



Land use adjustments in Blaine, Phillips and Valley counties, Montana, 1934 to 1940
by Nicholas Helburn

A THESIS Submitted to the Graduate Committee In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Agricultural Economics at Montana State College
Montana State University
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Abstract:

This thesis is an evaluation and criticism of the land use adjustments which have been brought about since 1933 in Blaine, Phillips and Valley counties, and a generalization on future adjustments for the area.

A physical characterization of the area shows it to be a part of the rolling, semi-arid plains, and a history of settlement points out that ranching dominated the area until 1910 when homesteaders started raising wheat with success at first, failure later.

Evidence from the human adjustments to the physical resources shows that the central axis of trade and transportation is the Milk River Valley; that population has increased in the valley, decreased on the upland; that ownership and control of land is scattered and varied; that the major problems of the area are: insecurity, over-specialization, exploitation of agricultural resources, and inability of the upland to support the expected services.

The critique of the action programs dealing with these problems shows that: the State Grazing districts maintain a centralized control over range land within their boundaries; the Agricultural Adjustment Administration tries to control production and to increase productivity by liberal subsidy; the Land Purchase program in buying about a million acres of land fulfilled the major national objectives, - the distribution of money (pump priming) and the bringing of land into government ownership; but the fulfillment of local objectives, only a minor part of the national program, would have achieved greater adjustment; the Resettlement program has resettled 169 families on irrigated units but with policies such that the clients carry an extremely heavy financial burden.

In conclusion it is noted that a resettlement project falls into four main stages: conception, proposal, development, and repayment; that the Milk River project is still in the development stage. Finally, if a dynamic adjustment is ever to be achieved in this area, concentrated rather than scattered settlement must prevail; community controls over land use must be developed and applied locally; individual units must be diversified; and financial arrangements must take into account fluctuations in climatic conditions.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	4
ABSTRACT.....	5
PART I: INTRODUCTION.....	6
<u>The Project Area and Its Resources</u>	9
Geology.....	10
Topography and Drainage.....	10
Soils.....	12
Natural Vegetation.....	13
Climate.....	15
Minerals.....	19
<u>History</u>	20
PART II: HUMAN PATTERNS, CHANGES, AND PROBLEMS.....	29
<u>Patterns and Changes</u>	29
Trade and Transportation.....	29
Population.....	32
Agriculture.....	36
Number and Location of Farms.....	36
Size of Farms.....	43
Land Ownership.....	43
Tenure.....	48
Type of Enterprise.....	49
Schools.....	52
Tax Delinquency.....	55
<u>Problems</u>	57
PART III: CRITIQUE.....	60
The State Grazing Districts.....	60

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	Page
County Commissioners.....	63
The State of Montana.....	63
The Federal Government.....	64
The Biological Survey.....	64
The Forest Service.....	64
The Indian Service.....	64
The Grazing Service.....	64
The Bureau of Reclamation.....	65
The Agricultural Adjustment Administration.....	66
The Soil Conservation Service.....	69
The Farm Security Administration.....	76
PART IV: CONCLUSION.....	90
<u>Stages of a Resettlement Project</u>	90
Conception.....	90
Proposal and Research.....	91
Development.....	92
Financial Adjustment.....	93
<u>The Mature Landscape</u>	94
Concentrated Settlement.....	95
Community Control.....	96
Diversification.....	97
Financial Arrangements.....	98
<u>Agencies and the Mature Landscape</u>	99
SUMMARY.....	102
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	103
LITERATURE CITED AND CONSULTED.....	104

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	page
Figure 1. Location of Blaine, Phillips and Valley Counties in the Northern Great Plains.....	7
Figure 2. Seasonal Precipitation and Temperature of Malta, Montana.....	16
Figure 3. Distribution of Purchased Land in Blaine County....	26
Figure 4. Distribution of Purchased Land in Phillips County..	27
Figure 5. Distribution of Purchased Land in Valley County....	28
Figure 6. Roads and Schools; Area V, Montana, 1939.....	31
Figure 7. Population Change by Minor Civil Divisions, Blaine County.....	33
Figure 8. Population Change by Minor Civil Divisions, Phillips County.....	34
Figure 9. Population Change by Minor Civil Divisions, Valley County.....	35
Figure 10. Changes in Number of Farms in Blaine, Phillips, and Valley Counties, 1930-1940.....	37
Figure 11. Location of Farms by Type and Type of Farming Sub-Areas, Area V, Montana.....	38
Figure 12. Land Classification, Area V, Montana.....	40
Figure 13. Farms Having Gross Income Expectancies of \$1,000 or Less.....	42
Figure 14. Number of Farms and Land in Farms by Tenure, 1940.....	45
Figure 15. Kind of Land Ownership; Area V, Montana, March 1, 1937.....	47
Figure 16. Percentage Change in Tenure in Project Area, 1920 to 1940.....	50
Figure 17. Trends in Acreage and Tonnage of Sugar Beets.....	53

	page
Figure 18. Status of Tax Delinquency Area V, Montana, July 1, 1936.....	56
Figure 19. Grazing District Boundaries in the Project Area....	61
Figure 20. Distribution of the Dry Land in Reference to the Irrigated Land; Blaine, Phillips and Valley Counties.....	97a

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