

# CHAPTER 11

## Cultural Resources



---

## Table of Contents

<b>11.1 Chapter Introduction</b> .....	3
<b>11.2 Brief History of Storey County</b> .....	4
11.2.1 Early History.....	4
11.2.2 Twentieth Century and Today .....	6
Figures	
11.2-1 Late Nineteenth Century Gold Hill.....	5
11.2-2 The Bonanza Cafe.....	8
<b>11.3 Policy Framework for Historic Preservation</b> .....	9
<b>11.4 Preservation Background</b> .....	10
<b>11.5 Resource Inventory History</b> .....	12
<b>11.6 Key Issues</b> .....	13
11.6.1 Education and Awareness.....	13
11.6.2 Encouraging Preservation .....	13
11.6.3 Mining Uses.....	13
11.6.4 Protecting Historic and Prehistoric Archeological Sites .....	21
Figures	
11.6-1 Relocation of Keystone Mine Headframe.....	14
11.6-2 Comstock Historic District jurisdictional map.....	19
11.6-3 Comstock Historic Preservation area map.....	20
11.6-4 The Lagomarsino Canyon Petroglyphs Site.....	21
<b>11.7 Goals, Policies and Objectives.</b> .....	23

## 11.1 Chapter Introduction

Any plan for the future, including a master plan, needs to grow from roots in the past. Communities evolve, grow, and change, but their character and identity always reflect their history. Features that form our memories of towns and communities can be bold and obvious like Chicago's Sears Tower, the Alamo in San Antonio, or San Francisco's cable cars. They can also be every day and not so easily noticed, such as the marbled-stepped rowhouses of Baltimore, the adobe constructed houses of Santa Fe, and the omnipresent lighthouses of New England. In either case, they help define the communities as we remember them and as we visit them today.

Preservation of structures and other features allows one to trace the history of an area. Constructions from different eras illustrate the social, economic, and political climate of the time. Historic preservation of resources with cultural, social, and architectural significance affords citizens and visitors a tangible link to the continuum that is the town or city in which they live and the community in which they belong. The preservation of sites from the past contributes to the richness and diversity of an environment in a way that cannot be fabricated or engineered. A community's identity must develop organically over time; it cannot be dictated through artifice. It is important to establish an understanding of a program for preservation; the developments and constructions of today will be the historic resources of tomorrow.

Historic preservation is also about economic development, building on local assets to improve the overall economy of the community. This chapter of the master plan identifies strategies for identifying and protecting those historic resources in the community that serve as a basis for improving the quality of life and economy of the Comstock and other parts of the county. It is important to consider that there are more historic assets in Storey County than those in Gold Hill and Virginia City. There may be historic and prehistoric sites, agriculture lands, cemeteries, private homes, and other sites that have historic and prehistoric value and contribute to the overall character of Storey County. These assets should not be overlooked when implementing a historic preservation program.

This chapter is intended to be used as a tool for elected and appointed community leaders, and the community-at-large for evaluating and making decisions regarding the location and design of land uses in areas where cultural resources may be impacted. This chapter will discuss key elements of cultural resources in the county including:

- Comstock Historic District;
- Lagomarsino Petroglyphs site; and
- Historic structures and sites outside of the Comstock Historic District.

The projects identified for this plan are intended to protect the heritage of Storey County through the preservation of historic buildings and sites and to utilize the county's heritage to develop tourism and related business. Some of the projects that will help accomplish these goals are:

- Collaboration with the State Historic Preservation Office to update and expand upon the existing inventory of all historic buildings and sites inside and outside of the Comstock;
- Develop county development design guidelines for new construction and renovation, major landscapes, streetscapes, parking lots, and other developments that are consistent with but expand upon Comstock Historic District design standards;
- Prioritize properties in need of protection and develop programs to do so.

## 11.2 Brief History of Storey County

### 11.2.1 Early history

The unprecedented wealth of the Comstock Lode helped shape Virginia City and Storey County. The following account gives a historical outline of Storey County.

Virginia City was established in 1859 after the discovery of the Comstock Lode, and it soon became one of the most famous mining camps in the world. The mining camp was named in honor of James "Old Virginny" Finney by the early prospectors because of his discovery and knowledge of placers below what would later be the Ophir Mine and his location of the first quartz mining claim on the Comstock.

Virginia City, the county seat of Storey County, is located on the east side of the Virginia Range just below Mountain Davidson at an elevation of 6,220 feet. Today Virginia City is a year-round international tourist attraction with a population of approximately 1,000 people.

Virginia City in 1859 had an estimated initial population of 200 to 300 people. After discovery of the Comstock Lode, word spread across the nation. By the 1860s nearly 10,000 people rushed to the Comstock, many from the California goldfields. About 4,000 residents remained in the area, including 2,345 residents in Virginia City (868 dwellings) with the rest in Gold Hill and the surrounding vicinity. The political ramifications resulted in the creation of the Territory of Nevada, carved from the Territory of Utah, by the Organic Act signed by President Buchanan on March 2, 1861 (U.S. Statutes at Large, 1863, v. 12, pp. 209-214).

Virginia City's population remained about 4,000 people through 1862. Samuel Clemens arrived in late 1862, worked as a reporter for the Territorial Enterprise for 21 months and left the area under his penname "Mark Twain". During this period, construction of the old Geiger Grade Toll Road was started and in partial use by the end of the year. This road linked Virginia City with emigrant trails and supply routes that crossed the Truckee River at the site that would become Reno in 1868. Organization of the San Francisco Stock Exchange Board, the first mining exchange in the United States, also occurred in 1862.

By 1863, mining successes and promotion brought the Virginia City and area population to some 15,000 people. Homes, business buildings, and office blocks were built, and gas and sewer pipes were laid in the principal main streets. Daily stages brought in all the luxuries of the San Francisco area. Seventy-five stamp-amalgamation mills were operating in the region: 19 in Virginia City and in Six Mile Canyon and Seven Mile Canyon below; 35 in Gold Canyon from Gold Hill to Dayton; 12 on the Carson River; and nine in Washoe Valley.

The Comstock brought enough money and politicians to the area to promote statehood, and, despite the Territory of Nevada not having sufficient population for statehood eligibility, it was admitted to the Union's as its 36th state by the Enabling Act signed by President Abraham Lincoln on October 31, 1864.

