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# Population change in Wyoming: 2000–2005

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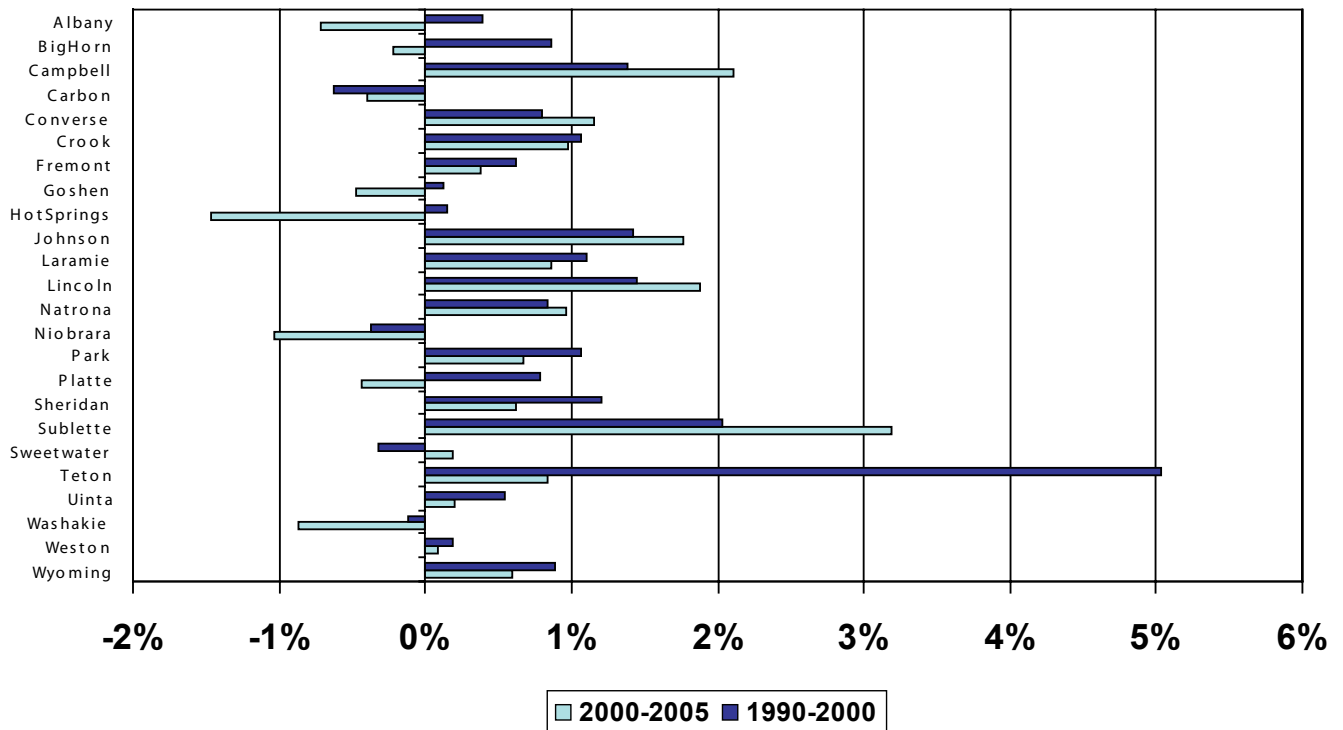
A key to effective community planning is understanding growth pressure brought about by changing populations at county, state, regional, and national levels. U.S. Census Bureau population estimates as of July 1, 2005, continue to paint a picture of growth in the Rocky Mountain West; however, areas of Wyoming are experiencing both growth and decline.

Wyoming's 2005 census numbers show a faster increase in growth in rural areas based on growth rates but nearly even growth between urban and rural areas based on overall changes in population numbers. And, while more than three-fourths of the state's population rise was due to natural increase, in-migration remains a significant component to growth in many counties while out-migration plays a role in several counties in population decline.

After increasing by more than 50 percent between 1970 and 1983 and then decreasing by more than 10 percent from 1983 to 1990, Wyoming's 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. The average growth rate from 1990-2000 was 0.89 percent per year (Taylor and Lieske 2002). The 2005 population estimate shows a slower rate of growth, an increase of 3.1 percent between 2000 and 2005, with an estimated 509,294 people living in the state on July 1, 2005, resulting in an annual rate of growth of 0.6 percent per year. The comparison of annual growth rates for Wyoming counties and the state for the 1990-2000 and 2000-2005 time periods can be seen in Figure 1.

