

CHAPTER 11

Cultural & Historic Resources

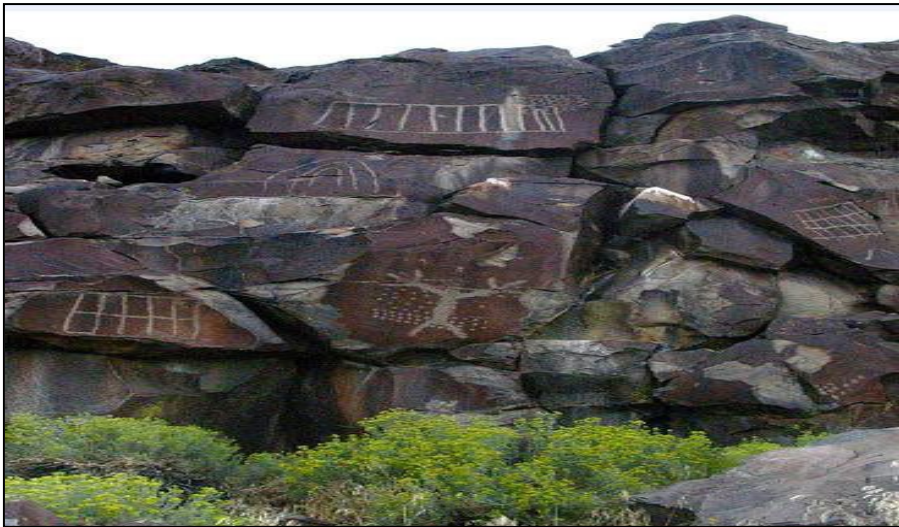


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11.1 Chapter Introduction

Storey County has experienced significant change over time, and the county's history is reflected through preserved buildings and other historic, archaeological, and cultural resources. These elements of the county's history help illustrate the social, economic, and political climate of the area over time, for both residents and visitors.

Historic preservation of the county's cultural resources supports 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 historic resources in the community that contribute to local identity and economic development opportunities in the Gold Hill and Virginia City area and throughout the county.

This chapter is intended to be used as a tool for elected and appointed community leaders, and the community-at-large, for evaluating issues and making decisions regarding the location and design of land uses in areas where cultural resources may be impacted. Key cultural resources in Storey County include:

- Comstock Historic District
- Lagomarsino Petroglyphs Site
- Historic structures and sites outside the Comstock Historic District.

Cultural resources also include, but are not limited to:

- Historic townships (including the townships of Virginia City and Gold Hill), structures, and natural and manmade landscapes within the boundaries of the Virginia City National Historic Landmark.
- Historic roads, trails, highways, and associated buildings
- Railways, sidings, and stations
- Racetracks
- Mining camps and districts, historic mine portals, shaft openings, and workings (with safety mitigation)
- Cemeteries and isolated gravesites
- Villages, campsites, and other sites from Indigenous groups in the area prior to contact with Euro-American mining settlers (sometimes referenced as “prehistoric” or “pre-contact”)
- Rock art sites
- Rock shelters, caves, and caverns
- Tool-stone sources and quarries
- Less tangible resources including dance forms, customary beliefs, material traits of a group, and integrated patterns of human behavior passed to succeeding generations by stories and traditions

Through the preservation of cultural resources, Storey County will protect regional heritage while also

promoting compatible development including local business growth and tourism. Some actions 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 Historic District
- Advance 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 Mining History

The unprecedented wealth of the Comstock Lode helped shape Virginia City and 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 placer deposits below what would later be the Ophir Mine and his location of the first mining claim in the Comstock area.

In 1859, Virginia City had an estimated 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 area, many from the California goldfields. By 1863, mining successes and promotion brought the Virginia City and area population to some 15,000 people. Significant historic milestones of this time include:

- The political ramifications of the Comstock Lode 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).
- 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 the early 1860s, construction of the old Geiger Grade Toll Road was started and in partial use by the end of the same 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, occurred in 1862.
- The Comstock Lode brought enough money and politicians to the area to promote statehood. Despite the Territory of Nevada not having sufficient population for statehood eligibility, it was admitted to the Union as the 36th state by the Enabling Act signed by President Abraham Lincoln on October 31, 1864.

The Comstock Lode helped finance the Union during the Civil War and contributed to the building of the city of San Francisco. Homes, businesses, and office blocks were built, and gas- and sewer pipelines were installed in the principal main streets. Daily stagecoaches 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.

