CASE STUDIES ON ENERGY IMPACTS

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Controlling Boomtown Development
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Foreword

This is the second in a series of case studies on counties that have been, or will be, impacted by energy development. The case studies are not intended to be guides with definitive answers to impact problems. Rather, their purpose is to alert other county officials to the potential problems and some of the solutions of major energy development projects. Each case study presents an approach to handling the growth.

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Introduction

In recent years, our attempt to gain "energy independence" has resulted in a headlong rush into the development of our various energy resources: coal, off-shore oil, gas reserves, and nuclear capability. Far too frequently the effects of such developments on the near-by communities are overlooked by industry and government until the projects are well underway. Because energy projects are normally located in rural communities, the large growth that results from development of our mineral resources places severe pressure on the social and economic forces of the community. The need for advance planning and cooperation between the industries and local governments is essential. If the growth is unplanned, the effect on the community can be disastrous.

This study of Sweetwater and Uinta Counties in Wyoming is the second in a series of case studies on energy impacted communities. The purpose of these studies is to familiarize officials in areas having potential energy development with efforts that have been made by counties currently experiencing development. There are several possible means to meet the development impacts and as many variations on them as there are impacted counties. Since the specifics of plans must vary greatly according to State and local laws (tax limitations, placement of authority, and constitutional constraints), the study will stress the process of preparing for and meeting impacts rather than specific numerical projections.

Sweetwater County, Wyoming, one of our nation's coal rich counties, has seen its population double in the past five years as a result of the opening of a 2,500 megawatt power plant and the expansion of its trona industry. This growth had not been adequately forecast. There was little preparation for the expected influx of population. There was a general expectation that the changes would be only temporary. As a result, numerous social and economic problems ensued. These problems included a doctor shortage, inadequate medical and educational facilities, a housing shortage, a sewage disposal problem, and a lack of recreational activities. The county has used a variety of approaches to gain control of these problems, but the most significant approach has been the development of close cooperation between industry and the local government.

Neighboring Uinta County, with no mineral wealth of its own, has become a bedroom community for Sweetwater's industrial and mining workers. With the development of Sweetwater County's mineral resources, Uinta's population greatly expanded. The population increase has brought financial and social difficulties to the county and its communities, similar to those experienced in Sweetwater.

The NAO Energy Project hopes that counties facing development of their own energy resources, or having neighbors which are expecting such development, will be able to benefit from some of Sweetwater and Uinta Counties' experiences. Both counties have had some failures and some successes in their efforts to control the socio-economic impact problems of energy development.
Background

Sweetwater County, in the southwest portion of the state, is Wyoming's largest county (10,429 square miles). It is approximately 170 miles northeast of Salt Lake City, Utah, and 250 miles west of Cheyenne, Wyoming's capital. There are two major population centers, Rock Springs and Green River, both located in the west central portion of the county. Never a big agricultural area because of poor soil and little rainfall, the county has developed because of its coal resources. According to the Wyoming Department of Economic Planning and Development, the county is 96 per cent underlaid with coal, and 45 per cent of the coal is readily mineable.

The Union Pacific Railroad has historically been an important force in the county. It came through the county in the 1860's because coal was readily available. During the construction, the Federal Government gave the railroad substantial tracts of land along the route. Today, they and the Bureau of Land Management control approximately 85 per cent, in a patchwork fashion, throughout Sweetwater County. The railroad was the mainstay of the local economy into the 1950's. When it completed its switch from steam to diesel engines in the late 1950's, the county suffered a severe depression (when the rest of the nation was undergoing great prosperity). The coal mines closed and the Union Pacific laid off workers.  

Discovery of another mineral resource, trona, revived the economy and the employment level through the 1960's, employing displaced coal workers. Trona is a natural soda ash used in the manufacture of glass, detergents, paper, photographic film, textile dyes, and, of course, bicarbonate of soda. There are three trona companies in the western portion of the county, and a fourth is under construction. All the companies (PMC, Allied, Stauffer, and the new one, Trinacuff) mine the trona underground and refine it on site.

From 1960 until 1970, the population remained stable, increasing only 2.6 per cent to 18,391 in 1970. The ratio of basic employment to total employment was .546 in 1970, which was close to the national ratio of .525.  

Development of Growth

In 1971, economic growth began to accelerate. The Jim Bridger Project, a joint venture of the Idaho Power Company and the Pacific Power 

1 Today the Union Pacific Railroad has become the Union Pacific Corporation with several major divisions. Two are active in Sweetwater County; Rocky Mountain Energy controls 27 per cent of the county's mineral rights and Upland Industries controls all company real estate transactions.

2 Basic employment industries are mining, industrial construction, industry and farming. The local service sector includes retailing, housing, construction, and government.
and Light company, announced plans for the construction of a three-unit 22,000 megawatt power plant. A fourteen-mile long strip coalfield, leased from Rocky Mountain Energy, would fuel the steam electric plant. The power would be transmitted to Idaho and Oregon. The two industries forecasted a construction force of 1,200 men by 1974. (A fourth unit was announced in the latter part of 1973. It has recently been approved by the Wyoming Siting Council for construction.)

