about government interventions. When many columnists and pundits look at the voting patterns of rural folks, they often shout that they are voting against their own self-interest. Let's take social welfare programs. Urban Americans see that rural people vote for local and national politicians that want to cut entitlement programs. The obvious and common response is that they are advocating to cut the exact programs that exist to help people like them. If their family income is less than \$40,000 a year, then why would they want to cut Medicaid and Medicare? Liberals often assume that rural voters have been somehow hoodwinked by the Republican Party. This is not a complete answer. Instead, rural consciousness allows us to consider how the issues themselves are influenced by identity and perceptions of values and lifestyles. In country areas, "there is a great deal of pride in the idea that 'help' is letting people work hard enough so that they can make it on their own."¹²⁵ So, it isn't that rural voters do not understand what entitlement programs are; they just have a fundamentally different understanding of what 'help' is.

Perceptions of Power

The first part of Cramer's definition of rural consciousness focuses on "perceptions of power, or who makes decisions and who decides what to even discuss."¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Cramer, 23

¹²⁵ Cramer, 76

¹²⁶ Cramer, 55

This focus mirrors the literature that has come out recently that discards the ‘blue state’ vs ‘red state’ distinction in favor of the urban vs rural divide. In Pacific County, that distinction is felt keenly. Folks in Pacific County feel disenfranchised by the overwhelming liberal majority in King County. They feel as though their preferences just do not matter when it comes to decisions that affect them being made on a state and national level, and they have a point.

Teresa Purcell is a local political operative in the 3rd Congressional District. She also ran as the Democratic candidate in the 2016 State House of Representatives election against Jim Walsh. She lost the general election by just 559 votes out of 57,000 cast, and she carried Pacific County (as well as Cowlitz County).

Figure 5.1: 2016 State Representative election results in the 19th Legislative District.¹²⁷



¹²⁷ “Pacific County November 8, 2016 General Election,” accessed November 20, 2019, <https://results.vote.wa.gov/results/20161108/pacific/>.

She was the most vocal proponent of the before-mentioned thesis that Democrats have been actively ignoring rural areas at their own political peril. That choice has enabled Democrats to keep power on a state level, but Dems in rural areas have taken a battering. If the state party does not allot resources and time to try and be competitive in rural areas like Pacific County, then they will lose elections there. Tiffany Turner agreed with Teresa. Tiffany is a successful businesswoman that lives on the Long Beach peninsula. She and her husband, Brady, own several businesses in the County, including the Ashore Hotel in Seaside. She was just named as one of Puget Sound Business Journal's 40 successful people under 40.¹²⁸ She tends to lean left in her politics, and she echoed Teresa's assertion that Democrat's neglect of rural Washington is the primary structural change that tipped the 2016 election. She remembered that:

20 years ago, Democrats decided that they did not need small towns and rural communities. They decided they did not need to work anywhere in Washington outside of Puget Sound. I used to work for a nonprofit that did political work, and in the 1990s they had 17 chapters, and had a veto proof democratic majority. We owned all of Southwest Washington, legislatively. Then, the decision was to not work in those places, and a byproduct of that decision is that you lose those places.

Teresa tied what is happening in Pacific County to the national urban-rural divide, and made the point that, not only do urban people ignore rural concerns, they do not even know what rural people care about in the first place. Teresa went on to point out that "Pacific County is a microcosm of what is happening nationally in terms of the urban-rural divide. Pacific County is pretty consistent with what rural people are experiencing

¹²⁸ "Member Spotlight: Tiffany Turner," Washington Marine Spatial Planning, March 9, 2016, <https://www.msp.wa.gov/member-spotlight-tiffany-turner/>.

nationally. Urban people do not understand rural concerns, and it is getting worse, not better.”

