

### 3.11 Social Setting

The past 30 years have seen sweeping social change in the U.S. and throughout much of the world. However, in addition to the broad forces that have driven social change in the U.S. as a whole, social conditions in some PRB communities have been substantially influenced by energy development. Preceding sections of this report describe factors that have affected social conditions in the PRB, including industrial and natural resource development, economic and demographic change, housing and public infrastructure development, and institutional change at the local and state government levels. This section presents an overview of the social effects of energy development in the PRB, focusing on Campbell County where most of the research on social change has been conducted. The objective is to define the social setting for future energy development.

#### 3.11.1 Population Growth

One of the key drivers of social change in the PRB has been energy-related population growth. Section 4.4 of this report discusses population growth for counties and communities in the PRB and for the basin as a whole.

When the first oil boom occurred in the late 1950s, Campbell County was a relatively stable, sparsely-populated rural county. Periodic visits by seismic crews and the construction of the Wyodak Mine introduced some newcomers into the community, but overall, Campbell County was, like many places in Wyoming and throughout the rural west, a small, relatively homogeneous ranching community (ROMCOE 1982). The oil booms of the 1950s and 1960s brought an influx of new people, many of whom were transient in that they resided in the community only for the duration of the drilling and field development phase of the project. Nevertheless, Campbell County's population grew by 168 percent between 1950 and 1970. Development of coal mines, continued oil and gas drilling, and power plant construction caused the county to grow another 88 percent between 1970 and 1980. Population growth slowed (in relative terms) to 21 percent between 1980 and 1990 and to 15 percent between 1990 and 2000. In all, Campbell County population grew by almost 600 percent between 1950 and 2000.

On the one hand, this population growth, combined with a robust economy, generated a variety of positive social effects. Financial and technical resources poured into the community as it mobilized to accommodate the new population. In addition to the large number of high-paying jobs in the energy industries that attracted people to the area, job opportunities were created in the construction industry, as the community responded to demands for housing, public facilities, and in the retail and service sectors as merchants and service providers responded to the needs of the increased population (Gardiner 1985). In fact, new jobs were created in all sectors of the economy. The large and rapid influx of new residents, eager to take advantage of the employment opportunities, created energy, vitality, and sense of economic optimism about the community (Gardiner 1985). Where economic advancement had been limited before the boom, there was now opportunity. The out-migration of high school graduates to seek employment, a concern during the pre boom era, became an option rather than a necessity given the abundant work opportunities (Hladky 1985).

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New residents brought new ideas, new ways of doing things, new preferences for goods and services and new demands for government services. Some long-time residents, particularly those who were not directly participating in the economic benefits of energy development, viewed these changes as negative. Some senior citizens and other groups and individuals on fixed incomes were affected by rising prices for housing and other goods and services. Ranchers and local merchants were affected by the rapidly increasing wage scales, which drew away long-term employees and made new employees difficult to find and retain. Increased taxes to pay for bond issues, particularly in the early years of the boom, were resented by some long-term residents, who believed that the new facilities were required to serve the new population and not themselves (Carter 1985; Swartz 1985).

Long-time residents who were used to knowing virtually everyone in the community and to being recognized by merchants, city and county personnel, doctors, and other community members increasingly encountered strangers in their business and social interactions. Consequently, these traditionally informal business and social interactions became more formal. It is likely that many residents had mixed feelings about these changes (Heineke 1985).

During both the coal and oil booms, there were conflicts with ranchers on split estate issues, and increasing instances of trespass occurred as residential growth and newcomers seeking recreation and sporting opportunities encroached upon traditional ranching land. There also was increasing concern among local and national groups about the environmental effects of the scale and pace of the energy development.

#### **3.11.2 Community Infrastructure and Services**

As might be expected, the community infrastructure in Campbell County and the City of Gillette initially was inadequate to accommodate the rapid population growth associated with energy development.

This resulted in a shortage of housing, particularly in the early years of the boom. The cost of conventional housing, coupled with the relatively huge and immediate need and uncertainty about the magnitude and duration of the boom, led to increased reliance on mobile homes as a partial solution to the housing needs. Some mobile home parks were unattractive with few amenities. Stores and public facilities such as schools and medical clinics experienced crowding. Indoor recreation options, important during the long winter months, were limited. Counseling and mental health services initially were more geared to a stable rural community than to the needs of a rapidly growing, more diverse population.

For new residents, the challenge of dealing with new jobs and new people in a new community, compounded by housing shortages and crowding in commercial and public facilities, created a certain amount of stress. While some people clearly relished the challenge and the frontier atmosphere of the early boom years, others were dissatisfied with their living conditions. Mental health and counseling professionals began to attribute increases in social and behavioral problems to the difficult living conditions and to the individual and family stress experienced during the early years of the boom. One researcher went so far as to coin the term “the Gillette Syndrome” to describe boom town conditions that he believed resulted in elevated levels of social problems including alcoholism, depression, delinquency, and divorce (Kohrs 1974). This label contributed to the focus of the regional and national news media on the problems associated with rapid growth in

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Gillette and Campbell County, which was often unaccompanied by coverage of the positive aspects. Locally, community leaders and residents lamented the one-sided coverage and disputed the fact that Gillette and Campbell County were difficult, undesirable places in which to live (Doll 1985; Bujol 1985; Heineke 1985).