At the same time, three existing trona companies, unknown to each other and to the community, began planning increases in their own mining operations, and a fourth began construction plans.

The boom was underway by 1972. Since the population had been stable for many years and there was minimal unemployment, industry had to go outside the area to hire workers. This resulted in rapid population growth, compounded by the Bridger Project which, by the end of 1972 had surpassed the projected 1974 construction force by 100, and the trona industry expansion from 1,000 to 2,000 workers. The population had grown to 24,007.

The increase in employment for 1974 was 4,200. The coal and trona mining force made up 2,650 men, or 64 per cent of the 1974 increase. One unit of the power plant was completed and operating with 150 new employees.

The service sector, attempting to respond to the rapidly increasing population, expanded from a work force of 4,480 in 1970 to 7,000 in 1974. Basic employment had become 52.7 per cent of total employment, up from 38 per cent of the 1970 total. Households did not receive the level of services they wanted or could afford. In four years, Sweetwater County's population doubled: from 18,391 in 1970 to 36,860 in 1974. (See appendices A and B—time charts and employment and population forecasts.)

The University of Denver Research Institute Study

In late 1973, Rocky Mountain Energy became concerned about the apparent social and economic disfunctions which had developed in the county. It determined that a study of the situation was necessary prior to the further development of energy resources. In December, 1973, it commissioned the University of Denver Research Institute (DRU) to prepare a study of the county's growth and recommendations for managing it.

The Institute's report groups the problems into three categories: deteriorating quality of life as growth in basic industry outran the local service sector's ability to provide housing, health services, schooling, retailing and urban services; declining industrial productivity in mining

3 The trona industries were supplying 45 per cent of an increasing national market for soda ash, up from 10 per cent in 1960.
because of labor turnover, labor shortages, and declining produc-
tivity; and an underserving by the local service sector in goods and
services because capital investment in this sector did not build up
adequately.

The Institute's study included a representative survey of 400
citizens, newcomers and oldtimers. The survey sought the citizen's
perceptions of the problem areas in the community; it revealed their
priorities for improvement of existing services. The top five prior-
\nts were: medical and health services; road and street maintenance;
suitable housing; police protection; and, more and better schools and
teachers.

A significant finding of the survey was that the majority of
workers were happy in their jobs but not with their living arrangements.
Even with suitable housing, about one-half of the construction workers
indicated that they expected to leave the community when the construction
was completed; however, without adequate housing, 75 per cent of them
had a low probability of remaining even with other jobs available.
Individuals who had moved to Sweetwater County within ten years were
asked to compare the various services offered locally with those provided
in their former places of residence. In all services, Sweetwater
compared unfavorably to the former residences, particularly in retail
stores, medical services, recreation facilities, housing, road and
street maintenance, and community planning.

The D.R.I. study provided the community's leaders with the citizens' perspective on the county's problems. The survey and the study brought
the leaders together and became a major impetus in the efforts to solve
the impact problems.

For the first few years of the growth, there had been a feeling in
the community that, with time, the problems would solve themselves or
would disappear as the construction force dwindled. It was true that
the construction force would decrease, but it was not true that the prob-
lems would disappear, since increasing numbers of coal and trona miners,
and local service employees would replace the construction workers. The
population would remain at the 1974 level, twice that of 1970.

The report made clear that the existing system was not responding
adequately. The local governments and industries could no longer wait
for the market place to respond to the demands of the citizens for housing
and doctors, nor could the government delay expenditures.

Comment—It has to be kept in mind that for many years Sweetwater
County had been a stable, rural community. Each governmental unit knew
its responsibilities, and carried them out as a matter of course. During

4 Stores and restaurants were not expanding nor were new ones moving
into the community, and the tax base was not initially increasing propor-
tionally with demands for government services.
the initial growth period, the governments continued to carry out their functions as they had before, without consultation with one another or with industry.

The Denver Research Institute suggested two new organizations aimed at responding to the changing environment of Sweetwater County. They were the Sweetwater County Priorities Board and Southwest Wyoming Industrial Association.

Sweetwater County Priorities Board

The four tasks of the Sweetwater County Priorities Board would be:

- to provide regular communication between local government and industry on information and plans of mutual interest;
- to analyze current and future problems and recommend solutions;
- to work out coordinated proposals for industries to help in the solving of common problems, and to coordinate approaches to the state government for their assistance; and,
- to move toward governmental economic self-sufficiency and an adequate capability for managing the growth of the county.

The concept of a Priorities Board was well received by various organizations, industry, and governments.

The Chairman of the Sweetwater County Board of Commissioners became the prime mover of the effort. As he saw it, the "social problems are a government responsibility and a responsibility of industry. To solve them we are all going to have to cooperate." The Priorities Board, as defined in July, 1974, would be a committee of fifteen members: two county commissioners; the Mayors of Rock Springs, Green River, Granger, Superior, and Wamsutter; four industry representatives; a representative from each school district; and two members-at-large from the county.

