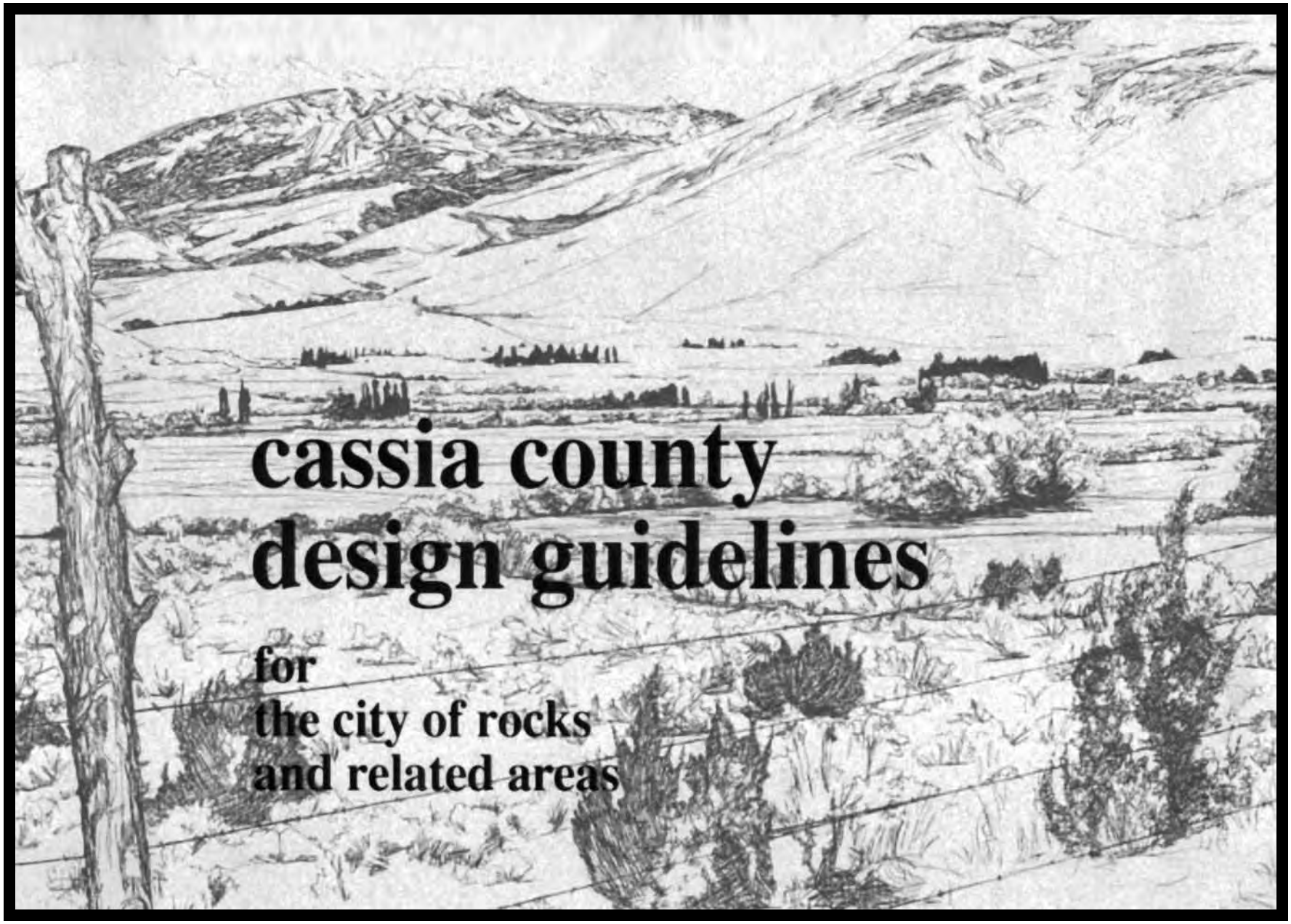

cassia county design guidelines

for the city of rocks and related areas

cassia county design guidelines

for
the city of rocks
and related areas

prepared by
Michael L. Timmons

Associate Professor
Department of Landscape Architecture and
Environmental Planning
Utah Sate University, Logan, Utah

Cynthia Butler Moffett
Marilynn Feuerstein

Candidates for the Masters in Landscape Architecture Degree
Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning
Utah State University, Logan, Utah

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The Purpose of the Publication

This publication is a guide to appropriate development in southern Cassia County. It could be compared to a cookbook, filled with recipes for successful design. A culinary guide must consider the ingredients, their proper combination, and the cooking conditions. Likewise, a successful built environment is also the result of many factors.

The purpose of this work is twofold. First, it examines and analyzes the essential elements of the visual landscape of the area. Second, it proposes a set of guidelines that will encourage and assist future development, both within the City of Rocks as well as along the designated historic loop route, to occur in a manner compatible with traditional landscape and architectural patterns. Issues which are addressed include densities of development, setbacks and siting of built elements, massing and grouping of structures, architectural appearance, signage, and planting design.

The intended audience for the guidelines is broad. They are intended for use by architects, site planners, property owners, developers, government agencies, and the general public to help comply with the intent of the City of Rocks legislation and to ensure perpetuation of the intact and beautiful landscape of Cassia County. This material will be useful to the County Planning Commission in their review of development proposals, as well as to private citizens or developers desiring to undertake projects compatible with the unique visual qualities of the study area.

A landscape is by definition a reflection of dynamic processes. Change is the one constant, as natural forces build and erode landforms. Fluctuations in global climate are played out locally in wet and dry cycles, which in turn influence vegetation and wildlife occurrence. The most rapid agent of change is human. As technological development occurs and economic fortunes shift, the tides of change impact the landscape through new forms of land use. Because of this dynamism, it is unrealistic to expect a static landscape devoid of change. However, the magnitude and appearance of change can be modified through design, and that is the intent of this publication. It is not an attempt to suggest that residents must live in a ”museum”, somehow encapsulated in a plastic laminated vision of the past. It is however, an attempt to recognize the unique attributes of this landscape and to work toward preserving those qualities enjoyed by tourists and residents alike, while at the same time continuing to allow reasonable growth and development.

Discussion of the Problem

Southern Cassia County is located propitiously at the convergence point of numerous notable features. With the City of Rocks National Reserve as a ”hub”, the area is traversed by the Oregon and California Trails, and is surrounded by points of interest such as the Oakley National Historic District. With an anticipated increase in popularity of the City of Rocks, and a broadening base of tourism including significant numbers of out-of-region and even international visitors, the opportunity for tourist related development will present itself to communities lining the approach routes to the reserve. While this is potentially an economic blessing to rural Cassia County, caution must be exercised to prevent ”killing the goose that laid the golden egg.”

In too many areas across America, poorly conceived tourist development adjoins our scenic and historic monuments. These developments, eager to cash in on the opportunities presented, have all too often destroyed the very values for which the area was initially preserved, and sought by visitors. The net result is disappointment on the part of tourists and disillusionment among local residents, who witness a loss in their own quality of life through the disappearance of the rural atmosphere and quality of life which they previously cherished. Throughout America, there is a tendency toward ”sprawling sameness”, an unintentional yet insidious destruction of regional identity under a blanket of uniformity. While the fast food stands and mega-stores bring with them a valuable convenience and reliable product, they also deprive us of variety and uniqueness. Today, we no longer have regional restrictions on availability of building materials. Widespread awareness of styles and access to pattern books have replaced localized patterns of design based on tradition and variations in functional need with generic structures. It is tragic to witness the homogenization of the American landscape; the *”make-every-place- look-like- Columbus, Ohio”* syndrome. Throughout much of the country, it is too late to salvage regional identity. The front range of the Rockies in and around Denver, the greater Sacramento area, and the Salt Lake Valley, each at one time unique places, are today but faceless entities. Rural Cassia County has survived a century of development intact. It is filled with scenes unique to this place and nowhere else. It is the contention of this document that this special quality can be retained while allowing and encouraging economic growth and expansion.

What is required is foresight, common acknowledgment of the factors that make this place unique, and a willingness of the citizenry to cooperate for the good of all.

The Planning Process

Fact finding and inventory phases of the project began in June, 1994. Many hours were logged driving, walking, mapping, and photographing southern Cassia County. Public meetings were held at the end of August in both Oakley and Malta. The purpose of these meetings was to inform residents about the purpose and scope of the project, to summarize the data inventory portion of the study, and to gather input from citizens regarding desired future visions of their visual environment.

The study team heard a lot about what residents value and cherish about their own surroundings and what was seen to be potential threats of unacceptable change in their landscape. Workshop participants were challenged to develop a collective visual image of their future landscape, answering the question: ”Thinking *20 years down the road, what would you want this place to look like?”* Responses varied, but the overwhelming sentiment was *”keep it the way it is”*, but do so without imposing mandatory regulations.

One comment which appeared to summarize the feelings of many suggested that, with regard to tourism development, they would like visitors to ”come, *look, and leave”*, without effecting any changes in the way

The question was posed: *”Are there elements of change in the landscapes of other places that would be undesirable if they happened here?”* The response was unanimously *”no fast food, no strip development, no freeways”*. Another question probed whether there was a concern over a loss of anything in the landscape. Participants talked of open space, and the importance of the cattle business as a way of life they did not want to lose. They spoke of old stately homes that give a landmark quality, and of remnant relics of bygone times serving as reminders of ancestral travails.

Design guidelines were then prepared in draft form, responding to feedback obtained from the initial series of meetings. These ideas were presented at a public meeting on December 6 in Albion, once again to gather feedback from residents of the area. Material presented herein represents the final documentation of ideas and concerns thus developed. The Cassia County Design Guidelines for the City of Rocks and Related Areas is both an educational primer of what presently exists, and a participatory manual of ideas for residents who value and wish to retain what they have.

How to Use this Booklet

The format of this booklet is designed to provide easy access by a variety of users to specific areas of interest or concern. The first section, ”The Purpose of this Publication”, explains the two main goals of the publication: First, to analyze and research the visual landscape, its origins and significance; and second, to make design recommendations based on this analysis. The outlined purpose is followed by a section which explores some of the dilemmas of growth soon to be facing southern Cassia County and issues a challenge to confront and plan for them. ”The Loop Route Concept” introduces the idea of a scenic byway and discusses its significance to the future of the area.

The two main sections of the booklet relate directly to the primary goals of analysis and design recommendation. An inventory and analysis of the area’s cultural and natural history was completed, in order to understand the existing landscape sufficiently to offer relevant design recommendations. The chapter entitled Context summarizes these findings by categories. Section one, ”Context: The Natural Landscape” deals with the natural setting and how the existing geology, landforms and vegetation originated. ”Context: The Cultural Landscape” addresses changes to the natural setting that were brought by people as they moved westward across the plains and settled this region. General changes to the vegetation, patterns of settlement on the land, and the location and orientation of farmsteads are all discussed. ”Context: Architectural Elements” examines the region in even more detail, focusing on historic patterns of architecture in both residential and working buildings and explaining how these historic elements form the basis of the towns and settlement surrounding the City of Rocks today. A discussion of ”Visual Zones” completes the contextual background with an explanation of how visually sensitive and less-sensitive areas are determined, and how this information can be used to design in a more efficient and sensitive manner. Following these visual analyses sections, the booklet turns to recommendations for more effectively designing the landscape and preserving the unique elements of this region. ”Site Planning Guidelines” is a section dealing with a series of hypothetical design scenarios which apply to a broad range of landscape types throughout the region. Typical development scenarios are contrasted with a more creative approach, with suggestions regarding building location and support elements, and how to best design and locate these to enhance visual quality.

The section entitled ”Architectural Guidelines” discusses the importance of individual elements such as building material, texture, scale and color, and looks at their importance in the context of the visual zones mentioned previously. There is also a brief section specifically for owners of manufactured housing to give them ideas as to how to address the unique design challenges they face. The booklet then moves on to ”Support Elements”, a section devoted to details in the landscape and how they can make a significant contribution to the overall identity of the region if they are used with sensitivity.

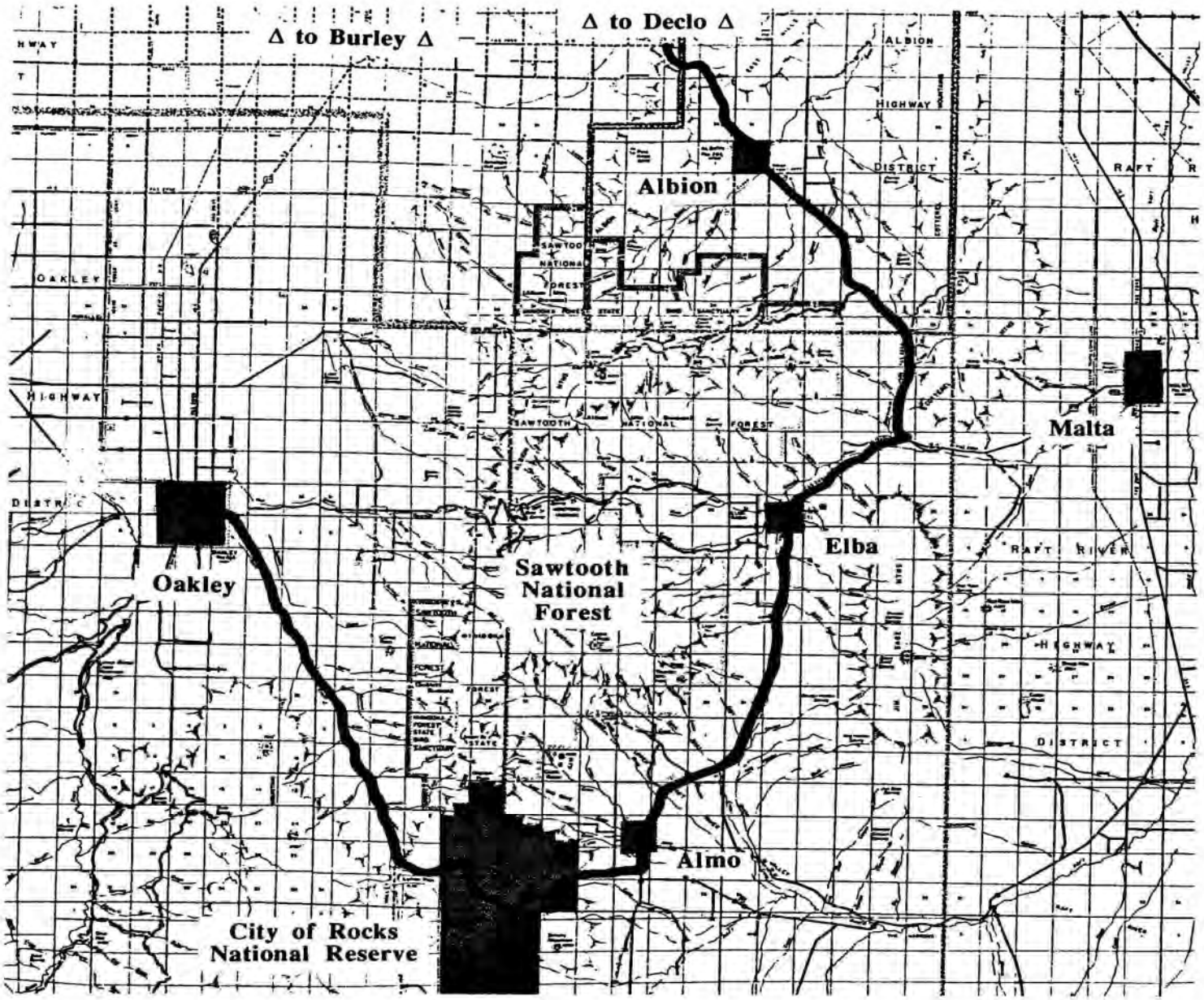
Finally, these guidelines address the importance of appropriate plantings and how vegetation can make a major contribution to the success of an area. They include recommendations for plant selection and placement depending on location, as well as ideas on how to use vegetation for screening and structure.

The Loop Route Concept

The idea of a scenic and historic route has been discussed for some time in the county, and was proposed conceptually in a planning workbook prepared by the National Park Service (NPS) as a preliminary step toward development of the City of Rocks Comprehensive Management Plan in August, 1991.

In other areas of the country, designated scenic byways have served to create a sense of regional identity and have become a thread unifying previously disparate communities into a cohesive entity. This image enhancement has been positive both in terms of strengthening the collective feeling of ”belonging” to residents, as well as for marketing purposes to promote tourism development with a unified front.

The route as discussed most frequently would form a ”U” shape around the Albion Mountain Range, following State Highway 77 south from Albion to Connor Junction, turning west to Elba and Almo connecting through the Reserve around the Albion Mountains, and north along Birch Creek to Oakley (see map on following page). As suggested in earlier NPS documents, this route would greatly enhance the historic interpretation of the region, linking the Oakley Historic District and numerous other properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It would also traverse an historically significant rural landscape which has to date preserved numerous unique attributes of early Western development. Although the area along the identified route is presently remarkable for its intact historic quality and scenic beauty, all of that can quickly change without proper planning. It is important to establish a sense of consistency and continuity throughout the length of the route. Given the wide range of geographical types traversed by the corridor, it becomes even more critical to provide overall unity in treatment of the route itself. The following recommendations address this concern. If a route can gain designation as a scenic byway, it can qualify for funding under various programs for such things as interpretive development to enhance viewer/ visitor appreciation and the acquisition and protection of scenic and historic easements and sites. Needless to say, such designation could be an economic boon by luring tourists off of the interstate and through otherwise less visited areas of the County. It can also serve to preserve and enhance the quality of the surroundings, the visual landscape which carries so much meaning to residents of Cassia County.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National
Forest
Almo
City of Rocks
National Reserve

context

Context:
The Natural Landscape

Homesteaders who came from the plains through the Narrows and into the City of Rocks knew that they had found a place of beauty and power. In the huge granite monoliths standing guard like sentinels, the pioneers saw fantastic shapes and forms that stretched their imaginations and renewed them. To reinforce their connection with this land, they wrote their names on the giant rocks in axle grease and ascribed to them myths and folklore, creating layer upon layer of cultural richness. Towns grew up around the City of Rocks and created their own form of order on the land, which also had unique visual characteristics and contributed strongly to a sense of place.

Geology

Undoubtedly the pioneers, weary from a long journey and its countless physical and emotional obstacles, thought little of the forces that heaved and carved this landscape into being. Nevertheless, the geologic processes that shaped the stone, distributed the soils and carved the mountains and valleys are fundamental to understanding the visual landscape to which the pioneers reacted so strongly. Even today, this land speaks to its residents and draws increasing numbers of visitors to experience its unique formations.

The formations preserved in the City of Rocks represent perhaps the most dramatic evidence of the geologic past, and serve as the nucleus for the surrounding landscape which supports Oakley, Albion, Almo, and Elba. These outcroppings were created by processes spanning millions of years, including deposition, burial, intrusion of molten granite, and shaping by wind and water. The oldest rocks in

the Reserve have been dated at 2.5-3.5 billion years and are known as the Green Creek Complex. Burial and subsequent exposure to high temperature and pressure altered sedimentary shale and sandstone to harder crystalline schist, gneiss and quartzite.

The Green Creek Complex was then exposed again and depositions of sandstone, limestone and shale accumulated. These sediments are known as the Dove Creek Group. These complexes were then once again buried and metamorphosed. Internal forces bent the entire mass of rocks upward into a dome shape.

About 30 million years ago, molten rock was intruded into this dome-shaped formation and as it cooled, it formed a body of granite known as the Almo Pluton. At this point, the long process of weathering began. The Almo granite has disintegrated largely along vertical and horizontal granular boundaries within the rock, forming the fantastic shapes, isolated towers, and uniform orientation of the rocks. Case hardening has also contributed to the formations in the City of Rocks by producing weather-resistant overhanging caps that protect more easily eroded rock below. For millions of years, these geologic processes have shaped a dramatic landscape. Likewise, forces have worked the City of Rocks' more gentle environs, sculpting the small valleys cradling Albion, Elba, and Almo.

Landform

Despite the intricate and impressive geologic history of this area, the major impact goes far beyond the scientific facts of composition and creation into the realm of visual and artistic perception. The rock formations, the color and texture of the soils, and the scale of the valleys and the mountains all play a significant role in contributing to a unique sense of place, and allowing the people who live there to identify with the landscape and find their way within it.

The settlers who came through the Narrows may not have thought of the forces that had carved it, but the visual implications as they spilled out into the Raft River Valley were significant; they had come westward off the plains and this meant progress. The gentle valleys ringed by worn mountains spoke to the pioneers not so much of their formation, but of protection and security. Thus the visual landscape became rich with meaning for the pioneers and remains full of visual messages for those who live there today.

Coming through the flat expanse of southeastern Idaho sage, the visitor enters through or around the Narrows into the Upper Raft River Valley, where Almo stands as a symbol of the successful attempt of pioneers to work with and organize the land. As one proceeds from the valley into the Reserve, glimpses of the rocks

indicate a dramatic change in landscape.
A feeling of enclosure and protection still exists in the Silent City itself, even for modern travelers and local residents who come to the Rocks to escape and recreate. The stark granite jutting to the sky is balanced by vegetation and the flat, broad valleys of sage and grassland It is a place of contrasts; horizontal opposing vertical, rugged granite formations looming behind orderly fences and grazing cattle, and high peaks shadowing the softer, more rolling profile of the surrounding hills and valleys.

To the west of the City of Rocks lies the broad Junction Valley, remarkable for its vastness and its absence of human development. The contrast of this spaciousness with the more intimate valleys directly east of the Albion Mountains offers a unique diversity to this area. People whose ancestors settled here continue to live in southern Cassia County because of the space and its accompanying sense of freedom. Colors are muted in this country. The faded browns of the soil combine with the silver-gray of drought- tolerant vegetation and the pinks, whites and yellows of the grasslands to form landscapes of unique and subtle beauty.

The expanse of Junction Valley gives way to the narrow confines of Birch Creek Canyon to its north, as the creek cuts its way through rock faces and dense vegetation toward Oakley. The steep walls on either side are punctuated by an occasional broken view to the mountain ranges beyond or a lush green field covering the valley floor. A couple of remnant homesteads convey the sense of security and enclosure felt by the early settlers. It is a fairly sudden change which brings the traveler from the restrictions of Birch Creek into the flat valley where Oakley sits, green and quiet, on the horizon.

On the east side of Mt. Harrison, geologic forces have formed land of quite a different character. The valleys are more intimate, each cradling a town which brings its own mark to the land. Here again, the pale browns, grays and white of the soil provide the backdrop for the faded plant material and grazing cattle. Driving down the east side is like entering and exiting a series of rooms. Despite the close proximity to and mutual focus of the City of Rocks, the towns of Southern Cassia County are diverse, and draw much of their character from the landforms which surround and support them. Understanding these inherent differences and planning for them sensitively will ensure their future integrity. By analyzing the visual landscape and determining which elements make it unique, it can be preserved rather than falling prey to outside interests. Understanding these towns and the landscape which has influenced them is the key to a positive future for Cassia County and its people.

Vegetation

Pioneers who came through the City of Rocks and its environs found not only interesting geologic formations, but patterns of vegetation distinguishing this place from the plains they had left behind and setting it apart from the land yet to come. As with the soil and land formations, the vegetation sent visual messages to the pioneers. By understanding the physical associations of different vegetation types, the settlers were able to find productive farmland under certain types of sagebrush, water near the thick, lush vegetation of the creek bottoms, and wood for fires and fence posts in the pinyon-juniper which covered the hillsides. Residents and visitors today still rely on vegetation both to orient themselves and to experience this place in a richer, more satisfying way. For the most part, this is not a landscape which absorbs the shock of change and development readily. The faded pastels of the grass and shrubland, the scattered pinyon-juniper and the delicate fingers of riparian vegetation reaching up the drainages all require conscientious development if they are to retain their intactness.

The City of Rocks and its neighboring towns are located in the Basin and Range Province, land dominated by sagebrush, saltbrush and bitterbrush communities at lower elevations, and juniper, mountain mahogany-oak scrub, pinyon pine, Douglas fir and aspen at higher elevations. The City of Rocks EIS and General Management Plan enumerates eight dominant plant communities. Each has a different visual and textural quality, and to each is attached certain meanings.

One of the most prevalent communities is the pinyon-juniper. It marches down the sides of the hills and bleeds slowly into the grass and shrubland of the lower elevations. The dark, rounded forms echo the worn profile of the lower mountains and give gentle relief from the flat light sage and grasses. Edges blend effortlessly together and the vegetation looks as though it is flowing over the land.

The riparian area and wetlands are lush and rich with varied greens. In Birch Creek, the vegetation emphasizes direction and urges the traveler to press forward until an occasional stand of poplars pierces the underbrush to the sky and invites the traveler to explore. The air is thick with the scent of green, and further marks the uniqueness of this area. In July, delicate bands of light lavender mark the riparian area between Connor Junction and Elba.

Big sagebrush and grasslands predominate, carpeting the valley floors and reaching up to meet the advancing pinyon-juniper. This scene is rich with meaning. To the settlers who came to southern Cassia County, Big Sagebrush often indicated areas which were more fertile or closer to water. Grassland meant life for the cattlemen and sheepherders and still does today. The pastels of the grasslands and sagebrush, therefore, have a visual impact that is full of meaning to the people who draw their life from the land.

Mixed scrub, mountain mahogany, high meadows and unvegetated lands make up a lesser but still important part of the landscape. These communities provide visual relief in terms of color, texture and form from the more dominant forms of vegetation, as well as diverse habitat for wildlife.

