

## **APPENDIX J**

### **HISTORIC STAGES**

## **Historic Stage Narrative**

The first Europeans likely to have penetrated into the region of present Wyoming, on the western side of the Powder River Basin, were French explorers Louis-Joseph and François La Vérendrye in 1742 – 1743 (Burpee 1927). France had little chance to successfully exploit the center of North America and the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803. Economic advancement and western expansion were the primary goals outlined by President Jefferson when he ordered Lewis and Clark westward on their mission of discovery beginning in 1804 (Larson 1978). The Lewis and Clark expedition explored the Missouri River north of Wyoming on their trek west, but several in their group led by Colter left the expedition to explore the Three Forks region of the Upper Missouri River. Colter became the first white man (American or European) to explore the mountains, valleys, and basins of northwestern Wyoming (Skarsten 1964).

The fur trade in Wyoming expanded after the early part of the century, with a number of rendezvous occurring in southern Wyoming (Goetzmann 1966). The fur trade ended in the late 1830s, to be followed a number of years later by settlers coming from the east, initially for the gold fields of California and later to settle the region. The trappers had explored the region and could provide the approaching settlers with information on passable routes, location of water, forage for animals, etc.

The major routes west for settlers and gold prospectors were the Oregon/Mormon, Overland, and Cherokee Trails. All of these trails traversed southern Wyoming well south of the Bighorn Basin. However, an emigrant trail was soon established through the Bighorn Basin. The 1864 Bridger emigrant trail resulted from the early exploration and discoveries made by Jim Bridger as a fur trapper and trader (1823-1842). The road he pioneered began along the Oregon Trail near present-day Casper and proceeded north through the Bighorn Basin, then west to the Montana gold fields (Lowe 1997, 1999). Once this road was established, settlement of the Big Horn began. The Bridger Trail became an important freight route for wagons carrying supplies during the early settlement of the Bighorn Basin in the 1880s and 1890s prior to the construction of the railroad. The trail connected the basin with Billings to the north and Casper to the south.

The first recorded attempt at gold exploration in the Bighorn Basin occurred in 1864 when James and Granville Stuart had prospected along the Bighorn River (Lowe 1999). Troubles with hostile Indians prevented much exploration until the Fort Laramie and Fort Bridger Treaties of 1868 (Larson 1978). The Big Horn Mining Association was organized in Cheyenne in the spring of 1870 with the purpose of exploring the basin's mineral potential (Larson 1978; Lindsay 1932). The expedition failed to find any evidence of gold in the southwestern portion of the basin. However, seven years after the Battle of the Little Bighorn and a gold rush in the Black Hills, miners again flowed into the Bighorn Basin. This attempt to find gold also failed. Gold was finally discovered in the early 1890s in the Kirwin District west of Meeteetse. However, gold mining never became a major industry in the basin.

Although a number of people had entered the Bighorn Basin via the Bridger Trail and a number of later roads, the settlement of the basin intensified after the railroad was built into the basin. In 1901, a branch of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad was built from Montana to Cody, Wyoming. By 1907, the line had been extended south to Worland and reached Thermopolis in

1909 (Larsen 1978; Overton 1965). This new rail line provided a more expedient transportation link for people in the Bighorn Basin and it provided local shipping centers for the cattle, oil, and lumber industries of Cody, Lovell, Greybull, Worland, and Thermopolis, linking them to distant markets (Overton 1965).

Following the railroad, automobile highways soon found their way into the Bighorn Basin. The proliferation of the automobile became the catalyst fostering the evolution of Wyoming's transportation network, transforming it from one of unimproved roads into a maintained highway system (Beard 1933). By 1924 modern highways had penetrated the Bighorn Basin.

The first large herds of cattle were brought into the Bighorn Basin between 1879 and 1883, and the initial stocking of the northern ranges occurred during this period (Larson 1978). Cattle ranching became very prominent in the basin and a number of towns including Cody, Meteteetsee, and Lovell were founded due to the cattle industry (Lowe 1999). The first sheep were brought into the basin as early as 1876. The natural vegetation of the Bighorn Basin was better suited for sheep than cattle. The number of cattle in the basin declined as the sheep population increased between 1888 and 1900 (Lindsay 1932).