As a result of the Chairman’s campaign, which included news articles, meeting with other governmental units, and informal discussions with other community leaders, the concept quickly became popular. The School Districts, town councils, industries, and medical groups, etc., passed resolutions supporting formation of the Priorities Board, and elected members of their groups to serve on it. The formation of an organization in which problems and their solutions could be discussed was underway. (See appendix C - By-Laws.)

The first meeting of the group took place at the County Courthouse on October 16, 1974. At the first meeting, an education subcommittee was formed. The Board agreed that a citizen advisory group would be established, and representatives were told to return to their organizations
and list their priorities for the Board’s next monthly meeting. At later meetings, subcommittees on health and ways and means were formed.

Prior to the organization of the Priorities Board, numerous private and public organizations (e.g., the Health Services Organization and the school districts) were requesting financial assistance from the industries, who had no systematic way of determining which requests to fund. Since the formation of the Board, representatives report on the resources of their organization which are available to the community. At their monthly meetings, proposed projects and funding sources are discussed. Priorities are set, and financial and man-hour support are coordinated.

The Priorities Board’s strength is that it provides a forum for discussion. It has no power to enforce its decisions. The Board members must confront one another’s problems and weigh their own organizational needs against others. Members of the community look at it with pride as a forum where grievances can be aired and action will be taken. It is a focal point for discussion, priority setting, and action. It has resulted in cooperation among all the organizations in the county and widespread knowledge of the difficulties faced in attempting to solve all the impact problems at one time.

Southwest Wyoming Industrial Association

The Southwest Wyoming Industrial Association was organized at the same time as the Priorities Board. The D.R.I. survey had revealed that workers were satisfied with their jobs but dissatisfied with the community. As a result, there was an extremely high turn-over rate among construction workers, and a 25-40 per cent decrease in productivity per man at the trona mines, as well as a miner turn-over rate of 35 to 100 per cent.

Just as the Priorities Board has become a structure whereby the community can collectively determine which issues are most significant and need immediate attention, the Industrial Association is a forum where the companies can determine their own role in the county.

Twelve industries joined the Association. They were the four trona operations (PMC, Allied, Stauffer, and Texassulph) Church and Dwight (a manufacturing division of Arm and Hammer), Pacific Power and Light (the Jim Bridger Project), Upland Industries, Union Pacific Railroad, Stanbury Coal, Rocky Mountain Energy, Black Butte Coal, and Champion Petroleum Company (a branch of the Union Pacific Corporation which recently opened an oil field in the county).

The Industrial Association was a response to the realization that general living environment was as critical to a worker as the work place environment. For their own economic good as well as that of the entire community, the industries had to take an active role in the community. Their public reason for the formation of the Industrial Association was to allow “industry to collectively deal with many community problems that

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were developed as a result of the problems created by impact."

The climate outside Sweetwater County also had a bearing on the formation of the Industrial Association. The continuing concern in the Rocky Mountain states about the development of regional energy resources and the effect of development on the local environment and life style has resulted in legislation increasing energy-related industry taxes and requiring industrial involvement in the communities. It was to the advantage of Sweetwater’s industries to show a concern for the county before the Wyoming Legislature mandated it.

Comment—This public-relations approach has been successful. For example, recently in Wyoming there has been talk of a trona severance tax, similar to the existing coal severance tax. Citizens in Sweetwater County have spoken out against the trona tax, stating that the industry has voluntarily recognized its responsibilities, and there is no need for coercion. It is also interesting to note that county officials expressed more concern and dislike for the Wyoming Plant Siting Act than did the industry representatives. Industry representatives think the Act is harsh, but agree that advance planning is necessary. For further details, see the appendix on state laws.

The Association has assisted in those problems which are county-wide in several ways. It prepares quarterly employment projections, maintaining the secrecy of the individual companies. It has been the guarantor of bank loans to both the Green River and the Rock Springs Community Health Services in their attempts to recruit doctors. The agreement between the industries states that the Association will offer its combined expertise to the local governments in such areas as planning decisions, budget priorities, and in working with state and federal agencies. Not all industry contributions have been joint efforts. Many industries have made donations to ease particular problems in the areas where they have been the major cause of impact (these will be dealt with in the particular categories).

According to members of both groups, the result of the efforts of the Priorities Board and the Industrial Association is an excellent working relationship between industry and local government. They express confidence in each other and are working together to make Sweetwater County a well-run and enjoyable community for its residents.

