

ALBERTA
SOUTHWEST

WILLOW CREEK NO. 26

Economic Report

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Executive Summary

Willow Creek No. 26 presents a local economy anchored by work and business activity, but with signs of softer labour market conditions than five years earlier. In 2021, both the employment rate and the labour force participation rate had declined from 2016, even though each remained relatively high in absolute terms. Employment still dominated the labour force profile, with a large majority of residents aged 15 and over working and unemployment small, yet the broader picture was less steady than that snapshot alone suggests. Work activity shifted unevenly over the same period, with full-year, full-time work rising modestly, part-year or part-time work falling, and the number of people who did not work increasing sharply.

The strongest structural theme is concentration. Employment in 2025 was led overwhelmingly by agriculture, with much smaller totals in wholesale trade, manufacturing, mining, and construction, leaving the job base narrow and weighted toward primary and goods-producing activity. The business base followed a similar pattern. Agriculture accounted for by far the largest share of establishments, and most local businesses were very small, especially firms with no employees. That profile points to an economy shaped more by nonemployer and microbusiness activity than by larger firms. At the same time, the establishment count was not static. After a sharp swing that pushed the total down in 2023, the number of active businesses rebounded strongly in 2024 and 2025, leaving the longer five-year trend positive but clearly volatile rather than smooth.

Income patterns add a final layer to this picture. Household after-tax income in 2021 was spread across a broad range but clustered most heavily in the middle and upper-middle brackets, with a notable presence in higher household income groups as well. Individual incomes looked different: both after-tax income and employment income were concentrated in lower to middle ranges, with counts tapering steadily at higher income levels. That combination suggests a municipality with a still-active economic base and a sizeable presence of working households, but one in which employment and business activity are concentrated in a limited set of sectors and recent labour market conditions have become less robust than they were in 2016.

Employment Rate

Willow Creek No. 26’s employment rate was 68.7% in 2021, down from 71.8% in 2016. That five-year decline of 4.3% shows a lower share of the labour force employed.

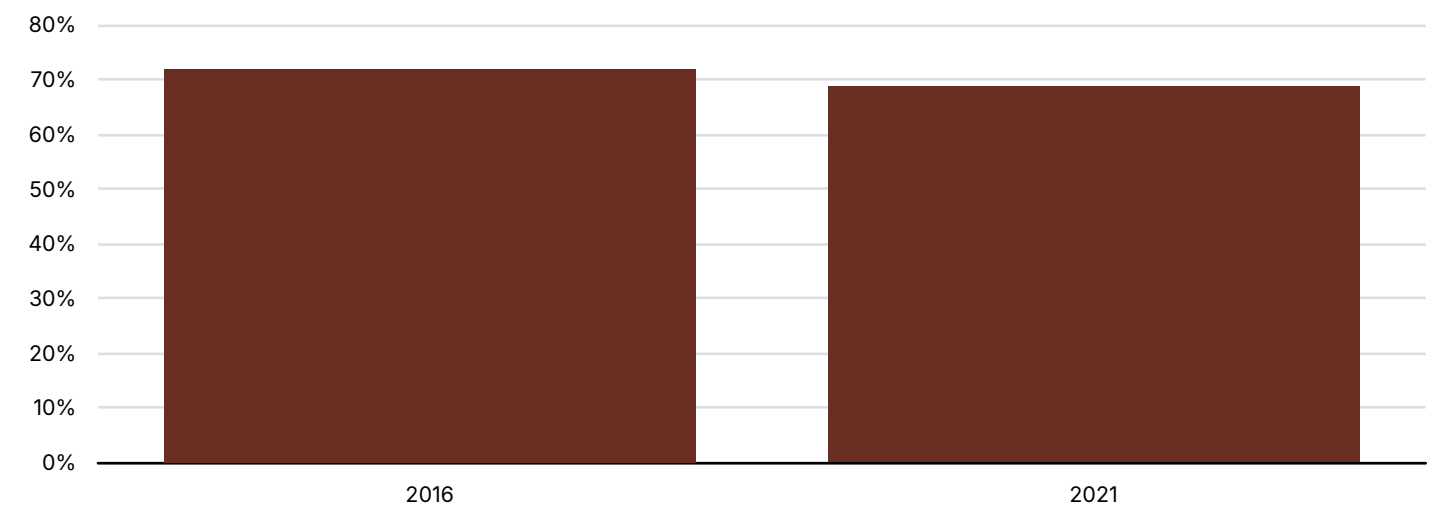
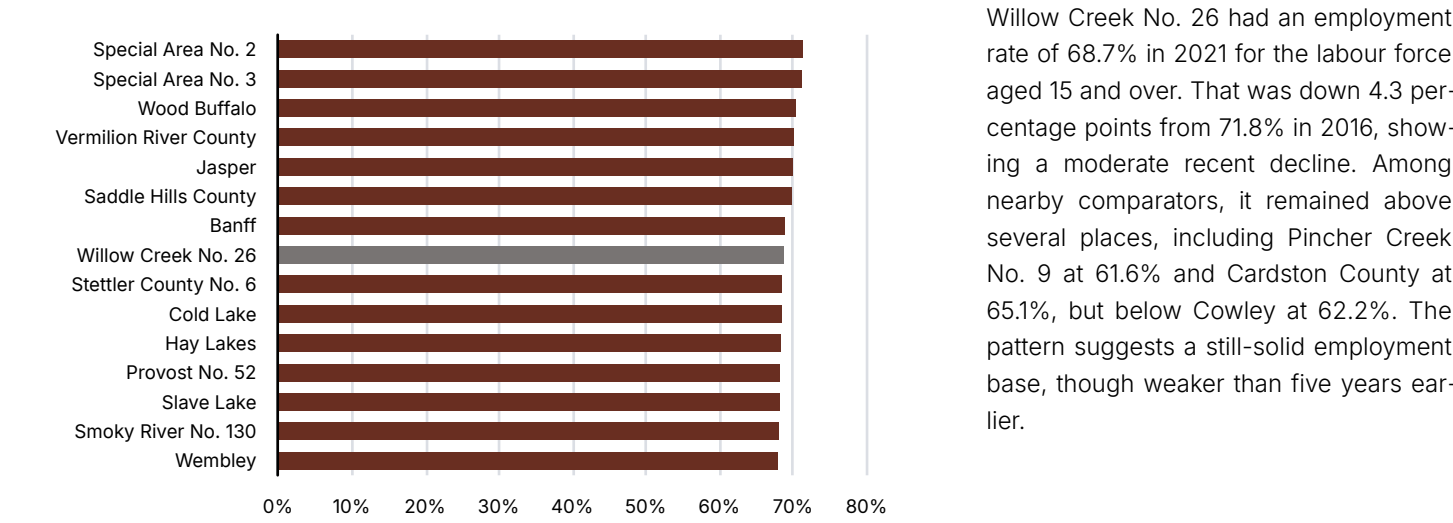


Figure 1.1: Shows the share of the working-age population that is employed. It helps indicate overall labour market health and how fully local talent is being used. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2016-2021)¹

Willow Creek No. 26’s employment rate fell over the 2016 to 2021 period, suggesting a softer labour market for the working-age population in that span. The share employed was 71.8% in 2016 and 68.7% in 2021, a decline of 4.3%. That change points to a modest downward trend rather than a sharp shift. With only these two census points available, the data show direction clearly but do not explain why the rate changed. The main pattern is steady weakening in employment participation over time.