Charlie Worland is credited with the first sheep operation in the Bighorn Basin., but he lost much of his herd to the severe winter of 1886-1887. The sheep industries recovered from the bad winter and by the late 1890s over 70,000 sheep were located in the Meeteetse area (Lindsay 1932). In the late Nineteenth Century and into the early Twentieth Century stock raising suffered from three significant problems. The first was weather problems that caused the death of many cattle, the second was overgrazing of the range, and the third was serious, and sometimes violent, disputes between the cattlemen and sheep men. Overstocking the range resulted in diminished forage and leaner cattle which had less market value. Two dry summers in 1885-1886, followed by a brutal winter in 1886-1887 caused herds to be from fifty percent to ninety percent in Wyoming including the Bighorn Basin (Frink et al. 1956). Following the cattle die-off, range was now available sheep. Sheep men and their herds increased and cattlemen took a militant view of increasing encroachment of sheep on the range, the fencing of homesteads that curtailed grazing on the federal lands, and the fact that the range was again overstocked and overgrazed. This was compounded by the overall misunderstanding of cattlemen about the impact that sheep had on the environment in general and cattle in particular (Larson 1978). A number of violent incidents throughout Wyoming resulted in the death of sheep and their owners or herders. The violence climaxed with the Ten Sleep raid in the spring of 1909. Two wealthy woolgrowers and a herder were killed, their wagons burned, and the dogs and a couple dozen sheep killed.

While the livestock industry brought only sparse settlement to the central and northern basins of Wyoming, agricultural development of Wyoming's arable lands was necessary to provide the impetus for growth, and irrigation was the key component for successful agriculture (Larson 1978). The reclamation movement and the introduction of irrigated agriculture in the Bighorn Basin in the 1890s, transformed the regions provided the necessary catalyst for a population growth, and the establishment of towns.

Passage of the *Carey Act* in 1894 provided federal and state aid to irrigation projects. The federal government donated up to one million acres of lands to each western state with the stipulation that

the land must be reclaimed and settled. This legislation gave promoters and settlers the opportunity to undertake ambitious projects to convert sagebrush-covered lands into farms. The major watercourses of the Bighorn Basin (the Bighorn, Greybull, and Shoshone Rivers) provided ample water to interest settlers in the region's agricultural prospects. In the mid-1890s, a number of *Carey Act* projects were begun by private interests with state approval and guidance, although these often proved difficult to complete. These projects spawned a population influx into the Bighorn Basin, and the growing need for administrative services was answered in 1897 by the formation of Big Horn County (Larson 1978).

The Twentieth Century brought greater federal involvement in reclamation with passage of the *Newlands Act* in 1902. The first federal project and the biggest in the Bighorn Basin was the Shoshone Project in 1905 (Larson 1978; Churchill 1979). Cultivation of sugar beets as a cash crop was introduced into the Bighorn Basin in the early 1900s. Once the success of beet cultivation in the Bighorn Basin was assured, a sugar factory was built in Lovell in 1916, and another sugar factory was established in Worland in 1917 (Lindsay 1932).

The reclamation projects resulted in the construction of ditches and canals across the Bighorn Basin. The Big Horn Canal, in the Westside project area, began as the Lawson Canal, a small ditch on the west side of the Bighorn River between Gooseberry and Fifteenmile Creeks. The Big Horn County Irrigation Company was formed in 1902 to irrigate lands south of Basin, Wyoming. The company filed an enlargement and extension of the Lawson Ditch to irrigate 16,295 acres as a cooperative canal association. However, the company was unable to fund construction, and the Big Horn Irrigation Company was organized. This company, who had a contract with the State of Wyoming for the construction of a permanent canal to irrigate a total of 20,000 acres and had a number of financial backers. Construction began in 1905, and the canal was completed to the Greybull River in May 1908. When completed, the canal extended 50 miles to the Greybull River and irrigated over 20,000 acres (Wasden 1973). The Big Horn Canal is currently maintained and in operation.

The final industry to become prominent in the economy of the Bighorn Basin was the extraction of fossil fuels. Small-scale coal mining in the Bighorn Basin began in the 1890s. The early "wagon mines" in the basin were operated by local ranchers who traded or sold coal to residents in nearby communities. Coal mining on a commercial scale occurred in the basin only after the railroad extended its line south through the basin along the Bighorn River. Coal production rose to its highest level in 1919, remaining between 450,000 and 550,000 tons per year through 1929. During the Depression, production plummeted after 1929 to around 200,000 tons and fell further in the late 1930s to less than 100,000 tons. During World War II, there was a small surge in production, but by the late 1940s, mining activity again declined; and when the railroad converted from coal to diesel power in the mid-1950s, annual production dropped to less than 10,000 tons (Lowe 1999, Glass et al. 1975).

The oil and gas industry in the Bighorn Basin began in the mid-1880s, and beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century, the area's prolific deposits of natural gas were tapped for industrial and domestic use beginning in 1916 (Larson 1978). A boom in the oil and gas industry occurred around World War I that continued through the early 1920s, but a saturated market and the national economic depression in the 1930s precipitated a steady decline in the production of oil and gas in

the Bighorn Basin after 1923 (Larson 1978; Lindsay 1932). The situation was reversed in World War II. The increased industrial demand brought on by American involvement in the war led to increased production of Wyoming oil, including product from the Bighorn Basin fields (Larson 1978). The extraction of gas and oil in the basin is on-going and will probably expand as the demand for fossil fuels increases domestically and internationally.