The problems which confronted these two groups were numerous. They will be discussed in the following sections, and include: a hospital which had been inadequate before the boom and was more so after the growth; a serious shortage of doctors; too few classrooms and teachers; a monumental increase in the number of mobile homes in the area; hotels filled with workers; inadequate zoning requirements; and a lack of retail services. The discussion will emphasize the process which led to solution, alleviation, or understanding of each problem.
The Hospital

The first recognized problems and the ones of major concern to residents, were a doctor shortage and inadequate medical facilities. Sweetwater County Memorial Hospital had been built in 1894, and doctors and the hospital board had been expressing concern well before 1971 that, despite new equipment, the building was no longer adequate. The County's sudden growth made a new hospital imperative. In 1973, the county commissioners announced a $6 million bond issue referendum. Community leaders supported the bond issue, and on election day 82 per cent of the voters approved it.

The county commissioners set aside $1.2 million of their 1973 Revenue Sharing Funds for equipping the new hospital. In September 1973, the total $7.2 million budgeted for the hospital was expected to be sufficient for the 100-bed facility. The hospital board was ready to begin the bidding process in late 1974. By then it was clear they would be short several million dollars due to inflation.

In February 1974, the Wyoming Legislature passed a bill allowing local governments to form Joint Powers Boards, and authorizing the State Farm Loan Board to lend money to Joint Powers Boards in impacted communities (see appendix D—state laws). To begin construction, the Hospital Board of Directors, the Rock Springs City Council, and the Sweetwater County Board of Commissioners formed a Joint Powers Board and applied to the Farm Loan Board for a $4 million loan. Approval of the loan gave the hospital sufficient on-hand funds to qualify for $440,000 in Federal Hill-Burton funds.

After receiving the Farm Loan Board loan, bids were taken, and construction of the new facility began in the spring of 1975. The hospital should open in the middle of 1976.

Comment:—The $4 million loan could have been avoided if the Hospital Board and the County had committed planning money before referendum approval. Such a decision to plan before a vote can only be made when chances seem excellent for voter approval.

Doctors

It is a well-established fact that rural areas of our country are not adequately served by doctors. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently stated that, on an average, counties under 25,000 people had only one doctor for every 1,770 people, in contrast to counties over 50,000, with one doctor per 768 people. Sweetwater County, prior to the boom,

5 The Hill-Burton program for funding hospitals requires that a certain percentage of the total cost be available as cash at the beginning of the construction period.
was no exception. In 1970, it had ten physicians for every 1,800 residents. Its isolation, poor climate, and lack of support facilities were liabilities in the doctor recruitment program. In 1974, they still had just ten doctors, only one per 3,700 people.

In June 1972, the majority of physicians then practicing in Sweetwater County formed a non-profit corporation, the Sweetwater Health Services Organization, to carry out a doctor recruitment program and to develop new techniques for dealing with the increased number of patients.

The doctor recruitment program has been one of the successes of the organized doctors. Their efforts have taken numerous forms, including advertising in medical journals, and following up on inquiries made to the Wyoming Medical Society by physicians interested in practicing in Wyoming. One of the most successful means of recruiting has been through word-of-mouth.

Financial incentives have been essential to the success of the recruitment program. Here, industry has been helpful. They have guaranteed salaries for the doctors, provided housing, and paid relocation costs. As a result of the National Health Service Corps, there are now three new doctors practicing in Green River. 6

Another difficulty in recruiting doctors has been the lack of clinic space. To overcome this obstacle, concerned physicians and industries provided money for construction of two modular clinics outside the present hospital and for the recruitment of physician assistants to work in the emergency room and clinics.

Several of the recruited doctors have not stayed in the county because they could not adjust to the isolation, housing facilities, and lack of adequate equipment. The community is hopeful that these doctors who do remain will encourage others to come into the county.

Comment—Doctor recruitment is a slow process in a rural, isolated community. It takes time and dedication by active citizens and doctors to find new doctors who enjoy the assets of rural life and participation in a growing community. A successful recruitment program also needs active involvement by industry in supporting financial incentives to encourage new doctors to give the community a chance.

The innovative technique attempted by the doctors was a health maintenance organization (HMO). 7 The HMO received $400,000 from the United

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6 The National Health Service Corps is a federal program which designates medically underserved areas, and assigns Corps personnel to the areas for two-year employment.

7 HMO's are organizations of doctors who contract with individuals and families to provide all medical services, typically for a fixed monthly fee.

In the past year, the organization faced increasing difficulties. Industries, while financially assisting in construction of clinics and doctor recruitment, did not believe that the HMO's contract services was the way to handle the medical problems in the county. They would not agree to offer the plan to their workers. Citizens resented the HMO and were concerned that, if they did not join, they would be unable to see a local doctor. Working relationships between the doctors deteriorated. Frustration in working within federal restraints in a community unprepared to accept this type of group health program led Sweetwater Health Services to suspend operations on October 31, 1975.

Comment—The HMO concept is an interesting innovation in the health care delivery system. However, the director of the Sweetwater Health Services believes that the chances of an HMO working in a rural area with a shortage of doctors are slim. Only when the community feels there are an adequate number of doctors who will remain in the community, and employers are willing to offer the HMO, rather than the normal insurance coverage, to their workers, can an HMO be effective. In reflecting on the situation, the director thinks that the Sweetwater doctors' efforts at recruitment were probably enough to keep them busy, and the HMO should have been held off for a couple of years.