A significant economic recession occurred in 1865, resulting in a population decrease to approximately 4,000 people. However, Virginia City's population gradually increased to about 11,000 people by 1868.

- In 1869, the Yellow Jacket Mine fire occurred.
- 1869 also brought the construction of the Virginia & Truckee Railroad 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 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 area 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. A fire (allegedly started from a woodstove) destroyed most of Virginia City on October 26, 1875, burning an area of about one square mile. Regardless, during 1876 post-fire reconstruction, Virginia City supported a regional population of approximately 23,000. Virginia City's population primarily consisted of Irish settlers, while Cornish settlers made up the majority of the Gold Hill population.

The third line of 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 area 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. Most of the mines closed after the Panic of 1893, an economic recession which lasted until 1897. 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 Storey County overall.

As an epilogue, it may be said that the Comstock Lode 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 Early Twentieth Century Mining and Economic Conditions

The economy of Storey County and the Comstock area 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 the deposits, there is no reason that accounts 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 area 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.

Because of the nature and depth of the ore in parts of the Comstock Lode, 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 area; the construction of the Virginia & Truckee Railroad; the 3.5-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 from \$0.30 per ounce to \$0.64 per ounce, and silver from \$0.25 per ounce to \$0.36 per ounce. The spike in monetary value for these commodities correlated to an increase in mining activities throughout Nevada and the Comstock area.

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 area's only railroad link, the 60-year-old Virginia & Truckee Railroad. The original function of the Virginia & Truckee 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 in the Comstock area, and alternative transportation opportunities offered by the newly paved highways, the Virginia & Truckee Railroad was forced to close its Virginia City line in 1938.

Unlike the relationship between extracted Comstock ore and Civil War financing which existed in the nineteenth century, mining in the Comstock area had no contribution to U.S. involvement in World War II. 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.

11.2.3 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 area'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 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 area, 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.

The Bonanza Cafe (Figure 11.2-2) is a classic example of 1960s architecture exemplifying the "Myth of the American West," as 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 demonstrating the mid-twentieth century misrepresentation of the American West.

Considerable effort has been made in the past three decades by both local government agencies and private businesses to sustain the tourism economy in the Comstock area. Significant adaptations to the changing economic parameters have been made over the past decade, and continue today, to capitalize on the mystique of Virginia City during the heyday of the Comstock Lode including the wide-spread promotion of events such as the Camel Races, Firefighters' Musters, Halloween and Christmas on the

Comstock, Street Vibrations, Chili cook-offs, Mountain Oyster Fries, Outhouse Races, and numerous other events.



Figure 11.2-2: Promotional image for *Bonanza* and the Bonanza Cafe. (Source: Bert Bedeau, Comstock Historic District Commission Director, 2014)

During the summer of 2009, the Comstock area began to reap the benefits of a collaborative effort between Storey County, Carson City, and several private enterprises to restore the Virginia & Truckee Railroad from Virginia City to Carson City. The reintroduced inter-local rail line was an instant popular attraction 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. Virginia City continues to be a year-round international tourist attraction with a population of approximately 918 people (according to the Nevada governor’s 2022 certified estimate – for additional population information, see Chapter 5 – Population).

In more recent years, Storey County has benefitted from a more diversified economy. In 2000, the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center was established at McCarran between Lockwood and Painted Rock. Since then, Storey County has grown to compete with Reno, Sparks, and Fernley in warehousing, distributing, and manufacturing industries, including specialized high-tech manufacturing, research-and-development, and “cloud-based” data management with companies like Tesla, Switch, and Google. Development for manufacturing and technology is expected to continue in the industrial area of the county, as discussed further in Chapter 7 – Economic Development. Economic growth can help bring more opportunities and investment to other areas of the county and benefit the preservation of historic, archaeological, and cultural resources in the county.

11.3 Historic Preservation

11.3.1 Policy Framework

The National Historic Preservation Act was 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 (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 the development and institution of federal, state, and tribal historic preservation program regulations, standards, and guidelines.

A well-known product of the National Historic Preservation Act is the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). 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, archaeology, engineering, or culture to the United States or the state or local community in which they are located. Historic 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:

- Criterion A: Be associated with historic events or activities
- Criterion B: Be associated with important persons
- Criterion C: Possess distinctive design or physical characteristics
- Criterion D: Possess potential to provide important information about prehistory or history.