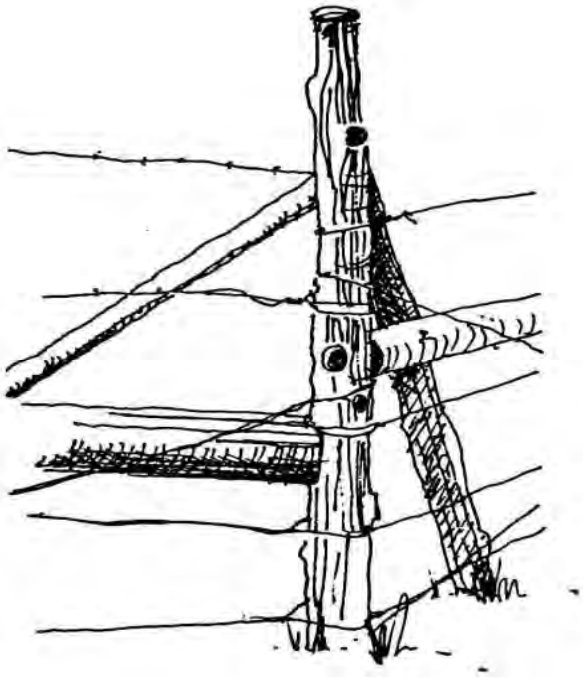
Context:
The Cultural Landscape

Settlement

Historical settlement has uniquely shaped the landscape of southern Idaho. During the last century and a half, Cassia County was transformed from a seemingly untouched high plain setting into a region scattered with farms and homestead development.

Prior to the arrival of the eastern emigrants, the City of Rocks region was a mosaic of diverse landforms and natural vegetation. Pre-settlement human populations were comprised of both resident Native Americans and white explorers passing through. Neither group left significant permanent imprints on the land, although the native people engaged in periodic burning of the vegetation to obtain food stuffs more easily. Native villages reflected a nomadic lifestyle, and did not withstand the harsh seasons because of the temporary grass and twig construction of their shelters. In a similar manner, the early explorers and fur traders who passed through left no evidence of their presence.

Beginning in 1841 and continuing for nearly two decades, some 300,000 settlers migrated westward from Independence, Missouri toward the West coast along the Oregon Trail network. The trail split in southern Idaho, where Oregon bound emigrants veered to the northwest along the Snake River, while those destined for California headed southwest through Cassia County. Few groups stayed behind at this time to settle the land. The mark they left was a barren trail beaten into the landscape by wagon wheels and countless feet and hooves. As the prairies healed from this mass exodus, the next wave of pioneers began to arrive with sheep and cattle.



Landscape Change

In 1850, Joseph Middleton, a settler moving through the City of Rocks area, described the setting: *"Altogether the picturesque grouping, the wild mountain background, the clear, cold streams and flower-decked meadows, presented a scene which one ... found J difficult to describe."* Since the time that Middleton penned these words, however, profound successional changes have occurred. These have been largely attributed to the unrestricted grazing which took place from the late 1800s to 1935. According to the Western Saga Guide Book, the first sizable herd of cattle, numbering 3,000 head, was brought into Cassia County in 1869. In 1870, an additional 10,000 head were imported. By 1886, approximately 230,000 head were in the county.

In a typical successional scenario, grazing cattle first reduce competition of grasses and forage and then, moving on to find new forage, leave the land open to invasion by sagebrush and pinyon-juniper which can readily establish themselves and out competed the once-thick grasses and forage Meadows seen by Joseph Middleton have in many cases been replaced by sagebrush dominated expanses, while the edge of the pinyon-juniper has moved gradually toward the valleys.

Seeding of southern Idaho rangelands has also had an effect on the historic composition of the vegetation. By 1964, Cassia County had been the location for five experimental and eight large-scale seeding efforts. Although the visual impacts of seeding may not be readily apparent, the introduction of foreign species to the landscape have undoubtedly affected the historic colors and textures of the area, however subtly.

The cultural impact on vegetation is not, of course, limited to grass and rangelands. Perhaps the most dramatic element in these rural landscapes is the rows of Lombardy poplars which challenge the flatness and randomness of the valley floors and seek unity with the strong upward

push of the hills. There is the added
richness of their history. Settlers who wished to impose a sense of order and structure on such a vast and untamed landscape planted them in the fertile soil along irrigation canals. As one progresses from valley to valley, views open and close, but it is always the Lombardy poplar that signals the approach of another new oasis. In each inhabited valley, the irrigated green and ordered poplars reveal themselves differently, creating a feeling of mystery ar a dramatic, sudden view, but always indicating the existence of a town or settlement. Moving through the town, sage brush and grass move in alongside the traveler until a hint of green and the tops of more Lambardies indicate another small town.

1939 Metsker Map, Elba, Idaho

Grids on the Land

While ranching and farming established itself as a viable livelihood, railroads were built to carry produce to a growing national consumer market. Following close behind the railroads, settlements sprang up throughout the region. Field pattern and town layout alike reflected the organization of the federal land survey, establishing a rectilinear grid following section lines. This pattern began to emerge in the Cassia County landscape in the latter 1800s as settlers homesteaded the valleys' quarter section modules, 160 acres in size.

As private ownership converted grassy valleys into staked-out homesteads, perimeter fencing confined grazing within geometric enclosures. The once free- flowing vegetative mosaic dominated by nature was converted to rectilinear patterns, cultured, manicured and managed by people. Depending upon the management practices of respective ranchers (such as grazing intensity or techniques used to clear natural vegetation), each homestead might exhibit entirely different visual character of color and textures. Although occasional variations such as the dry farms responded to natural constraints of slope and rock outcroppings, the "usable" lands of Cassia County took on the patchwork quilt appearance of earlier settled lands further east.

Seasonal dry farming covered the gentler slopes at the base of the steep mountains above the irrigation ditches. The fields rose above the valleys surrounding them with colors that changed throughout the year. In spring, fields encompassed the valley floors with new grain green. Summer's hot, dry days matured the fields into harvest gold. Fall harvest turned slopes into patterns contrasting the grid sections below. Then the colors turned earthy browns with tillage, exposed and awaiting winter's moisture to sprout the next spring's seed. The dry farm designs accentuated the landform, winding and flowing with natural contours, defiantly contradicting the grid and homestead patterns in the valleys below.

Farmsteads

Farmsteads appeared as oases in the greater gridded landscape, small and isolated in contrast to the vast scale of the valleys. These clusters of trees and farm structures appeared dark when seen from a distance, due in large part to the shade cast on buildings by trees planted deliberately for that purpose.

The first component of a farm development was a modest home, often of only one room, typically facing a section line road. Following the initial building, another shelter was built to protect livestock feed for winter. As each building maximized its potential, a new shed was built. Sometimes the original structure would be moved to a better location by team and wagon. Other times it was torn down and recycled into an entirely new structure. A third shed may have protected animals and a fourth sheltered equipment. The farmstead layout continued to develop outward from the house, always suggesting the prevailing rectilinear arrangement of the larger landscape in the parallel and perpendicular relationship of buildings.

The main working area was an open yard, surrounded by the farmhouse and various barns and sheds. From the frontage road, entrances led directly to this large open area where vehicles could park, turnaround, or load and unload.

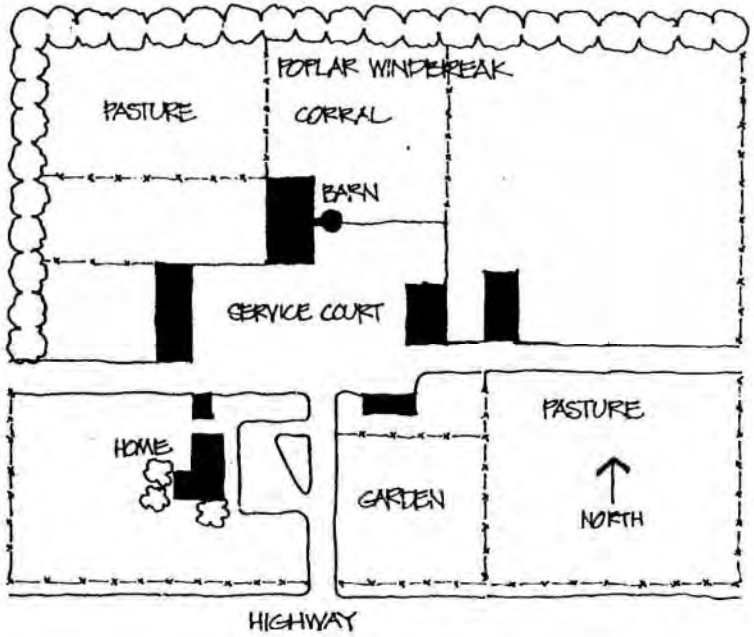
The yard functioned as a central hub in connecting the home with the adjacent areas, access lanes, structures, or fields. Other sub-areas consisted of corrals for working livestock, storage areas for idle equipment or hay stacks, and repair yards. The main working area was further enclosed by fences and plantings, again emphasizing the right angle.

This common-sense arrangement was institutionalized over time throughout the great plains and western US, as reflected in the following passages from South Dakota Agricultural Extension Service Circular 363, ”Arranging the Buildings in the Farmstead Group”, written by R.L. Patty in 1937:

“... general rectangular shapes still afford a compact arrangement so that every building is within close range. It also spreads the buildings so that most of there will be in clear view from the kitchen window. The size of the court should be as small as is consistent with the need for reasonable fire protection, the turning of vehicles, the parking of automobiles, and the temporary parking of farm machines.”

Patty continues his description with some very specific guidelines, including the following:

- *distance from the road to the house should be not less than 100 feet.*
- *distance from the house to the barn should be from 140 to 200 feet.*
- *feed lots and the hog or cattle shelters should be located at the rear of the court and not in the direction of the prevailing summer winds.*
- *the poultry house should be relatively close to the house and on the opposite side of the court from the hog lots.*
- *machine storage should be located along the lane to the fields and with a south or east front.*
- *the granary or farm elevator should be located within the court and with the driveway readily accessible.*
- *the shelter belt around the farmstead should extend around the north, the west, and possibly the east side. It should be as close to the buildings and lots as necessary room will permit.*



The consistency of these principles of layout is further demonstrated by excerpts from Farm Building Design, (Neubauer and Walker, 1961). They suggest that a concentrated farmstead be organized around a courtyard, preferably square. The average size of a typical grouping would occupy 4 to 6 acres, or a rectangle with outside dimensions of approximately 400 by 540 feet. The size of the inner court should be ”adequate for the easy maneuvering of mobile equipment, which requires a minimum width of 60 to 80 feet, and a length of 100 to 200 feet, depending upon the type and size of farm” The house should be ”at least 100 feet from the road, but if the traffic along the highway is heavy, noisy, or creates dust, 150 to 200 feet would be preferable.”

As is apparent in these excerpts, little was left to chance in the layout of a Western farmstead. Small wonder, then, that the rectilinear clustering of structures forms such a recognizable pattern on the rural landscape.

Fences further defined areas such as the work yard, contained livestock and protected crops. Those around residential yards were likely to be low and decorative, used primarily to establish domestic parameters and provide some protection for special plants. Decorative fencing was wire, rock, pole or wood slats. Field fencing was post and barbed wire extending around property boundaries, ensuring linear edges to rectilinear fields.

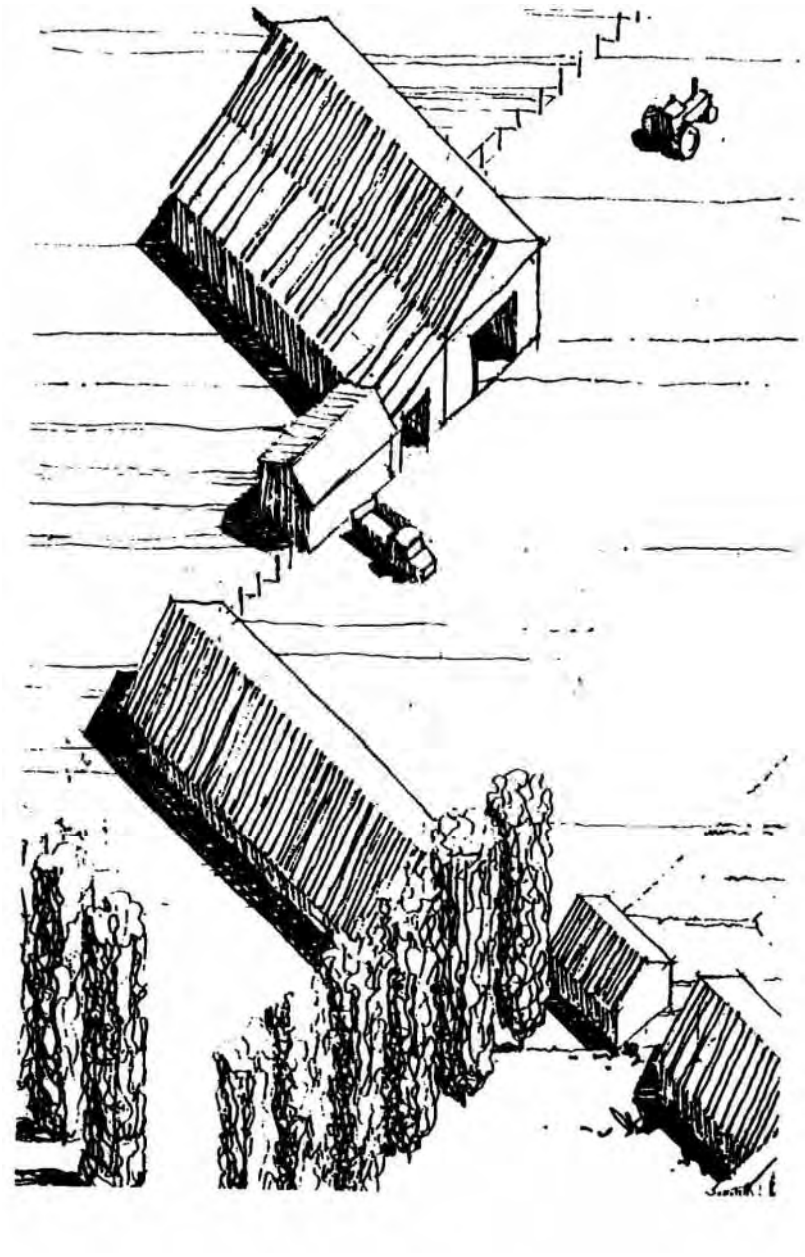
Planting has always played an important visual role in farm scenes. Like fences, rows of trees defined boundaries and additionally formed the wind breaks Patty recommended. Poplars planted close together formed linear windbreaks. The landmark quality of their verticality afforded mental comfort to travelers by marking settlements in the landscape that could be seen from afar.

Plants were especially significant in providing healthier living environments. Springtime blooms showed pride of place at homes’ entrances. They served a welcome site to visitors and a daily reminder to settlers that they had progressed in a once hostile environment.
Trees provided cool shade in hot summer months and places for children to play. With markets inconveniently

far away, gardens and orchards provided fresh produce for the present and canned and dried food for the winter months. Although smaller in scale, the planted rows also reinforced the rectilinear patterned landscape.

Linearity extending outward from agrarian clusters helped define grid patterns in the landscape. Besides row plantings and fence lines that stretched from the farmstead, ditches bringing water from mountain runoff reinforced the edges of fields. Rectangular patterns were further encouraged by increasingly expanding technological innovation. Engines replaced horse power, propelled tractors enabled farmers to produce more crops, more efficiently in less time. This efficiency was optimized with large fields and straight rows.

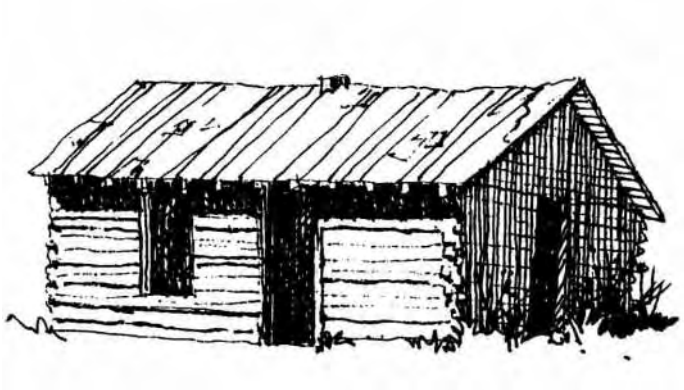
The patterns of the rural landscape were largely established by 1920, and would not change to any significant degree until the end of WW2. New pump irrigation systems and other technology developed during the war, contributed to emerging land patterns marked by still larger fields and farms. Metal sheds, coniferous windbreaks, and behemoth center pivot irrigation devices gave a new face to much of America. Remarkably, much of the change of these most recent decades has bypassed some parts of southern Cassia County, leaving intact an agricultural landscape representative of earlier times.



Context:
Architectural Elements

Residential Structures

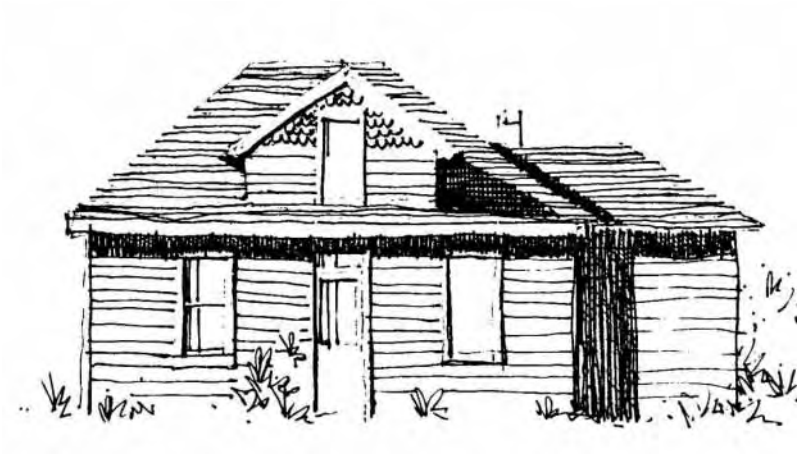
When the settlers first arrived, their main concern was to build a shelter before the coming harsh winter as quickly and expediently as possible. Early architecture responded directly to the landscape out of the need to utilize readily available building materials. This recognition of practical necessity ensured a ”fit” of color and texture with those occurring in nature. Some early structures may have been adobe, but most were made of logs harvested from local forests, which weathered with time into soft gray colors of the land. Basic elements provided the earthen floors. Sod roofs dripped for a week after the last rain; cow hides or canvas covered the doorway or maybe a window.



Early homes were comprised of one simple log room, usually no larger than 16 feet on a side. Building size was constrained by limited technology and unavailability of manufactured structural members, thus guaranteeing a subdued scale dwarfed by the surrounding scene. These bare beginnings were often expanded over time by the addition of what the old- timers called ”add-ons”. Each side of the structure could be extended by adding a shed roof projection, until all sides were thus consumed. Occasionally, this included a porch for relaxing in front of the home. Improvements came in the form of hewn logs, joined at the corners with dovetail joints. Wooden floors replaced earth, and shingle roofs improved water shedding capability.

Roof pitches often proved the limiting factor because slopes were either too level for efficient run- off or ceilings too low to walk under. As it was, cabin ceilings were only about seven feet high to economize on building materials and to best utilize heat, which would rise to a lower ceiling. Broken roof lines and inconsistent pitches evidenced the piecemeal construction process, and inadvertently reflected the natural forms of the mountain backdrop behind them.

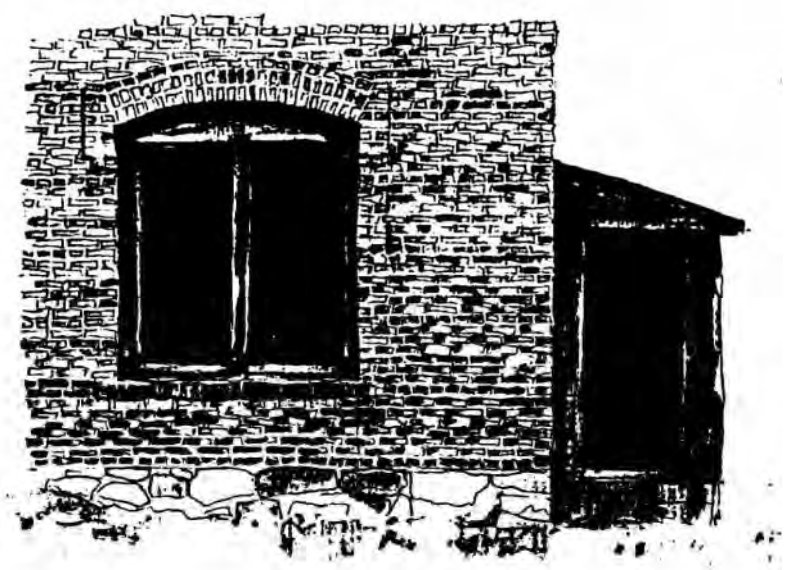
Home designs evolved over time from basic to ornate. The simplicity of the early cabins gave way to more complex designs only after brick yards and



sawmills were established in the early 1900s, the latter enabling people to build more easily with increasingly popular clapboard siding. Because the board lumber lacked the thermal properties of the former log structures, supply yards also began carrying a new product for builders called wall insulation. At the turn of the century with readily available building supplies, old country influences began emerging in architectural styles as craftsmen from foreign lands imported the styles and techniques they knew and believed in.

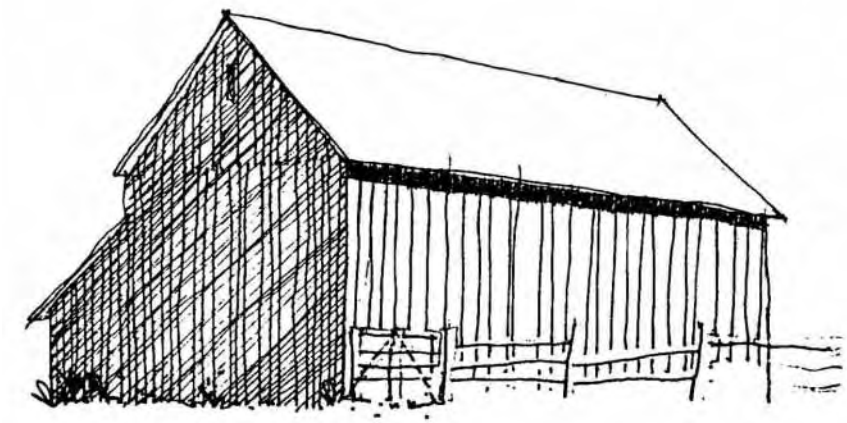
Brick homes created a sense of permanence and solidity lacking in wood structures. Clay deposits in some parts of the county provided a ready resource for locally produced brick. Depending on its composition and firing time colors varied from light beige to nearly black, with most of the local clay producing red variations. These red brick are particularly well represented in a number of well preserved homes in Elba and Oakley.

Masons showed individuality in the courses they laid, using a contrasting light, concrete-gray grout. Common bond patterns were typified by 5, 6, or 7 stretcher courses (brick laid lengthwise, parallel with plane of building facade), followed by a header course, to bond the wall together, with its end section showing. Harsh icy cold temperatures, fierce sandblasting winds and blazing summer suns rounded sharp edges and corners, creating a softened patina of age which contrasts with modern materials. These hardened successors will likely retain their crisp, sharp edges over time.



Increasing affluence in parts of the county was reflected in the late 19th century by a movement toward more ornate architectural design. The Queen Anne style, with its lavish decoration and asymmetric massing, appeared in some areas of the state, such as Boise. But in southeastern Idaho, with its heavy Mormon vernacular influence, conservative attitudes tempered the Victorian movement. Here, the older, more formal plans of Zion prevailed, with ”gingerbread” embellishment applied superficially to more traditional forms of architecture. Gables with decorative bargeboards, fish-scale shingles, and scroll- work insets gave a unique identity to every home. Chimneys, too, displayed designs as individualistic as autographs.

Some dwellings were constructed from quarried stone. They too showed talents in imaginative color mixing and finely hewn edges. Impeccably placed corner quoins remind later generations that craftsmen individually hand-shaped these perfect blocks. Some rock structures blended so well with the surroundings they appeared to be part of the outcrop bedrock beneath them. Unlike wood and clay, building blocks of granite and basalt have not weathered nor rounded with time. Foundations and walls still stand, but the pieces still appear as natural as when they were first chiseled from the landscape.



Farm Buildings

The ranch as a way of life lies at the core of western Americana. As a symbol of the ranch or farm, the barn and associated outbuildings necessary to the operation convey a feeling of connection to the land a sort of stability and link to the past and the pioneers who first homesteaded this area, and to their ancestors who have continued their hard-fought war of subsistence.

The evolution of barn buildings in southern Idaho has been influenced, as elsewhere in the country, by ethnic and cultural tradition, regional climatic conditions, and agricultural innovation. The original western barn structures were open, with a shed roof sloping in one direction supported by log posts. A sod covering protected winter feed and sheltered some livestock. Over time, three sides would be enclosed with round logs (hewn logs were generally reserved for residential structures). Various joining methods were used at the intersection of the outer

walls, including both the square and the V-notch. Gaps between logs were chinked with split wood and some form of filler, usually mud. These walls were often placed on low unmortered walls of fitted fieldstone.

Gabled barns followed, with roof pitches ranging from 6:12 to 12:12. These structures were often approximately 18 to 20 feet on a side with wood shingles replacing sod as the roofing material. Lean-to sheds could be added to the basic barn as need be, to expand the size as the farm operation grew. When the sides were completed with add-ons, additional outbuildings were built around the homestead to shelter horses, poultry, pigs, feed, or equipment.