Nationally, Wyoming ranked 31st in population growth rate between 2000 and 2005. As shown in Figure 2, Wyoming's population growth of 3.1 percent during this time was less than that in the neighboring states of Utah (10.6 percent), Idaho (10.4 percent), Colorado (8.4 percent) and Montana (3.7 percent). Wyoming's growth was also lower than the national average (5.3 percent), but it was slightly higher than the states to the east of Wyoming – South Dakota (2.8 percent) and Nebraska (2.8 percent). Growth was also higher than North Dakota (-0.9 percent).

Although Wyoming has grown since 2000, population growth has not been evenly distributed throughout the state (Figure 3). The fastest growing counties were in the western portion and in the Powder River Basin in the northeastern part of the state. Sublette County had the highest growth rate at 17.0 percent, comparable to the fastest growing states in the nation and behind only Nevada's 20.8 percent growth. Within



**Figure 1. Wyoming Annual Population Growth Rate 1990 to 2000 vs. 2000-2005**

Sublette County, the cities of Pinedale, Marbleton, and Big Piney all grew rapidly (18.3 percent, 12.6 percent and 11.5 percent respectively). The majority of the population growth occurred in rural areas (612 of the total increase of 1,006 people in the county, or 60.8 percent). The rural growth for the county was 18.1 percent.

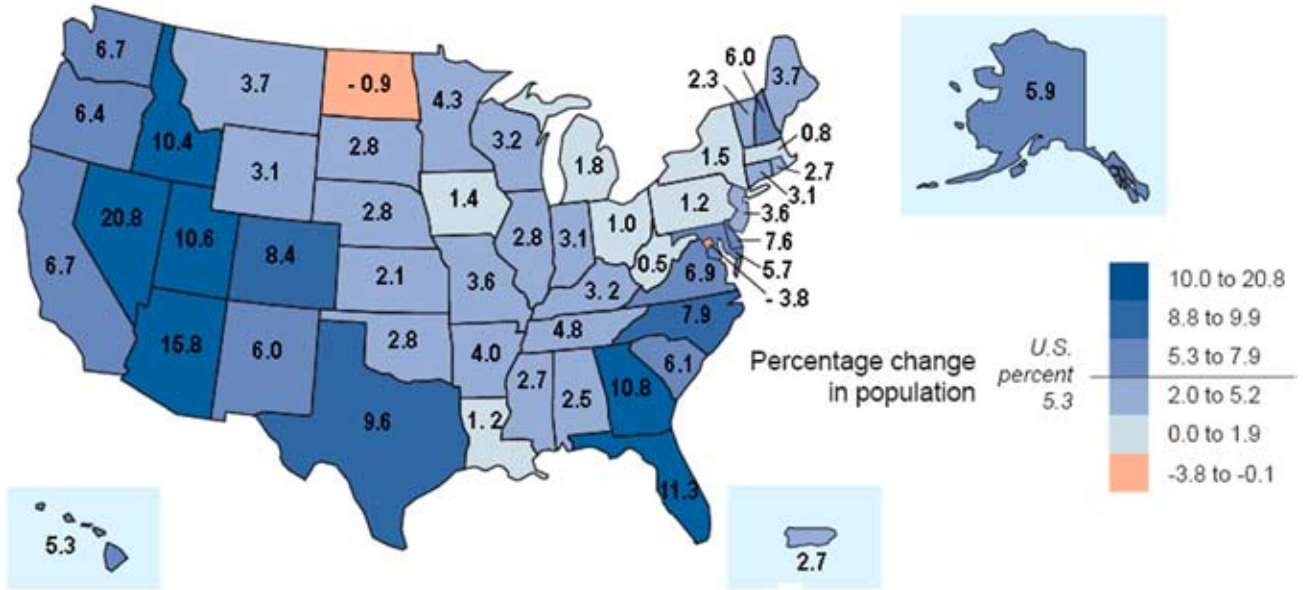
At 11.0 percent, Campbell County had the second-highest growth rate among Wyoming counties. Most of this population increase (2,414 of 3,707 people or 65.1 percent) occurred in Gillette, which grew 11.9 percent. The majority of the remainder of the population growth occurred in rural Campbell County where there was a population increase of 1,215 people equating to a 10.1 percent rural growth rate.

