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# Population change in Wyoming, 1990-2000

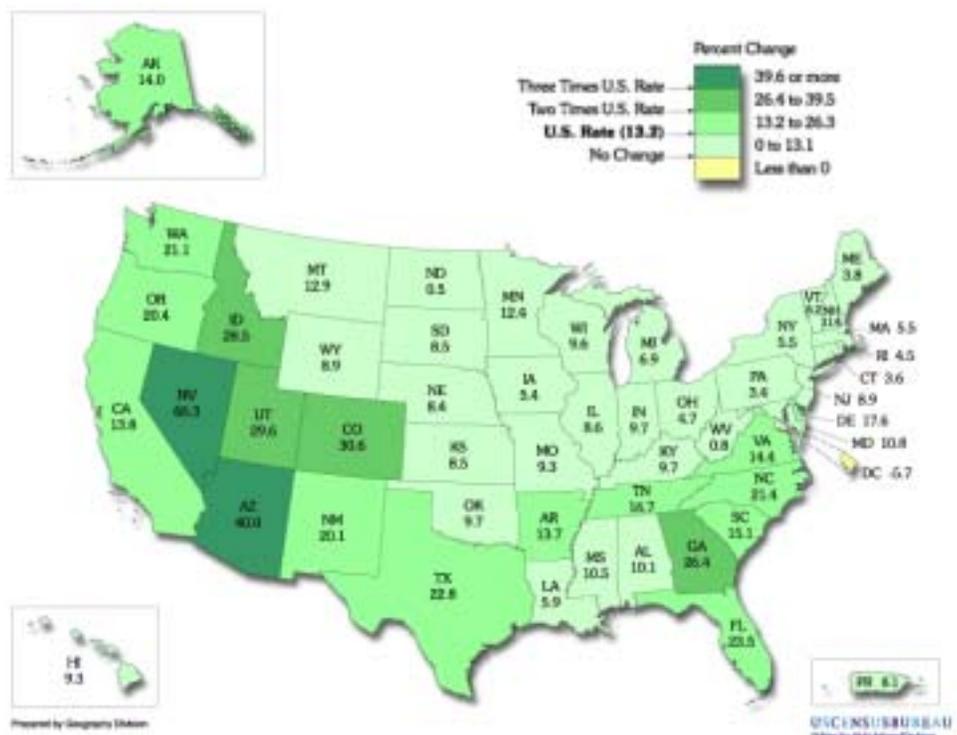
By David T. Taylor, Professor/Community Development Specialist, and Scott Lieske, Research Scientist, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics

Key to understanding how population alters land-use patterns is knowing how the population of a country, region, or state is changing. Numbers from the 2000 census paint a picture of growth in the Rocky Mountain West; however, different areas of Wyoming are experiencing both growth and decline. Wyoming's census numbers also indicate differences in growth between the urban and rural areas of the state.

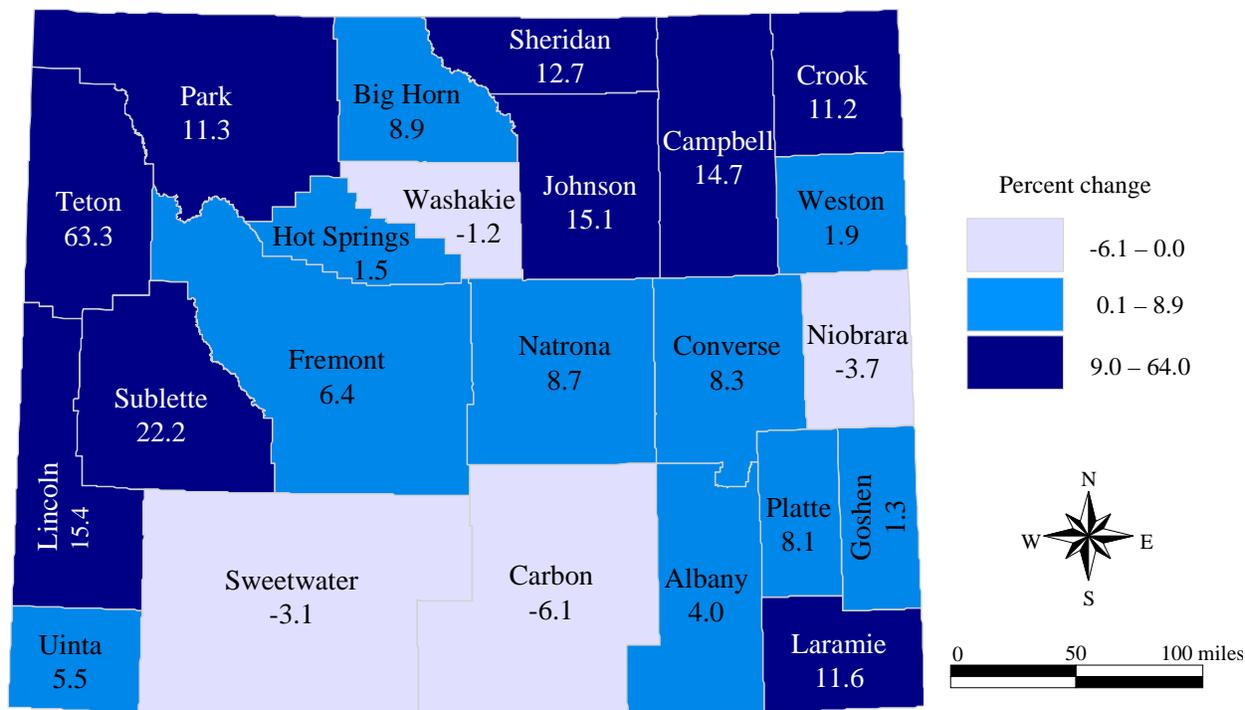
After increasing by more than 50 percent between 1970 and 1983 and then decreasing by more than 10 percent from 1983 to 1990, Wyoming population has returned to a more moderate growth rate. According to the 2000 census, the state's population increased 8.9 percent between 1990 and 2000, from 453,588 to 493,782.