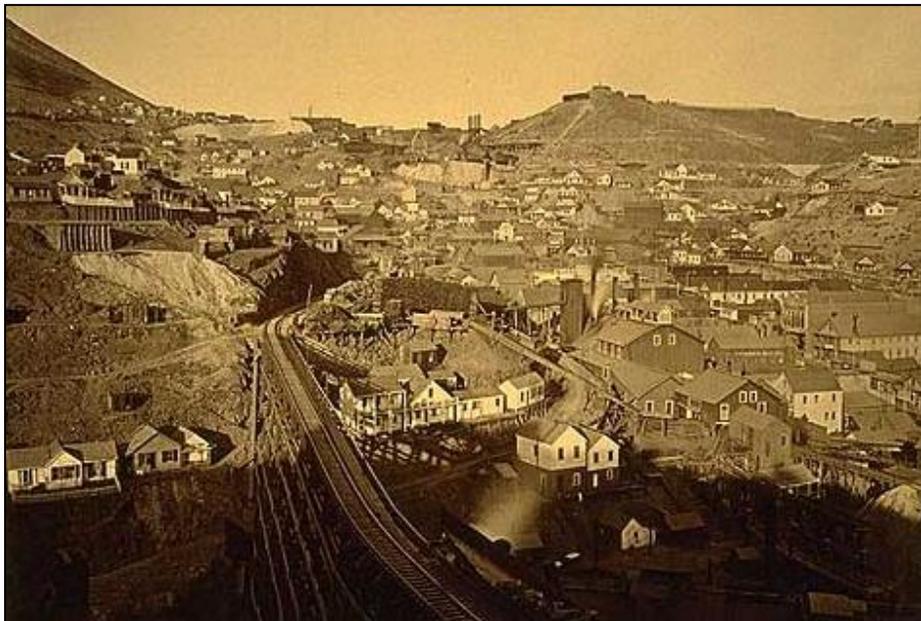
A significant economic recession occurred in 1865 resulting in a population decrease to approximately 4,000 people. However, Virginia City population gradually increased to about 11,000 people by 1868. In 1869, the Yellow Jacket Mine fire and the construction of the Virginia and Truckee Railroad occurred between Virginia City and Carson City. By August 24, 1872, the railroad connected to the Central Pacific Railroad, thus ending the wagon freight business over the Sierra and to Virginia City.

Mining operations and population increases existing in Virginia City and Gold Hill between 1869 and 1870 exhausted local water resources. In 1870, plans were made to bring water to the Comstock from Marlette Lake high in the Sierra near Lake Tahoe, down the east slope of the Sierra, and across Washoe Valley using an inverted siphon system. This was completed in August 1873 and, now modernized, is the source of Virginia City's water today.

Between 1873 and 1874, the population of the area exploded to 25,000 people in Virginia City and 5,000 people in Gold Hill as the result of the discovery of the Bonanza ore body in the Consolidated-Virginia Mine and extending into the California Mine. On October 26, 1875, just after 6:00 a.m., a fire, allegedly started from a woodstove, destroyed most of Virginia City, burning an area of about one square mile. During 1876 Virginia City, under post-fire reconstruction, supported a regional population of approximately 23,000. The Irish dominated in Virginia City, while the Cornish dominated the Gold Hill population. The third line vertical shafts were being sunk east of town (evidence by the large mine dumps) to intersect the Comstock Lode at depths of 2,500 to 4,500 feet. Of the 135 Comstock mines quoted in the San Francisco Stock Exchanges in 1876, only three, the Consolidated-Virginia, the California, and the Belcher were paying dividends. The others were levying assessments.

The decline of Virginia City began in 1877 as hard times hit the Comstock and discoveries were made in other mining districts in Nevada and California. In 1880, there were about 11,000 people and 1,200 buildings in Virginia City, of which 92 were constructed of brick-and-mortar in order to prevent the spread of another fire. Most of the mines closed after the Panic of 1893, and by 1900 the population of Virginia City had dwindled to 2,700 people, and continued downward to about 500 people by 1930. In 1980, the U.S. Census Bureau reported 1,503 people living in the Virginia City-Gold Hill area.

As an epilogue it may be said that the Comstock produced 29 millionaires in an environment where more than 1,000 mining companies were formed, of which only 19 ever paid dividends. More money was lost in the essentially unregulated stock market through assessments and stock manipulations than was ever produced in gold and silver.



**Figure 11.2-1:** Late nineteenth century Gold Hill, circa 1875

## 11.2.2 Twentieth century and today

### Mining and early economic conditions

The economy of Storey County and the Comstock has historically been directly and indirectly linked to mining. Without the unprecedented richness of the gold and silver contained in the Comstock Lode and the ability of early miners to develop them, there is no reason to account for the existence of the present towns of Virginia City and Gold Hill. During the initial mining period, other economic activities within the county, including agriculture, construction, finance, and transportation were dependent upon the local market fostered by mining.



The perceived stability of the mining industry, a large metropolitan population in nearby California, and high transportation costs to other contemporary industrial centers resulted in the development and diversification of the Comstock economy during the 1860s. Many of the industrial products needed by the mining industry and consumer goods required by the general population were soon supplied by local firms.

The unprecedented amounts of gold and silver which were extracted from the Comstock Lode helped finance the Union during the Civil War in addition to its major contribution to the building of the City of San Francisco. Because of the nature and depth of the ore in parts of the Comstock Lode, the lack of nearby natural and financial resources, and the mining industry's inexperience with the development of underground ore bodies, existing technologies were refined and new technologies developed. Among the more significant of these developments were square-set timbering to support the walls and ceilings of underground slopes, the Marlette Water System which incorporated a seven mile inverted siphon to bring water from the Sierra Nevada to the Comstock, the construction of the Virginia & Truckee Railroad, the three and one-half mile Sutro Tunnel which drained the Virginia City mines to the 1,600 foot level, the development and improvement of hydraulic pumps and elevators, and the refinement and invention of various ore milling processes and equipment. These developments were on the cutting edge of mid-nineteenth century technology.

