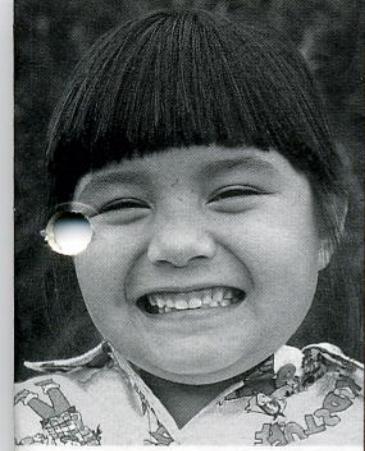


A Forum for Inyo County Residents



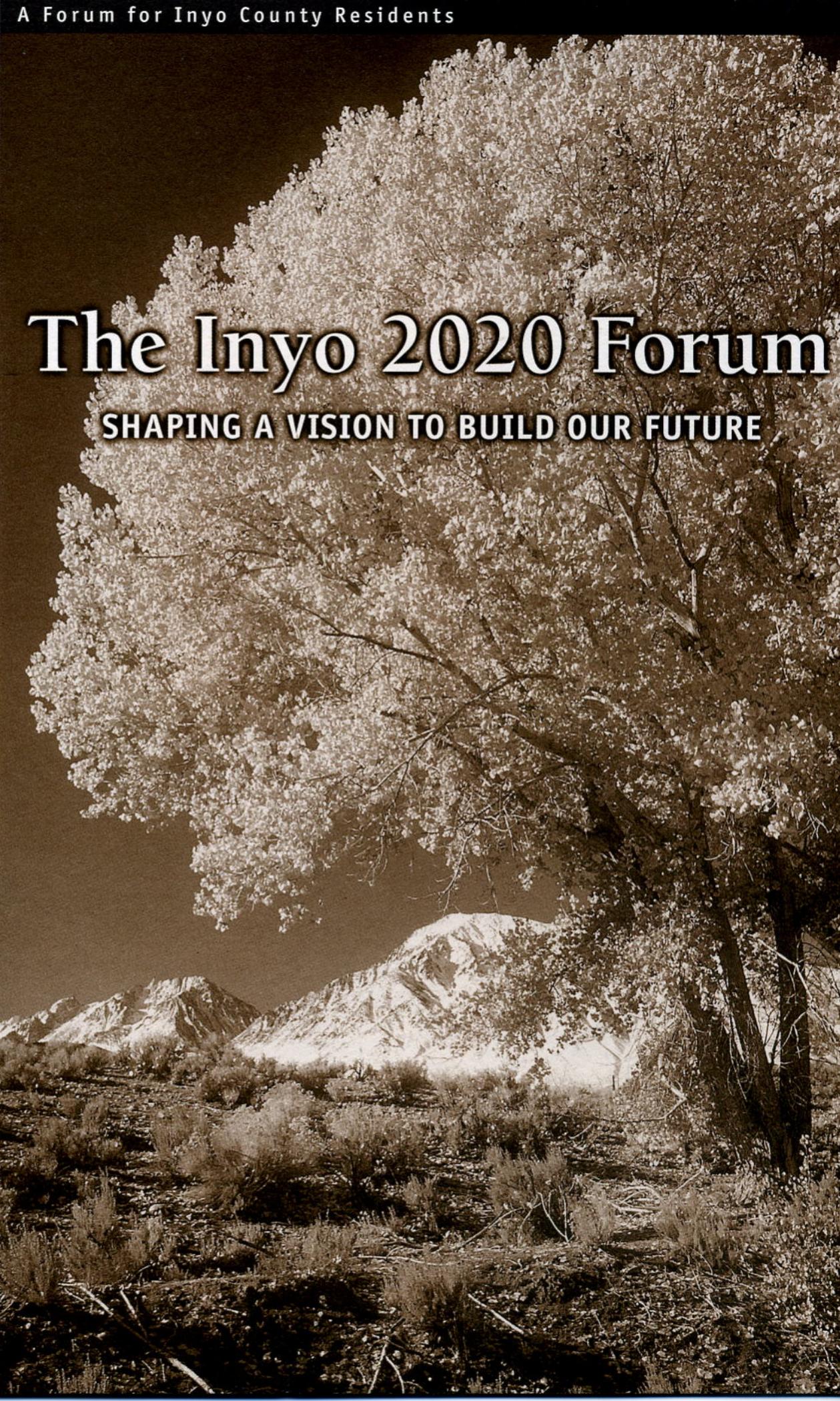
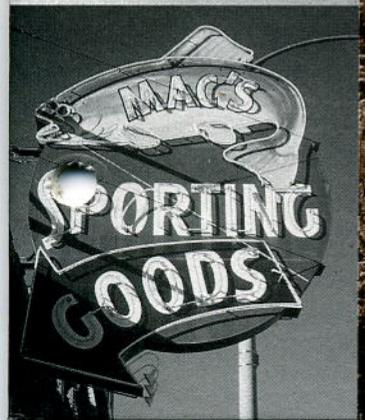
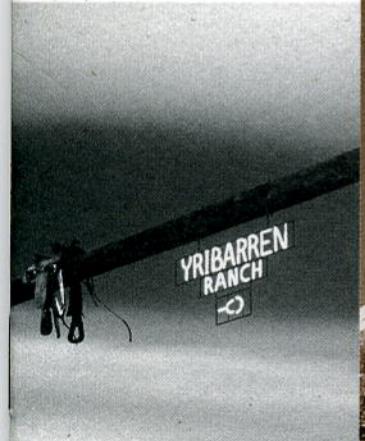
Tri-County Fairgrounds

