



Lander County Voters Describe Their Communities

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Lander County is located in north central Nevada. It has two distinct population centers: Battle Mountain and the combined communities of Austin, Kingston and Gillman Springs. It encompasses 5,621 square miles. Over 85 percent of the county is public lands, managed by federal agencies. Interstate Highway 80 transects the county east to west on the northern end of the county and U.S. Route 50 does so in the south. State Route 305 links the towns of Battle Mountain and Austin. Thirty miles south of Austin on State Route 376 are the communities of Gillman Springs and Kingston.

Data from the 2000 census reports Lander County's total population to be 5,794, of which about 5,300 reside in the greater Battle Mountain area and 340 in Austin. The 2010 census reports a total population of 5,775, which is a slight decrease from the 2000 census. Both population centers have been mining dependent, with agriculture, and natural resource, based business also supporting the local economies. [Davis, 2003]

Purpose

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide baseline data to community leaders in identifying issues of importance to the citizens of Lander County. The information provided here also provides a foundation upon which the University of Nevada

Cooperative Extension can build educational and research programs for Lander County.

Procedure

In the summer of 2009 a needs assessment package was mailed to approximately half (N=1,000) of the active registered voters in each precinct in Lander County. This package contained a cover letter, a self-addressed stamped envelope, and the survey instrument. A similar package was mailed two weeks later as a follow-up. One hundred eleven packages were returned as undeliverable. A total of 273 completed surveys were returned for a response rate of 31 percent.

Demographic Highlights

The major demographics of the survey respondents closely paralleled the demographics of Lander County as reflected in the 2010 census, with a few exceptions. Of note was that while almost equal numbers of males and females live in the county, 60 percent of the respondents were female.

- Nearly half of the respondents have lived in Lander County for over 20 years. The next most frequent response was a tie between less than one year and between 5 and 10

years, reported by nearly one-third of the respondents (Figure 1).

- The majority are employed, with a small percentage unemployed or not seeking employment. Nearly one-third were retired.
- Only 29 percent of those responding have ever lived in a metro or urban area.
- Approximately three-fourths of the respondents owned or are buying their current residence (Figure 2).
- A majority were 41 years old or older.
- A small majority were married (53 percent).

Sustainable Development

- When respondents were asked what factors are most important in creating a sustainable community, “Leadership” and “A growing economy with jobs” ranked highest. The existence of an industrial park ranked lowest (Figure 3).
- Respondents reported that individual citizens as well as private industry were most responsible for creating a sustainable community. They also felt that the federal and state governments were least responsible (Figure 4).
- Results of the survey indicate that recruiting new businesses, seeking alternative uses for existing buildings, increasing available housing, and seeking new uses for mine sites were the most important actions to be taken in creating a sustainable community.
- Respondents felt that government agencies at all levels had little to do with community health and happiness.

Quality of Life/Perceptions

- The majority of respondents felt that

Lander County residents have a healthy relationship with the land and natural resources.

- Over three-fourths of the respondents felt that economic growth would improve the quality of life in Lander County.
- When asked why they live in Lander County, over 70 percent of the respondents said it was because of “personal safety”, “it is a good place to raise a family”, and that “it is peaceful and quiet” (Figure 5).
- When asked about their level of involvement with community organizations, natural resource-related organizations and special interest groups ranked the highest. Youth-related groups such as sports, PTA, Boy Scouts etc. ranked lowest.
- When asked how respondents spent their free time, most rated watching TV, reading, cooking, hunting and fishing, gardening, camping and sightseeing/hiking, about the same.

Employment/Earnings

- Of the respondents, by far, most were employed in the mining sector (29 percent); followed by education, retail trade, government and agriculture (Figure 6).
- Most of the respondents indicated that their primary source of income was from employment earnings, followed by Social Security.
- Most households reported an annual income in excess of \$60,000.
- A large majority are employed in Lander County, followed by a small group working in Eureka and Humboldt Counties.

Directions for Extension

- All University of Nevada Cooperative Extension program areas were rated as “needed” by the respondents.

When much needed and needed responses were combined, natural resources ranked highest with 62 percent; followed by children, youth and families at 58 percent; agriculture at 57 percent; and community development at 55 percent (Figure 7).