With the exception of small-scale ranching, quarrying, and power generation along the county's northern border near the Truckee River, Storey County's economic well-being remained firmly linked to the health of the mining industry. By 1933, the average price of an ounce of gold increased to \$.64/oz. from \$.30/oz., and silver to \$.36/oz. from \$.25/oz. The spike in monetary value for these commodities correlated to an increase in mining activities throughout Nevada and the Comstock.

By the mid-1930s, numerous mines reopened and a period of steady growth ensued which economically benefitted the Comstock region. New ore processing mills were built which employed modern cyanide extraction technology. The main connecting roads to both Reno and Carson City were paved. However, these transportation improvements also contributed to the demise of the Comstock's only railroad link, the 60 year old Virginia and Truckee Railroad. The original function of the V&T Railroad was to provide inexpensive transport of ore to the processing mills on the Carson River ten miles away. With new ore processing mills located on the Comstock, and

alternative transportation opportunities offered by the newly paved highways, the V&T Railroad was forced to close its Virginia City line in 1938.

Unlike the relationship between extracted Comstock minerals and Civil War financing which existed in the 19th century, mining in the Comstock had no contribution to the involvements in Second World War. During this time, the War Production Board Order L-208 restricted "production of non-essential mines", including gold and silver operations. Although several mines and mills operated for a short period after World War II, this order effectively shut down Comstock mining operations until the government allowed the price of gold to be dictated by market demand in the mid-1970s. Several mining operations which started up after Order L-208 was rescinded in 1947 were unsuccessful due to substantially increased labor costs and production machinery shortages.

The region of Storey County outside of the Comstock Historic District contains numerous active, inactive or abandoned mine sites and a significant number of archeological sites, both historic and prehistoric. Archeological sites and mines sites are found clustered in specific regions and in isolated locations. Many sites are in regions remote from public access. Archeological sites provide information allowing the study of cultural forms of the past. Mining activity as reflected in active, inactive and abandoned mine sites may have a significant positive impact on the present economy and environment of the region. Planning commissioners should recognize and evaluate the importance and merit of each site when formulating planning goals for land use decisions.

### **Contemporary economic transformation**

During the 1950s and 1960s, the economy of Storey County shifted from mining and industry to tourism and gaming. The television show *Bonanza* was a significant contributor to the Comstock's transformation to a tourism-based economy. Virginia City was depicted in the popular and long-running television series as being located a short wagon-ride away from the Cartwright Ranch located in the majestic pines at Lake Tahoe. Notwithstanding the facts that the Comstock Lode is two mountain ranges away and over 35 miles by road, tourists began to flock to Virginia City looking for evidence of the Cartwright family and the town depicted in the series.

In 1973, new episodes of the television show were discontinued from programming, and consequently, the benefits of tourism that Virginia City and Gold Hill had experienced as a result of the series began to decline almost immediately. Exacerbating the economic decline of the Comstock, especially since the 1990s, was the ever-declining number of tourists visiting Reno and Lake Tahoe casinos. With gaming in California and other states becoming legal and highly-competitive to Nevada, the economic benefits provided to Virginia City and Gold Hill by the "spill-over" declined sharply, and this condition remains today.



**Figure 11.2-2:** The Bonanza Cafe shown above is a classic example of 1960s architecture exemplifying the “Myth of the American West”, such as what was largely depicted in the television show *Bonanza*. According to the Comstock Historic District, the architecture for this building, and others like it, may be considered of contemporary historic importance with regard to representing the mid-20th Century misrepresentation of the American West. *Bert Bedeau, Comstock Historic District Commission Director, 2014*

Considerable effort has been made in the past three decades by both local government agencies and private business to sustain the tourism economy on the Comstock. Significant adaptations to the changing economic parameters, included the wide-spread promotion of the Camel Races, Firefighters' Musters, Halloween and Christmas on the Comstock, Street Vibrations, Chili Cook-offs, Mountain Oyster Fries, Outhouse Races, and numerous of other events which capitalize on the mystique of Virginia City during the heyday of the Comstock have been made over the past decade and continue today.

During the summer of 2009, the Comstock began to reap the fruits of a collaborative effort between Storey County, Carson City, and several private enterprises to restore the V&T Railroad from Virginia City to Carson City. The reintroduced inter-local rail line was an instant hit for area residents and those visiting from other states and abroad. Tickets during the first season were sold-out soon after becoming available, and today the collaborative effort continues in order to maintain maximum ridership.

Today, Storey County benefits from a much more diversified economy and relies much less on the volatile tourism and mining industry. Since 2000, when the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center, located at McCarran between Lockwood and Painted Rock, was created, Storey County has grown to compete with Reno, Sparks, and Fernley in warehousing, distributing, and manufacturing industries. The industrial center quickly expanded to include such Fortune 500 Companies as Wal-Mart, PetSmart, James Hardie, Alcoa, Royal Extrusions, Dell Computers, and Mars/Kal-Kan. Between 2014 and 2016, the addition to Tesla and Switch/Supernap to the industrial center initiated a transformation of focus from conventional manufacturing and distribution to specialized high-tech manufacturing and research-and-development, and “cloud-based” data management. This pattern is expected to continue into the foreseeable future, with future economic growth expected to occur at both the industrial areas of the county and the Comstock.

### **11.3 Policy Framework for Historic Preservation**

Historic preservation in Storey County and the Comstock is a product of legislation enacted at the federal, state, and local levels. The policies of the various strata of government are coordinated to work together as they begin and expand upon guiding principles instituted with the adoption of the National Historic Preservation Act codified in Title 16 of the United States Code in 1966, to address the importance of saving cultural resources as a living part of any community in the United States.

The National Historic Preservation Act authorized the National Park Service, under the aegis of the Secretary of the Interior, to create and update the National Register of Historic Places. The Act also requires the appointment of State Historic Preservation Officers, the foundation and oversight of the Historic Preservation Fund, and requires the development and institution of federal, state, and tribal historic preservation program regulations, standards, and guidelines.

