

The PEOPLE of a Nevada Grazing District

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Alaska. Furthermore, BLM is the largest of the federal agencies in the state and administers 68% of the land in the state. It is unlikely that local or state government could take over administration of these lands, but discussion continues about local control because many people object to the distant and impersonal federal administration they associate with BLM.

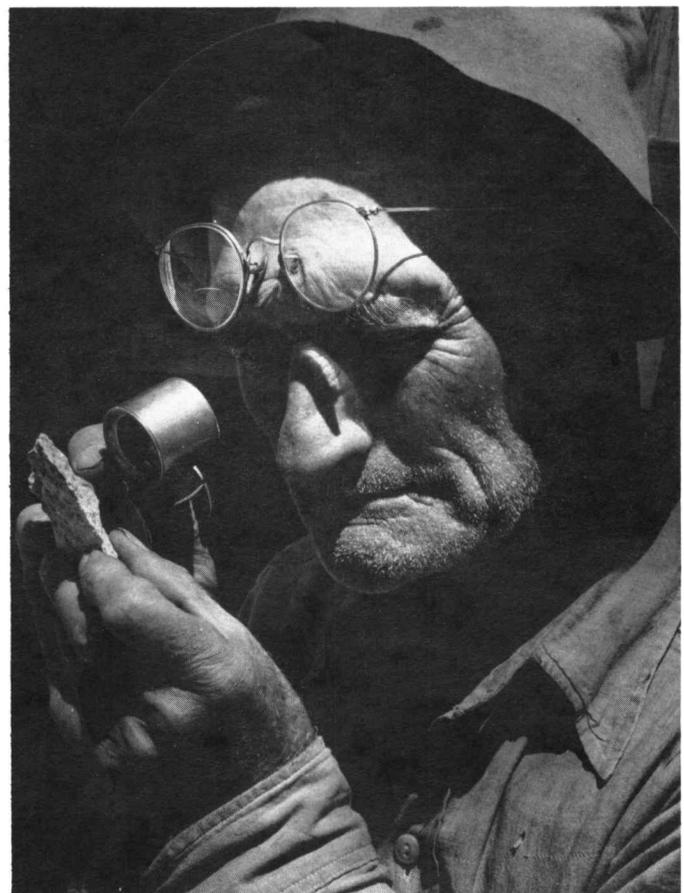
The state has approximately 650,000 people, with less than 10% living in rural areas. Most people live in the two metropolitan centers, Reno and Las Vegas. Although urban residents often refer to the rural areas as the "cow counties," these rural populations continue to be important in the state's political and economic affairs. The mining and ranching/farming communities were the first population centers of Nevada and today represent a greater stability and more continuous occupation in contrast to the rapidly changing urban areas of the state. There are personal ties between people and families that form important networks of communication, and often families have several generations of residence in a community. Not all these rural residents are BLM clients, but they are all directly affected by BLM activities

The activities of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM, U.S. Department of Interior) are complex and have expanded greatly since its creation in 1946. The agency still administers the activities of the old General Land Office and Grazing Service, agencies which were combined to form the BLM and it must increasingly consider many other activities as multiple use policies develop. At present, one step in the agency planning process is the inclusion in management plans of social and economic information about local populations.

In 1976 I contracted with the BLM Nevada State Office to prepare a report describing the people of one BLM District. The report would describe: "The extant cultural groups and their relationships to and dependence upon attributes and management of national Resource Lands (federally owned lands) in Humboldt and Pershing Counties in northwestern Nevada. . . These relationships will be affective and emotional rather than instrumental and economic." The subsequent report was summarized and published October 1976 in the Socio-Economic Profile, Winnemucca District, Winnemucca, Nevada.

In researching as a cultural anthropologist, the aim is to learn about the living groups of people of an area and to describe the culture or lifestyle of a community. Anthropology, one of the social sciences, includes archeology—long a part of federal agency activities. Anthropology, however, is seldom part of the training received by the staff of an agency like the BLM whose first priority is, and should be, to train staff in the physical sciences rather than social sciences.

BLM activities in Nevada are complicated perhaps by the fact that the state has a total of 86% of its land area controlled by the federal government—the largest share of any state outside of



because change in social or economic conditions of one family affects other families in such an inter-twined community.

The Winnemucca District in northern Nevada, with a population of 10,000 people, is one of six BLM Districts in the state. Several thousand people live in small and large towns within the District, and people living in the District are scattered over many square miles. Inhabitants of the District use three major categories to describe the groups of people living there: (1) the length of time a person has lived locally and how long his family and other relatives have lived there; (2) ethnic identity; and (3) the specific location, such as a valley or town, with which a group of people identifies itself.