Other medical shortfalls that became apparent were the lack of ambulances and the shortage of health education programs. There have been improvements in these areas. Fifty thousand dollars have been used for ambulances and the trona industry donated another $26,000 for Green River ambulances. The County Health Education Program has been expanded to include nurses' training and consumer education.

Education

When 4,000 new workers, most between the ages of 25 and 40, move into a community in a four-year period, the number of school-age children increase rapidly. Sweetwater County's two school districts, District I (Rock Springs) and District II (Green River) have had to face this situation head-on, initially without an adequate tax base.

The Jim Bridger Project is within District I. Despite the influx of 1,300 construction workers by 1972, most of whom settled in District I, the school system received no revenue from the Project until early 1973, when the first power unit began operation. (In Wyoming, facilities cannot be taxed until operating.) In 1973, District I was teaching 30 to 40 percent more children on the same budget as it had in 1972.
In District II, the problems are more severe. The trona mine work force began increasing in mid-1972; however low productivity kept the assessed valuation down. Construction has begun on the new trona mine which will have no assessed valuation until it opens in 1978. Therefore, the tax base for District II is too small to provide the necessary facilities and services.

There was a 50 per cent increase in enrollment from 1970 to 1974. New classrooms and teachers were needed. These shortages could not be overlooked for very long, even though the necessary tax revenue was not available. Therefore, early in the boom additional teachers were hired and maintenance expenses were decreased as much as possible. These budget adjustments have made it possible for the two school districts to hire an adequate number of teachers, except for short-term problems due to sudden large influxes of temporary workers and their families. There have been problems with staff turnovers, which have been attributed to lack of adequate housing and general unhappiness with the community.

Additional classroom space has been difficult to finance. The Districts have bonded to build new schools and have reached their indebtedness limit. While awaiting completion of the new facilities, both school districts have been utilizing portable classrooms, and rooms in administration buildings. The local industries have assisted in supplying classrooms. For example, Upland Industries (the real estate branch of Union Pacific Railroad) donated land for a portable six-room school house, and the Willamette Development Corporation donated ten acres for an elementary school in District I. In District II, the three operating trona mines have each provided two classrooms for the school system.

Both school districts face other serious problems. The high turnover of students causes fluctuations in class size during the course of a school year. School records are delayed, sometimes arriving after the student has moved on. Both districts recognize a need for expanded psychological services and more special classes. As a result, they have increased the ratio of special education programs to total classes. They both have added psychologists, nurses, and speech therapists.

The school districts began early to carry out development programs. They have coped as well as possible with their limited resources, and have struggled to maintain a quality education for the youth of Sweetwater County. For District I, the situation appears to be under control. The population has levelled off, tax revenue will increase as future Jim Bridger Power Units begin production, and it can budget for maintenance and upkeep once again. For District II, the situation is not as good. Until the assessed valuation for the district goes up (when Texcis golf opens in 1978,) the District can have no new bond referendums and

8 In Wyoming, a school district may be indebted only up to ten per cent of its assessed valuation.
the student population will continue to expand as new housing units open for the miners workers (bringing in miners from Lyman and Mountain View in Uinta County).

Sewer and Water

There is an ample water supply in Sweetwater County. Pacific Power and Light controls the water for the cities of Rock Springs and Green River. It has kept up with the increasing demand and has done its best to update the supply and distribution facilities. There is a possibility that the present water source may be insufficient by 1985. If such proves to be the case, it is essential that preparations begin now for finding other sources. Residents in the unincorporated areas of the county have their own wells, and to date contamination has not been a problem, though it may become one as development expands into areas with poor soil where effluents are more likely to leech into the water supply.

The sewage systems are more of a problem. It should be pointed out that sewage is a city responsibility, and, in the unincorporated areas, individual homes are on septic tanks and mobile home parks use lagoon systems.

In 1970, Rock Springs' sewage plant was operating at 65 per cent of its 1.3 million gallon a day capacity. The city started planning for a new facility at that time. In 1973, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) granted Rock Springs $48,000 for planning; additional money was expected for construction but the federal government froze funds. After the freeze thawed, EPA resumed financing planning grants but few, if any, for actual construction. Since 1973, the city has been attempting to get a construction grant from EPA under the 1972 Water Pollution Act, while their system has become more and more overloaded. The city has proposed a 1.5 million gallon plant and the State Department of Environmental Quality has approved the initial proposal. The EPA office in Denver is expected to do the same. The next step is state and federal approval of the engineering design. Rock Springs hopes to begin construction in spring of 1976 and complete the facility within a year. The city's 25 per cent match has been budgeted for several years and it is only awaiting EPA's 75 per cent match. As a stopgap measure, the existing plant has been cleaned in hopes of increasing its capacity.