In addition to fulfilling one or more of the criteria above, the property must also demonstrate integrity. Integrity is the ability of the property to convey its significance. A historic property will typically retain all or most of its aspects of integrity. However, one or more aspects may be integral in conveying the significance of a property while others are less so. It is essential to identify which aspects of integrity are the most important in assessing the property's integrity. The seven aspects of integrity are:

- Location
- Design
- Setting
- Materials
- Workmanship
- Feeling
- Association.

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.

The National Historic Preservation Act also allows the award of grant funds for historic preservation and requires the appointment of State Historic Preservation Officers. Officers are assigned to distribute 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.

11.3.2 Storey County Preservation Background

Because of the historical significance of the Comstock Lode, preservation efforts in the Virginia City area began in the 1940s. Local residents established preservation boards and attempted to acquire bonds for restoration of the town proper.

In 1961, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior designated the Virginia City National Historic Landmark under the Historic Sites Act of 1935. When the National Historic Preservation Act was passed in 1966, the Virginia City National Historic Landmark was listed in the National Register. The designation of the Virginia City National Historic Landmark today remains a federal designation with federal laws and regulations administered by the National Park Service.

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 [NRS] 384), with applicability throughout the Comstock area, including areas in and around Virginia City, Gold Hill, Silver City, Dayton, Sutro, and the Highlands. In 1981, the Comstock Act was again amended to prohibit permanent placement of trailers, mobile homes, and recreational vehicles in the Comstock Historic District. 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 NRS 384. The Comstock Historic District currently encompasses approximately 28,120 acres (see Figure 11.4-3 Comstock Historic District Boundary map).

The Comstock Historic District Commission was established pursuant to NRS 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 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 use federal tax-credit programs. The Comstock 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. NRS 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 considered by the Historic District Commission 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

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

All major applications are reviewed in an open public meeting, allowing for public input. The Comstock Historic District Commission also provides free brochures and other literature on construction standards and design guidelines for the district.

The Comstock Historic District Commission has a staff, which is responsible for:

- Reviewing certain exterior changes to buildings/structures which do not necessarily require commission review. Staff reserves the right to refer any project to the Comstock Historic District Commission 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 NRS 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 staff. The Comstock Historic District Commission is also charged with monitoring the district for violations of any of the provisions of NRS 384.

The Historic District Commission and the Storey County Commissioners have developed permit review guidelines which minimize conflicts. In particular, a building project must have prior approval by the Historic District Commission before the County Building Department will issue a building permit.

11.3.3 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 in the Comstock area and in Storey County. A partial inventory of buildings in the Comstock area 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 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," constitutes a total survey of all buildings within the town of Virginia City as of September 1985. Gold Hill, the Divide between Virginia City and Gold Hill, 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 to enhance public understanding and appreciation for area historic resources. The 1987 survey information led to an amendment of the Virginia City National Historic Landmark nomination on file at the National Register 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" (i.e., 1990 Sensitivity Study, included with this master plan as Appendix C) contains 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 depict location and potential significance of landscape, historic archaeological, prehistoric archaeological, architectural, and mineral resources.

The Storey County Board of Commissioners, Planning Commission, and planning staff have used these sensitivity maps from the 1990 Sensitivity Study in evaluating architectural changes, construction, and regulations within the historic district.

11.3.4 Key Preservation Issues

11.3.4.1 Education and Awareness

The preservation of historic and prehistoric resources, including within and outside of the Comstock Historic, 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 history of Storey County provides opportunity for tourism, business, education, and cultural awareness. To capitalized on valuable resources, and protect them from further degradation, it is important that information about local historic, archaeological, 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.

11.3.4.2 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 compatible with the

historic character of the surrounding area. Cooperation between government entities and private organizations involved in historic preservation is critical in the ongoing preservation of valuable historic, archaeological, and cultural resources.

11.4 Mining Uses

11.4.1 Mine Sites Data

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 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.

11.4.2 Active and Abandoned Mines

Active mines are those that indicated activity as of 1988. A total of nine 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. Approximately 47 inactive or status-not-indicated mines are in this category. Hazardous conditions exist at abandoned mines throughout Nevada and Storey County, and they pose a significant risk to human and animal safety. Hazardous features include, but are not limited to, shafts, adits (horizontal openings), open pits, high-walls, and stopes.

Nevada State law requires owners of abandoned mines to prevent access with fencing or otherwise safeguard mine workings. The Nevada Division of Minerals (Division) is legislatively mandated to follow 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 educational campaigns focused on the hazards in and around abandoned mines.

