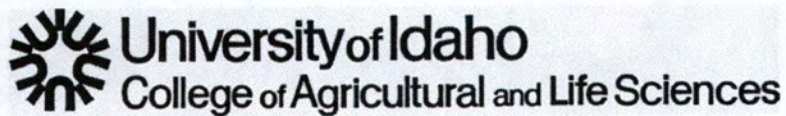


Social and Community Impacts of Public Land Grazing  
Policy Alternatives in the Bruneau Resource Area  
of Owyhee County, Idaho

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## BACKGROUND

*The Owyhee has never been an easy land. With searing heat, Artic cold, rattlesnakes, and the distinct possibility of getting truly lost, the Owyhee does not give of itself easily. But when it reveals itself in a sudden waterfall or cougar tracks circling your camp, or a 1,000-foot chasm appearing out of nowhere, you realize that its beauty is unsurpassed. To come to accept the Owyhee on its own terms is to learn something infinitely valuable about yourself. — Brad Purdy<sup>1</sup>*

In August 2002, the University of Idaho began social assessments of Owyhee County and the four southwestern Idaho counties to gather information to be used in the preparation of a Bruneau Resource Area Draft Resource Management Plan (BRMP) and a management plan for the Snake River Birds of Prey (BOP) National Conservation Area. This effort will update social and economic information relative to Owyhee County (Harp and Rimbey 1999) and provide new information on the users of public lands in southwestern Idaho as well as their perceptions towards natural resource management. The scope and focus of this analysis includes the following: 1) natural resources management throughout Owyhee County; 2) recreational use and impacts related to the Birds of Prey National Conservation Area and Bruneau areas; and 3) changing patterns of urban-user impacts to adjacent rural public lands in Owyhee County. Because of the interrelated and complex nature of these issues, the areas of focus are also compounded by other social structures and resource management policies.

The vast Owyhee region has a rugged appeal. Much like the landscape, many of the region's residents have an independent and likeable character. Local actions and attitudes demonstrate the strong interest to persevere in this place because of the desire and commitment to experience this place as home. The quality and character of the

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Nokkentved (2001).

Owyhee region is continually renewed by strong family and community ties, as well as strong attachments to the natural resources that make this place attractive.

On a broad scale, Owyhee County has recently undergone, and will continue to experience, rapid social change. Although many traditional cultural patterns persist in the communities of Owyhee County—ranching, farming, and a rural lifestyle—external forces related to population growth and shifts in regional economic bases have brought new and rapid changes to the county in the past decade. The high sage deserts, mountain peaks, and remote rivers attract many others besides the families who settled and have stayed in the region as farmers and ranchers since the mid-1800s. These changes continue to force local residents and officials to address local resource management and community sustainability issues, often in the context of federal and state policies due to the significant proportions of public lands within the region.

Previous research has found that although rapid social change may significantly affect well-being and quality of life, small rural western communities like those found in Owyhee County often do not experience lasting social disruption (Smith *et al.* 2001; Hunter *et al.* 2002). Nonetheless, one of the key outcomes of this assessment documents substantive sociocultural impact to the ways of life, livelihood, and perceived independence many residents of Owyhee County wish to maintain. For many local people in Owyhee County, things such as neighbors, land-use policy, and sources of environmental impact are not the same as in recent memory.

Following a section on *Methodological Procedures*, the remainder of this report is the *Analytical Results*, organized into three thematic sections—*Public Land Management, Community Involvement in Resource Management & Planning*, and

*Changing Perceptions in the Local Community and Landscape*—with an attempt to integrate qualitative and quantitative data collected as a part of this assessment. Rather than including a separate background section on history and culture of the region, those points are included within the analysis in order to emphasize the relationships between local heritage and contemporary life that characterize many local residents and their views on life on this land.

## **METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

We used complimentary qualitative and quantitative research methods to gather data for this analysis and report. Collection of background information and research design for both of these components began in late summer of 2002 and was completed in late summer of 2003.

### **Qualitative Assessment**

In addition to ongoing ethnographic fieldwork, a total of 30 key-informant interviews were conducted during the winter and spring of 2003 with elected officials, community leaders, agency representatives, and interest group representatives. Most interviewees are also residents of Owyhee County, but several live in counties bordering Owyhee County and have either work or recreational interests that bring them to the county.

Interviews ranged from one-to-four hours and were conducted primarily at the homes or business offices of local residents, or at public restaurants nearby. Those interviewed were selected via a snowball sampling method using a cross-section of

repeatedly noted potential interviewees derived from suggestions made by a variety of constituents solicited for input. Position, knowledge, and local relationship/interest to the issues of focus were also used as secondary criteria for respondent selection. The goal of this methodology is to maximize what can be learned from a particular case or set of circumstances while remaining sensitive to various forms of respondent bias (Stake 1995).

Each interview session was conducted via a semi-structured format (Denzin 1989). The interview protocol for these sessions included the questions listed below in Table 1.

**Table 1. Protocol for Semi-Structured Interview Sessions.**

- Please describe life in Owyhee County with respect to social, economic, and political contexts.
- What are the predominant land-management practices and values in this region? Are there alternative or competing local perspectives?
- To what extent do you find social cohesion in Owyhee County communities? Why or why not?
- What factors, in your view, most affect the levels of social cohesion for people living in Owyhee County?
- What social conflicts and/or cooperation do you observe with respect to public lands management on open range, but also specifically in relation to the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area & Bruneau Resource Area?
- Thinking about multiple recreation interests, how does the Bureau of Land Management balance and prioritize uses within the Birds of Prey and Bruneau Resource Areas?

## Quantitative Assessment

We also applied a quantitative research design within this study to develop statistically representative results to a variety of measures across a broader four-county (Owyhee, Elmore, Ada, and Canyon) region affecting land management and policy

within the Owyhee area. The overall objective of the quantitative assessment was to ask individuals their opinions and attitudes regarding their community, usage of the Snake River Birds of Prey (BOP) National Conservation Area, and other natural resource management factors.

A set of 75 attitudinal and demographic measures were established for three randomly selected stratified samples purchased from a commercial sampling firm and were administered by the Social Science Research Unit (SSRU) at the University of Idaho in the spring of 2003. We designed a total sample of 2,400 names divided into three stratified samples with the following designations: Owyhee, Urban, and Rural. Table 2 displays the number of responses and response rates for each of these subgroups.

**Table 2. Completed Responses, Non-Responses, Refusals, Ineligibles and Rates by Sample Area.**

Sample	# Completed	# Refusals	# Non-responses & Ineligibles	% Response Rate
Owyhee	385	134	81/200	64%
Urban	356	178	116/150	55%
Rural	368	148	116/168	58%

*Sample Frames:*

**Owyhee:** Population in Owyhee County, ID proper as well as Jordan Valley, OR.

**Urban:** Urban and suburban areas of Elmore, Ada, and Canyon Counties, ID (including Mountain Home, Boise, Caldwell, Eagle, Kuna, Meridian, and Star).

**Rural:** Rural areas of Elmore, Ada, and Canyon Counties, ID (including Atlanta, Boise River, Glens Ferry, Melba, Middleton, Parma, Prairie, Tipanuk, Wilder, and unincorporated areas).

As noted in Table 2, the sampling frames for the three subgroups comprised a four-county area. The Owyhee sampling frame included all residents of the County as well as the adjacent community of Jordan Valley, OR. The Urban sampling frame included the

metropolitan areas within Elmore, Ada, and Canyon counties only; and the Rural sampling frame included all non-metropolitan and unincorporated areas within the same non-Owyhee three-county area. Some of the charts presented below include all of the respondents from the three areas combined, while others report results broken out by each of the three areas.

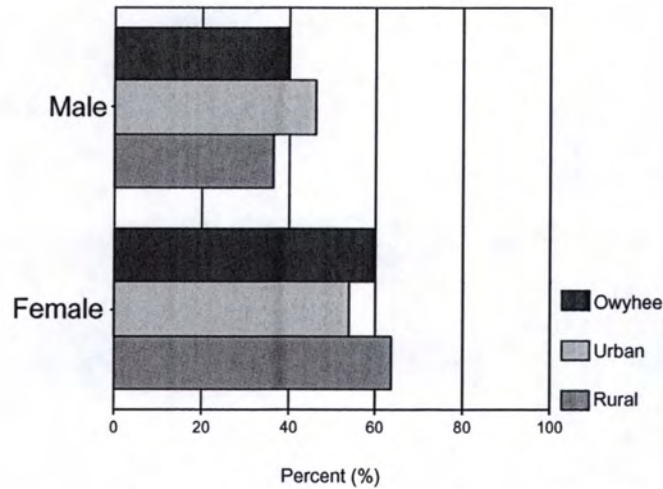
To increase the response rate, a pre-calling postcard was sent to all potential respondents. Using trained interview staff, the SSRU administered the questions via fifteen Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) stations. Interviewers recorded those who completed the questions, asked to be called back, were no longer eligible to participate, and refusals. Interviewers were monitored during each calling session by a trained supervisor. The SSRU staff included two interviewers, fluent in Spanish, who secured responses from a total of 47 Spanish-speaking individuals included in the data. Additionally, a total of 35 soft-refusals were converted to completed responses. Data were collected into a SPSS data entry program for verification and analyses.

### *Demographic Profile*

This section briefly outlines the demographic profile for respondents in the quantitative assessment. Women constituted a majority of the overall sample (59%), and an even greater majority of the sample were married (72%). With regard to racial and ethnic makeup, the sample is relatively homogeneous with 90% of respondents indicating they are White/Caucasian and 6% indicating a Hispanic/Latino background. Figure 1 illustrates the percentage male and female response by sample group. The median



Figure 1. Sex



age of the respondents was 53 years. The education level of respondents is a relatively normal distribution ranging from 'less than a high school degree'(10%) to 'graduate education' (9%) with over one third of respondents, as well as the mean value, falling within the 'some college or vocational training' category (34%). Figures 2 - 3 display the distributions of respondents' education levels for the entire sample as well as sample

Figure 2. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

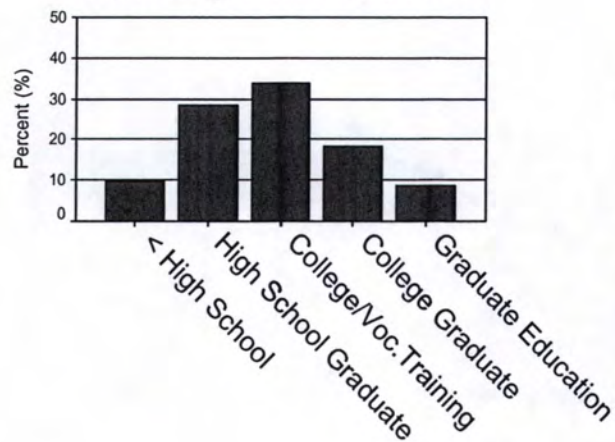
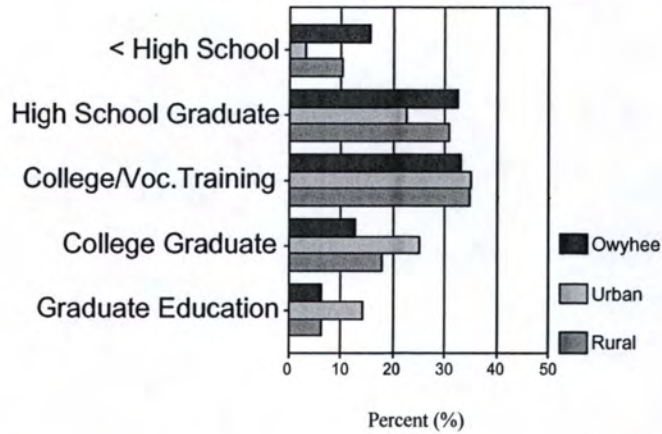
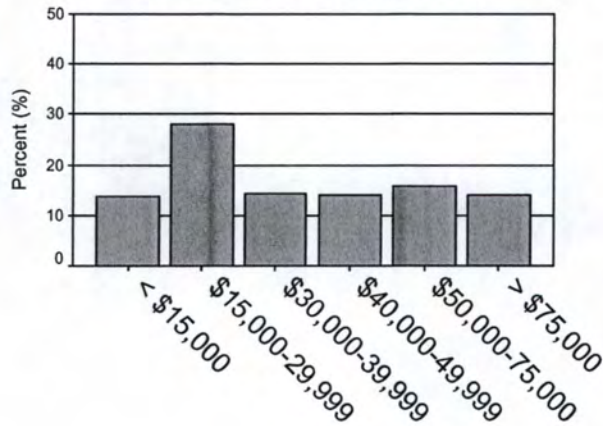


Figure 3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?



groups, respectively. As shown in Figure 4, the median annual household income in 2002 for all respondents was between \$30,000 – 39,999, although the most frequent

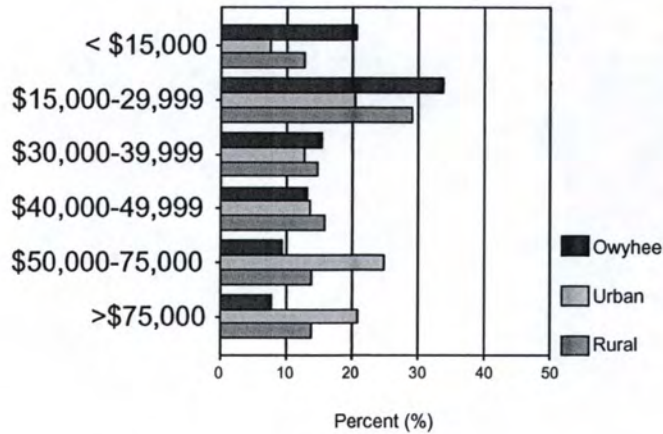
Figure 4. What was your total household income before taxes in 2002?



response across the entire sample was between \$15,000 – 29,999. Figure 5 illustrates the variability of income levels between the three subgroups, with the Owyhee and Rural samples skewed toward the lower income range categories, and the Urban sample

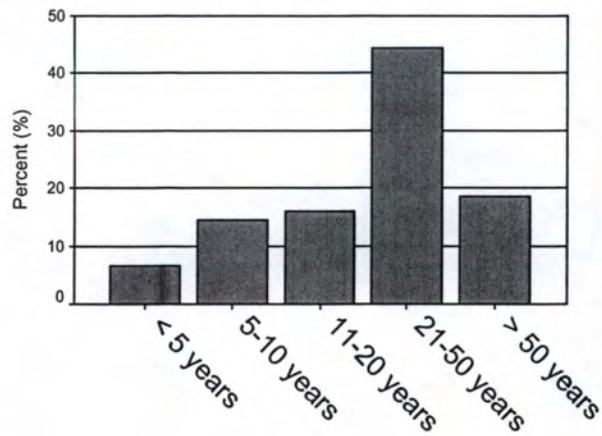
showing a slightly bi-modal response toward either end of the continuum, but skewed more heavily toward the higher income categories.