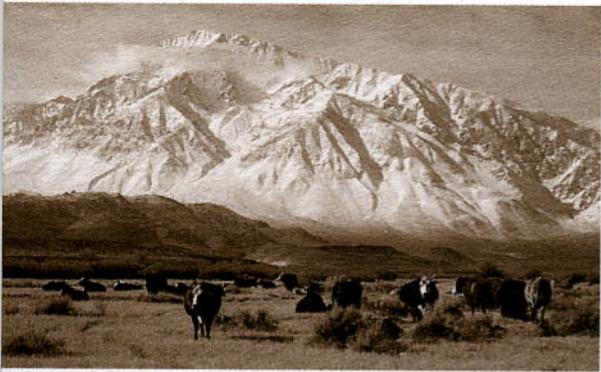
Bishop, California

March 20, 1999

The Inyo 2020 Forum

SHAPING A VISION TO BUILD OUR FUTURE





The Inyo 2020 Forum was held at the Tri-County Fairgrounds in Bishop, CA on March 20, 1999. Sponsored by the Inyo County Board of Supervisors and the Sierra Business Council (SBC), the Forum brought together over 200 people from around Inyo County to shape a vision for the county's future. The goals of the Inyo 2020 Forum were to:

- Help residents from throughout Inyo County gain a common and integrated understanding of the county's assets: its social, natural and financial capital;
- Help decision makers better understand the public's priorities;
- Inform and complement the update of Inyo County's General Plan, including the Economic Element; and
- Facilitate the development of an integrated investment strategy to build Inyo County's wealth, now and over the long term.



On June 15, 1999 the Inyo 2020 Forum Planning Committee presented the Forum proceedings and recommendations to the Inyo County Board of Supervisors to guide county decision making. Ideas from the Forum are now being incorporated into the county's new General Plan for 2000-2020 and into other planning initiatives underway in the county.

The Sierra Business Council prepared this report for the more than 200 Inyo County residents who devoted a full day of their valuable time to share the ideas and make the suggestions summarized herein. This report will serve as a permanent record of Forum proceedings and a reminder to all participants to implement the Priorities for Action identified at the Forum.

The Sierra Business Council would like to thank the Inyo County Board of Supervisors, Inyo County Administrator Rene Mendez, and Inyo County Planning Director Peter Chamberlin for joining with us to host this important public dialogue. An active and engaged citizenry is a fundamental building block of our democratic system; Inyo County decision makers are to be commended for their commitment to effective citizen participation. SBC would also like to thank the Inyo 2020 Forum Planning Committee who worked with us to plan the Forum and to encourage participation by residents from throughout Inyo County. We would have been lost without you. Thank you!