Willow Creek No. 26 had an employment rate of 68.7% in 2021 for the labour force aged 15 and over. That was down 4.3 percentage points from 71.8% in 2016, showing a moderate recent decline. Among nearby comparators, it remained above several places, including Pincher Creek No. 9 at 61.6% and Cardston County at 65.1%, but below Cowley at 62.2%. The pattern suggests a still-solid employment base, though weaker than five years earlier.

Figure 1.2: Comparison of Employment Rate with other locations (Willow Creek No. 26, 2021)¹

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.

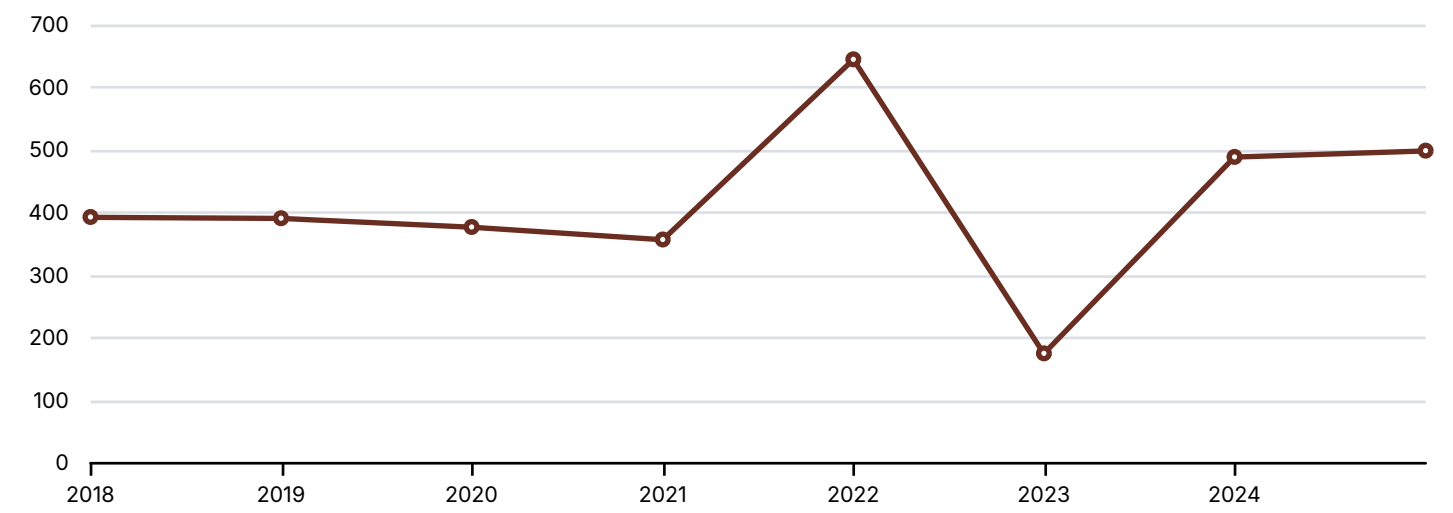
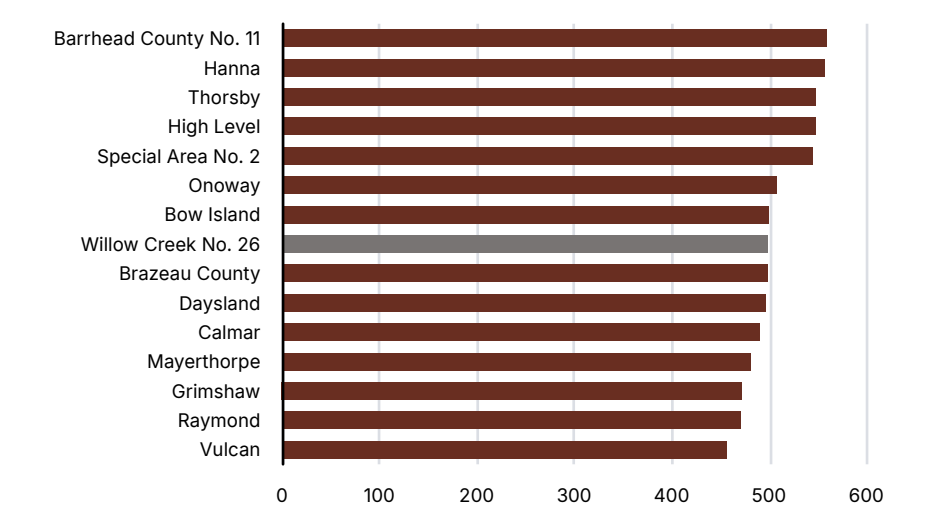


Figure 2.1: Shows the total number of active business establishments in the area, including those without employees. It helps indicate the scale and diversity of the local business base. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2018-2025)²

Willow Creek No. 26 had 498 active business establishments in 2025, a modest increase from 488 in 2024. The recent pattern is stronger than the longer dip seen in 2023, when the count fell to 174 after reaching 644 in 2022. Before that swing, the total was relatively steady at 392 in 2018, 390 in 2019, 376 in 2020, and 356 in 2021. The five-year change in 2025 was 32.5%, showing recovery from the earlier low, even though the series remains volatile. Source: Statistics Canada, Business Register.



Willow Creek No. 26 had 498 active business establishments in 2025, up from 488 in 2024 and well above 174 in 2023 after a sharp swing in the series. The local total remains smaller than nearby larger places such as Pincher Creek (978) and Fort Macleod (726), but higher than some smaller comparators, including Cowley (122) and Glenwood (44). The pattern points to a business base that is modest in size but still volatile year to year.

Figure 2.2: Comparison of Business Establishments with other locations (Willow Creek No. 26, 2025)²

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.

