

CHAPTER 6 — ECONOMY

This chapter presents a basic overview of the local economy and provides recommendations regarding economic development.

WORK FORCE CHARACTERISTICS

The 2000 U.S. Census reported that Cowley had a work force of 280 people with a low unemployment rate of 3.8 percent. Most of the work force commuted to work with an average commute time of 16 minutes. There are relatively few jobs in Cowley and most employed residents work outside of town. Of the type of jobs held by Cowley residents:

- ▶ 38 (14% of the work force) were service jobs
- ▶ 72 (27%) were management and professional jobs
- ▶ 60 (23%) were sales and office jobs
- ▶ 47 (18%) were production and transportation jobs
- ▶ 40 (15%) were construction, extraction and maintenance jobs
- ▶ (3%) were farming jobs

Most employed Cowley residents (165 or 62%) hold private wage and salary positions while 73 (28%) are government workers and 27 (10%) are self-employed.

SOURCES OF EMPLOYMENT

Cowley residents work in a number of settings both in and outside of town. According to the 2000 Census, employed Cowley residents worked in various economic sectors as follows:

- ▶ 41 (16% of the work force) in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining
- ▶ 29 (11%) in construction
- ▶ 20 (20) in manufacturing
- ▶ 31 (12%) in retail trade
- ▶ 13 (5%) in transportation and warehousing, and utilities
- ▶ 0 (0%) in information services
- ▶ 5 (2%) in finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing
- ▶ 12 (5%) in professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services
- ▶ 85 (32%) in educational, health and social services
- ▶ 9 (3%) in arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services

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- ▶ 3 (1%) in other services (except public administration)
- ▶ 11 (4%) in public administration

The largest sector for employment of Cowley residents was the education, health and social services sector. No employees in the information services area seems unlikely now (seven years later) and probably is no longer true.

Major employers within a short commute from Cowley include several in Lovell: Western Sugar, Georgia Pacific, Halliburton and WyoBen (bentonite plants), North Big Horn Hospital and the Lovell school district. Also within easy commuting range are the major employers in Powell including Northwest College, the Powell school system and the Powell Valley Hospital.

INCOME STATISTICS

Income and poverty level statistics indicate that Cowley fares well economically compared to the remainder of Big Horn County. Cowley's poverty levels for both families and individuals are much lower than for the county. Indeed, Cowley's poverty statistics are much lower than those of the state and nation. (See Table 8.)

Baseline poverty levels are based on the number of people in a household. For a typical three person household the poverty level was \$13,290. For one person living alone, the poverty level was \$8,501. For a family of four (two adults and two children) the poverty level was \$16,895.

Compared to the county, income levels in Cowley are higher for households and families, but lower on a per-capita basis. Compared to the state, Cowley's median household income is higher than the state median while family and per-capita income are lower. Cowley's income levels are lower in all respects compared to those of the nation.

TABLE 8: 2000 CENSUS INCOME AND POVERTY LEVEL STATISTICS				
	Cowley	Big Horn County	Wyoming	U.S.
Median household income	\$38,750	\$32,682	\$37,892	\$41,994
Median family income	\$39,722	\$38,237	\$45,685	\$50,046
Per capita income	\$14,964	\$15,086	\$19,134	\$21,587
Families in poverty	3.8%	10.2%	8.0%	9.2%
Individuals in poverty	7.2%	14.1%	11.4%	12.4%

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN COWLEY

The most recent (2004) County Business Patterns report provides basic statistics on business and industrial activity. The information is collected based on the zip code of the business. The information excludes data on self-employed individuals, employees of private households, railroad employees, agricultural production employees, and most government employees. The Business Patterns report indicates the types of businesses in the Cowley zip code area and how many employees they have. (See Table 9.)

