



Lewis County West Virginia

Lewis County is in central West Virginia on the Allegheny Plateau. The county is known for its livestock farms, natural gas and oil wells and timber operations. The county government is located in Weston, which is the hub for a wide area of agricultural grazing land.

Lewis County is named to honor Col. Charles Lewis, a famous soldier and leader among the Virginia Pioneers. The county was established in 1816 in the north central area of the state. The county is comprised of some 391 square miles of land area. The boyhood home of Confederate General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson was located at Jackson's Mill, five miles north of Weston. The first Methodist Protestant Church in the United States was organized here. John Mitchell and David Smith were the organizers at Old Harmony Church (near Jane Lew) in 1829.

Weston was first called Preston, and then changed to Flesherville after Henry Flesher, who originally owned the land. It was founded in 1818. The name later was changed to Weston. Col. Edward Jackson, grandfather of General "Stonewall" Jackson, was the surveyor who laid out the town. During the Civil War the North and the South alternately occupied the town. In 1859, Weston was chosen to be the site of the Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum, now called Weston State Hospital. The huge gray stone main building has nine acres of floor space. It is reputed to be the largest hand-cut stone structure in the United States.

Lewis County is located in central West Virginia. In April of 2003, Lewis County had an unemployment rate of 8.9%, up from 8.3% in April of 2002. This rate is considered "Worse Than Average" statewide.

Transportation Development

Lewis County is served by less than 30 miles of four-lane access by I-79 and Corridor H (U.S. Route 33). Route 33 is a main two-way road that extends from Weston to the western border of the county. Route 19 bisects the county from South to North. There are no navigable rivers or bus service. Coal is transported by some railroads. Lewis County's airport recently closed; however, the Upshur County Regional Airport is located less than 15 miles from Weston and has good public road access.

Infrastructure

Weston has made strides in improving both wastewater and potable water service. A new sewer plant became operational in 2002. The Town of Jane Lew is also considering developing a project to construct lines to connect to the City of Weston wastewater system. The new wastewater treatment plant for the City of Weston now has the capacity to serve a greatly expanded area.

Telephone and electric service is more than adequate. DSL is available to homes and businesses in Weston and nearby communities. Lewis County has a police force represented by a Sheriff Department, State Police detachment and the Weston City Police. The County has a modern medical hospital and is home to the West Virginia's mental health hospital.

Cluster Development

Lewis County has a cluster of retail firms at the intersection of I-79 and Corridor H. An industrial park is located at Jane Lew and is home to a swimming pool manufacturer and heavy truck dealer. There are sawmills and a log home manufacturer in the County along with a service sector to provide raw materials and transportation for the lumber industry. Lewis County is part of the Hardwood Alliance Zone. It should be noted that several pre-manufactured home dealerships are located on the four lanes north and east of Weston. Some of these home retail outlets are just outside county boundaries.

Technology

West Virginia University has a Life Long Learning Center at Jackson's Mill. Jackson's Mill is also slated to be the location of the new State Fire Academy, which is an Extension Service program. Weston formerly was part of the hand blown glass industry; however, the last manufacturing firm closed in 2003.

Existing Community Conditions

Lewis County continues to experience population decline. In 1990 the population totaled 17,223, while 16,919 residents were listed on the 2000 Census. The 2002 census estimate is 16,690. This decrease represents a 1.4% population decrease in two years and can be attributed to a lack of economic development.

Lewis County is primarily a rural county with two municipalities, the City of Weston and the Town of Jane Lew. The City of Weston is the county seat and the largest municipality of the two. Other communities would include Alum Bridge, Camden, Ireland, and Horner. There are about 5000 people living in urban type areas and 12,000 residents in rural Lewis County. 77% of the county residents work in Lewis County.

Condition of the old central business districts of Weston is declining due in part to the relocation of the old State Mental Hospital; however, revitalization efforts are underway. The first phase is a streetscape project near the downtown bank. Transportation is another factor in this decline. Business is flourishing at access points along I-79 and Corridor H. These areas would include the west side of Weston, Horner, and Jane Lew. Stonewall Jackson State Park, located in the southern part of the county, is developed in part and will be a major player the future of Lewis County's economy. Jackson's Mill Conference center, north of Weston is also an important asset to the county. A very popular arts and crafts festival is held there annually.

In cooperation with downtown merchants and interested citizens, the City of Weston City Council has initiated a beautification and improvement project to enhance the downtown economy. Region VII Staff is working with local officials and professional A/E services to plan a strategy for downtown revitalization. Downtown Weston is being recognized as an antique shop cluster and is striving to market their historical heritage/buildings.

This plan for downtown follows recent major improvements to the sanitary sewer system. Only four (4) miles from I-79, the City has progressed with this needed infrastructure by building a new wastewater treatment plant and extending service to the I-79 interchange with Corridor-H. This lack of adequate service has stifled development downtown and surrounding area.

