



# COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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## **CARSON CITY COMMUNITY NEEDS ANALYSIS — 2003**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The mission of University of Nevada Cooperative Extension is “to discover, develop, disseminate, preserve, and use knowledge to strengthen the social, economic, and environmental well-being of people.” To achieve this goal, Cooperative Extension is charged with developing, implementing, and evaluating education programs that address critical needs/issues in Carson City. The results of internal and external comprehensive needs assessments, studies, and surveys have been compiled here to identify potential education targets and program efforts in Carson City.

Knowledge of the needs most important to a community is critical to effective planning. By focusing energy on high priority needs, chances of improving the quality of life are greatly enhanced. Not all needs identified in the assessment process may be addressed by education alone. Some needs may be better addressed by entities other than Cooperative Extension. However, by identifying the critical issues, Cooperative Extension can provide support and direction in resolving the needs of the community, both directly through programming and indirectly through a cooperative effort with other community-based organizations.

The needs analysis or situational analysis reported here was compiled from a variety of sources of relevant research and information: Carson City public opinion surveys; youth needs assessments; demographic studies; census data; studies of seniors’ needs; and many others. Each was examined to identify community needs, gaps, problems, and teaching opportunities. In every instance, the most current information available was used for the analysis. These were then summarized into one cohesive report. References to the

materials used in the study and others useful for additional insights are presented at the end of the report.

## **SUMMARY**

Carson City is a dynamic, rapidly changing community. Area population has increased 30% in the past decade alone to 52,457 (2000 Census) up from 40,443 from 1990 (State of Nevada Demographer, 2003). As a growing community, Carson City faces a number of challenges that growth brings. Community residents tend to be especially concerned about traffic congestion, growth problems, and crime — in addition to concerns over economic vitality, opportunities for youth, and other quality of life issues such as drug and alcohol abuse. The most serious issues facing Carson City seniors are healthcare, transportation, and assisted living. Other, more important issues facing the community involve generating sustainable economic growth, while using natural resources wisely.

The youth component of this growing population adds another layer of complexity to the challenges facing Carson City. Many adults believe that young people are facing a situation leading to at-risk behavior, including gangs, gang violence, drug and alcohol abuse, inadequate preparation for work, and drinking and driving. Major contributors to these problems are a perceived lack of proper parental guidance, family breakdown, and a lack of positive adult influence.

- **Current Information is Needed**

Cooperative Extension can best serve the youth of the community and their families through programs designed to provide positive educational activities and diversionary programs, adult influences, and guidance. Doing so will require assessing current perceptions of Cooperative Extension and the characteristics of desired programs. At this juncture, there is a critical need for current information from all sectors of the community. As the understanding of community needs improves, Cooperative Extension can become a more substantial contributor by better matching program content with current perceptions among community members in Carson City.

- **Help Coordinate Information and Services**

The current economic environment presents challenges for better meeting the needs of the community. City revenues are already challenged to meet the demand for the increased services necessary to satisfy all the needs of youth and their families as the 3% budget cuts for all City departments in fiscal 2003-2004 indicate. Citizens typically indicate that they want more services but then are often unwilling or unable to pay additional taxes to cover those services.

It will be critical to coordinate the activities of the diverse groups offering support to Carson City as a way of maximizing the benefits to the community. Cooperative Extension can play a significant role in the process by helping to serve as a clearinghouse for community information, and by helping to coordinate the activities of the various support programs and services.

- **Get The Word Out**

Cooperative Extension already offers programs and activities of benefit to Carson City. It will be essential to inform and educate the community about current and planned programs to maximize effectiveness. Increased exposure in the community will provide residents additional opportunities for enhancing their quality of life. It will be important to improve community awareness of Cooperative Extension.

- **Reach Out To A Diverse Population**

Growth in Carson City has increased the diversity of the community. For example, Hispanics now represent 14% of area population — with numbers expected to grow substantially in the future. However, Hispanics have traditionally been under-represented in local surveys and assessments, in part due to language barriers.

Cooperative Extension must improve its outreach to the diverse cultural populations contributing to the makeup of Carson City. Every reasonable effort should be made to assure the representativeness of sampling from the community, along with efforts to increase sensitivity to the needs and perceptions of traditionally underrepresented groups. Advertising, programming, information, and education materials should reflect the language challenges that can hinder outreach into the community.

- **Encourage Conservation**

Rapid growth in Carson City has placed serious constraints on local natural resources. For example, water needs have grown dramatically and will require more extensive conservation efforts going forward. Also, the risk of loss of property, lives, and natural resources to wildfires is increasing as more and more people move into the urban/wildland interface. Likewise, energy consumption and waste disposal needs have increased without an associated improvement in conservation efforts.