Part of the ‘getting worse’ that she talks about is the stereotype of rural folks as uneducated and unsophisticated. Teresa was frustrated by what she sees as “a concerted effort to portray rural folks as horrible rednecks.” The result of Democrats ignoring rural concerns and negatively stereotyping the people that live there is that those folks have turned towards the Republican party. As I was listening to these sorts of concerns come up over and over again in my interviews, I found myself empathizing with this sense of being ‘forgotten people.’ Pacific County folks have voted Democratic and send Democrats to state-side office, and then nothing changes. That must be a frustrating experience. Teresa explained the end result of that frustration:

Democrats have ignored rural areas for 40 years, and Republicans have been building there, and have been intentionally building the divide between rural and urban areas, and between Democrat and Republican. The claim is: ‘Democrats only care about urban areas,’ and there is a lot of evidence to support that. When you look at the way that policies are executed, there is clearly no one from a rural area at the table telling others how this policy will impact rural areas in a negative way.

She also made the point that state officials voted into power by urban folks are actively enacting policies that hurt rural people. She uses the example of the ghost shrimp infestation in Willapa Bay to say that folks in Pacific County are not happy about what they perceive as over-regulation of rural industry that hurts working people. That sense of resentment against state Democrats makes it very difficult to convince people to vote for Democrats in local or national elections. Teresa argued that “it’s not just political, it’s about policy. The fact that the Department of Ecology has acted the way that they have

about the Ghost Shrimp has made it basically impossible for those people to vote Democratic.”

According to Teresa, once they have stopped passing actively harmful policies for rural areas, it is not enough for Democrats to turn around and say that they want to help rural areas. They actually need to pass policies that folks in Pacific County see as making their lives easier and better. This is what Cramer was getting at with her focus on “who even gets to make decisions.”¹²⁹ Folks in Pacific County do not think that their voice matters, and they cannot prevent the state government from acting against their interests. Teresa observed that “It is benign neglect of rural areas, Democrats need to pass policies that help rural communities, not just talk about values. Democrats are saying that ‘we don’t care about your feeding your families,’ over and over again.” Tiffany Turner agreed with this assessment. Her opinion was that “the biggest problem that we face is that state-wide Democrats have decided that rural Washington is not important, and there is limited effort to do any organizing here. There is a strategy put in place that we can win without any rural communities.”

I asked Wes Cormier, a county commissioner in neighboring Grays Harbor county, the same question. He had a very similar answer, and he was on the politically advantageous side: He ran as a libertarian-style Republican.

Do you think that the Puget Sound and the state government acts strategically when it does not take the views of Pacific County/Grays Harbor county into account?

I think that is definitely true

Is it getting worse?

I think that it is, and it is being represented by some of the numbers... I was elected in 2012 when President Obama won our county, and we made

¹²⁹ Cramer, 123

the first Republican commission since the 1930s. This change started to happen, and people started to look at more issues than party. I think that Seattle and Olympia are moving towards extreme politics of the national stage. They are forgetting the rural parts of the state in Olympia.

Tiffany Turner agrees with Wes, and she wants Democrats to re-focus on rural areas. Republicans are taking advantage of state-side Democrats' lack of interest in even trying to appeal to folks in Pacific County. She thinks that the state needs to rethink its strategy towards rural communities because "Republicans are working with rural voters; Democrats don't even try. Republicans connect both locally and nationally, which plays very well with rural people. I am imploring state people to care about rural voters."

As a result, voters elect Republican candidates who have no interest in working with Democrats representing urban areas, and compromise across the aisle becomes even more difficult than before. It is a vicious cycle: voters elect Republicans, who then have no incentive to work with the Seattle/Puget Sound Democratic establishment because they ran against those exact people, so nothing happens, which makes voters even more likely to blame the state government and vote for politicians spouting anti-Puget Sound sentiment. That is a problem. Tiffany went on to say that "People in Pacific County have elected representatives who are less willing to compromise with city politicians. They just go off and hunt instead. Our reps are not trying to build bridges."