Inyo County Today: An Overview

The Sierra Business Council presented *Inyo County Today* at the start of the Inyo 2020 Forum to give Forum participants a shared understanding of existing conditions and trends in the county and to establish a context for the visioning discussions that followed. By way of introduction, SBC Research Director Amy Horne discussed how changes in the global economy are affecting the way communities approach economic development.

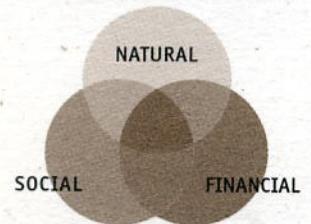
In the last decade, rapid improvements in communications and transportation have transformed the fundamental relationship between customer, product, producer and place in our economy. The Internet, Federal Express and UPS have freed many companies from the need to locate immediately adjacent to suppliers and customers, giving business owners greater flexibility than ever before when selecting locations for their operations. This new flexibility is a competitive advantage for places like Inyo County. In today's economy businesses tend to locate in communities where the high quality of life will help them attract and retain the skilled workers they need.

This reality is beginning to inform the economic development strategies of leading edge communities throughout the nation. These communities recognize that excellent schools, outstanding environmental quality, and attractive, interesting towns are essential magnets for the kind of business investment they want. They understand that financial capital flows to

communities with high social and natural capital, and this understanding informs their approach to economic development. Instead of embracing short term business recruitment strategies that direct community assets toward individual firms, these communities are making investments to build the long term quality and appeal of their community to current and future residents. In short, they are investing in the fundamental building blocks of prosperity.

Inyo County Today describes the social, natural, and financial assets that make up the wealth of Inyo County. But measurement alone will not expand wealth. Inyo County's wealth will grow only to the extent that public and private decision-makers invest resources carefully and wisely to expand that wealth. The Capital Investment Diagram below provides decision-makers with a powerful tool for expanding wealth and ensuring Inyo County's long-term prosperity. The Diagram shows the relationship between social, natural, and financial capital. The critical challenge for local decision makers is to design and implement investment strategies for Inyo County that will increase at least two forms of capital while not diminishing the third.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT DIAGRAM



Investments located in the intersection of the three circles are the best investments, the investments that offer the greatest return for county residents. Investments that expand one kind of capital, at the expense of one or both of the other forms of capital, will diminish Inyo County's total wealth and should be avoided.



For example, a business owner who decides to buy and remodel a vacant retail facility in downtown Bishop rather than build a new facility on the outskirts of town:

- Builds financial capital by turning an under-performing physical asset into a business that creates financial capital for the private and the public sectors;
- Builds social capital by enhancing the appeal and vitality of downtown Bishop; and
- Builds natural capital by maintaining open space on the outskirts of town and reducing pollution from unnecessary car trips.

Inyo County Today: Summary of Findings

Inyo County's greatest advantage is the extraordinary richness of its natural capital, from the scenic wonders of Death Valley National Park and Mt. Whitney to the wide open spaces that surround and define each of its unique communities. Abundant natural capital is driving tourism growth in the county but is equally important to the growth of other business as well; 80 percent of the respondents to the SBC Business Survey cited immediate access to high quality outdoor recreation as a significant benefit to doing business in the county. At the same time, good schools and high levels of civic participation point to strengths in social capital that enrich the county today and are essential to its future. Finally, slow but steady growth in jobs, personal incomes and county revenues are evidence of expanding financial resources and suggest the potential for further improvements in financial capital.