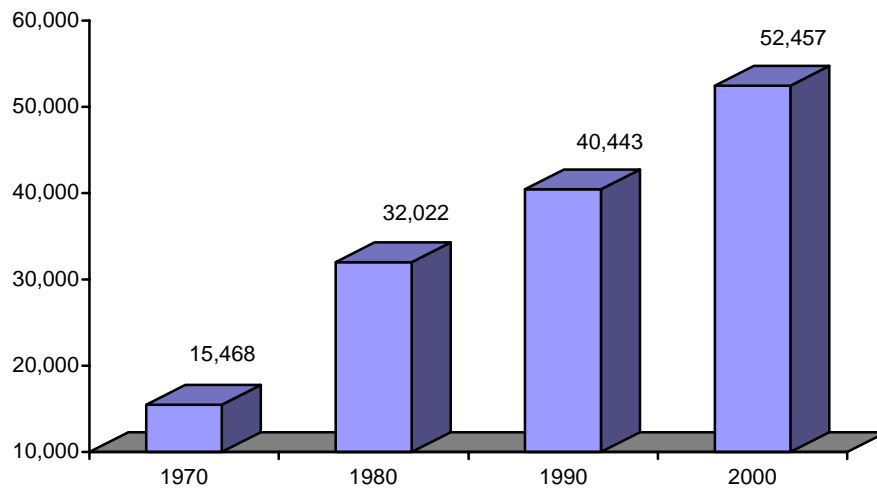
Improving conservation should become a more critical component of community outreach in Carson City. Cooperative Extension can serve a vital role in the community by further educating and informing residents about the resource issues, along with effective plans and programs for managing the problems.

## KEY FINDINGS

Carson City is a consolidated municipality, combining both city and county government. It covers 143.6 square miles and had a population in 2000 of 52,457 (2000 Census).

Carson City is a growing community (Figure 1). The population has increased dramatically in the recent past — up 30% just in the last decade and with a dramatic 64% increase since 1980. As of 2000, Carson City ranked third in Nevada in population, while the average annual population growth of 4.9% ranked sixth in the state (Lopez et al., 2002).

**FIGURE 1**  
**Population Of Carson City\***

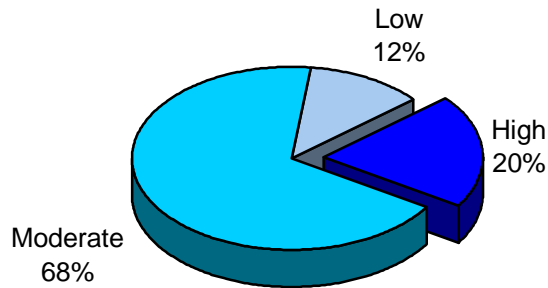


\* Lopez et al., 2002

## QUALITY OF LIFE

Overall, most Carson City residents tend to be moderately satisfied with the quality of life in their community (Figure 2). Almost nine in ten (88%) are at least moderately satisfied with the quality of life in the area, with 20% being very satisfied. Conversely, only about one in ten (12%) say they are not satisfied. To better understand the impact of Cooperative Extension on the community, it will be important to gauge the extent to which Cooperative Extension contributes to perceived quality of life. Currently, there is no information about perceptions of Cooperative Extension programs among community residents. A detailed assessment will be important for evaluating current programs and targeting new programs to maximize their effectiveness in the community.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Perceived Quality Of Life In Carson City\***

