

ALBERTA
SOUTHWEST

WILLOW CREEK NO. 26

Industry Report

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Executive Summary

Willow Creek No. 26 presents a local economy with a clear agricultural core and a business structure dominated by very small operations. In 2025, agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting remained the defining presence across employment, establishments, and industrial specialization, standing far ahead of every other sector in the municipality's economic profile. That strong base gives the area a distinct identity, but the broader picture is not one of simple stability. Several measures show uneven movement over time, including sharp swings in business establishment counts and mixed shifts across smaller employment sectors.

The labour force in 2021 was still anchored in agriculture, even as growth appeared in construction, manufacturing, health care and social assistance, and public administration, while transportation, wholesale trade, and mining-related resident employment declined. By 2025, employment continued to be concentrated in agriculture, with wholesale trade, manufacturing, and mining well behind it. Sector specialization was even more pronounced than employment alone suggests. Agriculture posted by far the strongest concentration, while mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction also stood out as a specialized sector after a strong one-year increase that contrasted with weaker longer-term change. Wholesale trade remained much smaller but showed unusually rapid growth in specialization over five years. Across the business base, agriculture also dominated establishment counts, with real estate and rental and leasing, construction, and professional services forming a much smaller secondary layer. The overall establishment count recovered strongly after a steep drop in 2023, but that rebound sits within a pattern of marked year-to-year volatility rather than steady expansion.

The structure of local business further reinforces that profile. Most establishments have no employees, and micro businesses account for a very large share of firms across most sectors, indicating an economy shaped mainly by independent operators and small-scale enterprises rather than larger employers. A few smaller industries posted sharp percentage gains or losses, but often from very limited job counts, which makes short-term changes look more dramatic than their absolute size would suggest. The result is a local economy that is highly specialized, strongly rooted in primary activity, and marked by uneven change around a durable agricultural centre.

Business Establishments

Willow Creek No. 26 recorded 498 business establishments in 2025, up 2.1% from 2024 and 32.5% above 2020. The count fell to 174 in 2023 before rebounding to 488 in 2024.

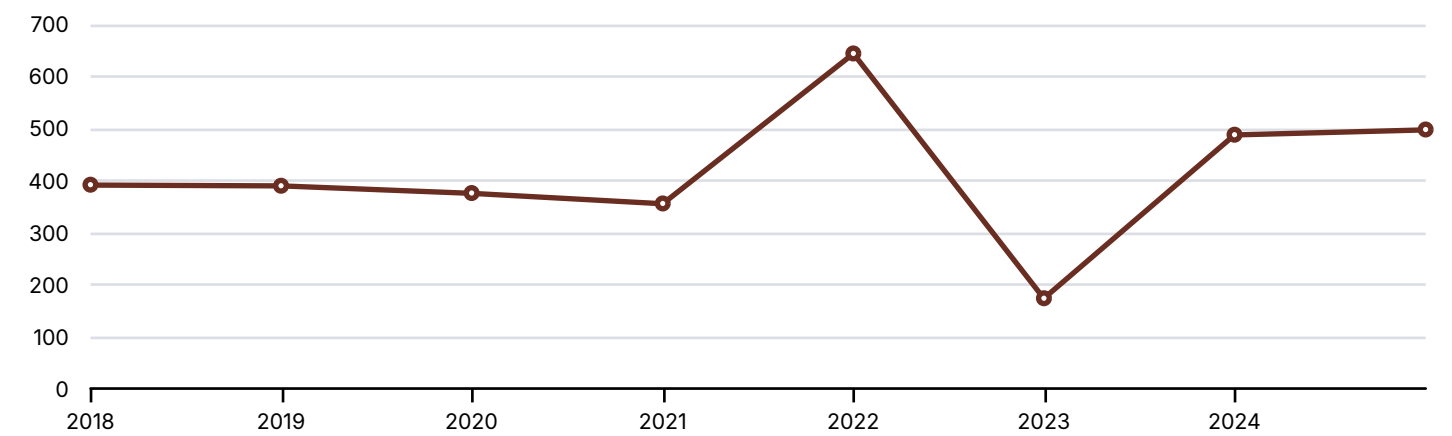


Figure 1.1: Shows the total number of active business establishments in the area, including those without employees. It helps indicate the scale and diversity of the local business base. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2018-2025)¹

Willow Creek No. 26 had 498 business establishments in 2025, marking a modest 2.0% increase from 2024. The series was relatively stable from 2018 to 2021, drifting from 392 to 356, before a sharp rise to 644 in 2022. That was followed by a steep drop to 174 in 2023, then a rebound to 488 in 2024 and 2025. The pattern points to pronounced year-to-year volatility rather than a steady trend.

Willow Creek No. 26 had 498 business establishments in 2025, continuing a recovery after a sharp dip in 2023. The count was 392 in 2018, slipped to 356 in 2021, jumped to 644 in 2022, fell to 174 in 2023, then rose to 488 in 2024 and 498 in 2025. That 2025 total sits below nearby larger places such as Pincher Creek (978) and Fort Macleod (726), but above smaller comparators like Hill Spring (66) and Cowley (122). Source: Statistics Canada, Business Register.

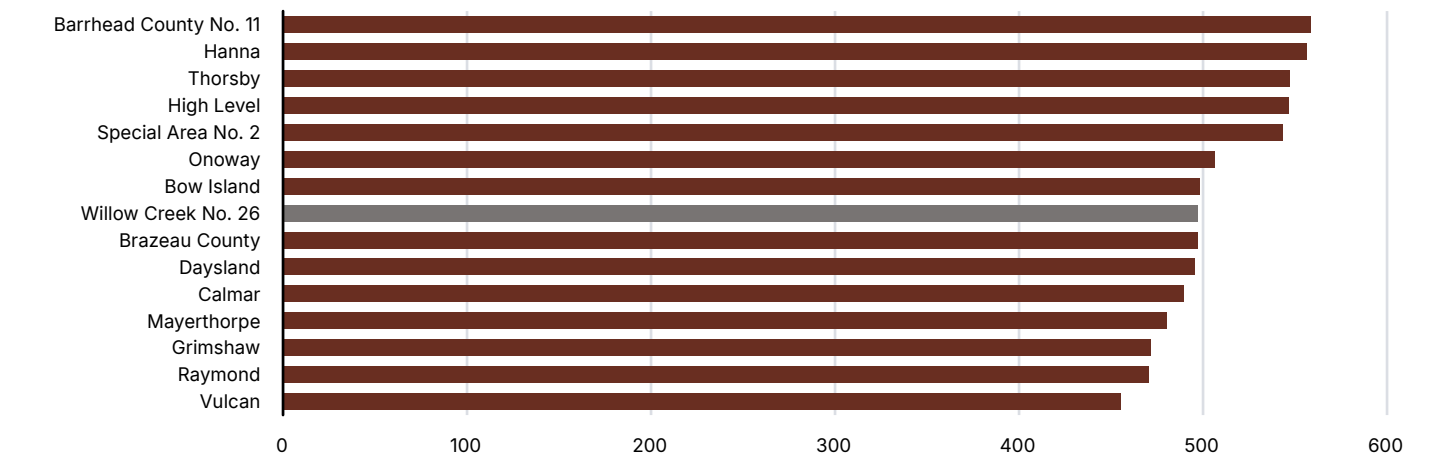


Figure 1.2: Comparison of Business Establishments with other locations (Willow Creek No. 26, 2025)¹

Resident Labour Force

Willow Creek No. 26’s resident labour force remained led by agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting at 995 people in 2021, down 6.1% from 2016. Public administration doubled to 60, the fastest five-year increase.

