



benton community visioning

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

NOVEMBER 2008

PREPARED BY



MIG, Inc.



Caltrans District 9

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A Vision for Benton

Benton's striking scenic views and beautiful natural areas continue to exemplify its unique rural character. Benton establishes a town core that maintains its small town feel and historic features while offering services and amenities for residents and visitors.

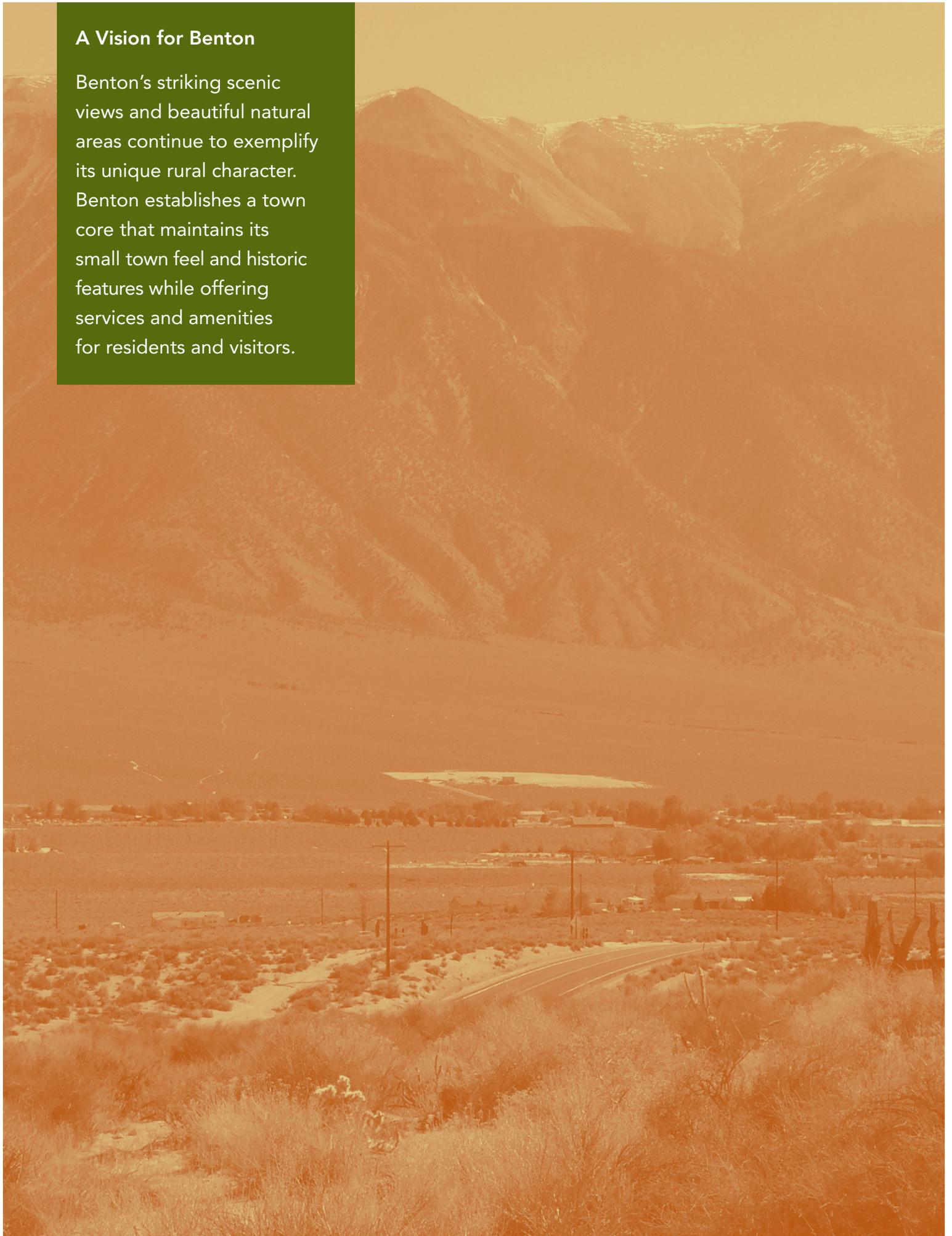


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executive summary

INTRODUCTION

All too often, small communities address local planning concerns in response to a crisis, with limited options and the need for a quick response. While such a sense of urgency may help achieve results, it does not allow a community time for in-depth discussion to plan its future and create a shared vision that can guide and inform local development activities.

The Benton Community Visioning process is a rare example of a small, rural community being given the time and resources it needs to thoughtfully and proactively plan for the future. This deliberative process has resulted in a set of guiding principles and strategies that encapsulate the desires of a passionate citizenry committed to the place they call home.

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The town of Benton, California has a rich history and a bright future. Situated along critical regional and

interregional transportation corridors, it is home to residents with strong ties to the community who want to see Benton grow in a coordinated and environmentally sensible manner.

In the fall of 2007, the Berkeley-based consulting firm MIG, Inc. began a 12-month visioning process, soliciting input from the general public and key stakeholders in order to establish preferences and priorities for Benton's future. The results of this process are encapsulated in the Vision and Guiding Principles summarized in this report. These products will inform Caltrans District 9 and Mono County planning efforts in the Benton area for the next 20 years.

While there are no current or pending development plans that will drastically alter Benton's present condition, change is inevitable. The Community Visioning process has provided residents an opportunity to discuss this change and inform decision makers about their preferences for the future. The resulting products





from this effort will provide a valuable resource for years to come.

DOCUMENT OVERVIEW

The *Benton Community Vision* document is organized into the following sections:

I. Benton Snapshot

The 'Benton Snapshot' places Benton in a historical and cultural context by describing the demographic and land use characteristics that have influenced and continue to shape the community. The snapshot identifies

key planning issues facing the community and illuminates the value of the Community Visioning process for residents and agency representatives alike. Maps in this section illustrate a variety of existing community and regional characteristics.

II. Public Outreach Process and Outcomes

This section describes the public outreach and engagement methods employed during the Benton Community Visioning process, including publicity methods, stakeholder interviews and interactive community



meetings. The section also reviews key outcomes from the outreach process that lead to the Vision and Guiding Principles.

III. Vision and Guiding Principles

Crafted from input generated during the Community Visioning workshops, the Vision and Guiding Principles are the culmination of the entire process and serve as the heart of this report. Maps in this section depict preferences identified at the community meetings.



Guiding Principles

- A. Protect and Maintain Benton's Distinct Character
- B. Protect and Manage Natural Resources
- C. Support Community Services
- D. Promote Coordinated Development Practices
- E. Develop a Safe and Efficient Transportation Network
- F. Encourage a Sound and Stable Economy



BENTON

POP. 164 ELEV. 5,377

benton snapshot

OVERVIEW

The community of Benton, California is very much a product of its rich history, regional surroundings and natural resources.

Benton's planning issues revolve around land use, land ownership, location and type of potential growth, allocation and preservation of natural resources and access to recreation. Central to these issues is the transportation infrastructure that links the community and greatly influences circulation for all travelers.

This snapshot provides an overall framework for these issues, placing them within the context of the town's history, geography, demographics, land usage and other factors.

LOCAL HISTORY

Benton flourished as a mining town in the 1860s, hosting almost 5,000 residents. An initial gold strike in

1862 attracted newcomers, and a thriving silver mining industry helped the town prosper for more than 50 years. Since then, Benton's population has declined dramatically and it now includes approximately 350 residents. Most new residents are attracted to Benton based on its remote lifestyle and affordable housing as compared to other communities in Mono County.

Historic Benton lies four miles west of the town center and features the Benton Hot Springs Bed and Breakfast and a campground popular with locals and tourists. Established in 1852 as a resting place for travelers heading to nearby Bodie and Aurora, the Hot Springs Resort is a historic resource that provides a glimpse into Benton's past. The resort features the Old House and the Benton General Store, two of the few remaining structures dating back to Benton's mining-boom era. While the hot springs is open to visitors, the historic Benton



General Store is closed. The resort covers almost 1,000 acres, with most of the land committed to open space through a conservation easement applied in 2007.

REGIONAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT

An unincorporated community in Mono County, Benton lies at the northern end of the Tri-Valley, a regional planning area that includes the unincorporated communities of Hamill Valley and Chalfant to the south.

Benton is located at the intersection of US 6 and SR 120 near the Nevada border, about 35 miles north

of Bishop on the eastern side of the Sierra Mountains. SR 120 bisects the community; the eastern entrance announces Benton as the Gateway to Lee Vining and other regional attractions including Yosemite, Mammoth Lakes, Mono Lake and Bodie.

Benton lies 5,377 feet above sea level nestled in a valley surrounded by mountains that include Boundary Peak (13,143 feet elevation)—the highest peak in Nevada, and Montgomery Peak—(13,441 feet elevation), in California.

Figure 1 illustrates Benton’s regional context.

According to 2000 US Census data, Mono County’s total population is 12,853. The Tri-Valley Region, which encompasses the communities of Benton, Hamill Valley and Chalfant has a population of 954. Benton has approximately 331 residents, Chalfant has 465 residents and the Hamill Valley has 158 residents. In comparison, the Town of Mammoth Lakes, the only incorporated community in the county, has a population of over 7,000.

The median age of Tri-Valley residents is 39.5. Between 1990 and 2000, the population of residents aged 65 and older increased from 10 percent to 12 percent of the overall population.



Benton includes a concentration of Mono County’s Latino and Native American populations: 60 residents and 56 residents, respectively. The Benton Paiute Tribe has reservation land and also owns several properties and businesses in Benton, including the Benton Station/Cafe.

The majority of Benton residents work in nearby Mammoth and Bishop. The 2000 US Census estimates that Benton’s working population has 93 employed residents. Benton residents have some of the highest drive-to-work times in the county, reflecting the lack of employment opportunities in the immediate area.

In 2000, the Tri-Valley area included 272 families and the average family size was 2.96 persons (3.15 in Benton). In 2000, 62 percent of occupied housing units in Benton were owner-occupied and 38 percent were renter-occupied. In the Tri-Valley region overall, 79 percent of occupied housing units were owner-occupied and 21 percent were renter-occupied.