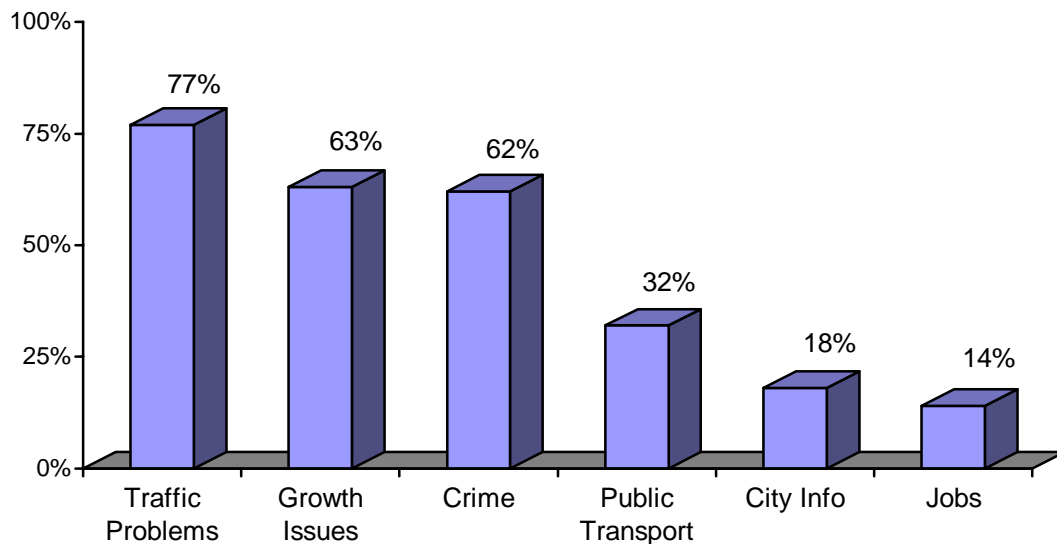


\*Source: Fall 2002 Carson City Public Opinion Survey (N = 416)

## CONCERNS OF ADULTS

As a dynamic community, Carson City faces many types of problems, issues, and obstacles (Figure 3). As a result of the rapid growth, the most important concerns of community residents center on growth-related issues (63%) — including traffic congestion (77%) and crime (62%). The need to improve public transportation (32%), while less serious, is also important to a substantial number of community residents, followed by the need for better local government information (18%) and concerns about jobs (14%).