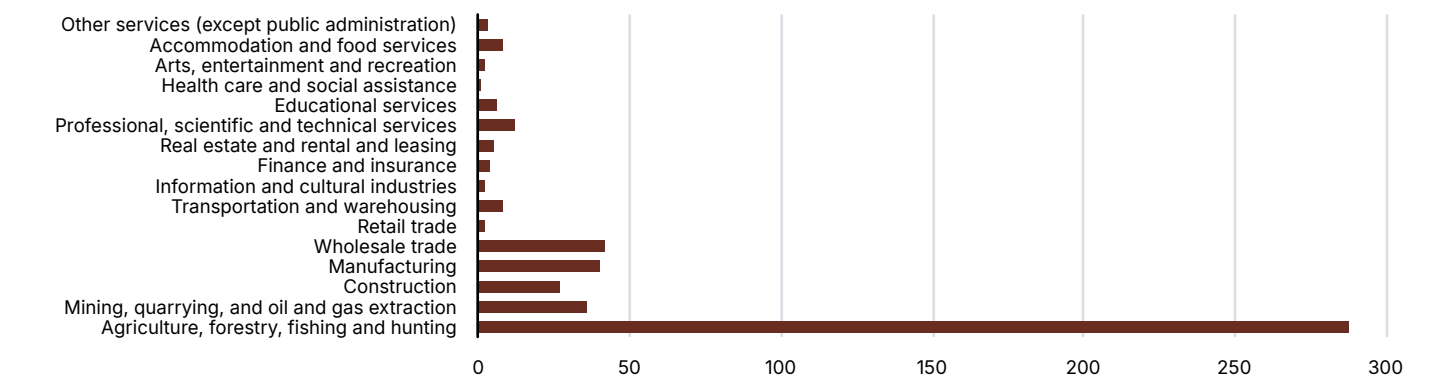


Figure 3.1: Shows how employment is distributed across industry sectors. It helps indicate which sectors account for the largest share of local jobs. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2025)³

Willow Creek No. 26 had 15+ employment concentrated in agriculture in 2025, with 288 workers, far more than any other sector. Wholesale trade and professional, scientific and technical services followed at 42 and 12, while mining and construction held 36 and 27 jobs. Several sectors moved sharply over time, including wholesale trade up 4,100% over five years and accommodation and food services up 700%. At the same time, retail trade fell to 2 jobs, and health care and social assistance dropped to 1, showing a narrow and uneven employment mix.

In 2025, employment in Willow Creek No. 26 was concentrated in a few sectors, led by agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting with 288 jobs. Wholesale trade, manufacturing, and mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction followed at 42, 40, and 36 jobs respectively, while construction accounted for 27. Smaller service sectors included accommodation and food services at 8 and health care and social assistance at 1. The pattern points to a job base shaped mainly by primary and goods-producing activity.



Figure 3.2: Distribution of Largest Group: Naics - Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (Willow Creek No. 26)³

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.

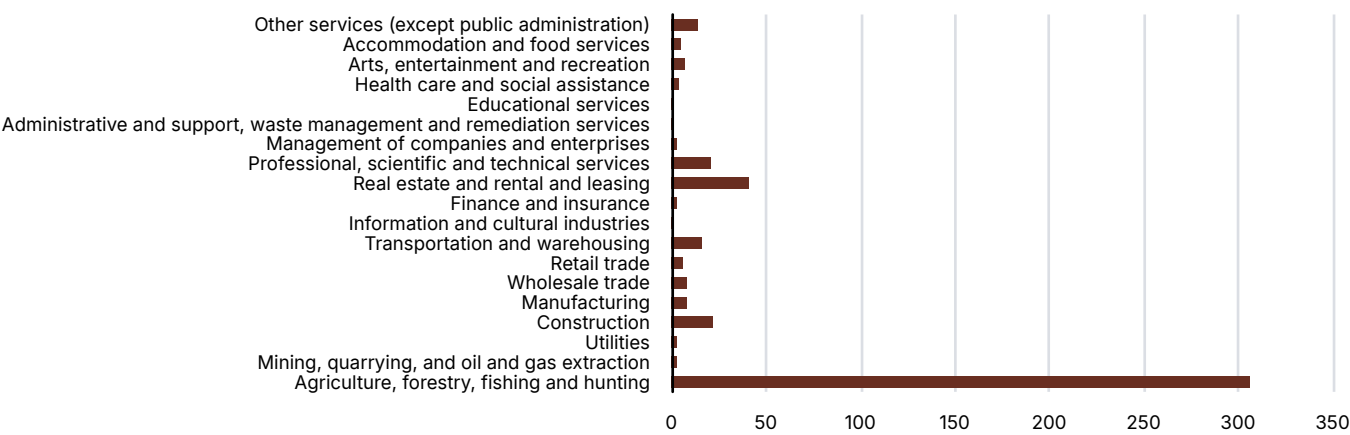
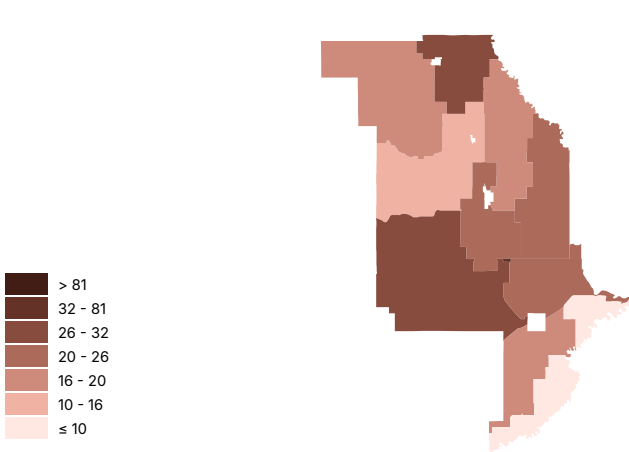


Figure 4.1: Shows how business establishments are distributed across sectors. It helps indicate the sector mix of the local business base. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2025)²

Willow Creek No. 26’s business establishments in 2025 are concentrated in a few sectors, led by agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting with 306 businesses. Real estate and rental and leasing follows at 41, while construction has 22 and professional, scientific and technical services has 21. Recent change is mixed. Wholesale trade rose 33.3%, accommodation and food services gained 25%, and professional services increased 16.7%. By contrast, manufacturing fell 11.1% and retail trade dropped 14.3%. The longer trend is stronger in some sectors, especially agriculture, up 58.5% over five years, and wholesale trade, up 100%. This points to a local business base that is broad but still dominated by primary-sector establishments.