Figure 5. What was your total household income before taxes in 2002?



We also asked respondents about their length of residence in southwestern Idaho. Figures 6 – 7 show that nearly half of all respondents have lived in this four-county region for between 21 and 50 years. While nearly 20% of the sample has lived in the

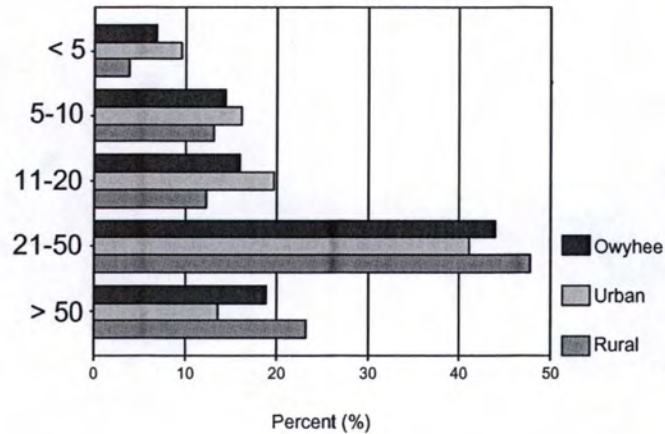
Figure 6. How many years have you lived in southwestern Idaho?



region for over 50 years, less than 10% has lived in the region for less than five years.

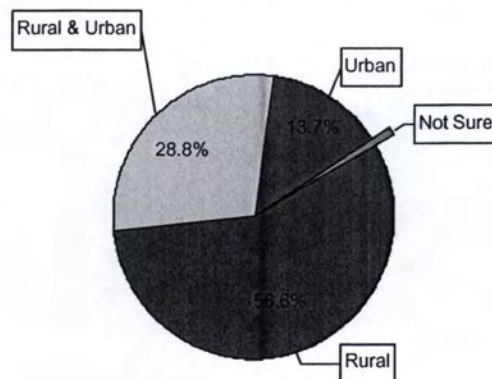
While these trends generally hold true for each of the sub groups, the Rural group tends

Figure 7. How many years have you lived in southwestern Idaho?



to have a longer length of residence, and the Urban group tends to have a relatively shorter length of residence compared to the other two groups. On another measure, respondent's selected from three categories 'Rural,' 'Urban,' or 'Rural & Urban' to identify a perceived description of their community. Figure 8 indicates that the majority of respondents consider themselves rural residents across the overall sample.

Figure 8. Respondents' self-description of their community



Given the average response rates and that the demographic profile matches comparable Census data measures with relative approximation,<sup>2</sup> the quantitative assessment sample appears to constitute a representative cross-section of the four-county population.<sup>3</sup>

### *County-Level Demographic Changes*

Tables 3 and 4 below compile data from the most recent U.S. Census (2000) to present population, employment, and income figures across the four-county region. The most notable changes include:

- A substantial overall increase in employment for Ada (50%) and Canyon (52%) Counties especially, but for Owyhee (22%) and Elmore (29%) Counties as well;
- A high rate of growth in nonfarm employment in Owyhee County (90%) from 1990 to 2000, in part due to the manufacturing plants recently sited and expanded in the County;
- substantial increase—ranging from 48-56%—in income for each of the four counties; and
- Similar to many other ex-urban areas around the West, parts of each of these counties had unprecedented residential population growth rates, ranging from a low of 27% in Owyhee County to a high of 46% in Ada and Canyon Counties (see Field 2002).

While these demographic trends are important, they do not tell a full story or provide much in the way of explanation as to why phenomenon emerge as they do. The

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<sup>2</sup> The median age of respondents was higher than the median age of the population in the four-county region. However, the distribution and age range of respondents reflected a normal distribution pattern.

<sup>3</sup> One probable limitation within the overall sample that continues to present a contemporary challenge to this methodology is the increase in cell phone users (numbers for whom are not included in most sampling databases) that also choose to abandon their landline. Such a shift—now with cell phones comprising up to 43% of all U.S. phones—may systematically exclude an expanding segment of the population (Carroll 2003).

**Table 3. Southwest Idaho Population Change in Four Counties (1990 - 2000).**

COUNTY	1990				2000				% Change 1990 to 2000			
	Popul.	Sex (M/F)	Age ≤ 18	Age ≥ 65	Popul.	Sex (M/F)	Age ≤ 18	Age ≥ 65	Popul.	Sex (M/F)	Age ≤ 18	Age ≥ 65
<b>Ada</b>	205,775	101,227 104,548	58,243	21,451	300,904	150,893 150,011	82,045	27,301	46%	49% 43%	41%	27%
<b>Canyon</b>	90,076	44,374 45,702	27,712	12,344	131,441	65,299 66,142	40,679	14,461	46%	47% 45%	47%	17%
<b>Elmore</b>	21,205	11,070 10,135	6,679	1,594	29,130	16,077 13,053	8,142	2,079	37%	45% 29%	22%	30%
<b>Owyhee</b>	8,392	4,384 4,008	2,775	1,073	10,644	5,551 5,093	3,703	1,293	27%	27% 27%	33%	21%

Source: U.S. Census (2000)

**Table 4. Southwest Idaho Income and Employment Change in Four Counties (1990 - 2000).**

COUNTY	1990			2000			% Change 1990 to 2000		
	Household Income (\$)	Nonfarm Employment <sup>a</sup>	Total Employment	Household Income (\$)	Nonfarm Employment	Total Employment	Household Income (\$)	Nonfarm Employment	Total Employment
<b>Ada</b>	30,246	91,797	104,423	46,140	145,958	156,634	53%	59%	50%
<b>Canyon</b>	22,979	23,462	39,181	35,884	37,305	59,634	56%	59%	52%
<b>Elmore</b>	23,750	3,041	7,373	35,256	3,741	9,492	48%	23%	29%
<b>Owyhee</b>	18,595	773	3,602	28,339	1,468	4,389	52%	90%	22%

<sup>a</sup> Calculated from Census 2000 figures.

Source: U.S. Census (2000)

following analytical section offers a variety of local perspectives gathered from within the four-county region in an effort to describe many of the consequences and effects of the changes in relation to resource management and community in the Owyhee region.

## ANALYTICAL RESULTS

This section of the report provides analytical results in three broad topic areas: 1) public lands management; 2) community involvement in resource management and planning; and 3) changing perceptions in the local community and landscape. The first section focuses on several dimensions of public land management in the Owyhee region including Bureau of Land Management (BLM) policies (pertaining to livestock grazing as well as recreation), military land use in this region, as well as the County's land-use planning related to residential growth and resource-management. The second section, although still focused on the context of public lands, emphasizes local perspectives about publicly-owned spaces *as local resources*. The third and final section of the analysis concentrates on the change this region will likely continue to experience, largely associated with the influx of permanent residents and non-resident recreational users.

### Public Lands Management

Like the state of Idaho, and much of the western U.S., a substantial proportion of the 4.9 million acres that make up Owyhee County, have a designation as public lands—nearly 83% including federal- and state-owned lands.<sup>4</sup> Many private landowners adjacent to the public lands in Owyhee County lease and depend on those lands, primarily for

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<sup>4</sup> The County publishes this figure, but it includes 76% federal land and 6.7% state-owned land, leaving just over 17% of lands in Owyhee County as privately owned (Owyhee County 2003).



livestock grazing. Recreational uses also occur, with increasing frequency, on the same lands. While it is *not* common practice to blatantly defy the County or the BLM policies, many local residents and ranchers approach the lands—public or private—with a mix of genuine consideration, care, and independence that is often found among those who *do* own something privately, in the form of material property. Access to public lands has become more complicated in recent years with regard to logistical, social, and ecological concerns. Some of this is due to the increase in recreational users, while others have emerged from changing BLM policy.

The first analytical section, on *Public Lands Management*, is divided into several key sub-section themes. The first of these is ‘Rangeland Changes,’ incorporating general aspects about the BLM and its local influences to the community. The second section, focusing on ‘Recreation Impacts, Property Rights, and Access’ examines attitudes toward the burgeoning level of outdoor recreation and related issues occurring in the Owyhee region. The third section on ‘Environmental Impacts’ emphasizes local definitions and meanings about what is happening to the land and who is responsible.

#### *Rangeland Changes—Policy, Personnel, and Peril*

Many of those interviewed who live and work the land in the Owyhee region, in some form reflected negatively on the broad change in orientation they perceive has occurred in the BLM during the past three decades, whether intentional or not. Originally established in 1934 as The U.S. Grazing Service via the Taylor Grazing Act, the BLM emerged as the federal entity assigned to manage the non-US Forest Service (est. 1906) lands following the “race for grass” in the mid-1800s and subsequent droughts in the

1920s and 1930s (Gorte and Baldwin 1999).

The crux of the change many described is an inversely correlated pattern between the loss of range scientists and the addition of recreation-oriented staff. The implications of this pattern perceived by ranchers in the Owyhee region are that the change in personnel both *reflected and caused* a political and environmental reprioritization of rangeland uses and impacts to de-emphasize livestock grazing and favor recreation interests and uses. One local individual who works on the land described the trend this way:

When we had Range Cons out here, they had a broad perspective. Now with all these wildlife biologists running around, they're all too narrow. When all the Range folks were taken out of management in the '80s and '90s, THAT's when the range deteriorated!

Another respondent offered a similar perspective, but in the specific context of how the change has affected the Birds of Prey (BOP) National Conservation Area:

Our regional district is corrupt. That happened when they changed the BOP to single-use. With this, they needed lots of [recreation] hires to run this—not the range. They think they're making good decisions for the raptors, but their management has let 70% of the BOP burn in the last 20 years with the multi-use designation. Before this, the nests were full. Now they're not because of the loss in the vegetation base.

This passage represents commonly held viewpoints and relates to the contemporary views on increased levels of recreation and related impacts described in a later section of this analysis (see pp. 22 - 44).

The perspective about a re-orientation toward recreation dates back to the early- and mid-1970s<sup>5</sup> when the BLM began attempting to implement required Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) as a part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

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<sup>5</sup> Foss alluded to the growth of the concept of multiple-use at least a decade earlier in the classic *Politics and Grass* (1960).

passed by Congress in 1969. The federal court case, *Natural Resources Defense Council v. Morton* ended in an out-of-court settlement in 1974, requiring the BLM to conduct 212 site-specific grazing Environmental Impact Statements—with little in the way of “planning” expertise—rather than a single impact statement covering its entire grazing program in the West (Davis 1993).<sup>6</sup> Several areas in Idaho were targeted as high priorities on the required EIS list, including the Owyhee area (Hanley 2002).

In the fall of 1979, a group of Owyhee cattlemen organized to stimulate a county-level response to the Owyhee Grazing EIS and other grazing reform measures (Hanley 2001). Establishment of this group, originally coined as “The Can Do Cowboys” and more formally known since as the Owyhee Action Committee, followed some of the initial disagreements between the BLM and local cattlemen in the 1940s and 1950s over disputed appropriate levels of livestock grazing (Hanley and Lucia 1999). The Owyhee Action Committee catalyzed at roughly the same time as other pockets of resistance to federal land control around the West, commonly known as the “Sagebrush Rebellion” (Cawley 1993; Yandle 1995). The movement emerged as “a protest against the growth of environmental regulations throughout the 1960s and 1970s” (Cawley 1993, p. ix) and in response to the Department of Interior’s “moratorium on claiming desert land for farming purposes” (Marzulla 1996, p. 39).