**FIGURE 3**  
**Most Important Perceived Problems In Carson City\***

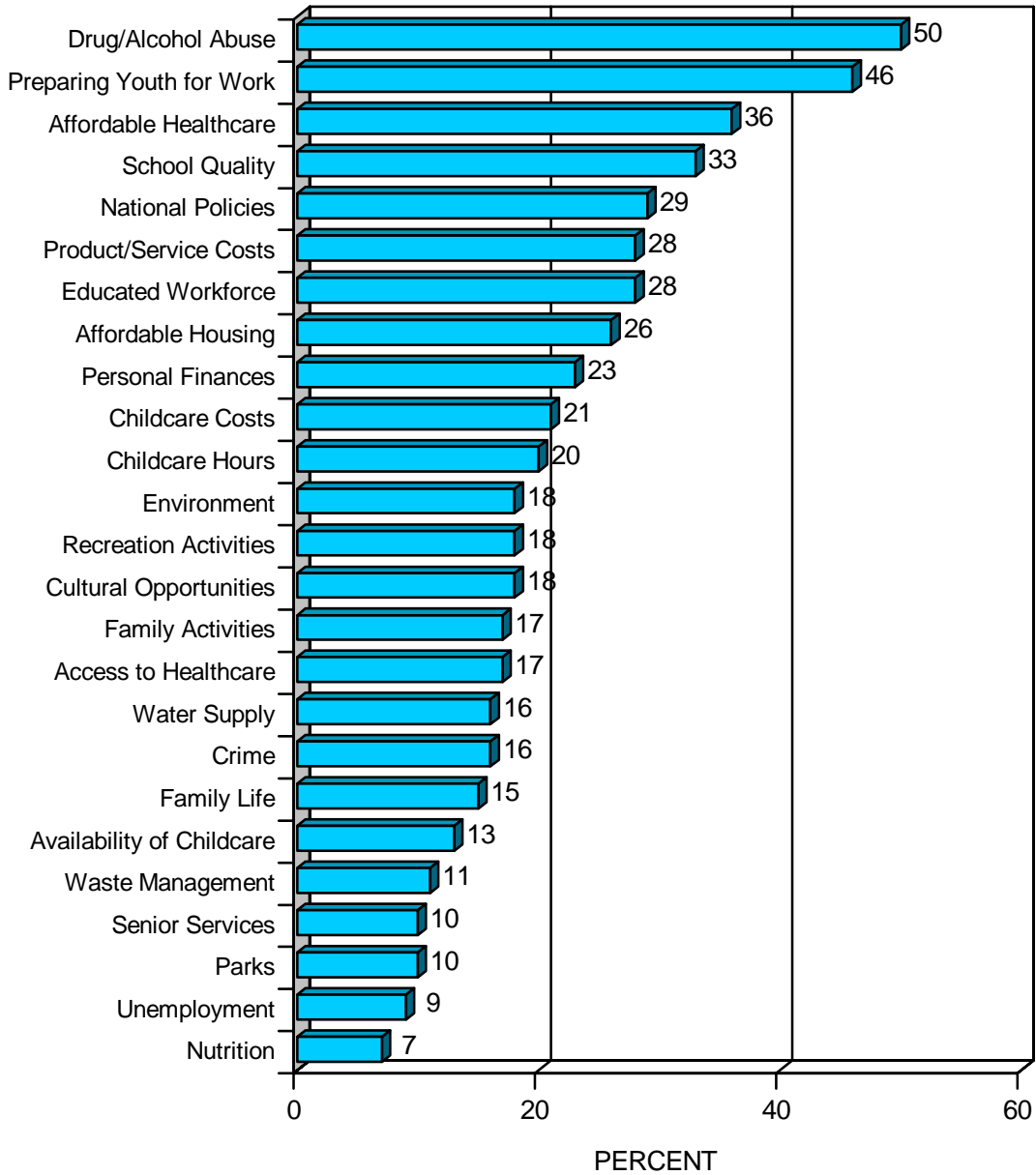


\* Source: Fall 2002 Carson City Public Opinion Survey (N = 416)

A detailed assessment of residents' perceptions of community problems is presented in Figure 4. However, it should be noted that these data were collected prior to 9/11 and thus do not reflect post-9/11 sensibilities. The lack of current information points out the need for a new study assessing specific perceptions among Carson City residents.

The results suggest that Cooperative Extension can be especially useful to the community by offering diversion and education programs for adults, and helping with education and job training skills for community youth. In addition, Cooperative Extension may be able to increase its impact by serving as a clearinghouse of information about services offered by other community organizations, as a way of helping with other community problems and concerns less central to its core mission.

**FIGURE 4**  
**Major Perceived Problems In Carson City\***



\*Source: 1999 Community Needs Survey (N = 760)

## NEEDS OF YOUTH

Carson City residents believe that the youth in the community are facing a number of serious problems (Table 1). Many of the most serious concerns center on problems associated with the lack of appropriate activities for young people, suggesting that by offering diversion, education, and information programs Cooperative Extension could play a significant role in improving the quality of life for community youth. However, additional information will need to be gathered that assesses young people's responsiveness to new and existing programs in the community.

**TABLE 1**  
**Major Concerns For Carson City Youth\***

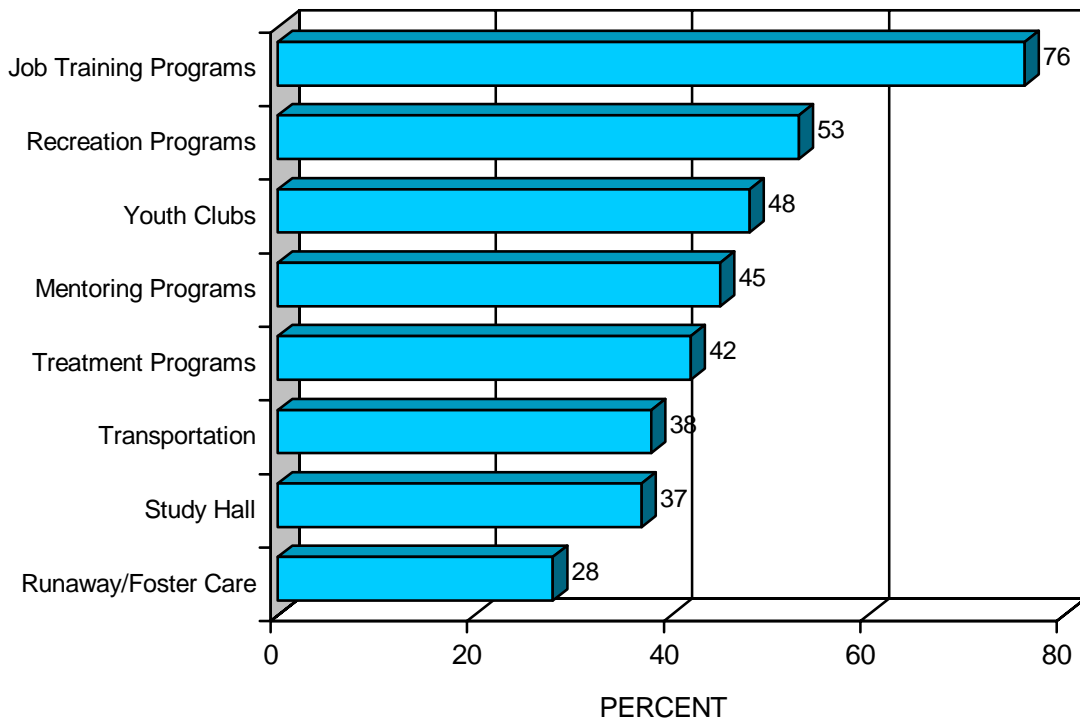
	TOTAL
Gangs/Gang Violence	58%
Drug/Alcohol Abuse	55
Drinking and Driving	52
Quality of Education	40
Teen Pregnancy	39
Role Models/Mentors	37
Post-High School Activities	35
Dropping Out of High School	34
Crime and Delinquency	34
School Safety/Violence	30
Abuse and Neglect	28
Recreation Activities (7 <sup>th</sup> thru 12 <sup>th</sup> )	28
Truancy	27
Sexually Transmitted Diseases	24
Depression and Suicide	24
Criminal Victimization	20
Recreation Activities (K thru 6 <sup>th</sup> )	20
Runaways	9
<b>BASE</b>	<b>(760)</b>