Willow Creek No. 26 had 306 agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting establishments in 2025, far more than any other sector. Real estate and rental and leasing ranked second with 41, while construction had 22 and professional services 21.

Figure 4.2: Distribution of Largest Group: Naics - Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (Willow Creek No. 26)²

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.

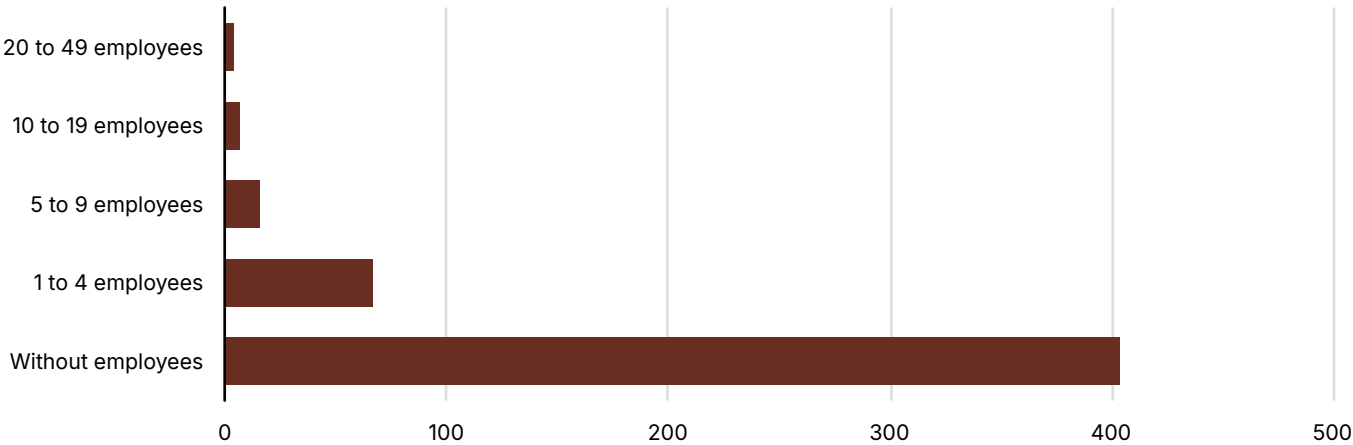
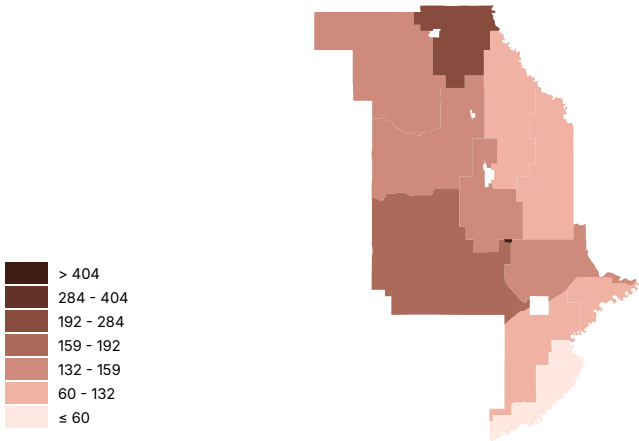


Figure 5.1: Shows how businesses are distributed by number of employees. It helps indicate whether the local economy is dominated by very small, small, or larger firms. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2025)²

In 2025, Willow Creek No. 26’s business base was concentrated in very small establishments. Firms without employees accounted for 404 businesses, far more than any other size group, while 67 businesses had 1 to 4 employees. Larger categories were much smaller: 16 firms had 5 to 9 employees, 7 had 10 to 19, and 4 had 20 to 49. The recent trend was mixed. The no-employee category rose 1.8% over the past year and 32.5% over five years, while 1 to 4 employee firms increased 1.5% and 21.8% over the same periods. The 5 to 9 employee group grew fastest, up 33.3% in one year and 220% over five years, though from a small base.



Willow Creek No. 26 is dominated by very small businesses. In 2025, 404 establishments had no employees, far more than the 67 with 1 to 4 employees. Smaller firms above that scale were much fewer: 16 had 5 to 9 employees, 7 had 10 to 19, and 4 had 20 to 49. The pattern points to a local business base concentrated in nonemployer and microbusiness operations, with larger employers limited.

Figure 5.2: Distribution of Largest Group: Business Establishment Size - Without employees (Willow Creek No. 26)²

Household After-Tax Income

Willow Creek No. 26’s largest household income group remained \$60,000 to \$69,999 at 190 households in 2021, unchanged from 2016. The fastest growth was under \$5,000, rising 60% to 40 households.

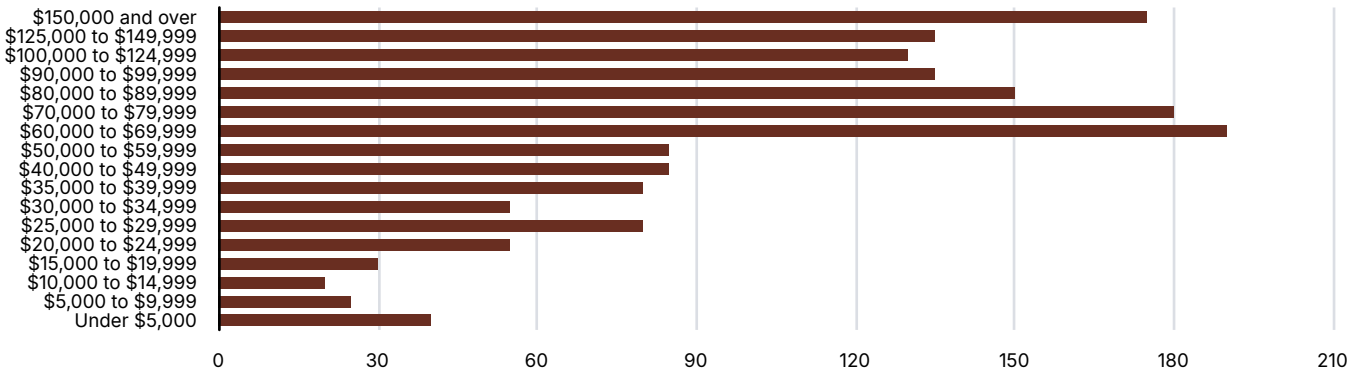


Figure 6.1: Shows household income after taxes across income groups. It helps indicate the resources households have available for day-to-day living after taxes are paid. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2021)¹

In 2021, household after-tax income in Willow Creek No. 26 was spread across a wide range, with the largest counts clustered in middle and upper-middle brackets. The biggest groups were \$60,000 to \$69,999 at 190 households, \$70,000 to \$79,999 at 180, and \$150,000 and over at 175. Five-year change was mixed. Several brackets grew, including under \$5,000, up 60%, \$100,000 to \$124,999, up 44.4%, and \$70,000 to \$79,999, up 38.5%, while some lower and mid-range groups declined. Source: Statistics Canada, Census Profile.