Tiffany also pointed out, exasperatedly, that the state Democrats that do care are not exactly doing great work to try and connect with rural voters. She recounted how, in the last campaign, a campaign consultant came to the area to try and help Democratic candidates in local races. The problem was, she showed up in a luxury car, wore very nice clothes, and had the kind of elite-style education that locals found snobby. Fair or

not, Tiffany thought that Dems need to do a much better job of actually reaching out to rural voters on their terms, with people who act and think like they do.

Everyone does not like Puget Sound, and statewide Democrats have done themselves no favors. They man-splain everything, and then send out a person driving a Mercedes and wearing high heels to come and consult on campaigns. She went to school in Boston, of all places... it was bad optics.

Amber Rosewood concurred with Tiffany's points. Amber ran the coordinated campaign for the 19th Legislative District in the last election. She pointed out that anti-Seattle attacks were used for seemingly the first time in 2016, and they were quite effective. Seattle urban liberals became the bogeymen, so to speak. She observed that "Seattle was used as a campaign attack tactic; it was used successfully in 2016 and up until the present. I did not hear Seattle as a bad word my whole childhood until recently, now it is used in attack ads and mailers. We've used Seattle, and anyone associated with Seattle, as the bad guy in politics." Amber does think that there is truth to this attack, however, but that things are not as simple as 'Seattle is bad.' She said that "The whole separate conversation is that King County politicians make decisions to harm rural communities with little regard to their well-being."

Erik Larson, the 20-something former mayor of Aberdeen (he was voted out in November 2019) was more sympathetic to Puget Sound, pointing out that rural communities typically benefit from the redistributive effects of taxation, and that urban areas should have sway in deciding how money is spent, just by virtue that they are contributing more than their fair share to the pot. But, he said, folks in Puget Sound risk alienating people if they try to push their agenda too much without regards to rural concerns.

Erik: Puget Sound, people around here view it as the enemy more than as a friend. They have an outsize role in policy decision making. Puget Sound receives \$0.80 for every dollar it spends on taxes, in the rest of the state it is above a dollar, so some merit to them deciding how it is spent, but go too far and you lose the reality that we are one state with one government

Values

In addition to these power inequalities, there is also a value divide. According to Cramer, rural consciousness “shows up with respect to perceptions of values and lifestyles.”¹³⁰ The perception is that urban Seattleites do not align with folks in Pacific County on values, and they are arrogant enough to think that Pacific County’s values do not even need to be taken into consideration. Here, the story is similar to the popular literature that has come out about the 2016 election. Nansen pointed out that Democrats in Pacific County have a very different set of concerns than those living in King County, as well as the national state.

There is a huge disconnect between Democrats living in Pacific County, and those living in Kings County. The issues that folks around here are passionate about are totally different. Republicans believe in strong family values and the right to bear arms. Again, rural southwest Washington has a disconnect with Seattle - we do not want Seattle telling us what to do. That is true of both Democrats and Republicans around here.

Trump is a wrecking ball that sends an effective message to urban liberals to the tune of ‘We are here! And we are not going to tolerate this anymore!’ One of my favorite articles on the 2016 election was written on the website Cracked.com, and it is called “How Half of America Lost Its F**king Mind.” It is written by a more liberal commentator on a comedy website, so the title is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but it has

¹³⁰ Cramer, 108

some good analysis on the urban-rural divide. The author, David Wong, argues that “to those ignored, suffering people, Donald Trump is a brick chucked through the window of the elites. "Are you a**holes listening *now*?"¹³¹ Donald Trump may have been boorish, but he undeniably spoke to the rural perceptions that urban people do not believe in the same things that they do.

When you are faced with the slow-moving collapse of your way of life, like some people in Pacific County are, there is a powerful motivation to vote for the candidate who promises restoration of a better time. So “yes, they vote for the guy promising to put things back the way they were, the guy who'd be a wake-up call to the blue islands. They voted for the brick through the window.”¹³² Nansen said that the election results made sense, given the sentiment in the area: “So, along comes Trump as a populist, and you saw what happened. I actually had Democrats come up to me and tell me that they came over to vote for Trump. They told me that they did. They really did not want Hillary.”