Log farm buildings were gradually replaced by frame structures with board siding, as lumber mills proliferated. The relatively arid climate of southern Cassia County allowed early ranchers to stack hay outside the barn, using a hay stacking derrick, which meant that smaller storage capacities were needed inside the barn itself than in regions with more moist conditions. Despite this general trend, some large hay barns were constructed, with hay storage in an upstairs loft. These buildings were usually of rectangular floor plan, with a length 2 or 3 times the dimension of the width. One common dimension was approximately 18 feet wide, 50 feet long, and 25 feet high. Once again, shed projections were occasionally added on one or two sides. Wagon entrances were commonly placed on each gable end, allowing wagons to pull straight through and unload hay under cover. An example in Elba, however, was built without wagon entrances, opting instead to hoist hay to the loft from outside, using a Jackson fork attached to the ridge beam.

Roof style on barns continued the gable tradition established earlier in time. On the larger hay barns, the pitch was almost always 45 or 12:12. The gambrel roof, developed early in the 20th century to allow greater headroom and storage in the loft, never became a dominant form in Cassia County, despite their appearance in relatively nearby Buhl. Likewise, the round roof which gained popularity elsewhere between 1910 and 1920 never developed in the County.

Following the end of WW2, galvanized steel and aluminum products gained increasing popularity for farm buildings. Surplus Quonset huts were available, and added the horizontal half-cylinder as a new form on the landscape. The earliest metal structures tended to rust rather quickly, but advances in the galvanizing process have developed much more durable finishes. In addition to the raw galvanized coating, roofing and siding is now available in a variety of factory applied color finishes, including shades of brown, beige, green, and white.

Innovations in the development of truss systems and commercial rigid steel names has allowed utility

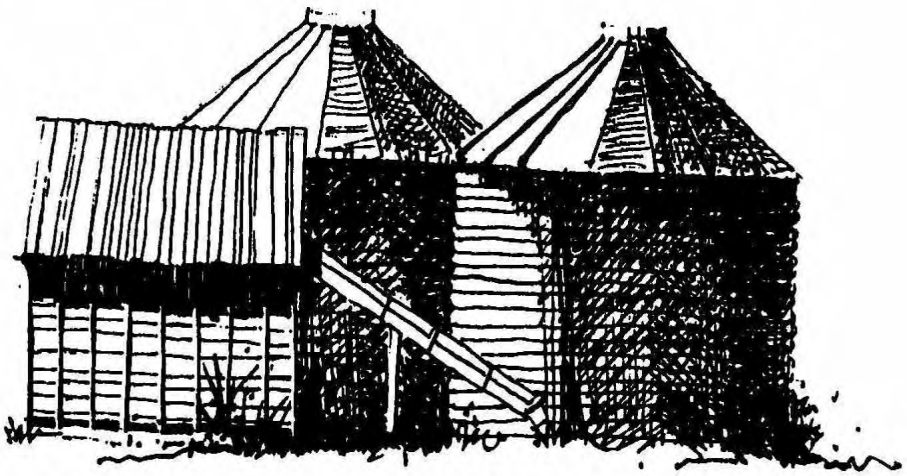
buildings to expand markedly in size. The old limitations imposed by length of available timbers and load bearing capacity of floor joists and roof rafters which kept maximum widths for post-free space to around 24 feet are now a thing of the past. Roof truss systems permit an open floor area of up to 60 feet wide, while rigid steel frame members can span in excess of 70 feet.

A fairly recent innovation in farm building packages is the prefabricated module. These units, like factory made modular housing, are built on an assembly line and shipped by truck to the site, often in two halves. Maximum sizes available are 28 feet wide and 60 to 70 feet in length.

Another relatively new form of construction is the monolithic dome, created by covering an air inflated form with layers of reinforced concrete and insulation. The result is a one-piece structure suitable for a variety of uses, which looks like an artificial mound.

A specialized form of agricultural building, the grain bin, has gone through its own evolution. Early granaries were square in shape, with an ”inside-out” construction of exposed studs with siding on the inside of the wall. This design technique provided greater strength against lateral load pressure from the weight of grain stored inside, and also prevented grain from becoming caught between the structural members, as would have happened had the siding been on the outside.

An alternative technique known as crib construction featured solid walls of 2x4 or 2x6 lumber laid flat, and thoroughly nailed together. This construction is associated with Mormon areas of Utah and southern Idaho. Timber was gradually replaced by corrugated zinc-coated galvanized steel siding as the material of choice following WW2, although wood frame structures remained the most common type of grain bin as recently as the 1960s. With the gradual change in material came a corresponding change in shape to a vertical cylinder with a conical roof.



Visual Zones

The image of an area or place formed by visitors (and many residents) is created by perceptions of the landscape as seen from the road. It is therefore of primary importance that the most visible areas along road corridors receive careful attention in terms of appearance. What an observer is able to discern while traveling is largely a function of their distance away from the viewed scene. Although there is a constant gradation from immediate adjacency to infinity, the seen area is commonly broken into visual zones of foreground, middle ground, and background.

The map on the facing page depicts a portion of the county transected by the loop route. The overlay illustrates approximate visual zones as seen from the road which runs from north to south in the center of the map. Although variations exist in terms of what can be seen depending on the direction of travel, what is indicated here is a composite of both north and south bound views. The darker the shading, the less visible the area would be from the road. The unshaded meas represent foreground, the most visible area from the road and consequently the most vulnerable to inappropriate design. These zones can be approx- imated on maps using the criteria which follows, and should then be field checked for accuracy.

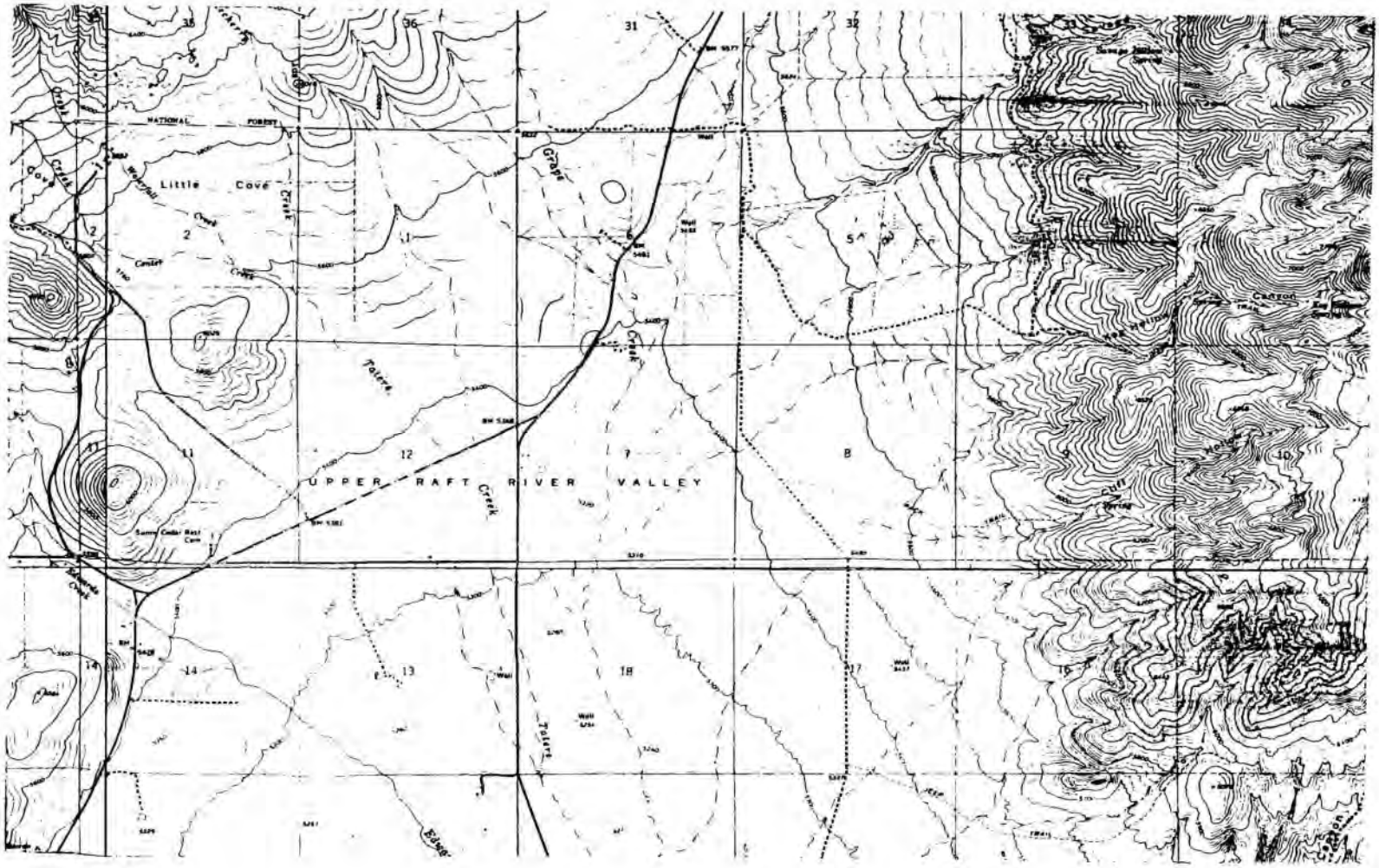
Foreground

The area seen immediately adjacent to the highway extending up to 1/4 mile on both sides of the road is the foreground. Within this zone, one is aware of considerable visual detail. The edge of the foreground represents the maximum distance at which one is aware of such detail as texture and composition of actual materials. Individual branches and leaves, texture of barbed wire fencing, rocks and boulders, and building materials and patterns such as brickwork on buildings are readily distinguishable. It is this zone which captures the brunt of a road users attention. It is also the area most heavily developed, due in large part to ease of access. It should be noted that the foreground zone does not always extend the full 1/4 mile from the road, but may be truncated in rural areas by landform or dense vegetation, and in built-up areas by structures. In such situations of ”invisibility”, development would be unseen, hence making the following guidelines less applicable. This is particularly true in the towns of Oakley and Albion, where most people will not see beyond the built facade of the streetscape. Even in these situations, however, the foreground design guidelines would encourage a sense of historic integrity which will undoubtedly be valued by many residents.

V Visual Zones

- Foreground; within ¼ mile of road
- Middleground 1; 1¼ to 1½ miles from road
- Middleground 2; 1½ to 3 miles from road
- Background; beyond 3 miles from road
- Unseen areas within 3 mile visual zone

Segment of Byway Corridor, north of Almo
This map represents an area of approximately 24 square miles, bisected by the Almo/Elba Road. The overlay illustrates visual zones seen from the highway.



Middle Ground

The area between approximately 1/4 mile and 3 miles from the road is the middle ground. Three miles represents the approximate distance at which the texture of vegetation becomes indiscernible at which colors become muted Within the middle ground itself, the viewer can distinguish colors, the textural differences between different tree species, and cultural landscape patterns such as building shapes and placement. Because this zone covers such a wide cross section, and realizing the many 'shades of gray' in moving from immediate foreground to background, the middle ground is further divided at a point 1 1/2 miles from the road, to further refine the gradation. The significance of middle grounds 1 and 2 will be explained below.

Background

Areas beyond the three mile limit are generally beyond the zone of significant visual perception by most road travelers. While most development in the background zone would not create a significant visual impact, there would be exceptions in the form of major large scale land use change. Included in this category would be such operations as mining, road cuts, or other large scale earth moving activities which would tend to scar existing landforms; deforestation of wooded hillsides, through clear cutting related to forestry, power line location, ski resort development, etc.; and industrial or other large scale development, either in terms of acreage or size of buildings. Development of a scale likely to create a background impact should be carefully examined prior to the issuance of necessary permits, and mitigation measures developed for restoration of the landscape. Although other smaller scale development within the background zone would be unlikely to have any visual effect on users of the main corridor, it is probable that residents and builders within this zone will nevertheless wish to comply with recommendations contained in these "Guidelines", in order to share in the sense of community and landscape integrity herein advocated.

Applying the Guidelines

The design guidelines which follow have been carefully developed based upon analysis of the traditions and existing conditions of Cassia County, taking into account the contextual conditions reviewed earlier. While not obligatory, they offer an opportunity for residents who value the quality of life that is currently enjoyed to participate in a unique opportunity of preservation and renewal for the future. Having identified the location of a proposed project with respect to its appropriate visual zone, the following chart can be utilized to determine which guidelines should be referenced

Note: Within the boundaries of the City of Rocks National Reserve, all land is to be treated as foreground (FG) in interpreting this chart.

	FG <1/4	**MG1** ¼ 1½	**MG2** 1 ½ 3	**BG** >3
site planning Pages 31-67	X	X	X	
architecture				
material page 71	X			
texture page 72	X			
shape / form page 73	X	X		
mass / scale page 74	X	X	X	
color / glare page 75	X	X	X	X
site details				
all pages 81-92	X			
roads / drives utilities pages 86-88	X	X	X	
planting				
town ages 95-100	X			
rural pages 101-105	X	X		

site planning guidelines

Site Planning Guidelines

Patterns of land subdivision are etched forever on the terrain. The landscape is continually carved into diminishing parcel sizes, each treated in a slightly different way by different owners. What we have habitually taken for granted as one broad sweeping panorama, is becoming instead a collage of many separate images. The openness of this landscape is visually unforgiving; it will not allow mistakes to be hidden from view. Careful consideration of how land is to be used, and of the proper placement and arrangement of elements on it, is the most significant contribution that can be made now for the benefit of future residents.

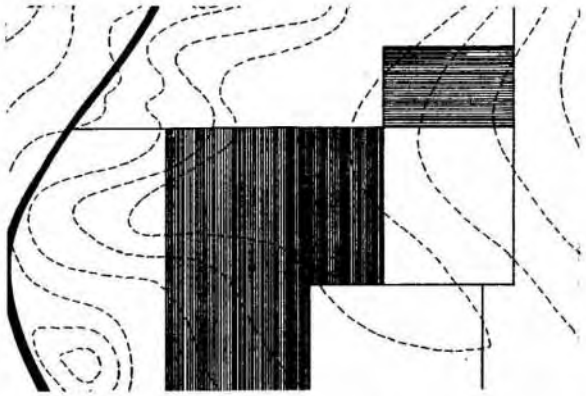
Traditionally, local patterns of development in this region included concentrated villages and isolated ranches. In villages, although lots were often fairly large, the overall feeling was one of compact grouping organized in a unifying grid pattern. Ranches, too, were characterized by clusters of structures linked by wooden fencing and corrals to form a harmonious whole (see section on Context: Cultural Landscape).

Recent land subdivision practices have created very different patterns on the landscape. A standard practice, common because it is permissible under zoning, is initially inexpensive, and is expeditious to undertake, involves the selling of frontage parcels on existing public in ads. The resulting view from the road is one of a never-ending development strip. Pattern number two, the suburban subdivision, involves the platting of parcels into minimal lots of a homogenous character, on which homes are subsequently placed at monotonously uniform setbacks from the roadway.

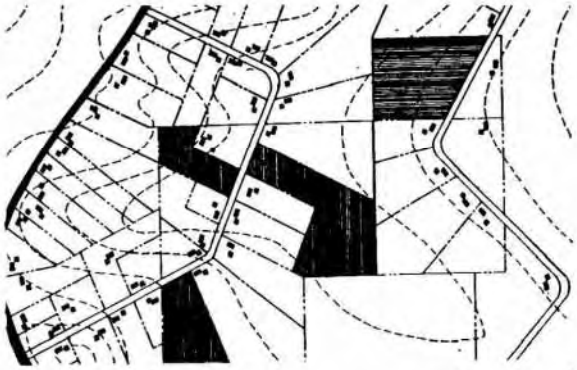
There are ways in which development can occur in a manner more reflective of traditional patterns. The following six scenarios represent a range of different site conditions found along the loop mute, and typify the issues likely to confront rural parts of Cassia County. Each example depicts a real site in its present condition, a fictitious but feasible development scenario which could actually occur under current regulations using a standard builders approach, and a creative alternative realizing the same net building program but with much improved quality of life (at often lower cost). The user is encouraged to study these examples and to borrow ideas from as many as may suit the circumstances under consideration. No two development situations are ever alike, and there are no automatic solutions to site planning problems. The intentions of these schemes should be clear however, and it is up to individual ingenuity to adapt relevant concepts to individual site problems in the interest of a creative future.

Albion Summit

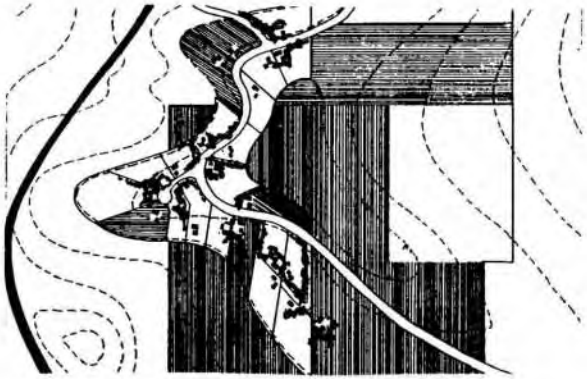
Existing Site



Conventional Development



Creative Development Plan



Albion Summit

For tourists traveling south on Highway 77 from Burley and Declo who have crossed the flat agricultural expanses of the Magic Valley, the ascent of 500 or 600 feet in elevation passing through Spring Canyon is a gateway to a new landscape experience. The canyon opens at the top into bowl-like valley of low grass-covered hills, backed by higher mountain ranges. A few shrubs are scattered across the valley, but there are no trees or outstanding features other than the gentle roll of the hills. It is representative of sections along the loop route where rangeland and dry farming prevail.

This portion of the loop route is easily accessible and attractive to Burley residents and others looking for acreage for ranchettes in a scenic rural setting. Because of its openness and adjacency to the road, the landscape is vulnerable to visual impact. Building and road placement, and the color and scale of buildings could have a substantial effect on the pastoral quality of this area, and negatively affect the entire image formed by visitors. The rolling landforms, however, also provide unique opportunities for creative development which preserves the site's notable features.

Existing Landscape Conditions

This site, located on the northern approach to Albion, is characterized by rolling landforms which add interest and motion to the landscape.

The vegetation is low, consisting mostly of grasses and providing no opportunity for screening introduced elements.

The site has one prominent hilltop which overlooks an enclosed valley.
There is no evidence of any land uses other than grazing and seasonal dry farming.

Standard Development

This scenario depicts the effects of a standard subdivision on the site. Lots ranging from one to five acres in size spread across the land. Many parcels front on the main highway.

Project roads mark straight lines on the land disregarding the flow of the undulating topography. Residential landscapes replace the homogeneity of open field with a patchwork of different plantings.

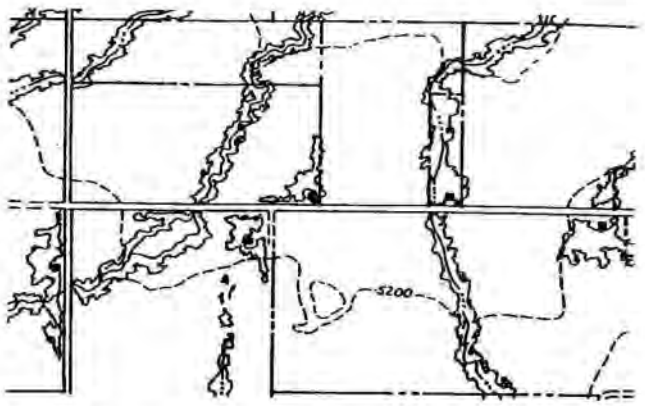
Fields are fragmented and become difficult to manage. The prominent hilltop is subdivided as well. The ridgeline is broken by the outline of houses, and the gentle form of the landforms is lost.

Creative Development

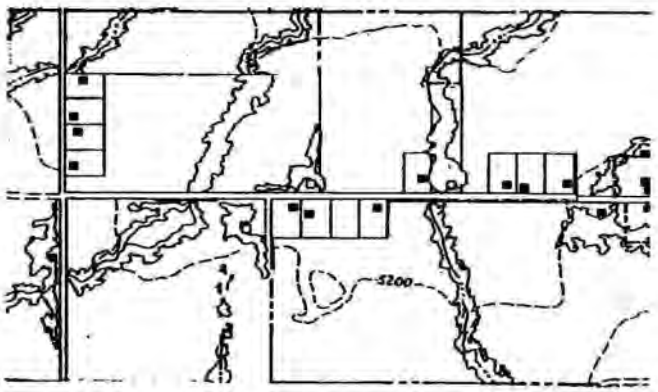
Rather than dividing the entire site into lots, the landscape's natural features are considered and only the most suitable areas developed. Lot sizes are reduced to retain the same overall density as the standard plan, but the surrounding open space means that individuals benefit from the sense of space without the burden of maintaining it. The rest remains open space No parcels front the highway, and all access is from secondary roads. Shared driveways minimize the impact of roads on the landscape. Lots are placed at the lower parts of the parcel where they are less noticeable to passing motorists. Farmers and ranchers can still use the land for such activities as grazing and dry land farming, maintaining the qualities of the original landscape.

Elba Basin

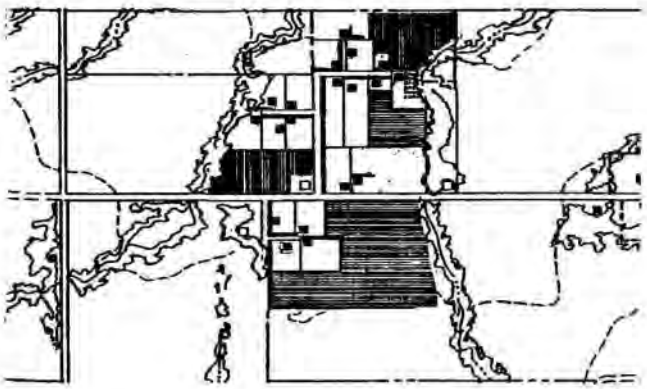
Existing Site



Conventional Development



Creative Development Plan



Elba Basin

Agricultural landscapes thrive in lush defiance of an otherwise arid climate, contrasting their green fields with backdrops of sage covered hills rising to steeper pinyon and juniper covered mountains. Settled over a century ago by pioneers who tamed the land with their irrigation techniques, these agrarian landscapes show the mark of their stewardship to this day. Farmsteads scattered among the fields in small gridded clusters of dark buildings are accentuated by clumps of towering poplar.

The Elba Basin is one such valley. Physical beauty combined with the availability of land make this area and others like it attractive for potential development. Because of the intact visual and historic qualities of this landscape, it is especially vulnerable to change. Development not in keeping with established patterns would be destructive the charm and unified quality it presently possesses.

Existing Landscape Conditions

Elba Basin is an historic agricultural valley located at the base of the Albion Range. Surrounding mountains define the wide sweep of the valley floor.

Scattered farmsteads are marked by cluster of Lombardy poplars, their verticallity contrasting with the flat openness of the surrounding farmland.

Bands of riparian vegetation border the streams providing habitat for wildlife and enhancing the beauty of the place.

Standard Development

The most common type of development in rural areas involves farmers or other land owners selling off occasional parcels for home lots. These tend to be frontage parcels on existing section roads, for convenience of access

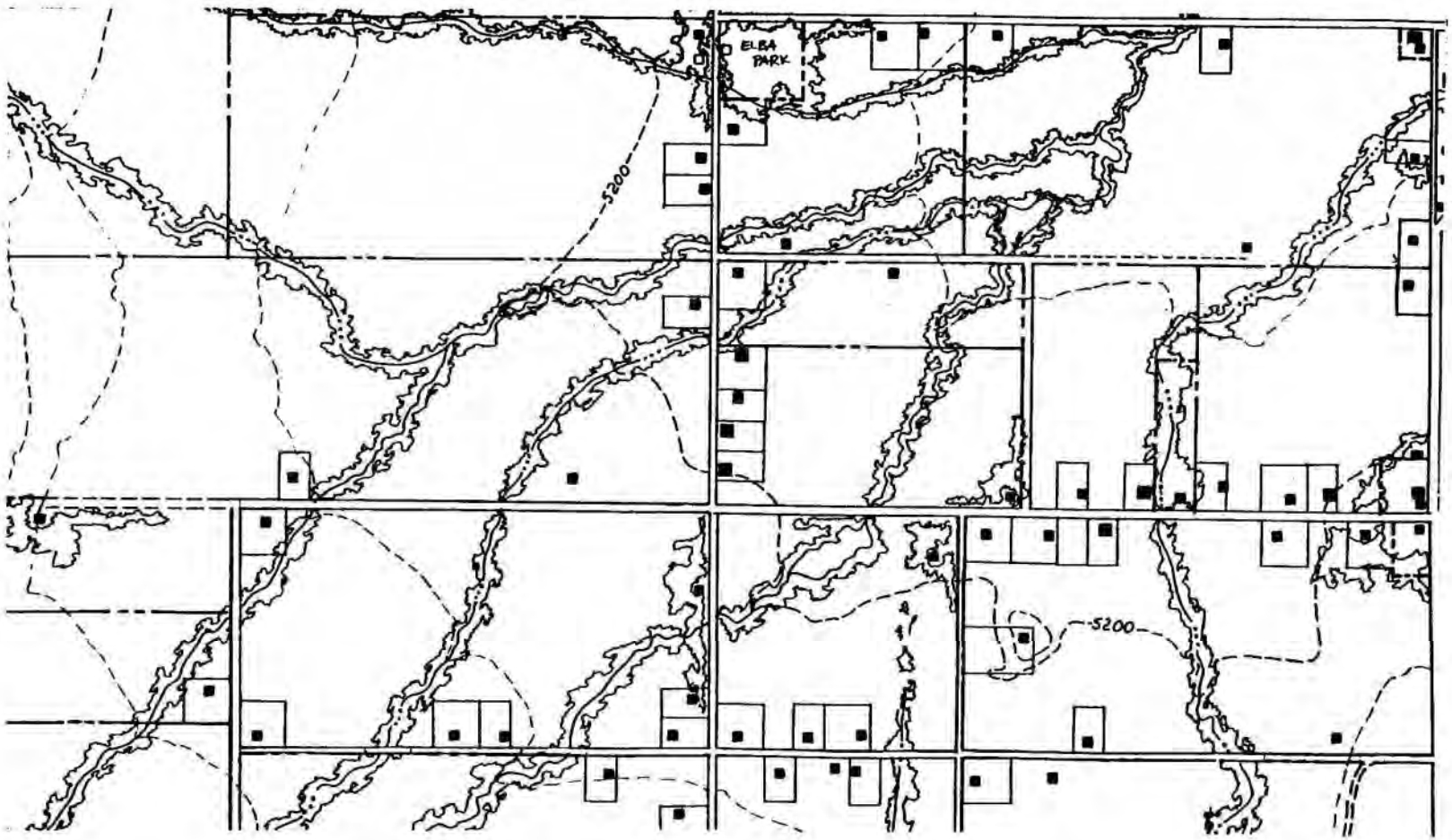
As the process continues over time, houses begin to line both sides of the road, creating the impression of a continuous strip of development, interrupting views of the landscape.