In 2021, Willow Creek No. 26’s household after-tax income profile was concentrated in the middle and upper-middle ranges, with 190 households in the \$60,000 to \$69,999 group and 180 in the \$70,000 to \$79,999 group. Higher-income brackets also remained sizable, including 175 households at \$150,000 and over and 130 in the \$100,000 to \$124,999 range. The smaller low-income counts suggest a distribution tilted toward moderate incomes. Source: Statistics Canada, Census Profile.



Figure 6.2: Distribution of Largest Group: Income Group Household - \$60,000 to \$69,999 (Willow Creek No. 26)¹

Individual After-Tax Income

Willow Creek No. 26’s largest income group was \$20,000 to \$29,999, with 1,395 people. Counts then fell across higher brackets, reaching 115 people in the \$125,000 and over group.

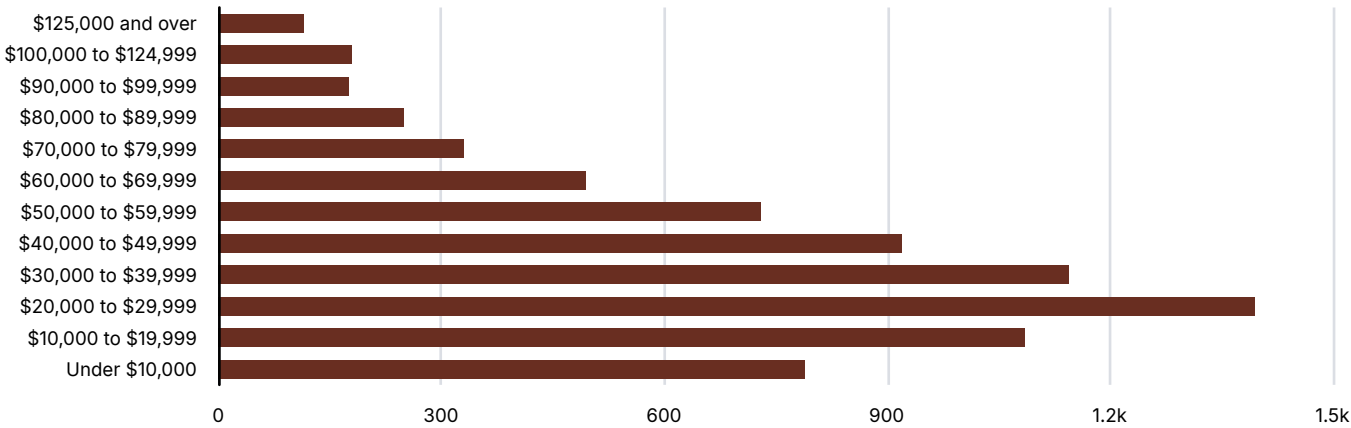
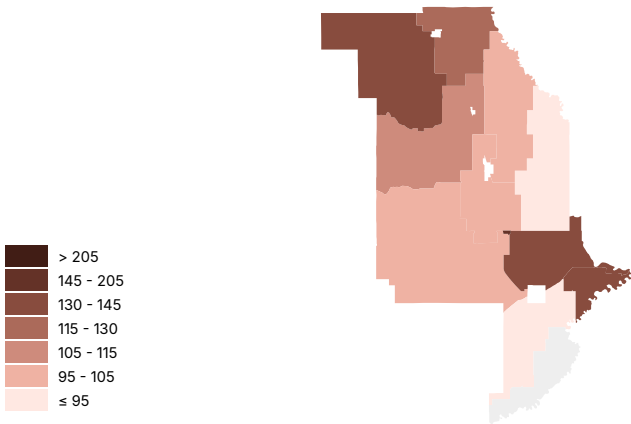


Figure 7.1: Shows individual after-tax income across income groups. It helps indicate the level of disposable income people have after taxes are paid. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2021)¹

In 2021, after-tax income in Willow Creek No. 26 was concentrated in the lower and middle income groups for people aged 15 and over in private households. The largest count was in the \$20,000 to \$29,999 bracket, with 1,395 people, followed by \$10,000 to \$19,999 at 1,085 and \$30,000 to \$39,999 at 1,145. Fewer residents were counted at higher income levels, including 180 in the \$100,000 to \$124,999 range and 115 at \$125,000 and over. The pattern shows a broad tapering as income rises, with the smallest counts in the upper brackets. That distribution suggests the local income profile is weighted toward modest after-tax incomes rather than the highest ranges.



In Willow Creek No. 26, individual after-tax income in 2021 was concentrated in the lower-to-middle ranges for people aged 15 and over in private households. The largest group was \$20,000 to \$29,999, with 1,395 people, followed by \$30,000 to \$39,999 at 1,145 and \$10,000 to \$19,999 at 1,085. Higher-income groups were much smaller, including 115 at \$125,000 and over.

Figure 7.2: Distribution of Largest Group: Income Group Individual - \$20,000 to \$29,999 (Willow Creek No. 26)¹

Individual Employment Income

Willow Creek No. 26’s largest income group was under \$5,000, with 1,220 people. The next largest was \$10,000 to \$19,999 at 885, while counts fell to 180 in both \$125,000 and over and \$80,000 to \$89,999.

