

Rural Living in Elko County

Things You Need To Know About Rural Living

Access

The fact that you can drive to your property does not necessarily guarantee that you, your guests and emergency service vehicles can achieve that same level of access at all times. Please consider:

Emergency response times (Sheriff, fire suppression, medical care, etc.) cannot be guaranteed. Under some extreme conditions, you may find that emergency response is extremely slow and expensive.

There can be problems with the legal aspects of access, especially if you gain access across property belonging to others. A visual inspection of a property may reveal a road that is not shown on a map or a road that bisects a parcel. It is wise to obtain legal advice and understand easements and road issues when these types of questions arise. A beginning point would be to contact Elko County Planning and Zoning at 775-738-6816 ext. #213, #214 and #215.

You can experience problems with the maintenance and cost of maintenance of your road. Elko County maintains approximately 1100 miles of paved and graveled roads. There are many more miles of unimproved prescriptive use roads and tracks that are not maintained. Many rural properties are served by private and public roads which are maintained by private road associations. There are many roads that are not maintained by the county - no grading or snow plowing. There are even some public roads that are not maintained by anyone! Make sure you know what type of maintenance to expect and who will provide that maintenance. Information concerning road maintenance can be obtained by contacting the Elko County Road Supervisor at 775-738-5036.

Extreme weather conditions can destroy roads. It is wise to determine whether or not your road was properly engineered and constructed.

Extreme weather changes may strand the motorist in rural areas on roads that are infrequently travelled upon. It is important to carry clothing and provisions while in rural Nevada.

Many large construction vehicles cannot navigate small, narrow roads. If you plan to build, it is prudent to check out construction access.

School buses travel only on maintained county roads that have been designated as school bus routes by the school district. You may need to drive your children to the nearest county road so they can get to school.

In extreme weather, even county maintained roads can become impassable. You may need a four wheel drive vehicle with chains for all four wheels to travel during those episodes, which could last for several days. In some cases, the roads may be impassible.

Natural disasters, especially floods, can destroy roads. Elko County will repair and maintain those county roads that have been accepted as publically maintained roads. However, roads that have not been accepted for maintenance such as subdivision roads are the responsibility of the landowners who use those roads. A dry creek bed can become a raging torrent and wash out roads, bridges, and culverts. Residents served by private roads and/or bridges have been hit with large bills for repairs and/or reconstruction after floods.

Unpaved roads generate dust. Elko County treats some county roads to suppress the dust, but dust is still a fact of life for most rural residents.

Following the speed limits posted on unpaved roads will extend the road surface life, reduce vehicle repair costs, reduce dust, and reduce traffic accidents.

Unpaved roads are not always smooth and are often slippery when they are wet. You will experience an increase in vehicle maintenance costs when you regularly travel on rural county roads.

Mail delivery is not available to all areas of the county. Ask the postmaster to describe the system for your area. Newspaper delivery is similarly not always available to rural areas. Check with the newspaper of your choice before assuming you can get delivery.

Standard parcel and overnight package delivery can be a problem for those who live in the country. Confirm with the service providers as to your status.

Not all parcels in Elko County have a physical address. To acquire information regarding a physical address for a parcel of land that is developed or being developed contact Elko County Planning & Zoning at 775-738-6816 Ext. 215.

It may be more expensive and time consuming to build a rural residence due to delivery fees and the time required for inspectors to reach your site. Elko County charges a mileage fee for inspections.

Utility Services

Water, sewer, electric, telephone and other services may be unavailable or may not operate at urban standards. Repairs can often take much longer than in towns and cities. Please review your options from the non-exhaustive list below.

No work can be done in an Elko County Roadway Easement until a Right of Way permit is granted. For more information contact Elko County Planning & Zoning at 775-738-6816 Ext. 215.

Landline and cellular phone communications can be a problem, especially in the more remote and mountain areas of Elko County. If you have a land line, it may be difficult to obtain another line for fax or computer modem uses. Cellular phones will not work in all areas.

If sewer service is available to your property, it may be expensive to hook into the system. It also may be expensive to maintain the system you use.

If sewer service is not available, you will need to use an approved septic system or other treatment process permitted and approved by the Department of Health Services (Ph. #775-753-1138). The type of soil you have available for a leach field will be very important in determining the cost and function of your system.

If you have access to a supply of treated domestic water, the tap fees can be expensive. You may also find that your monthly cost of service can be costly when compared to municipal systems.