In Idaho, and specifically within the Lower Snake District of the BLM, Owyhee respondents decried the changes in the agency during the 1980s and 1990s that reflected the national-level reorientation and corresponding policy reform. A ranching couple we

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<sup>6</sup> The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) and Public Range Improvement Act of 1978 (PRIA) were two additional pieces of legislation that increased the recognition given to ecological criteria in public land decision-making amidst the range policy reform era (Davis 1993).

interviewed described their views of some of these effects:

The latest round of BLM changes that hurt us was in the Clinton era. Seemed like the whole Lower Snake District office changed then. They took on this notion that the 'interested public' has as much say as anyone. Well, I know it's public land and all, but it affects whether we can make a living. And just a few people up there can change it all. The District Manager shouldn't have the authority to just change the whole RMP...One of them just clearly didn't want the cows out here and said they're the cause of all the damage.

Related to this perspective, much of the blame for current problems and conflicts over public lands management in the Owyhee region is placed on the loss of longstanding relationships local cattlemen shared with BLM personnel. One respondent expressed his views with the following:

Way back in 1968, we had a controversial decision on some allotments over in the Vale [southeastern Oregon] area. The BLM had set up some pilot projects to make improvements, but then just ended up cutting the permits. Lots of these cases happened when the BLM changed its administration—that really hurt us. They just come in, have never seen the country, and they have to say 'it's bad off' so it appears better when they leave and get moved around the agency.

Hess (1992) used this same case to describe what he termed "welfare ranchers," or those who receive federal subsidies to the point that they become a disincentive to implement range improvements in a multiple-use market situation. In theory, the competition for such a market would lead to greater conservation efforts on the range, but Hess (1992, p. 166) argues that with subsidies, ranchers ignore the increasing disfavor of livestock grazing on public lands among the public. This debate raged again recently with the claim that "welfare ranchers" continue to come under fire from the small, but fierce "cattle-free movement" (Horning 2002; Lanner 2003; Marston 2002; Wuerthner and Matteson 2002).

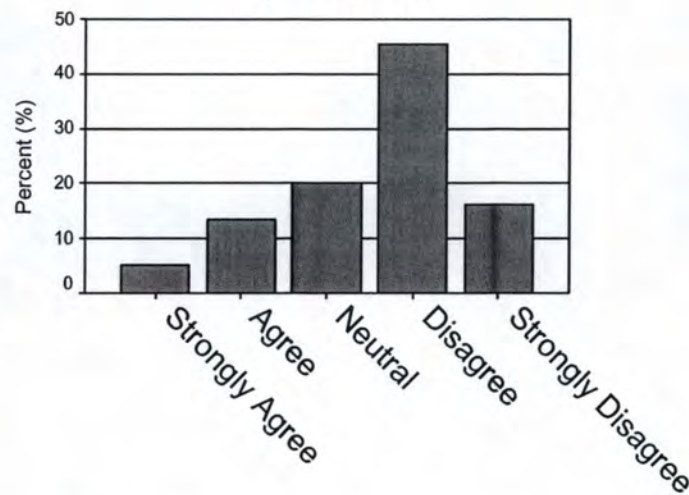
Similarly, a longtime resident of the Owyhee region noted how local ranchers

often characterize this pattern as related to the way they perceive the BLM uses scientific evidence:

Some of us signed cooperative agreements, and they were working, but once we started making progress and seeing the land improve, the permits began to go by the wayside. I've got pictures I can show you how the deferred and rest-rotation systems was working. There's been times when the BLM says they're making scientific decisions, but they just haven't had the science to back it up.

These passages, combined with portrayals of the modern state of "welfare ranching" call into question the level of support for grazing on federal public lands. Results from the quantitative measure used to assess that issue is displayed below in Figure 9. Clearly, the

Figure 9. We need less livestock grazing  
on public lands



distribution of results indicates much stronger levels of disagreement than agreement with the statement "We need less livestock grazing on public lands." In fact, all three subgroups indicate disagreement with the statement across the four-county region, and not just within Owyhee County, where one might presume these results to be even more extreme. Even if a regional perspective to support livestock grazing in southwestern Idaho remains an anomaly among the changing tides of federal resource policy and

public attitudes, the cowboy ironically remains an American icon and idol associated with heroism, endurance, and independence (Starrs 1998).

Changes in policy and personnel also highlights the levels of distrust many ranchers espouse and have become accustomed to when asked about the BLM and the agency's basis for sound decision-making. A longtime rancher who moved to Owyhee County to ranch added this perspective:

It's all relative; this District [Lower Snake] is way better than the one I dealt with before. But getting the BLM to be honest? They're just predisposed in the people they hire; before they even get their first paycheck, you know what their Science is going to be. Some of them are good people, and they try hard, but they just don't want thinkers working there. They just want tape recorders—people that will follow the rules and spit it back out.

Nelson (1995) concluded that much of what led public land permittees to develop attitudes like the above description stemmed from awkward and sometimes inconsistent juggling of both biological and now economic criteria for rangeland decision-making in the 1970s. Many of those interviewed made it clear they felt the agency had shifted too far in the direction of newer ecological and recreation-based emphases at the expense of common sense economic decisions to guide rangeland management of the federal lands they lease.

#### *Recreation Impacts, Property Rights, and the Politics of Access*

A number of distributional issues surround recreational use in Owyhee County. The major population center of Idaho lies in the Treasure Valley, north of Owyhee County. Ada and Canyon counties experienced over a 45 percent growth rate in population between 1990 and 2000 and currently account for a third of Idaho's total

population (432,345 residents in Canyon and Ada counties and 1,293,953 residents in the state). On a broad scale, recreational patterns of these residents have changed with this population growth. Individuals interviewed during the Social Assessment revealed a pattern of attempting to “escape” the sometimes over-crowded conditions in the “traditional” recreation areas to the north of Boise.

General Recreation Issues and Impacts. Many interviewees indicated a popular trend toward “desert” recreational activities and away from the forested mountains with lakes and streams. Horse enthusiasts, snowmobilers, ATV users and others expressed enthusiasm for recreational opportunities in Owyhee County. In addition to the spectacular aesthetics of the Owyhee landscapes, reasons cited included an escape from people and overcrowding, closer distances to their residences, open rangelands with numerous trails and seasonal differences which allowed use earlier in the spring and later in the fall and winter for the non-snow related activities. Snowmobile use is usually centered in the months of January through March, but is highly dependent upon the amount of snowfall in the peak use areas of Cow Creek, Silver City and others. Regardless of the season, however, such a notable increase in recreational usage across all respondents symbolized a widely held perception of the Owyhee region having “been discovered” by a multitude of outsiders.

As a result of this increased use of Owyhee County for recreational opportunities, the local government units face some distributional issues in terms of real and potential impacts on the land, the citizens of Owyhee County, and its increasing numbers of visitors. Interviews with elected officials of Owyhee County revealed that the 10,000+ residents of the county cannot afford to provide recreational related services to the

visitors without help from outside sources. Representatives from the Owyhee County Sheriff's office explained the constraints related to a relatively small population and tax base trying to support policing and search and rescue activities for a much larger populace. A law enforcement representative estimated that there were 4,000 out-of-county visitors to C.J. Strike Reservoir and 2,500 visitors to Silver City on Memorial Day of 2003. The sheriff's office emphasized concerns of being able to police these areas with a limited staff of approximately 13 FTE's (including the sheriff), especially considering the 7,643 square miles that constitute the county. Normal staffing for a rural police force of this kind is about 1.5 FTE's per 1,000 population.

Issues of backcountry (southern Owyhee County, away from the Snake River corridor) recreational use raised a number of other issues among county personnel. To help address issues of vandalism, trespass and lost or injured travelers, the sheriff's department has hired a back country patrol agent. Seasonal help is also hired in the peak recreational use seasons of Spring-Fall. One interviewee who has worked for over two decades in Owyhee County noted that there have been a total of less than 5 search and rescue efforts of Owyhee County residents during that period. The Owyhee backcountry is no less dangerous or treacherous for local residents, and perhaps even more so, for those who work on the land. However, the county estimates a ten-fold increase in recreational visitors in the last five years and an exponential increase in required search and rescue efforts. Thus, the bulk of the search and rescue efforts have been devoted to finding out-of-county residents that are lost, having mechanical problems and/or injured.

The scope of search and rescue usually varies with the recreational activity. For example, search and rescue for motorcycle and ATV users usually involve injuries; out-



of-county "tourists" or sightseers are usually stuck or having mechanical problems; those that frequently become lost are from the whole spectrum of recreational users. Increasing incidence of trespass and vandalism is also occurring in the backcountry areas of the county. Cow camps that were usually stocked and left open for travelers are now being locked and checked more frequently.

Search and rescue activities are conducted through the Patrol component of the Sheriff's budget, which amounted to \$13,600 in FY 2003. By comparison, the total operating budget for the Owyhee County Sheriff's Department was about \$900,000 in FY 2003. Search and Rescue supplies amounted to \$1,000 of the \$13,600 total. Quite obviously, one major search and rescue operation can consume the total search and rescue allotment for patrols. Traditionally, Owyhee County forms a posse to assist with search and rescue efforts. There are rational as well as cultural reasons behind that tradition. The following extensive passage illustrates a common local perspective on the interrelationships of these types of impacts, as well as the "local knowledge" tied to the landscape and more traditional lifestyles in the region:

The conservationist groups tell us to get the cows off the land. Way I see it though, is that we're the caretakers of the land. I'm constantly picking up trash in the canyon. BLM or the County can't provide the manpower to do all I do. When those folks come down here and get lost, law enforcement comes to us. The community forms a posse, and by necessity, we become the search & rescue. Ranchers are the ones who know the backcountry. It'll bite you if you're not too careful. Those kids from Boise just swarm up here now, but if they want to protect the land they should keep the people out of here. It's people doing the damage, not the cows. The 150 years of ranching we've done here has made all these people want to save it as wilderness.

More recently, the county has begun attempts to address the financial shortfalls of these situations by billing those that have been searched for or rescued over the past few

years. Not unexpectedly, the problem has been actually collecting these nominal fees (approximately \$500 per person), as only about half of those rescued have paid. One individual sensitive to these impacts summarized their point of view succinctly:

It's not fair or reasonable to ask taxpayers to subsidize these mishaps. You can't expect little old ladies living on a limited income to be paying for these idiots to wreck their ATVs.

The state of Idaho does provide some financial assistance for rural counties to reimburse for volunteer related expenses. There is a program that allows for reimbursement (from state gas tax and vehicle registration sources) for expenses related to search and rescue up to a maximum of \$4,000 per incident. The Sheriff has billed the Bureau of Land Management for backcountry patrols but there was no indication that funds had actually been transferred to the county. The County also recognizes its cooperative agreement with the BLM on patrols and procedures within the vast landscape. Recent attempts have also been made to start a process to deputize the BLM ranger, but to date, nothing has officially been finalized in this regard.

Many respondents also expressed concern with the effects of publicity about Owyhee County recreational opportunities on increasing use in the area. Both the contingent promoting recreation as well as those disgruntled with the trends in the Owyhee region, cited articles in local, regional and national media about Owyhee County. Those unhappy with the change described a lagged effect of increased recreational use and associated issues related to public safety and community impacts that usually followed. One individual even knew about an article, featuring the Owyhee Canyonlands, that recently appeared in a southern California newspaper. Local officials have also noticed correlations between that sort of high-profile publicity and visitors from

particular places (including the Boise metropolitan area) that require assistance over the course of the 6 weeks to 3 months following.

General Trends in Recreational Activities. As part of the quantitative assessment, respondents were asked whether they had participated in a variety of recreational activities within the past year in the four southwestern Idaho counties. Table 5 shows the results of these data. The table illustrates the data by subgroups in order to discern differences within the populations of the four-county area. Generally, the most frequent activities across the population included Fishing, Bird Watching, Hiking, and

**Table 5. Recreational participation in southwestern Idaho in the past year.**

<i>Have you done the following recreational activity in the past year?</i>	<b>% YES</b>		
	<b>Owyhee</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Rural</b>
<b>Fishing</b>	60	63	52
<b>Birding</b>	58	51	47
<b>Hiking</b>	50	50	59
<b>Other Types of Boating</b>	43	50	48
<b>Off-Road Vehicle Use</b>	40	38	30
<b>Big-Game Hunting</b>	30	26	14
<b>Ride Horses for Pleasure</b>	30	34	17
<b>Biking</b>	26	34	51
<b>Birdhunting</b>	23	21	13
<b>White-Water Rafting</b>	9	16	21

*Sample Frames:*

**Owyhee:** Population in Owyhee County, ID proper as well as Jordan Valley, OR.

**Urban:** Urban and suburban areas of Elmore, Ada, and Canyon Counties, ID (including Mountain Home, Boise, Caldwell, Eagle, Kuna, Meridian, and Star.

**Rural:** Rural areas of Elmore, Ada, and Canyon Counties, ID (including Atlanta, Boise River, Glens Ferry, Melba, Middleton, Parma, Prairie, Tipanuk, Wilder, and unincorporated areas).

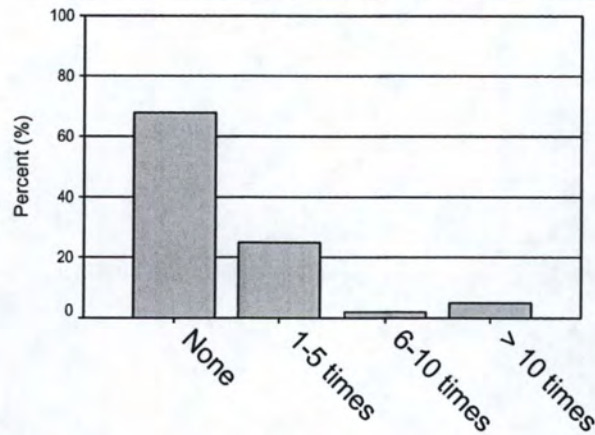
types of Boating other than white-water rafting. Comparatively, the Urban group tended to recreate more as bicyclists and white-water rafters than the Owyhee or Rural groups,

but did not participate much in Horseback Riding for pleasure, Bird Hunting, or Big Game Hunting as much. About 40% of Owyhee County residents used Off-Road Vehicles in the past year, a slightly higher average than among the Rural user group. The same pattern holds true for the measures on Bird Watching, Bird Hunting, and Big-Game Hunting.

