

Code of the West

Humboldt County, Nevada

The Code of the West was first chronicled by the famous western writer, Zane Grey. The men and women who came to this part of the country during the westward expansion of the United States were bound by an unwritten code of conduct. The values of integrity and self reliance guided their decisions, actions and interactions. In keeping with that spirit, we offer this information to help the prospective citizens of Humboldt County who wish to follow in the footsteps of those rugged individualists by living outside the city limits.

Introduction

It is important for you to know that life in the country is different from life in the city. Properties offered on the Internet may sound like a good investment, but “buyer beware” - if it sounds too good to be true, it just may be. We advise visiting Humboldt County to see what you are investing in - this is a rural community with a low population. Many of the properties offered are not easily accessible - the land may be on a hillside or in the flats - there is no way to be absolutely sure of the topography without seeing the property. There may be no road within miles and it may be necessary to obtain permission to cross land belonging to others in order to access the property.

Many of the advantages of living in a large city are not readily available in a small community. Reno is approximately 170 miles (a 2 ½ - 3 hour drive) east of Winnemucca - Boise (260 miles) a 5 hour drive - Salt Lake City - 369 miles (the nearest large airports).

County governments are not able to provide the same level of service that city governments provide. To that end, we are providing you with the following information to help you make an educated and informed decision to purchase rural land.

Access

The fact that you can drive to your property does not necessarily guarantee that you, your guests and emergency service vehicles can achieve that same level of access at all times. Please consider:

- < There can be problems with the legal aspects of access, especially if you gain access across property belonging to others. It is wise to obtain legal advice and understand the easements that may be necessary when these types of questions arise. Many of these properties are accessible only through BLM owned property; it is wise to contact the BLM to find out what they will require in order to access the property you propose to purchase.
- < Emergency response times (Sheriff, fire suppression, medical care, etc.) cannot be guaranteed. Under some extreme conditions, you may find that emergency response is extremely slow and expensive.
- < You can experience problems with the maintenance and cost of maintenance of your road. Humboldt County maintains 939 miles of roads, but many rural properties are not served by private or public roads, which are not maintained by private road associations. There are even some county roads that are not maintained by the county - no grading or snow plowing. There are many roads that are not maintained by anyone! Make sure you know what type of maintenance to expect and who will provide that maintenance.
- < Extreme weather conditions can destroy roads. It is wise to determine whether or not your road was properly engineered and constructed.
- < Many large construction vehicles cannot navigate small, narrow roads. If you plan to build, it is prudent to check out construction access.
- < School buses travel only on maintained county roads that have been designated as school

bus routes by the school district. You may need to drive your children to the nearest county road so they can get to school.

- < In extreme weather, even county maintained roads can become impassable. You may need a four wheel drive vehicle with chains for all four wheels to travel during those episodes, which could last for several days.
- < Natural disasters, especially floods, can destroy roads. Humboldt County will repair and maintain county roads, however, many roads are the responsibility of the landowners who use those roads.
- < Unpaved roads generate dust. When traffic levels reach specific levels, Humboldt County treats county system roads to suppress the dust, but dust is still a fact of life for most rural residents.
- < If your road is unpaved, it is highly unlikely that Humboldt County will pave it in the foreseeable future. Check with the County Road Department when any statement is made by the seller of any property that indicates any unpaved roads will be paved!
- < Unpaved roads are not always smooth and are often slippery when they are wet. You will experience an increase in vehicle maintenance costs when you regularly travel on rural county roads.
- < Mail delivery is not available to all areas of the county. Check with the postmaster for mail delivery information for your area.
- < Newspaper delivery is similarly not always available to rural areas. Check with the newspaper of your choice before assuming you can get delivery.
- < Standard parcel and overnight package delivery can be a problem for those who live in the country. Confirm with the service providers as to your status.
- < It may be more expensive and time consuming to build a rural residence due to delivery fees and the time required for inspectors to reach your site.

Utility Services

Water, sewer, electric, telephone and other services may be unavailable or may not operate at urban standards. Repairs can often take much longer than in towns and cities. Please review your options from the non-exhaustive list below.