Population projections for the Tri-Valley are mixed: State of California Department of Finance (DOF) projections predict that the Tri-Valley population will grow to 1,206 (a 26 percent increase) by 2020, while Mono County

FIGURE 1: BENTON REGIONAL CONTEXT

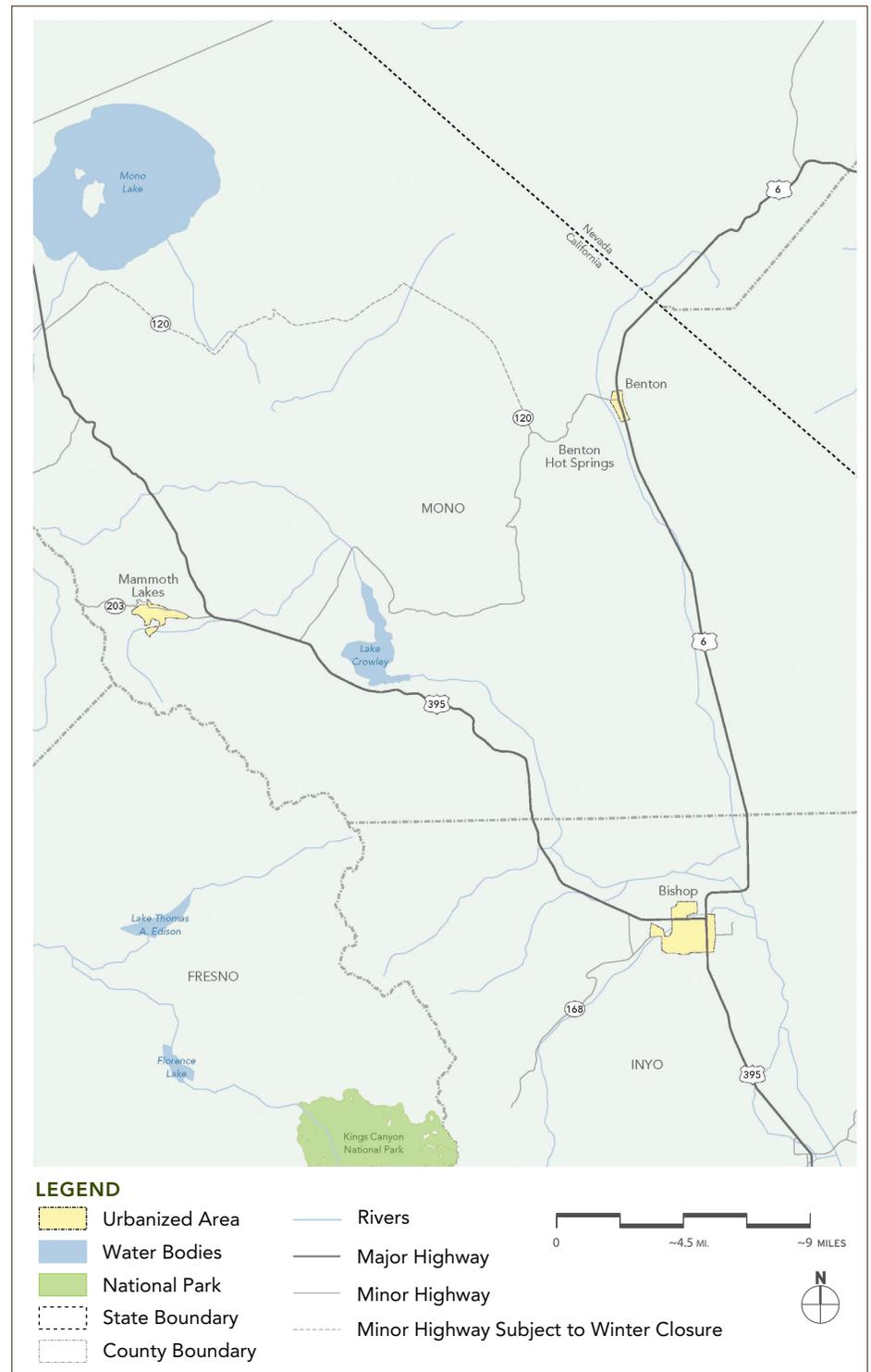
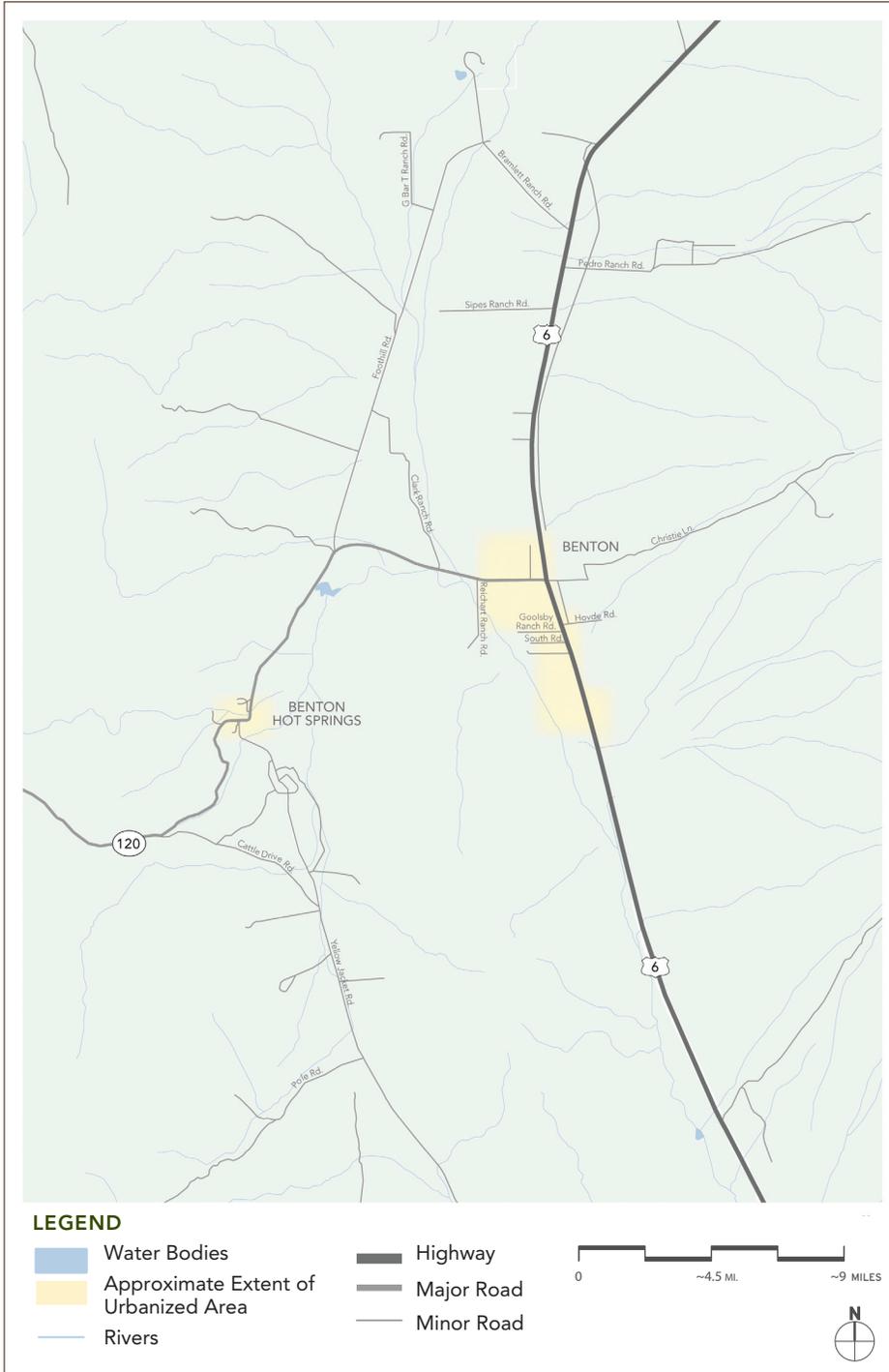


FIGURE 2: BENTON LOCAL CONTEXT



planning documents maintain that DOF projections appear low and do not account for population growth in the area.

Population growth in the Town of Mammoth Lakes, located approximately 50 miles to the north, is likely to impact the future demographic composition of Benton. Mammoth Lakes is home to the majority of employment opportunities in Mono County, including service, retail and government jobs. Mammoth Lakes’ continuing popularity as a resort community has driven up housing costs, limiting housing options for low and moderate-income residents and forcing workers to look elsewhere, including Benton, for housing. An aging of the regional population is also expected.

Figure 2 demonstrates Benton’s local context.

LAND USE AND ZONING

Every parcel of land in the unincorporated areas of Mono County, including Benton and the Tri-Valley Area, has been assigned a land use designation in the Mono County General Plan Land Use Element, October 2007.



The principal land uses in Benton, not including publicly-owned Resource Management lands (which cover 85 percent of the acreage), are residential and agricultural. Agriculture accounts for over 8 percent of the land and Rural Residential accounts for 4.1 percent. The remaining 2.6 percent comprises Mixed Use, Public Facilities, Commercial, Industrial and Resource Management and Rural Resort.

Agricultural Data

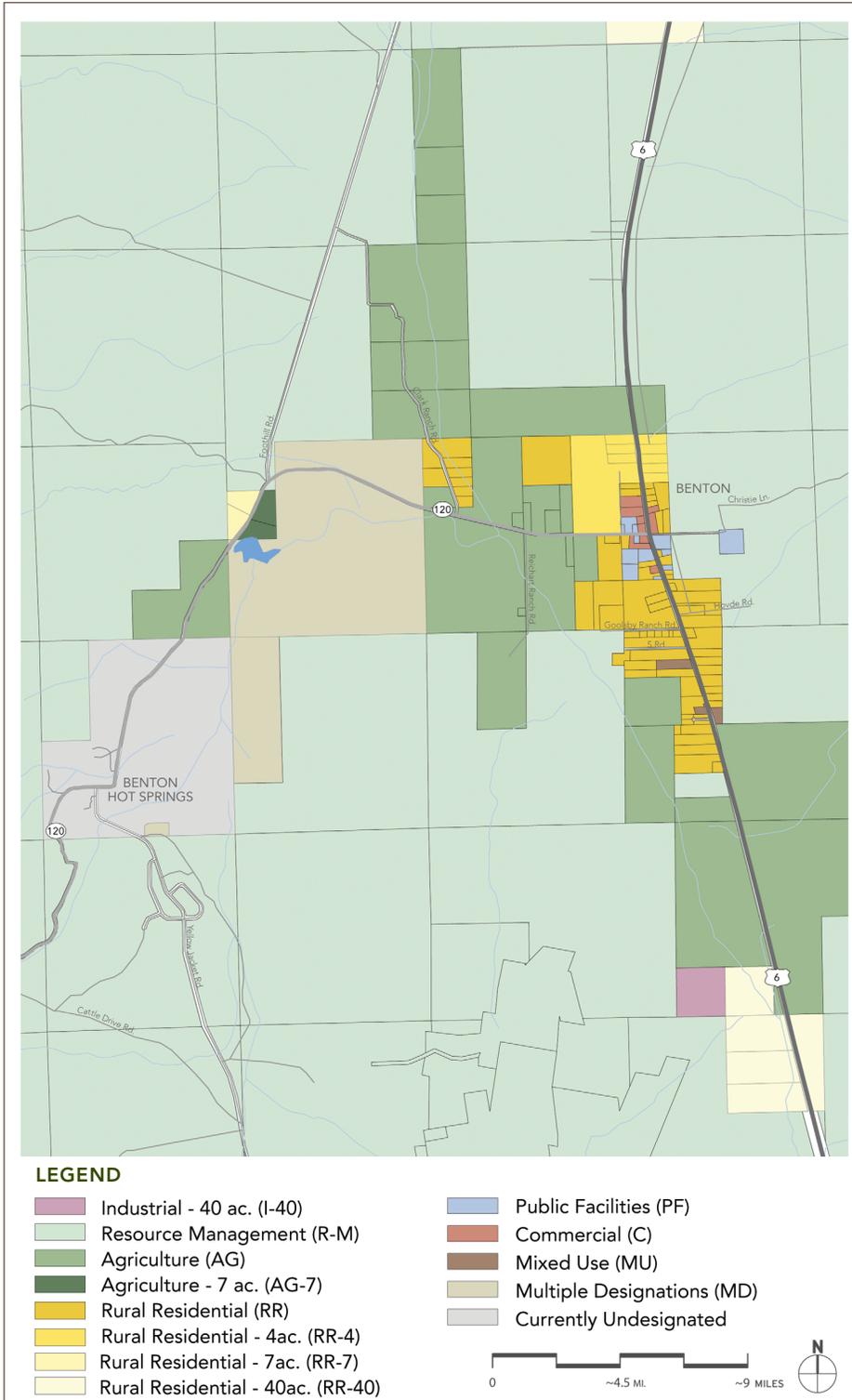
Designated agricultural land varies by area; however, the minimum parcel size is generally 2.5 acres. Primary