Recreation and Access in The Snake River BOP Area. Recreation at the BOP National Conservation Area offers a case of significant recreational use of public land designated for special or particular use and access in the Owyhee region. The BOP—home to the densest concentration of nesting birds of prey in North America—is designated as a multiple use area with recreational activities ranging from camping, boating, and hiking, to wildlife viewing and horseback riding. In addition to recreation and wildlife management, the BOP also provides forage resources for livestock grazing in portions of the BOP as well a training area for use by the Idaho National Guard which conducts military exercises in the region (Bureau of Land Management 2003).

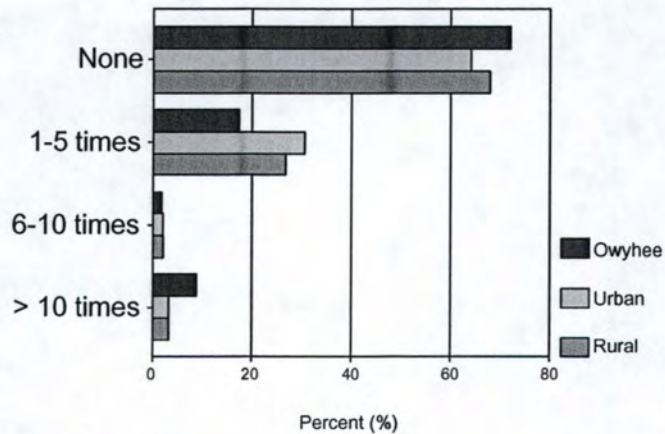
As a part of the quantitative assessment, we asked individuals about their usage patterns related to the BOP. Figures 10 - 11 display the number of times respondents visited the BOP Area last year for both the sample as a whole, as well as by subgroups. Among the overall sample (Figure 10), nearly three-quarters of all respondents did not visit the BOP last year, but over 20% of respondents did visit the BOP between one and five times, and less than 5% of respondents visited the BOP for each of the more frequent categories of six-to-ten times or more than ten times. Figure 11 displays the comparison between subgroups for visits to the BOP, and indicates a greater average frequency of visitation among the Urban group more than the Rural or Owyhee groups. For the range

Figure 10. How many times did you visit the Snake River Birds of Prey Area last year?



of visits between one and five, the Owyhee group ranked lowest of the three groups, but highest among the three groups for those having visited more than ten times in the last

Figure 11. In the past year, how many times did you visit the Birds of Prey Area?



year. This pattern indicates a more frequent average use among Owyhee region residents than Urban area residents *for those that do go to the BOP*.

Similarly, Figures 12 - 13 display whether any of the respondents' recreational activities were done in the BOP. For the sample as a whole shown in Figure 12, slightly under half (44%) of all respondents participated in recreational activities inside the BOP

Area. A few respondents indicated that they did not know whether their recreational activities were in the BOP Area or not. Figure 13 clearly shows that from this sample, Owyhee residents have a higher rate of recreational use of the BOP area than either the Urban or Rural groups.

Figure 12. Were any of your recreational activities done in the Birds of Prey Area?

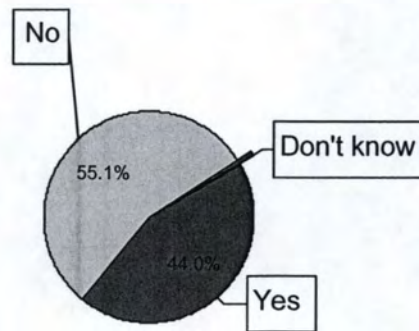
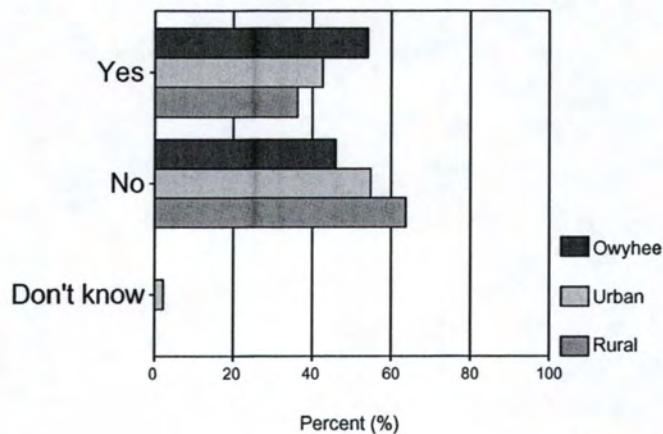


Figure 13. Were any of your recreational activities done in the Birds of Prey Area?

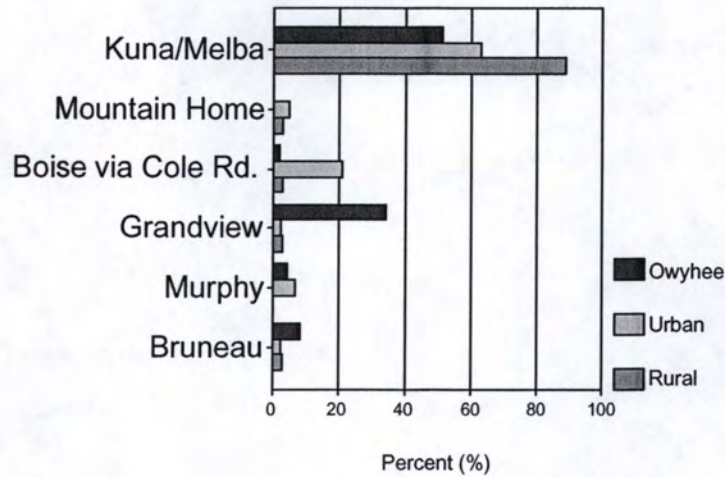


With regard to access of BOP Area entry and exit, the Kuna/Melba access route is far and away the preferred choice among all three of the groups. Figures 14 - 15 display

results for the BOP entry and exit patterns for the sample by comparisons of subgroups.

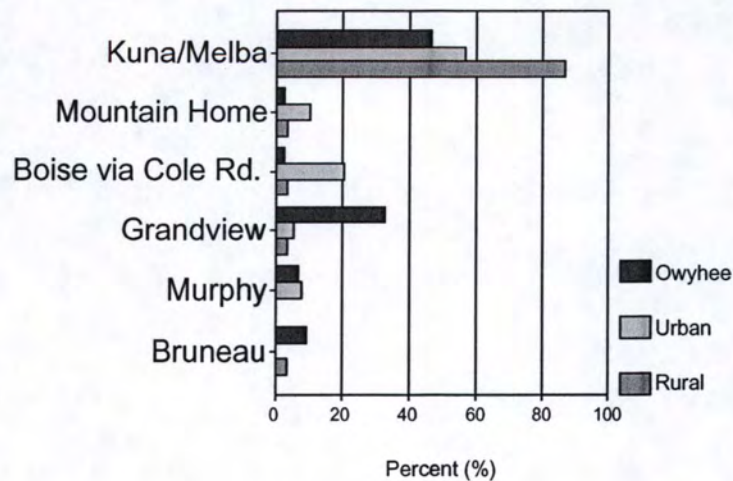
In the case of Owyhee residents, the Grandview access route is also heavily used with

Figure 14. Where did you most often enter the Birds of Prey Area?



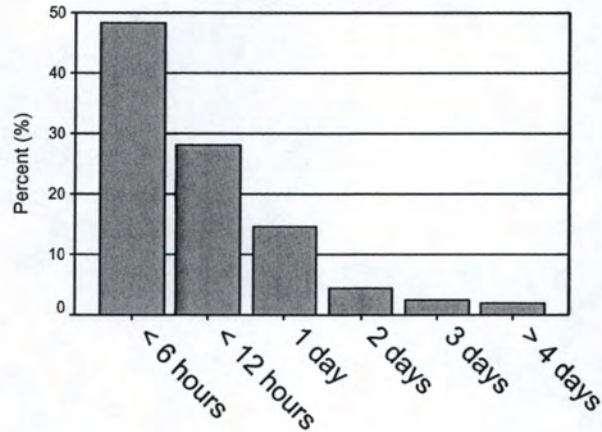
over one-third of respondents from that group indicating where they most often enter and exit the BOP. For the Urban group, about one-fifth of respondents also indicate they most often enter and exit from the Cole Rd. route to and from Boise.

Figure 15. Where did you most often exit the Birds of Prey Area?



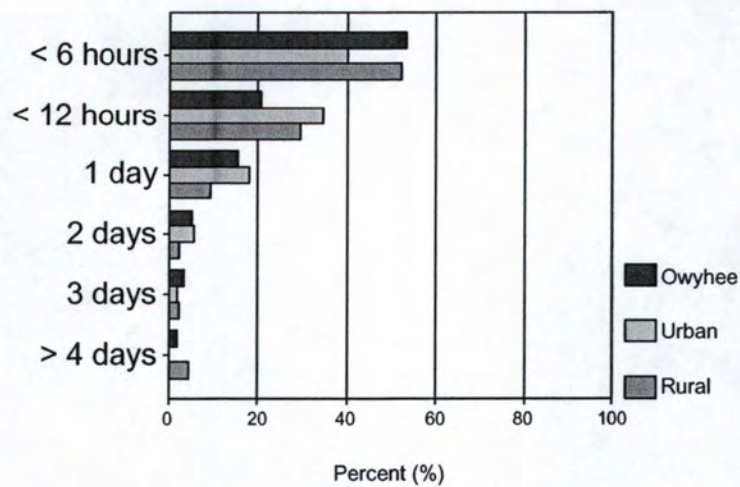
Related, we also asked respondents how long they spent on their last trip to the BOP Area. Figures 16 - 17 display an interesting pattern between the overall sample results and the subgroup results for duration of their visits. For the sample as a whole,

Figure 16. How long was your last trip to the Birds of Prey Area?



nearly half of all respondents indicated their last visit to the BOP area was for less than six hours. The subgroup comparisons show that only 40% of Urban visitors stayed for

Figure 17. How long was your last trip to the Birds of Prey Area?





this short of a time, while over 50% of both the Owyhee and Rural visitor groups stayed for less than six hours. The Urban group ranked highest among the three groups for the 'more than 12 hours' and '1 day' categories, as shown in Figure 17. The heavily skewed data charts indicate recreation use in the BOP is much more oriented to day-use than multi-day use across each of the three groups.

The next series of Figures below represents results from several measures used in the quantitative assessment related to perceptions of the military use in the BOP. The Idaho Army National Guard currently conducts some military training within the BOP Area, and the Mountain Home Air Force Base is a substantial military operation located just north of the C.J. Strike Reservoir toward the southeastern end of the BOP Area. Nokkentved (2001) also provided an account of the Air Force's controversial proposals to expand the Saylor Creek Bombing Range by up to almost 1.4 million acres almost completely overlapping a large portion of Owyhee County.<sup>7</sup>

The first question asked respondents how many times they saw the military in the BOP in the past year. Figures 18 - 19 display the results for the overall sample and comparisons of the three groups in response to this question. Nearly three-quarters of all respondents did not see the military at all in the BOP, nearly 20% saw the military between one and five times, and less than 10% saw the military more than ten times in the past year. Within the subgroup comparisons, the Urban visitors to the BOP ranked highest for the category of having seen the military one-to-five times in the BOP during the past year, while the Owyhee group ranked highest for the category of having seen the military more than ten times in the past year in the BOP Area.

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<sup>7</sup> The current Saylor Creek Bombing Range lies approximately 25 miles southeast of the C.J. Strike Reservoir (Nokkentved 2001).

Figure 18. In the past year, how many times did you see the military in the Birds of Prey Area?

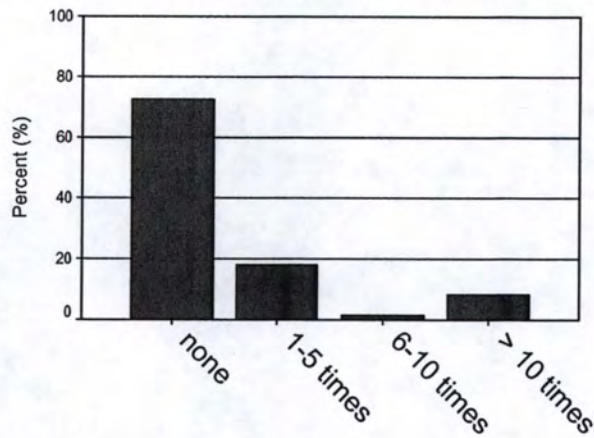
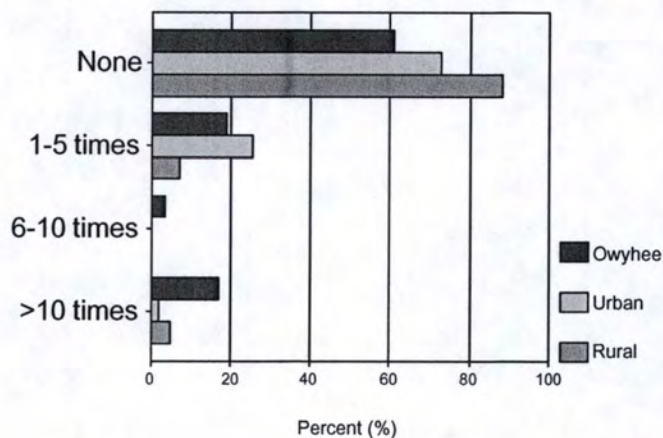


Figure 19. In the past year, how many times did you see the military in the Birds of Prey Area?