Jim Walsh agrees with that sentiment, and he added that Pacific County is not the place that is changing, it is the world around it. The Democratic party, on a state level, is moving away from the kind of values that are espoused in Pacific County, and that shift is making it very difficult for people in Pacific County to continue voting for Democrats.

Jim: You can always say that local issues matter, and you can always say that candidates matter. But I just think that is a calculated response. There are bigger issues going on here, issues of cultural, economic, and social orientation are changing. It is not that those qualities are changing here, it is that the world is changing around it. This place has true to what has always believed, but people are realizing that I can't vote the way my father did and still honor gun rights, honor property rights, honor

¹³¹ David Wong, “How Half Of America Lost Its F**king Mind,” Cracked.com, October 12, 2016, <https://www.cracked.com/blog/6-reasons-trumps-rise-that-no-one-talks-about/>.

¹³² Ibid.

extractive industries. The party that my father voted for disregards these things, disrespects those things.

Wes Cormier, a county commissioner in neighboring Grays Harbor, said much the same as Jim. The values espoused by national and state level Democrats have changed, and Pacific County is now better represented by Republicans, at least on a local level. Granted, both Jim and Wes are both libertarian-style conservatives that were elected into office as Republicans, so this shift helped them politically, so I do not necessarily want to take their comments as representative of the whole political spectrum. It does make sense, however, that a values-based argument is more effective now that Pacific County is less wedded to the Democratic Party through union influence. Here is Wes:

Have people changed how they view local issues?

You know, I don't think so. I think that they, on issues, the issues haven't changed on these different ideals. What has changed is this shift within the party system, the philosophical views of the party have changed.

How so?

The national influence has slowly shifted. In our local county, a lot of people say, 'Well, my dad voted Democrat, my grandfather voted Democrat,' they were strong union supporters. But I have all these conservative values, like lesser taxation. I support unions, the right to bear arms, right to free speech. They support these more conservative ideas that rural people often do, and they are starting to realize that the national shift is going more conservative. The Democrats have shifted a little more left than the Republicans have shifted right, on the national stage.

I asked Wes whether Pacific County could elect a politician who could conceivably persuade Puget Sound to pay attention to local issues and local values. He did not think so and added that the recent party shift has lessened the presence of the kinds of Democrats that tend to do well in Pacific County.

Will the situation be made better by the election of a politician who can make Olympia pay attention, or is it entrenched?

I think it is entrenched, I think your blue-dog Democrats, and he is strong on guns, but on other issues he is more left, and he always gets elected with strong numbers. Those Democrats are going away because they are getting kicked out by the party system. They do well in elections, if they would run, but it is entrenched by the party system.

People in Pacific County feel that their beliefs are fundamentally different from Puget Sound, and that difference isn't going away. They care about second amendment rights, freedom from intrusive government regulation, and self-reliance. As a result, they feel alienated from those in positions of power. Not only do they feel as though they have no agency in how the state government is run, they also feel like it does not represent what they believe in. That is a potent combination, and it helps to explain why a more populist, outside candidate did well in Pacific County in 2016.

Fairness/Racial Resentment

The third tenet of Cramer's rural consciousness is that "it involves perceptions of resources or who gets what." That focus on fairness can show up as racial resentment towards folks, particularly immigrants, who are perceived as not paying their fair share. This idea shows up in frustrations about immigrants who 'just do not pay their fair share,' or illegal immigrants who are vilified for 'cutting in line' ahead of people who have been waiting to enter the country legally for years. Whether or not these allegations are true, they do show up again and again in discussions about who deserves what in America. Several of the Pacific County folks that I interviewed brought up racial resentment as a potential cause for some of Trump's support in the area.