The sense of open space becomes fragmented and continuity lost. The prevailing quality of historic clusters gives way to the linear potpourri of styles common everywhere in America

Standard Development Plan

Shown below is the unfortunate result of continued lot sales along frontage roads. What began with one or two lots (center plan, p.38) has processed to the point where the viewed scene from the road is of near total building.

This pattern is not only visually destructive, but is inefficient and costly as well. Services are spread out rather than concentrated in nodes. Safety issues are a concern with many individual access points.

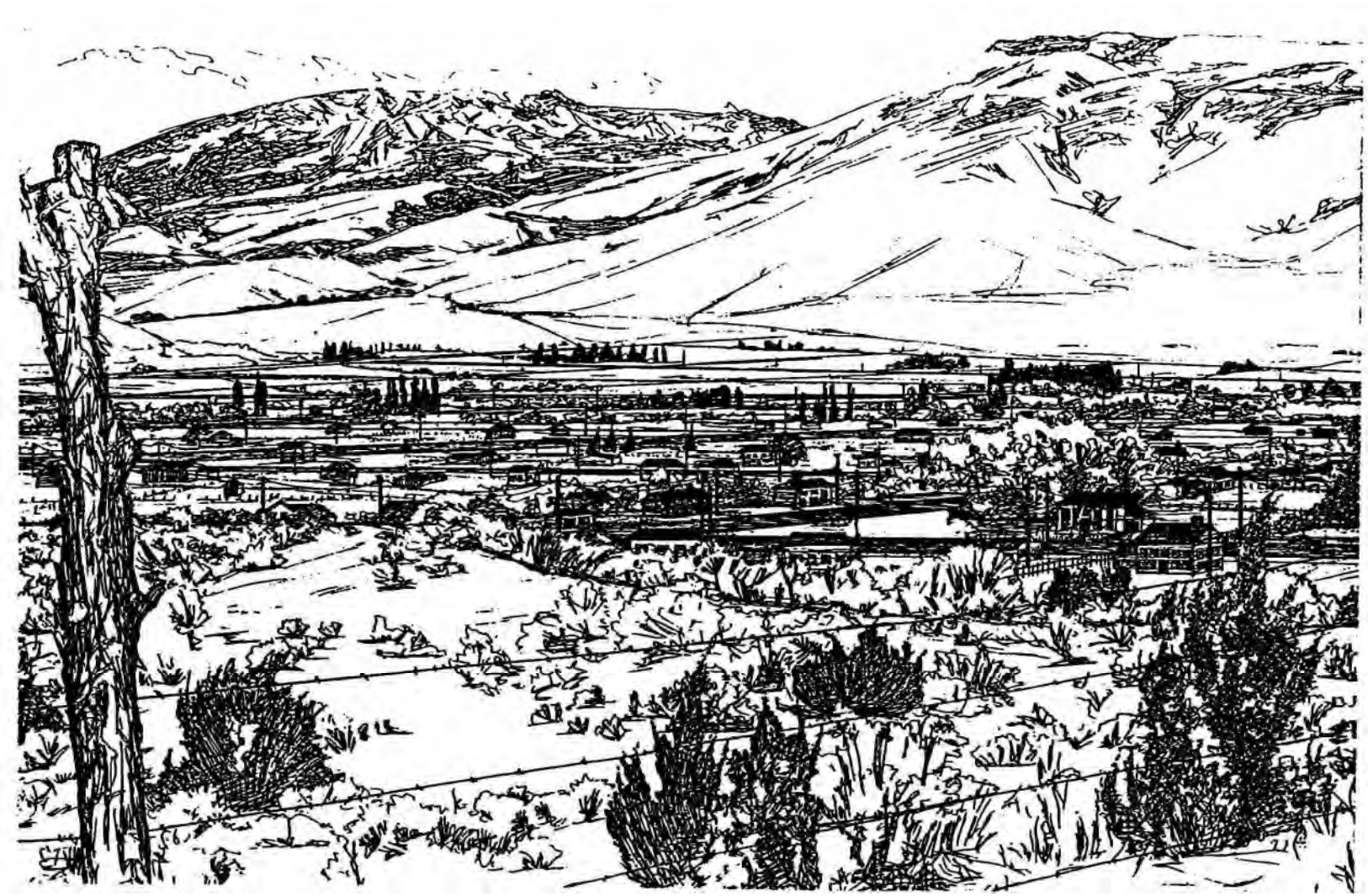


Standard Development II

Available land has been subdivided equally, creating a patchwork of individual lots which spread across the valley.

Open space gives way to roads and houses. Riparian corridors are fragmented, diminishing both the visual and ecological value of the area.

Rather than enhancing the uniqueness of the basin, this development obscures historic patterns and makes the valley much like any other place.

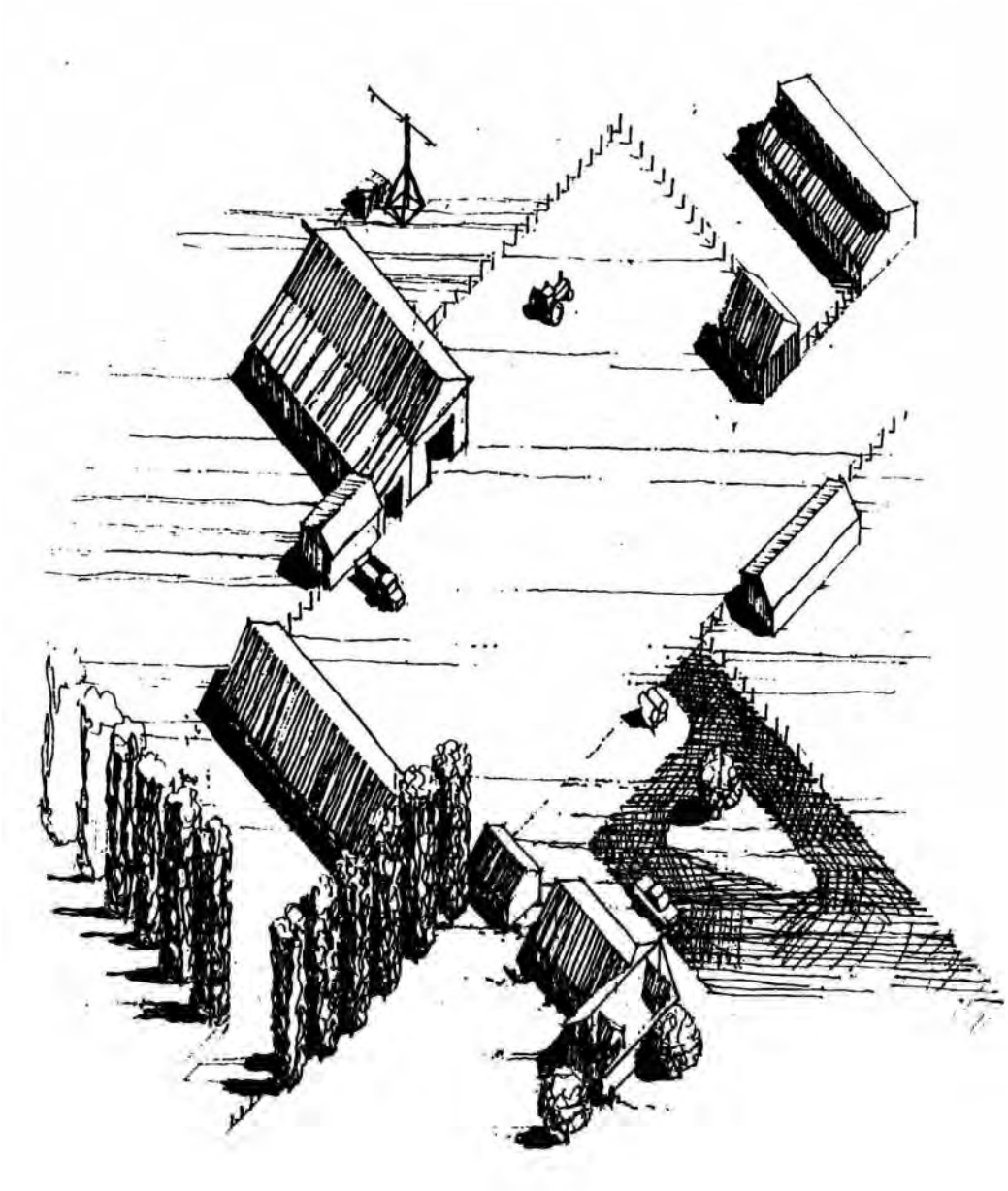


Creative Development

Farmstead clusters located on less sensitive portions of the basin mimic existing patterns of building grouping.

Development is set back from roads, retaining uncluttered foreground views. Open space and farmland are preserved, protecting the historic quality of the valley while providing ample opportunity for development.

Riparian corridors are preserved, maintaining habitat far wildlife as well as protecting the valley's scenic qualities.



Traditional Farmstead

The grouping of farm buildings shown in this aerial view is the same complex shown in plan view on page 18. It is typical of farmstead arrangements throughout the Snake River Valley, displaying a right angled orientation of structures grouped around a central service court.

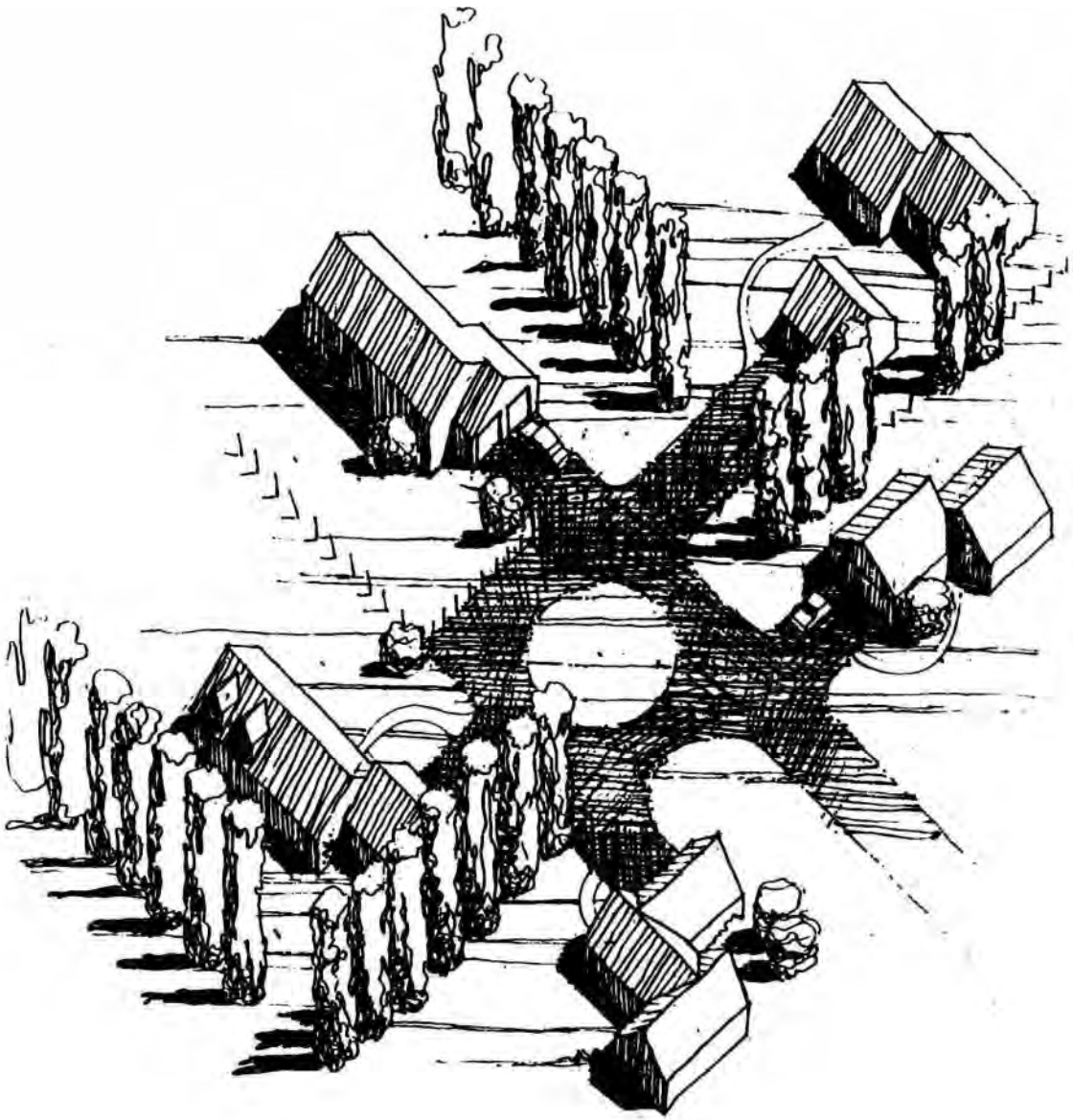
Traditional elements, consisting of a hay barn, granary, various stables and poultry shelters, and a collection of storage sheds, pump buildings, etc., form a high-density cluster of buildings, tied to the landscape with windbreaks of Lombardy poplar. The overall dimension of the built area shown on the plan, is approx. 400’ x 500’, or just over 4.5 acres.

This compact core would typically form the central nucleus for a larger farm, frequently 160 acres in size. Dispersal of farm building clusters throughout the landscape would create the collective landscape image seen in the view of Elba on page 39.

Creative Development: Farmstead Prototype

Using the same space as consumed by the traditional farmstead on the facing page, and grouping structures in a similar pattern, a residential cluster has been created which would fit into the rural landscape with little disruption. In this example, five homes have been placed on the 4.5 acre parcel, resulting in a net density of approximately 1 unit per acre. However, through careful siting and landscaping, a degree of privacy is attained rivaling that of much larger lot subdivisions. Actual individual lot sizes could range anywhere from 2 acres to 5 acres, or even more, with the open lands expanding outward from the developed zone. Residents would share a common access drive, greatly reducing initial development costs as well as ongoing maintenance. Developed landscape areas requiring heavy irrigation and care would focus on the area surrounding the service court, again minimizing costs associated with the larger outlying acreage.

Care given to architectural style, traditional plantings of poplar and detail elements such as fencing, allow this neo-traditional development to fit comfortably in the Cassia landscape.

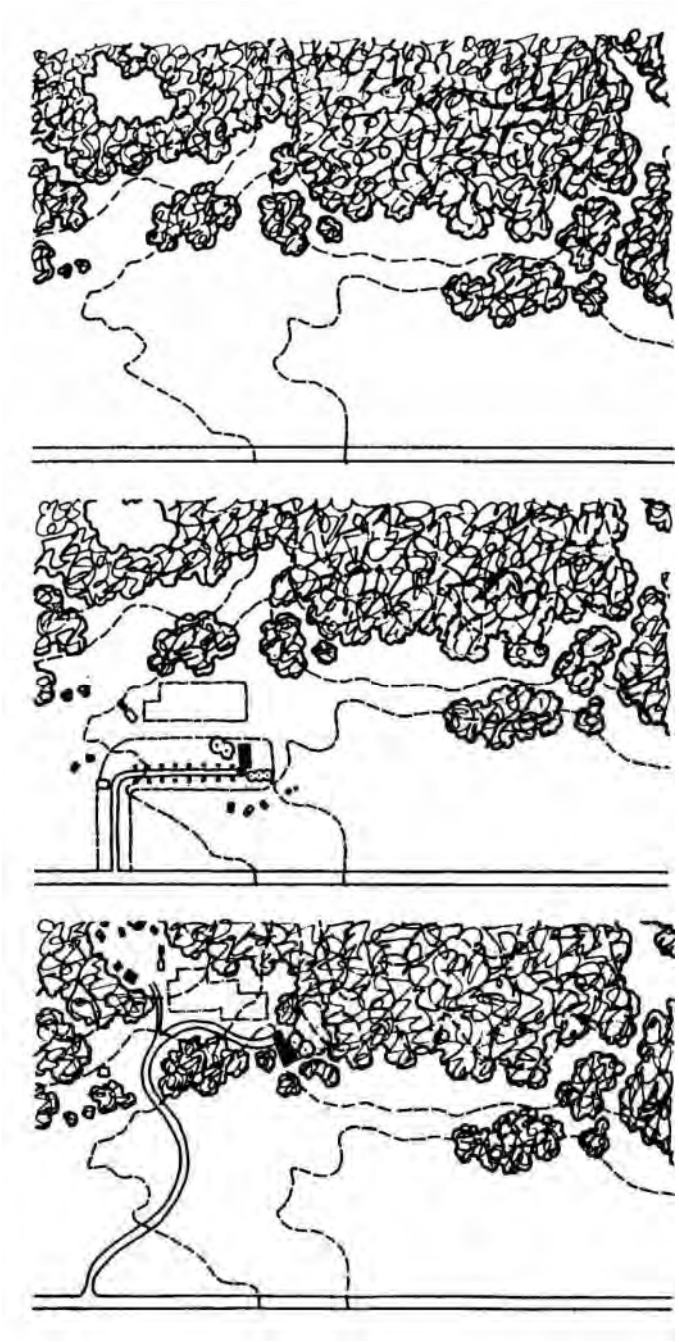


Pinyon/ Juniper

Existing Site

Conventional Development

Creative Development Plan



Pinyon / Juniper: Isolated Home

In between the small agrarian communities scattered along the loop route, the highway rises slightly in elevation and crosses areas of non-irrigated upland These areas have historically been sparsely populated, serving as rangeland in recent times. The vegetation consists of grasses and sagebrush in flatter areas, often close to the road, grading into Pinyon / Juniper thickets flanking the foothills. This pattern is typical of parts of the landscape at the foot of Jim Sage Mountain south of Elba, as well as other scattered locations along the corridor.

Recent building has occurred in areas of this landscape type, most typically of scattered individual large acreage ranchettes. The visual vulnerability of this landscape lies in its openness in foreground exposures, and in its susceptibility to development of severely contrasting color and form with the native vegetation. The dense character of the Pinyon /Juniper forest provides ample opportunity for development, however, provided it is carefully sited within the existing cover.

Existing Landscape Conditions

This parcel, located along a relatively isolated segment of the loop route, is typical of scattered frontage sites along the highway.

In these non-irrigated areas, only native plants adapted to arid conditions are found. The deep greens of the pinyon- juniper contrast with the beige and grays of the soils and sage.

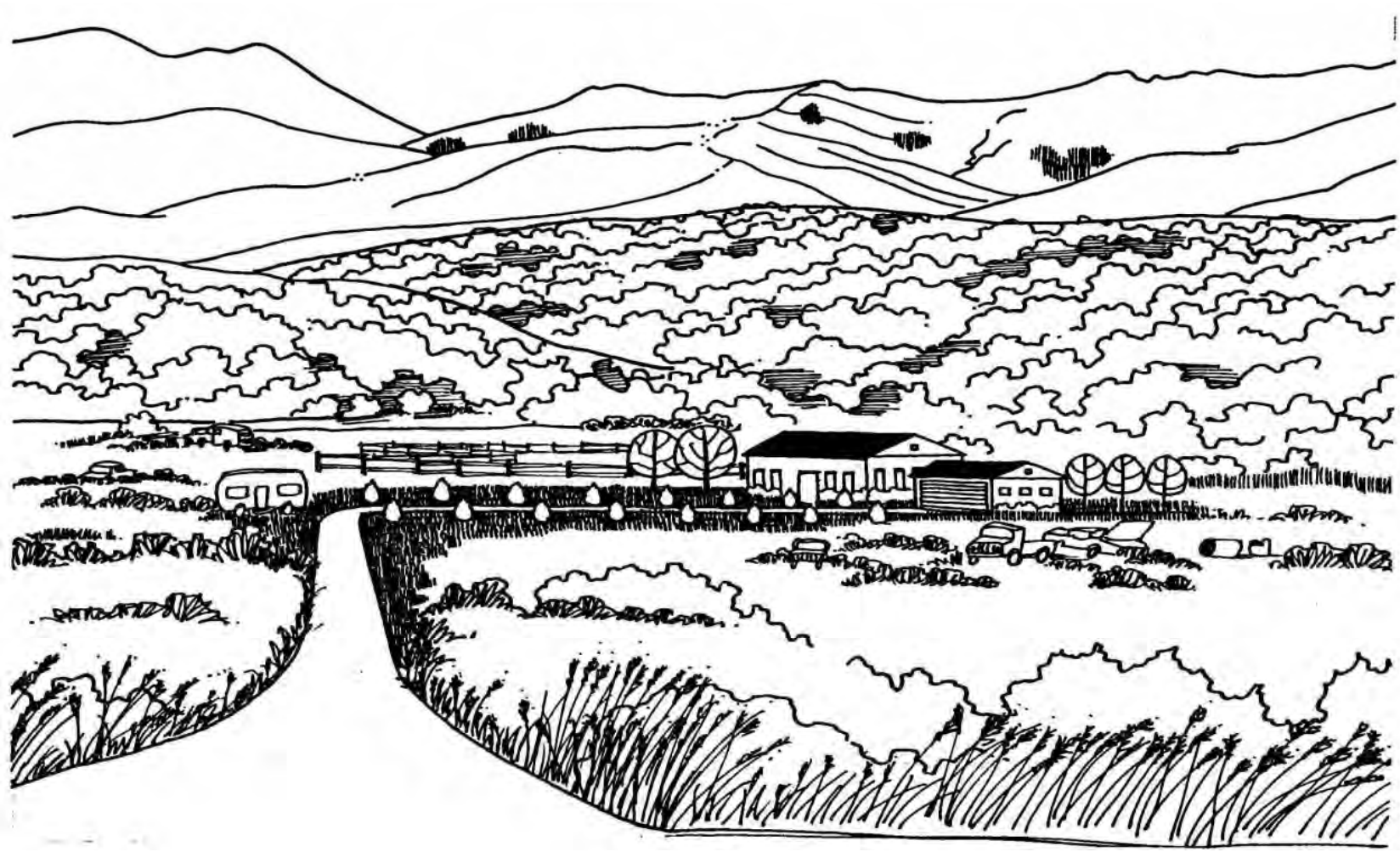
We natural edge between juniper and the open, sage-covered areas provides goad opportunities for sensitive development.

Standard Development

The house has been placed on the site so as to be extremely visible from the road. No attempt has been made to blend with the native vegetation and landforms.

Non-native plants contrast with the natural landscape and draw attention to themselves. The utility yard is a focal point, but the glare **and** disorder of the machinery and autos is unsightly.

The driveway cuts its own linear path drawing attention perpendicular to the road rather than following the contours of the landscape.



Creative Development

The house is tucked into the pinyon- juniper edge, while the utility yard is carved from the native vegetation in order to screen machinery and automobiles.

Juniper screens the house from the road and blends it into the landscape, while lawn, exotic flowers and trees are located in the back yard where they cannot be seen from the road.

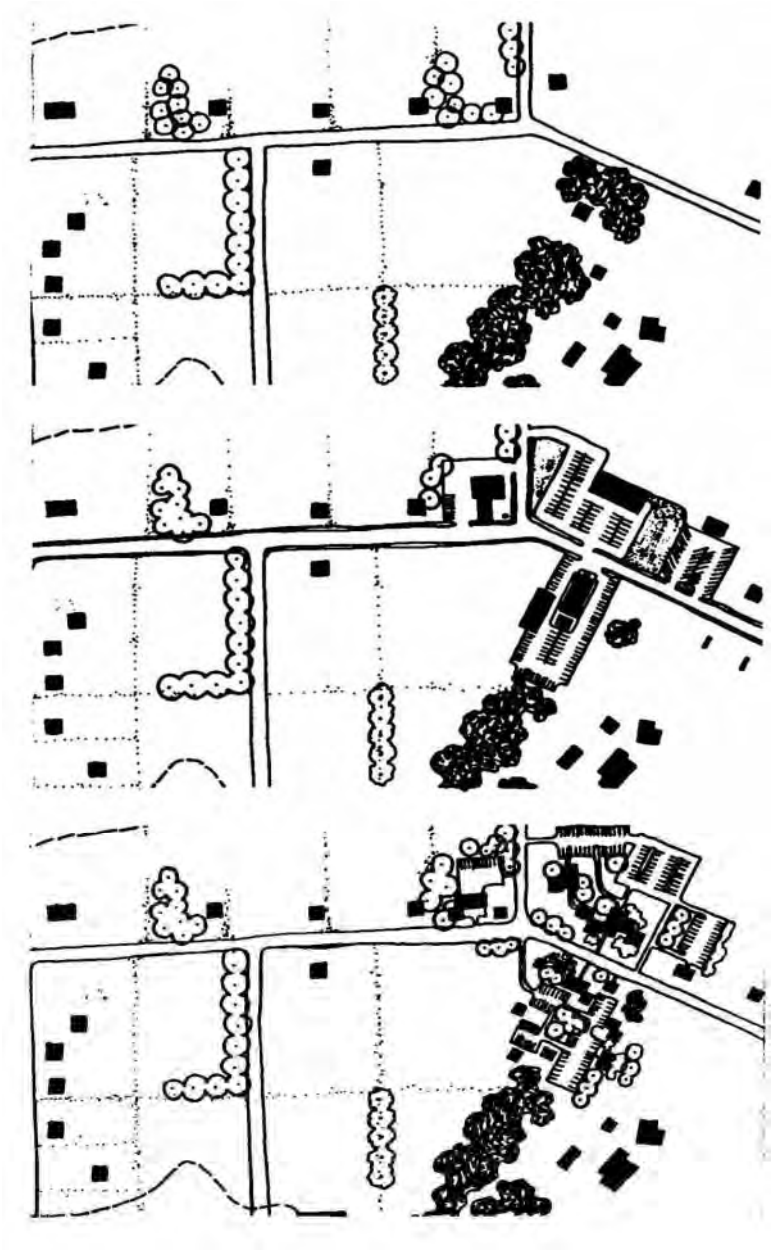
A curved drive blends better with the unstructured landscape and is better screened from the road by sagebrush and other natives. Open space near the road is preserved as a buffer and scenery.