Housing Conditions

According to the 2000 Census, there are 7,944 housing units within Lewis County. Of these, 6,946 are occupied and 998 are vacant. Renters occupy 1,878 of the housing units and 5,068 units are owner occupied.

In 2000, the county's housing stock consisted of 29 % of the units having been built before 1939. According to the 2000 Census, 14.6% of the existing housing was constructed in the 1990's. In general, there are no large areas of deterioration, but individual locations of rehabilitation exist which need to be addressed. There is a need for both elderly /family assisted housing and multi-family development.

There is a great need for Lewis County to organize a housing development team to focus on new property development. Due to the continued development of Stonewall Jackson Lake State Park, there will be a great need for new housing to meet the demands of visitors and/or new residents.

Project Needs Assessment and Priorities

Lewis County does not have a high percentage of residents with public water service. New residential housing development and current enhancements depend on access to public water. A new sewer plant became operational in 2002; however, City plumbing is 40 years old and does not handle modern waste loads properly.

The Fire Academy development at Jackson's Mill required upgraded water/sewer, this will result in providing more residential and commercial service in the northern area of Lewis County. There are many rural areas in Lewis County not serviced by public water/wastewater infrastructure.

The residents served in these areas have shown high interest in expanding public water to their communities. This project is needed to combat high iron levels and other water quality concerns.

As mentioned, residents remaining unserved in these areas are highly interested in receiving public potable water. The Lewis County Commission and other public meetings are repeatedly crowded. Completion of this project will greatly improve the water quality enjoyed by these residents as well as pave the way for continued residential development and potential economic development.

Also, with an expected increase in visitors due to the development of Stonewall Jackson Resort, revitalization of downtown Weston is a priority. New sidewalks and the relocation of some power poles are planned for the future for the City of Weston.

Documentation

1. Small Cities Block Grant Hearing
2. Housing Data from 1990/2000 Census
3. Region VII Planning & Development Council Regional Development Plan/Overall
4. Region VII PDC Project Priority List
5. West Virginia Economic Summary, April 2002
6. <http://www.state.wv.us/bep/lmi/cp97/CP97LEWI.HTM>
7. <http://www.wvcounties.org/map-frameset.html>

BEARFACTS 1991-2001 Lewis, West Virginia (54041)

Lewis is one of 55 counties in West Virginia. It is not part of a Metropolitan Area. Its 2001 population of 16,818 ranked 34th in the state.

PER CAPITA PERSONAL INCOME

In 2001 Lewis had a per capita personal income (PCPI) of \$19,274. This PCPI ranked 32nd in the state and was 84 percent of the state average, \$22,862, and 63 percent of the national average, \$30,413. The 2001 PCPI reflected an increase of 6.2 percent from 2000. The 2000- 2001 state change was 4.8 percent and the national change was 2.2 percent. In 1991 the PCPI of Lewis was \$13,069 and ranked 33rd in the state. The 1991-2001 average annual growth rate of PCPI was 4.0 percent. The average annual growth rate for the state was 4.2 percent and for the nation was 4.3 percent.

TOTAL PERSONAL INCOME

In 2001 Lewis had a total personal income (TPI) of \$324,151. This TPI ranked 34th in the state and accounted for 0.8 percent of the state total. In 1991 the TPI of Lewis was \$223,197 and ranked 32nd in the state. The 2001 TPI reflected an increase of 5.9 percent from 2000. The 2000-2001 state change was 4.4 percent and the national change was 3.3 percent. The 1991-2001 average annual growth rate of TPI was 3.8 percent. The average annual growth rate for the state was 4.2 percent and for the nation was 5.5 percent.

COMPONENTS OF TOTAL PERSONAL INCOME

Total personal income includes net earnings by place of residence; dividends, interest, and rent; and transfer payments received by the residents of Lewis. The 2001 net earnings accounted for 53.5 percent of TPI (compared with 54.0 in 1991); dividends, interest and rent were 20.0 percent (compared with 21.1 in 1991); and transfer payments were 26.4 percent (compared with 24.9 in 1991). From 2000 to 2001 net earnings increased 6.8 percent; dividends, interest, and rent increased 2.8 percent; and transfer payments increased 6.4 percent. From 1991 to 2001 net earnings increased on average 3.7 percent each year; dividends, interest, and rent increased on average 3.3 percent; and transfer payments increased on average 4.4 percent.

EARNINGS BY PLACE OF WORK

Earnings of persons employed in Lewis increased from \$174,133 in 2000 to \$185,011 in 2001, an increase of 6.2 percent. The 2000-2001 state change was 3.9 percent and the national change was 2.5 percent. The average annual growth rate from the 1991 estimate of \$131,207 to the 2001 estimate was 3.5 percent. The average annual growth rate for the state was 3.9 percent and for the nation was 5.6 percent.

Note: All income estimates with the exception of PCPI are in thousands of dollars, not adjusted for inflation.