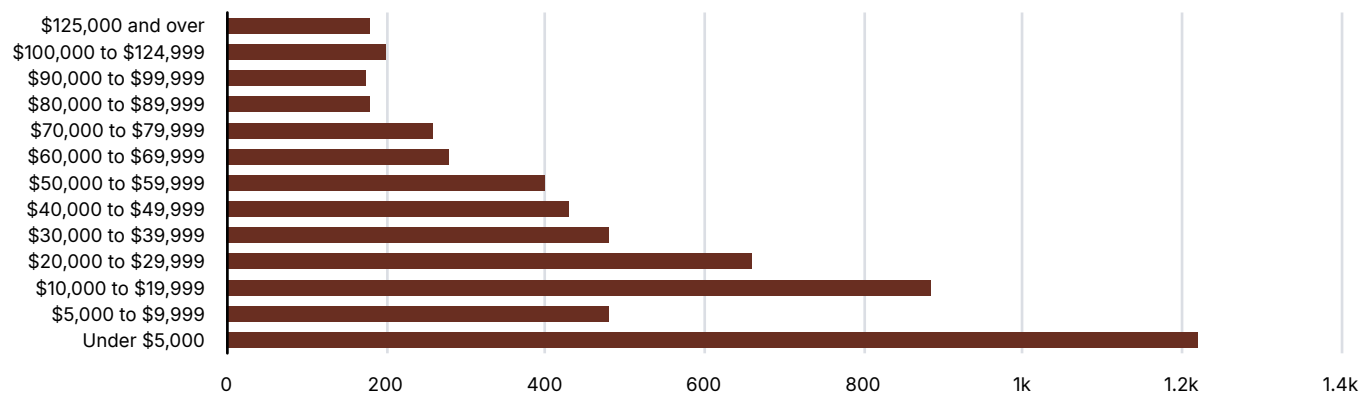


Figure 8.1: Shows individual employment income across income groups. It helps indicate how earnings from work are distributed among residents. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2021)¹

In 2021, individual employment income in Willow Creek No. 26 was concentrated at the lower end of the distribution for residents aged 15 and over in private households. The largest group earned under \$5,000, with 1,220 people. Counts then tapered across higher income bands, from 885 people at \$10,000 to \$19,999 to 180 each at \$80,000 to \$89,999 and \$125,000 and over. Source: Statistics Canada, Census Profile.

In 2021, individual employment income in Willow Creek No. 26 was concentrated at the lower end. The largest group was under \$5,000, with 1,220 people, followed by \$10,000 to \$19,999 at 885 and \$20,000 to \$29,999 at 660. Higher-income counts were smaller: 200 people earned \$100,000 to \$124,999 and 180 earned \$125,000 and over. The pattern suggests a distribution weighted toward modest earnings, with fewer residents in the upper income bands.



Figure 8.2: Distribution of Largest Group: Income Group Individual - Under \$5,000 (Willow Creek No. 26)¹

Labour Force Participation Rate

Willow Creek No. 26’s labour force participation rate was 71.0% in 2021, down 4.7% from 74.5% in 2016. The rate remained above seven in ten residents over the period.

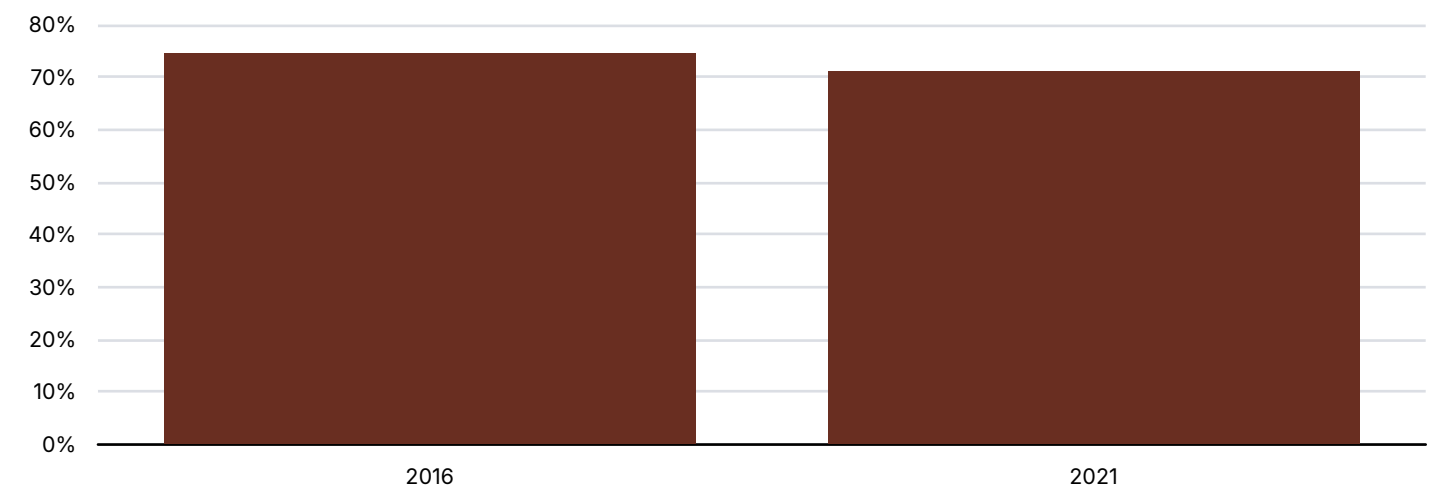
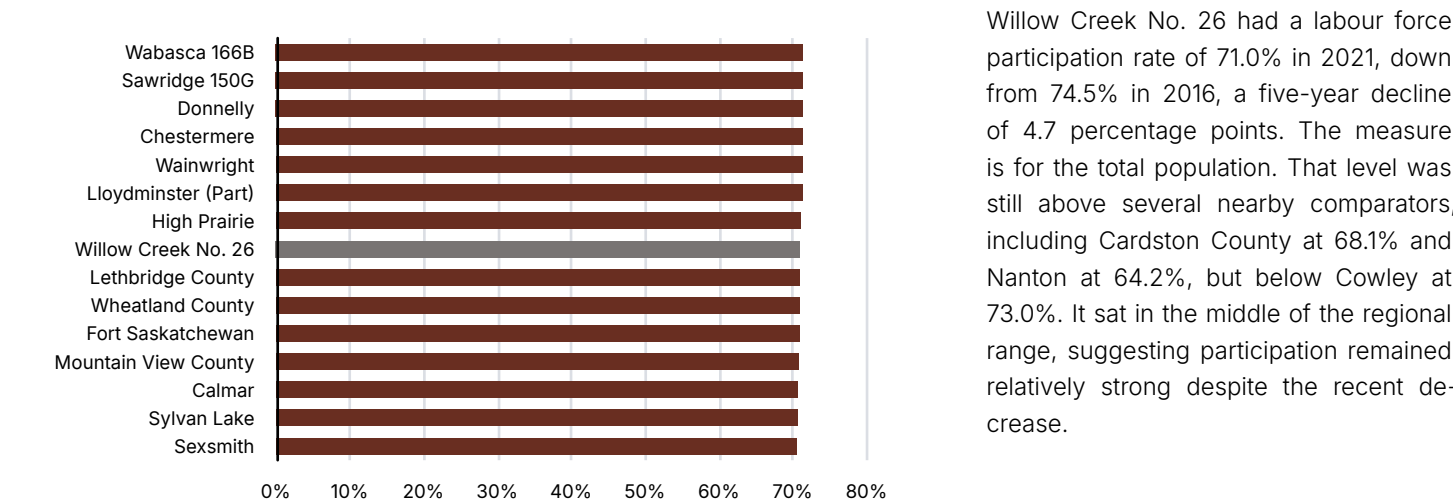


Figure 9.1: Shows the share of the working-age population that is employed or actively looking for work. It helps indicate the level of labour market engagement. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2016-2021)¹

Willow Creek No. 26 had a labour force participation rate of 71.0% in 2021, meaning just over seven in ten people in the working-age population were employed or looking for work. That was down from 74.5% in 2016, a decline of 3.5 percentage points over the five-year period. The 2021 figure places the community at a moderately high participation level, but the recent direction was downward rather than stable or rising. With only two census points available, the clearest pattern is a modest softening in labour market engagement between 2016 and 2021.