- < Telephone communications can be a problem, especially in the rural areas of Humboldt County. From time to time, the only phone service available has been a party line. If you have a private line, it may be difficult to obtain another line for fax or computer modem uses. Even cellular phones will not work in all areas.
- < If sewer service is available to your property, it may be expensive to hook into the system. It also may be expensive to maintain the system you use.
- < If sewer service is not available, you will need to use an approved septic system or other treatment process. The type of soil you have available for a leach field will be very important in determining the cost and function of your system. The system must be checked by the State Inspector and permits must be obtained. Perk tests may be required to determine if the property will drain.
- < You may not have access to a supply of treated domestic water. You may also find that your monthly cost of service can be costly when compared to municipal systems.
- < If you do not have access to a supply of treated domestic water, you will have to locate an alternative supply. The most common method is use of a water well. Permits for wells are granted by the state engineer and the cost for drilling and pumping can be considerable. The quality and quantity of well water can vary considerably from location to location and from season to season. It is strongly advised that you research this issue very carefully.

- < You will be allowed a well for domestic water use. Permits from the state engineer may restrict water to use to that which is used inside of a home. This includes water use for irrigation of crops or landscaping and/or livestock. If you have other needs, make certain that you have the proper approvals before you invest. It may also be difficult to find enough water to provide for your needs even if you can secure the proper permit. Water rights in Nevada are very expensive and difficult to obtain.
- < Electric service is not available to many areas of Humboldt County. It is important to determine the proximity of electrical power. It can be very expensive to extend power lines to remote areas. Currently (2006), the cost is \$3500 per pole - a pole is required every 300 feet from the nearest source.
- < It may be necessary to cross property owned by others in order to extend electric service to your property in the most cost efficient manner. It is important to make sure that the proper easements are in place to allow lines to be built to your property.
- < Electric power may not be available in two phase and three phase service configurations. If you have special power requirements, it is important to know what level of service can be provided to your property.
- < If you are purchasing land with the plan to build at a future date, there is a possibility that electric lines (and other utilities) may not be large enough to accommodate you if others connect during the time you wait to build.
- < The cost of electric service is usually divided into a fee to hook into the system and then a monthly charge for energy consumed. It is important to know both costs before making a decision to purchase a specific piece of property.
- < Power outages can occur in outlying areas with more frequency than in more developed areas. A loss of electric power can also interrupt your supply of water from a well. You may also lose food in freezers or refrigerators and power outages can cause problems with computers as well. It is important to be able to survive for up to a week with no utilities if you live in the country.
- < Trash removal can be much more expensive in a rural area than in a city. In some cases, your trash dumpster may be several miles from your home or non-existent. It is illegal to create your own trash dump, even on your own land. It is good to know the cost for trash removal as you make the decision to move into the country. In some cases, your only option may be to haul your trash to the landfill yourself. Recycling is more difficult because pick-up is not available in most rural areas.

The Property

There are many issues that can affect your property. It is important to research these items before purchasing land.

- < Not all lots are buildable. The Humboldt County Assessor has many parcels that are separate for the purpose of taxation that are not legal lots in the sense that a building permit will not be issued. You must check with the Humboldt County Assessor to know that a piece of land can be built on.
- < Easements may require you to allow construction of roads, power lines, MINING, etc. across your land. There may be easements that are not of record. Check these issues carefully.
- < Many property owners do not own the mineral rights under their property. **Owners of mineral rights have the ability to change the surface characteristics in order to extract their minerals. It is very important to know what minerals may be located under the land and who owns them – check for Mineral Leases, which allow access**

to property. Much of the rural land in Humboldt County can be used for mining, however approval of a conditional use permit may be required. A public hearing is held and review and a recommendation is passed on by the regional planning commission for final review and approval by the county commissioners. Be aware that adjacent mining uses can expand and cause negative impacts.

- < You may be provided with a plat of your property, but unless the land has been surveyed and pins placed by a licensed surveyor, you cannot assume that the plat is accurate.
- < Fences that separate properties are often misaligned with the property lines. A survey of the land is the only way to confirm the location of your property lines.
- < Many subdivisions and planned unit developments have covenants, conditions and restrictions that limit the use of the property. It is important to obtain a copy of the CC&R's (or confirm that there are none) and make sure that you can live with those rules. Also, a lack of covenants can cause problems between neighbors. The county is not responsible for CC&R's and in order to enforce them, the residents must engage an attorney.
- < Homeowners associations (HOAs) are required to take care of common elements, roads, open space, etc. A dysfunctional homeowners association or poor covenants can cause problems for you and even involve you in expensive litigation.
- < Dues are almost always a requirement for those areas with a HOA. The by-laws of the HOA will tell you how the organization operates and how the dues are set.
- < The surrounding properties will probably not remain as they are indefinitely. You can check with the Humboldt County Planning Department to find out how the properties are zoned and to see what future developments may be in the planning stages. The view from your property may change.
- < It is important to make sure that any water rights you purchase with the land will provide enough water to maintain fruit trees, pastures, gardens or livestock.
- < The water flowing in irrigation ditches belongs to someone. You cannot assume that because the water flows across your property, you can use it.
- < Flowing water can be a hazard, especially to young children. Before you decide to locate your home near an active ditch, consider the possible danger to your family.