The most recognizable product of the NHPA is the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is an inventory of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant to the history of the American social landscape. Designated items characterize or are themselves noteworthy milestones or achievements in architecture, archeology, engineering, or culture to the United States and the state and local community in which they are located. Properties listed in the National Register are eligible for certain state and federal regulatory protections, financial assistance, and tax benefits. To be registered, a property must fulfill one or more of the following criteria:

- Be associated with historic events or activities;
- Be associated with important persons;
- Possess distinctive design or physical characteristics; or
- Possess potential to provide important information about prehistory or history.

U.S. Department of Interior staff may select from the National Register certain properties to be designated National Historic Landmarks. These chosen sites, in addition to the requirements for the National Register are, according to the Department of Interior, of “transcendent importance” to the history and development of the United States.

Less recognizable, but of equal importance, is the mandate by the National Historic Preservation Act to award grant funds for historic preservation and require the appointment of State Historic Preservation Officers. The officers are assigned to distribute these federal grant funds for the purpose of conducting comprehensive statewide surveys of historic structures and sites, recording and rehabilitating historic structures, and preparing comprehensive preservation plans. In Nevada, the policies are carried out under the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office.

## 11.4 Preservation Background

Because of the historical significance of the Comstock Lode, preservation efforts in the Virginia City area began in the 1940s. Attempts were made by local residents around that time to establish preservation boards and to acquire bonds for restoration of the town proper.

In 1961, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior designated the Virginia City National Landmark under the Historic Sites Act of 1935. In 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act (see Section 11.4 above) was passed, and resultantly the Virginia City National Historic Landmark was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The designation of the Virginia City National Historic Landmark today remains a federal designation with federal laws and regulations administered by the National Park Services.

The Virginia City Historic District Act was established by the Nevada Legislature in 1969 and amended in 1971 to become the Comstock Historic District Act (Nevada Revised Statute 384), with applicability throughout the Comstock, including areas in and around Virginia City, Gold Hill, Silver City, Dayton, Sutro, and the Highlands (see Figure 11.1 Comstock Historic District Boundary map). In 1981, the Comstock Act was again amended to prohibit permanent placement of trailers, mobile homes, and recreational vehicles. In 1990, the boundaries of the Comstock Historic District were refined, and outlying properties with nominal or no significant historic integrity or applicability to the Comstock area, including the Highlands, were categorically excluded from certain strict regulations of Nevada Revised Statute 384. The Comstock Historic District presently encompasses approximately 28,120 acres.

The Comstock Historic District Commission was established pursuant to Nevada Revised Statute 384 to promote the preservation and knowledge of the cultural resources of the Comstock Historic District. For example, as part of its assigned duties, the historic district provides specific information for property owners regarding the maintenance, rehabilitation, stabilization, and restoration of historic structures within the historic district, and it encourages property owners of commercial buildings to utilize federal tax-credit programs. The historic district commission is also charged with reviewing all permits for structures to be erected, reconstructed, altered, restored, moved or demolished within the historic district boundaries. Persons who wish to do such work must obtain a Certificate of Historic and Architectural Appropriateness from the historic district commission, or its director designee, prior to commencing work. Nevada Revised Statute 384 establishes the definition, board make-up, functions, and powers under which the Comstock Historic District Commission operates.

In its review process, the historic district commission determines whether the proposed action is appropriate to "the interests of the historic district and congruous with the aspects of the surrounding historic environment of the district" (NRS. 384.10). The criteria under which the historic district commission considers in evaluating applications for Certificates of Historical and Architectural Appropriateness include the following:

- Historic and architectural value and significance;
- Architectural style;
- Location of the subject lot;
- Position of the structure in relation to a public way and visibility from a public place;
- General design, arrangement, texture, material, color and size of the exterior architectural

features and the relationship of building to others in the neighborhood; and

- Relation of a structure's exterior architectural features to the recognized styles of early western architecture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The historic district commission provides free brochures and other literature on construction standards and design guidelines for the district.

All major applications are reviewed in an open public meeting, allowing for public input. Only through public meetings can residents or other members of the public express their feelings about the actions of the historic district commission. The members of the board also need to have public opinion to provide them with direction regarding the attitudes of the people who are interested in the management of the resource.

The staff is responsible for:

- Reviewing certain exterior changes to buildings/structures which do not necessarily require commission review. Historic district commission staff reserves the right to refer any project to the CHDC for review.
- Making recommendations to the historic district commission on agenda items.
- Establishing agendas for the monthly meetings.
- Maintaining the official records of the historic district.
- Developing education programs for the area.
- Assisting other agencies with preservation projects.

Other functions provided for in Nevada Revised Statute 384 include the establishment and maintenance of an office, which houses a historic resources library and the official records of the Comstock Historic District Commission. The office provides a location where people can review proposed projects with the staff. The historic district commission is also charged with policing the district for violations of any of the provisions of Nevada Revised Statute 384.

The historic district commission and the Storey County Commissioners have developed permit review guidelines which minimize conflicts. Most pertinently, a building project must have prior approval by the historic district commission before the county building department will issue a building permit.

## 11.5 Resource Inventory History

Photographic inventories of buildings, historic and prehistoric sites, and other resources within the Comstock Historic District have been undertaken since the 1939 Historic American Building Survey. Most of these efforts have been focused on architectural resources in and around Virginia City and Gold Hill, since they are perceived to be the most prominent cultural elements on the Comstock and in Storey County. A partial inventory of buildings on the Comstock was also conducted by Heather Hallenberg in 1979. The inventory led to the establishment of new construction and rehabilitation project design guidelines for Comstock Historic District buildings.

The first comprehensive inventory of historic buildings and structures, known as the Historic American Engineering Record inventory, was undertaken in 1980 by the U.S. Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service. The resulting work constitutes an important resource for the Comstock Historic District Commission in making decisions concerning the conservation of historic buildings. The project also provided initial archaeological and economic planning studies, walking and driving tour guides, and further developed design guidelines for buildings and their environment in the historic district.

Allan T. Comp and his associates also conducted a survey and inventory of buildings and structures in the 1980s. This survey, known as "Project 85", focused on Virginia City and it constitutes a total survey of all buildings within the town as of September 1985. Gold Hill, the Divide between Virginia City and Gold Hill, and Silver City and Dayton were surveyed as part of the project in 1987. This project also proposed a cultural resources management plan and pointed toward the development of the Virginia City Tourism Authority (now the Virginia City Tourism Commission) to encourage cultural tourism as a means by which to enhance public understanding and appreciation for area historic resources. The 1987 survey information led to an amendment of the Virginia City Historic District nomination on file at the National Register of Historic Places in Washington D.C. Due to the survey, the period of historic structure significance recognized by the historic district was extended to resources within its jurisdiction existing on or before 1942.