crops include alfalfa, carrots and garlic along with irrigated pasture and grazing. Other agricultural size categorizations are 5 acre minimum and 7 acre minimum. Agricultural land uses line SR-120 and US 6 and also tends to include waterways and streams in Benton. Some agricultural lands are located near residential areas and are not currently in agricultural use. A return to agricultural use on these parcels is unlikely.

Rural Residential Data

Rural residential parcel sizes are 1 to 40 acres in size and run along US 6 in

FIGURE 3: BENTON LAND USE



Benton. Commercial buildings and public facilities are concentrated on the SR 120/US 6 (120/6) intersection, as depicted in **Figure 3**.

LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

Table 1 describes Benton land uses.

The Mono County General Plan Land Use Element contains projected buildout figures for each community area in the County. Buildout figures are calculated based on the allowable densities established for each land use designation in the community area. Buildout figures are determined under the assumption that the maximum number of housing units allowed under each land use designation is possible. It is unlikely that all large parcels of private land will be developed due to environmental constraints, lack of access, lack of infrastructure, and community interests to maintain large parcels of designated agricultural lands as open space.

In Benton, the additional development allowed by the Mono County General Plan would be predominantly rural, along with limited commercial and mixed-use development that could incorporate residential uses. Commercial development would occur in the existing community along SR 120 and

TABLE 1: LAND USE DESIGNATION IN BENTON

Land Use Designation	Permitted Uses	Parcel Size
Agriculture (AG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intends to preserve agricultural uses, to protect agricultural uses from encroachment from urban uses, and to provide for the orderly activities related to agriculture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Min. parcel size: 2.5 acres
Commercial (C)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wide range of commercial uses including commercial lodging and higher density housing, when found compatible with retail and service functions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Min. lot area: varies depending on the use Min. district area: 5 acres
Industrial (I)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heavy industrial uses that may potentially cause moderate to higher degrees of environmental nuisances or hazards. Industrial areas are to be located in areas remote from residential and commercial development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Min. lot area: 10,000 s.f. Min. district area: 30 acres
Mixed Use (MU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides for a wide range of compatible resident- and visitor-oriented residential and commercial uses, including business, professional and retail uses. Mixed use designated areas are intended to provide a transition between intensive commercial use and residential uses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Min. lot area: varies depending on the use Min. district area: 5 acres
Public/Quasi-Public Facilities (PF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Variety of public and quasi-public facilities and uses. Permitted uses include: grazing of horses, cattle, sheep and goats; small scale recreational uses; structure accessory to these uses; and, other uses permitted by the public landowner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No development standards
Resource Management (RM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low-intensity rural uses that recognize and maintain the resource values of the parcel. Resource management designation indicates that land may be valuable for uses including, but not limited to, recreation, surface water conservation, groundwater conservation and recharge, wetlands conservation, habitat protection for special status species, wildlife habitat, visual resources, cultural resources, geothermal or mineral resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Min. parcel size: 40 acres
Rural Residential (RR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Larger-lot single-family dwelling units with ancillary uses in areas away from developed communities. Small scale agriculture, including limited commercial agricultural activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1-5 acres

TABLE 2: BUILDOUT OF BENTON VALLEY AND LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

Land Use Designation	Density	Acres	Percentage by Type	Maximum Potential Dwelling Units
RR Rural Residential	1 du/acre	1,799	4.1%	586 ^a
MU Mixed Use	15 du/acre	110	0.3%	1,650 ^b
RU Rural Resort	1 du/5 acres	35	0.1%	---
C Commercial	15 du/acre	15	0.0%	225 ^b
I Industrial	---	40	0.1%	---
PF Public/Quasi-Public Facilities	---	45	0.1%	---
RM Resource Management	1 du/40 acres	893	2.0%	22
AG Agriculture	1 du/2.5 ac.	3,578	8.2%	1,391 ^c
Total Private Lands		6,515	14.9%	3,874
RM Resource Management—Federal/State	---	37,248	85.1%	---
Total		43,763	100.0%	3,874

Notes: Calculations assume 2.51 people per dwelling unit; du = dwelling unit

- a. 492 acres RR; 288 acres RR 4 (4-acre minimum lot size); 16 acres RR 7 (7-acre minimum lot size); 775 acres RR 5 (5-acre minimum lot size); 134 acres RR 10 (10-acre minimum lot size); 234 acres RR 40 (40-acre minimum lot size).
- b. Assumes the development of a water and sewer system to obtain this density.
- c. 202 acres designated AG 5 (5 acre minimum lot size); 22 acres AG 7 (7-acre minimum lot size).

US 6. Residential development could also occur throughout the valley on agricultural lands. A large amount of the land designated for rural residential has large minimum lot sizes (4 acres or more) encouraging a low-density development pattern.

The Mono County Open Space and Conservation Elements requires remote parcels without services to be held to a minimum of 40 acres.

The Benton Community Visioning process was designed, in part, to proactively shape and guide the potential growth permitted by the current Land Use Plan element so that future growth is aligned with expressed community desires.

Table 2 provides acreage of developed land during buildout and indicates that up to 3,874 units could be built in the area, increasing the local population to over 9,000 people.

KEY LANDOWNERS

The predominance of land ownership by federal and state agencies for resource management purposes greatly influences land use patterns in Benton and throughout the Tri-Valley.

In Mono County, 97 percent of the land is publicly owned. In Benton this

figure is lower, at 85 percent. Over 37,000 acres in the Benton Valley are owned by Federal or State agencies for resource management purposes. The majority of the valley floor is managed by the Bureau of Land Management for habitat conservation and recreation. The mountains on either side of the valley are public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service. Key landowners in Benton include

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Benton-Paiute Tribe
- Mono County

Figure 4 illustrates the pattern of parcel ownership in Benton.

Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), an agency within the U.S. Department of the Interior, is responsible for management and conservation programs of resources on 258 million surface acres and 700 million acres of subsurface mineral estate in the United States. BLM is one of two primary public agency landowners in Mono County.

As part of its land management strategy, BLM regularly reviews its property inventory to release any lands that do not support its mission. Through