Time is particularly important because long-term residence means a person and his family care about the local area and believe it is a good place to live. So important is this means of classification that BLM employees who come for only a few years and then are transferred to other locations find it difficult to become accepted and established in the local community structure.

Ethnic identity groups include the Basques, descended from sheep herders and now prominent in local ranching and town businesses; American Indians, mostly Paiutes, who live on Indian Reservation land and remain culturally distinct because of their language and social and religious activities; and other smaller ethnic groups including the recently increasing Mexican-Americans, who are important as farm and ranch workers for the region.

The third category of classification is location, and each town or valley of the District is considered unique. People associated with a location have become familiar with the landscape through long residence and believe themselves better able than newcomers to understand the area.

Values that dominate here include an emphasis on face-to-face, personal interaction in any contact between people. Individuality and self-reliance are admired. When people are personally acquainted, they find it is easier to communicate because shared interests, and differences, are known. The people of urban areas of Nevada, whose more impersonal, and day-to-day activities are transacted through the defined role of a job rather than a personality, are not admired here.

Comments by people interviewed help reflect the character of the rural population. A recently arrived resident said, "I have never seen so many independent, strong-willed people in my life as around here. They all say, 'Don't interfere with me'." As a rancher said, "We are frontiersmen, pioneers; especially the ones that have chosen to come in here. Some of us are born to stay and just accept this life and see it as a challenge we can meet." Another ranch family's views were presented by a woman: "We will fight to survive. We like this life. People are already gone if they can't take it." She continued and talked about a topic many people—ranchers and others—raised in their interviews: "For most ranchers this BLM thing is the toughest thing we have had for years."

The increasing BLM controls and multiple use demands by other groups have forced ranch operators to face a variety of changes that are coming or have already arrived. Economic, climatic, and political forces are causing public land use policy to change to meet these forces.

Because the BLM is a federal agency, it has a difficult time communicating with some of its clients here who prefer to operate in a personal rather than impersonal sphere. A newspaper editor said: "How can you talk to a bureau?" and

expressed the frustration of many. The agency requires public comment and contributions as part of its planning program, so it is particularly vulnerable to any misunderstandings that come between its staff and local community residents. This was illustrated in something that happened. I was having a meal with a ranch family who live farther from town than most residents of the District. The only road passed near the house and we could see clearly any vehicle that might pass. A BLM truck came by with two men in it. The truck did not slow down and the men in the truck did not even look in our direction or wave to acknowledge we were there. The family and two employees present were very unhappy about this event. In later talks with various local and state staff many pointed out that it was difficult for them to talk to people who were angry at the BLM since they, as employees were part of the BLM. Sentiments expressed by local people criticized the agency: "The BLM is out to put ranchers out of business. We should have BLM get out of here; that is not personal as there are some nice guys here, but we need local control."

Later one BLM staff member asked, "How can we learn to meet people?" Because the agency recognized that such questions reveal a great need on the part of its employees, some training sessions were organized in several district offices—"people management" is often an important factor in resource management.

The purpose of my report was to describe the people of the District, their social groupings, and their values. It was prepared after conducting interviews with 50 residents of the District with which I was familiar because of having conducted research about the Indian population here since 1965. It had not been anticipated that the BLM research would lead into discussion of management and training, but this became an important part of the research because people repeatedly commented on problems of communication between the BLM staff and local residents in this and other Districts of the state.

Another unexpected aspect was the people were very pleased to be interviewed: "I am glad someone is asking me what I think; it is a good idea." A few were suspicious about the usefulness of a study: "This study must be a smokescreen. How can it actually be of use?" "Why do they want another study? Why don't they just talk to me themselves?" It is believed that the research actually helped the cause of improved public relations because it established some contact with many people not involved directly with the BLM, and it demonstrated to them, the people, that the agency was making an effort to recognize and learn more about the local population.

As a consequence of the research, more staff orientation and training that would inform employees about each local District have been recommended to the agency. Even someone skilled in getting to know people and/or acquainted with many other rural communities cannot know the local situations and variations that exist in one particular area. Further, it has been suggested that a supplement be prepared for the BLM Planning System Manual in which local Nevada District history and circumstances be described to better orient staff to the region. It is likely that such a document would be useful in other states as well.

Some readers may be interested in the volume titled, *Nevada Lifestye and Lands*, published by the University of Nevada, Reno, Bureau of Governmental Research, which is made up of statements that came out of a state-wide conference held in 1976 on public lands in Nevada. For those interested, the book may be obtained from the University. ●