

LAND USE

Land use in the Gillette, Wyoming, area is varied but not complicated. RANGELAND occupies the greatest part of the area and supports the production of cattle and sheep. Pronghorn antelope, a valuable big-game species, are abundant. The terrain is mainly rolling, but includes some flat and some very steep and dissected areas. Vegetation is mainly short grasses and midgrasses including blue grama, western wheatgrass, threeleaf sedge, prairie junegrass, sandberg bluegrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, needle-and-thread grass, green needle grass, and little bluestem. Big sagebrush occurs with the grasses; it is generally sparse but in some places it makes up about half of the vegetation cover. Silver sagebrush is abundant along most drainage channels and on many of the higher hills and ridges. Saltgrass and greasewood are dominant on bottomlands that have high concentrations of salt. In places forage production has been improved by replacing native grasses with crested wheatgrass and by controlling sagebrush with chemical sprays.

WOODLAND vegetation is scrubby, noncommercial ponderosa pine and rocky mountain juniper with grass understorey. Trees tend to be sparse on south-facing slopes and moderately dense on north-facing slopes. The woodland mainly occupies steep, dissected areas blanketed by resistant thick beds of baked shale (clinker), which were produced by the burning of coal beds. These lands are used for grazing and as habitat for deer, sagehen, grouse, and other small animals. In the northern part, the woodland includes stands of cottonwood and willow on the flood plains of larger streams.

CROPLAND, HAYLAND, AND PASTURE are mainly flat to gently rolling areas which have moderately deep to deep well-drained soils. Dryland wheat, oats, and barley are the main cash crops, and alfalfa is grown for hay. Wild hay is harvested on some bottomlands and also on scattered upland areas. All the hay is fed locally to cattle and sheep in the winter. More than half of the cropland, hayland, and pasture area is seeded to crested wheatgrass, which is cut for hay and used for livestock pasture. Occasionally some of this land is plowed and used for small grain production for several years before crested wheatgrass is reseeded.

RESIDENTIAL, COMMERCIAL, AND SERVICE areas of the central part of Gillette are like those of most small cities, in which a business district is surrounded by conventional homes. However, most of the outskirts consist of mobile-home parks, and of service and supply businesses which were established after oil and gas development began in 1956. The population of Campbell County, of which Gillette is the county seat, increased from 5,861 persons in 1960 to 12,957 in 1970 with most of the increase occurring in the Gillette area.

RECREATION areas consist of a park and adjacent golf course in the southeast part of Gillette, another golf course adjacent to the Gillette Municipal Airport a car race track northeast of Gillette, and a motorcycle, race course near the southern coal mine at Wyodak.

THE STRIP COAL MINE in T. 48 N., R. 71 W., was opened in 1972. Mining of baked shale from numerous small pits is another important extractive activity. The hard shale is crushed and used for road and highway metal. Several oil and gas fields with their associated wells, roads, tanks, and buried pipelines exist on land that is also used either for agriculture or rangeland.

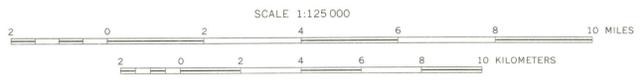
THE AIRPORT is the only transportation feature that is large enough to outline at this scale. Roads, highways, railroads, and landing strips are other essential uses of land, even though they occupy only a small amount of the Gillette area.

WATER features also use some land. The ephemeral stream channel network which conveys water and the many small lakes and ponds which store water are the main water features of the area. Some of the ponds are used for watering livestock and some for irrigating hay fields.

Base from Wyoming State Highway Commission, 1956 with main highway system updated to 1969



Based on interpretation of 1:24,000 scale orthophotographs which were prepared from 1:80,000 aerial photographs taken in September 1970. Supplemental information obtained by field reconnaissance and from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service



LAND USE MAP OF THE GILLETTE AREA, WYOMING, 1970

By
Lynn M. Shown
1973