FIGURE 4: PARCEL OWNERSHIP

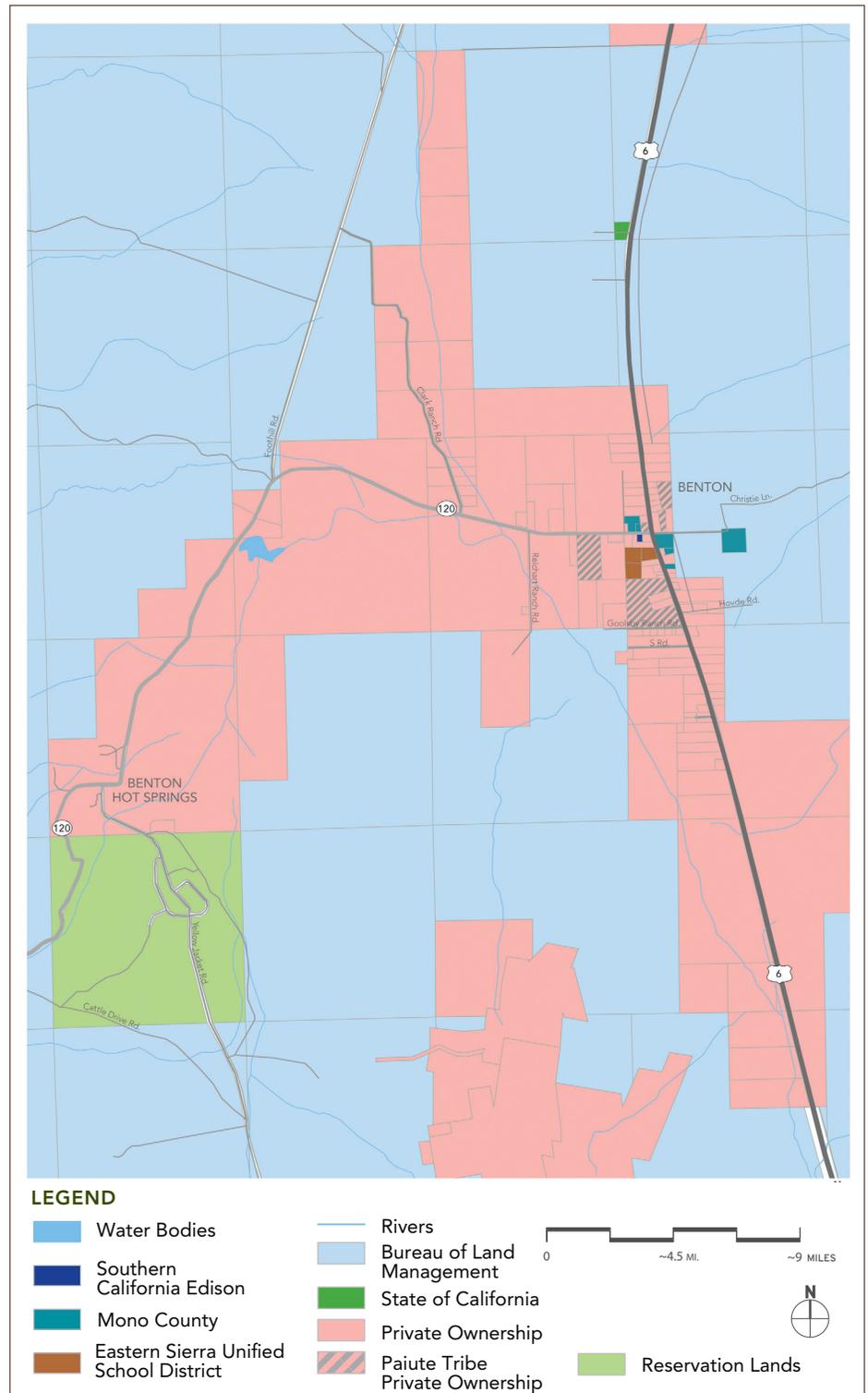
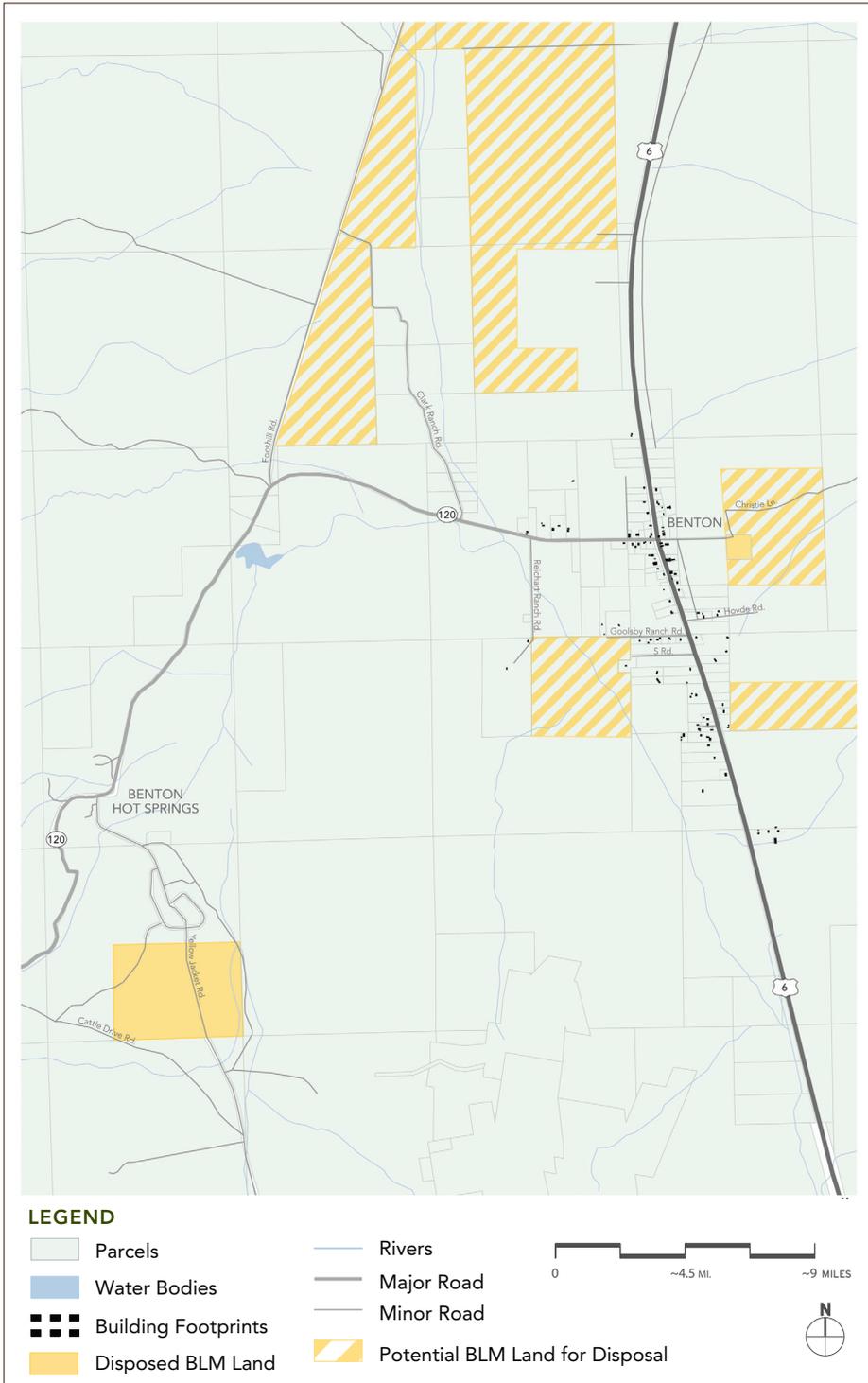


FIGURE 5: BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT DISPOSAL PARCELS



its Realty and Ownership program, BLM has assessed and evaluated its properties in the Benton area and determined that many of these open lands no longer support the BLM's ability to achieve its natural resource goals and can be released from the agency's holdings. These properties can then be disposed (i.e., sold or exchanged) to facilitate development. Lands are appraised and any exchanges must include non-federal lands of equivalent value.

There is a significant amount of BLM land that could be disposed of within Benton's local context. **Figure 5** illustrates lands that have been disposed of and potential acreage targeted for disposal. As **Figure 5** illustrates, there is a significant amount of land just beyond Benton's residential and commercial areas. The exchange of some or all of these lands could result in additional development or enhancement of public lands.

Benton-Paiute Tribe

The Paiute peoples' ancestors occupied the Eastern Sierra range for what is believed to be about 10,000 years. The Benton Paiute Reservation was established by Executive Order in 1915. Federal Tribal Status was established in 1976.

The tribe's mission is to provide governmental services to its citizens: health care and senior citizens programs through Toiyabe Indian Health Project; housing through the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Housing Improvement Program of the Bureau of Indian Affairs; and roads and street development using federal highway trust funds through the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The tribe owns significant acreage in the Benton area; therefore, tribal development activities have the potential to significantly affect the character of the community. The Benton-Paiute Tribe owns five key parcels in Benton with a total area of approximately 58 acres in Benton, including Benton Station/Café, a store, café and gas station located at the 120/6 intersection.

Additionally, the tribe has supported economic development activities such as the Superior Saddle Tree Company, a business located on a 33-acre parcel south of the Benton Hot Springs (zoned Rural Residential) that recently closed. The tribal land is home to a community center, health clinic as well as the Superior Saddle Tree Com-



pany, a micro-economic development project.

Additional Rural Residential (8.26 acres total), Commercial (2 acres) and Agricultural (15) designated parcels owned by the tribe are located in proximity to the 120/6 intersection.

In addition to these lands, the tribe was recently awarded 220 acres of land with sovereign nation status from the BLM located adjacent to existing tribal lands to the south of Benton Hot Springs. Development activities on these properties could have an impact on the future of Benton.



Mono County

Mono County owns land parcels in proximity to the 120/6 intersection. These parcels total approximately 20 acres and are designated Public Facilities including a park, community service facilities and two workforce housing projects that were built to supplement housing opportunities in the area.

Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP)

In addition to BLM, LADWP is one of the primary public agency landowners in the County. Established more than 100 years ago, the LADWP is the largest municipal utility in the United States and delivers water and power to some 3.8 million residents and businesses in Los Angeles. The Department provides water to 640,000 customers and electricity to 1.4 million customers. The LADWP owns the majority of the surface and subsurface water in Mono County.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

While the population of Benton is small, the community is served by an assortment of commercial, service-oriented, educational and recreational facilities:

- White Mountain Fire Protection District Station
- Edna Beaman Elementary School
- Mono County Library Facility
- Benton Senior Center
- Ida Lynn Parkinson Park
- U.S. Post Office
- Mono County Road Shop
- Benton Transfer Station

The White Mountain Fire Protection District Station provides fire protection services for the community and region. The Edna Beaman Elementary School serves the community's school-aged children in grades K-8. The Mono County Library Facility provides library services and Benton Senior Center offer senior services for the older adult community. Ida Lynn Parkinson Park is a community park located in proximity to the 120/6 intersection and provides a basketball court and play area.

These facilities meet Benton's basic needs; however, as described in the following section of this report, current residents are interested in additional services and facilities and recognize that some growth may be required to support them.

CIRCULATION

State and federal highways bisect Benton, providing connections for regional, interregional and local travelers. State highways are managed by Caltrans, an integral partner in planning the future of the community, as balancing the various needs of travelers is a Caltrans mandate.

Benton's circulation is defined by the 120/6 intersection, highways that facilitate local, interregional, and regional traffic. US 6 serves as a conduit for truck traffic through Benton, providing a connection to distribution centers to the north in Nevada and to the south in Southern California. Trucks and other vehicles along US 6 often travel at high speeds. Roadside parking and chain installation requirements also contribute to safety issues since truckers must often remove chains along US 6 near Benton with little available room to do so.

US Highway 6

US 6, which extends north-south through Benton, is designated under the following standards and designations that Caltrans maintains:

- Part of the National Truck Network or Surface Transportation Assistance Act (STAA); in compliance



with STAA, trucks are allowed on route on US 6.

- Part of the Extralegal Load Network, which allows for vehicles that exceed that STAA size limits such as escorted "wide loads." US 395, which joins US 6 in Bishop, is part of this same network.
- Defined as an Interregional Road System Route (IRRS); it is part of a network of circulation routes to enable goods and services to travel across state borders and through regional areas.
- Part of the National Highway System (NHS) and part of the Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET); it is part of the system dedicated to



the mobilization and deployment of military forces, equipment, and for utilization in emergency capacities in times of peace and war.

Due to these designations, US 6 will continue to be a major thoroughfare for large trucks and will always serve as a part of a regional transportation network. These standards impose restrictions on Caltrans' ability to make certain changes to the primary character of the roadway as it passes through the Benton community.

State Route 120

SR 120, which extends west-east and

terminates at the 120/6 intersection, is a two-lane conventional highway. SR 120 serves as a connection for vehicular traffic to Lee Vining and Yosemite for parts of the year. Seasonal closings of SR 120 East hinder vehicular circulation to Lee Vining and Yosemite for portions of the year. Largely due to some very sharp curves, SR 120 East has restricted use for vehicles with kingpin-to-rear-axle length in excess of 40 feet, which includes many motor coaches and motorhomes.

Benton Crossing Road

Benton Crossing Road is a two-lane road that provides a year-round connection between SR 120 and US 395. The 34-mile stretch of road is a vital connection for residents, commuters and travelers alike between Benton and western destinations such as Mammoth Lakes. The current topography and configuration of Benton Crossing Road limits the passage of long vehicles such as tour buses.