Comment—This procedure is an example of local inaction but of federal delays. Rock Springs has been dealing with both the state and federal agencies since late 1973, and has had its financial share ready for use since that time. This situation emphasizes the need for coordinated federal response to the needs of energy-impacted communities.

9 Under Title II (the Construction Grant Program) of the Act, EPA distributes money to the states. Each state has a priority list of areas needing facilities. The state is responsible for approving projects.
In District II, the problems are more severe. The trona mine work force began increasing in mid-1972; however low productivity kept the assessed valuation down. Construction has begun on the new trona mine which will have no assessed valuation until it opens in 1978. Therefore, the tax base for District II is too small to provide the necessary facilities and services.

There was a 50 per cent increase in enrollment from 1970 to 1974. New classrooms and teachers were needed. These shortages could not be overlooked for very long, even though the necessary tax revenue was not available. Therefore, early in the boom additional teachers were hired and maintenance expenses were decreased as much as possible. These budget adjustments have made it possible for the two school districts to hire an adequate number of teachers, except for short-term problems due to sudden large influxes of temporary workers and their families. There have been problems with staff turnovers, which have been attributed to lack of adequate housing and general unhappiness with the community.

Additional classroom space has been difficult to finance. The Districts have bonded to build new schools and have reached their indebtedness limit.8 While waiting completion of the new facilities, both school districts have been utilizing portable classrooms, and rooms in administration buildings. The local industries have assisted in supplying classrooms. For example, Upland Industries (the real estate branch of Union Pacific Railroad) donated land for a portable six-room school house, and the Willamette Development Corporation donated ten acres for an elementary school in District I. In District II, the three operating trona mines have each provided two classrooms for the school system.

Both school districts face other serious problems. The high turnover of students causes fluctuations in class size during the course of a school year. School records are delayed, sometimes arriving after the student has moved on. Both districts recognize a need for expanded psychological services and more special classes. As a result, they have increased the ratio of special education programs to total classes. They both have added psychologists, nurses, and speech therapists.

The school districts began early to carry out development programs. They have coped as well as possible with their limited resources, and have struggled to maintain a quality education for the youth of Sweetwater County. For District I, the situation appears to be under control. The population has leveled off, tax revenue will increase as future Jim Bridger Power Units begin production, and it can budget for maintenance and upkeep once again. For District II, the situation is not as good. Until the assessed valuation for the district goes up (when Texas Gulf opens in 1978), the district can have no new bond referendums and

8 In Wyoming, a school district may be indebted only up to ten per cent of its assessed valuation.
The Green River sewage situation is in much worse shape than Rock springs. Their facility is the simple leach trench designed for 5,100 people. Today Green River's population is 11,000. Green River is planning a new facility with a capacity of 1.2 million gallons a day. Completion of the first phase will be in 1977, with final completion in 1985—provided there are no further federal or state delays.

Housing

Housing has been the most critical problem in Sweetwater County. The lack of it has been a major factor in the high worker turn-over rate. The shortage of adequate dwelling structures has increased the difficulty of recruiting doctors, teachers, and employees for the public sector.

According to a county housing study, there were very few vacant homes prior to the boom, and the majority of them were dilapidated. No preparations were made for the projected population increase. The situation was chaotic in 1970-74. In that period, there was a 760 per cent increase in the number of mobile homes in the county. The motels became temporary dwellings for construction workers. Single family homes were converted into two-family units. Landlords began condemned years ago.

It was not until 1973, when it had become clear that the private market place was not responding to the demand, that industry became involved. Upland Industries owned much of the vacant land, and hadn't known what to do with it since 1960; it became the major real estate dealer and housing developer.

Since competition with other industries keeps labor costs high and the boom has inflated land costs, all housing development is of necessity modular units, prefabricated in the factory and laid on developed sites. Despite the modular unit construction, housing costs are high—single family homes sell for $33,900 to $45,600. While many families would like to move out of their mobile homes, the cost of new housing is prohibitive.

Industry has attempted to alleviate the housing problems by assisting their workers in financing housing. Allied, for example, has contracted with Upland for the building of homes. Their workers may rent these homes with an option to buy. The rent payments are deducted from the price, which will not increase for the renter. (This not only benefits the worker, it benefits industry in stabilizing their work force, more than making up the cost of subsidized housing in increased productivity and work benefits.)

A Communities Profile prepared by Upland Industries in October, 1975, projected demand for housing in the county at about 2,075 new units by 1980. This demand is being met with construction of single-family homes, apartments, townhouses, and mobile homes.

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The Rock Springs area, as of January 1, 1975, had 324 new single-family homes, 140 new multi-family units, and 216 new mobile homes. These units have eased the housing situation. There are no longer permanent residents in the motels. Permanent housing is available for those who want it and can afford it. Mobile homes will continue to be a large part of the housing market for construction workers, short-term employees, and for some permanent residents.

The rapid development of housing units, sponsored by industry, shows what can be done when cooperation exists between local officials and industry. Their combined efforts made necessary annexations and zoning and subdivision controls occur rapidly. The developments are well planned, and utilities, where possible, have been hooked into the city system. Community leaders have commended the industries for their efforts in this area.

