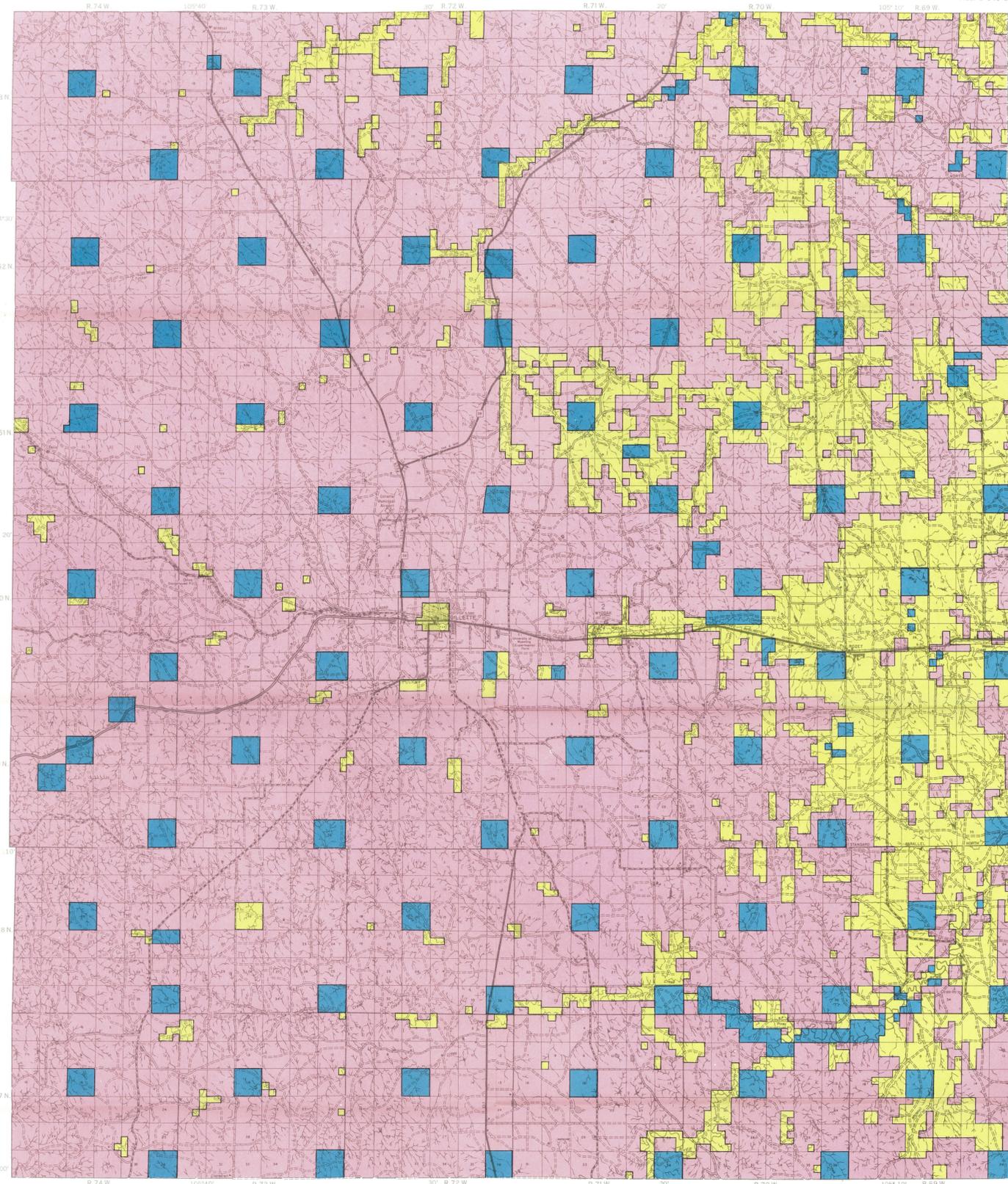


Base from Wyoming State Highway Commission, 1956, with main highway system updated to 1969

LAND (SURFACE) OWNERSHIP

Compiled from published land ownership maps, Bureau of Land Management, 1972

- Federal
- State
- Private
includes city-owned
- Bankhead-Jones
Land Utilization
Lands
Coal ownership uncertain in some tracts



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

COAL OWNERSHIP

Interior-Geological Survey, Washington, D.C.—1973-R73336
Compiled from Land and Mineral Title plats, Bureau of Land Management (as of March 1973)

LAND AND COAL OWNERSHIP IN THE GILLETTE AREA

Since the signing of the Articles of Confederation in 1781, the Federal government has held jurisdiction over vast acreages of land. During the 19th and early 20th centuries one of the chief responsibilities of Congress and of several Federal bureaus was to provide for, and regulate, the transfer of public lands to State and private ownership. As a result, a large body of laws and regulations have been enacted to control the disposition of the public domain. (See "History of Public Land Law Development," U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968, for detailed discussions).

For lands in northeastern Wyoming, the Homestead Act of 1862, the Desert Land Act of 1877 (and revision of 1891), the enlarged Homestead Act of 1909, and the Stock Raising Homestead Act of 1916 are of special importance. Through these measures, millions of acres of public land were opened to entry and settlement for agricultural purposes, and a large part of the land surface in the area shown has been converted to private ownership. Additional large acreages were also transferred to State ownership (specifically sections 16 and 36 in every town-

ship in the region), the income from which was to be used for public education. The Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, which established grazing districts on the remaining public lands and made them available for leasing to stockmen, virtually ended the acquisition of land through homesteading in northeastern Wyoming.

The disposition of mineral-bearing lands has been controlled for the most part by a separate set of laws and regulations. With respect to coal, a law in 1864 empowered the President to sell lands containing known coal beds at public auction, but at a minimum price of \$20 per acre. Any lands left unsold were then made available for private entry under the general public land statutes for a minimum fee. In 1873, Congress further provided that a citizen might claim up to 160 acres, and that a group of individuals might enter as much as 320 acres, of unreserved coal lands. The minimum price was \$10 per acre for tracts located more than 15 miles from a completed railroad and \$20 per acre for tracts located within 15 miles of a railroad. The 1873 act regulated the disposition of coal lands on the public domain until the passage of the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920. This statute, still in effect, authorized the Secretary of the Interior to issue two-year permits to prospect for coal on land not known to contain workable deposits,

and then to issue preference leases to the same parties if coal is found to be present in commercial quantities. Under certain conditions, leases may also be offered by the Department of the Interior on the basis of competitive bidding.

In 1906 many millions of acres of coal-bearing lands which still remained within the public domain were withdrawn from private entry, and a series of acts followed in 1907-1910 that eventually separated surface and mineral rights. Thus, individuals could obtain title to the land surface but the Federal government retained the right to prospect and mine the underlying coal. Because ownership of much of the land surface in northeastern Wyoming was acquired after these "separation" laws went into effect, the coal deposits are still largely owned by the Federal government. The extent of separate ownership is dramatically illustrated by this pair of maps.

Two tracts of land are designated Bankhead-Jones Land Utilization Lands. These tracts were acquired by the Federal government through purchase from private owners chiefly in the 1930s, and placed in the category of grazing lands. In some cases, the title to the mineral rights is still in doubt.



LAND AND COAL OWNERSHIP IN THE GILLETTE AREA, WYOMING

Compiled by
U.S. Geological Survey

1973