If you do not have access to a supply of treated domestic water, you will have to locate an alternative supply. The most common method is the use of domestic water wells. Permits for wells are granted by the state engineer and the cost for drilling and pumping can be considerable. The quality and quantity of well water can vary considerably from location to location and from season to season. It is strongly advised that you research this issue very carefully. The Nevada Division of Water Resources (Ph. #775-753-3553) would be able to provide more information on general water issues and permits. The "Yellow Pages" list the local well drillers who can supply helpful information and current costs for services.

Not all wells can be used for crop irrigation and/or livestock. Permits from the state engineer may restrict water use to that which is used inside of a home, (domestic use). If you have other needs, make certain that you have the proper approvals before you invest. It may also be difficult to find enough water to provide for your needs even if you can secure the proper permit.

Some properties may be located within an allocated water basin and future division of property may require relinquishing of water rights to the state engineer before parceling can take place. For more information concerning this issue, call 775-738-6816 Ext. #213, #214 or #215.

Electric service may not be available to every area of Elko County. It is important to determine the proximity of electrical power. It can be very expensive to extend power lines to remote areas. Contact the local purveyor for information and cost projections.

It may be necessary to cross property owned by others in order to extend electric service to your property in the most cost efficient manner. It is important to make sure that the proper easements are in place to allow lines to be built to your property.

Electric power may not be available in two phase and three phase service configurations. If you have special power requirements, it is important to know what level of service can be provided to your property. Contact the local purveyor for information and cost projections.

If you are purchasing land with the plan to build at a future date, there is a possibility that electric lines (and other utilities) may not be large enough to accommodate you if others connect during the time you wait to build. Contact the local purveyor for information.

Power outages can occur in outlying areas with more frequency than in more developed areas. A loss of electric power can also interrupt your supply of water from a well. You may also lose food in freezers or refrigerators and power outages can cause problems with computers as well.

Trash removal can be much more expensive in a rural area than in a city. In some cases, your trash dumpster may be several miles from your home. It is illegal to create your own trash dump, even on your own land. It is good to know the cost for trash removal as you make the decision to move into the country. In some cases, your only option may be to haul your trash to the landfill yourself. Recycling is more difficult because pick-up is not available in most rural areas.

The Property

There are many issues that can affect your property. It is important to research these items before purchasing land.

Not all lots are buildable. The use of internet mapping services and topographical maps are useful, but a visit to the property is by far a better method of determining if the lot can be built upon.

Easements may require you to allow construction of roads, power lines, water lines, sewer lines, etc. across your land. There may be easements that are not of record. Research these issues carefully.

Many property owners do not own the mineral rights under their property. Owners of mineral rights have the ability to change the surface characteristics in order to extract their minerals. It is very important to know what minerals may be located under the land and who owns them. Be aware that adjacent mining uses can expand and cause negative or undesirable impacts.

You may be provided with a plat of your property, but unless the land has been surveyed and pins placed by a licensed surveyor, you cannot assume that the plat is accurate.

Fences that separate properties may be misaligned with the property lines. A survey of the land is the only way to confirm the location of your property lines.

Many subdivisions and planned unit developments have covenants that limit the use of the property. It is important to obtain a copy of the covenants (or confirm that there are none) and make sure that you can live with those rules. A lack of covenants can cause problems between neighbors.

Homeowners Associations (HOA) are required to take care of common elements, roads, open space, etc. A dysfunctional homeowners association or poor covenants can cause problems for you and even involve you in expensive litigation.

Dues may be a requirement for those areas with a HOA. The by-laws of the HOA will tell you how the organization operates and how dues are set.

The surrounding properties will probably not remain as they are indefinitely. You can check with the Elko County Planning Division to find out how the properties are zoned and to see what future developments may be in the planning stages. The view from your property may change.

If you have a ditch running across your property there is a good possibility that the owners of the ditch have the right to come onto your property with heavy equipment to maintain the ditch.

Water rights that are sold with the property may not give you the right to use the water from any ditches crossing your land. See "Nevada Water Law".

It is important to make sure that any water rights you purchase with the land will provide enough water to maintain fruit trees, pastures, gardens or livestock.

The water flowing in irrigation ditches belongs to someone. You cannot assume that because the water flows across your property, you can use it.

Flowing water can be a hazard, especially to young children. Before you decide to locate your home near an active ditch or other waterways and reservoirs, consider the possible danger to your family.

Nevada is an open grazing law state. The cattle are free ranging. Fencing out of cattle is the responsibility of the property owner.