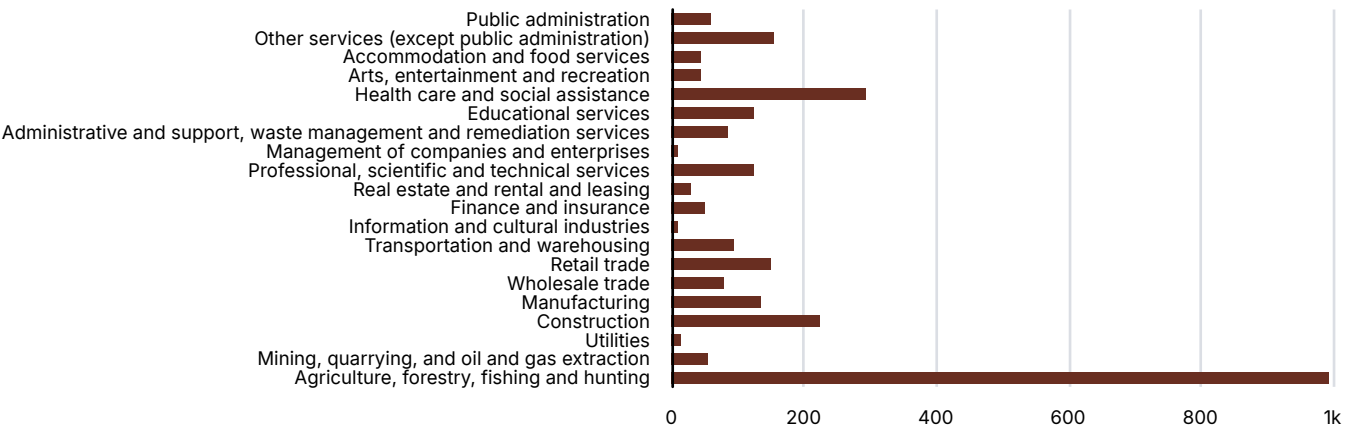


Figure 2.1: Shows the number of residents who are in the labour force. It helps indicate the size of the locally available workforce. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2021)²

Willow Creek No. 26’s resident labour force in 2021 was led by agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, with 995 people. Health care and social assistance followed at 295, while construction employed 225 residents. Over five years, construction rose 55.2%, manufacturing increased 58.8%, and health care and social assistance climbed 47.5%. Public administration doubled to 60, and administrative and support services grew 70%. By contrast, mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction fell 38.9%, and transportation and warehousing dropped 42.4%. Wholesale trade also declined 27.3%. The pattern shows a labour force still anchored in agriculture, alongside growth in several service and construction fields.

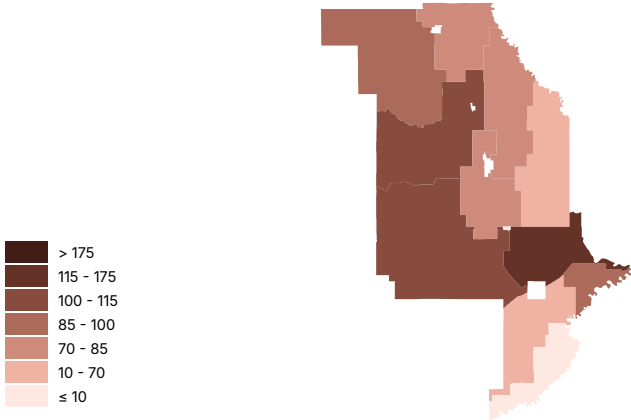


Figure 2.2: Distribution of Largest Group: Industry Sector - Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (Willow Creek No. 26)²

Willow Creek No. 26 had a labour force of 15 years and over that was concentrated in a few sectors in 2021. Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting was the largest group at 995 people, followed by health care and social assistance at 295 and construction at 225. Several other sectors were much smaller, including public administration and utilities at 60 and 15 people. Five-year change was mixed: construction rose 55.2%, health care and social assistance 47.5%, while transportation and warehousing fell 42.4%.

Star Sectors

Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction is Willow Creek No. 26’s largest group at 6.0 lq in 2025. It rose 115.3% in one year, though it remains 30.3% below its five-year level.

In Willow Creek No. 26, the star sectors profile is led by a sharp concentration in mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction, alongside a much smaller but fast-rising wholesale trade presence. Both sectors are identified in 2025 among employees aged 15 years and over. Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction records a location quotient of 6.0, with 115.3% growth over 1 year. Its 5-year change is -30.3%, showing that recent momentum differs from the longer-term direction. Wholesale trade has a location quotient of 1.9, with 11.2% growth over 1

year and a 5-year change of 3,778.7%. The contrast is notable: one sector is highly specialized, while the other shows a much lower level of specialization but extremely strong longer-term concentration growth. Together, they point to a local economy where star sectors are defined by both strong current clustering and uneven change over time. For this location, the pattern is less about a broad mix of industries than about a few sectors standing out clearly in specialization and momentum.

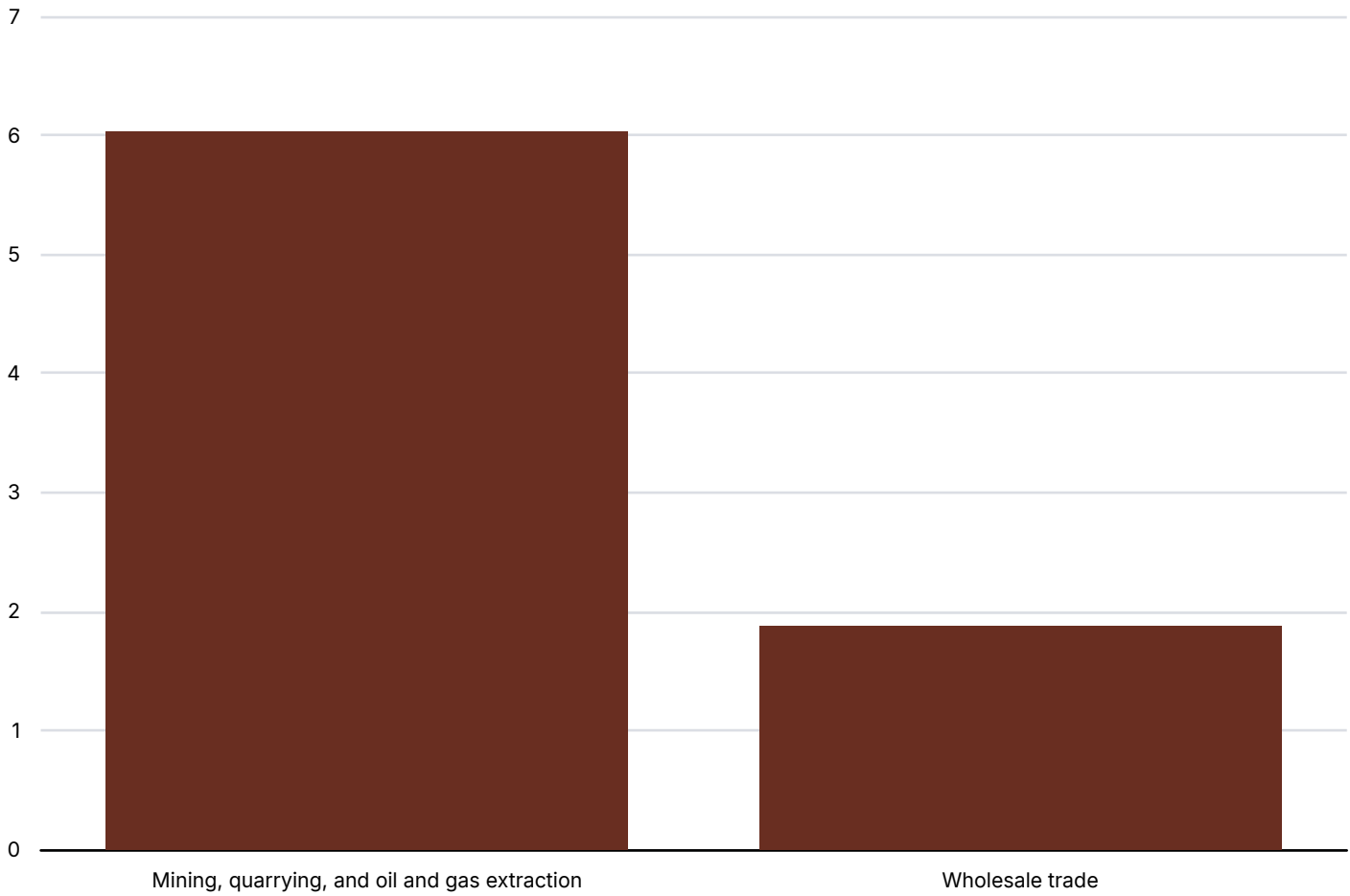


Figure 3.1: Shows major industry sectors where the local economy has strong specialization and increasing concentration or strong growth. Sectors are categorized based on specialization (location quotient) and recent employment growth or change in concentration. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2025)³