\*Source: 1999 Community Needs Survey



Carson City residents tend to believe that education and diversion programs will reduce the problems facing young people (Figure 5). As such, Cooperative Extension is ideally situated for providing relief for some of the most serious problems facing youth in the community. Job-training programs (76%) may be especially beneficial, followed by appropriate recreation activities (53%), youth clubs (48%), and mentoring programs (45%). Although less directly related to the mission of Cooperative Extension, many adults also believe that treatment programs (42%) are necessary, and that young people need transportation options (38%). If possible, Cooperative Extension should consider offering information and referrals for other, more appropriate community agencies — again, serving as a clearinghouse for community information.

**FIGURE 5**  
**Perceived Solutions To Youth Problems\***



\* Source: 1999 Community Needs Survey (N = 760)

Because 4-H and youth development are key programming areas for Cooperative Extension in Carson City, a 4-H Needs Assessment of 4-H Parents (N=150, 22% return rate) was conducted in 2001. Parents were asked how 4-H could help their children. They responded that life skills needing improvement for 4-H youth included:

- learning about future career choices
- improving skills to lead peers
- improving decision making and communication skills
- learning how to trust others and be trustworthy.

Parents were also requested to suggest ways staff could improve the management of the program. Management goals identified for improvement were:

- Improving the ways 4-H staff teach and announce upcoming events
- Improving planning and communication with leaders
- Doing more recruiting of both leaders and youth
- Bringing a wider variety of programs and clubs to Carson City youth.

It was also pointed out that Cooperative Extension should attract children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

In addition, a focus group, the 4-H Conversation on Youth, was held in 2002, by Cooperative Extension to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of 4-H and to explore what youth thought about the direction 4-H and community youth programming should be headed. Youth want:

- To create youth and adult partnerships throughout the community
- To increase access to information on colleges and scholarship programs
- To have more counseling and support for troubled teens
- To increase both educational and social activities
- To establish internships for youth participation in government and industry

Youth find it essential to have positive youth-related news stories conveyed through the assorted media: television, newspapers, and radio. Cooperative Extension can improve its outreach to the youth of the community by providing and coordinating current information and services across the community, and by getting the word out about its own programs.

## NEEDS OF SENIORS

The most serious issues facing Carson City seniors are healthcare, transportation, and assisted living (Table 2). Caregiver, grief, and Alzheimer's support groups are also desired. It may be that Cooperative Extension can be most useful by providing information about community organizations that offer these types of services to senior community members. The types of diversion and education programs that would be of most use to seniors are not currently known and should be assessed. The Carson City Senior Center may be a good location for placement of Cooperative Extension publications and materials, given that a full one-third (34%) of seniors said they had visited the Center in 1999.

**TABLE 2**  
**Major Concerns For Carson City Seniors\***

	TOTAL
Cost of prescriptions	43%
Affordable dental care	43
Affordable medical care	38
Finding Medicare doctors	34
Lack of transportation	34
Assisted living housing	31
Elder daycare	29
Personal finances	28
Crime	26
Affordable housing	25
Finding a doctor	21
Senior services	15
Nutrition	13
Elder abuse	11
Adult recreation	8
Drug and alcohol abuse	5
<b>BASE</b>	<b>(719)</b>

\*Source: 1999 Carson City Senior Center Survey

## COMMUNITY HEALTH AND NUTRITION NEEDS

In 2000 the state nutrition team for Cooperative Extension identified three areas of concern for people across the state: increasing physical activity, reducing tobacco use, and improving food choices. Four goals were selected to address these needs:

- Physical activity must be an individual, family, community, and state priority
- School nutrition and physical activity policies must be integrated with identified health needs
- Nutrition and good health can be improved through building basic skills and awareness
- Images about food and body size that are consistent with good health should be promoted.