Housing

- More than half of the respondents have lived in their current home for more than 10 years.
- Most report living in stick-built homes, followed by single-wide trailers, manufactured homes and double-wide trailers.
- The vast majority of respondents report two persons per household.
- Nearly all had lived in Nevada prior to moving into their current residence.
- A majority of the respondents, 64 percent, plan on retiring in Lander County.
- Nearly all of the respondents were full-time residents of Lander County.

Discussion/Interpretation

Housing

Noting that the majority of respondents were over the age of 41, it is understandable that most households averaged two individuals per household, being more likely to have established permanent relationships than younger respondents.

Sustainable Development

Respondents felt that the private sector bears the majority of the burden for creating a more sustainable economy, and that this is best accomplished by utilizing vacant facilities. They also recognize the need for increasing available housing to meet the

housing needs of an expanding population.

Quality of Life/Perceptions

When quality of life responses are viewed collectively, it is evident that Nevada residents like their rural lifestyle. Because 68 percent of respondents were 41 or older, they are less likely to be engaged in youth-related activities than younger couples more likely to have school-age children.

Extension Teaching/Research Priorities

Extension teaching and research should focus on community development; natural resources; and children, youth and families.

Employment/Earnings

This data reflects a community very dependent upon the mining sector. It also demonstrates a community with a narrow economic base in need of diversification.

Limitations of This Study

Many of the frequency graphs developed from the data are the results of combining wide variations in the demographics of the respondents. These graphs could certainly be misleading. This is illustrated in the responses in Figure 1: Nearly half of the respondents had lived in Lander County for 20 years or more, with next highest percentage of respondents (24 percent) having lived in Lander County less than one year. Other results, such as type of housing, home ownership and marital status, could indicate misleading respondent preferences in other areas, such as leisure time activities and quality of life issues.

Conclusions

The stability of respondents as reflected by age, home ownership, income and demographics in general would lead one to believe that Lander County is a stable upper-middle class community. This is not the case when housing, length of residency, and dependency upon a single economic sector for nearly one-third of all jobs is considered. There is an expressed desire for economic diversity and expanded housing options. Preferences for natural resource and youth education in Cooperative Extension programming are indicated. As noted in the "Limitations of This Study" above, further manipulation of this data is needed to reflect a more accurate picture of the Lander County community. Certainly quality of life, leisure time preferences and housing need to be compared according to employment type, age and gender.