Employment by Sector

Agriculture remained the largest employer in Willow Creek No. 26 in 2025 with 288 people, despite a 3.4% annual decline. Wholesale trade followed at 42, while accommodation and food services rose to 8, up 700% from 2024.

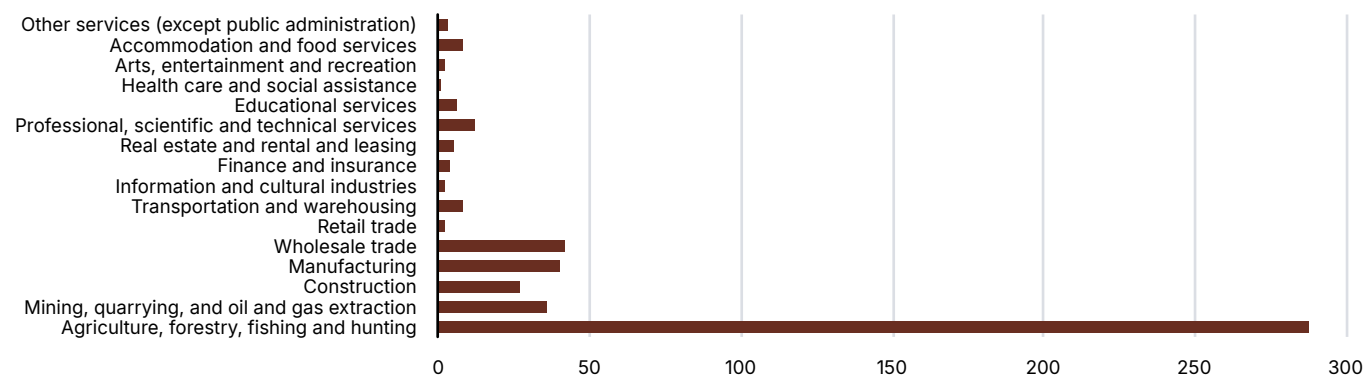


Figure 4.1: Shows how employment is distributed across industry sectors. It helps indicate which sectors account for the largest share of local jobs. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2025)⁴

In 2025, employment in Willow Creek No. 26 was concentrated in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, with 288 people, far ahead of every other sector. Mining, quarrying and oil and gas extraction had 36 jobs and manufacturing 40, while construction had 27. Recent movement was mixed: agriculture slipped 3.4% in a year, but accommodation and food services jumped 700% from a very small base.

Employment in Willow Creek No. 26 is concentrated in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, which accounts for 288 people in 2025. That is well ahead of any other sector, with wholesale trade at 42, manufacturing at 40, and mining, quarrying and oil and gas extraction at 36. Construction adds 27 people, while accommodation and food services, professional services and transportation are smaller but present. The pattern points to a local job base shaped by a single dominant sector, alongside a modest mix of supporting activities.



Figure 4.2: Distribution of Largest Group: Naics - Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (Willow Creek No. 26)⁴

Establishments by Sector

Willow Creek No. 26’s largest sector is agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, with 306 establishments in 2025. That count was down 1.0% from 2024 but up 58.6% over five years.

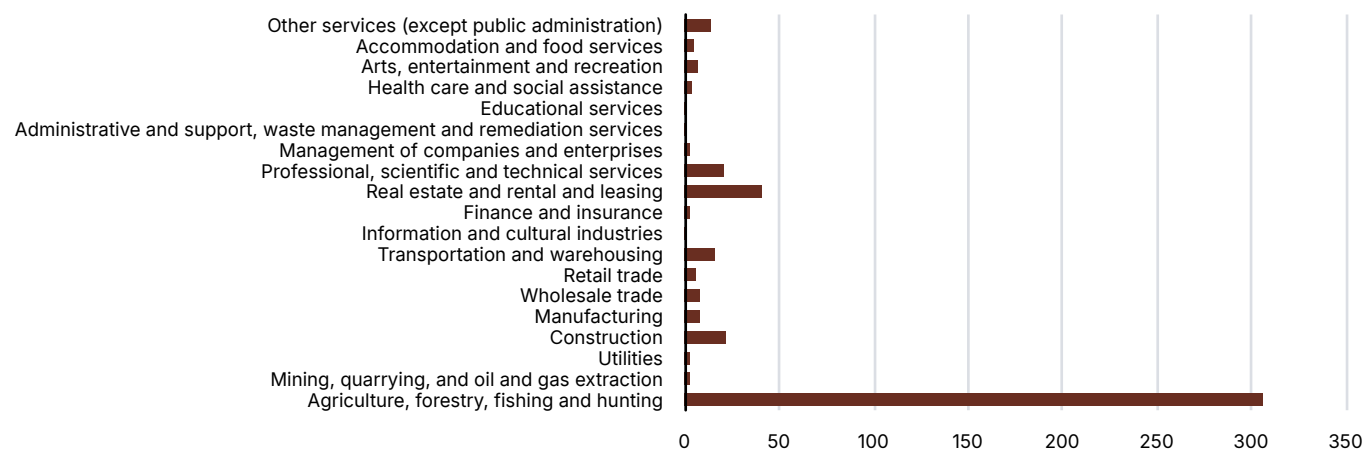


Figure 5.1: Shows how business establishments are distributed across sectors. It helps indicate the sector mix of the local business base. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2025)¹

Willow Creek No. 26’s business base in 2025 is strongly concentrated in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting. That sector accounts for 306 establishments, far more than any other part of the local mix. The next largest categories are real estate and rental and leasing at 41, construction at 22, and professional, scientific and technical services at 21. Recent change is mixed. Agriculture edged down 1.0% over the past year but is still up 58.5% over five years. Wholesale trade rose 33.3% in one year, while professional services increased 16.7%. Several smaller sectors also shifted modestly, suggesting a varied but uneven business structure.