Willow Creek No. 26 had a labour force participation rate of 71.0% in 2021, down from 74.5% in 2016, a five-year decline of 4.7 percentage points. The measure is for the total population. That level was still above several nearby comparators, including Cardston County at 68.1% and Nanton at 64.2%, but below Cowley at 73.0%. It sat in the middle of the regional range, suggesting participation remained relatively strong despite the recent decrease.

Figure 9.2: Comparison of Labour Force Participation Rate with other locations (Willow Creek No. 26, 2021)¹

Labour Force Status

Employed residents were the largest group in Willow Creek No. 26 in 2021 at 2,695 people, up from 2,560 in 2016. Those not in the labour force also increased to 1,135, while unemployment held at 95.

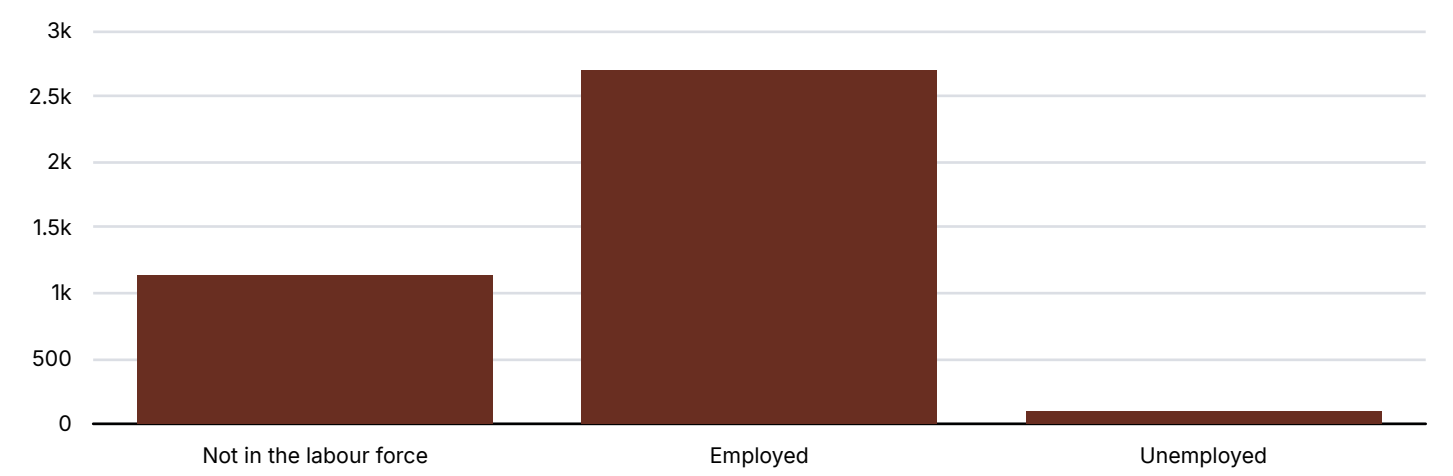


Figure 10.1: Shows whether residents are employed, unemployed, or not in the labour force. It helps indicate how people are participating in the labour market. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2021)¹

In 2021, labour force status in Willow Creek No. 26 was shaped by a large employed population, alongside a smaller group not in the labour force and a very small unemployed count. Among residents aged 15 years and over, 2,695 people were employed, 1,135 were not in the labour force, and 95 were unemployed. The distribution suggests a labour market profile where employment accounted for most observed status categories, while unemployment remained limited in size. With only a single year provided, the data shows a snapshot rather than a trend, so changes over time cannot be assessed from this dataset alone.

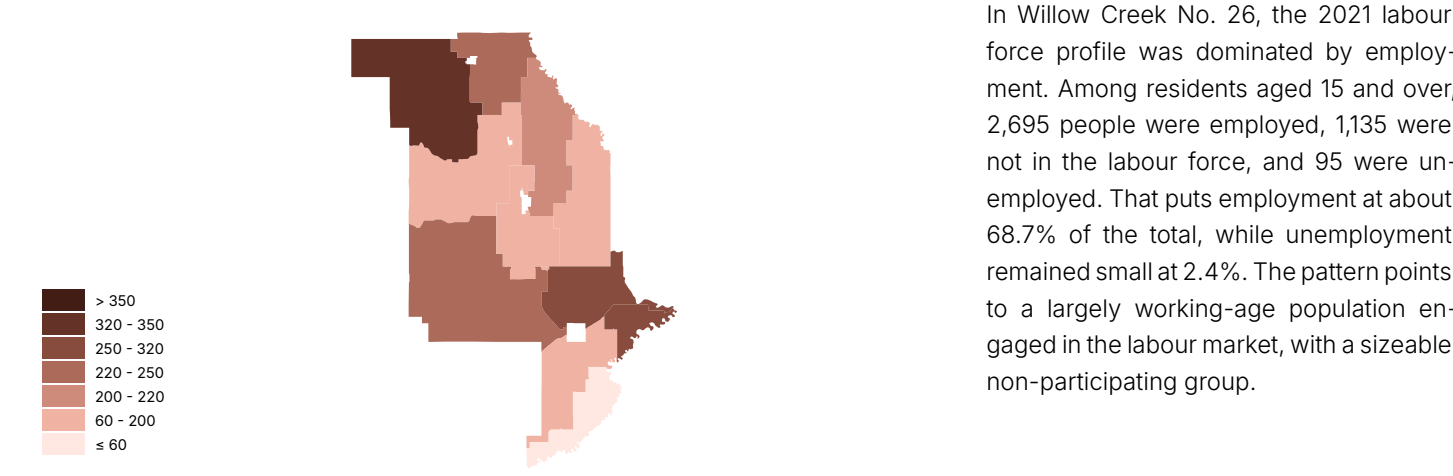


Figure 10.2: Distribution of Largest Group: Labour Force Status - Employed (Willow Creek No. 26)¹

Work Activity

In Willow Creek No. 26, the largest group in 2021 worked full year full time, at 1,555 people, while 1,230 worked part year and/or part time and 1,145 did not work, up 68.4% from 2016.