Wyoming ranked 32<sup>nd</sup> in population growth between 1990 and 2000. As shown in Figure 1, Wyoming's population growth during this time was substantially less than that in the neighboring states of Colorado (30.6 percent), Utah (29.6 percent), Idaho (28.5 percent), and Montana (12.9 percent). Growth was also lower than the national average (13.2 percent), but it was comparable to the

Figure 1. Percent change in population: 1990-2000.



**Figure 2.** Change in population for Wyoming counties: 1990-2000.

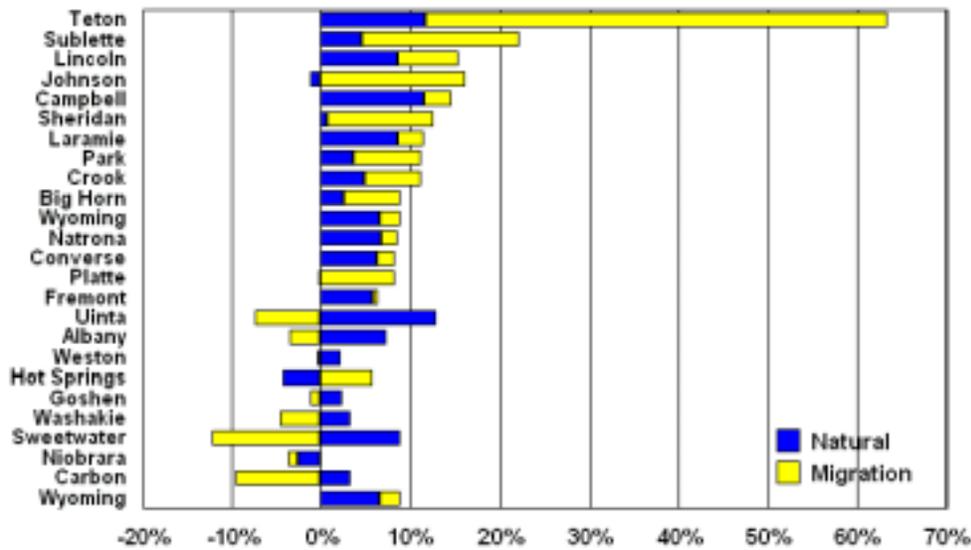


eastern border states, South Dakota (8.5 percent) and Nebraska (8.4 percent). Growth was substantially higher than North Dakota (0.5 percent).