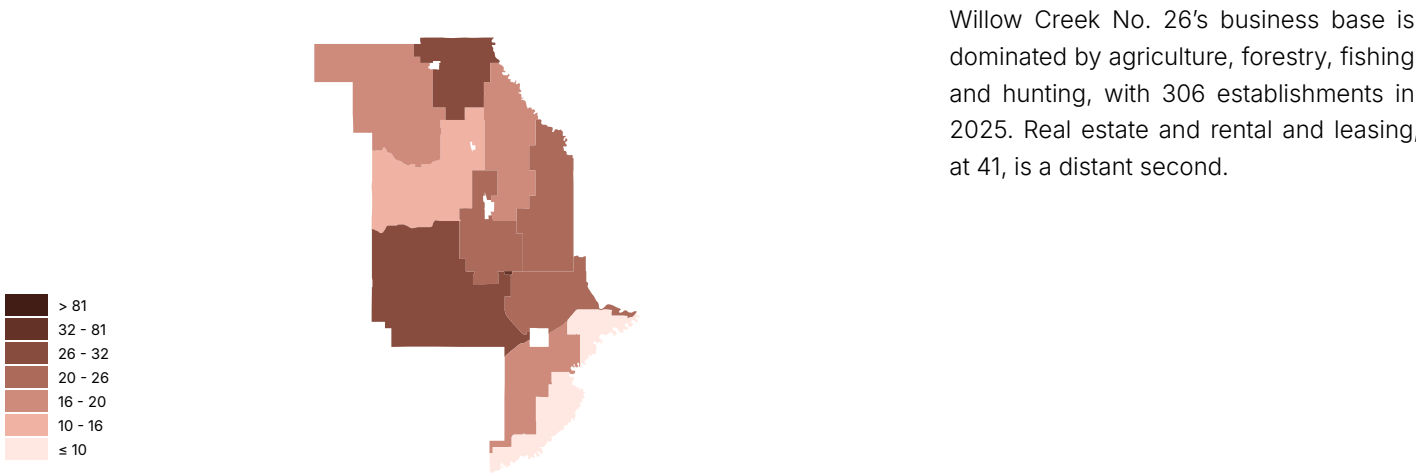


Figure 5.2: Distribution of Largest Group: Naics - Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (Willow Creek No. 26)¹

Establishments by Size

Willow Creek No. 26 remained dominated by establishments without employees, at 404 in 2025. That group rose 1.8% from 2024 and 32.5% over five years, while 1 to 4 employee firms reached 67.

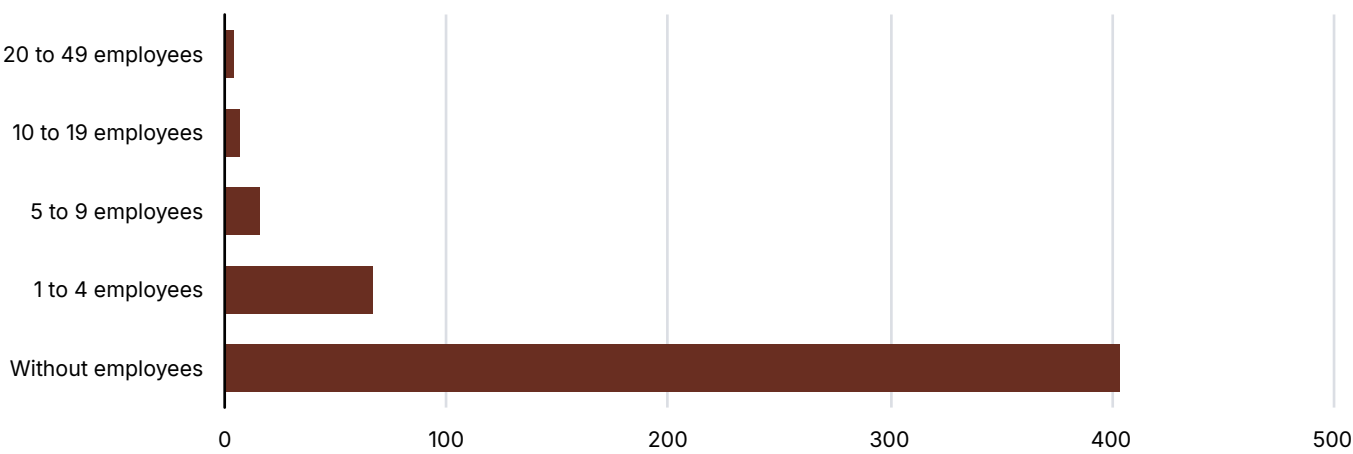
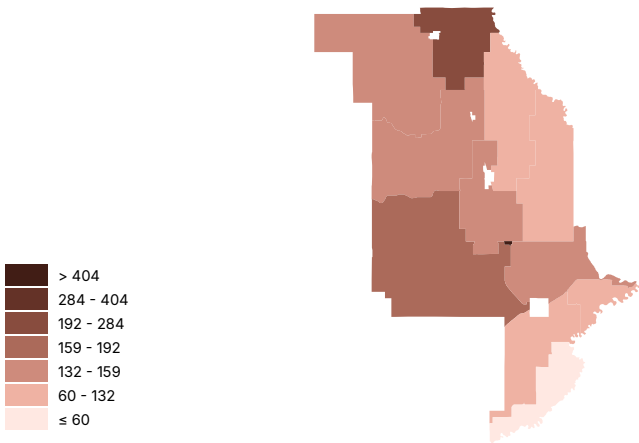


Figure 6.1: Shows how businesses are distributed by number of employees. It helps indicate whether the local economy is dominated by very small, small, or larger firms. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2025)¹

In 2025, Willow Creek No. 26’s business base was heavily concentrated among very small establishments. The largest category was businesses without employees, at 404, followed by 67 firms with 1 to 4 employees. Larger size classes were much less common, with 16 establishments in the 5 to 9 employee range, 7 in the 10 to 19 range, and 4 in the 20 to 49 range. Recent change was mixed. No-employee businesses rose 1.8% over one year and 32.5% over five years, while the 5 to 9 employee category grew 33.3% in the past year and 220% over five years. By contrast, 10 to 19 employee establishments fell 22.2% in the past year.



Willow Creek No. 26’s business base in 2025 is heavily weighted toward establishments with no employees. There are 404 such businesses, compared with 67 firms with 1 to 4 employees, 16 with 5 to 9 employees, 7 with 10 to 19 employees, and 4 with 20 to 49 employees. The pattern points to a local economy dominated by very small operations, with larger firms present only in limited numbers.

Figure 6.2: Distribution of Largest Group: Business Establishment Size - Without employees (Willow Creek No. 26)¹

Labour Market Gap

Willow Creek No. 26’s largest labour market gap in 2021 was in information and cultural industries at 0.5000. Manufacturing and public administration followed at 0.3100, while agriculture, retail trade, and public administration each were 0.2500.

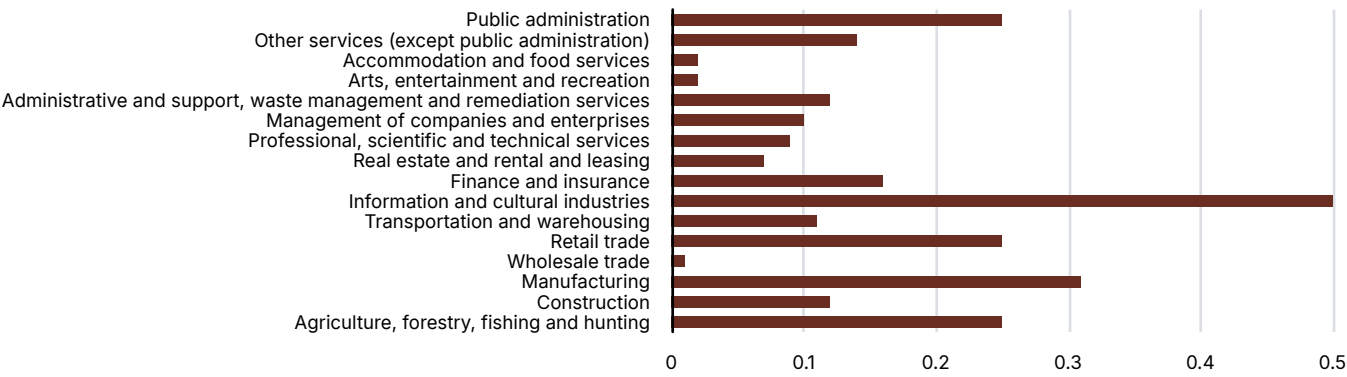


Figure 7.1: Shows the gap between the number of local jobs and the number of resident workers across all sectors. It helps indicate whether the area attracts workers in or sends workers out. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2021)⁵

In 2021, Willow Creek No. 26’s labour market gap was generally modest across sectors, with the largest values in information and cultural industries at 0.5 and manufacturing at 0.31. Agriculture, retail trade, and public administration were each at 0.25, while wholesale trade was the smallest at 0.01. The pattern is a single-year snapshot rather than a trend line, so it shows sector-by-sector balance in that year.