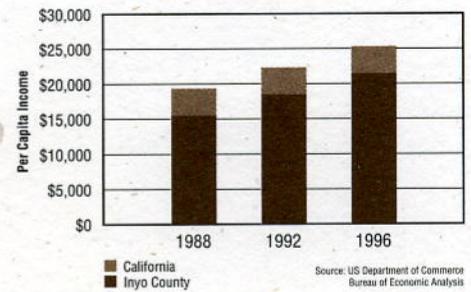
Notwithstanding these strengths, Inyo County faces some important challenges. High teenage birthrates and inadequate pre-natal care are sources of concern. Potential new water exports from the county could undermine successful environmental restoration initiatives already underway and limit the county's economic development prospects. Finally, although potential to expand tourism exists, the county's already heavy reliance on travel-related jobs (many of which pay less than the average per capita income) suggests the need for greater diversity in employment to increase the resilience of the local economy and to support further increases in per capita incomes for working families.

Inyo County is not as isolated as it may seem. Close to 2 million people drive through the county each year to visit Death Valley, Mt. Whitney, Mammoth Mountain and other attractions in the eastern Sierra. Although Inyo County businesses, and the county itself, are capturing some of the benefits of this human flow, the county should explore ways to encourage day travelers and other short term visitors to invest more time and money in the county. At the same time, the county needs to address the competitive disadvantage it faces due to the lack of regular air service. The difficulty of business travel to and from the county is a major obstacle to attracting exactly the kind of "foot loose" entrepreneur who would otherwise be drawn to Inyo County by its high quality environment and good schools.

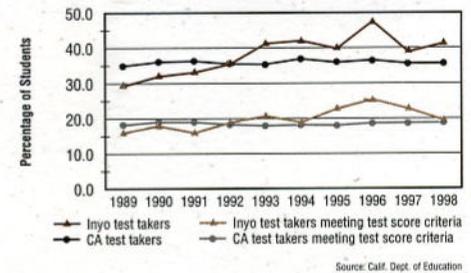
The southeast corner of the county is playing an increasingly significant role in Inyo County's present and future. Rapid population growth in the Las Vegas area, the explosion of visitors to Death Valley National Park, and the high rates of poverty among students at Death Valley Unified all point to the urgent need to develop a more fully integrated approach to strategic planning and investment, especially in this corner of the county.

Inyo County Today, which includes the thirty-four indicators for social, natural and financial capital and the Inyo County Business Survey, is available to researchers and interested readers in its entirety on the web at: www.sdsc.edu/Inyo/planning.html

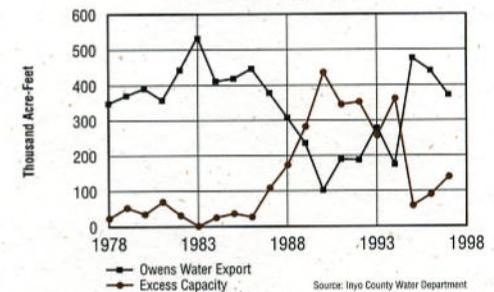
Inyo County Per Capita Income 1988-1996



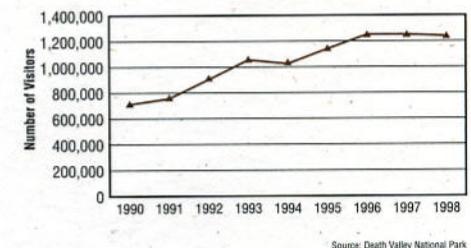
College Bound Student Achievement Performance On SAT, 1989-1998



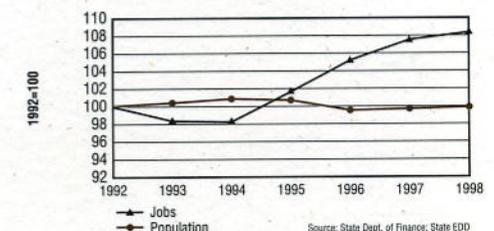
Water Exported from Owens Valley & Excess Aqueduct Capacity 1978-1997



Visitor Trends Death Valley National Park 1990-1998



Local Job and Population Growth 1992-1998





Vision for 2020

Following the presentation of *Inyo County Today*, Forum participants broke into ten small groups, each led by a team of two experienced facilitators from outside the area. The groups spent the next hour discussing their visions for Inyo County in the year 2020. Studies show that communities with clear visions for their own futures are more likely to achieve those visions; agreeing on where you want to go is the first essential step to getting there.