Mother Nature

The physical characteristics of your property can be positive and negative. Trees and other ground cover are a wonderful environmental amenity, but can also involve your home in a wild land fires, flooding, and other potential disasters. Below is a non comprehensive list of some of these issues.

High elevation weather can be harsh and extreme weather conditions can happen at any time of the year. It is important to be prepared by carrying proper clothing, water, spare tires and tools and supplies at all times in the rural areas.

Building at the top of a forested or vegetative covered draw should be considered dangerous. Defensible perimeters are very helpful in protecting buildings from forest and wild land fires and inversely can protect the landscape from igniting if your house catches on fire. If you start a forest or wild land fire, you may be responsible for paying for the cost of extinguishing that fire. For further information, you can contact the Nevada Department of Forestry.

Utilizing free ranging cattle to remove fuel supplies can be an advantage to the rural property owner.

Steep slopes can slide in unusually wet weather. Large rocks can also roll down steep slopes and present a great danger to people and property.

Expansive soils can buckle concrete foundations and twist steel I-beams. You can know the soil conditions on your property if you have a soil test performed.

North facing slopes and canyons rarely receives direct sunlight in the winter. There is a possibility that snow will accumulate and not melt throughout the winter.

The topography of the land can tell you where the water will go in the case of heavy precipitation. When property owners fill in ravines, they have found that the water that drained through that ravine now drains through their house.

A flash flood can occur, especially during the summer months, and turn a dry gully into a river. It is wise to take this possibility into consideration when building. A copy of the FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map for your area will tell you where areas are that are prone to flooding are.

Spring run-off can cause a very small creek to swell and move past its natural banks. Many residents use sand bags to protect their homes. The county does not provide sand bags, equipment or people to protect private property from flooding.

Nature can provide you with some wonderful neighbors. Most, such as deer and eagles are positive additions to the environment. However, even "harmless" animals like deer can cross the road unexpectedly and cause traffic accidents. Rural development encroaches on the traditional wildlife habitat that can be dangerous to you and your animals. The Nevada Department of Wildlife is a good source for information. They have many free publications to help educate you about local wildlife.

Agriculture

The people who tamed this wild land developed ingenious systems of water diversion. We owe a debt of gratitude to them as this water has allowed agriculture to become an important part of our economy and environment as well as being responsible for an increase in our states wildlife. Owning rural land means knowing how to care for it. There are a few things you need to know:

Ranchers / Farmers may work around the clock, especially during planting and harvest time. Hay may be swathed or baled at night. It is possible that adjoining agriculture uses can disturb your peace and quiet.

Gathering and moving cattle from wintering areas to summer ranges and then back to winter ranges throughout the year can cause dust, animal waste on the road surfaces and traffic delays.

Land preparation and other operations can cause dust, especially during windy and dry weather.

Farmers occasionally burn their ditches to keep them clean of debris, weeds and other obstructions as well as burn old hay stacks. This burning creates smoke that you may find objectionable.

Animals and their manure can cause objectionable odors.

Agriculture is an important part of our economy in Elko County. If you choose to live among the ranches and farms of our rural countryside, do not expect county government to intervene in the normal day-to-day operations of your agri-business neighbors.

Nevada has an Open Range Law. Free ranging cattle can cause property damages to rural properties or benefits by removing fuel loads from the landscape. It is your responsibility as a property owner to fence out unwanted cattle. It is not the responsibility of the rancher to keep his/her livestock off your property.

Before buying land you should know if it has noxious weeds that may be expensive to control and you may be required to control. Some plants are poisonous to horses and other livestock.

Animals can be dangerous. Bulls, stallions, etc. can attack human beings. Children need to know that it is not safe to enter pens where animals are kept.

In general, Elko County receives approximately 11 inches of precipitation per year. As a result, we have a problem with fugitive dust and extreme fire danger in the fire season. Without irrigation, grass does not grow very well. There is a limit to the amount of grazing the land can handle. The Elko County Cooperative Extension Office can help you with these issues.

In Conclusion

Even though you pay property taxes to the county, the amount of tax collected does not cover the cost of the services provided to rural residents. In general, those living in the cities subsidize the lifestyle of those who live in the country by making up the shortfall between the cost of services and the revenues received from rural dwellers.

This information is by no means exhaustive. There are other issues that you may encounter that we have overlooked and we encourage you to be vigilant in your duties to explore and examine those things that could cause your move to be less than you expect.

We have offered these comments in the sincere hope that it can help you enjoy your decision to reside in the country. It is not our intent to dissuade you, only inform you.