In 2021, Willow Creek No. 26 showed a labour market gap measured as a ratio across sectors, with the strongest values in information and cultural industries at 0.5 and manufacturing at 0.3. Agriculture, retail trade, and public administration were each at 0.3 or 0.2, while wholesale trade was near zero at 0.0. The pattern suggests the gap is uneven across sectors rather than concentrated in one area. By contrast, several service sectors remain modest, including accommodation and food services at 0.0.



Figure 7.2: Distribution of Largest Group: Industry Sector - Retail trade (Willow Creek No. 26)⁵

Largest Sectors

Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting employed the most people in Willow Creek No. 26 at 288 in 2025, down 3.4% from a year earlier but up 58.2% over five years.

Willow Creek No. 26’s employment profile in 2025 is led by agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, which is the clear largest sector among the industries listed. The remaining sectors are much smaller, suggesting a concentrated local employment base within the scope of employees aged 15 years and over. Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting employs 288 people. Wholesale trade follows with 42, manufacturing with 40, and mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction with 36. Recent movement is mixed: agriculture is down 3.4% over the past

year but up 58.2% over five years. The smaller sectors show sharper short-term changes. Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction rose 125.0% in one year, while manufacturing increased 21.2% and wholesale trade 7.7%. Over five years, though, mining and manufacturing remain below their earlier levels. Taken together, the data points to a dominant agricultural employment base with some shorter-term volatility in the other sectors.

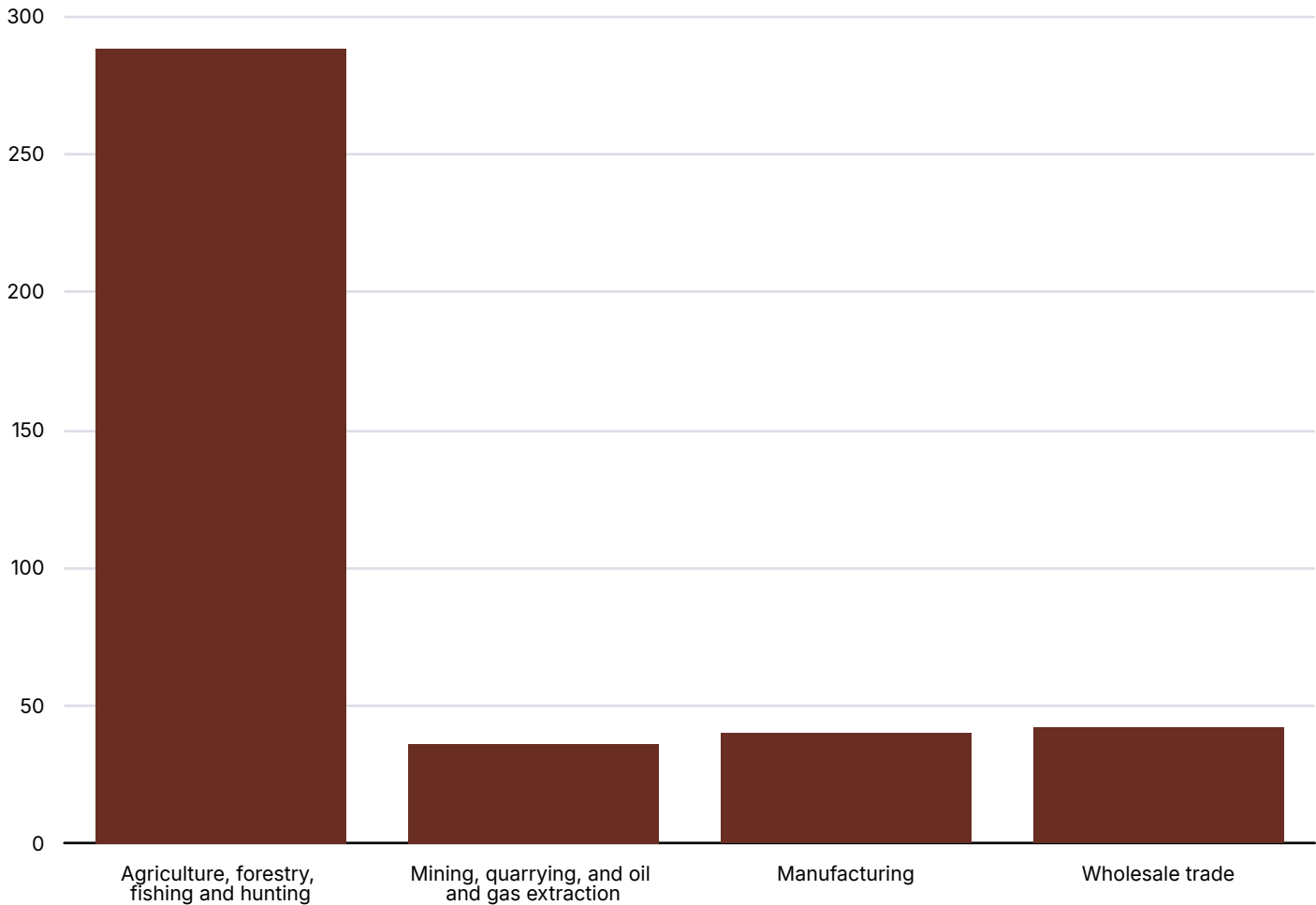


Figure 8.1: Shows the sectors employing the most people. It helps identify the largest pillars of the local economy. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2025)⁴

Anchor Sectors

Willow Creek No. 26’s largest anchor sector is agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, with a location quotient of 27.4 in 2025. It also rose 39.5% over five years, despite a 2.4% decline in the past year.

Willow Creek No. 26 shows a pronounced specialization in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting among employees aged 15 years and over. In 2025, the sector’s location quotient was 27.4, indicating a very strong concentration relative to the broader comparison area. The recent change is more mixed. The sector’s location quotient fell 2.4 percentage points over the past year, suggesting some easing in concentration. Even so, the five-year change was 39.5 percentage points, which points to a much stronger longer-term rise in specialization

than the short-term dip suggests. That combination makes the sector stand out as an anchor for the local economy, while also showing that its relative weight has not moved in a straight line. The short-term decline does not erase the much larger longer-term gain, but it does indicate some recent softening in concentration. The data support a picture of a highly specialized sector with a strong base, tempered by a recent pullback in its relative intensity.