References

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APPENDIX

FIGURE 1 Length of Residency

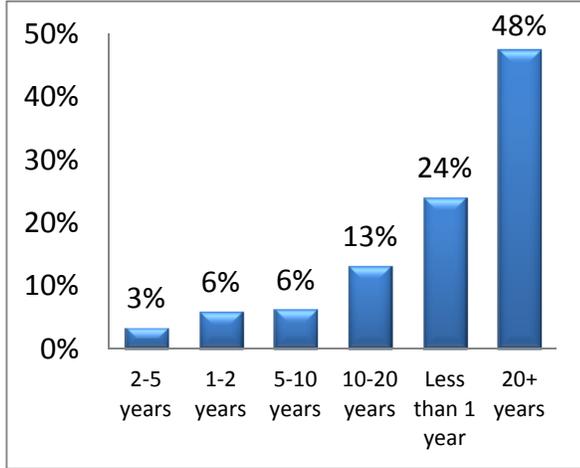


FIGURE 2 Source of Residency

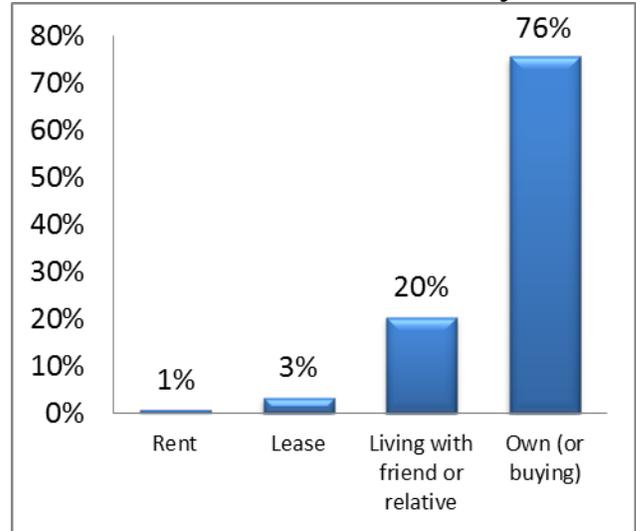


FIGURE 3 Factors Contributing to a Sustainable Economy

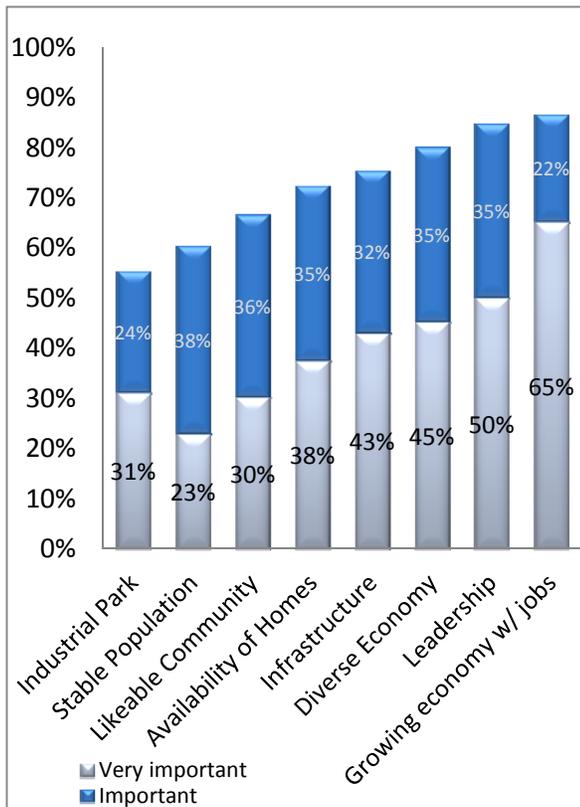


FIGURE 4 Who is Responsible for Creating a Sustainable Community?