Lincoln County had the third highest growth rate at 9.8 percent. The town of Alpine was the fastest growing town in the state. The increase of 239 people between the 2000 census and the 2005 estimate resulted in an extremely high 43.5 percent growth rate (Table 1). This was the highest growth rate of any city or town in Wyoming and comparable with the fastest growing metropolitan and micropolitan

areas in the country over the same time period (Palm Coast, Florida, grew at 53.3 percent and Fernley, Nevada, grew at 37.7 percent). The communities in the southern part of Lincoln County (Cokeville, Diamondville, Kemmerer, La Barge, and Opal) all lost population in the range of -2.3 percent (La Barge) to -3.4 percent (Kemmerer). Afton is estimated to have lost 15 people since 2000 (down 0.8 percent), and Thayne grew by 16 people or 4.7 percent. Rural areas accounted for 92.9 percent of the total population growth in the county.

Johnson County had the fourth-highest growth rate among counties at 9.1 percent. Buffalo grew at 9.9 percent, Kaycee 9.6 percent, and rural Johnson County 8.0 percent. Incorporated areas accounted for 63.8 percent of the total population growth in the county.

In addition to the four counties discussed above, Converse (5.9 percent), Crooke (5.0 percent), Natrona (4.9 percent), Laramie (4.4 percent), Teton (4.3 percent) and Park (3.4 percent) counties had population growth rates exceeding the state average. On the