TABLE 9: EMPLOYMENT AT PRIVATE BUSINESSES IN COWLEY					
Industry Type	Total Businesses	Number of Employees			
		1-4	5-9	10-19	20-49
Construction	6	2	1	1	2
Manufacturing	2	2	0	0	0
Retail trade	2	1	0	0	1
Professional, scientific & technical services	2	2	0	0	0
Accommodation & food services	1	0	0	1	0
Other services (except public administration)	1	1	0	0	0

Cowley’s largest public sector employer is Big Horn County School District #1 with 43 employees based in Cowley. The Town of Cowley employs two full-time and two part-time personnel as well as seasonal recreation and maintenance staff. Other public sector employers in Cowley include the Big Horn County Road and Bridge Department and Sidon Irrigation District.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In 2005, The Wyoming Business Council commissioned a study that examined economic development constraints and opportunities for Park County and western Big Horn County, including Cowley (Wadley-Donovan Group and Tamerica Management Company, “Target Industry Assessment”). The study identified key assets and key challenges for economic development for the area that includes Cowley. (See Table 10.)

The report recommended that communities in the area, including Cowley, would be most suited to new businesses known as “mobile entrepreneurs” and “lone eagles” particularly in the areas of “knowledge-based operations” and creative arts, western arts and home furnishings. Outdoor recreational products businesses were also identified as a good prospect for the area.

Mobile entrepreneurs are individuals who are willing and able to relocate to communities of their choice in order to start and develop their own business. Lone eagles are individuals who look to operate as self-employed individuals or in free-lance capacities using advanced telecommunications technology and a

TABLE 10: NORTHERN BIG HORN ASSETS AND CHALLENGES	
Key Assets	Key Challenges
Growing population and labor force	Higher wage levels compared to Wyoming and the U.S.
A growing base of retirees willing to work	Higher median age (39.6 years) compared to Wyoming and the U.S.
Workforce has good basic skills	Low unemployment rate - employers report a lack of qualified applicants for available jobs
Community college presence – Northwest College	Productivity, computer skills and work ethic rated as unsatisfactory by employers
Well rated K-12 public education	Limited housing availability in Big Horn County, and lack of affordable rental housing overall
Among the lowest, if not the lowest, electric power costs in the nation	Lack of vacant industrial and business sites, and lack of vacant industrial buildings
A very good quality of life as measured on a broad set of indices	Inadequate and expensive truck service

commercial airport to remain linked with the outside world. Examples include writers, consultants, software programmers, investors, financial analysts, traders, brokers, and manufacturing representatives. Knowledge-based operations include software development, advertising, management consulting, writing and journalism, and public relations.

Cowley is primarily a “bedroom community” with most employed residents working outside the community. Economic development in Cowley should be compatible with the community’s primary role as a bedroom community. This means keeping the scale of economic development small enough that it does not overwhelm the town. At the same time, additional businesses in Cowley would help provide a larger and more diverse tax base, could provide needed services for town residents, and could offer employment for those who would rather not commute. In order to achieve this, the Town should pursue several different tasks:

- ▶ There is insufficient commercial land in Cowley for any new, substantial business. The Town

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should facilitate the creation of designated areas for commercial development. This would involve zoning undeveloped areas for commercial use, establishing commercial development standards in the development ordinance, and arranging for needed utilities to the locations.

- ▶ Cowley has great potential for home-based businesses, in line with the recommendations of the Target Industry Assessment report mentioned above. The Town's development code is about 25 years old and should be updated to reflect modern trends in home-based businesses.
- ▶ Cowley has traditionally had small-scale commercial activity in residential buildings located on U.S. Highway 310 in town. This type of business activity should be encouraged. Cowley's development code should be modified to designate these areas for commercial uses. The code should specify that businesses should be highly compatible with the adjoining residential areas.
- ▶ Cowley's original business district could become a greater focus of business activity. The district is already at the heart of town. The district could stand to be improved from the appearance standpoint, with a focus on storefronts, sidewalks, street lighting and similar elements of the streetscape. In addition, non-business uses, including the Town's equipment yard, a parking lot, and the irrigation district building are not ideal for the district. The Town should look for opportunities to eventually relocate these uses and allow commercial buildings in their place.
- ▶ The North Big Horn Airport could support economic development for aviation related businesses. The nearby proximity of town water could be a plus for certain businesses. To make the most of this opportunity, the Town should work with the Big Horn County Airport Board to develop a plan for business development at or near the airport.