Comment—While this industrial involvement in housing construction is commendable, it should have begun well in advance of the influx of workers. Housing must be an industrial priority in an impact area. The industries can provide the financial resources to build housing which conventional builders are unable or unwilling to commit to a boom town. The demand for immediate housing in impacted areas necessitates a large initial capital expenditure which must come from the private sector. The local government should be involved only to ensure compliance with zoning, building, and subdivision controls.

Planning

Sweetwater County, prior to the announcement of the Jim Bridger Project, had done no land use planning. In 1972, they hired a consultant to prepare a comprehensive plan for the county. The consultant, using the Jim Bridger Project's employment projections, greatly underestimated future population growth. In fact, by 1974, Sweetwater's population had reached the consultant's estimate of 1985 population. This error increased the existing resistance to county-wide planning. Nonetheless, the Commissioners and their appointed Planning and Zoning Commission did pass a loose County Zoning Resolution in August, 1972. It has not been effectively implemented, and mobile homes continue to be scattered throughout the county.

The Commissioners hired their first planner in 1974 who prepared an analysis of the existing land use patterns and a housing inventory. These studies and others to be performed will be used to prepare an up-dated comprehensive land use plan. Recently-passed state legislation mandates counties to prepare comprehensive plans. If a county does not, the state will prepare the county's plan. (See Appendix D - state laws.)

Comment—This planning will not be effective unless the county
develops the capacity to enforce its zoning regulations. Unless there is strict enforcement of a county's regulations, comprehensive land use planning is worthless.

Rock springs and Green River did not have zoning ordinances until early 1972, when growth was already well under way, and mobile homes and houses were appearing haphazardly throughout both cities. They adopted subdivision ordinances at that time and are actively attempting to enforce them. Both communities hope that, in time, strict enforcement of the regulations will result in a decrease in the number of non-conformance structures.

Law Enforcement and Fire Protection

With the rapid growth, increased demands have been placed on police and fire services. The result is that areas that once needed only light protection now require much more. These demands are magnified by the size of the county.

While the population has doubled, the number of reported crimes has risen by a much greater percentage. In Rock Springs, for example, there were 9,000 calls for police assistance in 1970, and 39,000 in 1973. There have also been changes in the types of crime reported. Sweetwater County, according to a county commissioner, has always been a heavy drinking area, and this has continued unabated; however, the drinkers are younger. In an extensive drug and alcoholism survey conducted by the Southwest Counseling Service, seven per cent of the senior high school males reported daily drinking, 17 per cent reported drinking three to five times a week, and another 23 per cent drink once a week. Figures for the senior high females are five percent, eight per cent, and twenty-six per cent respectively. Police report six per cent of their drinking-related arrests are of youth. According to the county attorney, there were only ten to fifteen juvenile crimes in 1963, and in 1975, there were five cases a week! (It should be pointed out that many community leaders believe that these problems are not due to a sudden increase in "problem kids," but rather to the serious shortage of alternative activities—see the recreation section, page 18.)

Another serious problem has been child abuse in the county. Prior to the boom, there had been no reported cases of child abuse. Today, Sweetwater County ranks number two in the state in reported cases. Very few cases get to the courts; however, the county welfare office and the sheriff's office refer many to the Southwest Counseling Service for assistance.

The Sweetwater County Sheriff's Office still operates as a rural department. The sheriff is frequently hard to locate for investigations and his office is understaffed. One of the reasons for this is the difficulty in finding men who are willing to work for the low county
salaries when much higher salaries are available with the industries.

In order to respond to the situation, the county doubled its appropriation for the sheriff's office between fiscal years 1971 and 1975. Some of this increase was necessitated by inflation; however, much is in response to growth. Before the boom, there were only two full-time deputies; there are now nine full-time deputies in the Rock Springs-Green River area and four part-time deputies in the outlying towns.

Both Rock Springs and Green River have municipal police departments. The cities have also expanded their police departments in an attempt to meet the needs of the citizens.

As in most rural counties, there is limited fire protection in the unincorporated areas, and Sweetwater County has no area-wide fire districts. Both Green River and Rock Springs have fire departments, and both have informal working relationships with the county, answering calls to ten or fifteen miles outside the city limits. Sweetwater County has allocated revenue sharing funds to the purchase of fire trucks, which were given to the two cities with the understanding that rural calls would be answered. If there is continued growth in outlying areas of the county, the county will have to establish fire districts, and build and equip several stations in these areas.

Comment—As long as informal agreements between the cities and the county are effective, it is not necessary to formalize the arrangement. However, as the situation becomes more complex, financing may become a problem. Population increases in unincorporated areas, and the resulting increase in fire calls, could necessitate the development of a formal cost-sharing agreement.