This master plan emphasizes the importance of mitigating safety hazards of abandoned mines, while also recognizing the value that mining remnants bring to maintaining the historic integrity of the Comstock area. Methods for 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 mining activity intact for safe public viewing.

Figure 11.4-1: Relocation and Preservation of the Keystone Mine Headframe

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).

11.4.3 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 area should not be solely focused on buildings and structures. Landscapes and landforms, including natural monuments, and historic mine dumps and tailings should also be protected as practicable to preserve the historic integrity of the Comstock area. While recognizing the rights of private property owners, natural and cultural resources should be protected from new uses that substantially alter or degrade important features of the Comstock Historic District.

The 1990 Sensitivity Study describes the pattern of continued degradation from mining that "has intensified the destruction of archaeological sites" throughout Gold Hill, Virginia City, and their surrounding areas. Later County Master Plans in 1994 and 2016 included policies to protect cultural

resources, based on the 1990 Sensitivity Study. 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.

11.4.4 Mining and Land Use Regulations

Through local land use decisions, County leaders can prioritize preserving the distinctive historic character throughout the Comstock area, including certain landscape features identified in Chapter 3 – Land Use. County officials should continue to work with landowners, residents, businesses, and where applicable the Bureau of Land Management (as discussed further in Chapter 4 – Public Lands), in considering regulations and/or incentive programs that allow appropriate development to occur while balancing preservation of key landmarks identified in this master plan.

In 2012, the Planning Commission and Storey County Board of Commissioners approved substantial modifications to the County’s zoning ordinance regulating surface- and underground mining (County Code Section 17.92). The ordinance was ratified after considering mining and non-mining interests, and consultation with attorneys, citizens of Storey County and neighboring Silver City (Lyon County), and various state and federal agencies through a series of public workshops over 18 months.

Stakeholders from different sides of the mining issue expressed to the Board of Commissioners, Planning Commission, and County planning staff their firm desire for the provisions and supporting findings of the mining ordinance to be embedded into the 2016 Master Plan. This master plan update also carries forward the same findings. Future amendments to mining regulations, and special use permits and other entitlements that apply to mining interests, should conform to these findings, which represent the unified interests of the community.

The County 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 (such as recreational uses). Regulatory provisions in the county should apply to exploration and mining of locatable metallic minerals such as gold and silver, and non-metallic natural resources 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 methods across the county.
- Ensure exploration and mining activities are consistent with the general purpose, goals, and objectives of this master plan and 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.

To balance different types of mining methods and allow the exploration and extraction of minerals in all parts of the county as allowed by certain property rights, the mining ordinance provides for a tiered structure of regulations based on classifications of mining activities, 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 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 use exploration and mining should be allowed with a minimal level of regulation as this 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, as shown in Figure 11.4-2. A combination or series of small operations permits or uses (e.g., serial or chain exploration or mining) that violate or serve to circumvent the letter and spirit of County Code Chapter 17.92 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. Large operations should be regulated in the most stringent manner, except as to not cause unreasonable restriction as to infringe upon existing mineral rights.
5. **Ancillary Uses:** When allowed by the provisions of County Code Section 17.92.090 and the underlying regulatory zone, certain ancillary uses which are incidental to the small operations or large operations exploration and mining may be made part of submitted permits. These ancillary uses could include beneficiation and processing, boarding accommodations, concrete batch plants, and the keeping of large domestic animals.

There are two historic preservation areas or district boundaries within the Comstock area of Storey County, each with separate jurisdictions that govern and regulations that apply, as depicted in Figure 11.4-2 and Figure 11.4-3 and as noted below:

- Figure 11.4-2 depicts the Comstock Historic Preservation Area, which dictates the area subject to special restrictions per Storey County’s mining ordinance adopted in 2012.
- Figure 11.4-3 shows the Comstock Historic District boundary, which includes areas within and outside Storey County. This area is subject to special requirements and reviews from the Comstock Historic District Commission. This map was originally adopted in 1972. As of the time of this County Master Plan update in 2024, the State Historic Preservation Office is working on a revision of this map that will remove the Virginia City Highlands.