In response to a request by the Storey County Board of Commissioners, Archaeological Research Services, Inc. contracted with the county to perform archival and field studies. Prepared by archaeologist Ronald L. Reno and published in 1990, the Sensitivity Study of the Storey County Portion of the Comstock Historic District contained findings, summary and discussion of previous planning recommendations, an outline of an archaeological mitigation plan, and an archaeological inventory of Cottonwood Spring and vicinity (approximately six miles north of Virginia City). The report also contains five sensitivity maps designed to summarize location and potential significance of landscape, historic archaeological, prehistoric archaeological, architectural, and mineral resources.

The county commission, planning commission, and planning staff have utilized these sensitivity maps in evaluating architectural changes, construction, and regulations within the historic district.

## **11.6 Key Issues**

### **11.6.1 Education and Awareness**

The preservation of historic and prehistoric resources, including within and outside of the Comstock Historic District, is important to the character and heritage of Storey County and its culture. Cultural resources provide focal points which help shape the identity of the area and its people. The rich history that exists throughout Storey County provides rich opportunity for tourism, business, education, and cultural awareness. To make the most of these valuable resources, and protect them from further degradation, it is important that information about local historic, archeological, and cultural resources is conveyed to residents, businesses, and visitors through general communication and public outreach; local school curriculum; authentically themed tourism attractions; preservation of buildings, structures, and natural and manmade landscapes (e.g., mine tailings and dumps); and the preservation of overall historic community design and layout.

### **11.6.2 Encouraging Preservation**

Because historic resources can enrich the identity and character of the county, it is important that Storey County exercises leadership and coordinates with existing historic preservation groups to encourage cultural resources preservation. New land development should be made to be compatible with the historic character of the surrounding area. Organizations with focus on historic preservation issues should be encouraged and supported. The initiative shown by Storey County and the cooperation between other governmental entities and private organizations involved in historic preservation is critical in the ongoing preservation of valuable historic, archeological, and cultural resources.

### **11.6.3 Mining Uses**

#### **Mine Sites Countywide**

##### *Data Presentation*

Data on mine sites has been obtained from current sources available from the Mackay School of Mines Library at the University of Nevada, Reno and the United States Geological Survey topographic quadrangle maps. When dealing with specific land use proposals, planning officials should consult the Storey County possessory and patented claim maps available in the Storey County Assessor's Office.

Data on archaeological sites have been obtained from the Nevada State Museum and the Bureau of Land Management. Most sites have been field checked for accuracy; however, locations of specific development proposals may warrant additional field or archival research to evaluate the cultural resources affected.

##### *Active and Abandoned Mines*

Hazardous abandoned mines are found throughout Nevada and Storey County and they pose a significant risk to human and animal life. They include, but are not limited to, shafts, adits (horizontal openings), open pits, high-walls, and stopes. Active mines are those that indicated activity as of 1988. A total of nine different active mines are indicated in Storey County by this measurement. Inactive (abandoned) or status-not-indicated mines may be reopened and worked depending upon factors which affect the ability of the mine owner to bring the mine into production. A total of 47 different 'inactive' or 'status-not-indicated' mines are in this category.

Nevada state law requires owners of abandoned mines to fence or otherwise safeguard mine

workings. The Nevada Division of Minerals is legislatively mandated to conduct the state's Abandoned Mine Lands program to identify inactive mines, rank their degree of hazard, and carry out activities to secure these sites, be it through owners of the abandoned mines or division staff. The division also conducts extensive public awareness and education campaigns focused on the dangers in and around abandoned mines. In addition to mitigating safety hazards of abandoned mines, this master plan recognizes the value that mining remnants bring to maintaining the historic integrity of the Comstock. Abating hazards of abandoned mines should emphasize use of gates, fences, bat-cupolas, and other means to block public access, while leaving remnants of the mines intact for safe public viewing.



The Keystone Mine head frame had nearly collapsed at its original location in Gold Hill (top) before it was acquired by Storey County, and restored and relocated to its new home at the North Virginia City Visitors Center (right).



**Figure 11.6-1: Relocation and Preservation of the Keystone Mine Headframe**

*Mining within the Virginia City National Historic Landmark*

Considerable concern has been expressed by residents, businesses, and historic preservationists regarding the impact of modern surface mining on existing cultural resources.

The Comstock Historic District Commission's area of responsibility is limited to review and approval of exterior architectural features of buildings and other structures. The historic district has no regulatory jurisdiction over the use, alteration, or degradation of natural and man-made landforms and landscapes that contribute to the authenticity of historic communities and their surrounding environment. Additionally, the historic district and the county may have limited regulatory jurisdiction on uses occurring on federally-owned lands, including those within the historic district.

Regardless of local and state jurisdictional constraints, efforts to preserve the distinct character of the Comstock should not be solely focused on buildings and structures. Landscapes and landforms, including natural monuments, historic mine dumps and tailings, and new uses that substantially alter or degrade these features, should also be protected as practicable in order to preserve the historic integrity of the Comstock while also protecting the rights of private property owners.

Recent mine development plans have included cultural resource surveys, protection and preservation of buildings and sites and mitigation of negative impacts where disturbance is unavoidable. Chapter 4 Land Use contains the 1990 "Sensitivity Study of the Storey County portion of the Historic District", by Ronald L. Reno, supporting the goals and objectives for historic preservation contained in the 1994 county master plan. The report describes the pattern of continued degradation from mining that "has intensified the destruction of archeological sites" throughout Gold Hill, Virginia City, and their surrounding areas.

The 1994 master plan suggests that county leaders through local land use decisions, including review of land use allowances, preserve the distinctive historic character throughout the Comstock, including certain landscape features identified in Chapter 4 Land Use. County officials should work with landowners, residents, and businesses, and where applicable the Bureau of Land Management, in considering regulations and/or incentive programs that allow appropriate development to occur while taking into account the importance of key landmarks identified in this master plan.