Mother Nature

Residents of the country usually experience more problems when the elements and earth turn unfriendly. Here are some thoughts for you to consider.

- < The physical characteristics of your property can be positive and negative. Trees are a wonderful environmental amenity, but there are few trees in this area. Brush fires can also be a problem. Defensible perimeters are very helpful in protecting buildings from fire and inversely can protect the area from igniting if your house catches on fire. If you start a fire, you are responsible for paying for the cost of extinguishing that fire.
- < Steep slopes can slide in unusually wet weather. Large rocks can also roll down steep slopes and present a great danger to people and property.
- < Expansive soils, such as Bentonite Clay (which is common in the foothills) can buckle concrete foundations and twist steel I-beams. You can know the soil conditions on your property if you have a soil test performed.
- < The topography of the land can tell you where the water will go in the case of heavy precipitation. A flash flood can occur, especially during the summer months, and turn a dry gully into a river. It is wise to take this possibility into consideration when building.
- < Spring run-off can cause a very small creek to become a major river. Many residents use sand bags to protect their homes. The county does not provide sand bags, equipment or

people to protect private property from flooding.

- < Nature can provide you with some wonderful neighbors. Most, such as deer and antelope are positive additions to the environment. However, even "harmless" animals like deer can cross the road unexpectedly and cause traffic accidents. Rural development encroaches on the traditional habitat of coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions, rattlesnakes, prairie dogs, and other animals that can be dangerous and you need to know how to deal with them. A problem with mosquitoes and West Nile Virus has arisen in the wet years. In general, it is best to enjoy wildlife from a distance and know that if you do not handle your pets and trash properly, it could cause problems for you and the wildlife.

Agriculture

The people who tamed this wild land by finding water has allowed agriculture to become an important part of our environment. Owning rural land means knowing how to care for it. There are a few things you need to know:

- < Farmers often work around the clock, especially during planting and harvest time. Hay is often swathed or baled at night. It is possible that adjoining agriculture uses can disturb your peace and quiet.
- < Land preparation and other operations can cause dust, especially during windy and dry weather.
- < Farmers occasionally burn their ditches to keep them clean of debris, weeds and other obstructions. This burning creates smoke that you may find objectionable.
- < Chemicals (mainly fertilizers and herbicides) are often used in growing crops. You may be sensitive to these substances and many people actually have severe allergic reactions. Many of these chemicals are applied by airplanes that fly early in the morning.
- < Animals and their manure can cause objectionable odors. What else can we say?
- < Agriculture is an important business in Humboldt County. If you choose to live among the farms and ranches of our rural countryside, do not expect county government to intervene in the normal day-to-day operations of your agri-business neighbors.
- < Nevada has an open range law. This means if you do not want cattle, sheep or other livestock on your property, it is your responsibility to fence them out. It is not the responsibility of the rancher to keep his/her livestock off your property.
- < Before buying land you should know if it has noxious weeds that may be expensive to control and you may be required to control. Some plants are poisonous to horses and other livestock.
- < Animals can be dangerous. Bulls, stallions, rams, boars, etc. can attack human beings. Children need to know that it is not safe to enter pens where animals are kept.
- < Much of Humboldt County receives less than 8 inches of precipitation per year. As a result, we have a problem with overgrazing, and fugitive dust. Without irrigation, grass does not grow very well. There is a limit to the amount of grazing the land can handle. The Humboldt County Cooperative Extension Office can help you with these issues.

In Conclusion

Even though you pay property taxes to the county, the amount of tax collected does not cover the cost of the services provided to rural residents. In general, those living in the cities subsidize the lifestyle of those who live in the country by making up the shortfall between the cost of services and the revenues received from rural dwellers.

This information is by no means exhaustive. There are other issues that you may encounter that we have overlooked and we encourage you to be vigilant in your duties to explore and

examine those things that could cause your move to be less than you expect.

We offer these comments in the sincere hope that they can help you enjoy your decision to reside in the country. It is not our intent to dissuade you, only inform you.