Almo Gateway

Existing Site

Conventional Development

Creative Development Plan



Almo

The long vistas and wide spaces of the loop route axe occasionally relieved by the poplar-marked outline of a small town. Unlike many towns, which are separated from the surrounding landscape by sharply contrasting elements, the towns of Southern Cassia County blend effortlessly with their surroundings. The entry to the town is marked by an increase in houses and organization, but there is nothing to detract from the beauty of the surrounding landscape or the visual quality of the area. These entries play an important role in introducing travelers to the town and forming first impressions in the minds of visitors.

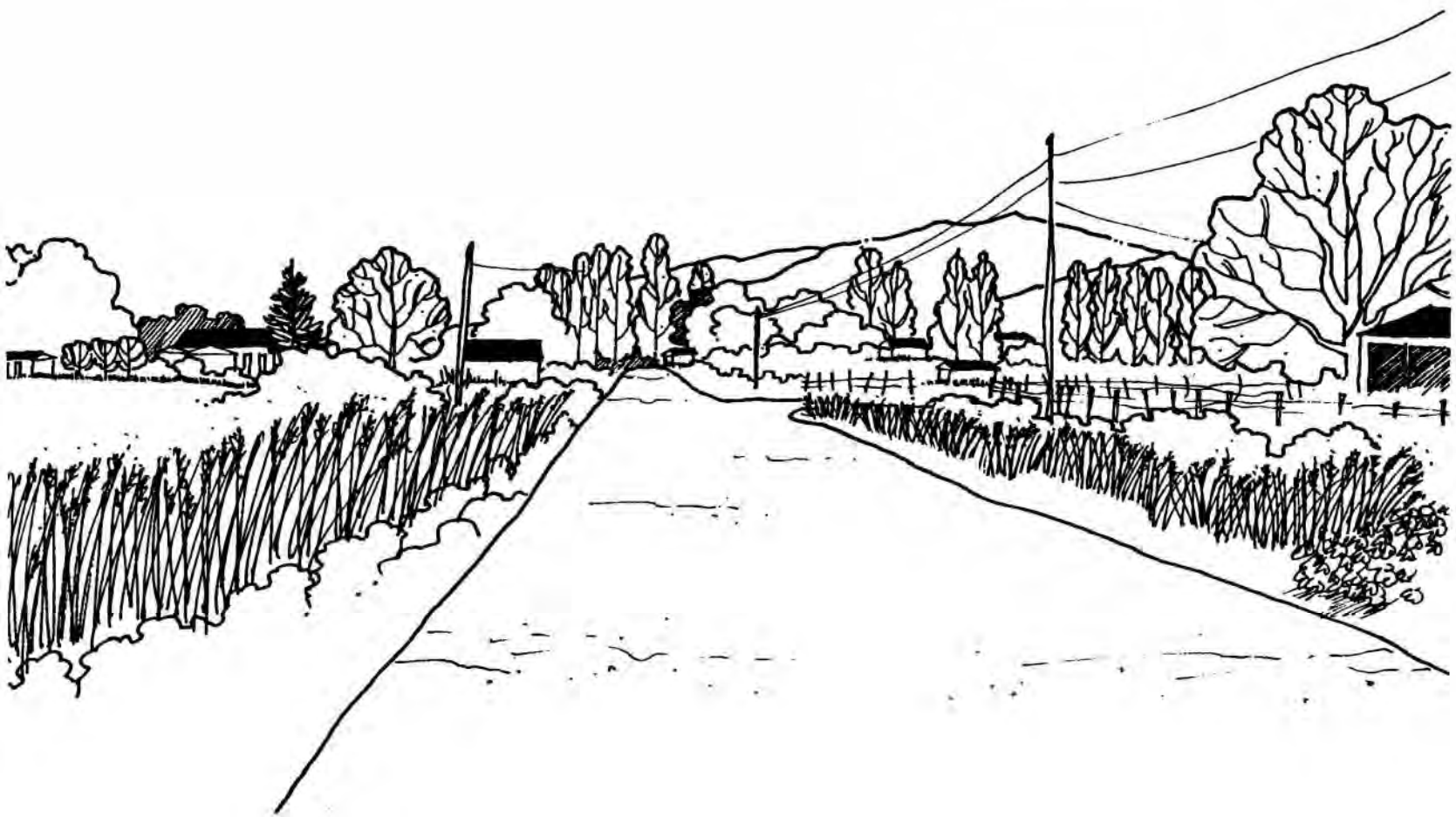
As tourism increases, development often springs up on t town. Advertisements, commercial buildings and overnight accommodations that aren't in keeping with the existing landscape fragment the approach and detract from the arrival experience, h: existing town behind a facade of unrelated development. By drawing on existing forms and patterns in the landscape, however, the entry and other small towns can be enhanced by development which s responds to these elements in color, form and placement.

Existing Landscape Conditions

This is the entry to Almo, a small hamlet on the edge of the City of Rocks. The southbound approach seen here is the arrival view of most visitors to the area.

Open space on the outskirts of town gives way gradually to an increasing density of building. Buildings encroach more closely to each other and to the mad.

The old school house and general store form landmarks at the heart of town. Lombardy poplars are a major structural element, dominating and unifying the landscape.



Standard Development

As visitation to the City of Rocks has grown Almo will develop as the major tourist gateway. In this conventional scenario, service businesses such as gas stations and motels have appeared on the northern entry to town.

Unimaginative placement of businesses, parking lots and signage clashes with the traditional sense of place. Structures compete for attention, disrupting the harmony created by established vegetation and historic architecture.

Roadside parking lots result in setbacks which disrupt the historic pattern of the streetscape and create an impediment to pedestrian movement through town. The rural village quality of life is gone.

Creative Development

Historic architecture and vegetation remain the dominant, unifying elements in this landscape. Businesses are sited so that they harmonize with and enhance the existing buildings.

New buildings are located closer to the street in order to maintain the town's historic patterns. Parking lots are located behind buildings to lessen their impact from the road.

Lombardy poplars are used as visual accents and to link historic architecture with modern development.

City of Rocks

Within the overall boundaries of the City of Rocks National Reserve are contained numerous parcels of private land. It was the intention of Public Law 100-696 to continue ”private use subject to appropriate local ordinances designed to protect the historic rural setting”. Section 202(c) further specifies that appropriate units of local government having jurisdiction over land use within the reserve shall enact ordinances or establish regulations ”which in the judgment of the Secretary will protect and preserve the historic and natural features of the area in accordance with the comprehensive plan”. The following guidelines are proposed to address site planning issues within the Reserve, in accordance with the Act.

Buildings should be located so as to be as invisible as possible from Reserve roads or major public use areas. Most of the private land parcels within the City of Rocks Reserve are of sufficient size and landscape diversity to allow for the placement of structures on sites screened from view by rock formations or existing Pinyon / Juniper forest. This is of critical importance to avoid introducing a residential visual character in an otherwise unbuilt landscape of National significance. Proposed building sites should be evaluated in the field by identifying them with visible markings and walking mad and trail alignments to
observe their visibility.

In instances where a private land parcel cannot accommodate a non-visible building site, the following guidelines must be met:

Setback. The building must not be located in the foreground zone as viewed from the road unless it is otherwise impossible to locate a suitable building area on the parcel..

Site Placement. It is important to eliminate building silhouette against the sky. The architectural lines of the roof would create unacceptable contrast with surrounding natural forms. To avoid silhouette, buildings should nestle close to rocks or irregularities in landform. A backdrop of natural features, combined with architectural controls of massing and color (see page 80), will effectively camouflage the structure from most vantage points. It is also important to avoid the placement of structures at the end of sight lines, where attention would be focused on them for an extended period as viewed from a trail or road.

Land management. It is important to avoid an appearance of human manipulation in this historic landscape. Intensive agriculture including irrigated crops is not appropriate here. Continued cattle or sheep grazing will maintain the traditional Western rural appearance associated with the City of Rocks.

From this vantage point into the heart of the Silent City of Rocks, looking from east to west with Circle Creek Basin on the right, one can trace the route of the California Trail running through the middleground as it passes Register Rock. Although much of the area in this view is in public ownership, at least 8 and possibly as many as 12 private in holdings of land occur.

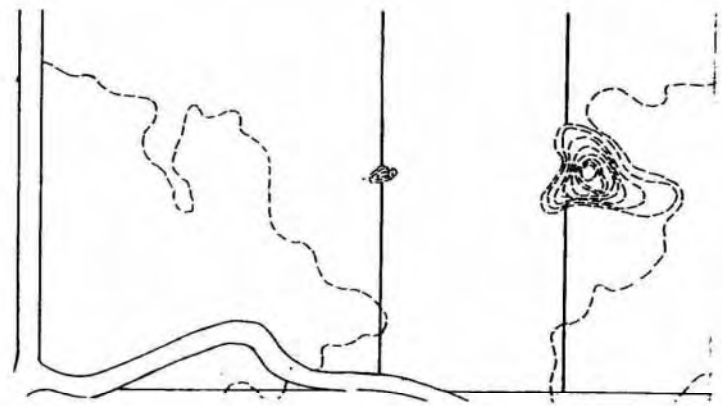
At the present time, there is minimal activity on private lands other than the traditional use of cattle grazing. The landscape has the appearance most associate with the ”historic West”, of wide open spaces of rangeland contrasted with the magnificent handiwork of nature. As timeless and permanent as this view seems, major change is possible without careful planning.

In this scenario, the privately held parcels of land axe clearly evident. Homes have been built in highly visible locations. Individual properties have been enclosed and the land has been put to a variety of uses. The manipulated character of the scene is very different from the open quality observed by pioneers on the California Trail, and from the historic rural character intended by the designation of the City of Rocks National Reserve

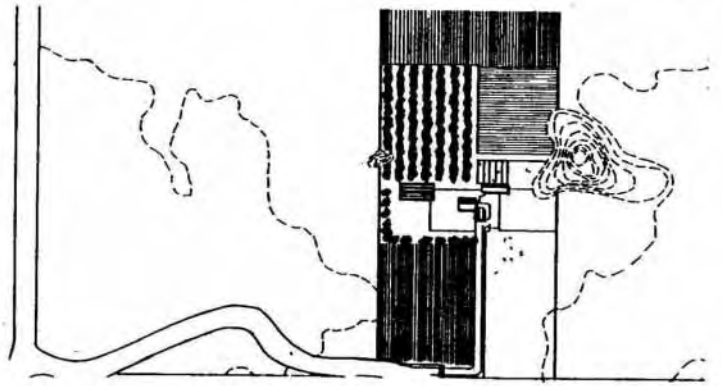
Ample opportunity exists within this viewshed for the siting of homes in visually screened locations. Through the careful placement of structures and management of the land as range leased to local ranchers, there is no reason why this area cannot accommodate compatible private activity while retaining the traditional image depicted an the previous pages.

City of Rocks

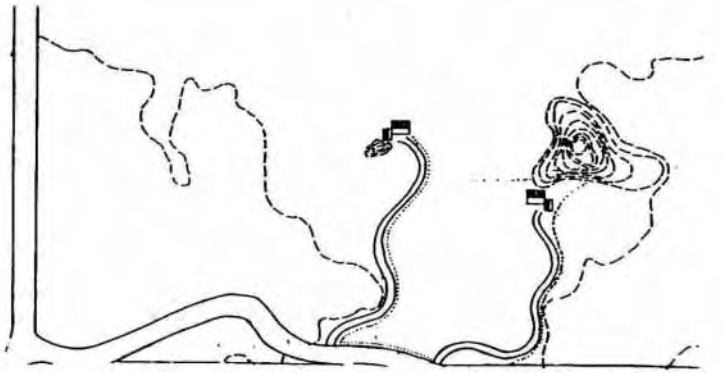
Existing Site



Conventional Development



Creative Development Plan



City of Rocks Case Study

The rocks jutting from the valley floor have been an attraction since settlers steered their wagons between them. Until recently, livestock grazing and hay crops were the only activities here. Private land holdings scattered throughout the Reserve present challenges in maintaining the historic rural character.

In the **Conventional Development** scenario, land owners have built their one home permissible under zoning and placed the remainder of their parcel into active use. Private lands in the Reserve are divided into rectilinear areas with fences and roadways. Although typical of other landscapes in the county, this treatment is alien here and violates the provisions of the City of Rocks establishment act.

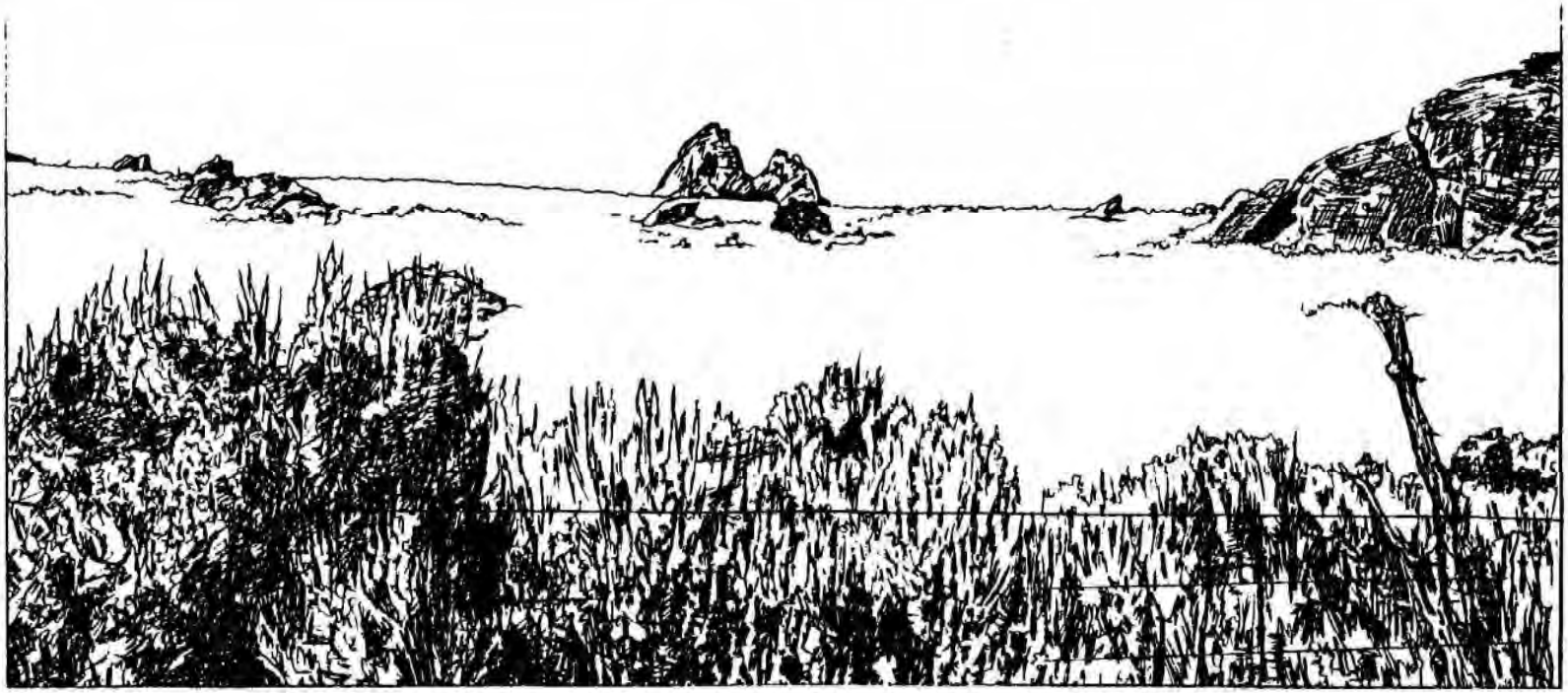
With the **Creative Development** Scenario, the unique features of the landscape determined where development would be most suitable. Homes have been located behind landforms and vegetation unseen by the visitor and ensuring privacy to the homeowner. Homes which were unable to be screened completely are placed in the shadows of or at the base of rock outcrops, disguising their silhouette. Architectural detailing further obscures these homes, through the use of broken facades and rooflines, the use of natural materials, and dark earth tone colors (see architectural guidelines, page 80).

Existing Landscape Conditions

This site is located within the City of Rocks Reserve, making it particularly susceptible to any visual impacts.

The soft, muted color of open land covered with grass and sage contrasts with the solid forms of large, granite outcroppings.

Juniper snag-and-barbed-wire fencing delineates private land just as it has done for decades, marking the history of human use that has taken place on this land for over a century.



Standard Development

Houses are located in the open, away from outcroppings that could be used as screens. Building mass competes with the rock forms for attention, and light colors stand out from the background.

Rather than following the contours of the land, rectilinear fields have been imposed on the landscape, bordered by post-and rail fencing which further emphasizes their geometric form.

The introduced vegetation is out of character with the natural quality of the area, Lombardy poplars and ornamental trees appropriate elsewhere in the county are not in keeping with this landscape.

Creative Development

Granite formations are used to screen new development. This allows natural elements to remain dominant and retains the intact, open quality of the scene.

Houses are located at the base of rock outcrops rather than in open fields, using the rock to disguise rooflines. Darker earth tone colors camouflages buildings against granite masses.

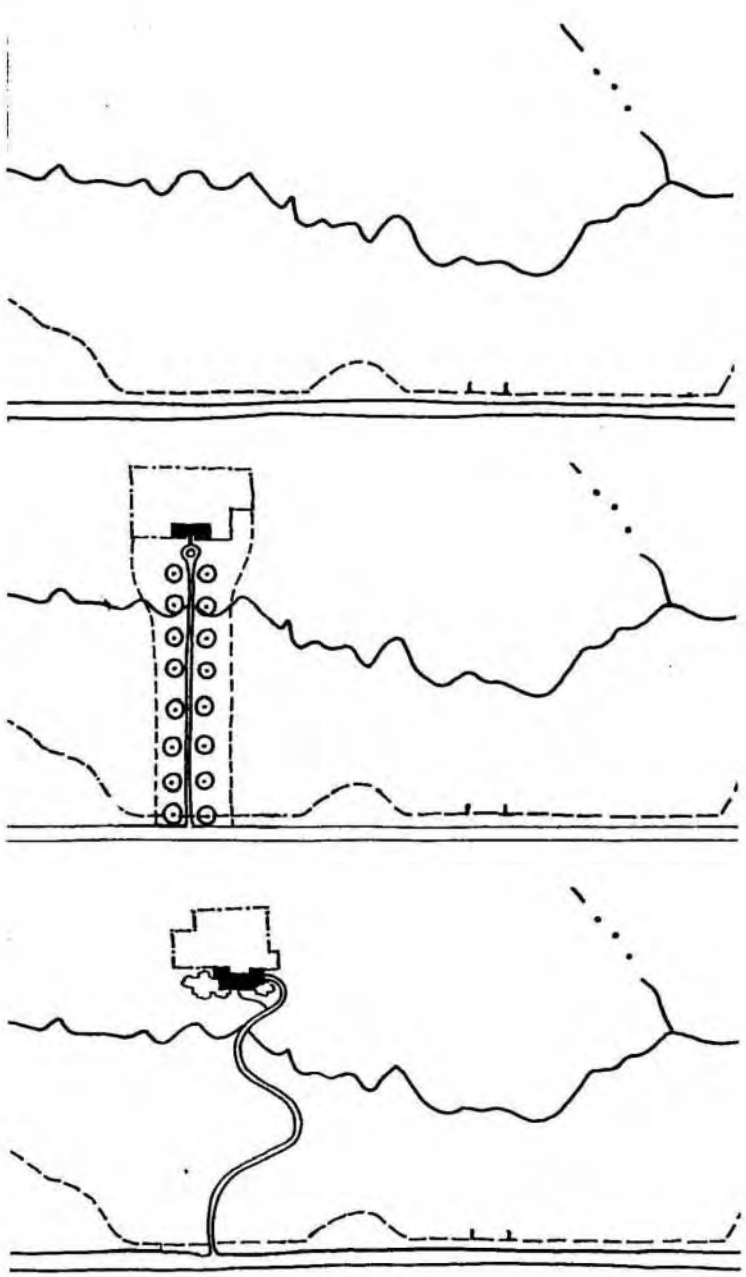
Native plants are used exclusively to blend homes with the setting. Land is leased to ranchers for grazing, retaining the traditional land use. Historic juniper snag fence posts are preserved.

Open Sagebrush

Existing Site

Conventional Development

Creative Development Plan



Sagebrush: Isolated Home

On the west side of the City of Rocks Reserve Junction Valley, remarkable for its vast emptiness. This broad, U-shaped expanse is dominated by vigorous sagebrush mixed with perennial grasses. Colors here are muted, the dusty greens of the sage mixing with the warmer tones of the soil and other plants. Although the landscape is empty and very arid, it has a distinct and subtle beauty.

Introduced elements draw attention to themselves in this remote, natural setting. The dearth of vegetation that can be used for screening makes the placement of structures on this landscape particularly challenging. While not particularly development prone, due to the harsh climatic conditions and lack of cover, this landscape is so open that any construction whatsoever could create visual sears that would be seen for miles.

Since it is unlikely that structures can be hidden in this landscape, an understanding of color and form becomes especially important. If colors are selected in harmony with those of nature, and forms reflect the horizontality of the land, a much better chance of achieving some degree of camouflage exists.

Existing Landscape Conditions

This remote landscape is incredibly vast and empty. Sagebrush predominates here to form a landscape of sweeping horizons and low vegetation.

The sage-covered valleys merge into pinyon and juniper covered slopes, connecting ultimately with the dramatic backdrop of the mountains.

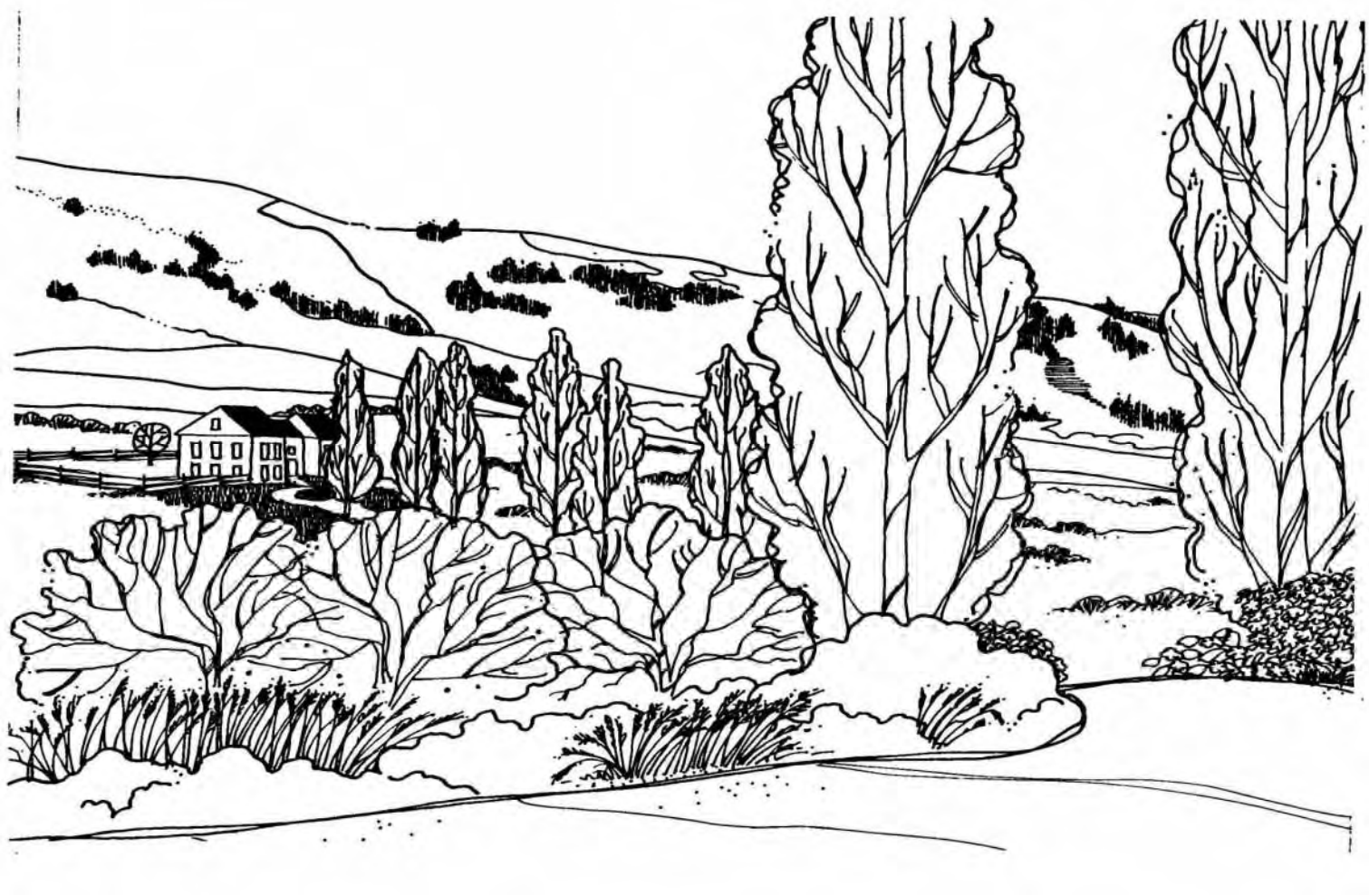
The sagebrush creates a landscape of subtle color and unique, harmonious beauty. It's openness makes it highly susceptible to visual impact.