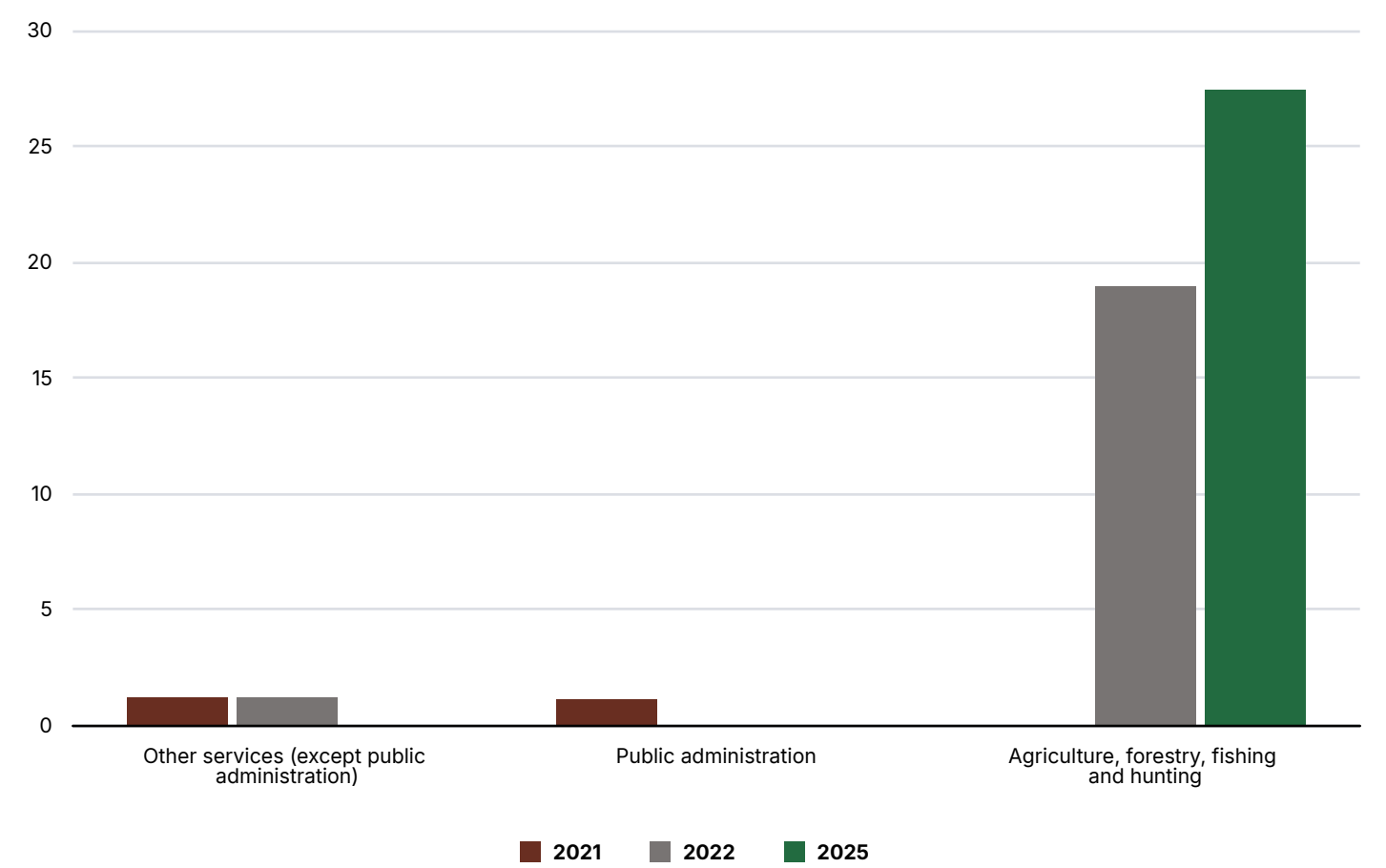


Figure 9.1: Shows major industry sectors where the local economy has strong specialization but relatively stable or declining concentration over time. Sectors are categorized based on specialization (location quotient) and recent employment growth or change in concentration. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2021-2025)³

Micro Establishments Share

In Willow Creek No. 26, micro establishments made up 100.0% of retail trade in 2025, up from 83.3% in 2020 and 20.1% above 2020 levels. Manufacturing was 75.0%, down from 90.0% in 2022.

In Willow Creek No. 26, the share of businesses with 0 to 4 employees is high across most sectors in 2025, though it varies by industry. Several sectors are at or near 100%, including utilities, retail trade, information and cultural industries, finance and insurance, management of companies and enterprises, administrative and support services, health care and social assistance, arts, entertainment and recreation, and other services. The lower shares appear in wholesale trade at 62.5%, mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction at 66.7%, manufacturing

at 75.0%, and accommodation and food services at 80.0%. Construction stands at 90.9%, while agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting is 95.4% and transportation and warehousing is 93.8%. Recent change is mixed. Retail trade rose 16.7 points in one year, while accommodation and food services fell 20.0 points. Wholesale trade also declined 6.3 points. The pattern suggests a business base dominated by very small firms, with a few sectors showing more movement than others.

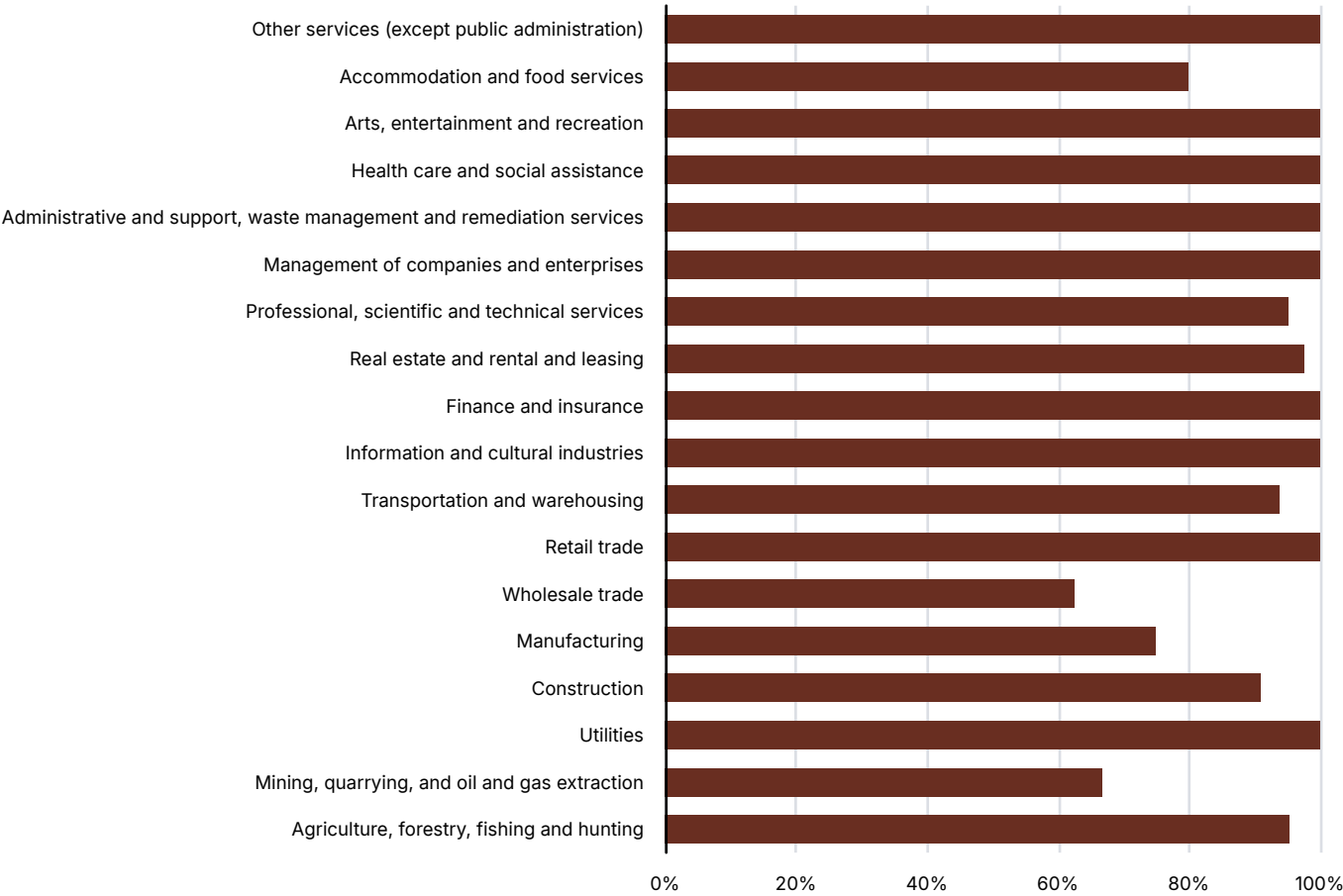


Figure 10.1: Shows the share of businesses with 0 to 4 employees. It helps indicate how much the local business base is made up of very small firms. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2025)⁶

Specialist Sectors (LQ)

Willow Creek No. 26 is most specialized in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, with an LQ of 27.4. Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction follows at 6.0, while manufacturing remains below average at 0.9.