With these thoughts in mind, Forum participants discussed seven aspects of life in Inyo County: economy, schools, environment, towns, landscape outside towns, transportation and communications, and civic and cultural life. While each participant naturally used different language to describe his or her desired future for Inyo County, and participants did not always agree, this description of Inyo County in the year 2020 attempts to summarize the major areas of agreement across the ten groups. *Please note that this vision statement is written in the voice of an Inyo County resident in the year 2020.*

Economy: By 2020, Inyo County's economy is stronger. A countywide tourism strategy, linking the efforts of communities throughout the county, has expanded both the number of visitors to the county and per visitor spending. New events celebrating the history, culture and natural beauty of Inyo County complement existing events and attractions and have transformed the county into a successful year round tourist destination.

Investments to improve the quality and visual appeal of our towns and to expand the range of products available to local customers and visitors have paid off in significantly increased retail revenues and less leakage to out-of-county suppliers. The new convention center in Bishop is drawing business visitors to the county. Having discovered Inyo County, many of these business visitors return to the county to vacation with their families. Some decide to relocate their businesses and their families to Inyo County.

Improved air service has been a boon to the county, linking business owners, residents and visitors to international airports in less than one hour. Better access has contributed to business growth in the county; new firms include clean, environmentally sustainable manufacturers, high quality health care providers, agricultural producers, scientific research companies, mining operations, educational services, and environmental restoration services. These new employers have helped to create a more diverse and resilient employment base, more high wage jobs in all sectors, and more support for education and training for people of all ages.

Schools: Expanded support for K-12 education has translated into the retention and recruitment of exceptional teachers who value the opportunity to work in classrooms with low student to teacher ratios and appreciate the recognition they receive in the form of good salaries. Investments in the physical facilities at county schools have improved the learning environment for all students, expanded access for handicapped kids, and brought all buildings up to code. Students in every grade are testing at levels that exceed state averages.

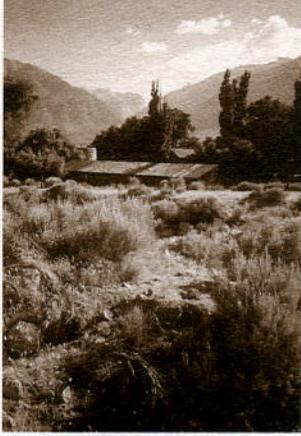
Cero Coso Community College is attracting students from all over the state with a full and outstanding curriculum that trains graduates to excel in their chosen professions, here in Inyo County or elsewhere. Local residents now have the option to pursue four-year degrees, to continue graduate work, or to obtain vocational training without leaving the county. The College has made a concerted and successful effort to build on Inyo County's natural advantages by developing academic excellence in fields such as natural resources restoration and management, tourism, business, and the arts. In addition, courses in fields like computer-technology and health care are augmenting the skills of current and future employees for emerging businesses in the county.

Environment: Environmental quality in Inyo County is outstanding and continues to improve. Protecting and maintaining environmental quality is a priority for people throughout the county. Residents, visitors, and land management agencies have struck a balance between protection and access, and do their best to instill in all users a sense of personal responsibility and stewardship for the land. Local initiatives to reduce water exports and groundwater pumping have enhanced water quality countywide and have contributed to the successful restoration of the Lower Owens River. Investments to control



dust at the Owens Dry Lake have dramatically improved air quality in southern Inyo. Based on these and other successes, Inyo County is becoming known worldwide as a pioneer in ecosystem restoration, a reputation that has attracted new economic and educational resources to the county.

VISION



Towns: Inyo County's towns are more attractive, accessible and enjoyable than ever before. Each has a clean, safe, pedestrian-friendly downtown that is as inviting to locals as it is to visitors. Each has a unique identity, which is immediately evident upon entering the town, and is reinforced in the quality and character of the streets, sidewalks, public spaces and buildings. Local residents in each community have cooperated to bring about these many improvements. Changes have included attention to the entry statements of each town, improved landscaping, agreements on appropriate signage, the use of architectural review committees to improve the appeal of each town's built environment, more active engagement to ensure reuse of abandoned and vacant properties, the placement underground of utilities, and the construction of bike paths both within and between towns. Each town has also made efforts to provide a wider range of housing options to address the varying needs of community residents: students, seniors, lower income residents and families. Finally, excellent law enforcement and fire departments continue to ensure public safety in each community.