Figures 20 - 21 show a consistent pattern of results that respondents overall, as well as within each of the three subgroups, indicate more agreement than disagreement with the military using the BOP Area. This overall pattern is slightly different when we distinguish the three subgroups, with the Urban group having a more normally distributed response (showing less agreement with the military presence) distribution than either the Owyhee or Rural groups; the latter two groups indicated stronger agreement with the military presence in the BOP Area.

Figure 20. Do you agree or disagree with the military using the Birds of Prey Area?

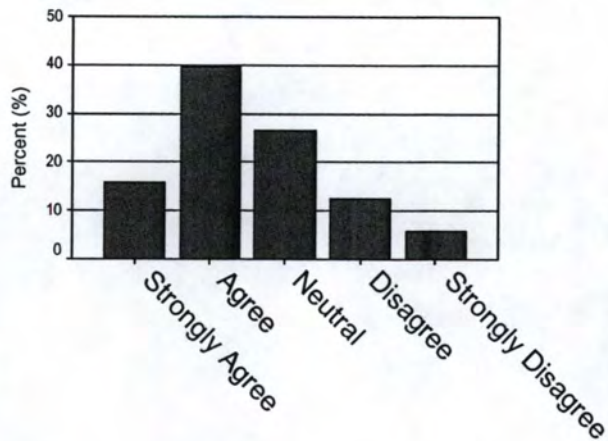
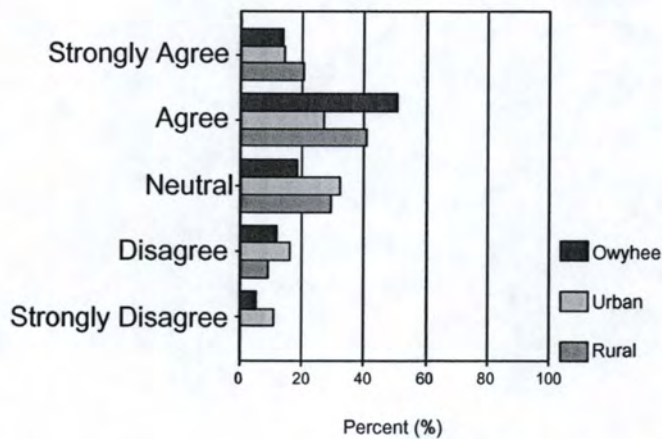


Figure 21. Do you agree with the military using the Birds of Prey Area?



Finally, we asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with both military *and* recreational use in the BOP Area. Figures 22 - 23 display results for these responses. The overall pattern is similar to the previous question, with a tendency among the general population to agree with both military and recreational use in the BOP Area. Within the 'Strongly Agree' category, the Rural group ranked highest in the frequency distribution, and the Owyhee group had the highest frequency within the 'Agree' category.

Figure 22. Do you agree with military and recreational usage in the Birds of Prey Area?

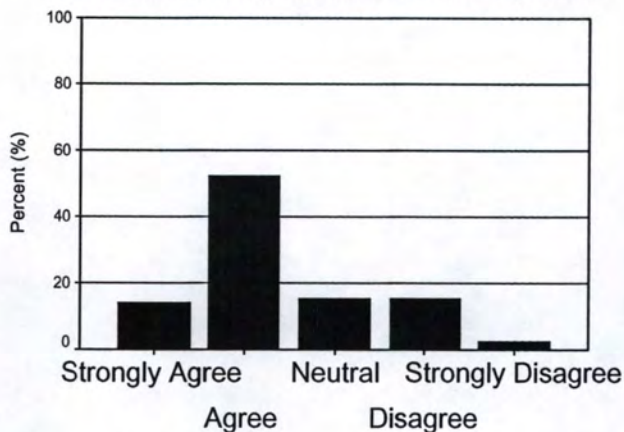
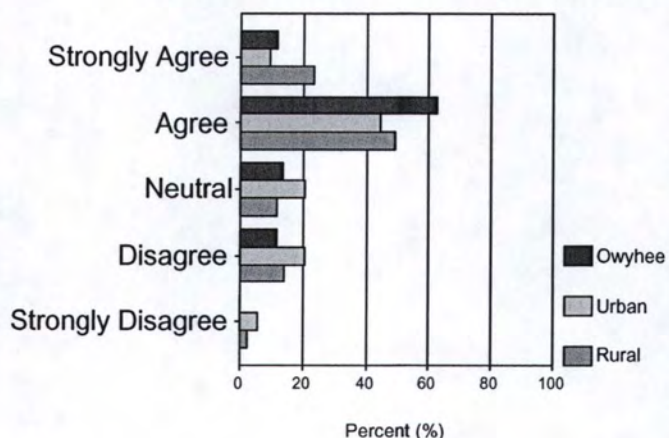


Figure 23. Do you agree with military & recreation use in the Birds of Prey Area?



In general, the patterns of these results reflect that the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area receives a wide mix of visitors from this four-county region. However, visitors from the metropolitan area north of the site constitute a significant percentage of all visitors and are likely to increase as the urban population continues to grow. Most of these visitors tend to use the BOP Area for day-use once or twice a year

and overwhelmingly take the entry and exit route via Kuna/Melba. Results from the same population appear to show substantial support for continuation of livestock grazing and military use in this region.

### *Environmental Impacts*

Stewardship and Perception. One of the more poignant subjects for respondents to reflect on during interviews centered on the topic of environmental impact. Long criticized as those responsible for rangeland degradation, ranchers interviewed for this project as well as many others in the region we spoke with feel such a view mischaracterizes their identity, behavior, and livelihood. Many in this region, as explained by this individual, conceive of themselves as the stewards of the land:

This isn't really an easy life you know? Sometimes we struggle with it, but we like the life. Mostly, we just do our best to try to take care of the resource. Those environmentalists say they have to 'protect' this from us! But we're the ones that have used it all these years and they don't give us any credit for it being the 'pristine' place they want to lock away. They just look at this as an all or nothing thing, but we're doing what's right for the land.

Others who had similar perspectives explained their points in a way that they felt the constraint to fit within regulatory frameworks that change with science and policy. Numerous informants emphasized the economic relationship of range stewardship and their own lives to illustrate:

Well, on the BLM permits, of course we're limited to their regulations, but if you're in this for the long haul—and I don't know any ranchers who aren't working on this as *at least* a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation outfit—you're not going to treat it bad anyway. Why would we do that? It's our own livelihood. We know we can't survive if we try to run on too little grass because the cows can't survive on that. Their argument that way just doesn't make any sense.

Another county resident whose friend's ranch put it more bluntly:

Most of 'em are lifers, these guys. We're all environmentalists when you get down to it even though they wouldn't want me to say that. Hell, it's a renewable resource. It's grass. It'll come back, if you eat it. There's times you regulate being out there, and times you have to get off the range. We know that. That's who we are and what we do.

And still others found the need to illustrate this perspective using examples of previous rangeland improvement efforts that obviously vary with interpretation of costs and benefits:

We initiated one of the first coordinated range plans down here. There was all this emphasis in the new policy, but nothing had been studied for long enough yet to know whether it was working or not, according to the plans on their books. But we didn't try to tell 'em how to fix their experiments. We knew what would work and what wouldn't with those fences because we've had four generations learning about this, and we may not have it all written down in a science book, but I can tell what's going to happen just as good as they can, or better.

Connected vs. Disconnected Interests. On a general level, those interviewed for this project who were not affiliated with the ranching sector of the local communities can be subdivided into two analytical groups: *connected interests* and *disconnected interests*. The former of these—connected interests—are generally Owyhee County residents and either have ties to the people and places of this region and/or take a particular interest to use the Owyhee resources for recreational interests, including motorized and non-motorized uses. The latter group—disconnected interests—consist of individuals and organizations based outside the County but acting with the intent to influence land use and policy at the local level.

A significant split generally exists between these two types of interests with regard to perspectives on responsibility for environmental impacts. A pattern exists among the connected interests to focus on attempts to cooperate and negotiate workable

agreements with private landowners such as ranchers. The connected interests, by and large, do not emphasize perceived problems with the landscape, but alternatively, attempt to suggest ways that multiple uses could and should still function. In contrast, the disconnected interests tend to present more polarized and oppositionist viewpoints, resulting in less cooperative outlooks about whether ranching and recreation can coexist. The disconnected interests often place categorical and direct blame on ranchers and their livestock for problems of resource health.

First, to convey the compiled perspective of the connected interests, several passages exemplify how these groups and individuals aim to remain connected to the communities potentially impacted by their recreation:

I've recreated in the Owyhees all my life. That's where I went on my first hunt. We try to work with the ranchers on agreements about where we can go and where we shouldn't. Take Upper Reynolds Creek for instance. We had a protocol agreement with the ranchers there that may still work out, but now other things are affecting this. The last BLM draft told people it'd be against the law to go off road with the ATVs now. But lots of people don't know that, or don't respect it and have jeopardized our relationship to the landowners.

And the following passage comes from a group of representatives interviewed from an Urban/Suburban-based non-motorized recreational interest group:

The terrain in the Owyhees is spectacular. It's unmatched for being close to here. It's very accessible and isn't overcrowded yet because it's never been publicized much. The ranchers are few and far between. They'd prefer to just have responsible people out on the land. They're a conduit for communication and helping create an atmosphere for responsible recreation. They shouldn't have to put up with the bad apples and the renegades, but there are always a few of those that spoil it for everyone. It's just a few people that leave all the trash.

From the disconnected interests, views focusing primarily on the resources rather than human-landscape relationships dominate their perspectives. As a moderate example,

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is undertaking an Owyhee Weed Project as a rangeland conservation effort (The Nature Conservancy 2002). Although not comprehensive or representative of the entire plan, the following offers some perspective on this organizational point of view regarding their weed management objectives:

*Do we have strong views on the issues?* Yes, though others will have to help validate the urgency and scale of the threat;...*Do we want to persuade others?* Yes! This is the number one threat to this landscape and we believe the issue is urgent. Without TNC's advocacy, we will likely lose this battle...*Do our constituents see us as a legitimate advocate?* More so all the time. TNC is perhaps the lone conservation group that has pushed weeds to the front of our agenda, given it more media attention than any other issue for the chapter over the last year (TNC 2002, p.6).

An often more radical point of view comes forth from other disconnected interests with strong preservation agendas less community-oriented than TNC. For instance, The Committee for the Idaho High Desert (CIHD) webpage suggests that grazing and corporate grazing:

Causes pernicious slow, steady harm to land and water; Results in weeds, polluted water, soil erosion. End result is long-term loss of native plants and wildlife, loss of biodiversity (CIHD 2003).

The well-known activist John Marvel holds special irreverent status for many in Owyhee County because of their perception of his personal attack on the state of the land and lifestyles in the Owyhee region, especially with respect to grazing livestock on public lands. Precisely because the lawsuits and actions Marvel has brought to bear on the Owyhee communities are legal, the local residents perceive and feel the impacts directly and substantively. While CIHD aims to hold local people accountable for perceived degradation of a public resource, local residents are affronted at the thought of being the perpetrators of environmental impact to resources they view as their own homes and businesses.



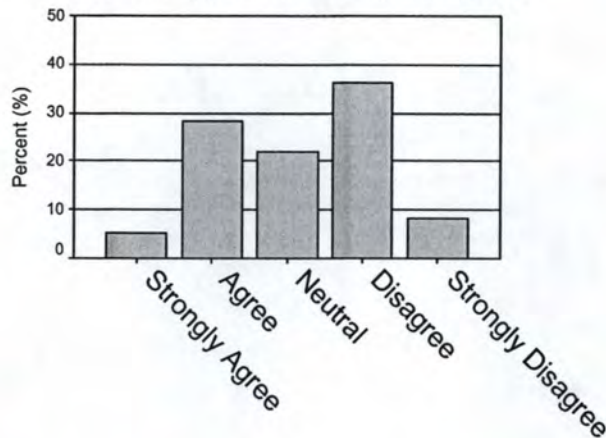
The Increase & Impact of Motorized Recreation. A number of others interviewed consistently emphasized recreational impacts from ATV (all-terrain vehicles) and OHV (off-highway vehicles) as the greatest potential impact and area of concern facing the Owyhee region and landscape. This point of view was nearly universal across all informants. Many respondents also included snowmobiles in this category as the winter-season equivalent, however, snowmobile advocates and enthusiasts argued their environmental impacts were not the same or of the magnitude as with ATVs and motocross bikes because the snowpack buffers the contact with the resources.