Later, some researchers would dispute the contention that rapid growth resulted in elevated levels of alcoholism, domestic violence, and divorce, contending that these conclusions were not reflected in the social indicators. These researchers concluded that increases in social problems generally were proportionate to increases in population and demonstrated, in the case of divorce, that increases in divorce rates did not seem to be correlated with increases in growth rates (Wilkinson et al. 1980).

Given the passage of time and difficulties associated with collecting and interpreting social indicators, it is unlikely that this issue will be definitively resolved. Even if proportional to population growth, the increases in mental health and counseling caseloads, like increases in demand for most public services, far outstripped the capacity of local counseling and mental health services. However, while it is true that living conditions in Campbell County and Gillette were difficult for some during the energy boom, it is also true that many residents believed that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. In 1976, the Gillette/Campbell County Department of Planning and Development (GCCDPD) initiated an annual community survey of randomly selected households in the city and county. This practice has continued to the present. In 1978, the first year the question was asked, just over 70 percent of the respondents to the survey said they would recommend Gillette as a place to live (GCCDPD 1978).

As the rate of growth slowed during the 1980s and 1990s and energy development matured into the more stable operations phase, resident satisfaction with the community as a place to live increased dramatically. During 1984 through 1989, the percentage of survey respondents saying they would recommend Gillette as a place to live ranged from a high of 88.7 in 1983 to a low of 77.6 in 1986 (the second year of the nationwide energy bust). Between 1992 and 2000, the percentage of survey respondents saying that they would recommend Gillette as a place to live ranged between 91 and 96 percent (City of Gillette, various years), and between 2001 through 2003, the favorable response was about 90 percent (City of Gillette, various years).

Other parts of the Gillette/Campbell County survey elicited opinions about the adequacy of community facilities and services, about the effectiveness of local government, and about citizen priorities for improving public services. Local officials have used results of those surveys to help guide the expansion and improvement of public facilities and services and to formulate public policies on growth management and community governance. Although public facilities lagged demand during the early years of the boom, the considerable revenues associated with energy facilities and production, coupled with the development of state and federal funding resources for community facilities and the willingness of Campbell County residents to approve bond initiatives and sales tax increases, resulted in the development and expansion of the most critical facilities in the community. In many cases such as schools, hospitals, and recreation facilities, Campbell County and Gillette are now recognized as having among the best public facilities in the state. For instance, the number of hospital beds and range of health care services offered in Campbell County relative to the other counties is profiled in **Table S-18**.

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### **3.11.3 Community Management and Institutional Structures**

Partially due to lessons learned from previous booms, partially as a result of intervention by the Governor, and partially as a result of a new municipal administration, Gillette and Campbell County responded to the coal boom of the 1970s by developing management and institutional structures to plan for and accommodate growth (Burgess 1982) (see Section 3.10 of this report for a discussion of management and institutional capacities). The professional managers and planners hired by the City of Gillette developed the institutional and regulatory tools to address growth-related issues. Additionally, state programs, including the WIIISA, and a variety of funding mechanisms (also discussed in Section 3.9) were developed to assist communities in planning for and responding to energy-related growth.

Responding to the findings of a statewide energy issues task force created by Governor Stan Hathaway, in 1971, Campbell County energy company managers formed a committee to work with city and county officials to plan and implement a coordinated response to rapid growth issues. In addition to communicating plans for future development and funding technical studies, individual companies sometimes provided land, financial assistance, housing, or in-kind support to address community impacts (Burgess 1982).

### **3.11.4 Inter-organizational Cooperation**

While there have been tensions between the City of Gillette, Campbell County, and more recently, the Town of Wright, these communities have cooperated on many aspects of growth management. The City of Gillette and Campbell County joined together under the authority of the Wyoming Joint Powers Act to develop a city-county fire department and to expand and operate the airport and a solid waste landfill (Burgess 1982).

More recently, the Town of Wright has participated in these efforts; for example, the Town contracts with the county sheriff's office for law enforcement services. During recent Wyoming Industrial Siting Hearings, Campbell County, Gillette, and Wright have been instrumental in cooperating with other affected units of local government to develop formulae for distributing IAPs.

As noted above, the energy industry has cooperated with local government in planning and accommodating industrial growth, although cooperation from larger more discrete coal, electric power generation, and railroad industries has been easier to obtain than cooperation from the more diffuse CBNG industry.

### **3.11.5 Community Integration**

Again, as a result of previous booms and the magnitude and duration of population growth, newcomers have been able to more easily integrate into Campbell County communities. Although there were tensions between some newcomers and old-timers in the early days of the boom, the numbers of newcomers and the growth in community organizations facilitated community integration for those that were so inclined. Then-Mayor Michael Enzi (who became Mayor only 6 years after moving to Gillette) suggested that participating in community activities and organizations was easier in Gillette than in most places, because although most members of the community were relative newcomers, many of the organizations themselves were new (Enzi 1985).