*Most recent findings and recommendations*

In 2012, following more than eighteen months of public workshops in Virginia City, the county commission with recommendation by the planning commission approved substantial modifications to the county's zoning ordinance regulating surface and underground mining. The ordinance was ratified after considering mining and non-mining interests, including attorneys, citizens of Storey County and neighboring Silver City (Lyon County), and various state and federal agencies throughout a series of public workshops over eighteen months. Stakeholders from both sides of the mining issue expressed to the board, planning commission, and county planning staff their firm desire for the provisions and supporting findings of the mining ordinance to be embedded into the comprehensive master plan update. Accordingly, it is recognized that that future amendments to mining regulations, and special use permits and other entitlements that apply to mining interests, will conform to desires expressed and agreed upon by the numerous parties involved in this planning endeavor. This master plan intends to abide by the unified interests of the community in this regard.

This master plan supports enhanced regulations on surface mining while partially deregulating underground and other mining activities believed to have nominal impacts on other uses and the

integrity of the Virginia City National Historic Landmark. Regulatory provisions in the county should apply to exploration and mining of locatable metallic minerals such as gold and silver, and non-metallic minerals such as limestone and gypsum. Such provisions should also be maintained for ancillary activities to exploration and mining.

The intent of this master plan is to recognize and protect both mineral and surface property rights, provide for mineral exploration, allow for surface mining where appropriate, and allow and encourage underground mining across the county, when exploration and mining activities are consistent with the general purpose, goals, and objectives of this master plan, and when they do not result in substantial adverse impacts to the adjacent residential and commercial uses, tourism, and local economy, natural resources (without appropriate mitigation), or other matters affecting the health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens of the county.

In order to balance different types of mining, and allow the exploration and extraction of minerals in all parts of the county as allowed by certain property rights, the ordinance provides for a tiered structure of regulations for categories of mining including: recreational use, casual use, small operations, and large operations. They are defined as follows:

1. **Recreational Use:** This classification includes recreational gold panning, sluicing activities, and “rock hounding” lasting a short duration of time. Recreational use exploration and mining should be allowed with a minimal level of regulation as this level of activity typically causes little to no impact on the natural environment or surrounding land uses.
2. **Casual Use:** This classification includes surface and underground exploration and mining with the use of hand tools for a longer period of time than recreational use. The use of explosives and mechanized or motorized equipment is prohibited. Tools typically associated with casual use include picks, shovels, gold pans, sluice boxes, miner’s moss, wheelbarrows, ore carts, and other similar manually operated devices. Casual uses exploration and mining should be allowed with a minimal level of regulation as this level of activity typically causes little to no impact on the natural environment or surrounding uses.
3. **Small Operations:** This classification includes surface and underground mining and exploration involving the use of mechanized or motorized equipment, or involving the use of explosives, but remaining less than the duration, excavation, and surface area disturbance thresholds at which a special use permit is required for large operations, or the limitations imposed on the restricted Comstock Historic Preservation Area. A combination or series of small operations permits or uses (i.e., serial or chain exploration or mining) that violate or serve to circumvent the letter and spirit of this chapter or title will not be permitted. This level of use should be regulated in accordance with the anticipated level impacts to the environment and surrounding land uses.
4. **Large Operations:** This classification includes surface and underground exploration and mining meeting or exceeding the duration, excavation, or surface area disturbance thresholds requiring a special use permit. This level of use should be regulated in the most stringent manner, except as to not cause unreasonable restriction as to infringe upon exiting mineral rights.
5. **Ancillary uses:** When allowed by the provisions of section 17.92.090 Ancillary uses and the underlying regulatory zone, beneficiation and processing, boarding accommodations, concrete batch plants, and the keeping of large domestic animals which are incidental to

the small operations or large operations exploration and mining may be made part of the submitted permit for exploration and mining.

The following findings should be included in any regulation of or approval for mining operations within the Comstock Historic District, and these findings should be the basis for which such operations are allowed, allowed with mitigating conditions, or denied.

1. Certain mineral and surface property rights exist across the county, and this master plan serves to protect those rights. This master plan recognizes and serves to abide by the Mining Law of 1872 which provides mineral property owners the right to mine where the property is a mine patent pursuant to title 30 of the United States Code Section 29, or an unpatented mining claim located pursuant to section 23, as well as the right to milling and ancillary uses necessary for the success of mining.
2. Storey County has a diversified economy including agriculture, commercial, industrial, tourism, recreation, and mining. Permitted uses under these categories are found to be economically and socially beneficial to the county, directly and indirectly, when they are appropriately regulated so that they do not cause substantial adverse impacts to adjacent uses and are not detrimental to the health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens, property owners, scholars, and businesses in the county.
3. This master plan serves to address and provide for regulations which mitigate potential adverse impacts that mining and related activities may have on the natural and historic environment and adjacent land uses (e.g., residential, commercial, tourism, etc.) as they now exist or as they may in the future be developed as a result of the implementation of the provisions and policies of this master plan, and any other plan, program, map, or ordinance adopted or under consideration, pursuant to an official notice by the county or other governmental agency having jurisdiction to guide growth and development.
4. This master plan supports that the existing historical environment, including natural and manmade features, in and around the Virginia City National Historic Landmark provides a sense of orientation and authentic place and feeling which is beneficial to residents, businesses, investors, visitors, scholars, and future generations. This plan emphasizes the importance of reducing land use conflicts between mining and other land uses and preserving the historic resources and heritage of the Comstock for the enjoyment and education of present and future residents, visitors, and scholars, and the economic opportunities afforded. Present and future mining and its ancillary uses within the Comstock, when conducted in a way to preserve and not cause substantial negative impacts to existing cultural resources, also contributes to the sense of orientation and authenticity of the historic mining area. The provisions of this master plan serve to consider certain mining proposals within the Virginia City National Historic Landmark while protecting its existing historic environment, including natural landscapes and manmade features.
5. Surface mining (e.g., open-pit mining) by its nature causes substantially greater impact to the surface environment than underground mining, and in some instances, precludes complete restoration of the affected land to a condition existing prior to the surface mine. Thus, unless appropriately mitigated through reclamation of land, surface mining has a greater potential for adverse impacts to adjacent land uses, the Virginia City National Historic Landmark, the tourism economy, and the health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens of the county. While the provisions under this chapter provide for surface

mining under certain circumstances, underground mining is highly encouraged in all areas of the county, including within the Virginia City National Historic Landmark, when conducted pursuant to the provisions of this chapter.