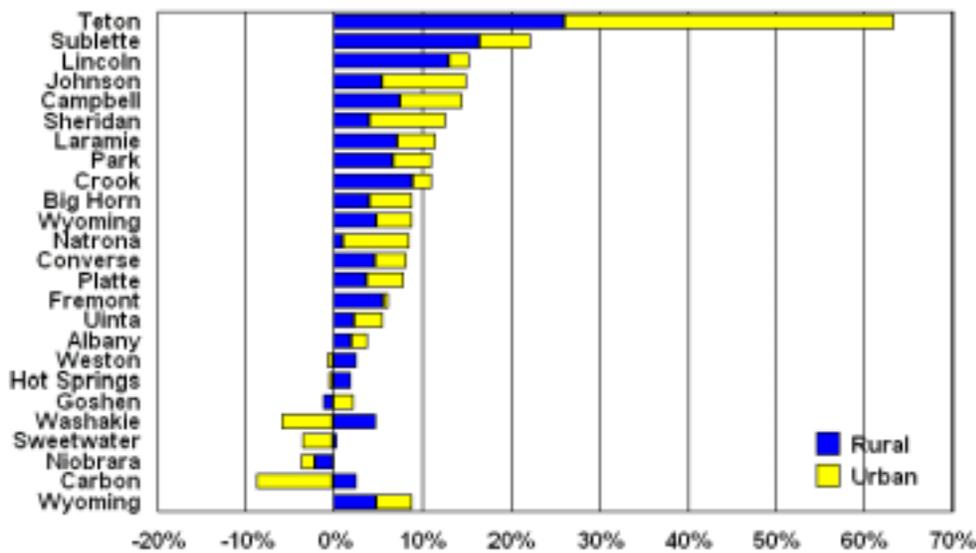
Although Wyoming has grown since 1990, population growth has not been evenly distributed throughout the state (Figure 2). For example, the three fastest growing counties were located in the western part of the state. Teton County had the highest growth rate at 63.3 percent, with Jackson almost doubling in size between 1990 and 2000 (93.4 percent). Teton County’s population growth rate was comparable to Nevada’s, the fastest growing state in the nation (66.3 percent), and Jackson’s population growth actually exceeded the growth rate for Las Vegas, the fastest growing metropolitan area. (It should be noted that part of the population increase in Teton County may be due to a significant undercount in 1990.)

At 22.2 percent, Sublette County had the second highest growth rate in Wyoming. Much of this population increase occurred in rural (unincorporated) areas of the county where the growth rate was 30 percent between 1990 and 2000. The rural growth rate was comparable to the overall growth rate in Colorado, the third fastest growing state in the nation (30.6 percent).

Lincoln County had the third highest growth rate at 15.4 percent. The communities in the northern part of the county (Afton, Alpine, and Thayne) had a 45.6 percent growth rate, which exceeded the rate for Arizona, the second fastest growing state in the nation (40 percent). The rapid growth in the northern part of Lincoln County was partially offset by declines in communities in the southern part of the county (Diamondville, Kemmerer, and La Barge).



**Figure 3.**  
Wyoming  
population growth  
by source: 1990-  
2000.



**Figure 4.**  
Wyoming  
population growth  
by location: 1990-  
2000.

In addition to the three counties in the west, Johnson (15.1 percent), Campbell (14.7 percent), Sheridan (12.7 percent), Laramie (11.6 percent), Park (11.3 percent), and Crook (11.2 percent) Counties all had population growth rates exceeding the state average. On the other hand, four Wyoming counties lost population between 1990 and 2000: Carbon (-6.1 percent), Niobrara (-3.7 percent), Sweetwater (-3.1 percent), and Washakie (-1.2 percent).

Population growth is caused by two factors: a natural increase as a result of births exceeding deaths among current residents and a net in-migration of individuals from outside the region. As shown in Figure 3, both factors are a source of population growth in Wyoming. At the state level, three-fourths of the 8.9 percent population growth between 1990 and 2000 was due to a natural increase, and one-fourth of the growth was due to in-migration. However, the

source varied substantially by county. In some counties (Teton, Sublette, Johnson, Sheridan, Park, Crook, Big Horn, and Platte) most of the growth was due to in-migration. In other counties (Campbell, Laramie, Natrona, Converse, and Fremont) most of the growth was due to natural increases. Eight counties (Uinta, Albany, Weston, Goshen, Washakie, Sweetwater, Niobrara, and Carbon) had a net out-migration between 1990 and 2000. In most cases these population losses were at least partially offset by natural increases, though Niobrara had both a decrease in natural growth and in out-migration.

Just over half of Wyoming's 8.9 percent population growth occurred in rural areas outside incorporated cities and towns (Figure 4). In some counties (Sublette, Lincoln, Crook, and Fremont), almost all of the growth was in rural areas. In other counties (Natrona), most of the growth was in urban (incorporated) areas.

Only two counties, Goshen and Niobrara, had a decrease in rural population between 1990 and 2000. Even among the four counties that lost total population, three (Washakie, Sweetwater, and Carbon) had an increase in their rural populations.

During the last decade, states in the Rocky Mountain West have seen strong increases in their populations. Portions of Wyoming, especially the western part of the state, have seen population growth as rapid as any area in the Mountain West. From 1990 to 2000, the majority of Wyoming's population growth occurred in rural areas outside incorporated cities and towns. Even three of the four counties that lost overall population had increases in their rural populations. Clearly, understanding the changing population patterns is a key step in understanding land-use changes and planning for Wyoming's future.

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Wyoming Open Spaces Research Group  
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