Figure 11.4-2: Comstock Historic Preservation Area Map (2012)

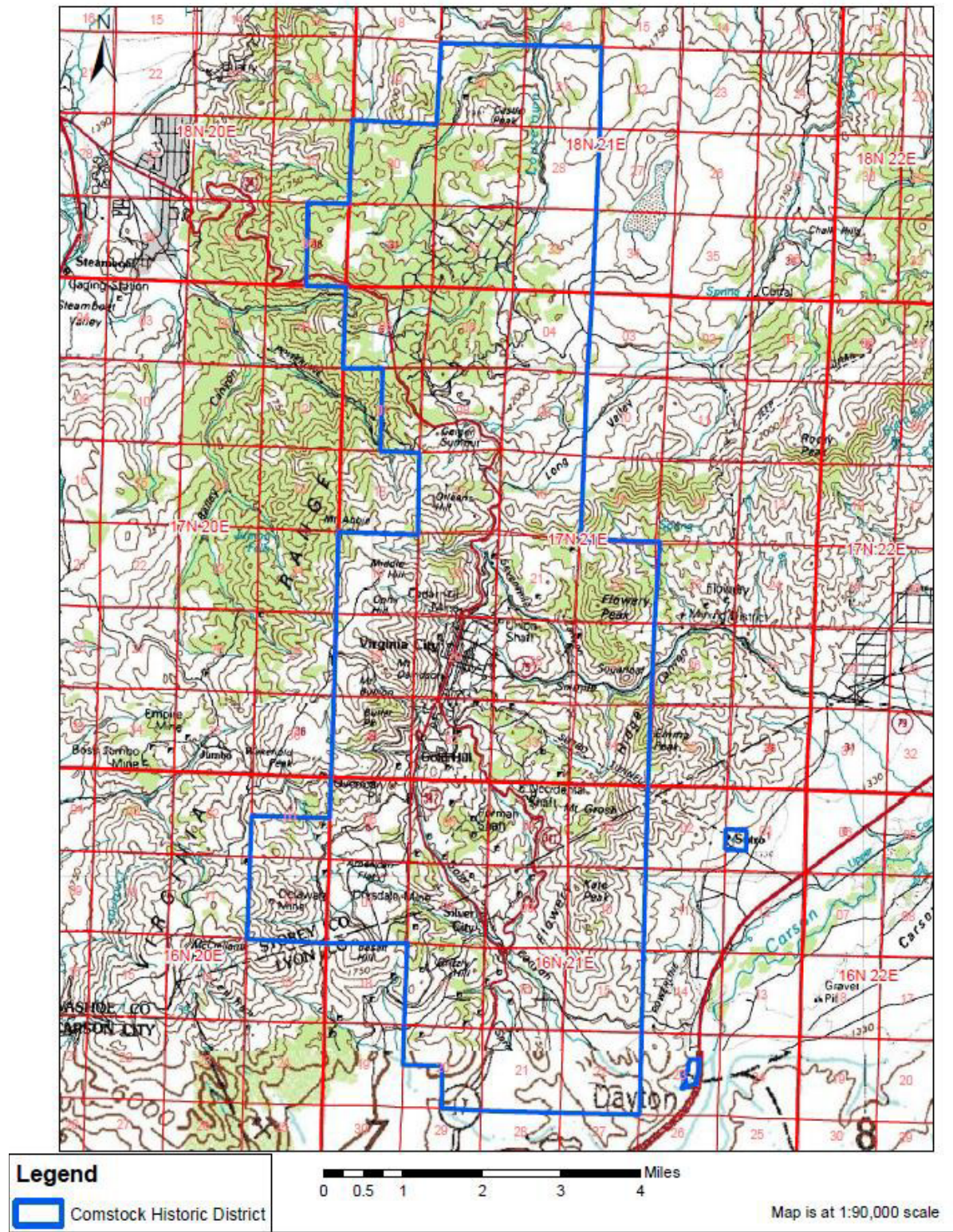


Figure 11.4-3: Comstock Historic District Jurisdictional Boundary Map (Source: Comstock Historic District, 2016)

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 Storey 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) 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 area 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 area, 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 methods are 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 depicted in Figure 11.4-2 and made part of this master plan.

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 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.

The regulations adopted in 2012 can also impact mining special use permits that were issued prior to the 2012 regulations if the older permits are amended. For example, 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 consideration in Gold Hill and the surrounding Comstock area into the foreseeable future; and County officials will continually need to balance mining and non-mining interests and rights in the area.