While observations in the communities and remote areas of the county provided evidence that a wide spectrum of residents and types of users ride ATVs—including rural and urban, young and old,—a significant contrast exists among local residents' impressions of which ATV users are the culprits for damage on the landscape that has escalated dramatically over the past five years: *the outsiders*. Implicit in many respondents' remarks were the assumptions or characterizations that outsiders were urbanites from north of the river, as if to indicate the river demarcated a symbolic point of intrusion on the landscape that is home for Owyhee residents. These notions are summarized in the following individual's description of the problem:

We have too many ATVs coming out here from the city. These types of users are the ones damaging the resources. For instance, out at C.J. Strike [Reservoir], I've seen them just go down the hills all over; if the agency or county can't enforce the regulations, they just go anywhere. There's lots of abuses all over the county with circles and hill-climbing. Some organized events have good cooperation to reduce the impact, but as soon as no one's looking, they ride the range just like the cattle.

Interestingly, the quantitative assessment measure used to gauge public levels of interest in this activity yielded mixed results. As shown in Figure 24 a slightly higher proportion

Figure 24. We need more off-road vehicle recreation opportunities on public lands



of respondents indicated at least some level of disagreement with the statement ‘We need more off-road vehicle recreation opportunities on public lands’ which may indicate the pervasive point of view about the increased impact to the landscape from ATV use. While a full third of respondents did indicate agreement with the notion of more recreational opportunities, this distribution is more evenly distributed than a number of other measures in the assessment, showing greater variation within the overall sample.

Interestingly, data gathered by the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR) on ATV and Snowmobile registration confirms a substantial increase in the number of units, which likely implies increased recreational use. Tables 6 and 7 below document the numbers and percent-change of registrations for Motorbike/ATV and snowmobiles in this region from 1998-2002. The IDPR requires registration of these vehicles. Although IDPR reports these numbers are not absolute, they also estimate a 50% compliance rate for Motorbike/ATV registration (Cook 2003), and much higher for snowmobiles. In essence, these data indicate that the *percentage growth* registration of motorized recreational vehicles in each of these four counties has increased dramatically,

**Table 6. Southwest Idaho Motorbike/ATV Registrations By County, 1998-2002.**

COUNTY	1998 Registrations	1999 Registrations	2000 Registrations	2001 Registrations	2002 Registrations	1998-2002 % Change
Ada	7,701	9,093	10,397	11,889	13,646	77.20%
Canyon	3,225	3,799	4,473	5,499	6,651	106.20%
Elmore	585	749	872	1,024	1,216	107.90%
Owyhee	241	282	338	393	513	112.90%
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,752</b>	<b>13,923</b>	<b>16,080</b>	<b>18,805</b>	<b>22,026</b>	<b>87.40%</b>

Source: Cook (2003).

**Table 7. Southwest Idaho Snowmobile Registration By County, 1998-2002.**

COUNTY	1998 Registrations	1999 Registrations	2000 Registrations	2001 Registrations	2002 Registrations	1998-2002 % Change
Ada	5,167	5,488	5,690	6,013	6,141	18.90%
Canyon	1,618	1,761	1,814	1,842	2,125	31.30%
Elmore	411	432	480	509	525	27.70%
Owyhee	84	93	102	127	140	66.70%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,280</b>	<b>7,774</b>	<b>8,086</b>	<b>8,491</b>	<b>8,931</b>	<b>22.70%</b>

Source: Cook (2003).

but that the actual numbers of increase within Ada County especially, but also Canyon County, are staggering to consider in such a short time frame. One can only assume that there is a correlated increase in the amount of use of these machines on public lands in southwestern Idaho, but there are no use-data to support this assumption except anecdotal observations.

The above results related to ATV use from the quantitative assessment, combined with the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation data on ATV registration, suggest that the emphases and multiple viewpoints expressed by many of those interviewed are grounded empirically. However, when we consider data from Figure 9 (p. 21) and Figure 24 (p. 42), we observe somewhat divergent trends that many local residents of this

four-county region perceive less impact from livestock grazing than from ATV/OHV use on public lands. The vast increase in registration and use of the latter confirms this perspective.

### Community Involvement with Resource Planning

Many who live in the Owyhee County area share a strong sense of independence and attachment related to the remote and often unforgiving landscape. Given that previous research has documented the strong sense of place often articulated by rural community residents in a variety of settings throughout the West (see Keiter 1998), as well as other locales (see Vitek and Jackson 1996), this raises the question of whether the Owyhee sense of independence and attachment is unique? If not, is it part of a significant pattern reflecting community-level impacts and change within the region? Although answers to these questions could vary according to one's theoretical perspective, this analytical section provides evidence to suggest that, *at least with respect to resource management and planning*, several conditions and characteristics of the Owyhee communities and residents co-exist to create *the perception of a unique landscape and community situation*.

From local perspectives, the important question and essential threat to social structures in the Owyhee region is the control over resource-planning and decision-making. This sense of control appears to manifest itself in at least two primary ways—both of which affect the opportunities and quality of life of local people in this region. First, the negotiation of federal decisions and policy of public land-use remains a set of contested issues often on the minds and part of the daily activities of local people.

Second, in addition to the long-term and more familiar context of the first point (federal land-use policy), many perceive the intrusion of special interests, newcomers, and non-local user groups as the futuristic picture of resource control and planning. Coupled with this is the strong sense of community and attachment associated with most Owyhee County communities, as documented by Harp and Rimbey (1999)

### *No History, No Future?*

The open space and range resources so plentiful in the Owyhee region have always served as a natural asset. The grass, soil, water, and wildlife have enabled life and livelihood in this landscape, in spite of the often harsh level of conditions. For settlers as well as current residents, the historical characterization of the Owyhee landscape as foreboding mistakenly defines life as unmanageable or a struggle with questionable return value. During the recent 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary meeting of the Owyhee Cattleman's Association held annually in Silver City, a commemorative oral history presentation emphasized the local perspective of life in the Owyhee region:

People often say we live without a history and we have no future here. The first cattle migration opened up this country in 1843. The legacy of the Owyhees is continued by everyone here today. In the early days, they used to say you had to have enough cattle to be respectable, and enough sheep to make a living after the hard winter of [18]'88 when we lost a lot of cattle and the Irish, Scottish, and Basque migrated here with all the sheep. Generations later, we really came of age—after the railroad, the [Taylor] Grazing Act, and the age of the acronym<sup>8</sup>—to help get the Sagebrush Rebellion started. When the newspapers used to report about that, they'd list those represented or in attendance as New Mexico, Wyoming, Nevada, and Owyhee County! Some things haven't changed out here much: what affects one of us affects us all, and we're all just trying to make a living around here (Hanley 2003).

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<sup>8</sup> By the "age of the acronym", the presenter referred to the era of change in the BLM and federal land management during the 1970s and 1980s discussed above on pp. 17 - 22.

This passage illustrates much about the color and character of life in the Owyhee region by illustrating a will to battle the odds, confront setback, and persevere. These qualities, more than most, define the sense of community commonly described in the area.

The above description also highlights the importance of how integral the resource planning process is to the very nature and essence of community in this place. Resource management decisions regardless of who makes them, affect local patterns and ways of doing things. This direct significance, however, is precisely why it matters a great deal to local people who makes resource management decisions. In many cases, it makes sense to people in local communities to have the chance to make the decisions of local relevance (Snow 1997). In other words, those policies, regulations, or management schemes applicable to a region or locality arguably affect that regional or local population more, as well as more directly, than others not local to the place. This is the reason and basis for local people in rural communities surrounded by public lands often asserting their claims to management, "ownership," and/or rights to the resources. Because it affects them substantively, is part of the local landscape, and requires management, it logically follows those who live there could provide the most relevant knowledge for decision capacities. The Experimental Stewardship Program, mandated under Section 12 of the Public Rangeland Improvement Act (PRIA, 43 USC 1901, PL 95-514) is an example of an attempt from a previous era to involve local people in federal land planning at the local level (U.S. Congress 1978).

The perspective described here, is not an academic argument for or against the idea of local control (Krannich and Smith 1998). Our point is merely to stress the source of such perspectives is not wholly political, nor is it a bias. Ironically in fact, the

perspective of local control should seem quite familiar, albeit a different structure and context, to many who do not live proximate to large tracts of public land. For those who live in and around primarily privately owned resources, their existence and regulatory structure is quite locally-controlled relative to communities surrounded by public lands. With some comparative perspective in mind then, it might seem quite normal for those in the Owyhee region, as well as many western community settings, to define the needs and wants of their community in the context of control of their own surroundings. The idea of local control, in other words, is not an aberration among remote rural westerners, often labeled as radical for those positions.

Many who live and work in the Owyhee region see their existence there not so much of a struggle as a delicate balance between political decision-making, the weather, economic markets at multiple levels, and increasingly, the whims of the recreationists and other non-local visitors who “leave the occasional gate open, or vandalize remote cow camps.” One individual made it known during his interview that he’d lost 6 head of cattle that spring as a result a single gate left open by an unknown, but likely visitor. Who can replace those animals as an investment? Who is responsible for the loss? What is a land-owner to do given appropriate fencing, etc., but one’s crop walks off due to carelessness from what, in some instances at least, amounts to an absentee owner dropping by for a visit.

Most individuals we talked with who owned or worked the land were particularly careful to *not overgeneralize* with respect to impacts from visitors. Despite the fact that these impacts produce anxiety and a significant feeling of lost control among the local population, almost universally the “problem” visitors are considered the minority, “a few

bad apples,” or described as the ones “you know you’ll always have a few of them in any crowd.” Impacts attributed to these types of individuals range from open gates, to vandalism, to garbage left behind. One interviewee relayed this story:

Well, we always used to leave the cow camps open you know. They’d just be unlocked in case someone was up there in a snowstorm or had some emergency—you know the weather that happens in this kind of country out here. The honest folks would just get in there and leave it that way. Then last winter, we never were up there because that year we didn’t have any need to and found out this spring they’d taken the whole kitchen. People come out here and just have this perception that it’s ALL public land, which it’s not, and that they can do whatever they want on public land. So, they do whatever they want, wherever they want.

This type of impact, small as it may seem in isolation of its context and other related incidents, characterizes much of how local people in the Owyhee region feel a loss of control manifests within their communities and their own lives. They work within a system of federal, state, and local laws, not all of which are clear to all the passersby that seek freedom and a lack of constraint to explore the wild. Another individual put all these issues in the context of his relationship with the BLM in order to provide an illustration of how the effects translate into practical impacts:

There’s a tremendous increase in how many people are coming out here. I’d say it’s doubled in the past couple years. Most of them are pleasant people and get along well with others. Some of them even understand this concept that we’re trying to make a living off this land. Usually, they shut the gates and contact you if they find one of your animals with a broken leg. But twice, just this year, I’ve had gates left open, and cows get out. I could be just sittin’ here doing nothing and not even know, just depending on whether they understand how the ranch works or not. But how could they? The BLM is understanding about the impacts from open-gates, but no one can change the impacts once the damage is done or our cows are gone.

Many of the private landowners in Owyhee County that lease public land also consider the resource “theirs” with respect to stewardship as well as ‘rights’ to decision-



making and management. This perspective has several important aspects. First, local concepts of stewardship about the land and surrounding environment are both individualized and collective. By this, we mean land owners and operators, or lessees as the case may be, approach the land around them that they use with experiential and local knowledge about how to take care of it. In the Owyhee region, however, group work—for branding, rounding up livestock, search & rescue, etc.—still dominates the minds of many people such that they perceive a level of local oversight and ‘peer review’ helps ensure good practices on the land.

A related second point is that fending for oneself and for family is not only accepted and taken-for-granted within Owyhee County’s local culture, but also remains a source of significant pride and respect. Those interviewed often emphasized tradition and heritage to make the point of how this relates to autonomy, free-will, and decision-making:

If you choose this life, it’s obviously not to make a lot of money. And you kind of know it, that except some help from your neighbors, you’re pretty much on your own out here. Three generations before us in my family have run cattle here. They did a decent job and we’re just trying to keep that up.

This point relates to control and involvement with resource planning because, here, the land is part of the community in a way that local people understand how land-management decisions affect their long-term viability. In some respects, the communities of this region existed before the regulatory structure that now governs their lives. They are a proud people to transcend the latter by virtue of their history.

The third and final point with regard to stewardship, “rights” to the land, and the relationship with involvement in resource planning results from the ambiguity of

language and law that changes and gets continually reinterpreted over time. Several ranchers noted their 'preference rights' on certain public lands established in the 1950s from which the concept of split estates developed. This in turn led to a local understanding that the federal government owns what is below ground and the operator owns what is above ground. Similarly, the recent *Hage v. United States* legal battle has been used to bring attention to contested questions of ownership and property rights related to some public lands in Owyhee County. The Hage case put the question of 'what property rights do ranchers own on their grazing allotments?' before the US Court of Federal Claims. The following excerpt from the ruling judge's opinion described this issue of 'takings' with the following:

'The Government cannot deny citizens access to their vested water rights without providing a way for them to divert that water to another beneficial purpose if one exists. The Government cannot cancel a grazing permit and then prohibit the plaintiffs from accessing the water to redirect it to another place of valid beneficial use. The plaintiffs have a right to go onto the land and divert the water.' (Bedford, 2002, p. 7).

Although this case is no doubt significant with regard to 'takings', the court also ruled against Hage's surface claims.<sup>9</sup>

A relatively recent debate about public lands within Owyhee County coalesced local efforts in a contemporary case of maintaining or losing control over rights and uses associated with public land status. In November 2000, on the heels of President Clinton's twelve-fold expansion of the acreage of Idaho's only National Monument—Craters of the Moon—a coalition of conservation groups from southern Idaho made a final push to lobby the President for an additional national monument designation (*Capital Press*

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<sup>9</sup> The County also references another legal case of Cliff Gardner in Nye County in which the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the United States does own the land (Owyhee County 2003, p. 1).