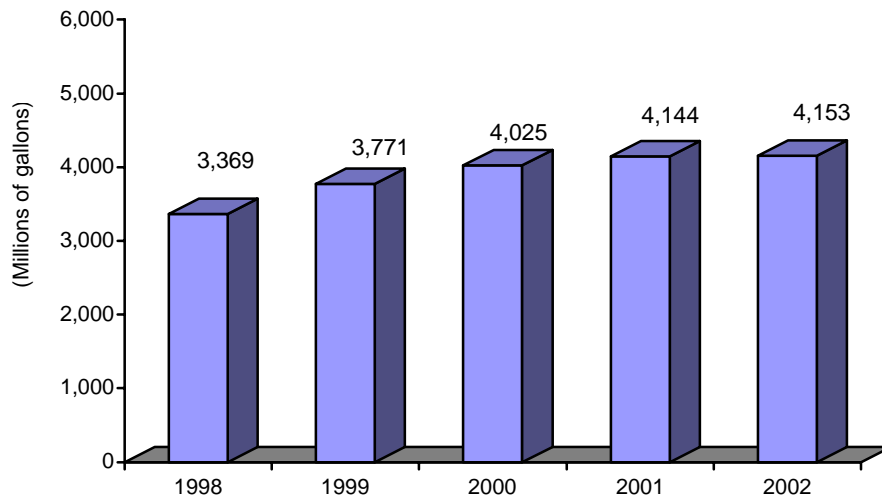
Health and nutrition concerns were also identified through the 2002 Community Tour: people need to know what information, programs and classes are available on health and nutrition and they want more information on addictions, obesity, and cancer and diet. There is also a need for multilingual programming. Cooperative Extension could link with after-school care programs and provide nutrition education for youth.

Cooperative Extension can meet health and nutrition needs by continuing its own programming; by discovering and disseminating current research; by working with other agencies and organizations who are also educators in the area of health and nutrition; and by expanding outreach efforts to underserved audiences.

## RESOURCE USE AND CONSERVATION

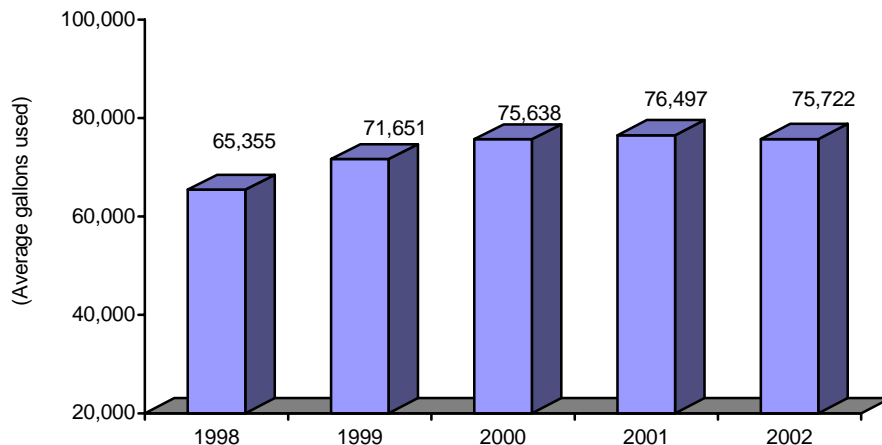
The rapid growth in Carson City has led to resource allocation issues and exacerbated some pre-existing resource needs. For example, water needs have grown dramatically with the increase in area population (Figure 6). Water use was up 23% to 4.2 billion gallons annually in 2002 from 3.4 billion gallons in 1998. Water needs continue to grow even though average usage (including tourists) has stayed fairly constant at about 76,000 gallons per person annually over the past three years (Figure 7). The national average ranged from 37,000 (USGS 1995) to 60,000 gallons per person annually (EPA 2003). Stressing water conservation will become even more important as the growing population continues to tax the delivery system.