11.5 Protecting Archaeological Sites

Data on archaeological sites, including historic and prehistoric sites, has been obtained from the Nevada State Museum and Bureau of Land Management. A total of 63 archaeological sites have been identified in Storey County. Most sites have been field checked for accuracy; however, locations of specific development proposals may warrant additional field or archival research to evaluate whether cultural resources could be affected by the proposed development actions.

Historic sites related to Euro-American settlement in Storey County include features and artifacts such as town sites, buildings and building sites, railroad structures, and abandoned mine sites.

Prehistoric sites are generally Indigenous in origin from the time prior to intrusion of Euro-American settlement. In Storey County, these sites include such features as rock art, camp sites, and sites containing lithics, bone, or other indications of land uses prior to the contact of European and Indigenous American cultures. These sites are protected by the National Historic Preservation Act, which prohibits the release of specific location site information in a public document.

11.5.1 Lagomarsino Petroglyphs

The Lagomarsino Petroglyphs Site is an 80-acre site toward the center of the county where an estimated 2,000 Indigenous prehistoric petroglyphs exist, stretching an area approximately one-quarter

mile in length with panels estimated to be 12,000 years old, according to 2012 information compiled by the Nevada Rock Art Foundation (Figure 11.5-1). The site is protected by the National Historic Preservation Act, so this master plan is intentionally absent of maps showing the precise location of the petroglyphs. The site is remote and challenging to access. However, the internet indicates increased awareness of the existence and location of the petroglyphs with resulting vandalism and theft becoming an increasing problem. Furthermore, development proposals within the interior of the county, such as for roadways, could encroach on the remote area of the petroglyphs and make them more accessible and therefore vulnerable.

For decades, Storey County, various volunteer organizations including the Nevada Rock Art Foundation, local residents, and other stakeholders have advocated to the State Historic Preservation Office and other state agencies to better protect the site, potentially by designating and managing the site as a state park with full-time supervision. However, local and state resources available to appropriately manage the site are limited at this time. County officials will continue to work with local residents and volunteer groups to voluntarily monitor the site while the County and various agencies continue to research and explore permanent solutions to protect this resource.

County staff recognize potential conflicts between preservation efforts and surrounding development proposals. Proposed land use projects could have a significant impact on this cultural resource, so County officials should seek counsel from the State Historic Preservation Office when considering proposals that could have direct and indirect negative effects on the petroglyphs.



Figure 11.5-1: Lagomarsino Canyon Petroglyphs Site (Source: Nevada Rock Art Foundation 2012)

11.5.2 Cottonwood Spring Archaeological Site

The 1990 Sensitivity Study discussed earlier in this chapter (included in Appendix C) contains a comprehensive inventory of archaeological resources in an area approximately four miles northeast of Virginia City, in and around Cottonwood Spring and Chalk Hills Ranch in Long Valley.

The study 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. The goals of the study were to refine previous modeling by analyzing existing artifacts in the area and mapping specific areas of cultural concern, and to survey areas of private land in the Highlands subject to future disturbance.

The 1990 Sensitivity Study contains recommendations to use study findings to develop reasonable measures by which to preserve archaeological resources on the private lands through incentives and other non-punitive measures.

11.5.3 Other Archaeological Sites

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

11.6 Goals, Policies, and Objectives

Goal 1: Foster historic preservation activities that respect the local community while also promoting economic development.

Policy	
Policy 1.1	The customs and culture associated with Indigenous people in Storey County is necessary to the livelihood and wellbeing of the present-day Indigenous and broader community within the county. Storey County supports the continuation of these Indigenous customs and culture.
Policy	
Policy 1.2	Tangible artifact remains and records of folk life and cultural heritage should be preserved locally rather than removed to out-of-county or out-of-state sites.
Objectives	
Objective 1.2-1	Protect cultural resources from threats including fire, vandalism, unauthorized use or removal, and rural and urban sprawl.
Objective 1.2-2	If local cultural resources are protected, encourage and manage citizen access to these cultural resources.

Policy	
Policy 1.3	The County supports conservation of historic properties, landscapes, and practices which use these features in a manner that does not degrade them for future generations.

Policy	
Policy 1.4	The County allows and promotes new commercial and residential development within the Comstock Historic District, provided it is balanced with the preservation of historic, archaeological, and cultural resources.

Objectives	
Objective 1.4-1	Collaborate with historic preservation groups such as the Comstock Historic District Commission.
Objective 1.4-2	Enforce design requirements for developments and community improvements to complement the surrounding historic environment.
Objective 1.4-3	Encourage adaptive reuse and integration of historic properties into new projects where possible and appropriate.