To get insight into racial resentment as it pertains to Cramer, let's consider Trump's most infamous campaign promise: to build a wall on the southern border with Mexico. Many policy analysts find the project to be unsubstantiated by actual data, as illegal immigration has substantially declined in the previous two decades. Gordon Hanson and Craig McIntosh, two researchers at University of California, San Diego, argue that "it is unlikely that Mexico-to-US migration rates will again reach the levels witnessed between the early 1980s and the mid-2000s."¹³³ If illegal immigration across the southern border is declining, why do we need to build a multi-billion dollar border wall? Urban folks are frequently tempted to turn to racism as an explanation for the ceaseless chanting of "Build the Wall" at Trump Rallies.

To just label rural Trump voters as racist, however, misses the point. Rural consciousness tells us that rural folks think that they aren't getting their fair share. As Cramer notes, "they are making sense of this injustice by resenting those whom they think are getting more than they deserve, and perceptions of who works hard and who is deserving are infected with racism."¹³⁴ According to Cramer, they aren't just racist, and to label them as such is a great way for Democrats to lose in 2020 as well. While economic anxiety and race are undoubtedly intertwined, we must consider this anti-immigrant sentiment in the context of a more nuanced conversation about deservingness.

On one side, for locals working in the oyster industry, the sentiment is almost all positive towards immigrants. Matt Winters, the editor at the *Chinook Observer* (a local

¹³³ Gordon Hanson and Craig McIntosh, "Is The Mediterranean The New Rio Grande? US And EU Immigration Pressures In The Long Run," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 2016, 58, accessed November 26, 2019, doi:10.3386/w22622.

¹³⁴ Cramer, 87

newspaper) told me that, in general, people in the oyster/shellfish industry are supportive of immigrants. That makes sense, as immigrants (particularly Hispanic immigrants) make up the backbone of the hard labor necessary to make the shellfish industry operate.

According to Mary Sheldon, a local business owner, “it is not the case that immigrants are the only ones applying, it is the case that immigrants are the only ones willing to stick it out.”¹³⁵ Matt Winters added that “people working in the oyster industry are supportive of immigrants regardless of legal status”

Trump ran on a platform of kicking ‘drug dealers, criminals, rapists’ out of the United States. That sort of language was popular amongst some voters in Pacific County, but the reality of the platform was made plain when ICE arrested at least 28 people in Pacific County in 2017.¹³⁶ As a whole, immigration enforcement action in Washington state has increased since President Trump was elected, though it is still far off its peak in 2013, when the Obama Administration ratcheted up efforts during his first term.¹³⁷ Inevitably, some of the undocumented immigrants that were arrested worked in the shellfish industry. Company owners were not happy about losing key employees, especially during a labor shortage. The arrests hurt business, and “so many people have been arrested or moved that [business owners] can no longer fill empty positions. [They have] to scale back orders and turn away customers.”¹³⁸ Folks in the shellfish industry

¹³⁵ Shapiro, Nina, “A Washington County That Went for Trump Is Shaken as Immigrant Neighbors Start Disappearing,” *The Seattle Times*, November 9, 2017, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/northwest/fear-regrets-as-pacific-county-residents-go-missing-amid-immigration-crackdown-police-chief-neighbors-kind-of-in-shock-after-immigration-arrests-in-pacific-county-immigration-crack/>.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

view immigrants and their contributions to society in a positive light, views that are almost certainly influenced by interacting with them and their families on a daily basis.

On the flip side, Matt Winters did mention that other folks in the area do harbor some racial resentment towards minorities. Those feelings were not as apparent before the 2016 election, but Trump's candidacy triggered some people to share those opinions more publicly. Matt told me that "other folks in Pacific County harbor a lot of racial animosity... that came out during Trump's election. Some rhetoric has been suppressed until basically licensed to speak hatefully by the President."