**FIGURE 6**  
**Carson City Water Use — Total Per Year\***



\* Carson City Water Utilities, 2003 – includes State of Nevada facilities usage

**FIGURE 7**  
**Carson City Water Use — Average Per Person Per Year\***



\* Carson City Water Utilities, 2003 – includes State of Nevada facilities usage

In addition to water use issues, the Cooperative Extension Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation team (NREC) determined nine pressing natural resource-related issues for the western area of Cooperative Extension (Carson City, Douglas, Storey, and Washoe counties):

**(1) Water quantity** – as populations grow, water needs grow. Water conservation practices are needed to increase water-use efficiency. **(2) Water quality** – attention must be focused on managing the impacts to surface and ground water from non-point or diffuse sources. Erosion has increased, reducing water quality. **(3) Watershed management** – integrated management should combine the efforts of diverse groups to address the complex issues affecting planning decisions for improved watershed health. **(4) Flooding** – floods are the number one cause of loss of life and property in Nevada. Residents are often unaware about the hazards. Flood education is needed. In 1997 alone, flood damage costs to Carson City were over two million dollars (Carson City Finance Department, 2003). Cooperative Extension has provided educational programs in each of these areas and should continue to do so — as well as building collaborative efforts with water purveyors, educators, conservation districts, land managers, ranchers, and others.

**(5) Forest health** – The stresses of drought, wildfires, and insect infestations have led to widespread tree mortality, increasing the risk of catastrophic wildfires, and threatening public safety and natural resources. Cooperative Extension should direct educational programming to how to restore forests to a state where natural and human-induced influences do not threaten desired conditions. This may entail group facilitation, solicitation of public input, and conflict resolution.

**(6) Wildfire** - Western Nevada is an extreme fire-hazard environment where large uncontrollable, intense fires may rage. From 1999-2001 3,245,817 acres burned in Nevada. Wildfires take lives, destroy property, cost millions for suppression and rehabilitation, damage watersheds, and impair wildlife habitats. Cooperative Extension should continue to collaborate with fire and land management agencies to educate communities to increase pre-fire preparedness.

**(7) Noxious weeds** – Problem weeds on public and private lands threaten plant and animal diversity, water quality, stream bank stabilization, and water table depth. Economic losses can occur. Effective control measures require groups and individuals to work together. Cooperative Extension can improve coordinated control measures by conducting research-based educational programs and facilitating the Carson City Weed Coalition's efforts.

**(8) Urban Horticulture** – Homeowners and agriculture producers using fertilizer and pesticides have the potential to pollute surface and groundwater. Cooperative Extension should continue its educational outreach to guide residents in proper plant choices for water efficiency and sustainable landscape

design, teach the least toxic methods of pest control, and offer methods to increase wildfire and flood survival. Cooperative Extension should teach more about water conservation and water efficient landscaping (Horticulture Needs Assessment, 2003) and might use television and radio more for educational outreach. Fact sheets need to be kept current with up-to-date research and chemical recommendations (Dean's Tour, 2002). "Ongoing contractor education to raise the professionalism of the industry" and "expanding educational offerings for residents in western Nevada" were identified as educational needs in the 2003 Horticulture Needs Assessment. The top ranked issues in this survey were **drought planning** and species selection for water use characteristics. Other top ranking issues were water quality and integrated pest management.

**(9) Public Policy** – Western Nevada's increasing population places complex demands on natural resources raising a mix of challenges as it accelerates the loss of natural areas, agricultural land, and impacts the environment by disturbing native plant communities, increasing soil erosion, impairing water quality, and speeding the spread of invasive or noxious plants. Increased use of septic systems contaminates groundwater. Increasing vehicle travel impacts air quality. Natural resource issues are generally contentious and controversial. Cooperative Extension can act as an objective facilitator and help provide training and support to improve the collaborative decision-making process. (Natural Resource Needs in Western Nevada, 1999).

In addition to the above, other important resource issues exist. Energy consumption increased 41% from 1991 to 1997 (Nevada Department of Transportation, 2003). Likewise, there was an increase in pollutant emissions owing to an increase in vehicle miles traveled (an increase of 65% from 1990 to 1997) and a decrease in average fuel efficiency. Currently, most of the energy consumed comes from the combustion of coal, natural gas, and oil. Only 7% comes from non-fossil fuel sources such as hydropower or geothermal resources (Nevada Natural Resources Status Report, 2001).

Another serious issue centers on problems with waste disposal and recycling. On average, Nevadans generate nine pounds of solid waste per person per day, almost twice the national average of 4.5 pounds per person per day. The recycling rate in Carson City is only 11% compared to a national average of 28%. Carson City Sanitary Landfill life span is estimated to be 37 years (Carson City Environmental Health Department, 2003). Cooperative Extension could increase educational efforts aimed at encouraging recycling.

Key stakeholders felt a wellhead protection program was needed and that storm water management was also an important issue (personal interviews). Cooperative Extension can facilitate discussions at the neighborhood level to improve understanding about the implications for the community and suggest appropriate action to residents.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

State and local non-education government made up about 25% of total Carson City employment in 1999, paying in the top ten of total Carson City economic sectors and adding stability to the economy (Harris, 2002). However, in retail, Carson is losing from 33% to 78% of potential taxable sales depending on the type of business from home furnishing to apparel. In eating and drinking, the City is losing 55% of potential taxable sales because people spend money for these services in other counties.