Standard Development

Two-story, ”colonial” style home is highly visible in this setting. The scale of the building dominates the vegetation and landforms.

The long, straight drive conflicts with the naturalness and openness of the place, attracting undesirable attention to the home.

Although desirable elsewhere, poplars are inappropriate in this isolated landscape dominated by low, muted, drought-tolerant plants.

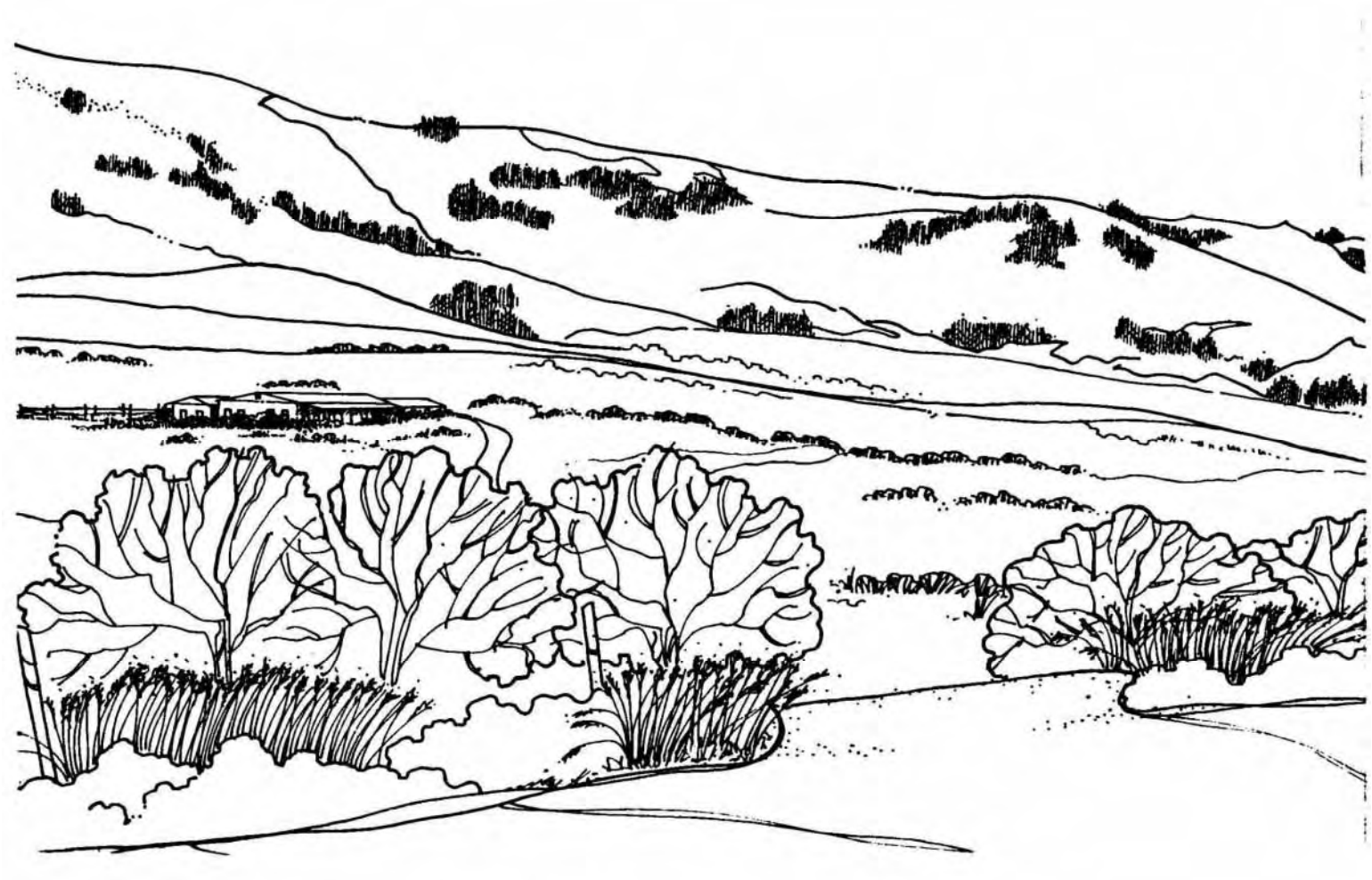


Creative Development

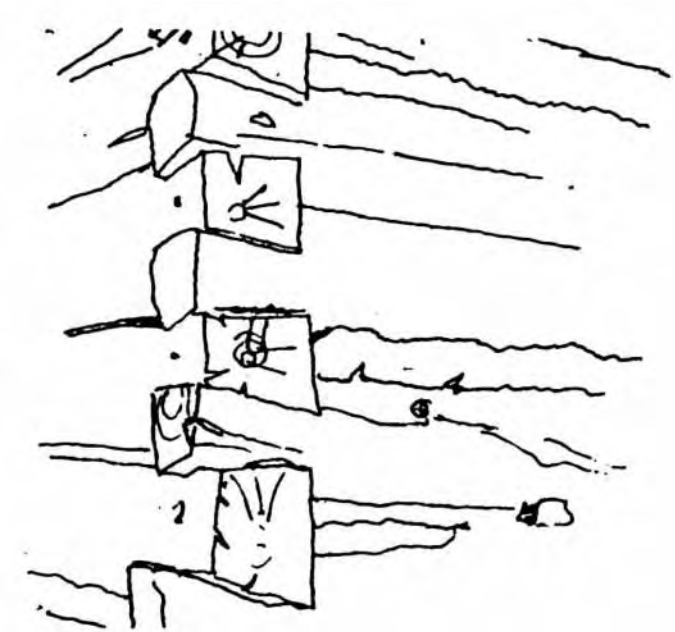
To harmonize with the landscape, a long, low building was chosen. A broken roofline modifies the architecture, reducing its sense of mass.

Colors which reflect the native landscape help the structure "dissolve" into the natural setting. The meandering driveway appears and disappears as it winds to the house, making it less noticeable and more in harmony with the landforms.

Vegetation is restricted to native plants and those with similar coloring and form in the front, while ornamentals are allowed behind. Foundation plantings anchor the house and tie it in with the land



architectural guidelines



Design guidelines contained in this section deal with the appearance of both old and new buildings. Architecture creates a major visual statement on the land, and possesses the power either to unify or to fragment a scene. Southern Cassia County is blessed with remarkable collection of vernacular architecture with reinforces the pastoral and historic qualities of the landscape. Numerous variations exist within the study area, from the remains of early dugouts to well-preserved log homes and barns, and from elegant red brick homes in Elba to the stately stone structures in Oakley and Albion. The common thread is a design response through built form to the availability of materials and functional necessity. The following recommendations along with the earlier section on Architectural Context serve to illustrate the many positive aspects of that which exists, and to offer suggestions for the perpetuation of those qualities.

Section **X** dealt with Visual Zoning. The degree to which architecture affects a scene is directly related to the distance from which it is viewed. The following matrix summarizes which attributes of architecture are significant in each visual zone. Each of the attributes is treated in the discussion which follows, with specific guidelines offered for each.

	FG < ¼	**MG1** ¼ 1 ½	**MG2** 1 ½ 3	**BG** >3
Material p.	**X**			
Texture p.	**X**			
Shape / form p.	**X**	**X**		
Mass / scale p.	**X**	**X**	**X**	
Color / glare p.	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**

Visual Zones and Architectural Attributes.

Materials

Traditional structures used local building materials, which reflected the colors and textures of the landscape. The relatively limited palette of construction supplies available to early builders forced a continuity of materials between structures, creating an overall sense of unity in the built environment. Today, this long-standing visual continuity born of necessity is threatened by the ready availability of standardized building materials. Admittedly, it can sometimes be cost prohibitive to build structures out of logs or cut stone, but there are things that can be done using modern materials to create a ”fit” with the traditional.

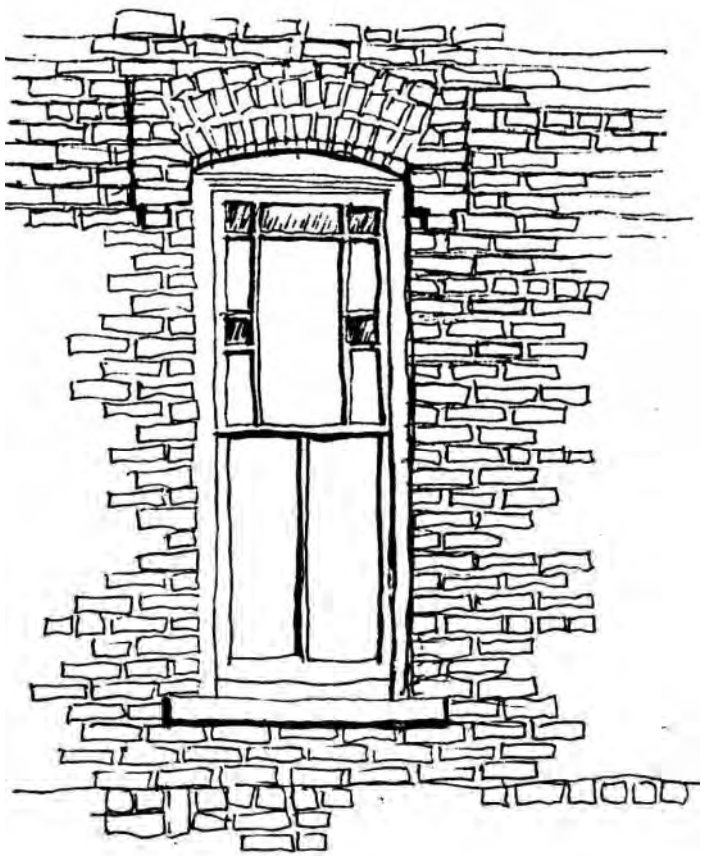
The appropriateness of building material varies with the distance at which a structure is viewed. Buildings in the foreground zones of intact historic areas will be more obvious if constructed of non- traditional materials than will a similarly built home in a more eclectic development, m in a less visible location. Material authenticity is encouraged in the foreground throughout the loop route corridor, but is of particular necessity within the City of Rocks, and would be highly desirable in Elba, with its intact collection of red brick structures.

Attention to detail is important in consideration of materials. For example, brick, while a common building material today, can look very incongruous in historic setting, avoid white, artificially ”burnt”, and ”antiqued” finishes.

Also inappropriate are the random mixes of multi-colored brick found in some recent construction. Brick in the reddish brown or yellow tones are the most compatible within the study area. See page 22 for further discussion of traditional brick construction, including patterns and grout.

Log construction is another example of tremendous variation. While the greatest number of log buildings in southeast Idaho were of round logs with square or ”V” notching, a number of structures still exist in the county with hewn logs and dovetail notches. Regardless of joinery detailing, logs ended at the corner of the structure and did not extend several feet beyond as in many of the rustic cabin kits available today. Details such as this are important in attempts at authenticity in blending with existing structures.

Buildings in the middle ground or background may utilize many materials so long as they are not obviously incongruous in the setting. As discussed later, color and form become more significant than actual materials at this greater distance.



Texture / Details

The original roof character of older structures should be retained. Homes and barns requiring re-roofing should use materials appropriate to the style of the house or material that matches the original as closely as possible. Care should be taken to retain architectural features such as decorative barge boards and cornices, fish scale shingles, collar beams, scrollwork, etc. Dormers, chimneys, and other projections from the roof add a distinctive texture which should be carefully retained.

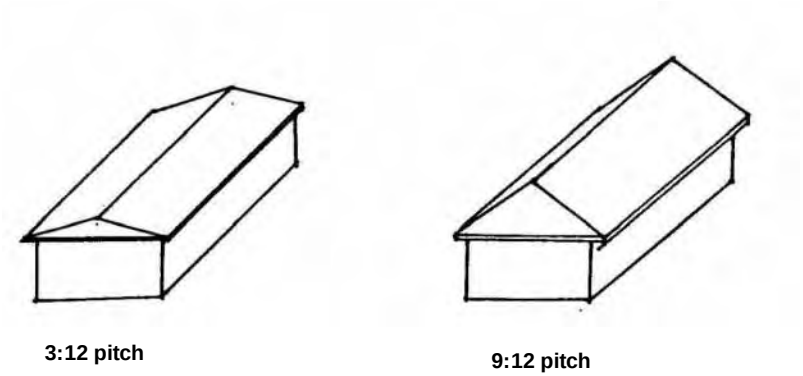
Windows and doors form a significant visual component of the facade. Wherever possible, original wood or stone sash, sills, lintels, shutters, etc., should be retained or matched with appropriately similar replacements. Metal, vinyl, and fiberglass awnings and shutters, and unpainted aluminum storm windows and doors detract significantly from the integrity of older structures and should be avoided.

Shape / Form

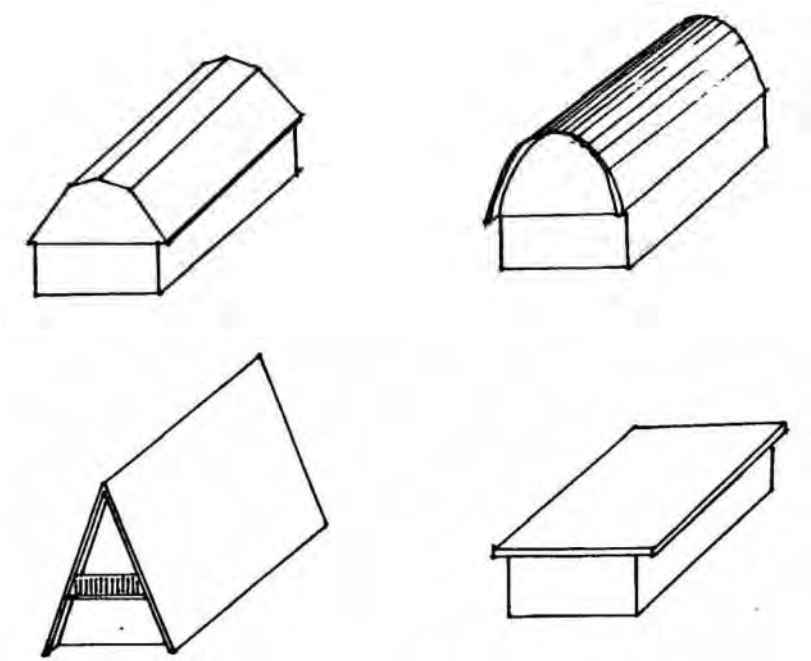
Built form is a major factor in the overall visual picture of the landscape. Architectural forms reflect a myriad of localized influences such as climate and building techniques passed on by generations of craftsmen. Today, widespread awareness of styles and access to pattern books encourage experimentation with a wide variety of forms, shapes, and colors.

Roof configuration is one of the most noticeable parts of a building. New structures should feature a roof of appropriate pitch as well as style. Traditional roof styles in the south Cassia area were almost entirely of a simple gable type, with occasional shed roof additions. Steeper roofs prevail because of design for snow loading and the need to shed snow. The most common roof pitch on rural farm and ranch homes ranged from 8:12 to 12:12, with some town homes dating from the 1930's and 40's featuring slopes as steep as 15:12.

Flat and low pitched roofs are rarely found on traditional structures (with the exception of very old dugouts and sod roof homes) and look inappropriate in this setting, as do such alien forms as the gambrel, mansard, dome, or "A" frame. Although we now possess the ability and understanding to engineer and build a flatter roof, they appear out of place and should be avoided.

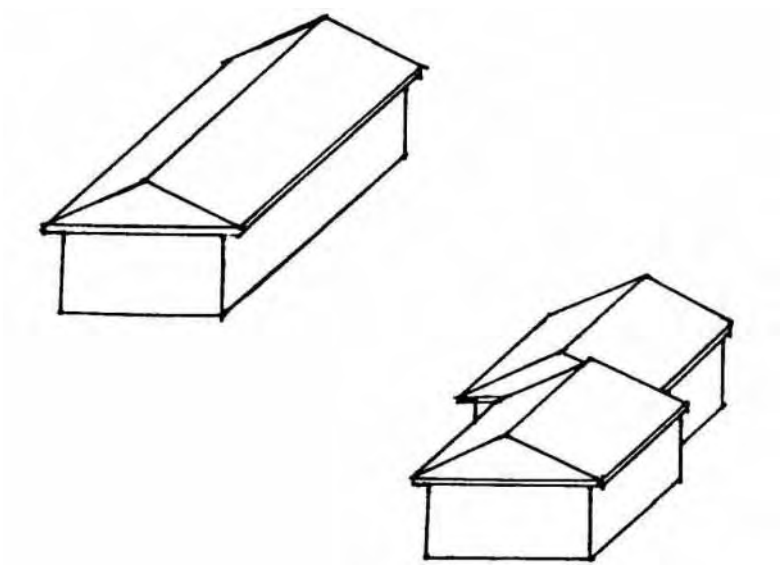


Effect of Steeper Roof Pitch



Collection of Inappropriate Roof Styles

Traditional Home with Add-on Appendages



Two Buildings of Identical Size Illustrating Reduction of Scale by Breaking Roof Line

Mass / Scale

Buildings should be designed to appear small in scale, avoiding monolithic appearance in either the wall or roof plane. Traditional buildings in the Cassia County landscape were small in scale. Until recent times, affordable structures required the use of relatively small timbers and other materials. When it became necessary to expand a farm, home, or business, the standard procedure was to add an appendage to an existing building. The appearance was of an assemblage of components, rather than that of a mega-structure. A large, unbroken plane is not only historically inappropriate but is visually dominant in a landscape of fine textured built elements.

New buildings can simulate traditional development through the use of dormers, offsets in roof ridge, staggered heights, projections of porches, and other similar techniques. Even an existing structure of extensive unbroken planes can be visually altered by the addition of attached projections (see Page 76 for mom ideas). The resulting break-up of mass into finer textured surfaces will have the added effect of increasing shade and shadow patterns, allowing buildings to more readily disappear when viewed against the broken texture of rocks and vegetation.

Color and Reflectivity

The effect of color becomes less significant with increasing distance. While foreground colors are strong and dominant, colors in the distance become less distinctive and take on a bluish cast due to atmospheric effects. In the rural foreground, colors should generally be neutral (borrowing from the dominant earth tones of the site is a good idea) and darker than the landscape backdrop. Shades of brown and beige, taupe, gray, and greens of an olive or sage hue are reasonable in most situations. In the zone of middleground 2 and beyond (further than 1 ½ miles from the mad), most colors become indistinguishable. Bright colors are not recommended in the rural setting, but may be appropriate in town, particularly in association with Victorian architecture.

White is particularly noticeable in the landscape, continuing beyond the 1 ½ mile mark throughout middleground 2. It can even accentuate a structure that is very carefully located and partially screened. To make matters worse, it all too frequently appears on structures of recent vintage already contrasting in form, focusing additional attention on their incompatibility. While white coloration is the most e8'ective at reflecting heat from the sun, a light shade of sand or sage can be almost as efficient while blending into the setting much more convincingly.

Even more noticeable than white is surfacing which is highly reflective, such as metal siding or roofing The glaze from unweathered galvanized steel can be distracting well into the background. In the foreground and middleground 1, it can be so bright as to completely dominate a scene. Because of the popularity of metal farm buildings, and increasing use in residential applications, the following suggestions are offered to minimize its inherent visual problems.

Metal roofing of a non-reflective, non-painted finish is preferred, weathering to a medium gray. Tern-coated sheet stainless steel (copper-bearing steel coated on both sides with tern alloy: 20% tin, 80% lead), or commercially available steel roofing products such as Astrazinc or Micro zinc will age with natural weathering to arrive at a rich flat dark gray color, compatible with the earth tones traditional to Cassia County building . Alternatively, a galvanized coated sheet steel can be used if treated with solutions to accelerate the weathering process, producing a weathered, non-reflective, dark gray patina.

Pre-painted steel buildings and roofing material, while preferable to untreated galvanized, is still prone to reflection with the sun at certain angles. Look for the flattest matte finishes available.

Special Considerations for Manufactured Housing

A significant percentage of new housing is comprised of modular units, prefabricated on a factory assembly line and delivered by truck to their ultimate site. These units axe popular in many areas because of their lower cost. This is particularly true in rural areas such as southern Cassia County, where builders may live some distance away, and the cost of shipping materials can add significant costs to home building.

Because of transportation restrictions, units are generally not wider than a combined 28 feet, and 60 to 70 feet long. Those wider than 14 feet are shipped in halves and assembled at the site. Unfortunately, transportation requirements imposed by height and width restrictions greatly limit the amount of flexibility in planning and design. The assembly line nature of their construction cannot provide both economy and customized features. Resulting shapes tend to be quite box like, with a long rectangular shape and a low angle roof pitch, both of which are alien architectural forms in this area The objective of this section is to provide guidelines to assist owners of mobile and manufactured homes faced with these limitations to achieve a more attractive fit of their units in the landscape.

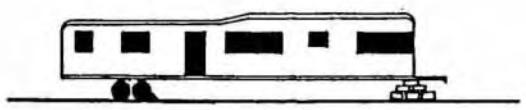
The suggestions offered fall within five general categories: changing the massing of the structure through the addition of accessory structures, selection of appropriate colors, arrangement of the unit on the site, landscape screening and a brief look at creative options available in the design of the actual units themselves.

Configurations

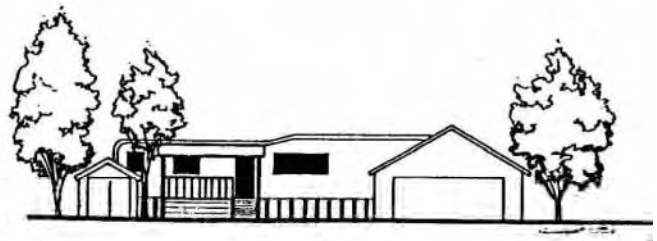
Several design tactics can be utilized to break up the simple linearity of a prefabricated unit, helping it to resemble the broken plane qualities of vernacular building. Accessory structures, unit extensions and linear elements unifying or connecting the home to detached objects or areas can turn a mobile home into one element of a larger complex instead of the focus of attention in its setting. Accessory structures can be added to the immediate environs of the unit, either as attached or free standing units. Examples may include porches, storage sheds, garages, or pole covers. A free standing pole structure supporting a more steeply pitched roof over the home facilitates the shedding of snow, adds additional protection against roof leakage, and casts shade over the home itself. Trellis, decks, and storage facilities can be incorporated into the design.

Site Design Options for the Mobile Home

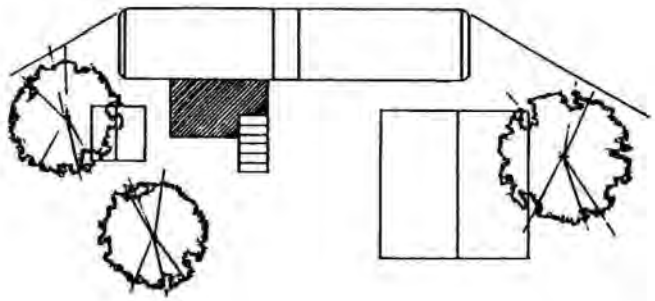
The elevational view at the top shows a typical mobile home with no landscaping or accessory structures. The lack of screening of any sort calls attention to its rectangular shape and glossy siding, which me not in keeping with the local landscape.



The middle view shows the same elevation with the addition of accessory structures oriented at a right angle to the axis of the mobile home. Note how the simple addition of a few elements changes the scale entirely, and helps it fit into the vernacular of local building groupings. A few trees for shade and scale add the final touch.



The bottom view shows the plan relationship of the landscape elements to the mobile home. Again, note the right angle orientation of the new structures.



The keys to success in working with additional architectural elements are configuration and unity. Accessory structures will appear most fitting if oriented at a right angle relationship with the main unit. Where possible, pitches should orient perpendicularly to the main unit. This arrangement most closely mirrors the traditional building clusters of farmsteads, adding a sense of appropriateness Unity of color and materials is critical to avoid a chaotic jumble of disparate parts. A shed, deck, and overhead arbor all of stained fir, interconnected by fencing of the same material, can greatly enhance the sense of unity in the mobile home or modular unit environment

Colors

Manufacturers have responded to the market by making many color choices available to the mobile and modular home buyer. Care should be exercised to select pleasing combinations to fit with the area where the home will be placed. To avoid unanticipated color clashes, it is recommended that samples of available finishes be obtained from the dealer, and observed on- site under natural daylight conditions. Many shades in the earth tone range, with variations of browns, beige, gray, and greens are very attractive in the natural landscape, and will avoid garish contrasts. White and reflective surfaces are the most visible finishes. While they may be fine in a village setting amidst other structures of similar tones, they are undesirable in the rural scene where they attract undue attention.

Siting and Orientation

Most of the manufactured homes in Cassia County are located on isolated lots in rural settings. With proper care in placement, they can fit comfortably in the landscape. What works the best to minimize visibility from the highway also works to the advantage of the home owner by reducing views dominated by road pavement and traffic. Home owners should avoid open, exposed sites with minimal vegetation. Look instead for partially wooded sites, where the home can be screened and softened by trees. Avoid placement on a silhouetted landform, such as ridge line, hill top, etc. Instead, tuck the home into the landform beneath the brow of the hill or high point. (Not only is this visually preferable, but it is also safer and more protected than a more exposed higher sitting).