Transit Services

Transit Services in the Tri-Valley are provided by Inyo-Mono Transit (IMT). IMT provides local Dial-A-Ride service in Benton and twice-weekly roundtrip service from Benton to Bishop.

Other Transportation Modes

Informal trails and pedestrian pathways are available (but not formally designated) in and around Benton, however, there are no sidewalks. Some bicyclists use US 6 for touring.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Benton is surrounded by vast public open space. Water and access to surrounding public open space are two of the most significant concerns of local residents.

Water

The Tri-Valley watershed is a tributary to the Owens River. Streams originating in the White Mountains contribute most of the runoff in the watershed. An ephemeral wash that drains the length of the watershed from Benton to Laws in Inyo County is the main stem of the drainage system. Most of the runoff is either captured as surface water and used as irrigation for agricultural practices or drains into the valley's deep alluvium and is captured as groundwater. There is one surface water resource: Fish Slough, a protected wetlands area in the southwest corner of Chalfant Valley. Located on BLM lands, Fish Slough is a significant surface water resource in the Tri-Valley.



Water is a valuable resource in Benton and the region. The County's *Surface Water and Groundwater Availability Assessment—Tri-Valley Area* discusses existing water resource management and conditions. Domestic water is supplied with groundwater, and sewage is treated by individual septic systems. Agricultural irrigation is supplied primarily by pumped groundwater and limited surface water diversions. Surface water is diverted for irrigation, stock watering, wildlife, and recreational uses. Existing water rights for the diversion of surface water are maintained by BLM, LADWP, and various private entities and persons.



Future Tri-Valley area surface water usage depends on the pattern of growth in the area, future agricultural practices and water level trends. If agricultural lands that currently use surface water are converted to residential land uses or conversion of agriculture to less water-intensive crops, surface water usage will decrease. Conversely, if water levels continue to decrease, a greater reliance on surface water may result, adding pressure to the existing water supply.

Topography

Topography within the Tri-Valley region is characterized by flat-floored valleys, gently sloping alluvial fans

along the sides of the valley floors, and steep slopes above the alluvial fans. The three valleys that comprise the Tri-Valley region are bound on the east by the White Mountains and on the west by the southeast sloping lava flows of the Volcanic Tablelands and the Benton Range.

Visually, Benton is quite exposed, with sweeping views of the surrounding mountains. The valley floor is relatively flat and there is little screening vegetation. Consequentially, development and agricultural uses are noticeable. Communities are nestled in surrounding sagebrush scrub and agricultural land.

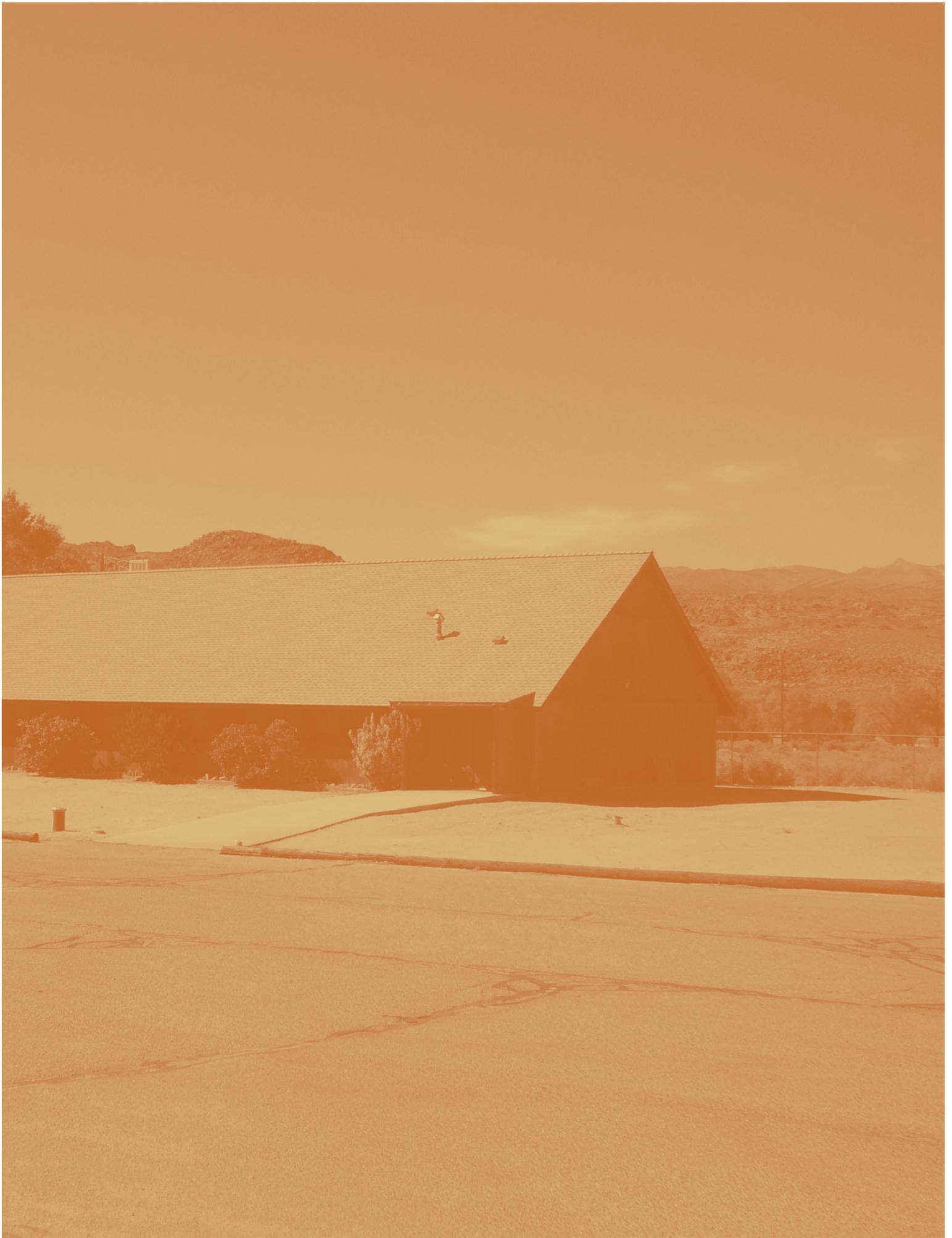


Public Lands For Recreation

Benton residents and visitors utilize surrounding public lands for a variety of recreational activities including hiking, biking, horse riding and ATV use.

Since its early days as a mining town, Benton has offered residents and visitors with awe-inspiring surroundings and access to an impressive array of natural areas. Benton's unique rural character is defined by its vast surrounding public lands. Located in proximity to hiking, rock climbing, wildlife viewing, and other opportunities, Benton offers a world-class recreational experience.





public outreach process and methods

APPROACH

Caltrans District 9, in partnership with the Mono County Planning Department, worked with MIG to design and facilitate a public involvement process for the community of Benton following a successful visioning process in the nearby community of Chalfant.

The public outreach process resulted in a community Vision Statement and a series of Guiding Principles and Strategies that can help guide County land use and transportation planning decisions through 2030. These products will help decision-makers determine where and how future growth should occur and to anticipate related highway and safety improvements and access management needs on US 6 and SR 120.

The information developed through this planning outreach process will be incorporated into an update of Mono County's General Plan. Caltrans will also gain information that will inform the development of the

Transportation Corridor Report for Highway 6.

A related goal of the process was to gauge community interest in the release of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) agency lands to facilitate development in the area. The BLM is interested in the process, as agencies may sell, trade or transfer surplus lands to public or private interests for future development through their agencies land tenure process. The BLM could potentially release more than 1,000 acres to the immediate north and south of Benton for development if there was interest in these lands. These lands are one of the few sources of developable land in the County.

Input generated during initial stakeholder interviews informed the design of a public outreach process that included three community workshops. The project team agreed to test several scenarios in order to collect public feedback on the desired size and scale, types of services and amenities, and types of





growth the community might be willing to accept. This information could help inform Caltrans' future efforts regarding the need for a bypass or other improvements. The community was also asked its opinion about improvements that might encourage walkability and community connectivity as well as access to surrounding public land.

The discussions were designed to draw out resident attitudes towards future growth in the area, identify the community's current assets and help shape where potential growth should be directed to maximize benefit for the existing community. There was recognition that development pressure in the area may provide an opportunity for the community to remedy longstanding safety issues and concerns by exacting require-

ments of developers. Increased development and the resulting tax-base could provide the necessary funding stream to support additional amenities and services for the community.

PUBLICITY

The partnership utilized a cost-effective approach to publicizing the community workshops, resulting in broad awareness and substantial attendance at the events. Some of the methods included:

Newspaper and Radio Advertising

Project staff worked with local agency representatives to identify local newspaper and radio stations popular with the target audience. Feedback from attendees indicated that these low-cost outreach methods successfully attracted people to the workshops.

Direct Mail and E-Mail

Project staff mailed meeting announcements to every household in the Benton area from a list of nearly 400 addresses provided by Mono County Staff. The County also utilized the Regional Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC) listserve. Electronic meeting announcements were sent to nearly 150 people on an active emailing list.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

As part of the overall outreach process, project team members conducted a series of interviews with area stakeholders to elicit feedback on the issues as well as the process of public engagement. The interviews were conducted in person or by phone during October 2007. The purpose of the interviews was to gain insight into current and future issues facing Benton and to seek advice about how to successfully engage the community in the process. Joan Chaplick from MIG conducted the interviews, accompanied by representatives from the County or Caltrans.

Stakeholder Outreach: Benton-Paiute Tribe

At the outset of the Benton Community Visioning process, coordination with and inclusion of the Benton-Paiute Tribe was a high priority. At the time of the interviews, results of a tribal election were unresolved, a fact that created some challenges to working with Benton-Paiute on a tribal leadership level. The project team instead approached the tribe in a less formal manner, i.e., as a key landowner and business owner. Interviewers met with a tribal administrator to determine the most effective way to notify tribal



members and involve members and decision makers in the process. These interviews also allowed the team to gain insights into the preferred methods for tribal outreach. Individuals identifying themselves as tribal members attended the workshops and shared opinions about current and proposed opportunities.

INTERACTIVE WORKSHOPS

The Benton Community Vision Partnership held a series of three public workshops in February, June and August that attracted 95 Benton residents. Each of the three workshops employed specific methods to solicit feedback and engage participants effectively, based on the goals of the meeting.





February 2008: Creating a Vision

The February meeting served as the formal start of the visioning process. It provided participants an opportunity to identify the qualities they wanted retained in their community. Participants also shared their issues and concerns and discussed potential opportunities. This information was used to shape a draft Vision Statement for the community and provided the basis for a set of draft Guiding Principles that were presented in August.