Declining local revenues continue to concern citizens and leaders. In July 2003, for example, the *Nevada Appeal* reported that taxable sales had declined again in May for the tenth straight month.

Based on per capita income, the quality of life in Carson City is better than for many Nevada counties, with the third highest per capita income of \$32,206. However, trends in personal income indicate that a large number of people earn their living in Carson City but live outside the county, resulting in a potentially significant spending leakage. People get paid in Carson City, but spend their money closer to home in other counties.

One possible solution involves forming a business assistance committee. As part of this type of business development program, the business sector could be analyzed to identify voids in the regional market that could be filled by Carson City businesses. In addition, this committee could “provide assistance and counseling to improve the efficiency and profitability of local businesses” (Harris, 2002) and help with new business startups. Funding sources could be identified and home-based and other small businesses could be promoted. To facilitate this process, local organizations and media should be involved — including the assistance of Cooperative Extension through educational programs and information support.



## DEMOGRAPHICS

A demographic profile of Carson City residents is presented in Table 3 (drawn primarily from 2000 U.S. Census data).

In general, more than one-half (55%) of the community has at least some college experience (with 19% college graduates or higher) and one-quarter (25%) has family incomes of \$75,000 or more. However, there is a relatively high proportion of less educated (45% have a high school education or less) and lower income families (19% have incomes of less than \$25,000). (Carson City Public Opinion Survey, Spring 2003). As of 1999, only 3% of adults were unemployed and 10% of the population lived below the poverty level (\$16,895 or less for a family of four) (Center for Business and Economic Research, 2003). Almost six in ten (58%) of the adult population is registered to vote.

More than one in ten community residents (14%) are Latino or Hispanic — with about half of these residents (7%) experiencing some English language difficulties. 15% of Carson residents do not speak English at home (U.S. Census 2000). The Hispanic population in the community has increased from 8% in 1991 and is projected to be 26% of the population by 2022 (State of Nevada Demographer, 2003). Cooperative Extension needs to partner with the Spanish-speaking population. Cooperative Extension and other agencies are missing serving the Hispanic Community. Expanding programs and communication with the Hispanic community should be an important goal for Cooperative Extension to increase its reach and effectiveness in the community.

Native Americans comprise only 2% of the population, but are greatly under-represented in the data. Cooperative Extension needs to assess the needs of this portion of the community and find ways to build communication channels with other portions of the community.

Almost two in ten Carson City residents (18%) have a disability, suggesting another area where Cooperative Extension may need to assess its ability to meet the special needs of a significant subgroup of the community.

The population of Carson City as a whole is aging. The median age increased from 36.6 years in 1990 to 38.7 years in age in 2000 (Lopez et al., 2002). As the median age increases, needs will change, incomes may change and the economy and perceptions of desired social services may be affected.

**TABLE 3  
Resident Demographics\***

	TOTAL
<b>GENDER</b>	
Male	52%
Female	48
<b>AGE</b>	
<b>Under 21</b>	<b>27</b>
Less than 15	20
15 to 20	7
<b>Over 21</b>	<b>73</b>
21 to 44	33
45 to 64	25
65 and over	15
MEDIAN	38.7
<b>EDUCATION (25+)</b>	
High school/less	45
Some college	36
College graduates	19
<b>OWN HOME</b>	
Yes	63
<b>DISABILITY</b>	
Yes	18
<b>MARITAL STATUS (15+)</b>	
Married	56
Not married	44
<b>ETHNICITY</b>	
White	79
Latino	14
Asian	2
African American	2
Native American	2
Other	1
<b>2000 POPULATION</b>	<b>(52,457)</b>

\* Source: 2000 U.S. Census data

**TABLE 3**  
**Resident Demographics**  
(Continued)

	TOTAL
<b>FAMILY INCOME*</b>	
<25K	19
\$25-50K	32
\$50-75K	25
\$75-100K	13
≥100K	12
MEDIAN (1999 estimate)	\$32,206
<b>REGISTERED TO VOTE** (18+)</b>	
Yes	58
<b>POLITICAL PARTY**</b>	
Republican	51
Democrat	34
Other	15
<b>2000 POPULATION</b>	<b>(52,457)</b>

\* Source: 2000 U.S. Census data

\*\* Source: Nevada Secretary of State

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