2000). One report (conducted by the Owyhee-Bruneau Canyonlands Coalition who supported the designation) cited 80% of Idahoans supported the monument (Nokkentved 2000).

Had the Order gone forward, up to 2.7 million acres, all within and constituting over one-half of Owyhee County in the Owyhee-Bruneau canyonlands area, could have been designated as a national monument with restrictive uses similar to the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument that still catalyzes criticism and resentment among local communities in southern Utah (Nijhuis 2003). This case, often cited as a high point in public involvement and activism among people from and within Owyhee County, catalyzed the largely motorized-vehicle use special interest group known as 'People for the Owyhees'. The debate also sparked the Owyhee County Commission to formulate "the Owyhee Initiative" detailed in the next section due to the current, innovative, and substantive expression of public lands policy and management it seeks to pioneer.

### *The Owyhee Initiative*

The Frontier of Collaboration? Two years ago, the Owyhee County Commission brought a vision of change into action for how a local collaborative working group could implement decision-making regarding federal lands surrounding their communities. That effort is the Owyhee Initiative (OI), currently peaking in its effort to find balance and compromise among a set of diverse constituent representatives. Although the OI has its naysayers, hardly anyone could disagree that it has offered a new model and forum in hope of resolving long-term conflict over public lands management.

In a similar vein to collaborative groups forming in different regions of the West to address natural resources management conflicts (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000), the Owyhee County Commission proactively convened the OI to:

Develop and implement a landscape-scale program in Owyhee County that preserves the natural processes that create and maintain a functioning, unfragmented landscape supporting and sustaining a flourishing community of human, plant, and animal life, that provides for economic stability by preserving livestock grazing as an economically viable use, and that provides for the protection of cultural resources.

The working group now includes representatives from the following entities and organizations: the US Air Force; The Nature Conservancy; Idaho Conservation League; Sierra Club; The Wilderness Society; Owyhee Borderlands Trust; Owyhee Cattleman's Association; People for the Owyhees; Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association; Owyhee County Commissioners; Owyhee Soil Conservation District; staff from Senator Mike Crapo's office (ID) and the BLM offices; and chairperson, Fred Grant (Beeson 2003).

Much of the actual substantive work of the Initiative has revolved around a proposal to accomplish two interlinked and complimentary objectives:

- 1) to negotiate a fixed number of acres and particular areas, long under restriction as Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) within the BLM management, that would be promptly and permanently designated as wilderness with standard restrictions; and
- 2) to 'release' the remaining WSAs as such and allow multiple use in these areas while protecting ranching interests from repeated lawsuits and arbitrary grazing restrictions they currently feel threatened by within the current management system.

The final number of acres decided upon as wilderness is not yet set; however, the total could range up to 450,000 (Grant 2003).

In addition to the initial resolve of the contested wilderness lands in Owyhee County, the OI would also establish a Scientific Review Team whereby the collaborative

process could provide objective, independent scientific review of proposed BLM decisions under guidelines set by representatives from the Initiative. If the BLM chooses not to follow the advisory decision of the scientific review panel, the agency must explain why (Grant 2003). Additionally, the OI would also establish more managed control of public lands uses via the following: a research center; enforced management of OHV/ATVs; additional funding for local law enforcement; funding for search and rescue; an ongoing Work Group as a Board of Directors for the OI; and protection of grazing in designated wilderness.

The list of "improvements" noted above would substantially address many of the issues already outlined in this report as concerns among the elected officials, residents, and special interests of the Owyhee region. Based on that accomplishment alone, the OI is a concerted effort that deserves reckoning. Whether or not we label the OI as unique, innovative, or successful pales in comparison to the energy and symbolic interaction it has created for, within, and about the Owyhee region. The collaboration and compromise, albeit not perfect, static, or finally resolved in full, indicates the magnitude of cooperation that this landscape commands. The remainder of this section details different interpretations and descriptions of the opportunities and costs associated with the OI from local perspectives.

Staying in Business, or Selling Out? Many of those still ranching or working on the land in Owyhee County have worried a great deal about the OI. Some long-time residents of the County that have lived through different management regimes within the BLM and seen changes come and go are not yet sold on the idea that the collaboration will hold together long-term:

Well, that Owyhee Initiative.....Seems like some good things could come of it. They're saying to turn several hundred thousand acres to wilderness. But these collaborations have never worked here in the past. Whenever we compromise, it's always *our* compromise in *our* territory. In some ways, this puts all the Ag industry secondary to people's other interests. Who's going to grow their food?

Others emphasize the pattern many who work with livestock on public lands feel continues to plague them from conservation or environmental interests. Describing the Initiative, one who stands to be directly affected had this to say:

It is better than what we were going to get, but I still feel it is leaning toward the left wingers. They are trying too hard to appease them I think. They are still going to make it tough for the cattleman to operate with full numbers it looks to me. It is going to be too easy for someone to holler and get the rights cut down some more, which in order to get everything set up, that is what they do (Beeson, 2003, p.8).

On the other end of the spectrum, some landowners and livestock operators are more optimistic. If implemented, the Initiative would free ranchers' abilities to make range improvements many believe are essential to a healthy range ecosystem. At a recent address to a group of cattleman, the chair of the OI emphasized this point:

The Board of Commissioners presented testimony in Congress within the past year pointing out how the 'no-action agreement' of wilderness study areas crippled the ranchers plagued with them in their allotments. The draft proposal now would free those study areas for proper grazing management and for multiple use (Grant 2003).

Similarly, many OI representatives have found each other not to be the enemies they thought they were:

When we started meeting, there was a lot of tension—and there still is some times because we just don't agree on everything. But now, we've gotten to know one another a bit more, and in a lot of cases, we realize that what we want is a lot of the same things. Basically, we all want to take care of the land.

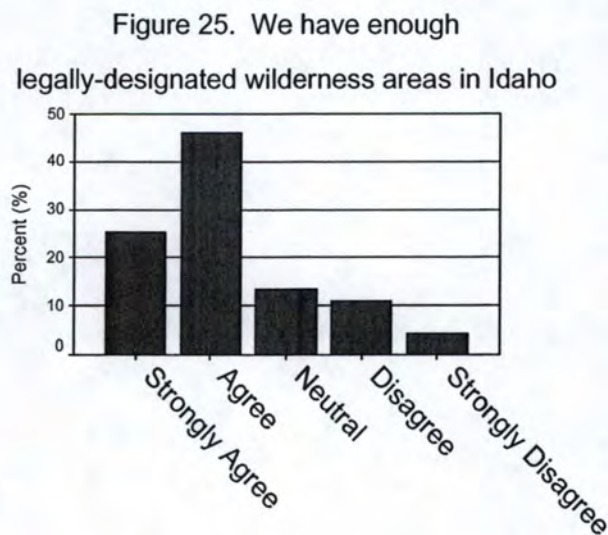
Others have been highly critical of some of the process and results of the OI. For

instance, this excerpt from a recent letter to the editor in the local newspaper emphasizes the complex social and community issues associated with collaborative working groups:

It concerns me that decisions about the future of the Owyhees will be made without the knowledge and consent of the majority of the residents of this county and the state. Yes, the Owyhee Initiative Workgroup meetings are public....but has anyone ever seen a public notice for the meetings? A process that is going to dictate use in the Owyhees should invite public comment. I fear that many users are going to wake up one day to find locked gates and 'keep out' signs on public land they they have responsibly used for generations, and wonder how this could have happened without their knowledge.

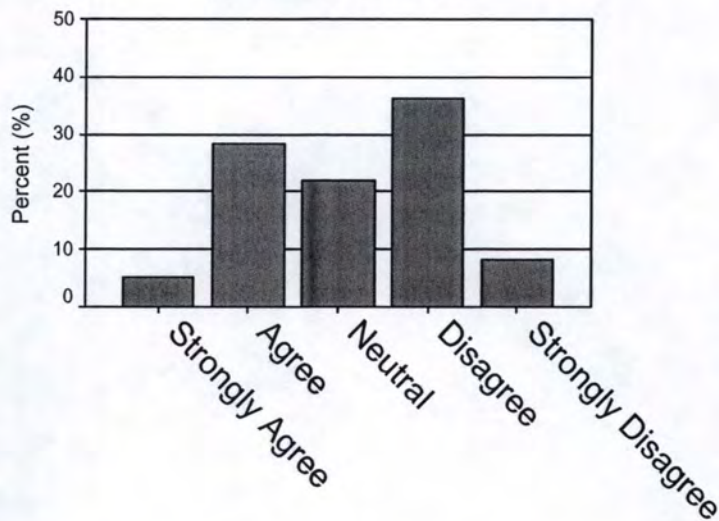
This passage raises an interesting set of questions about representation and decision-making. Assuming "consensus" as he has noted before, Senator Mike Crapo (ID) intends to sponsor Congressional legislation that would implement the Owyhee Initiative, with that process beginning as early as this fall. However, some we interviewed said it remains unclear whether 'consensus' will be considered full-consensus only, or if 'most' representatives and broad support will suffice.

Figure 25 illustrates results from another measure asked of respondents in the quantitative assessment about whether Idaho already has enough legally-designated



wilderness areas. By the distribution of response in Figure 25, a substantial proportion of respondents indicated at least some level of agreement, implying reservation about additional designation. This result suggests support for wilderness among the population in the southwestern corner of Idaho is mixed at best. In a related measure, Figure 26 shows a similar pattern, although not quite as strong, with respect to levels of agreement about wildlife protection in Idaho.

Figure 26. We have enough wildlife protection in Idaho



Symbolically, the OI has promoted the standard to full-consensus. However, recent indicators suggest one group in particular—motorized recreation (represented by the People for the Owyhees)—is not in agreement with the current form of the proposal. The representative for that coalition organization (originally formed to oppose Clinton’s proposal for a national monument in Owyhee County) has been the solitary ‘no vote’ on recent opinions taken from the Workgroup which intended to produce a final proposal during the late summer this year. Several people we interviewed indicated they feel



members of the community have been betrayed because they were led to think the process would only operate on full-consensus, but now appears to still be moving forward despite the lack of alliance between all the represented groups. One individual, who is not an OI representative, but sympathizes with the dissenting vote, argued that local constituents are giving too much to the other interests represented on the Committee:

The Initiative is rubbing some people the wrong way. It's becoming a big problem. The Enviro's are just getting their way, but we're getting blamed for 'not cooperating'. We just don't believe in Wilderness, but it looks like people are going to just take that, which is disappointing.

In contrast, others have publicly stated the amount of effort and cooperation exemplified by how well the process *has held together* for two years now is indicative of substantial and unprecedented progress, translating to less conflict and better policy and management by asserting local control. Most agree that in the end, the success of the Owyhee Initiative will rest on the ability of the County Commission and involved constituents to follow through, as they perceive this phase is when other similar efforts have fallen apart.

### Changing Perceptions of Community and the Landscape

Although the Owyhee Initiative highlights a high-profile example of an era of change from "how things have always been," the Initiative is also a symptom of a larger pattern of change occurring on an everyday level within the region. The collaborative Initiative effort symbolizes the rise and fall of new and old social relationships. Simultaneously, the effort has catalyzed the need for new and ongoing discussion about the future and sustainability of community for this region as the numbers of in-migrants continue to increase.

### *Ranch Consolidation, Community Subdivision*

Within discussions about changes happening within the region regarding both the surrounding natural environment as well as the communities, interviewees described two divergent yet related patterns. The first trend focused on changes within ranching communities and families, and largely emphasized the pattern of consolidation some see occurring, but many more fear is on the horizon at a new level. The second trend focused on the combination of changes associated with land development, residential growth, and affects to the longstanding social structures many find so familiar.

For most interviewed in the Owyhee region, describing changes to ranches, farms, or other similar uses of the land did not come easy. In fact, such change often stimulated emotions of sadness, despair, and/or frustration. Many face the difficult question of how to reconcile the expectations that honest hard work should be sufficient to make a living with many of the external forces such as outside interest groups and federal land management policies perceived to directly or indirectly constrain their opportunities.

Along these lines, the emotions associated with a threat to the loss of one's livelihood induce social-psychological impacts. For some these transitions may occur in a manner that evolves into positive opportunities. One former farmer described his personal change in the context of the trend happening within the community area:

Farming is going corporate—just getting bigger and bigger. You have to get huge or get out. Staying in farming, if you can, is just survival and I didn't want to do that. I want a return on my investment so I don't have to be frustrated with my quality of life. Some people love farming so much they don't want to do anything else, no matter how bad it pays. Some are also scared because they don't think they *could* do anything else. To those kinds of farmers, the land is not just dirt—it's alive; the farm is their friend. When I sold my farm, I wanted people to know I was just making

a change and accepting a new challenge. Even though we have all this growth in the County, our main economic base is still agriculture here. Times are tough with the prices where they are, so I'm not sure it could get any worse.

Equally true, however, seems to be the case where change may not be welcome or desired. For a number of ranchers in particular, changes in the land available for them to use has manifested itself in at least two distinct ways. Some interviewed referred to the first of these as a change or "loss" of permits they or their families have traditionally held on BLM lands. By change or "loss" here, we mean either non-renewal of a grazing permit once held, or in many cases, a new restriction to an old permit that has a significant effect on the local operator and how livestock are managed in a given area. A few cases of this type of loss are well-known in this community area and are the source of worry and concern at a collective level because of how many perceive the pattern to illustrate a changing orientation within the BLM as the primary management agency.