At the start of the meeting, Caltrans and Mono County staff made brief presentations on their respective planning processes and explained how the results of the visioning process would be utilized in these efforts. Joan Chaplick of MIG made a presentation on best practices in rural planning.

Following her introductory comments, Ms. Chaplick opened up the large group discussion, prompting responses with a series of questions on topics such as development, transportation, water infrastructure and recreation. Meeting staff recorded individual comments on a large wallgraphic at the front of the room. This method allowed participants to see that their comments had been noted and served as a useful tool to guide the conversation as well as serving as a formal record following the meeting.

Results

The large group discussion identified the following issues:

Transportation

Residents expressed concern about safety on the highways, including unsafe driving speeds and dangerous conditions related to truck parking and chain control along Highway 6. However, a majority of participants were concerned about a potential rerouting of the highway to bypass Benton. They supported the idea of keeping SR 120 open year-round. Finally, residents expressed a desire for improvements to the bicycle and pedestrian network in the area.

Water Supply and Infrastructure

Residents repeatedly emphasized that



any future development must be compatible with existing water supply, and that maintenance and preservation of the existing water supply is strongly valued. Furthermore, meeting attendees felt strongly that future growth should be sensitive to the long-term water supply for the area.

Workforce Housing

Many Benton residents work outside of Benton in either Bishop or Mammoth. Meeting attendees expressed a desire to develop housing for people who will live and work in the Benton area. There was a strong desire to develop housing for permanent residents, rather than second homes.

Recreation Access

Meeting attendees expressed a strong desire to maintain strategic access to surrounding public open space.

Economic Development

Participants mentioned existing parcel sizes as a limiting factor to future development. Many appeared open to reviewing parcel sizes if it would help increase opportunities for development aligned with the community's vision and quality of life. Others communicated a preference for large lots where they can raise and keep animals, especially outside the core community area.

June 2008: Discussing Future Growth

The June meeting utilized a map-based exercise (represented in **Figure 6**) to solicit residents' attitudes towards growth and site-specific preferences for potential growth, circulation improvements and access to recreation.

Participants worked in small groups to discuss issues related to recreation, growth and circulation. Facilitators led participants in small group discussions about these issues, recording comments on the maps when applicable and also on flip charts. Following the small group exercise, designated "reporters" from each group shared the results of their discussion with the large group. This format allowed for all attendees to provide input and to learn and reflect on the discussion points presented by other groups. The small group reports were recorded on wallgraphic paper, similar to those used at the February session.

Results

The results of the June land use exercise are depicted in Figures 6, 7 and 8 on pages 37-39.

The items on the maps are suggestions and do not imply a commitment to implementation by any local agency. Implementation of improve-





ments may require further technical analysis and consideration.

The Community-Identified Recreation Opportunities map (**Figure 7**) represents existing recreation access points identified by residents and those BLM lands that should be retained as recreational lands.

A recurring theme expressed throughout the stakeholder interviews and first Community Visioning meeting was the need to protect strategic access to existing public lands and recreational opportunities such as hiking and horseback riding. In June, residents identified four specific access points and two BLM parcels that should be maintained for recreational uses. Strategies to support these activities were identified under Guiding Principles A, B and D.

The Community-Identified Circulation Opportunities map (**Figure 8**) represents resident suggestions about preferred locations for local circulation improvements.

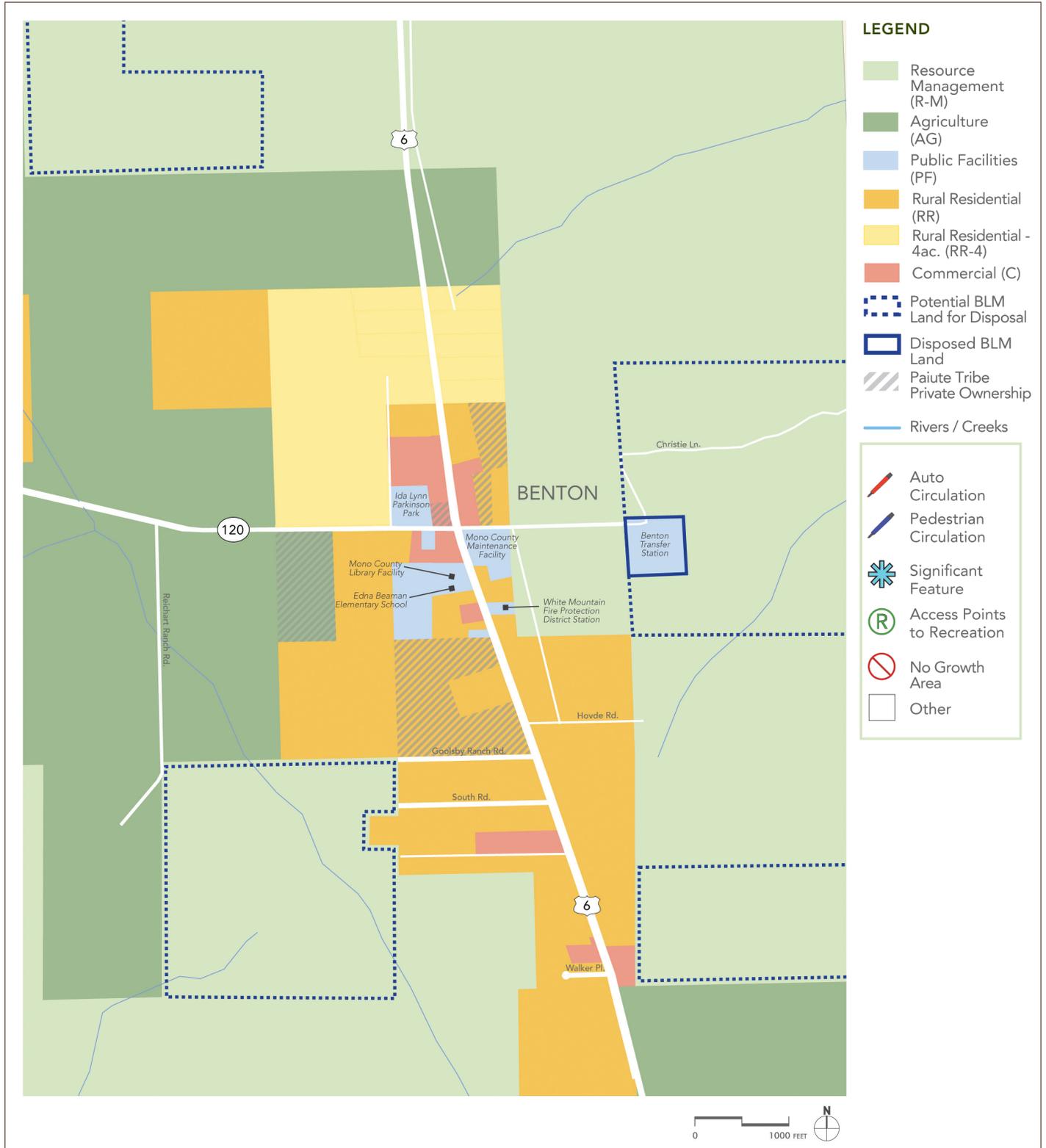
Local road connections were primarily identified to the west of US 6 and south of SR 120 and those roads connecting existing residential areas to community facilities such as the school and community center. The

strategies accompanying guiding principle E (“Develop a Safe and Efficient Transportation Network”), were identified based on resident input generated during this exercise and throughout the entire community visioning process.

The Community-Identified Land Use Opportunities map (**Figure 9**) represents general preferences for locations and types of improvements. Development of any of the identified improvements would require a more in-depth planning process.

Specific types of opportunities and locations suggested by residents are identified on this map and reflected in strategies developed to support guiding principles A (“Protect and Maintain Benton’s District Character”), C (“Support Community Services”) and F (“Encourage a Sound and Stable Economy”). A community welcome center was suggested as an opportunity to attract visitors, as was a potential campground/RV park on BLM property. A truck stop to the north of town was identified as an economic development opportunity, but community sentiment was mixed on this type of development. Cemetery location ideas were suggested and are located on the map. Opportunities

FIGURE 6: VISIONING EXERCISE





identified in Figure 8 are representative of a need. The actual location of any of these land uses or amenities in the future will require further planning review.

August 2008: Guiding Principles

Following the February and June meetings, the partnership returned in August to present a series of Community Vision and Guiding Principles for consideration and review. The materials presented met with a positive response and were accepted by the community with minor edits.

To expedite the feedback process on the principles, facilitators provided participants with a set of red, yellow and green cards. As participants reviewed each Guiding Principle and Strategy, they indicated their level of agreement by raising a card. A green card indicated full agreement; a red card indicated disagreement and a yellow card indicated either a need for clarification or possible support for the principle with modifications. This technique allowed facilitators to move quickly through all the guiding principles and strategies.

Results

Overall, participants supported 29 statements without modifications,

and suggested changes to 13 strategies. One additional strategy was suggested and one strategy was removed completely. The final Guiding Principles and Strategies are listed in Section Three.

Comment Cards

Facilitators provided comment cards to all meeting attendees. These cards offered an additional opportunity for attendees to give their input and were an especially useful tool for soliciting feedback from those attendees who are uncomfortable with public speaking. Comment cards were collected and reviewed following every meeting. A return mailing address was also provided on the comment cards and attendees were given one week to mail back their comments. Facilitators also encouraged attendees to distribute comment cards to those not in attendance to solicit their written input and feedback on key questions and strategic directions.

OTHER OUTCOMES

In addition to the development of a Community Vision Statement and Guiding Principles and Strategies, the Benton Community Visioning Process can be considered a success due to the following outcomes:

Sustained Community Engagement

Over 100 Benton residents of all ages participated in the Benton Community Visioning process. The sustained level of community interest and participation has encouraged local agency staff to continue with ongoing community involvement in local planning efforts.

Increased Agency Coordination

Increased coordination and collaboration between local agency representatives at Caltrans, Mono County and the BLM is another successful outcome of the Benton Community Visioning Process.

NEXT STEPS

The documented community preferences related to land use, circulation and access to recreation embodied in the Community Vision Statement and Guiding Principles and Strategies will be included in a variety of agency planning documents, including:

- Mono County General Plan Update and Benton Area Plan
- US 6 and SR 120 Transportation Concept Report updates
- Regional Transportation Plan
- County Environmental Assessment Report

- Regional Blueprint Planning Efforts

CONCLUSION

The development pattern in Benton is inextricably linked to a handful of land-owning agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) that manage the majority of acreage surrounding the community, as well as the Benton Paiute tribe that manages reservation and private lands in trust. These ownership patterns present both a challenge and an opportunity to the community. While the lands are currently managed as open space, a change in land management strategy by any these parties could drastically alter the landscape.

