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Bear Lake basin : Rich County, Utah

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RICH COUNTY, UTAH

Rich County, located in the upper northeastern corner of Utah, is approximately 18 miles wide and 56 miles long. It is bordered on the east by Wyoming, on the north by Idaho (with the southern half of Bear Lake extending into Utah), on the west by Weber and Morgan counties and the Wasatch National Forest, and on the south by Summit County. The major cities and communities of Rich County are Garden City, Laketown, Lakota, Meadowville, Pickleville, Randolph, Round Valley, and Woodruff. See figure 2 for establishment date and 2000 population numbers of each community.

Rich County comprises a land area of 654,080 acres. A total of 170,583 acres (26%) are administered as public resource lands by the Bureau of Land Management; 51,835 acres (8%) are administered by the U.S. Forest Service along the western perimeter of the county; 67,695 acres (10%) are owned by the state of Utah; 362,836 acres (55%) are currently under private ownership, and some 4,376 acres (1%) are located within urban centers, road rights-of-way, and railroad rights-of-way. The principal cities include: Randolph, Laketown, and Garden City. Local economy is basically generated from agriculture, cattle, sheep, and recreation (Parson, 1996).

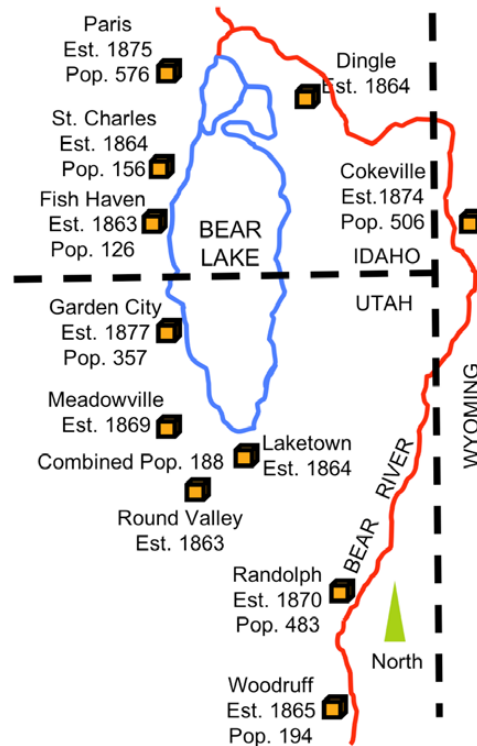


Figure 2. Year of Establishment and 2000 Population Estimates of Bear Lake Townships (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Elevations in the county vary from a high of 9,045 feet at Cristo Peak on the western edge of the county, to a low of approximately 5,900 feet at the surface of Bear Lake. Existing land use surveys consist of 6 unique types; water (36,352 acres open water), urban land (2,304 acres in Garden City, Laketown, Randolph, and Woodruff), multiple uses (271,040 acres), recreation (2,592 acres), recreation development (3,264 acres mostly privately owned) and agriculture (373,408 acres day cropland, irrigated pastures, native grazing lands) (BLRC, 1979).

Historically the south shore areas of Bear Lake were the home of several nomadic Indian tribes. Utilized primarily during spring and summer periods, the Shoshonie, Bannock, Ute, Sioux, and Blackfoot Indian tribes favored the prime hunting and

fishing of the area (Parson, 1996). It was customary for these native Americans to spend many weeks on the shores of Bear Lake trading furs, ponies, and fish with other tribes and then eventually with the white man. The Rocky Mountain Fur Company joined the fur trading rendezvous in 1826 and 1827.

Permanent settlement of the valley by “white men” was initiated by the Mormon pioneers in the 1860’s.

When Congress passed the Homestead Act of 1862, Brigham Young became anxious to obtain control of the land before the non-Mormons did. Although the earliest communities were established on the north west shores of the lake, exploration for suitable town sites were being conducted at this same

time in the Round Valley and Laketown area. Rich County takes its name from Mormon colonizer Charles C. Rich, who officially established the county on March 5, 1872, with Randolph as its county seat (Real Life Foundation, 2006).

Even though much of Rich County is highland, it also has fertile lowlands that can support productive farms and livestock production. Farming and livestock production have provided county residents with their livelihoods from the mid-1800’s to current times. The 2002 census of agriculture indicated that there were 509,279 acres in farms or ranches in the county with an average size of 3,772 acres. The value of livestock and crops produced was listed at \$13.1 million, and was ranked first in the production of “other hay”. The census also showed Rich County as having the third largest inventory of beef cattle in the state (Godfrey, 2005).

Bear Lake State Park Rendezvous Beach is named for the famous rendezvous of fur trappers and Indians held in the summers of 1827 and 1828. A thousand or more Indians and mountain men, including Jedediah Smith, attended the gatherings. There were so many campfires at the south end of the lake at these trading sessions that one observer called the area "a lighted city."
<http://www.stateparks.utah.gov>

Rich County Demographics							
Water Area	57.76 Square Miles						
Land Area	1028.53 Square Miles						
Total Area	1086.29 Square Miles						
Year	1900	1910	1930	1950	1970	1990	2000
Population	1946	1883	1873	1675	1615	1725	1961
Population Density (per square mile)	1.89	1.83	1.82	1.63	1.57	1.67	1.90
Housing Units	----	----	472	580	741	1859	2408
Housing Density (per square mile)	----	----	.46	.56	.72	1.80	2.30

Table 1. Demographics of Rich County, Utah (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

As of the year 2000 census, 1,961 people, 645 households, and 521 families were residing in the county. The population density is just under 2 people per square mile. There are 2,408 housing units at an average density of 2 per square mile. The racial makeup is 1,889 White, 1 Native American, 8 Asian, 36 Hispanic or Latino, 18 from other races, and 9 from 2 or more races. Of the 645 households in the county, 272 have children under the age of 18, 480 are married couples living together, 24 have a female householder with no husband present, and 123 are non-families. The average household size is 3.01 and the average family size is 3.44. The population is spread out with 679 under the age of 18, 141 from 18-24, 435 from 25- 44, 429 from 45-64, and 277 who are 65 years of age or older. The median age is 34 years. For every 100 females there are 103 males. The median income for a household in the county is \$39,766, and the median income for a family is \$44,783. Males have a median income of \$34,464 versus \$22,396 for females, and the per capita income for the county is \$16,267. Out of the total population, 10% are below the poverty line consisting of 158 adults, 26 under the age of 18 and 12 individuals older than 64. As table 1 indicates the population has remained within one to eighteen percentage points of the current population since the early 1900's. This stable population growth, however, is not mimicked in the number of housing units being

developed in the area. This number has more than tripled in the last thirty years. This trend has been observed in all municipalities in the Bear Lake basin.

Population of Bear Lake Municipalities				
	1970	2000	2004	2020
St. Charles, ID	200	156	145	----
Fish Haven, ID	120	195	----	----
Garden City, UT	134	357	391	348
Pickleville, UT	106	121	138	157
Laketown, UT	208	188	263	298

Table 2. Population of Bear Lake Municipalities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)

Data from the Census Bureau indicate that the populations around Bear Lake in both the Idaho and Utah sides have remained relatively stable within the past thirty-five years, with a 32% increase overall between 1970 and 2000. As table 2 depicts the Utah State Data Guide suggests that this trend will continue with the 20% increase expected between 2000 and 2020. The areas that currently comprises the greatest increase are Garden City, Utah and Fish Haven, Idaho.