Landscape Outside Towns:

In 2020, Inyo County is a place where the distinction between town and countryside is still meaningful and cherished. Each community is surrounded by a natural greenbelt of successful ranches and farms and accessible open lands. Efforts to concentrate businesses in the towns, to reduce the visual impacts of dumpsites, to curb litter, to plant trees, and to eliminate billboards have paid off with enhanced viewsheds for locals and visitors alike. Highway 395, now four lanes from Los Angeles to Reno, is a world famous scenic byway leading visitors to the variety of scenic and cultural attractions around Inyo County.

Transportation and

Communications: At the same time, affordable and regular air service to and from Inyo County has provided a less time consuming travel option to tourists, residents, and business travelers, and has made Inyo County a much more convenient tourist destination and business location. Mobility and public safety have also been enhanced by the expanded public transportation network within the county which now enables visitors and residents, including young people and seniors, to reach communities and recreational opportunities throughout the Eastern Sierra without a car. Improved roads throughout the county have made driving a safer and more pleasant experience.

Inyo County's communications infrastructure is excellent, linking businesses, institutions and individuals to the rest of the world through high-speed access. Cell phone service and other wireless communication capacities now extend through-

out the county. These improvements in communication and transportation have reduced the feeling of isolation once prevalent among county residents.

Civic and Cultural Life:

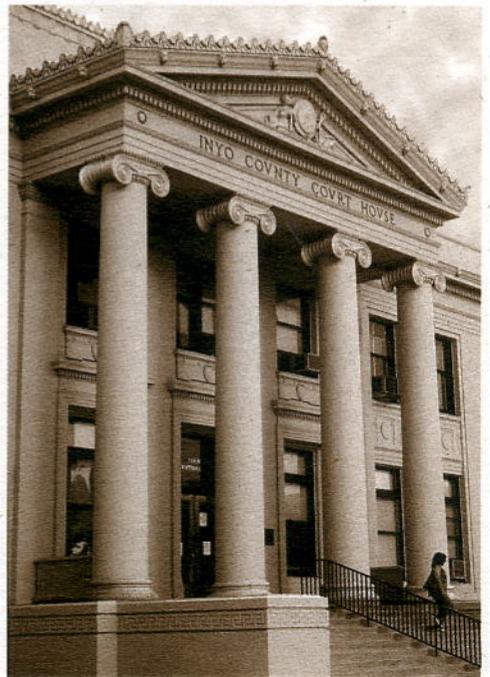
The past twenty years have brought many changes to Inyo County. By working together on projects of mutual concern and interest, residents have developed an even greater appreciation for the cultural and geographic richness of their county and have discovered the power of collaboration. Improved dialogue and cooperation among communities and within communities, inspired by organizations like Inyo Associates and Inyo County Collaborative Team, have strengthened Inyo County's civic fabric and contributed to the blossoming of community initiatives, institutions and events.