Input generated through the Benton Community Visioning process indicates that while Benton residents are open to some form of growth, they prefer concentrated growth that conserves resources and celebrates Benton's unique history and identity.

In contrast to these desires, current land use planning designations allow for a very different evolution of growth. If Benton were to become built out under current Land Use Des-



ignations as described in the Mono County General Plan Land Use Element, the area could accommodate as many as 3,874 dwelling units and potentially over 9,000 residents.

Therefore, while current land use designations do support the community's ability to determine their destiny as a small, rural community, they do not embody the vision of the Benton community as expressed in the meetings; rather, they have the potential to encourage a style and location of development that is in stark contrast to the desires of the community.

While residents were not opposed to an increased population in the future, they clearly expressed a desire for concentrated, resource-sensitive development as described by the Vision, Statement and Guiding Principles and Strategies.

Looking to the future, the Community Vision Statement and Guiding Principles will serve as useful tools for community members and decision-makers alike. The continued and committed involvement of local citizens and agency representatives will ensure that the ideas expressed in this document come to pass.

The ideas articulated through the community visioning process give residents and decision-makers a greater range of tools to help maintain Benton's most desirable qualities while meeting the needs of current and future residents.

FIGURE 7: COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

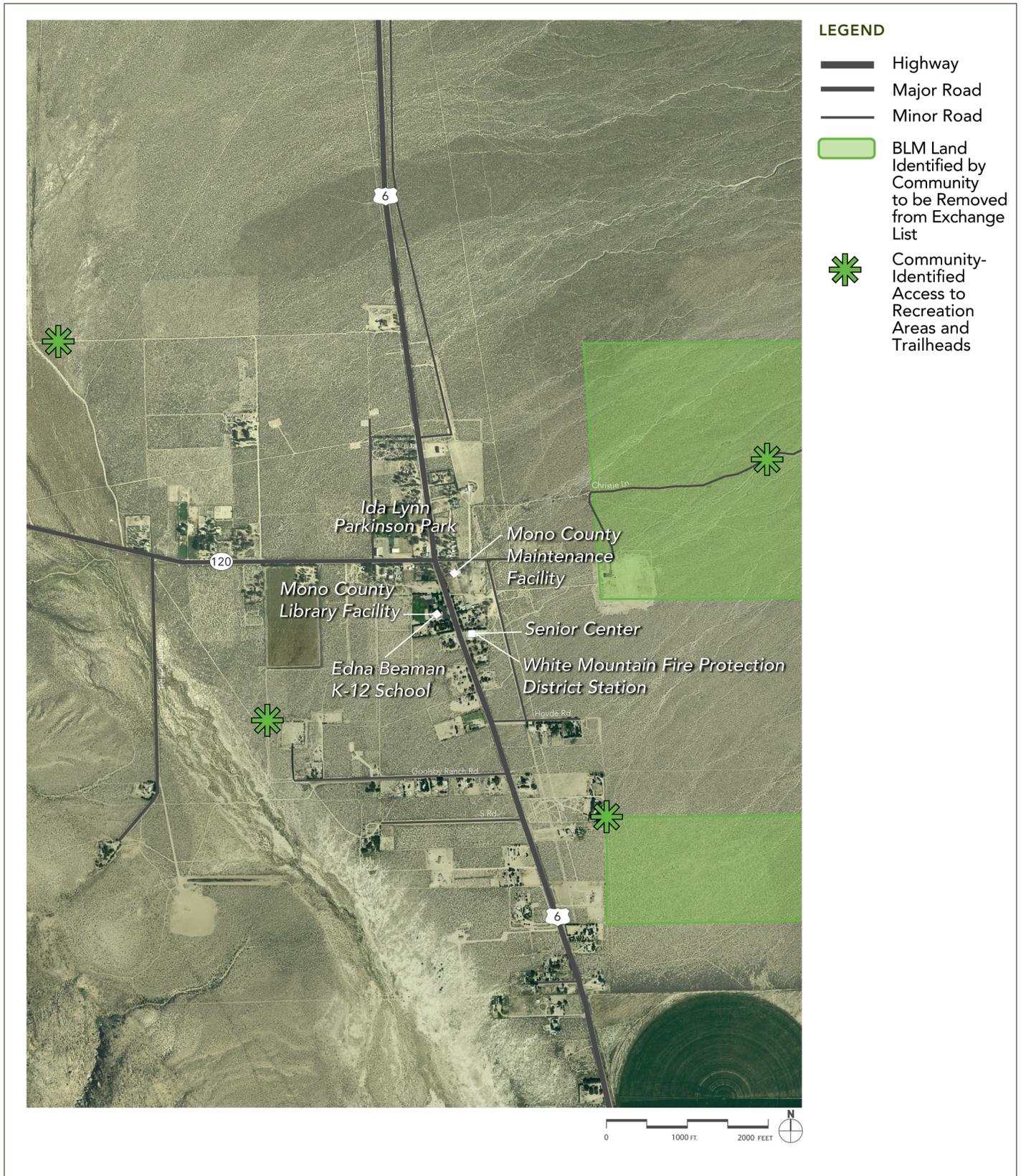


FIGURE 8: COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED CIRCULATION OPPORTUNITIES

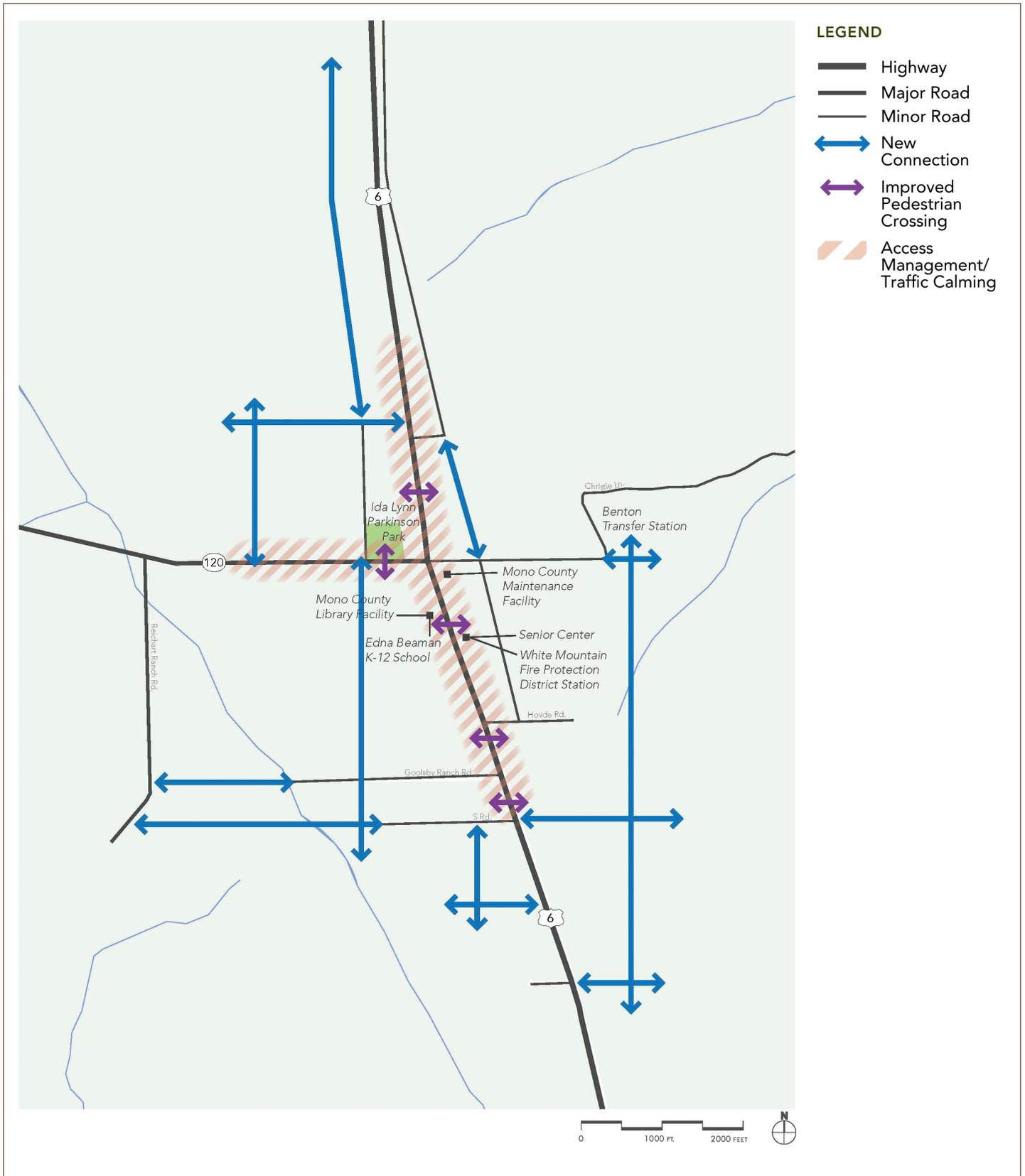
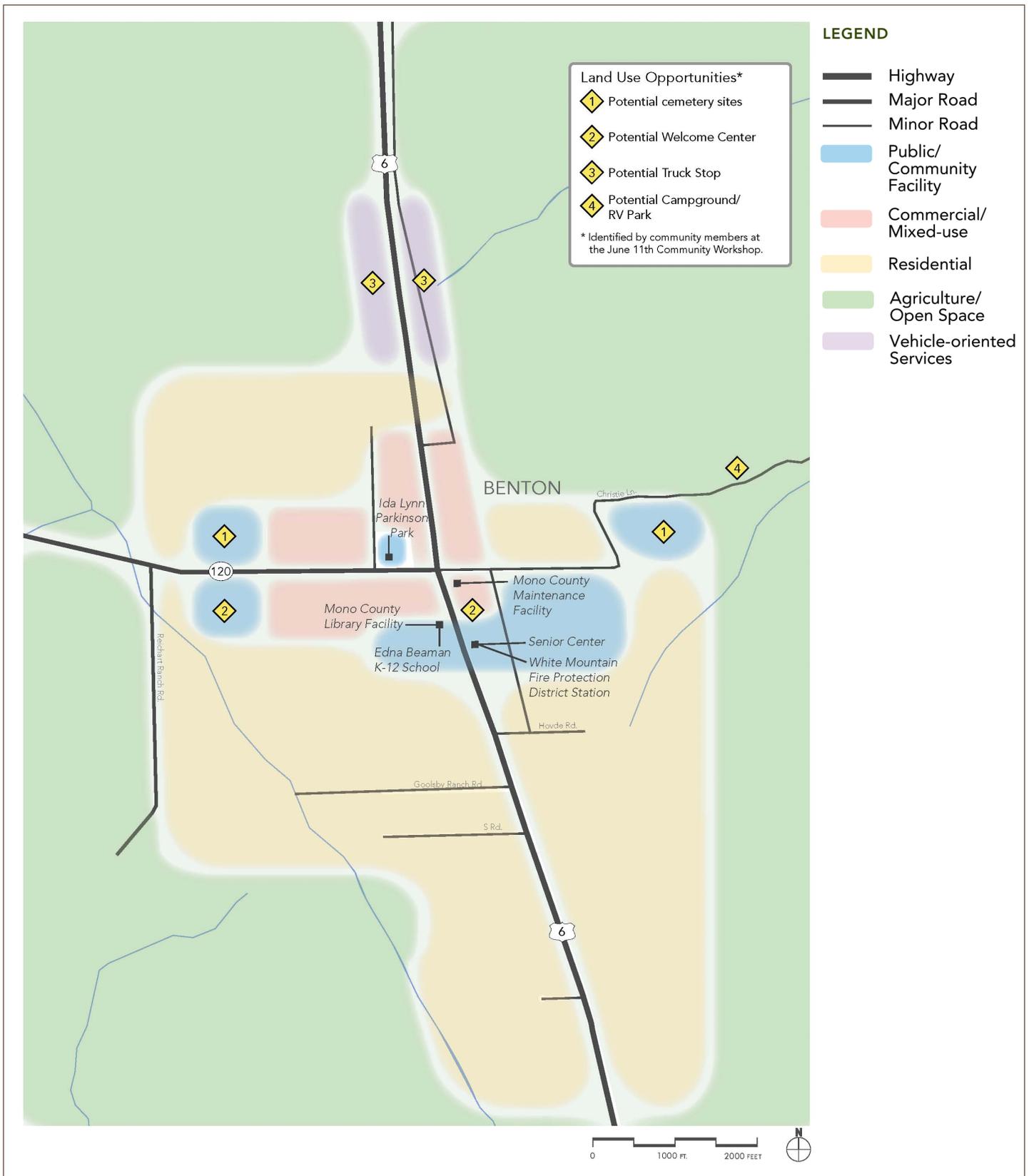