Policy	
Policy 1.5	Where practicable, the historic character of buildings, sidewalk, utilities, and other improvements and structures within the Comstock Historic District should be maintained.

Policy	
Policy 1.6	The County discourages amusement parks and other uses which exploit rather than complement the area’s history.

Goal 2: Improve the effectiveness of education and outreach to incentivize and promote historic resources preservation.

Policy	
Policy 2.1	The County encourages a comprehensive approach to educate the community and visitors on historic preservation.
Objectives	
Objective 2.1-1	Provide education and assistance to residents, businesses, and other stakeholders to promote historic preservation and manage historic resources.
Objective 2.1-2	Improve 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.
Objective 2.1-3	Coordinate 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.
Objective 2.1-4	Promote educational programs for citizen stewardship of cultural resources in a manner that will encourage future generations to understand and pass on the value of cultural resources.
Objective 2.1-5	Promote cultural resources awareness and preservation through local tourism and visitor entertainment programs and activities.

Policy	
Policy 2.2	The County seeks to incentivize private participation in historic preservation efforts.
Objectives	
Objective 2.2-1	Work 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.

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

Policy	
Policy 3.1	Storey County supports a collaborative approach to planning for historic preservation.
Objectives	
Objective 3.1-1	Continue and enhance inter-local agency cooperation on historic preservation efforts.
Objective 3.1-2	Complete additional phases of the historic inventory funded by a 2021 State Historic Preservation Office grant, by making GIS data and linked photographs available on the County's website for use in future study and planning efforts.
Objective 3.1-3	Investigate additional potential public and private funding sources for the research and identification of archaeological resources in the county.
Objective 3.1-4	Work with state and federal agencies to plan for and secure grants to preserve and restore historic resources.
Objective 3.1-5	Work 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.
Objective 3.1-6	Plan and develop programs for historic preservation on lands within the Comstock Historic District and other places in the county where significant historic, archaeological, and cultural resources are found.

Policy	
Policy 3.2	Storey County supports appropriate design requirements and other ordinances and statutes related to the preservation of historic resources.
Objectives	
Objective 3.2-1	Work with the Comstock Historic District Commission to minimize conflicts between County and Historic District structure design requirements.
Objective 3.2-2	Consistently enforce applicable ordinances and statutes.

Goal 4. Protect and preserve the Lagomarsino Canyon Petroglyphs Site.

Policy	
Policy 4.1	The petroglyph site should remain with remote and difficult casual access until it can be better protected.
Objectives	
Objective 4.1-1	The County will refrain from disseminating maps or directions to the site in this master plan or in other official documents until appropriate permanent monitoring of the premises is established.
Objective 4.1-2	Construct and maintain motor vehicle barriers at site access points.
Objective 4.1-3	Prevent approval and construction of area road and access improvements around the petroglyphs site.
Objective 4.1-4	Require that parties pursuing the development of new land uses and/or infrastructure closer to the petroglyphs work with the County and other appropriate agencies to consider the protection of the petroglyphs site.

Policy	
Policy 4.2	The County and other relevant agencies and groups should continue current efforts to protect the petroglyphs site while pursuing longer-term protection.
Objectives	
Objective 4.2-1	Educate the public about the site's importance as a cultural resource.
Objective 4.2-2	Maintain interim efforts to protect the petroglyphs, including working with local residents and volunteer groups to casually monitor and exhibit presence at the site.

Policy	
Policy 4.3	The County supports public access to the petroglyphs once permanent protection can be established.
Objectives	
Objective 4.3-1	Help appropriate managing agencies establish permanent security at the site.
Objective 4.3-2	Continue to seek grants and other funding sources to improve the site with full-time security staffing and long-term management.
Objective 4.3-3	Plan for the potential alternative of transferring the site to federal or state ownership and/or active security and management of the site.
Objective 4.3-4	Collaborate with volunteer organizations, such as the Nevada Rock Art Foundation, local residents, and other stakeholders to develop a master plan detailing goals, objectives, and benchmarks for site improvement and long-term security and management.
Objective 4.3-5	Collaborate with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office, the Nevada Division of State Lands, and other state agencies to explore ways to protect the petroglyphs site, such as by designating the site as a secure and actively managed state park.
Objective 4.3-6	Improve public access roads to the site after full-time security and management of the site has been established.