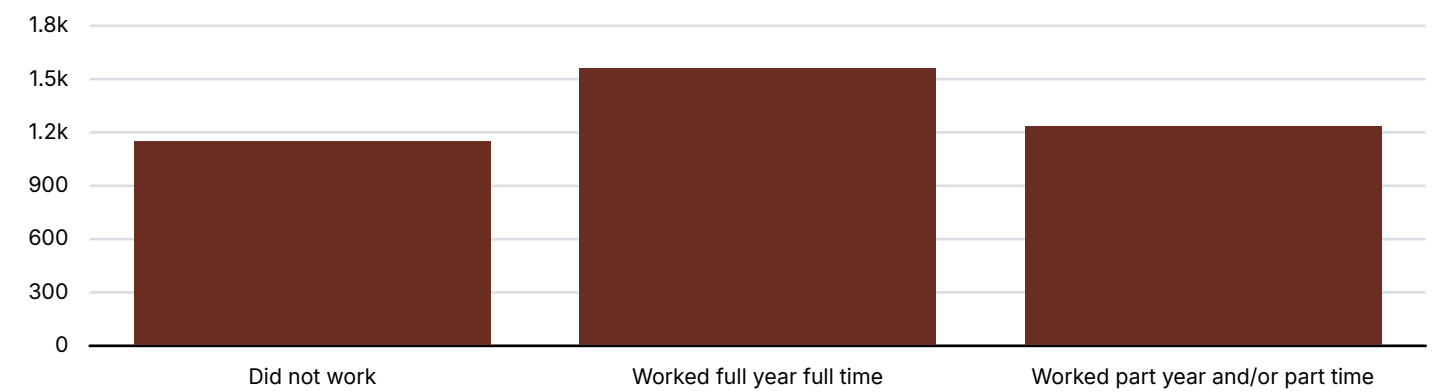


Figure 11.1: Shows the amount of work activity people had during the reference period. It helps indicate attachment to work over the year, not just at a single point in time. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2021)¹

In Willow Creek No. 26, work activity in 2021 showed a clear shift toward people who did not work during the reference period, alongside a smaller core of full-year, full-time workers. Among residents aged 15 and over, 1,555 people worked full year full time, 1,230 worked part year and/or part time, and 1,145 did not work. Over five years, did not work rose 68.4%, full-year full-time work increased 5.4%, and part-year or part-time work fell 12.5%.

In Willow Creek No. 26, work activity in 2021 was split between people who worked full year full time, those who worked part year or part time, and those who did not work. The largest group was full-year full-time workers at 1,555 people, followed by 1,230 part-year or part-time workers and 1,145 who did not work. Over five years, the pattern shifted unevenly: full-year full-time work rose 5.4%, while part-year or part-time work fell 12.5% and non-work increased 68.4%. Source: Statistics Canada, Census Profile.



Figure 11.2: Distribution of Largest Group: Work Activity - Worked full year full time (Willow Creek No. 26)¹

Employed Residents by Occupation

Willow Creek No. 26’s employed residents were led by natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations at 955 people in 2021, up 135.8% from 2016. Trades followed at 575, while natural and applied sciences reached 75, up 200%.

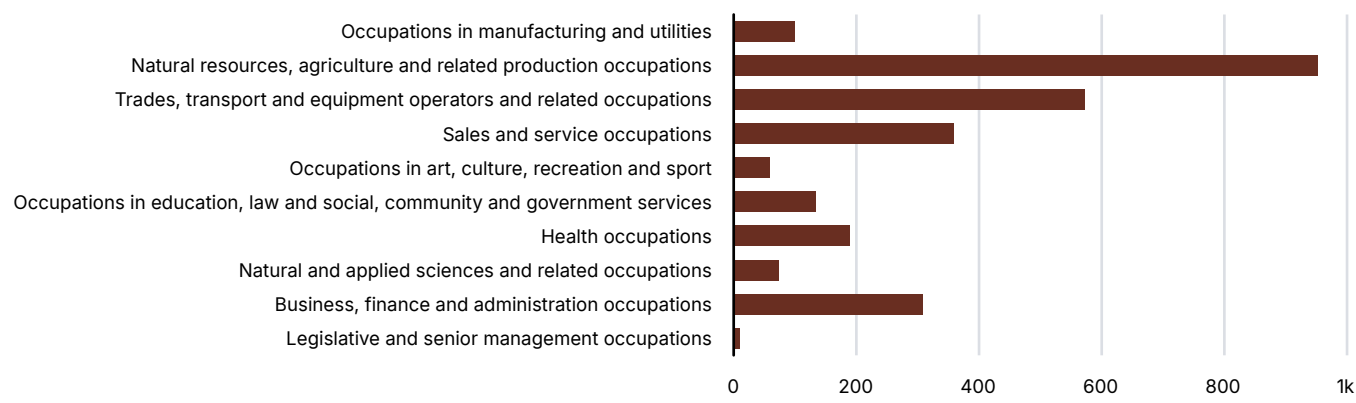


Figure 12.1: Shows the occupations held by employed residents. It helps indicate the community's skill mix and the kinds of work people do. (Willow Creek No. 26, 2021)¹

In 2021, employed residents of Willow Creek No. 26 were concentrated in a few occupation groups. Natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations were the largest category at 955 people, up 135.8% over five years. Trades, transport and equipment operators followed at 575, while sales and service accounted for 360 and business, finance and administration for 310. Legislative and senior management was the smallest group at 10, down 98.7%.

In Willow Creek No. 26, employed residents are concentrated in a few occupations, led by natural resources, agriculture and related production at 955 people. Trades, transport and equipment operators follow with 575, while sales and service account for 360 and business, finance and administration for 310. The 2021 profile also shows strong five-year growth in natural resources and agriculture, up 135.8%, alongside gains in trades and health.



Figure 12.2: Distribution of Largest Group: Occupation - Natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations (Willow Creek No. 26)¹

Data Sources

1. Statistics Canada, Census Profile. Published in Dec 15, 2022.
2. Statistics Canada, Business Register. Published in Jun 1, 2025.
3. Statistics Canada, Business Register; Localintel, Employment by Industry Estimates of Census Areas. Published in Mar 13, 2026.

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