In 2025, Willow Creek No. 26 showed clear specialization in a small set of employment sectors. Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting had the strongest concentration, followed by mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction. Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting posted a location quotient of 27.4, with a 2.4% one-year decline but a 39.5% five-year increase. Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction stood at 6.0, rising 115.3% over one year despite a 30.3% drop over five years. Manufac-

turing was much less concentrated at 0.9, while wholesale trade registered 1.9. Wholesale trade also showed the sharpest long-term shift in the table, with a 3,778.7% five-year increase and an 11.2% one-year gain. The pattern points to a local economy where specialization is heavily weighted toward primary-resource activity, with wholesale trade emerging as a smaller but fast-changing sector.

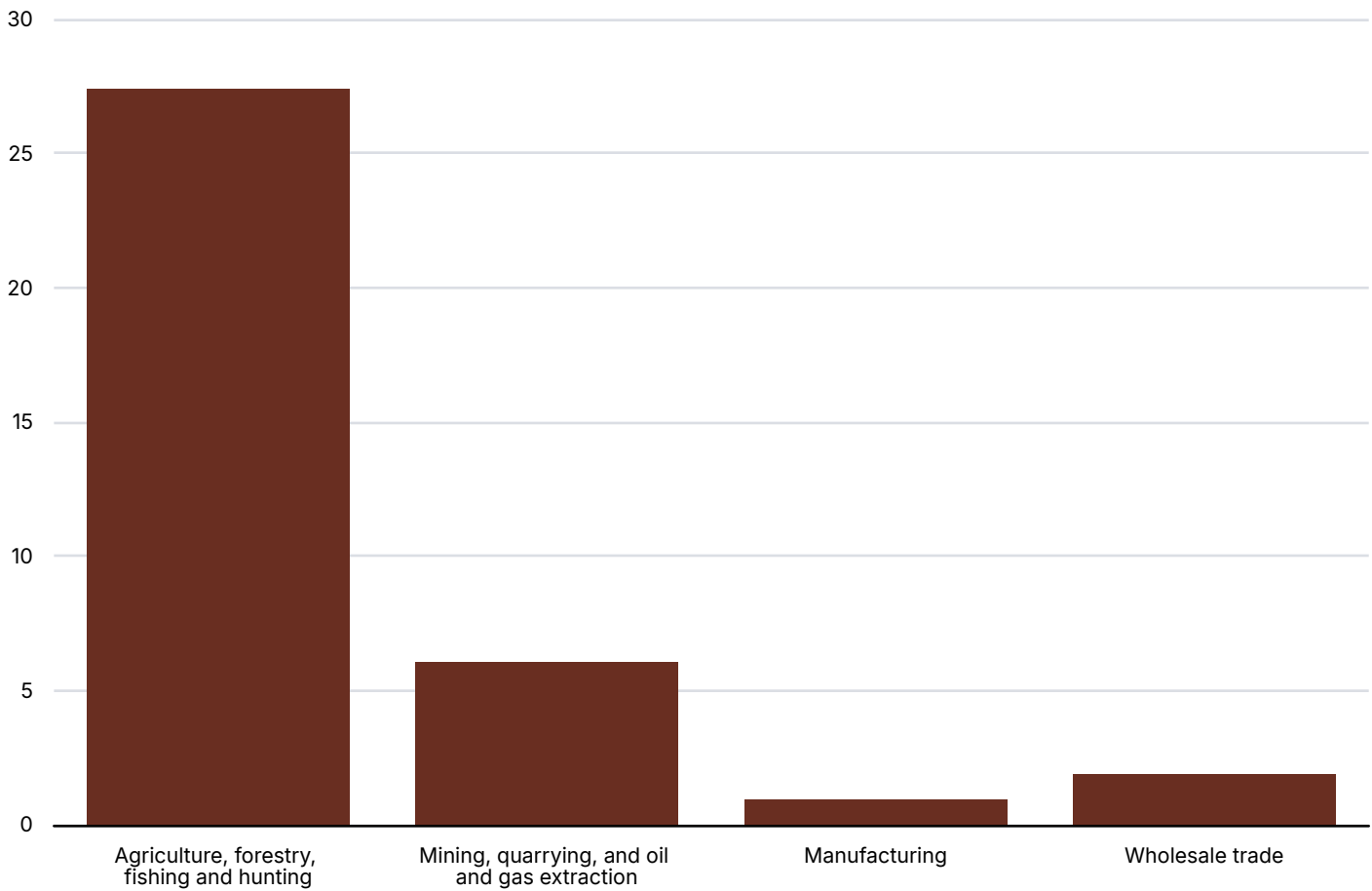


Figure 11.1: Shows sectors where the local economy has the highest level of specialization based on employment concentration compared with the national average. Sectors are categorized based on specialization (location quotient) and recent employment growth or change in concentration. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2025)³

Declining Industries

Residential building construction had the largest group in Willow Creek No. 26 at 6 people, down 40.0% from 2024 but up 200.0% over five years. Gasoline stations fell 71.4% to 2 people.

In Willow Creek No. 26, the declining industries profile for 2025 points to a small number of sectors with notable employment losses among employees aged 15 years and over. The clearest decline is in residential building construction, followed by gasoline stations and general freight trucking. Residential building construction employed 6 people and was down 40% over one year, though it remained 200% above its five-year level. Gasoline stations employed 2 people and fell 71.4% over one year. General freight trucking also employed 2 people and was

down 50% over one year. The pattern is concentrated in very small employment bases, which means even modest absolute changes can produce large percentage swings. The five-year gain in residential building construction stands apart from the recent drop, suggesting a shift after longer-term growth rather than a steady slide. Taken together, the data show that the main declines are limited to a few industries and are measured in small numbers of jobs.