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Today, almost any organization, committee, or government body is made up of a cross-section of energy employees, ranchers, and other community members whose tenure in the community may be long or short (Bigelow 2004; Spencer 2004). Moreover, because of the turnover in the energy companies, the community has become accustomed to newcomers.

### **3.11.6 Social Climate for Energy Development**

Gillette and Campbell County are much larger communities than they were at the beginning of the 1970s, and they have nearly 50 years of experience in dealing with energy development. Consequently, the city, the county, and more recently, the Town of Wright, have developed both the expertise and the management and institutional systems to respond to and accommodate growth and development and are accustomed to the ebbs and flows of energy industries. However, institutional mechanisms at both state and local levels are better equipped to handle discrete projects, such as coal mines and mine expansions, power plants, and enhanced-coal/coal gasification projects than to address the challenges posed by more diffuse development, such as CBNG. Nevertheless, given their size, past experiences with rapid growth, and the quality and capacity of most infrastructure, Campbell County and the City of Gillette are among the communities best situated to accommodate energy development in Wyoming and perhaps in the Rocky Mountain west.

From a social integration standpoint, much of the existing population in Campbell County is supported directly or indirectly by the energy industry. Consequently, there are few social barriers to integration for new residents of the community. However, there is potential for conflict between new or expanded energy development and certain segments of the community. During the recent CBNG boom, split estate conflicts between CBNG developers and ranchers gained national attention and resulted in continuing attempts to change mineral entry laws. Also, environmental organizations have been active participants in energy-related environmental processes, and over the years have identified issues that needed to be addressed more thoroughly.

### **3.11.7 Other Communities within the PRB**

Much of the energy development-related social change that has occurred in Campbell County and Gillette also has occurred in other communities and counties throughout the PRB, although to a substantially lesser degree.

#### **3.11.7.1 Converse County**

Converse County, the City of Douglas, and the Town of Glenrock have been affected by a variety of energy development, including coal mines in Converse and southern Campbell counties, uranium mines, railroads, oil and gas, an electric power plant and natural gas pipeline construction. As these communities grew in response to energy development, they added management and institutional capabilities for managing growth and developed infrastructure to accommodate populations larger than currently existed. Recently, the county and its communities have been affected economically by the closure of the Dave Johnson Mine near Glenrock. Much of the Converse County work force is employed directly and indirectly by energy industry, and the county and its communities are actively pursuing a number of carbon-based industries to spur economic development in the county. As with Campbell County, Converse County, the City of Douglas, and the Town of Glenrock are

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accustomed to accommodating energy development, and there would be few barriers to social integration for long-term energy industry employees and families.

### **3.11.7.2 Crook County**

Energy development within Crook County has been limited to oil and natural gas development. A number of Campbell County energy industry employees live in Crook County, primarily in Moorcroft and Pine Haven. While Moorcroft has a long history of accommodating energy employees, particularly from the Wyodak Coal Mine and power plant, Pine Haven is a more rural agriculture- and recreation-based community. The growth in public service demand in Pine Haven is resulting in an intensification of service levels in that area with associated cost implications for the county (Barron 2004). If residential development continues to increase in Pine Haven, it is likely that the community will continue to face issues related to residential growth in rural areas.

### **3.11.7.3 Johnson County**

During the past 30 years, Johnson County has experienced oil, natural gas, and uranium development and more recently has been the site of increasing CBNG development. Due to the relatively modest level of oil and gas drilling and field development that has occurred in the county over the years, the county is primarily a rural, ranching oriented county, with tourism, recreation, and second/retirement home development playing an important role in the Buffalo area and western parts of the county. Split estate conflicts between ranch owners and CBNG developers have occurred in recent years, and the county has experienced some road maintenance and law enforcement issues related to CBNG development (Pedersen 2001a). Additionally, some residents of Buffalo and the surrounding area actively opposed development of a natural gas-fired power plant near Buffalo.

### **3.11.7.4 Sheridan County**

Sheridan County was home to the Big Horn Mine for over 60 years, and several Sheridan County towns serve as bedroom communities for the Decker and Spring Creek mines in Montana. The county may host the Ash Creek Coal Mine in the future. Sheridan County had only minimal experience with oil and gas development until about 1999, when CBNG development began and subsequently accelerated. Sheridan County and the City of Sheridan have been ranching and agriculture oriented, with second and retirement home development, tourism, and recreation playing a large part in the economy of the City of Sheridan and the western portions of the county. Sheridan also serves as a regional trade center for much of north central Wyoming. Although community integration is unlikely to be a problem with energy development, controversy may arise over environmental concerns, split estate issues, the financing of public service expansions to serve energy development, and effects on county roads (Pederson 2001b).

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### 3.11.7.5 Weston County

Weston County's experience with energy development includes oil and natural gas development and the relatively long-term operations of the Wyoming Refining Company petroleum products refinery. Newcastle and Upton also serve as bedroom communities for some employees of southern Campbell County coal mines. A number of Newcastle residents recently have expressed concern over air emissions at the refinery, but the communities generally are seeking development of energy-related businesses (Spencer 2004).