6. Areas surrounding State Routes 341 and 342 within the Virginia City National Historic Landmark are found to contain critical natural and manmade features which contribute to the historic integrity of Gold Hill and Virginia City. This area has been incorporated into the “Comstock Historic Preservation Area” map as shown in Figure 11.6-3 and made part of this master plan.
7. Under certain circumstances and when regulated appropriately by local ordinance, mining and processing of existing historic mine dumps and tailings, including those located within the Virginia City National Historic Landmark, may be found to be beneficial when the existing mine dumps and tailings contain Contaminates of Concern applicable to the Carson River Mercury Superfund Site and when appropriate measures are employed to preserve the historic significance of the manmade landscape features.

In 2014, the new regulations were applied to a local mining company’s major special use permit amendment. A significant difference between the company’s previous and amended special use permit is the requirement that the company must post mine reclamation surety bonding that extends beyond the requirements of the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection and other applicable regulatory agencies.

Mining is expected to remain a significant factor in Gold Hill into the foreseeable future; and county officials will continually be faced with balancing and mining and non-mining interests and rights in the area.

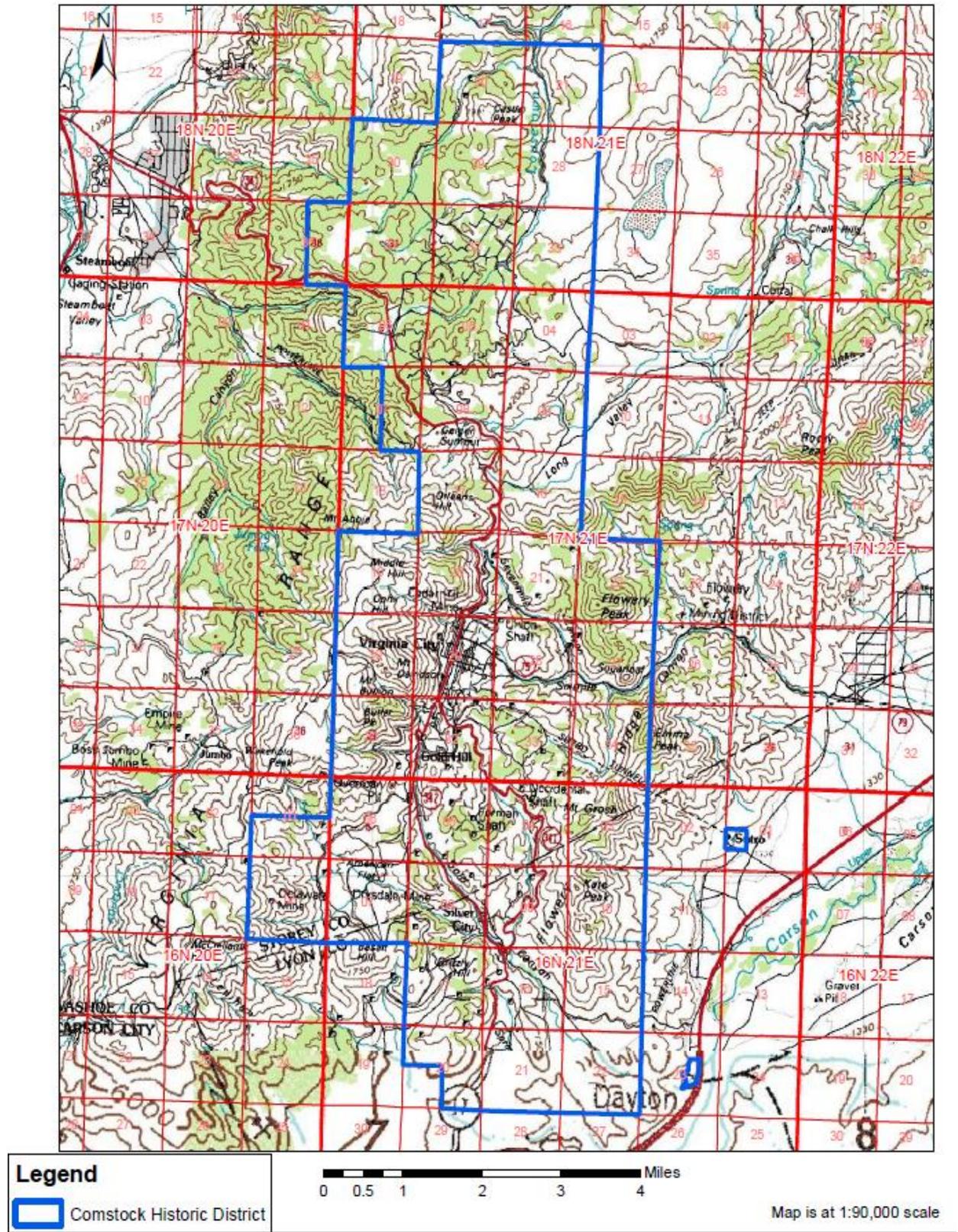


Figure 11.6-2: Comstock Historic District jurisdictional boundary map Source: Comstock Historic District, 2016



Figure 11.6-3: Comstock Historic Preservation Area Map (2012)

### 11.6.4 Protecting Historic and Prehistoric Archeological Sites

A total of 63 archeological sites have been identified in Storey County. Historic sites relate to the intrusion of the culture of United States citizens and include such features and artifacts as town sites, buildings and building sites, railroad structures, and abandoned mine sites in addition to those sites depicted as inactive or abandoned mine sites. Prehistoric sites are generally aboriginal in origin and include such features as rock art, nomad camp sites, trash dump locations, and sites containing primitive tool, bone, or other indications of land uses prior to the contact of European and indigenous American cultures. These sites are protected by federal law which prohibits the release of specific location site information in a public document.