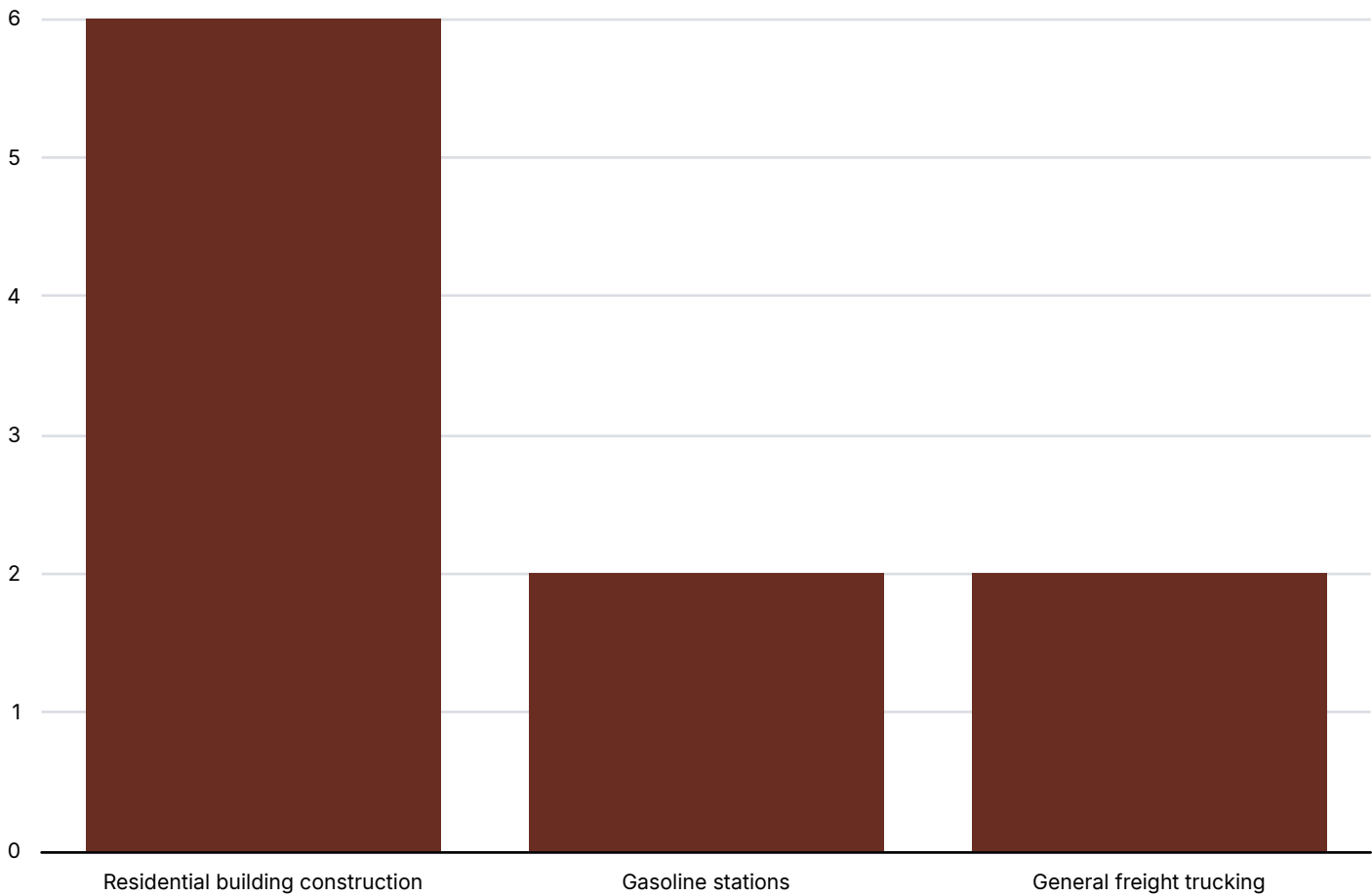


Figure 12.1: Shows industries where employment has decreased the most over the selected time period. It helps identify parts of the local economy that are losing jobs. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2025)⁴

Largest Industries

Cattle ranching and farming employed the most workers in Willow Creek No. 26 in 2025, with 128 people. Oilseed and grain farming followed at 79, while non-metallic mineral mining and quarrying rose 133.33% to 35.

In 2025, employment in Willow Creek No. 26 was concentrated in a small set of industries, with farming and ranching accounting for the largest job counts. Oilseed and grain farming led with 79 employees, followed by cattle ranching and farming at 128 employees and other animal production at 52. Together, these industries point to a local employment base shaped by agriculture. The remaining leading industries were smaller. Non-metallic mineral mining and quarrying employed 35 people, while animal food manufacturing employed 28. Recent changes were mixed: oilseed and grain farming rose 14.5% over

the year, cattle ranching and farming dipped 1.5%, and animal food manufacturing increased 33.3%. Longer-term movement varied more sharply. Oilseed and grain farming was up 125.7% over five years, cattle ranching and farming rose 75.3%, and animal food manufacturing increased 40%. Other animal production fell 1.9% over the same period, while five-year change was not available for mining and quarrying. The pattern suggests a local job mix with strong agricultural concentration and uneven growth across related industries.

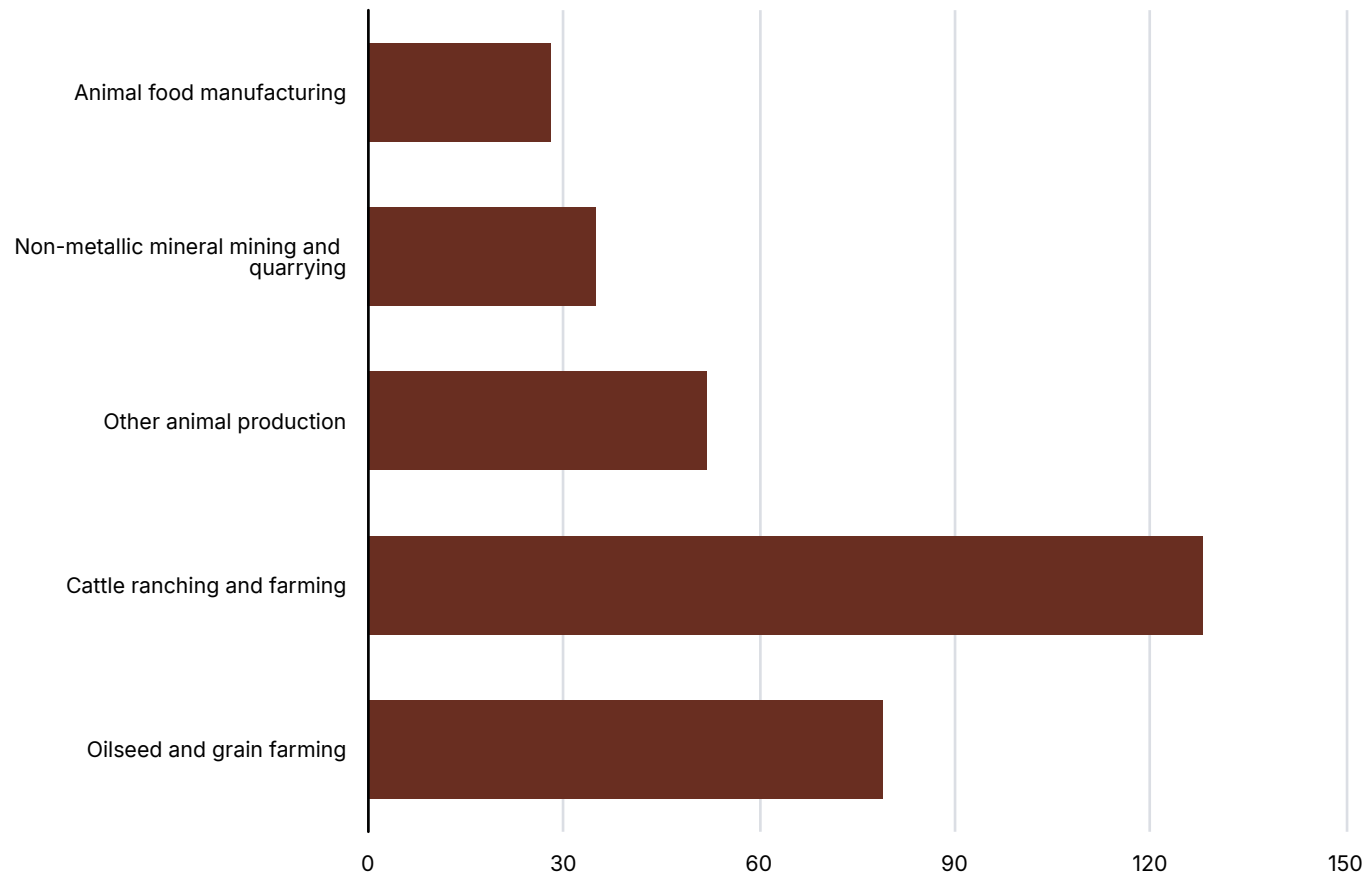


Figure 13.1: Shows the industries with the highest employment. It helps identify the biggest sources of jobs in the local economy. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2025)⁴

Data Sources

1. Statistics Canada, Business Register. Published in Jun 1, 2025.
2. Statistics Canada, Census Profile. Published in Dec 15, 2022.
3. Statistics Canada, Business Register; Localintel, Employment Location Quotient by Industry Estimates of Census Areas. Published in Mar 13, 2026.
4. Statistics Canada, Business Register; Localintel, Employment by Industry Estimates of Census Areas. Published in Mar 13, 2026.
5. Statistics Canada, Business Register; Statistics Canada, Census Profile; Localintel, Labour Market Gap Estimates of Census Areas. Published in Mar 13, 2026.
6. Statistics Canada, Business Register; Localintel, Micro Establishments Share of Census Areas. Published in Mar 13, 2026.

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