Karen Spackman, the former chair of the Pacific County Democrats, agreed with Matt's assessment of the situation in Pacific County. She remarked that the racism in the area got worse in the run-up to the 2016 election. She made the distinction that it is not specific to Pacific County, and it is by no means beyond the pale and abnormal. Similarly to Matt Winters, she did observe that Trump enabled people to voice racially tinged views that they would have kept to themselves otherwise.

I think that the underlying racism is a lot more active than it was, and I think that Trump let it out. I think that there has been fairly pervasive racism in rural areas, I am not saying that Pacific County is terrible, I have no reason to say that. I just suspect that in 2020... I think any black candidate would face opposition here

According to Nansen, the 2016 election swung Trump's way in Pacific County because of a combination of all these factors. It was perceived shared cultural values and resentment against urbanites and a state government that only caters to those areas that have the greatest concentration of votes. In a sense, 2016 was a protest vote and a vote for the future rolled up into one. I conducted my interview with Nansen approximately two and a half years into Trump's presidency. At that point, Nansen said that Trump

voters in Pacific County did not regret their choice. If anything, there was even more support for Trump than there was back in 2016. She said that “I think that people don’t feel remorse about the way that they voted. I think that, if the election were today, Trump would win in Pacific County with even more votes than he got in 2016.

In conclusion, feelings of rural resentment in Pacific County have continued to push it further towards the Republican Party. Grievances towards ‘Puget Sound’ show up in perceptions of a lack of power to influence events, unalignment of values, and a lack of fairness. State Democrats have been actively harming their chances in rural areas by only catering to urban voters. At best, rural voters feel as though the state government has been neglecting their needs. At worst, it has been actively harming folks in Pacific County through increased regulation of industry, like in the ghost shrimp infestation problem. Local perceptions of state government continue add credibility to local Republicans’ values-based appeal to voters in Pacific County, and those feelings have continued to actively push folks in Pacific County towards voting for Republican politicians.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Donald Trump's win in 2016 was not an aberration. It was the end result of decades of economic, social, and political change in Pacific County. The decline of natural resources decimated local unions. Once there was no longer a union machine to ensure public goodwill towards the Democratic Party, the resulting political vacuum created a new opportunity for Republicans to be successful in Pacific County. Republicans seized that opportunity by appealing to economic interests, rural consciousness, and indigenous local values. By the late 2000s and early 2010s, Ron Paul-style libertarians took over the local Republican Party and helped elect Jamie Herrera-Beutler to the 3rd Congressional District in 2010. She still serves today. Clinton's defeat was merely the latest domino to fall.

Given these developments, how should the parties respond? For Republicans, the answer seems fairly simple: keep doing what you have been doing. Conservative elites have decried the current direction of the 'Party of Reagan,' lamenting that the Party's traditional focus on responsible fiscal choices and the supremacy of the free market is no longer a priority in the era of Trumpism. That may be true, but the turn towards traditional Democratic priorities like infrastructure and industry jobs enabled Republicans to do well in rural places like Pacific County. They now have an agenda that folks in Pacific County find persuasive.

Not just any Republican could have won Pacific County. Whether you love or hate Trump, there is no denying that his message was remarkably effective there. He spoke to their concerns and grievances. In hindsight, selecting Hillary Clinton to be their nominee was a mistake for Democrats. She was representative of the kind of progressive

politician that Pacific County's citizens dislike in its statehouse. It is no wonder that Bernie Sanders, not Secretary Clinton, was popular here among politically engaged people.

What should the Democratic Party do moving forwards to try and counteract this rightward shift? I recommend three paths: 1) *listen* to rural voters, and create a policy plan that addresses those concerns, 2) alter the Party's environmentalist rhetoric, and 3) welcome Trump supporters back into the Democratic fold without shaming them.

The first suggestion – listening – is important because rural citizens feel ignored by urban elites. I heard this complaint often. Tiffany Turner talked about how state-level Democrats actively ignore rural areas as part of their general political strategy, and Jim Walsh mentioned that resentment towards a state government that does not listen to Pacific County was a central component of his successful election campaign to state representative. If people feel that Democrats do not listen to them, or care what they have to say, then *of course* they will stop voting for Democrats up and down the ticket.

