Missoula County

Missoula was the first community in Montana to feel the impact of the recession, and it is likely to last longer in Missoula than elsewhere. The recent announcement that Smurfit-Stone would close its mill on December 31, 2009, was just the latest shock to the Missoula economy. The first piece of bad news was the shutdown of the Stimson plywood plant in 2007. This was followed in 2008 by the further closing of the Stimson sawmill, combined with cutbacks in transportation and declines in retail trade and services. The projected -0.7 percent decline in 2010 may well be too optimistic. The three straight years of no growth or declines (2008 to 2010) is Missoula's worst economic performance since the early 1980s. The bad news was not solely due to the recession. As shown in Figure 3, the Missoula economy was lagging behind the rest of the state since mid-2004. It will be at least mid-2011 before Missoula's real nonfarm labor income (an overall measure of the economy) regains its 2007 peak.