Social Services

Sweetwater County residents have placed increasing demands on the county for social services. Child abuse has become a major problem. Families have been struggling to stay together, frequently not succeeding, and turning to county agencies for assistance. Children are bored and unhappy.

Several groups in the county are working to alleviate these problems and have met with varying degrees of success. The Sweetwater County Welfare Office handles Aid for Families with Dependent Children, and child abuse cases where possible. The office is hampered by inadequate space to interview clients or to hold staff meetings. To provide assistance in the evenings, they have developed a close working relationship with the ministers association. After 5:00 P.M., three ministers are available to respond to calls and provide assistance, and, when necessary, they can contact one of the welfare office staff.
There has been an increase in the demand for mental health counseling services in the schools and among citizens, which is being met by the Southwest Counseling Service. The Southwest Counseling Service was started in 1963 as a regional effort with offices in three counties, but by 1972 the various offices had each become a single county agency. This separation simplified budget and decision-making mechanisms.

The Service is funded through the county’s mill levy and the state’s mental health funds. The county portion of the Counseling Service’s budget is small, the major sources of revenue being the state and the nominal service fees.

For many years, the Service had maintained a small, steady patient load. In 1972, a staff of four provided counseling services and acted as the school psychologists. Since then, staff has increased as more citizens have asked for assistance and client participation has increased. The Service is able to focus more directly on community needs since the schools have hired their own psychologists.

The 1974 survey by the Denver Research Institute indicated that all citizens perceived the county as being a safe environment, without adequate activities for women or couples. The Service has been working to improve the situation, and has attempted to bring women from the mobile home parks into community activities.

In the summer of 1975, the Service opened an Alcoholism Center, through which counselors assist spouses of alcoholics, hold meetings with alcoholics, and visit jailed alcoholics. Other new programs to meet the changing needs in the community are: diagnostic testing, family therapy, marriage counseling, assertiveness training sessions, child therapy, Weight Watchers, and child management—parent effectiveness.

Over the years, the Southwest Counseling Service has earned a respected place in the community. Their referrals come from community agencies, including the sheriff’s office and the welfare office, the schools, the county attorney, and doctors. In fiscal year 1975, they held 3,234 consultations, an increase of 200 per cent from 1970. The Counseling Service attributes the increasing use of the service not only to the population rise but also the growing understanding that it is acceptable to seek help for problems.

In late 1974, a newcomer to the county became concerned about the alcohol and drug problems she thought existed in the community. A former nurse, then working on a masters degree in social work, she believed the community was ignoring a serious situation. She obtained the support of the Rock Springs Women’s Club, and approached the Southwest Counseling Service for their assistance. Working with them, she
developed a survey to measure the drug and alcohol abuse problem in the county. The results indicated that programs were needed to offer alternative activities to the citizens. She spoke to numerous groups and arranged a luncheon with the community leaders to encourage their interest and input in the formation of the Sweetwater County Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Program (SCDAAPP). The county commission provided funding for the program.

One of the most successful programs of SCDAAPP is Rent-A-Kid, a program to provide odd-job employment opportunities for the 12-16 year-olds. Through radio announcements, meetings and ads, employers were encouraged to hire the teen-agers.

SCDAAPP is also working to educate the community on responsible use of drugs and alcohol through participation in meetings, radio shows, and news articles. It is also providing activities for the woman of the county. This volunteer program is making progress, but there is unhappiness with the length of time it takes to reach the newcomers.

Recreation

With all of the open spaces in the county, recreation has not been considered a problem—until recently. One of the reasons for discontent among new county residents is the lack of activities in the evening and on week-ends. A person can spend only so much time with the four-wheel drive up in the hills. Until recently, neither the county nor the cities have considered this problem to be a priority.

The school districts have been asked to open their gyms in the evenings. Although they recognized the need, they have not been able to afford the maintenance costs, and would not comply.

According to the director of the Rent-A-Kid program, it is the children of the area who are the most bored. There is no recreational or community center where the youth can relax after school with their friends. Many citizens believe that if there were organized activities for the youth, the juvenile crime rate would decline.

It wasn't until the summer of 1975 that the county had any summer recreation program. Through the efforts of the leader of SCDAAPP and an instructor at Western Wyoming Community College, the County sponsored a nine-week summer program. The program provided organized recreational activities to approximately 200 kids each week once a week in eight different population centers. The activities leaders were volunteers. However, the county is now financially able to provide paid recreational staff and equipment in the various population areas for future programs.

In 1975, the county began plans to rehabilitate the county fair site for use as a year-round recreational facility. It will provide activities
for the youth and adults of the community year round.

Comment—Since the county is large, the fair grounds, located just north of Rock Springs, will not be accessible to outlying communities in the evening. Community centers should be set up in the other residential areas with basic equipment, such as pool tables, bowling lanes, etc.

In the private sector, there is a shortage of restaurants, movie theatres, and bowling alleys. The manager of the Chamber of Commerce is considering beginning a recruitment program to bring in new retail and service activities. Such a program should be successful since the county has the population base to support many new services.