To counteract this anti-urban sentiment, members of the Democratic Party should go on a listening tour of rural communities, with the goal of listening to and internalizing rural concerns in order to rebuild the Party's message. It has been tried, albeit in a limited way. Tom Perez went on a listening tour in Northern Wisconsin during his ultimately successful campaign for Chair of the Democratic National Committee (DNC), saying that he was to “excited to kick off this tour[...] and looking forward to sitting down with Democrats in rural communities across the country to hear exactly what they need to

rebuild our party from the ground up.”¹³⁹ The DNC Platform now includes language about investing in rural America. I particularly liked the idea to “expand access to equity capital for businesses and expand the New Markets Tax Credit to better serve rural small businesses.”¹⁴⁰ A listening tour will have the dual effect of making rural voters feel heard, which is important in and of itself, as well as enabling lawmakers to more effectively speak to rural concerns and rural needs. Democrats can then craft a message and pass legislation that actually helps rural communities, as well as speak to rural values like individuality and hard work.

Democrats also need to rethink how they talk about environmentalism. I recognize that climate change is happening, and that its effects will be catastrophic in the next century if we do not reduce our dependence on fossil fuels as a society. Even so, urban Democrats need to recognize environmentalism harms communities like Pacific County by taking away economic opportunity from the people who live there. It is possible to say both “we need to preserve old growth forests” and “communities that rely on natural resource-extraction for their way of life should be listened to and supported.” It is not enough to just say, as some urbanites do, *just retrain yourself in something else, like solar energy production*. That is like telling a career lawyer to go retrain themselves to be a commercial fisherman. It is not going to work.

Environmentalists should moderate their message to better serve the needs of communities like Pacific County. Just as humans sometimes infringe on natural

¹³⁹ "Tom Perez To Kick Off Rural Listening Tour," Tom Perez, November 26, 2019, accessed November 26, 2019, <https://www.tomperez.org/news/2017/1/18/tom-perez-to-kick-off-rural-listening-tour>.

¹⁴⁰ "Our Platform," Democrats.org, accessed November 26, 2019, <https://www.democrats.org/party-platform>.

ecosystems and prevent them from functioning correctly, human ecosystems can be negatively impacted by outside factors, including regulation. Democrats should recognize that almost no one, including people in Pacific County, want natural lands to be decimated, and work to redefine environmentalism as a compromise that preserves both natural lands and human communities. Democrats *have* to show that they believe that human beings and their health are as important as fish and birds. People deserve to make a living, and people in Pacific County have been living off of the land for generations. Democrats need to respect that, and work to create a compromise that does not just consist of urban liberals telling rural folks to *shut up and stop cutting down trees. Owls live there.*

Finally, Democrats need to stop shaming Trump supporters if they want some to return to the party. It is common for liberal Democratic voters to refer to all Trump supporters as morons or racists. That is a terrible way to win back their votes, one that hurts the Democrat's chances of winning back power on the local, state, and national level. Teresa Purcell, the Democrat who ran against Jim Walsh for a state representative seat in 2016, emphasized that anti-Trump supporter rhetoric has to stop:

We are saying that Donald Trump is evil, which is true, but not necessarily helpful. One thing I've learned is that you can't get anyone to change their mind by telling them they are stupid; you have to give them an honorable way forward to change their mind. We don't have a good way to enable people who voted for Donald Trump to admit that they were wrong.

All of the work that Democrats do to reach out to rural voters is going to be for naught if those voters feel belittled by the same establishment that is asking for their vote. Whatever Democratic candidate ends up winning the nomination in 2020 will face a

steep road here, one that will be made all the more difficult if folks feel that the Democrats have learned nothing from the last four years. Places like Pacific County are asking for help and a friendly ear. The eventual candidate has to speak to those needs in a sincere and respectful manner.

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