

Rural area power users need relief

THE Bureau of Reclamation finally offered rural ratepayers some relief this week from exorbitant power bills associated with the over-endowed visitors center at Hoover Dam.

The bureau issued a report which said it will try to keep assessments down to the 1983 estimate

to build the center, which will be about \$58 million, including interest. The original estimate was \$32 million, but thanks to an appalling lack of cost control, the center's price tag now stands at \$123 million.

The urban power users' share of the cost is miniscule, about 84 cents a year. In the rural areas, it's a different story. Nye, Lincoln and

rural Clark County farmers are facing assessments up to \$1,000 a month, a terrible penalty for the bureau's lack of frugality. Bureau Commissioner Dan Beard vows such extravagance will never happen again and at one point threatened to stop construction on the center.

The Nevada delegation has been trying to reach a resolution on this issue and examining how the bureau planners went berserk over what should have been a simple visitors center. As in most federal projects, no heads will roll, but hopefully better fiscal controls will be adopted.

The small power companies serving rural Nevada have been to court twice over this assessment and are looking at this latest offer from the bureau with understandable suspicion. They are seeking legislation or at least a written contract to protect them from added financial burdens.

The bureau has taken the right step in trying to absorb some of the costs. Now if it can assure the power users that no more rate-hike surprises are in the wings, an accommodation may be likely. Better ways must be found to pay for federal extravagance than on the backs of agricultural producers.