Landscape Treatment

Similar to locating any other structure on the land, hard and soft landscape treatment also can be used to help wed a manufactured home to its site. In addition to structural additions (garages, sheds, etc.) described above,

exterior unit appointments such as planter boxes, extension walls, fences, decks, and overhead arbors can be used as extensions of the unit itself. These features will visually break up an otherwise ”boxy” form, and provide a transition to the ground plane and into the site. Fences and walls should not be used simply to delineate property lines, but rather to relate the home to other site features. The use of earth mounds or berms can help settle a manufactured home into the land and soften the linearity. Extensive use of planting will soften the visual impact of the home and help it to blend with the native landscape of the area, provided that plants are selected to match those growing naturally in the area.

Creative Options for Home Design

With recent technological break-throughs, the days of the stereotypical rectangular box may be over for mobile and manufactured homes. Makers have devised innovations such as the double-fold hinged roof, allowing houses to sport a more fashionable steeply pitched look Others design cathedral ceilings into their units, or add site-built features such as entries or even ”plug-on” room modules. While such options add cost, it is minimal compared to the savings over custom built homes.

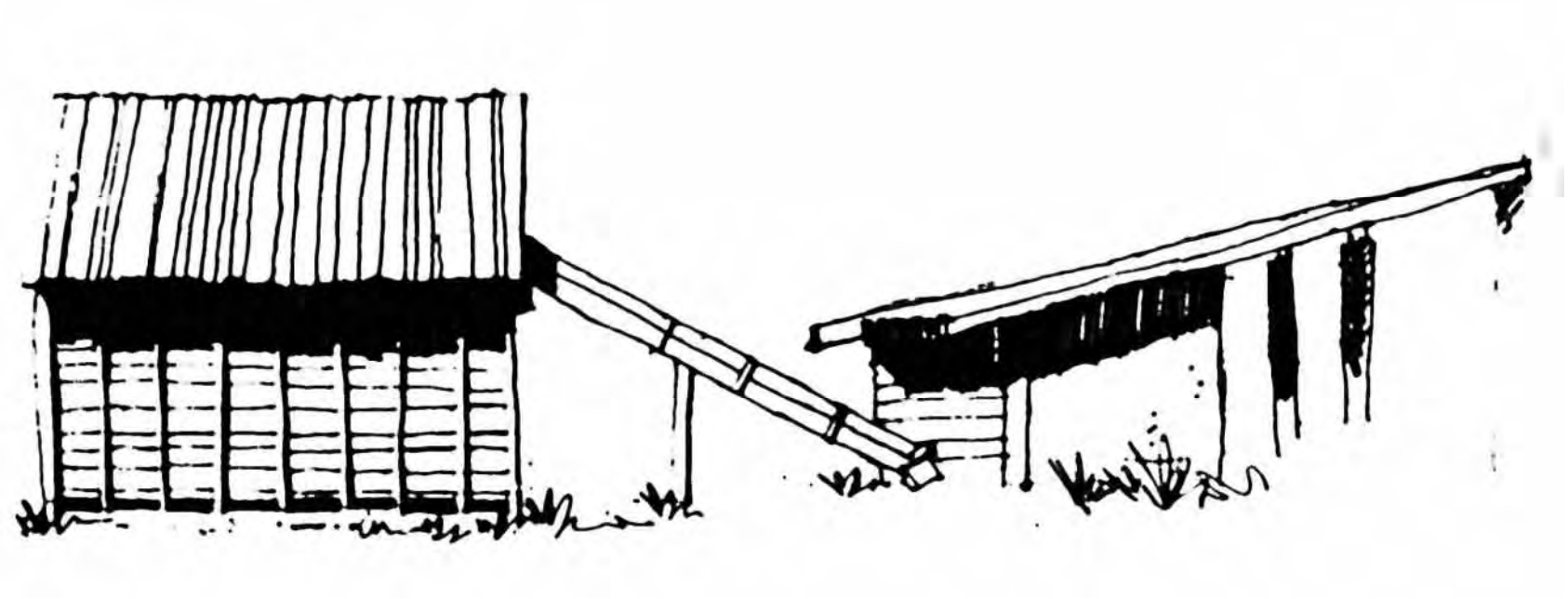
Architectural Guidelines within the City of Rocks

The private lands within the City of Rocks pose a special challenge in terms of the visual character of their development. A problem in the determination of an acceptable ”style” of architecture within the Reserve boundaries is that there is virtually no development of any type within the area to which new building can relate. Even historically, very few structures were created within the area of the park, and those were mostly of a temporary log character. The stone ruins of the Nicholson home mark the sole significant exception. The primary wooden structures surviving within the area are of a low slung style, reflecting the horizontality of the open sage rangeland. These buildings, unlike the solid historic homes in nearby Elba and Oakley, are wider than they are tall.

In proposing an appropriate style, one must be careful not to borrow styles from the surrounding vicinity as guidelines simply because they were appropriate somewhere within a 100 mile radius of the City of Rocks. The solid red brick dwellings of nearby Elba bore evidence to a local brickyard of red clay, and revealed a desired stamp of longevity on an outpost village. The Victorian gingerbread of Oakley revealed an arrival at an economic level able to support a degree of affluence even in the hardened west. The City of Rocks was neither an urban outpost nor an economic showplace. It was always the frontier; a temporary inhabitancy of transient cowhands or trail travelers.

Within the Reserve, it is of primary importance that buildings recede into the landscape. Colors should be selected from a palette of naturally occurring hues which relate the structure to surrounding rocks, vegetation, and soil. Generally speaking, this will include shades of brown, beige, taupe, green, and gray. Slightly darker tones than the structure’s backdrop are preferable. The goal in final selection is not so much to create a total camouflage as it is to ensure compatibility and prevent garish contrasts which would attract undue attention.

For buildings that must occur in the visible foreground (see page 55 for further discussion), log construction would seem most appropriate. Details such as joinery should reflect traditions of this area, as described elsewhere in this booklet. Roofs should be steeply pitched (8:12 to 12:12), and covered in natural wood shingles. Scale must be kept small by not exceeding 1 1/2 floors (one full floor with second level under roof with dormers), through the use of changes in roof height, projecting appendages with add-ons.)



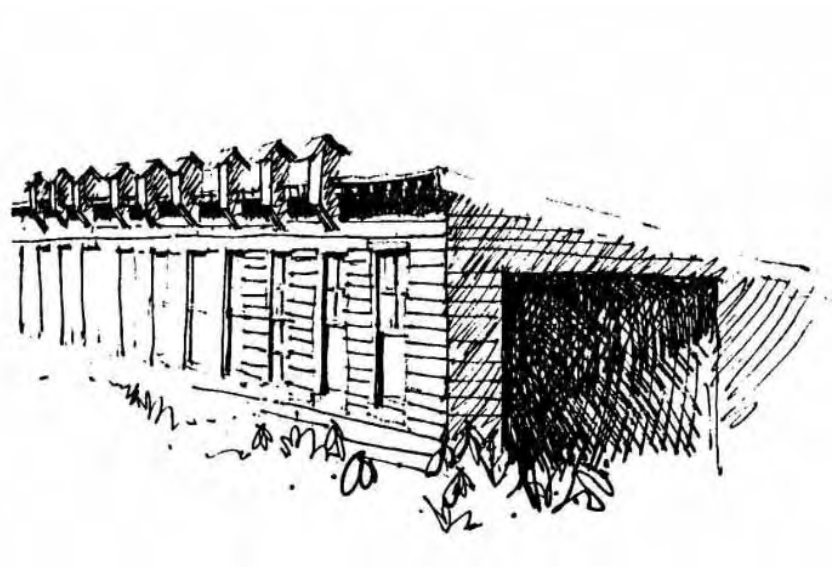
landscape details

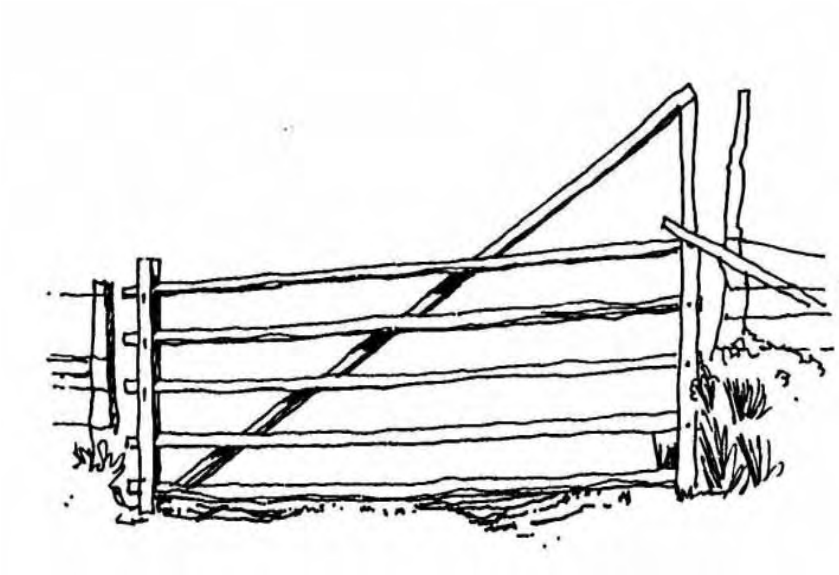
Site Details in the Landscape

In evaluating a landscape and determining what contributes the most to its character, it is easy to overlook the small scale site details. Yet these very elements often say the most about a place. The shape of a culvert, the spacing and construction of fencing, the layout of a road, even mailboxes impart a distinct feel to the landscape. As visitors come and people move to southern Cassia County from other areas, traditional details are jeopardized by mass produced replacements of a generic nature. The following pages evaluate the significant support elements in the Cassia County landscape and provide suggestions for appropriate preservation or replacement.

Historic Relics and Artifacts

The Cassia countryside is an open air museum of pioneer history. Remnants of previous settlement scatter across the landscape, leaving visual record of the past. What may be perceived by some as junk and clutter, is to others a testament of a way of life; a sort of living history book representing a period of time which has vanished throughout most of America. These relics are disappearing rapidly, victims of time and exposure to the elements, accelerated by vandalism and well intentioned attempts at ”improvement”. Although in most cases no longer functional, these elements should be stabilized to prevent further degradation. It is hoped that pride alone will encourage landowners to do their best to retain and preserve their own relics of the past. Existing ”relics and artifacts” include outdated buildings and ruins. The remnant dugouts and sod roofed log farm buildings, abandoned homes and schoolhouses, barns, sheds and corrals; all contribute to the cumulative identity of the area. Particularly unique are the infrequent wooden granaries and hay stacking derricks. Ancient farm implements of varied description further enhance the total image.





Fences and Gates

Juniper snags have served as the standard fence post since the earliest efforts to enclose the range. Twisted and irregular, they tie the agrarian landscape directly to the surrounding pinyon-juniper stands from which they were taken. While at one time common throughout the Intermountain West, juniper fence posts have given way to steel replacements in many meas. Cassia County is unique in the amount of traditional fencing remaining intact, contributing in a major way to the rustic feel of the place. Many factors have combined to threaten the continuation of this historic practice here as well.

Fencing and gate construction using traditional materials and construction techniques is encouraged. This is particularly important in the foreground of the scenic loop, where the majority of visitors and residents travel. Further back from the road in the middle ground zone, the actual material of the fence posts is less important. Steel posts or other suitable material may be used provided the colors blend in with the landscape backdrop. Gates of painted tubular steel, commonly replacing those of log construction, are also suitable in all but the closest zone to the road. White rail fencing is not a part of the local vernacular and should be avoided.

Corrals

When the settlers came to this area, they built barns and corrals of local materials and left them unpainted. The wood bleached over time to a weathered gray, blending with the natural landscape. Today, wooden corral structures still impart a rich texture to the landscape. Like the juniper post fencing, they tie the manmade structures to the land. The continued use of wooden corral structures in the foreground zone will help maintain visual harmony. In keeping with tradition they should remain unpainted or be painted a color which blends with the natural landscape. In the middle ground, corrals can utilize different materials but color remains important.

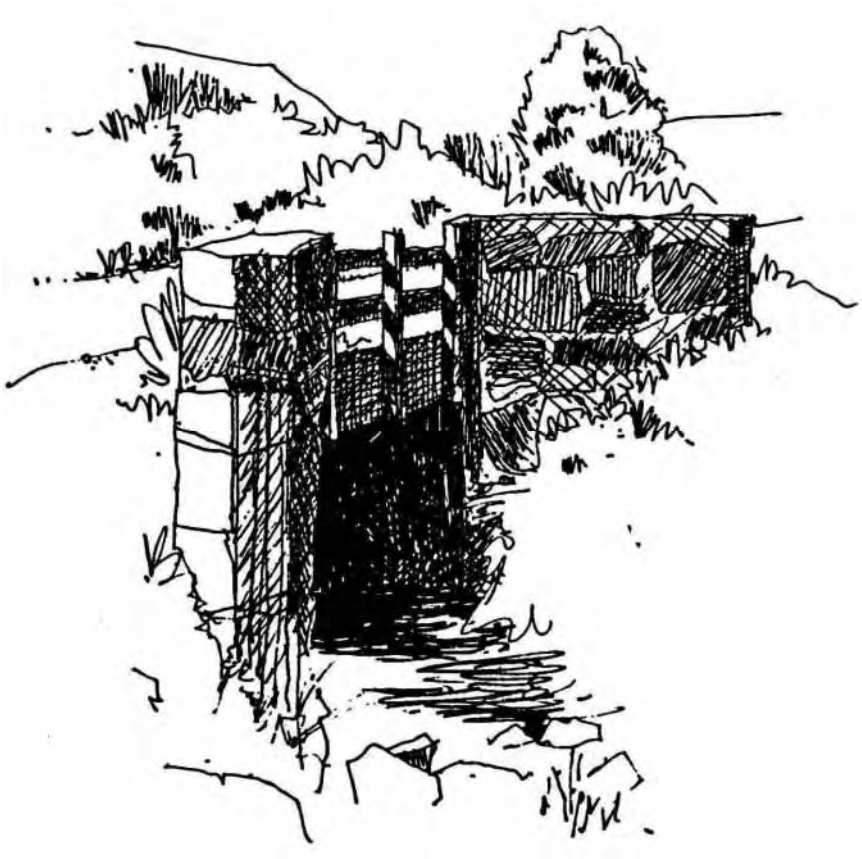
Bridges and Culverts

Drainage elements exemplify functional necessities in the landscape that are often overlooked for the visual contribution they can make to a general scene. Whether a small pipe culvert or a bridge, attention to form and detail is important. Due to the wide range of settings the loop route traverses, different solutions will be appropriate to achieve the best fit in any given area.

For example, in lower lying elevations, or areas typically irrigated and farmed, it was common in earlier times to build bridges or box culverts out of logs or timbers. Rustic timber construction remains the most appropriate choice in these same settings today, perhaps in combination with other materials in the unseen areas.

In rockier portions of the loop route, particularly within the City of Rocks Reserve, culvert headwalls of native stone axe a more fitting choice. Culverts built by the Civilian Conservation Corp. (CCC) south of Oakley to accommodate crossings of Birch Creek are a fine example of workmanship and demonstrate the richness imparted to the landscape by the use of local construction materials. Here, head- walls have been constructed of locally quarried stone.

In the most visible (foreground) locations along the scenic route, indigenous rock should be used to face all head-walls, wing-walls and bridges. If culverts cannot be seen from the roadway or are located in the middle ground zone, it is not necessary to use stone headwalls. In these instances, the pipe should be cut flush with the finished grade and could be coated with asphalt. On bridges with a historical design and construction precedent, wood may be used in conjunction with stone.



Roads

New roads will be constructed as development occurs in the County. While many requirements related to safety and maintenance are governed by existing ordinances, some of the attendant aesthetic issues are left unrestricted. The following guidelines apply primarily to foreground areas, although the high visibility of a road scar makes them applicable in many middle ground areas as well. This is particularly true when a road is located on a hillside or other site which is readily seen from the byway.

The placement of a new road on the land leaves an indelible mark. Proper location and final alignment demand careful consideration according to context and need. No single solution will work in every situation. A small private lane accessing a cluster of homes may best be camouflaged by a flowing route following the contours of the land. Conversely, roads serving a larger development adjacent to an existing town may find a closer fit with the traditional pattern, extending the straight lines of the grid. In making a decision, consider fit with adjacent established roads, landform and cover, and historic character. Curvilinear alignments work best with hilly and forested settings; grid extensions are appropriate in flat settings adjacent to existing development.

Barren cut slopes often leave the most obtrusive sign of a road long after construction. These emban4aents, often steeper than the natural angle of repose, are difficult to re-vegetate and are prone to erosion. The lighter tone of exposed subsoil remains as a permanent scar visible at a great distance. The best cure for the problem is avoidance, staying well away from steeper slopes. Running roads generally parallel to the contours can minimize or even eliminate the need for excavation into existing embankments.

The appearance of the road itself influences the overall impression of the view corridor. Width, surfacing, and edge treatment are all contributing factors to the streetscape. While width is largely dictated by state and local standards, excessively wide road surfaces should be avoided where possible for visual, environmental, and economic reasons.

Edge treatment, while seemingly insignificant, effects a subtle influence on our perception. The neat and tidy curb and gutters of urban landscapes do not belong in the countryside. Even in the larger communities of Oakley and Albion, they are not common. The traditional swale or ditch will not only handle runoff adequately, but will assist in ground water recharge, enhance environmental quality, save considerable expense, and look much more appropriate in the rural scene.

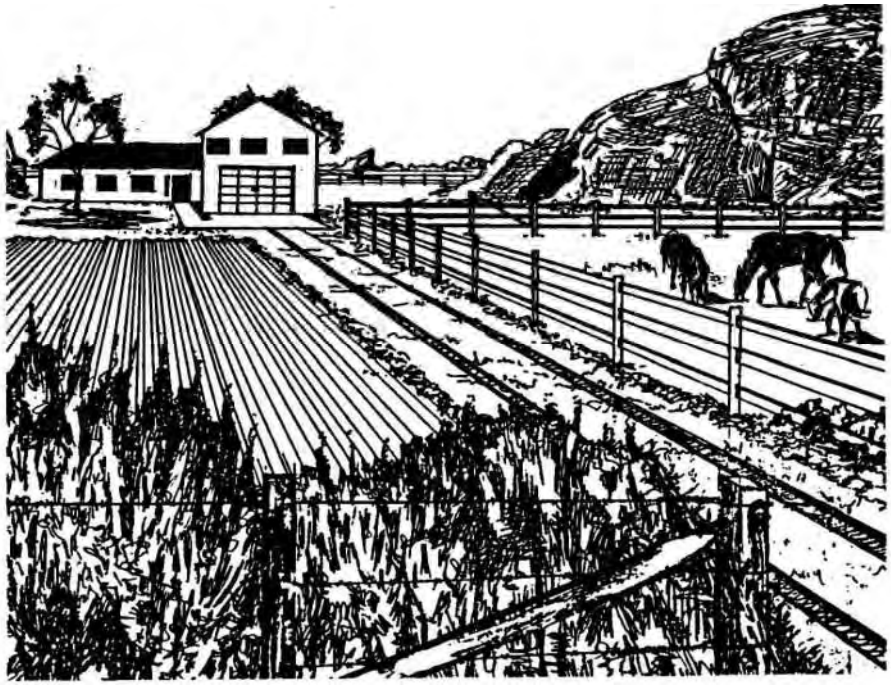
Ditches and Canals

Irrigation canals bisecting rural villages and ditches lining the wide streets of larger towns bring water to otherwise arid land, making it viable for agriculture. Clear, cold water running down the streets on a summer day, a commonplace occurrence to longtime residents, is a distinct and striking element of the landscape to outsiders unfamiliar with this traditional irrigation technique. An innovation of the early settlers, this landscape element is unique to areas of the Intermountain west.

Many areas formerly served by open canals and ditches have recently converted to underground piped systems in an effort to conserve water lost through seepage and evaporation. While it is difficult to argue against improved efficiency and water conservation, the traditional technique contributes significantly to the lifestyle and overall community aesthetic. Due primarily to the cost-effectiveness of the time-proven method of water distribution (particularly in comparison with the cost of underground retrofitting), surface irrigation is likely to perpetuate itself for years to come. Care should be taken to maintain existing canals, ditches, head gates, and other elements of these systems for both their functional and aesthetic benefits.

Driveways

Driveways which branch from the scenic loop road should be aligned to avoid monotonous straight glimpses into private residences, dominated by views of road surface. Instead, the layout should capitalize on the use of landforms and native vegetation to provide the resident with maximum privacy and screen driveways from the road and minimize the visual impact for those traveling the scenic loop. A curving alignment, dipping behind vegetation and over the brow of a hill, is much less likely to draw attention than one leading directly to a garage.



Undesirable Driveway Alignment

Utilities

Overhead utilities can detract considerably from the scenic and historic qualities of the area. Although technological innovation now allows most utilities to be buried out of sight, the cost is often prohibitive. Alignment that responds to landforms and viewsheds offers the best solution for visual mitigation. Lines should be sited low in the landscape, avoiding placement where they will be seen in silhouette against the sky. In flat, exposed settings, staggering of poles to break up infinitely long straight lines will at least relieve the scene and avoid emphasizing unplanned sight lines. Colors of poles should be darker than the tones of the landscape backdrop. Any clearing of vegetation required in the right-of-way should avoid straight line borders; feather the edge to create the appearance of natural openings.

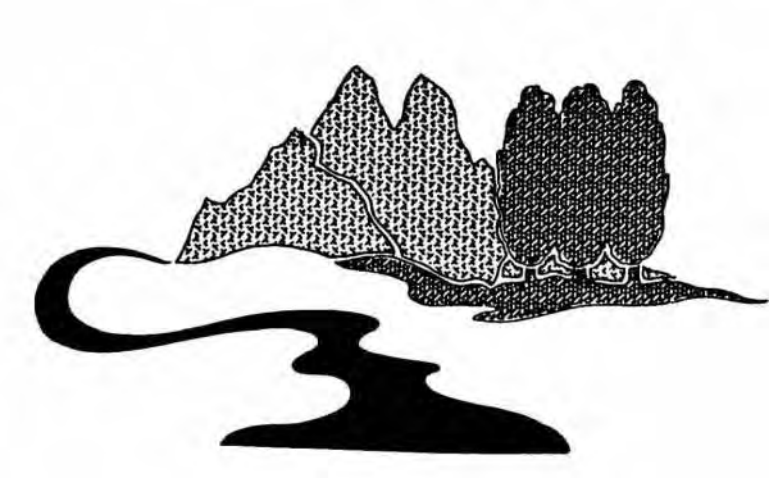
Signs

Very few signs are present along the scenic loop route corridor. The infrequent ranch sign, business identification, and instructional message are the only communication markers in the uncluttered clarity of rural countryside. It is likely that with growth in tourist visitation and related development however, the demand and need for signs will increase.

Well designed signs of appropriate materials, color, and scale can contribute to the overall experience in positive ways by disseminating needed information. Unfortunately, advertising is a major business, and over-promotion by sign companies has caused a proliferation of roadside media far in excess of what is actually needed. Oversized signs with bright lights and vivid colors would create unfortunate conflict with the desired rural atmosphere of Cassia County and in fact convey a message contradictory to the quality of place desired by residents and visitors alike.

A rational guideline for signage should encourage only that which is required for identity and orientation. Designs should fit with existing landscape and architectural character. Commercial signs should be limited, not to exceed 16 square feet, and should be located on the front of the businesses themselves or placed at ground level, rather than elevated on a post. Internally illuminated signs should be restricted to occur only within incorporated town boundaries. Other signs could be illuminated by flood or spot light.

Rural signs that are needed to identify residential properties, ranches, etc., should be rustic in character, utilizing local stone and / or wood in their design. Sizes should not exceed 8 square feet. Where feasible, individual signs should be clustered on shared posts and located at common access points.



Establishing a Regional Image

A coordinated regional identity (logo, word- mark, or other graphic symbol) should be developed for the City of Rocks and adjacent areas. This would be expressed on an integrated sign system throughout southern Cassia County to help unify the region and to enhance the traveler's experience. Applications for the symbol could range from scenic byway signs and interpretive pullouts along the loop to information signs within the Reserve proper. The system would mark entries into the region, explain the significant aspects of the area's past and present, and guide visitors.

The alternatives presented here represent a conceptual system consisting of three different sign types. The first is an entry sign, located at gateways to the loop route and possibly into the City of Rocks Reserve. This sign is largely responsible for establishing initial impressions of an area and is therefore very significant. Entry signs should be simple, bold, and contribute to the overall scenic quality of the area.

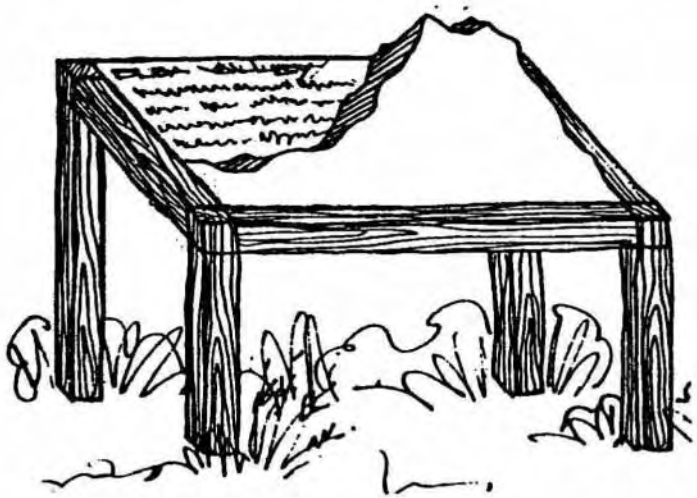
The second sign type is an interpretive sign, used primarily at scenic pullouts along the loop mute to explain unique aspects of the landscape and the area's history and culture. These signs contain the most information and should be attractive to travelers in order to pull them off the road and invite them to learn mom about the area.