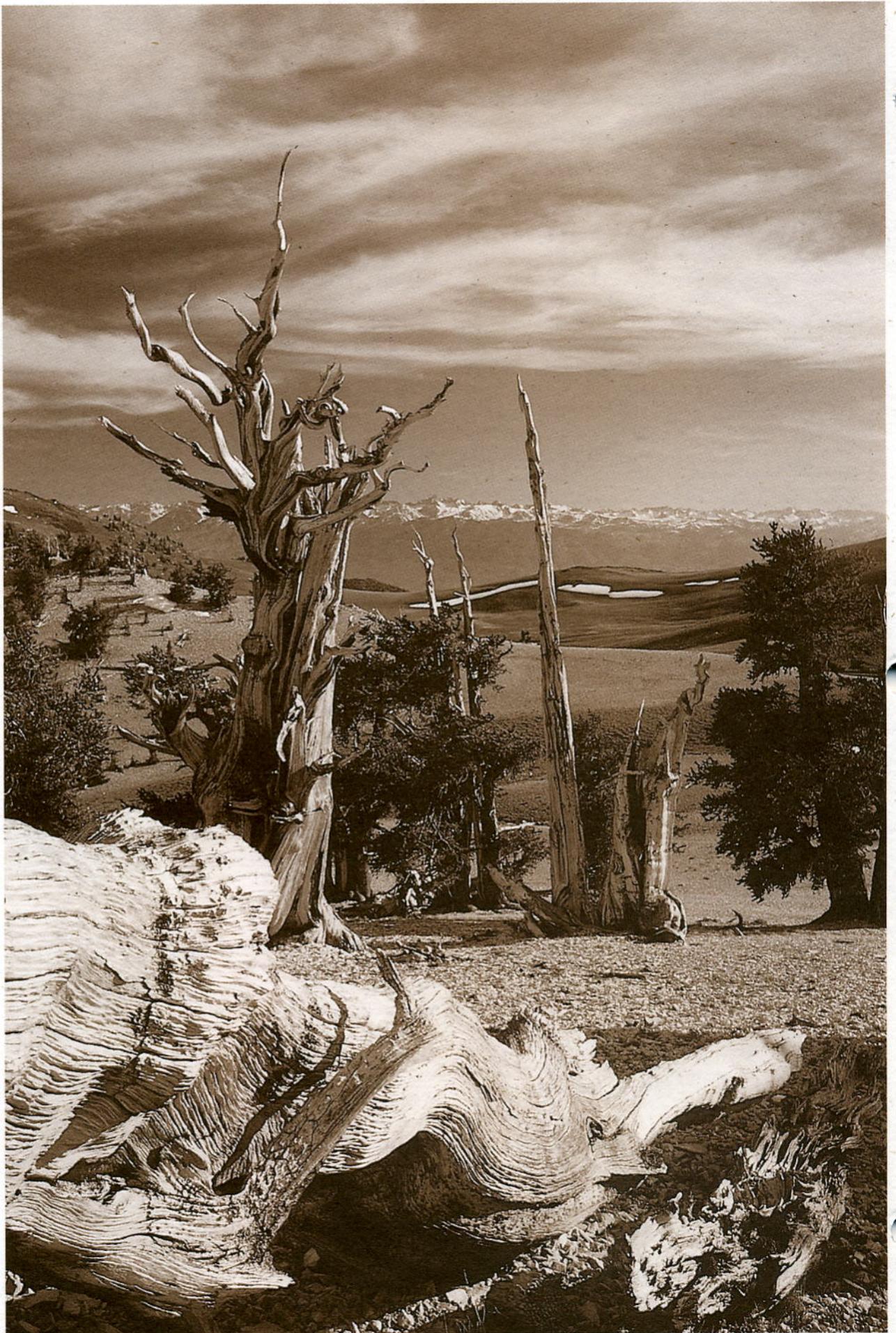
Recent successes include the completion of the beautiful new Inyo County Center for the Arts and Culture which sponsors a wide range of artistic, historic and cultural programs for local children, teens and adults, as well as for visitors of all ages; the construction of a well equipped new YMCA facility; magnificent new murals in all of our communities; newly renovated historic and cultural assets throughout the county which support the county's cultural heritage; an outstanding network of public libraries and museums; excellent recreation opportunities for all residents through Inyo

County Parks and Recreation; and a Native American culture that is a source of pride for all Inyo County residents.

Inyo County has also made real strides in addressing the health care needs of its residents and visitors. Each community is now serviced by a medical clinic that can handle routine health care and is a gateway to expanded emergency services. In addition, county residents of all ages now have access to advanced medical services and benefit from insurance reforms that have made medical care affordable for all residents.

Finally, Inyo County has become a more pleasant and efficient place to live, work and visit because local, state and federal agencies are working more closely and cooperatively with each other and with the public. By joining forces, public agencies have been able to stretch their dollars further, enabling them to improve the range and quality of services they provide. For example, new visitor centers in each community are jointly operated by a collaboration of agencies, providing a one stop information center for Inyo County visitors.