FIGURE 9: COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES





INN AT BENTON HOT SPRINGS

INN AT BENTON
BED
&
BREAKFAST

300

guiding principles

As part of the Benton Community Visioning process, the public evaluated the following Guiding Principles:

A. Protect and Maintain Benton's Distinct Character

B. Protect and Manage Natural Resources

C. Support Community Services

D. Promote Coordinated Development Practices

E. Develop a Safe and Efficient Transportation Network

F. Encourage a Sound and Stable Economy

Each Guiding Principle was in turn supplemented by a series of strategies identifying specific and general actions to be taken to achieve the goals of the principle.

In general, community members supported the strategies related to guiding principles A, B, D and F and accepted them with minor edits.

The strategies supporting guiding principles C and E required greater modification. In general, these modifications did not significantly alter the overall intent of the strategies; rather, they served to clarify the action involved. In some instances the modifications provided greater specificity, in others they broadened the scope of the strategy. For example, Strategy E3 was modified from:

Enforce established speed limits, especially on US 6

to

Enforce established limits, truck parking and idling laws, especially on US 6

The result is a series of principles and strategies that the community believes are appropriate and achievable.

A Vision for Benton

Benton's striking scenic views and beautiful natural areas continue to exemplify its unique rural character. Benton establishes a town core that maintains its small town feel and historic features while offering services and amenities for residents and visitors.



character

Protect and Maintain Benton's Distinct Character

Maintain and enhance Benton's unique identity as a rural small town with a rich history, stunning views and abundant recreation opportunities.

- A1** Facilitate the scale and type of development that complements Benton's small town character and feel.
- A2** Develop community design guidelines to encourage development that reflects Benton's history, character and current scale.
- A3** Define a town center or core with a concentration of attractive community shops and services near the intersection of SR 120 and US 6.
- A4** Develop town center design guidelines to encourage development that reflects Benton's history, character and current scale.
- A5** Revise signage to promote Benton as a destination in its own right. Develop informational kiosks that identify local services, and describe historic sites, natural resources and recreation opportunities.
- A6** Pursue grants and other financing opportunities for "main street" planning and design efforts.



Protect and Manage Natural Resources

Ensure that Benton's surrounding natural areas provide a high quality water supply; provide recreation opportunities for residents; and maintain Benton's unique rural legacy and sense of community.

- B1** Protect and manage local water resources to ensure quality and quantity for current and future residents.
- B2** Explore the potential for siting and developing rural potable water and wastewater treatment facilities.
- B3** Promote stewardship and appropriate recreation use of Benton's surrounding public lands.
- B4** Retain and enhance strategic public recreation access.
- B5** Increase community awareness and understanding of land use and resource management issues on nearby agency lands, in coordination with the Bureau of Land Management and the United States Forest Service.



Support Community Services

Provide community services, facilities and amenities to enhance the health, well-being and quality of life of all Benton residents.

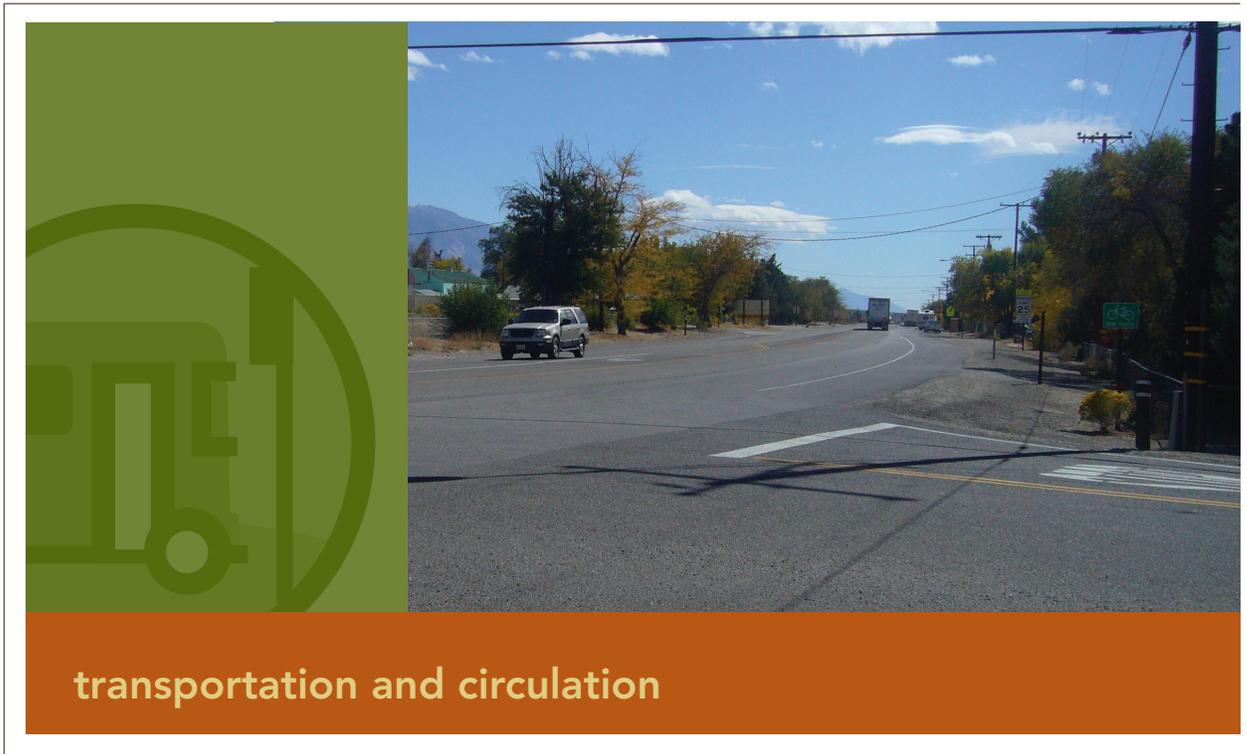
- C1** Increase emergency medical and safety services for the surrounding community.
- C2** Update the communication infrastructure to improve telephone service, high speed VOIP capabilities, internet access and wireless services for all residents and businesses. Continue upgrades as needed to match current state-of-the-art communication infrastructure.
- C3** Improve the energy infrastructure and develop sustainable resources to satisfy the long-term energy needs of local businesses and residents in a manner consistent with these principles.
- C4** Develop facilities to attract and serve tourists and through travelers to generate economic activity.
- C5** Establish a local cemetery or mortuary facilities to meet the needs of Benton and Tri-Valley area residents.
- C6** Improve educational resources and school facilities for Benton's youth, in partnership with the Eastern Sierra Unified School District.
- C7** Maintain and enhance Ida Lynn Parkinson Park.
- C8** Explore potential for siting and developing a centralized County Social Services Center.



Promote Coordinated Development Practices

Maintain direct and ongoing communication between public and private landowners to ensure the success of desirable future development in Benton.

- D1** Work to ensure that surplus federal lands adjacent to Benton are prioritized for development or conservation in a manner consistent with community goals.
- D2** Ensure that local agencies coordinate development with property owners.
- D3** Maintain productive and ongoing communication with the Benton Paiute Tribe regarding potential development on both reservation and private properties.
- D4** Draw on the Regional Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC), local fire district and local groundwater management districts to encourage ongoing coordination and communication with local residents.
- D5** Encourage citizen leadership and participation in local planning efforts to help guide agencies and decision makers.



transportation and circulation

Develop a Safe and Efficient Transportation Network

Improve the safety, efficiency and reliability of Benton's highways, roads, bikeways and pathways for all users.

- E1** Create viable alternatives to US 6 for local travel. Identify a wide range of alternatives, including a bypass and local roads to alleviate safety issues and infrastructure burden.
- E2** Identify appropriate traffic calming strategies, especially near the intersection of SR 120 and US 6.
- E3** Enforce established speed limits, truck parking and idling laws, especially on US 6.
- E4** Develop safe pedestrian pathways throughout town and establish pedestrian crossings where appropriate and necessary.
- E5** Create and improve bicycle routes throughout Benton.
- E6** Continue to support efforts that invest in making SR 120 (between US 6 and US 395) a year-round facility and assist in removal of the advisory designation that discourages use by larger vehicles.
- E8** Update flood zone maps to improve local transportation planning, community development and resident safety efforts.



Encourage a Sound and Stable Economy

Increase local economic opportunities to support Benton residents and their families.

- F1** Promote local business development and employment opportunities.
- F2** Leverage Old Benton’s history and the area’s natural resources as strong foundations for economic development.
- F3** Consider the development of a truck stop to the north of Benton.
- F4** Stay abreast of appropriate economic opportunities through ongoing communication with the Mono County Economic Development Division and other similar organizations.

for more information

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