The second distinct way ranchers have experienced change is via land consolidation. While it may not suit this phenomenon to call it a trend or pattern pervasive in the local area, many fear it could become so as evidenced by the decline of numbers of farms and ranches as well as increases in the average size of farms and ranches in recent decades. Many in the communities in Owyhee County discussed several cases of ranch consolidation they had experienced or perhaps heard about from neighbors, friends, and family. One rancher put his observations bluntly:

We keep just having to buy more and more as we go. We can't keep doing that forever. We've got to be able to still pay the bills on our debt load, so we need to get more land, so we can run more cows. It's simple—you have to have 'X' amount of cows to pay your bills, and you know what that number is. With the changes the BLM has been making on us, we have to get more land to stay at that same number of head of cattle. They also change the grazing periods on us by makin' 'em shorter,

so that can mean you have to get even more land still to keep the same AUM level you're at with your ranch. Then, once we get all this land, we can't keep it all up, and it's getting harder and harder to find decent help for that. So it just keeps getting bigger and bigger, and it feels like it's going to reach a point where we can't manage it anymore. Then what do we do?

This passage represents a sentiment of confusion and frustration about the future of the ranching industry. Many local operators perceive the potential need for consolidation as unsustainable and ultimately, a threat to their livelihood. Meanwhile, individuals in the Owyhee region continue to adapt in order to maintain their operations, but often describe the collective plight of the industry in negative and pessimistic, if not bitter, terms.

It should be noted that the trend to fewer ranches and running more livestock on more land, is not something that is specific to only Owyhee County, Idaho. USDA figures reveal the trend is true in Idaho, other western states, as well as the nation overall. The number of people involved in agriculture is shrinking and the number of livestock and, and the amount of land per farm is increasing. Precisely because many are aware of these consolidation trends in other regions that have large allotments of public lands, the anxiety from anticipation of whether they have to follow the same path becomes a measurable impact in the present.

Perhaps unrelated to the consolidation of large landholdings described above, an equally notable trend occurring across the region is ex-urban development. Compared with the likes of Las Vegas, NV, Denver, CO, or Phoenix, AZ (Howe et al. 1997; Jenkins 2003; Vesbach 2003), one hesitates to label the Boise metropolitan area and its outstretched ex-urban fingers now surfacing on the northern rim of Owyhee County as sprawl (Knight et al. 2002; Rome 2001). However, growth and development are relative to time, space, and context, such that the *rate of change* may make as much impact as the

material changes occurring on a landscape (Krannich and Greider 1984; Wilkinson et al. 1982). And by all accounts, the rate of change in northern Owyhee County has escalated dramatically in the past five years.

Although different interviewees described the pattern in different ways, a constant message within all the interviews emphasized the perceived impacts associated with residential growth to the communities. In addition, many described this pattern in conjunction with and related to the widespread increase of those coming to the Owyhee region to recreate. The perception exists within the Owyhee region, that with the increase in recreation on the part of urban outsiders, those outsiders adopt the notion to relocate to the area in order to benefit from the quality of life in a rural or ex-urban environment.

One local elected official expounded upon this point of view:

This rapid growth has become a huge issue for our County. We're starting to see subdivisions in our communities that were once considered rural and far away from the city. Some are coming out here to get out of the city, but there's lots of newcomers that locate here because it's less expensive and more affordable as an all-around cost-of-living. We have all kinds of opportunities for people to volunteer and get involved in things, but many of them seem to have individualistic patterns, and because so many of them commute to work in Boise, lots of them *don't have time to get involved* in the community they now live in.

Long-term residents of the region that were interviewed often stressed how these immigration patterns continue to affect social structures in the local communities:

This growth hasn't even gotten out of control yet, but the County is already having trouble meeting all the demands for services like garbage pickup, resources at the schools, and emergency needs. You see the change too, because you used to know all the kids at the school, and their families. But now, there are more and more people in town, at the schools, the grocery, the post office and other places—just folks that I've never even seen before. It's hard for some of them to integrate here. Without roots here, it can be hard to become part of the social fabric.

Local officials, such as the County Commission, have begun addressing this rapid change

with Planning & Zoning efforts, which many accept as needed, but others resist in principle. One long-term resident of Owyhee County explained how this effort has caused some local friction:

I'd say 80% of the people around here don't even want planning and zoning because they think it's going to infringe on their personal property rights. Maybe they'll change their minds when all of a sudden they're surrounded by an unplanned subdivision that doesn't have any regulations. We can't afford that kind of thing anyway. We've got to protect our land base because a third of our tax base is from ranching here. We can't just ignore that or let it wither away. But the people are just going to keep moving out here too. We can't stop that train, so we've got to figure out a way to control it.

By focusing on the dilemmas of controlling rapid residential in-migration, local interviewees also emphasized the expectation that their surrounding environment would suffer as a result of the combined increase in development and recreation (Theobald et al. 1997). Huntsinger (2002, p 84) summarized well the situation many perceive as Owyhee County's present and future:

As a landscape becomes more residential and less rural, conflicts with neighbors may add to the costs and frustrations with ranching. Trespass by people and pets, complaints about agricultural activities, negative car/animal interactions—all can impinge on the rancher's livelihood. Urbanization makes ranching more difficult, and it also affects the outlook of ranchers (*footnoting Ellickson 1991 in original*).

### *Social Impacts to Family, Community, and Identity*

The changes and difficult situations discussed above cumulatively add to significant effects to family, community, and identity. While some ecocentric groups outwardly define their primary interests and goals as the natural non-human world, ignoring our own role(s), need(s), and place on the landscapes seems misguided if not naïve. Arguments aside about whether we have to choose between cows or condominiums, the

human race continues to do its share of damage to our own nest (Knight 2002). Ironically, in the Owyhee region, extreme traditional and conservative values coexist with the action and intent to set aside, in designated Wilderness, segments of resources that intuitively impact who they are and what makes up their daily lives. Regardless of the motivations, something undeniably personal is at stake and under negotiation in the Owyhees. This final section of the report outlines a set of impacts to the human communities and well-being in the Owyhee region deserving consideration from all.

Family is an entity amidst all the change in the Owyhee region that has not escaped impact. As in many rural areas, tensions exist in these communities between grandparents, parents, and *their* children about whether the latter can and will take over the family ranch or farm. At one community celebration, our interview questions sparked a significant, and apparently ongoing, debate between these three generations of one family, with the eldest scolding the two younger generations for not having changed careers and lifestyles *away from* ranching because of how tough it has become to start or maintain a ranch within the regulations and boundaries of the law. The younger generations' decisions to continue ranching, however, occurs in the context of the strength of those values within the local community to preserve this way of life as a healthy pattern for humans and the range. This local community intuitively understands the limits in the economics of ranching.

Another family situation exposed during the interviews illustrated how the chronic negative stress suffered by the parents from changes in public land grazing permits, litigation, and the looming threat that the economic tide may turn on their operation has negatively affected their children's outlook on the ranch as an option for

*their* future. One of the parents expressed these points:

Our ranch and this place you see here is not just our business—it's our home and our collective heart too. But our kids grew up in this house, and even though they've helped us everyday, they had to grow up listening to all this anger and frustration about who we are and what we do—sometimes it was us being upset with one another, which was not good for them to see, you know, as their own parents, but usually it was both of us just being so strung out by the agency [BLM] for the past fifteen years. I mean, THAT has been their life—almost the entirety of it—seeing us fighting with the BLM and almost always losing. What would you think if that's all you saw and heard everyday? You wouldn't want to take over the family ranch either. Even though they have some of their own cows, it's just for cash; they don't want to do this for a living. They want out of here. It hurts us, but we can't hardly blame them.

Emotionally, this type of effect within the family and community was often difficult for interviewees to explain because it causes embarrassment and shame for many to highlight the negativity, fatalism, and feeling of defeat. The seriousness and magnitude of the feelings, however, helped some individuals overcome the reservation to disclose these impacts.

Another level of impact related to the stress of these changes occurs when individuals or families have to confront the bottom line of their operation's economics. But true to what seems to matter most in the Owyhee region, this rancher explained to me that it's not really a question of money, even when things have become unsustainable:

I remember in '94 when we went up to Babbitt's land management hearings in Boise. They held that meeting on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the invasion of Normandy, which some of our community's ancestors here died in that battle. They died in vain so that we could have our freedom here. Have a chance to make something of our lives, even though it's kind of tough in Owyhee County. But this isn't really about dollars and cents anymore. We've gone past the point of good business practice and knowing when to quit. Our cause and reason to be here is much greater than the business end of our operation. I have an obligation to my children and grandkids to leave them something good, to leave them the land in better shape, *so that I can pass it on*. It seems odd that I know now I'll go broke doing this because I've worked hard all my life out here,



trying to make an honest living. I may go broke. But that doesn't upset me—it's about exposing my kids to a set of values that go beyond their needs and wants.

As this account illustrates, the ties and challenges between the social community and the landscape run deep. In that way, which extends beyond economic rationality perhaps, local attitudes and behavior illustrate a pattern some outsiders seem to mischaracterize as a lack of stewardship and a lack of willingness to change. The change that would be required would be to leave behind one's culture, one's livelihood, and one's identity.

Others we interviewed alluded to some of these same types of effects, but explained them more in the context of community morale and a loss of cohesion. This individual despairingly offered the following:

This community continues to get more and more alienated. If the ranchers here aren't making any money—and they're not—then no one is. The grocery store, gas station, and restaurant here—they're all hurting. Cows are our main crop, and prices have been down. I've seen some have to get out of the business and I don't like what I see that it's doing to them. They've turned angry and don't know how to deal with it. Ranch communities are at risk for becoming dysfunctional places now where we turn on our own just like in the ghettos. I see more abuse, more alcoholism—all those same things that happened to the forest-dependent communities. We're not the healthy community we were 20 years ago. You can't see a future for children here. We're hanging on now, but our industry is hurting and some don't even see how they'll be able to retire after a full life of hard work.

As a final illustration, we return to the Owyhee Initiative as a symbol of the crossroads facing the communities and natural resources in the Owyhee region. Much of the time and energy of the community, as a whole, has gone into this effort, and to date not every individual is yet satisfied. In fact, in the middle of this past summer, our observations indicate an increase of private and informal discussions to negotiate the home stretch of the proposal occurred and increased the anxiety of some anticipating its resolution and

how that may or may not carve out the next chapter of effects in local lives as described above. At the recent Owyhee Cattleman's Association meeting in Silver City, one longtime rancher in Owyhee County summarized his thoughts while the community listened:

I've heard two of my friends, who have long opposed Wilderness, stand here today and support what's going on around us [the Owyhee Initiative]. If those two guys even support *one acre* of Wilderness, there's got to be something right going on with that Owyhee Initiative. Maybe all those people we're fighting aren't the same enemies we thought they were. We're still not going to agree on *everything*; but if *not* the Initiative, then *WHAT?* We're changing fast. We can't sustain this fight for another 11 years. Our community needs this now. It's strange for me to say that, but maybe this is what we ought to do.

Even though the Initiative symbolizes substantial change that makes many uncomfortable—even some of its supporters—it appears to be a forward-looking community-based solution and a marked improvement over the conflict so many long to get away from.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Land-use and Management Plan (Owyhee County 2003, p. 1) published by the County summarizes the essence of what the place and people of the Owyhee region are about:

The custom and culture of the County includes the determination of its people. Life was never easy for the settlers of the County. This is a land in which nature plays the upper hand. Water is scarce and access is difficult. The settling developers of this land worked hard to establish their livelihood, and today's residents work hard to maintain their livelihood. The settling developers were diligent in pursuing legal protection of their property rights. Today's residents continue with that diligence.

Owyhee's roots that helped seed the Sagebrush Rebellion are alive, well, and responsive to the actions of 'outsiders' perceived to threaten the local patterns and ways of life.

Long-term Owyhee residents aim to be involved and will likely be creative to ensure that possibility.

New recreational scars on the landscape from a largely affluent and predominantly in-migrating urban population have begun to change the social structure of Owyhee County. Clashes over the old and the new will remain, but high levels of visitation have already motivated changes in local perceptions in everything from planning and zoning, to the local economic base, to how well you can depend on your neighbors. This worries long-term residents because they know those patterns can often make the difference for people in a constrained rural environment.

Owyhee residents should not be categorically characterized as resistant to change. Rather, they will stand up and assert their rights, values, and beliefs no matter who they perceive as the foe. One interviewee highlighted the paradoxical irony that much of the recent conflict faced in this region has had for the community:

Our young people have a center, a resourcefulness, and a perseverance you don't see in every community. Producing food is a fundamentally good thing to do. It used to pull us together and add to our cohesion. This fight—some days I don't know who we're fighting: Marvel, the BLM, or each other—but this fight has also helped unify this community against who or whatever it is. And that's a good thing, because without it, we never would have been unified. We just needed a common enemy. And to be truthful, in each person's plight in dealing with this, there's worry about whether it'll all go bad, but we've got to try do something. Ranch people believe that the future will work out ok. We've been at this a long time.

As evidenced here, change rarely comes easy. But as the Owyhee region continues to experience change at a rapid rate, even its vast landscape may begin to feel constrained to those who like to wander or work within it. Its people, no doubt, will find a way to carry on.

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