#### Lagomarsino Petroglyphs

An 80 acre site exists toward the center of the county where an estimated 2,000 (Nevada Rock Art Foundation, 2012) aboriginal prehistoric petroglyphs exist (see Chapter 11 Cultural Resources Plan). The site is protected by federal law. This master plan is intentionally absent of maps showing the precise location of petroglyphs. The internet, however, has increased awareness of the existence and location of the petroglyphs, and, resultantly, vandalism and theft have become an increasing problem.

Storey County, various volunteer organizations including the Nevada Rock Art Foundation, local residents, and other stakeholders over the past two decades expressed desire to the State Historic Preservation Office and other state agencies to designate and manage the site as a state park with full-time supervision. At this time, however, local and state resources available to appropriately manage the site are limited. County officials will continue to work with local residents and volunteer groups to voluntarily monitor the site while the county and various agencies research permanent solutions to protecting this resource.

County officials should be aware of the conflict which this policy represents and be prepared to deal with it accordingly. Proposed land use projects and the elements they bring to the area could have a significant negative impact on this cultural resource. County officials should seek counsel from the State Historic Preservation Office when considering land use proposals that could have direct and indirect negative effects on the petroglyphs.



**Figure 11.6-4:** The Lagomarsino Canyon Petroglyphs Site contains over 2,000 rock art panels stretching an area approximately one-quarter mile in length. The panels are estimated 12,000 years old.  
*Source: Nevada Rock Art Foundation, 2012*

**Cottonwood Spring Archeological Site**

A comprehensive inventory of archeological resources in an area approximately four miles northeast of Virginia City, in and around Cottonwood Spring and Chalk Hills Ranch in Long Valley, was conducted in 1990 by Archeological Research Services, Inc. by request of the county commission.

The study, contained in Appendix F, built upon previous cultural resource modeling conducted in 1975 by Elston and Rusco concerning the probable effects of the development of the Virginia City Highlands on existing area historic and prehistoric resources (Elston and Rusco). The goals of the study were to refine previous map modeling by analyzing existing artifacts in the area and delineating on maps specific areas of cultural concern, and to survey areas of private land in the Highlands subject to future disturbance. The report prepared by Ronald Reno and Vickie Clay (1990) contains recommendations to use findings in the study to develop reasonable measures by which to preserve archeological resources on the private lands through incentives and other non-punitive measures (Reno and Clay).

**Other Archeological Sites**

There are other potential historic and prehistoric sites identified throughout the county that should be considered for further archeological study as well as protective measures.

## **11.7 Goals, Policies and Objectives**

**Goal 1 Foster an environment conducive to economic growth and historic preservation**

**Objective 1 To enhance collaboration between Storey County and historic preservationists groups such as the Comstock Historic District Commission**

Policy 1 By allowing and promoting new commercial and residential development within the Comstock Historic District

Policy 2 By fostering balance between new development and preservation of historic, archeological, and cultural resources

Policy 3 By designing new developments and community improvements to complement the surrounding historic environment

Policy 4 By maintaining, where practicable, the historic character of buildings, sidewalk, utilities, and other improvements and structures within the Comstock Historic District

Policy 5 By encouraging adaptive reuse and integration of historic properties into new projects where possible and appropriate

Policy 6 By discouraging amusement parks and other uses which exploit rather than complement the area's history

**Goal 2 Educate, incentivize, and promote historic resources preservation**

**Objective 1 To improve the effectiveness of education and outreach**

Policy 1 By providing education and assistance to residents, businesses, and other stakeholders to promote historic preservation and manage historic resources

Policy 2 By studying potential public and private funding sources for the research and identification of archeological resources in the county

Policy 3 By improving public understanding and interest in historic preservation with a variety of resources including reading material, exhibits, news and social media, broadcasts, school visits, and other public outreach

Policy 4 By working with citizens and property owners to promote voluntary donation of property, deed restrictions, grants of easements, and other forms of less than fee-simple ownership that enable preservation of historic properties

Policy 5 By coordinating with the Storey County School District to develop and implement public education programs and classroom standardized curricula that promote awareness and preservation of local cultural resources

Policy 6 Promote cultural resources awareness and preservation through local tourism and visitor entertainment programs and activities

**Goal 3 Continue long-term planning for the preservation of historic resources**

**Objective 1 To continue and enhance inter-local agency cooperation**

Policy 1 By working with state and federal agencies to plan for and secure grants to preserve and restore historic resources

Policy 2 By working collaboratively with the Virginia City Tourism Commission and

- Comstock Historic District Commission to develop projects to preserve and restore historic resources within the historic district
- Policy 3 By planning and developing programs for historic preservation on lands within the Comstock Historic District and other places in the county where significant historic, archeological, and cultural resources are found
- Policy 4 By working with the Comstock Historic District Commission to minimize conflicts between county and historic district structure design requirements
- Policy 5 By consistently enforcing applicable ordinances and statutes
- Goal 4 Protect and preserve the Lagomarsino Canyon Petroglyphs site**
- Objective 1 To maintain interim efforts to protect the petroglyphs**
- Policy 1 By working with local residents and volunteer groups to casually monitor and exhibit presence at the site
- Policy 2 By constructing and maintaining motor vehicle barriers at site access points
- Policy 3 By educating the public about the site’s importance as a cultural resource
- Policy 4 By refraining from the dissemination of maps and directions to the site in this master plan and in other official documents until appropriate permanent monitoring of the premises is established
- Policy 5 By preventing area road and access improvements around the petroglyphs site
- Objective 2 To establish long-term protection of the petroglyphs site**
- Policy 1 By helping appropriate managing agencies establish permanent security at the site
- Policy 2 By collaborating with volunteer organizations, such as the Nevada Rock Art Foundation, and local residents and stakeholders to develop a comprehensive master plan detailing goals, objectives, and benchmarks for site improvement and long-term security and management
- Policy 3 By maintaining a position with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office, the Nevada Division of State Lands, and other state agencies to designate the site as a secure and actively managed state park
- Policy 4 By continuing to seek grants and other funding sources to improve the site with full-time security staffing and long-term management
- Objective 3 To improve public access to the petroglyphs site and protect it from theft and vandalism**
- Policy 1 By planning for the transfer of the site to federal or state ownership and/or active security and management of the site
- Policy 2 By improving public access roads to the site after full-time security and management of the site has been established