Priorities for Action

After discussing their visions for Inyo County in the year 2020, Forum participants spent the next three hours discussing how to get there. Each group addressed the following questions:

- What current strengths and advantages do we need to maintain?
- What external opportunities or trends should we respond to?
- What problems or concerns do we need to address?
- What external pressures or threats could hinder our success?
- What steps should the county, or others in the county, take to achieve the vision for 2020?

At the end of the day, each group presented its top priorities for action to the entire Forum. The following actions were identified as the highest priority for Inyo County. Within each category, actions are listed in order of their priority to Forum participants.



PRIORITY Maintain Inyo County's Natural Environment and Rural Quality of Life

Update general plan policies and guidelines to ensure that Inyo County's unique beauty and environmental quality are sustained; include in the plan a broad vision for the future incorporating the ideas discussed at the Inyo 2020 Forum.

Protect agricultural lands and recognize their contribution to Inyo County's rural quality of life.

Promote protection of and access to public lands. Support educational programs to instill in all visitors and residents a sense of personal responsibility and stewardship for the land.

Encourage the use of good science in environmental and natural resources decision making. Reassess mountain lion management policies in response to the decline in big horn sheep populations.

Develop a strong county water export ordinance to protect the environment, local water supplies, vegetation health, and groundwater. Encourage rehabilitation of the Owens Valley. Implement and monitor the water agreement with Los Angeles to the fullest extent.

PRIORITY Support and Expand Tourism in Inyo County

Create a coordinated countywide tourism strategy to improve marketing of Inyo County as a tourist destination.

Enhance tourism by providing regularly scheduled air service at the Bishop Airport and by expanding recreational and cultural attractions.

Improve the attractiveness and enhance the character and uniqueness of Inyo County communities, particularly downtown areas; encourage building design to reflect historic character and small town aesthetics; pay more attention to signage and to national chain influence.

Complete the widening of Highway 395 to four lanes and explore transportation alternatives for the Owens Valley.

PRIORITY Improve Government Decision Making in Inyo County

Increase citizen involvement in collaborative planning processes at all levels of government (county, state, tribal, adjacent counties, state and federal land agencies) to ensure that research and decision making reflects the understanding and knowledge of local residents.

Build bridges between North and South Inyo County.

PRIORITY Improve Health Care, Social Services and Education

Appoint a task force to determine what health and social services are needed in the county and to identify ways to improve services, particularly in the southeast portion of the county.

Recruit HMOs, doctors and health professionals to service the area; provide office space for traveling specialists, and create community health clinics.

Join with other jurisdictions to seek legislative health care reform to ensure all local residents have access to quality health care.

Expand Cero Coso Community College with an emphasis on learning linked to employment opportunities in Inyo County: natural resources restoration and management, tourism, business and the arts. Develop a four-year curriculum.

priorities

**Inyo 2020 Forum
Planning Committee**

- Linda Arcularius, Bishop
- Julie Bear, Bishop
- Brian Brown, Shoshone
- Tina Cocherell, Bishop
- Jean Dickenson, Independence
- Gary Giacomini, Bishop
- Jaque Hickman, Lone Pine
- Vernon Miller, Independence
- Gary Olson, Bishop
- Paul Payne, Lone Pine
- Allan Pietrasanta, Bishop
- Chris Plakos, Bishop
- Murt Stewart Jr., Big Pine
- John Triolo, Lone Pine
- Rich White, Independence
- James Wilson, Bishop
- Erma Wright, Bishop

For More Information

The Inyo 2020 Forum was sponsored by the Inyo County Board of Supervisors and the Sierra Business Council (SBC). Founded in 1994, the Sierra Business Council is a non-profit association of more than 500 member businesses working to secure the economic and environmental health of the Sierra Nevada region for this and future generations. The Council has gained national recognition for its novel approach to assessing regional wealth, for its award-winning guide to rural planning, *Planning for Prosperity*, and for the strength and commitment of its members to the principles of sustainable development.

For more information about the Inyo 2020 Forum or the Sierra Business Council, please contact:

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