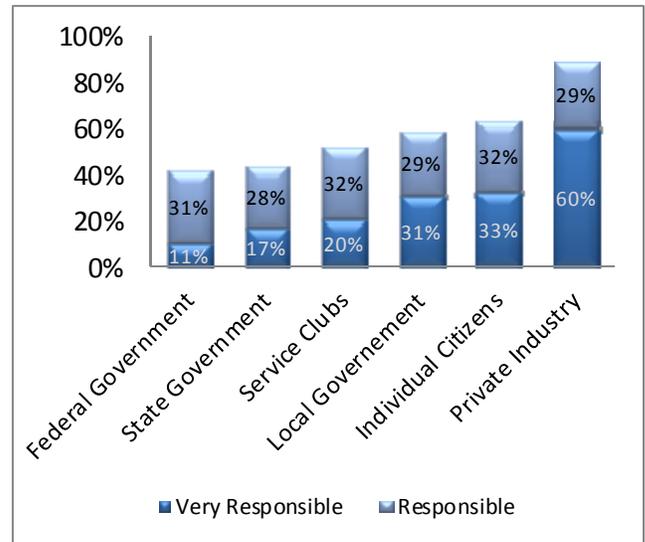


FIGURE 5
Reasons for Living in Battle Mountain

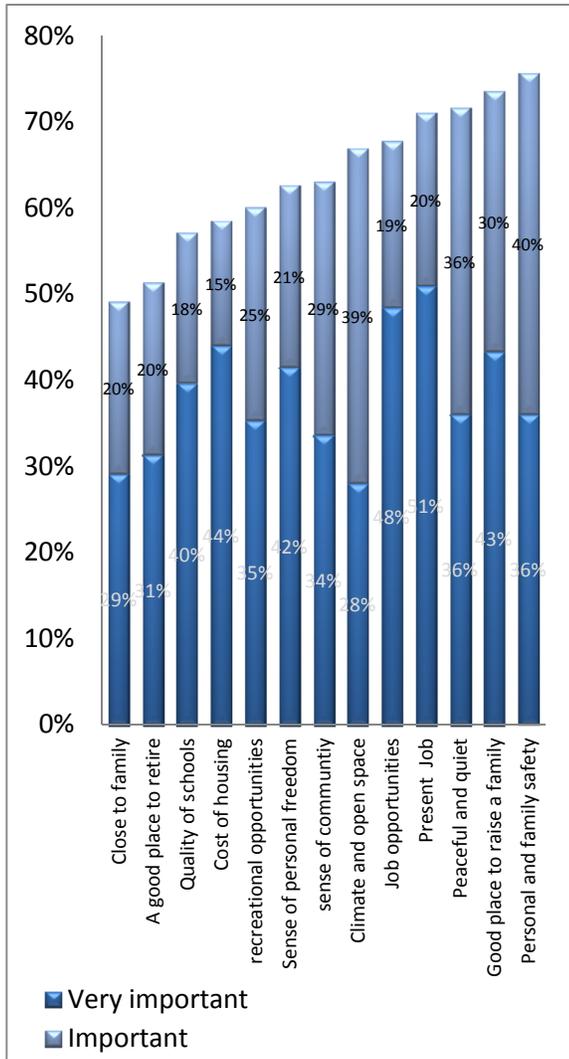


FIGURE 6
Sources of Employment

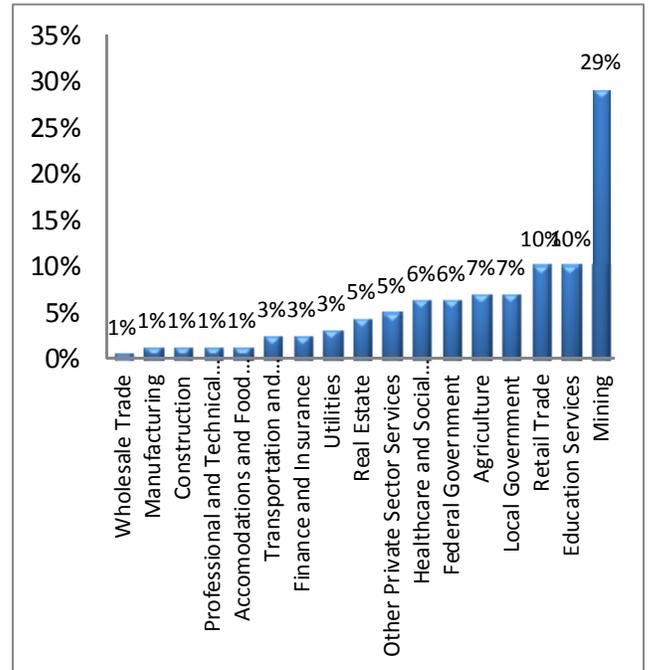
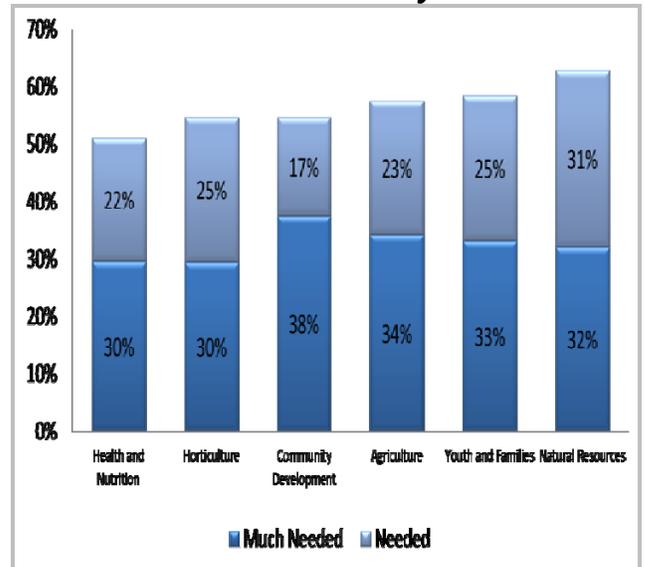


FIGURE 7
Teaching and Research Priorities for University of Nevada Cooperative Extension in Lander County



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