The third type is the road marker, used to direct visitors and indicate scenic pullouts and places of interest. It is essential that these signs be easily legible by travelers passing at high speeds, and that they convey their information briefly and clearly.

Within each sign system, construction materials and text style are integrated to enhance cohesiveness and legibility. Construction materials and logos relate directly to the landscape and culture of southern Cassia county, strengthening the importance of existing elements. By establishing a cohesive sign system throughout the region, visitor enjoyment of and appreciation for Cassia County's unique features can be greatly enhanced.

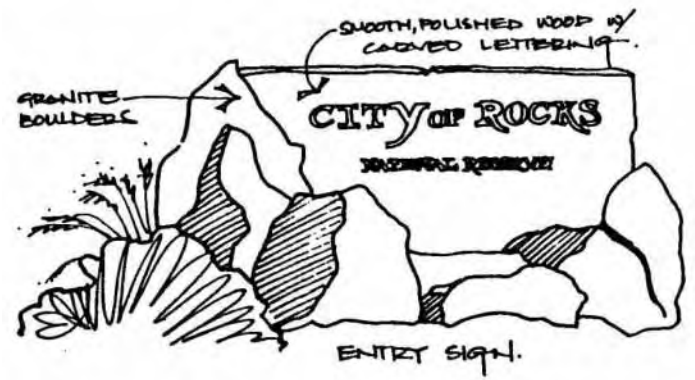
Granite Theme

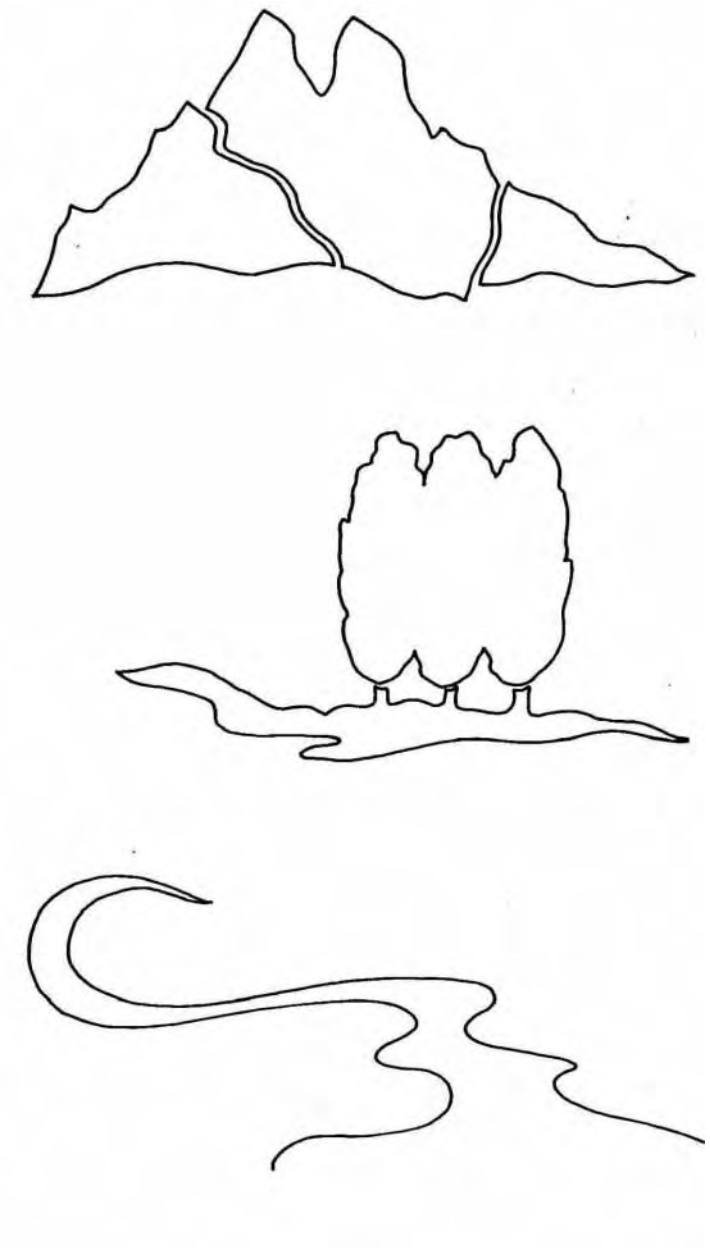
The sign system shown here draws on the beauty of the granite formations within the City of Rocks for inspiration. The entry marker is composed entirely of granite. The smooth, polished back portion contrasts the rough-hewn, three-dimensional ”formations” on the front. The text itself is simple and bold, readable at driving speeds. The interpretive sign is also composed of a three-dimensional formation which offsets the text describing various points of interest along the loop route. The road marker continues the granite outcrop theme in silhouette, creating an easy-to-read signpost which details important information to passing travelers.



Juniper Post Theme

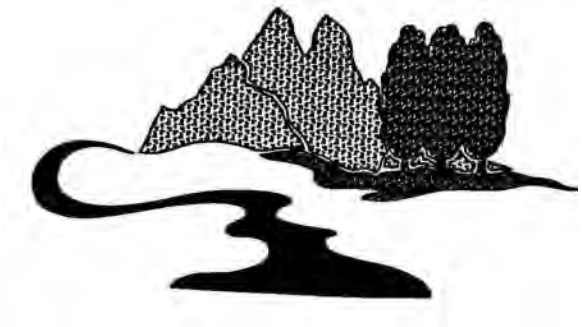
This design series derives from the juniper log fence posts, a ubiquitous element of the Cassia County landscape. In the example of the interpretive sign, juniper posts support a plank of polished wood upon which are inscribed descriptive passages about the landscape. The juniper posts tie the sign to its surroundings and enhance the unique identity of the place. The road marker is also constructed of juniper and polished wood, forming a simple design which is easy to read. Due to its size and importance, the polished wood of the entry sign is supported by granite boulders rather than juniper.





Three-part Logo

The third system utilizes a different approach. The entrance sign consists of three individual logos, each representative of a different landscape component traversed by the southern Cassia scenic loop. The individual symbols axe color coded to provide visual cues to the traveler and make the landscape more legible. The rock logo represents the huge granite formations within the City of Rocks. Signs with this logo would refer specifically to the City of Rocks region. The Lombardy poplars represent the townscape with its dark masses of trees, as well as settlements which are found in outlying areas. Signs of this type would be used at pull outs overlooking towns or areas of cultivation. The third logo is a ribbon of road which represents the loop route itself and would be used to give travelers directions. The three separate symbols combine to form a unified logo, representing the region as a whole and used at entryways and other major intersections.



planting guidelines

Cultivated Plants in the Landscape

The pioneers who pushed westward across the plains were searching, some for success, others for political or religious freedom. Some came simply to satisfy a sense of adventure. Despite overloaded wagons and limited space, most pioneers brought with them objects which linked them to the past. Among these objects were seeds and saplings of every kind.

An early LDS leader encouraged his people to *"emigrate as speedily as possible... bringing with you all kinds of choice seeds, of grain, vegetables, fruit, shrubbery and trees, to cheer the soul of man"*.
Newspaper articles also encouraged pioneers to supply themselves with flower seeds and trees before crossing the plains. As they established themselves in a strange land, they planted trees and flowers which tied them to their past and separated them from the wilderness they had come to conquer. Despite their arid surroundings, irrigation systems allowed the pioneers to create gardens in the desert. Romantic plants which were loose and relaxed in nature like hollyhocks, lilacs, roses and snowballs softened the hard lines of frontier life and calmed the spirit.

Of particular significance were the straight rows of Lombardy poplar, which not only broke the occasional gusting winds, but established a sense of structure and order on a vast and untamed landscape. Today, the aging and dying rows of poplar means more than the death of trees. It means the loss of history and the cultural and visual richness those trees represent Because the residents of southern Cassia and their ancestors before them gave so much meaning to the visual landscape, it is imperative that they work to maintain the integrity of the land By using historic vegetation patterns and perpetuating those elements of the landscape which are strongly tied to the residents' perception of the place, Almo, Elba, Albion and Oakley can maintain the historic quality of their towns in the face of change.

Although both the built and natural landscapes in and around the City of Rocks are rich in culture and history, they must be examined in a modern context as well. While many attitudes toward land and gardens appear to have carried over from pioneer times, modern residents are nevertheless faced with an abundance of choices regarding home landscaping and the aesthetic and practical functions of plant materials. While some may prefer a landscape or garden which closely follows a turn-of-the-century model, others may desire more freedom and expression while still contributing to the overall cultural and historical characteristics which make the City of Rocks area so unique.

The purpose of this section is to aid property owners in making choices about plants and other landscape materials, and to outline some general principles which, if adopted, will enhance the unique qualities and beauty of Cassia County. Three landscape situations are presented: the town, the rural or agrarian landscape, and the natural landscape in which an isolated home may be located. Appropriate colors, textures, sizes and shapes will be suggested and their visual impacts discussed. In addition, the text will cover some effective uses of plants as visual screens.

The Town Landscape

Towns formed the nucleus of pioneer life. It was here that people concentrated, building homes to shelter themselves from harsh climatic conditions. Towns were oases where people congregated, socialized and transacted business. They filled their gardens with plants of sentiment, working to reestablish traditional surroundings and a familiar diet. In southern Cassia County, towns contrast markedly with the surrounding land. To people traveling the road which loops down from Burley through the City of Rocks and back again, these towns indicate resting points and places of historic interest.

Because of the greater concentration of homes, human influence on the land is very pronounced. The town establishes a sense of order and imposes structure on the natural landscape. To those within it, the town is often a stronger visual element than the surrounding landscape. It can absorb visual impact more readily. An extremely bright building or broken- down piece of machinery can be absorbed in the built form and dense vegetation of surrounding homes.

Vegetation plays a major role in establishing the character and continuity of an area, and in maintaining its historic value, particularly as viewed from the roads Seen in the context of neighborhood, the front yard plays an important role in the overall cohesiveness of the community. Back yards, hidden from view and essentially invisible to the public, are stylistically more flexible, featuring a range of individual design treatment.

A series of guidelines follow, addressing plants appropriate to historic landscapes in a town setting. They are general guidelines, discussing principles which provide a framework within which to design a landscape capable of contributing to the harmonious, intact character of the towns ringing the City of Rocks.

Planting Guidelines

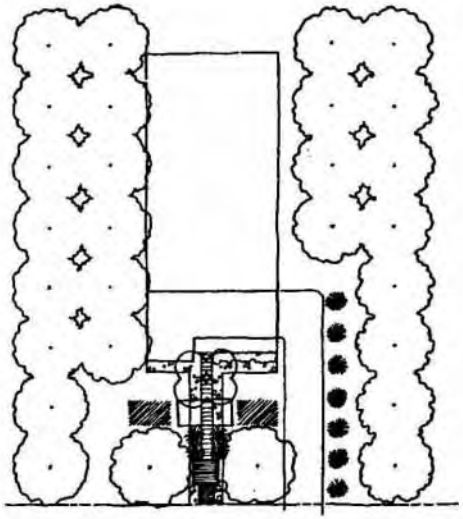
Size: Plantings should be residential in scale in order to complement the historic architecture rather than overwhelming it. Larger trees such as the Lombardy poplar are used appropriately to create windbreaks or line the streets, where their scale relates more to the street than the home.

Form: Historic plants used by the pioneers were irregular, loose, exuberant, and relaxed in habit. This appealed to hard-working men and women who escaped to the front porch or their gardens at the end of the day to partake of the feeling of freedom. Geometric shapes and sculpted plant materials such as tightly trimmed hedges or topiary are the antithesis of this feeling. They me not true to historic gardens of western pioneers, and should be avoided.

Color: Town gardens exhibited a wide range of color. The pioneers favored flowers with white, blue, pink, and purple blossoms. Shrubs and trees were free from the arid limitations of the surrounding landscape and were often lush and green, growing along the irrigation ditches.

Native habitat: Vegetation in town consisted mostly of imported species which were brought from other areas such as the east coast or even other countries. Although generally only the hardier ones survived, they still required more water than the surrounding landscape. A few plants were brought from the hills and stream areas but they had value as food or as highly ornamental plants. Natives like sagebrush and juniper were never considered as possibilities for landscape plants in urban areas.

Patterns: Due to the dependence on irrigation, plantings were often arranged in linear patterns for ease of maintenance. Flowers were often planted in random fashion, mixed in with vegetables and shrubs rather than in formal planting beds or cutting gardens. Ornamental areas were generally located to the sides and front of the lot. The functional, informal areas were located out in the back Because of the heat, the home was often surrounded by a grove of trees which could provide shade during the long summer days.



Standard Development

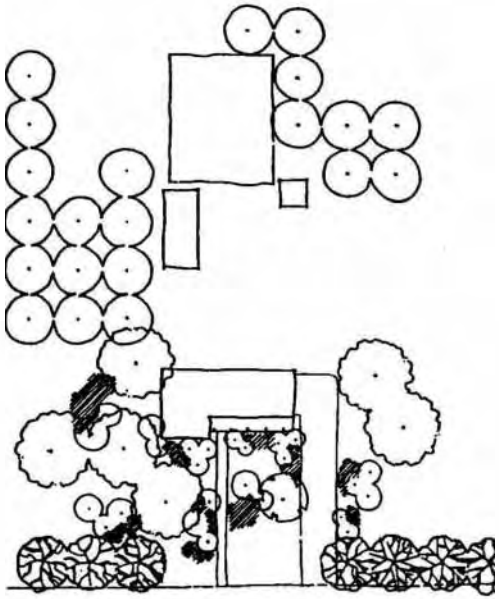
The homeowners chose plants and structural materials which have no link to either the surrounding landscape or the historic context of the place. Pruned hedges draw attention to themselves rather than providing an appropriate setting for the historic home.

Large areas of lawn demand a lot of water and are unnecessary. A complex system of walkways and overheads constructed of modern materials obscures the entry to the home. The modern lines of the design fail to respond to historic traditions and vegetation.

Historic Treatment

This landscape draws on historic patterns and vegetation for its materials. Lombardy poplars line the street, creating privacy and linking the property to its surroundings.

Native and old-fashioned flowers are scattered with smaller shrubs to evoke the exuberant pioneer gardens of the past. Lawn is limited to needed areas while the rest is planted in shrubs and flowers. Orchards are retained in back as in pioneer days



Plant materials: Whatever species survived the long trek across the arid country of the West were found within town limits. Many of these plants were romantic and relaxed in nature, plants that are referred to today as ”old-fashioned”. In her thesis, Home Gardening on City Lots in the Salt Lake Valley 1847- 1918, Esther Truitt lists several plants typical of that time period and to pioneers in the Salt Lake Valley.

They include the following:

Flowers: mullein, tobacco, peonies, lilacs, honeysuckle, marigolds, salvia, iris, daylillies, cleome, verbena, hollyhocks, roses, snapdragons, columbine, asters, Canterbury bells, larkspur, clematis, sunflowers, hibiscus, balsam, camilla, coreopsis, and pinks.

Shrubs: Viburnum, mock orange, snowball bush, lilac, spiraea, and berry bushes (these were often brought down from the mountains and riparian areas).

Trees: Lombardy poplars, cottonwoods, black locust, fruit trees

Lawn: Rather than a bluegrass lawn, many pioneers had what is referred to as a Victorian lawn. It consisted of grass**,** clover, violets, English daisies, dandelions and other small flowers and grasses and complemented the hodge-podge array of flowers and vegetables. The Victorian lawn required only about 10 inches of water per year to the typical bluegrass demand of about 45 inches. Bluegrass also required considerably more maintenance time in water application, etc., which was simply not available to the early settlers.

Landscape Furnishings

The town landscape of early settlement included few non-plant elements. Simple walkways of earth, brick, or concrete led directly to the front porch. Occasional furnishings such as seating, overhead rose arbor or veranda, or decorative low picket or wire fencing might grace a particularly well appointed yard. In keeping with this prevailing simplicity, residents are urged to avoid modern expression in the front yard of historic neighborhoods or districts. This would include treatments featuring an excess of landscape fencing, overhead structures and walkways of modern materials. Formal, symmetrical flower beds and designs featuring modern forms, lines and materials, international influence such as Japanese gardens, etc., would likewise be discouraged.

The Natural Landscape

The opposite extreme of the village residence is the home set in rural isolation, whether in a landscape of open expansiveness or one more concealed in scattered forest and undulating landforms. Unlike the towns, where the density of buildings and vegetation creates a feeling of separation from the natural landscape, the dispersed homestead is completely dominated by the nature of the surrounding land.

As discussed in the chapter on context, the building of isolated homes is a relatively recent phenomenon. A skillfully developed landscape scheme can assist the house and its vegetation to blend with the natural setting in form, color, and texture in order to preserve its inherent beauty. Hem, imported ornamental plants contrast starkly with native growth. A fit is created by selecting plants that harmonize with the landscape. By doing so, built elements will complement rather than detract from the natural beauty of southern Cassia County, and allow people to continue to enjoy the views despite an increased density of development.

Size: Planting in the natural landscape should relate closely in scale to that of the native vegetation. For example, sage and grassland ecosystems have evolved in response particular conditions, such as exposure to high wind forces and climatic extremes. Large plants would be out of place in this setting, but may be perfectly scaled for a riparian stream corridor, tucked in a low ravine where it is sheltered from the elements and afforded ample water.

Form: Landscape Architect Jens Jensen, practicing in the Midwest early in this century, developed what he called the ”Prairie Style” of landscape planting. His approach emphasized horizontality of design form, reflecting the landscape of the region. Such awareness of landscape character type is needed today to select appropriate plant forms. While Lombardies and cottonwoods of the early settlers fit with the thick, lush vegetation of the riparian stream corridors and irrigation canals in the agricultural land, low growing species fit better in arid open expanses, appropriately mirroring the ground hugging grasses and sage.

Color: Flower beds and shrubs can be tied strongly to the silver grays of the sage and the muted pastels of the grasslands. Showier, contrasting flowers can be tucked at the back of the house where they may still be enjoyed by their owners without affecting the natural scene.

Native Habitat: Native plants are definitely an asset in this landscape type. Some natives are not available in local nurseries, but can be field dug and transplanted during dormancy.

Patterns: Linear plantings are out-of-place here. A homeowner who uses straight lines of non- native trees competes with the beauty of the natural landscape much more than one who adopts the randomly dispersed native patterns and applies them to his or her own property.

Plant materials: Native plants or those with similar color and texture as natives include the following:

Flowers: native grasses, santolina, lavender, yarrow, cornflower, cosmos, sea pinks, matilija-poppy, blue flax, lamb's ears, fountain grass, blue fescue, penstimen, dwarf or prostrate rosemary, blue sage, woolly thyme.

Shrubs: rabbit brush, salvia species, sage, mountain mahogany.

Trees: Juniperus sp., Pinus sp.

Elements to avoid

1. Structured flower beds, and bright flowers and shrubs in the front yard. If desired by a homeowner, these could be appropriately located in back of the house for personal enjoyment. (The natives listed above can be used to create a beautiful display of color in the front in a manner complimentary of the surroundings, provided they are irregularly scattered in a natural manner).

2. Lawns in the front yard. Use non-irrigated wildflowers, native grasses and ground covers which echo the colors of the surrounding scene rather than turfgrass which competes visually with its arid surroundings.

3. Ornamental trees which relate more to the historic townscape than they do to the natural environment.

4. Trees and shrubs of a manicured appearance. Clipped hedges, topiary, or tightly pruned shapes are a drastic contrast with natural forms and look peculiar in the rural scene.

The Agrarian Landscape and the Lombardy Poplar

As one comes across the sage-covered valleys of southern Idaho from the west or the south, the towns which surround the City of Rocks and their adjacent agricultural lands reveal themselves by degrees. Cool green replaces the muted pastels of the sage and grasses, the landscape becomes more linear and organized, and well-kept homes take the place of vast expanses of empty land. The patterns of husbandry evolved by generations of inhabitants are etched on the earth here as no other place.

The most striking mark of civilization, however, is not the plowed fields or manicured yards. It is the Lombardy poplars brought by the pioneers which reach to the sky and organize the flat landscape. Noted Western writer Wallace Stegner, had this to say about the trees in his book, Mormon Country:

> *They grew boldly and fast without much tending,... and they make the landscape of the long valleys of the Mormon Country something special and distinctive. The view across one of those valleys...when the wind is bending the tall poplars... and the whole valley leans a little tipsily... is a view one does not immediately forget. There are Lombardy Poplars elsewhere in the world; there are few places where there are so many.. and there is no place where the peculiar combination of desert valley and dark lines of trees exists as it does in this country. There are not as many... trees as there used to be; it seems a pity. Trees of other varieties wherever there has been developed a dependable water supply,... break up the clear patterns that existed only a generation ago... But still, in the rural districts... the Lombardy Poplars line the ditch banks and the fields.*

Stegner's descriptions penned in 1942 apply today to that fundamental symbol of the landscape which contributes so much to the unique character of southern Cassia County.

The Lombardy poplar makes important contributions to the landscape, of which several are visual. It distinguishes those parts of the valley which have been cared for and cultivated from the surrounding areas still largely under natural control. It provides a vertical accent in a landscape which is dominated by wide, open valleys and low vegetation. Poplars unify the townscape and tie diverse elements of the town together. The tree has much aesthetic value: its narrow, vertical form and dark leaves with their light green undersides enhance the rural scene.

Its visual importance is increased by layer upon layer of historical significance. Since first introduced to the area, generations of Cassia residents have planted them, watched them grow and incorporated them, consciously or unconsciously, into the mental image of what makes their place unique. The species is

inexpensive and easy to grow. A dormant hardwood cutting, placed in warm sand and allowed to callous, will often begin rooting. The Lombardy Poplar has been part of the backdrop for every human action in these valleys for over a century.

Despite its visual and historical significance, the poplar is now in decline. Old trees are dying without new ones to take their place. One or two ancient trunks with broken branches and decaying crowns are often all that remains of a what was once a solid windbreak As different varieties of trees are planted and old rows continue to die out, a significant element of the local landscape threatens to disappear. Why? What can be done to preserve the qualities that these trees represent? One reason the Lombardy Poplar is on the decline is probably due to its reputation as a weak tree with numerous liabilities. While it is true that poplars do have characteristics that require special consideration, precautions can be taken that allow it to be used successfully in the landscape.

In order to implement an effective program for preservation, it is important to understand the characteristics of the tree. The Lombardy poplar is a columnar, quickly growing tree which can attain 70-90 feet in height and 10-15 feet in spread. The effective life span of the species is approximately 20-30 years, although many may live much longer than this as evidenced in the local landscape. Because of its rapid growth rate, the poplar is a weak-wooded tree. This also contributes to its susceptibility to disease. It is affected mainly by a canker which establishes itself in the crown of the tree and causes dieback.

In order to avoid the liabilities associated with the Lombardy Poplar, three main steps should be followed: First, choose an improved cultivar, second, plant the tree in good soil and provide ample water, and third control competing vegetation until the tree is established.

Choosing an improved cultivar will result in a tree that is mom resistant to disease. Populus nigra ‘Theves’ is a cultivar with improved characteristics. Make sure that the chosen cultivar is adapted to the southern Cassia region and will do well in its climate. Although the poplar seems to adapt well to a variety of soils and growing conditions, giving it optimum conditions will result in greater resistance to disease and a faster growth rate. The Lombardy Poplar likes soil that is deep (more than three feet) and free of hardpan or naturally cemented layers. Although flooding or standing water in the early spring suits the Lombardy, a water table at 3 to 6 feet with good surface drainage is ideal for the remainder of the year. The Poplar does best in soil which has been free from disturbance or cultivated for less than five years, and thus is rich in nutrients. The area around young trees

should be kept free of weeds until they are well established, to avoid competition to which they seem vulnerable.

In addition to these major points, the following suggestions will also contribute to the success of the Lombardy system. Although the tree, as mentioned, is particularly susceptible to canker, the disease strikes primarily mature trees. A rotational system for tree planting and removal is particularly important. By providing 2 or 3 stages of growth in any plantation, new trees are always flourishing and maturing to take the place of those trees which have reached the age where top die-out and other liabilities yearly increase. This system also avoids the empty, treeless look which results from an even-aged group of trees all dying at approximately the same time.

Proper maintenance also increases the longevity of the tree. By trimming the ends of branches that have been storm-damaged and painting them with a disease resistant mixture, the occurrence of canker can be greatly reduced. If these steps are implemented, the beauty of the Lombardy Poplar can contribute to the landscape indefinitely with minimal concerns.

In addition to sound cultivation and maintenance practices, the tree also requires careful consideration of placement and spacing in order to truly fit into and enhance the landscape. The pioneers used the Lombardy as a windbreak. For this mason, the trees are almost without exception planted in tight rows. Spacing of anywhere from 5 to approximately 30 feet seems natural, while greater spacing becomes increasingly foreign to both the visual and historical context. Plants spaced at 60 or 100 feet lose the cohesiveness that imparts such a distinct character to the area. In addition to spacing, it is important to group the trees in a way that reflects the historic landscape. Although a close-knit row of Lombardy poplars might work very well as street trees because of their similar appearance to a windbreak, a large grouping planted in a park or a solitary tree used as the focal point in a front yard may seem out of place with historic patterns.

By recognizing the patterns established by the settlers decades ago and planting accordingly, with appropriate steps taken to ensure the vitality and longevity of the new trees, the continuing role of the ”landmark” tree can be ensured in the Cassia County landscape.

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