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates Program

Figure 2. Percent Change in State Population: 2000 – 2005

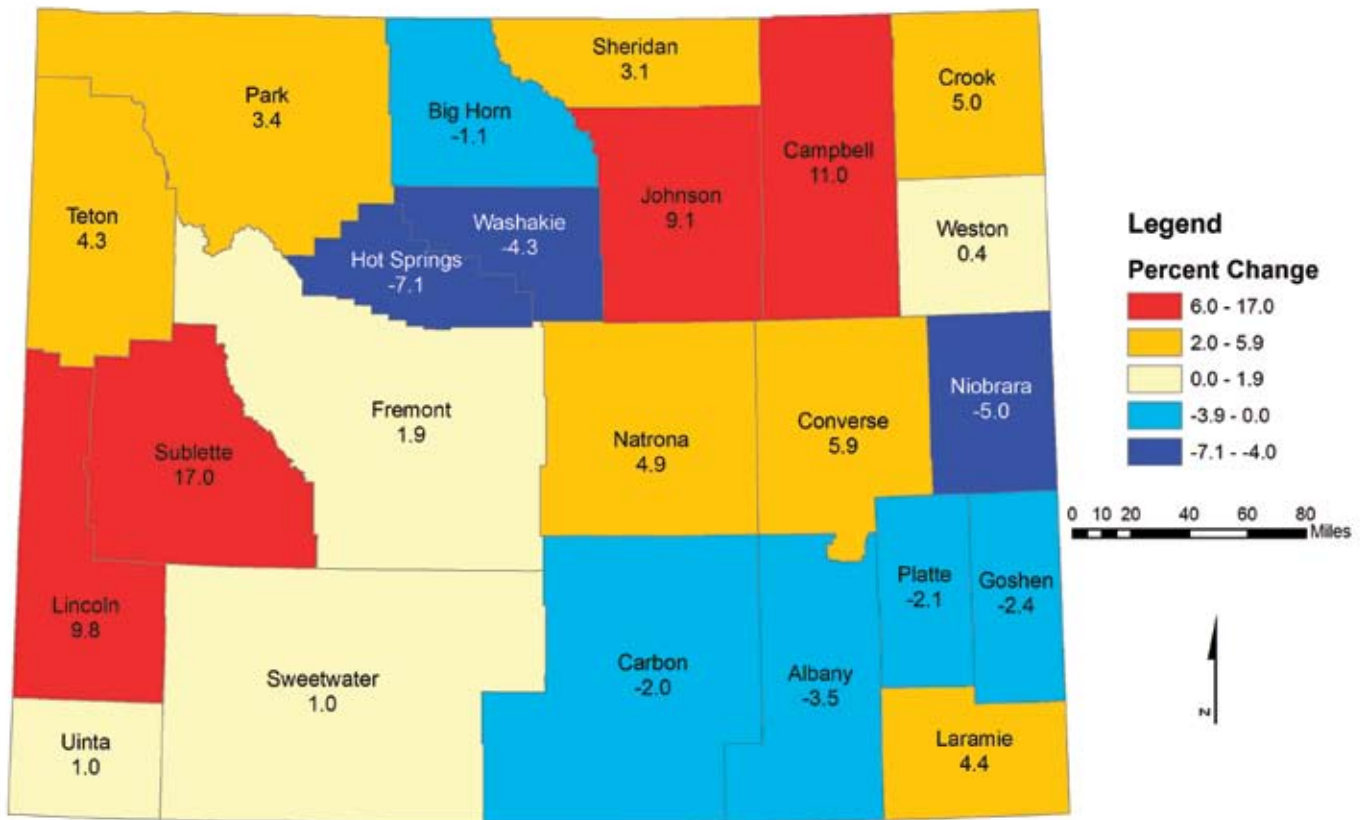


Figure 3. Change in Population for Wyoming Counties: 2000 – 2005

**Table 1. Wyoming's Fastest Growing Cities and Towns 2000–2005***Ranked by Population Increase and Growth Rate*

Place	Population Increase	July 1, 2005 Population	Place	Growth Rate (percent)	July 1, 2005 Population
Cheyenne	2,539	55,731	Alpine	43.5	789
Gillette	2,414	22,685	Pine Haven	42.8	317
Casper	2,001	51,738	Bar Nunn	38.0	1,292
Sheridan	461	16,333	Pinedale	18.3	1,658
Jackson	391	9,038	Marbleton	12.6	811
Buffalo	388	4,290	Gillette	11.9	22,685
Bar Nunn	356	1,292	Big Piney	11.5	455
Douglas	286	5,581	Mills	10.1	2,898
Mills	266	2,898	Buffalo	9.9	4,290
Pinedale	256	1,658	Kaycee	9.6	273
Alpine	239	789	Burns	8.8	310
Cody	215	9,100	Wright	5.8	1,425
Riverton	171	9,430	Dayton	5.8	717
Rock Springs	123	18,772	Midwest	5.6	431
Glenrock	109	2,351	Douglas	5.4	5,581
Pine Haven	95	317	Hulett	5.1	429
Marbleton	91	811	Glenrock	4.9	2,351

other hand, eight Wyoming counties lost population between 2000 and 2005: Hot Springs (-7.1 percent), Washakie (-4.3 percent), Niobrara (-5.0 percent), Albany (-3.5 percent), Goshen (-2.4 percent), Platte (-2.1 percent) Carbon (-2.0 percent), and Big Horn (-1.1 percent).

Population growth is caused by a natural increase of births exceeding deaths among residents and a net in-migration of individuals from outside the region. As shown in Figure 4, both factors are a source of population growth in Wyoming. At the state level, more than three-fourths of the 3.1 percent population growth between 2000 and 2005 was due to natural increase with less than one-fourth of the growth due to in-migration; however, the source varied substantially by county. In some counties (Sublette, Lincoln, Johnson, Converse, Crook, Park, and Sheridan) the majority of growth was due to in-migration. In other counties (Fremont, Laramie, Sweetwater, Teton, and Uinta), most growth was due to natural increases. Campbell and Natrona counties were nearly evenly balanced between growth from natural sources and growth due to in-migration. Ten counties (Albany, Big Horn, Carbon, Goshen, Hot Springs, Niobrara,

Platte, Sweetwater, Washakie, and Uinta) had a net out-migration between 2000 and 2005. In most cases, these losses in population were at least partially offset by natural increases, though Hot Springs, Niobrara, and Platte counties had decreases in both natural growth and due to out-migration.

Slightly more than half of Wyoming's 3.1 percent population growth from 2000 to 2005 occurred in incorporated cities and towns (Figure 5); however, on a percentage basis, rural areas of the state grew twice as fast as incorporated areas. In Campbell, Converse, Crook, Johnson, Laramie, Natrona, and Sheridan counties, most growth was in urban areas. On the other hand, in Fremont, Lincoln, Park, Sublette, and Sweetwater counties, the majority of growth was in rural areas. Wyoming's fastest growing rural areas between 2000 and 2005 are listed in Table 2.

Five counties, Goshen, Hot Springs, Niobrara, Platte, and Washakie, had decreases in rural population between 2000 and 2005. Among the eight counties that lost total population between 2000 and 2005, three (Albany, Big Horn, and Carbon) showed increases in rural population. Eighteen of the counties in Wyoming saw higher growth rates in the rural areas of

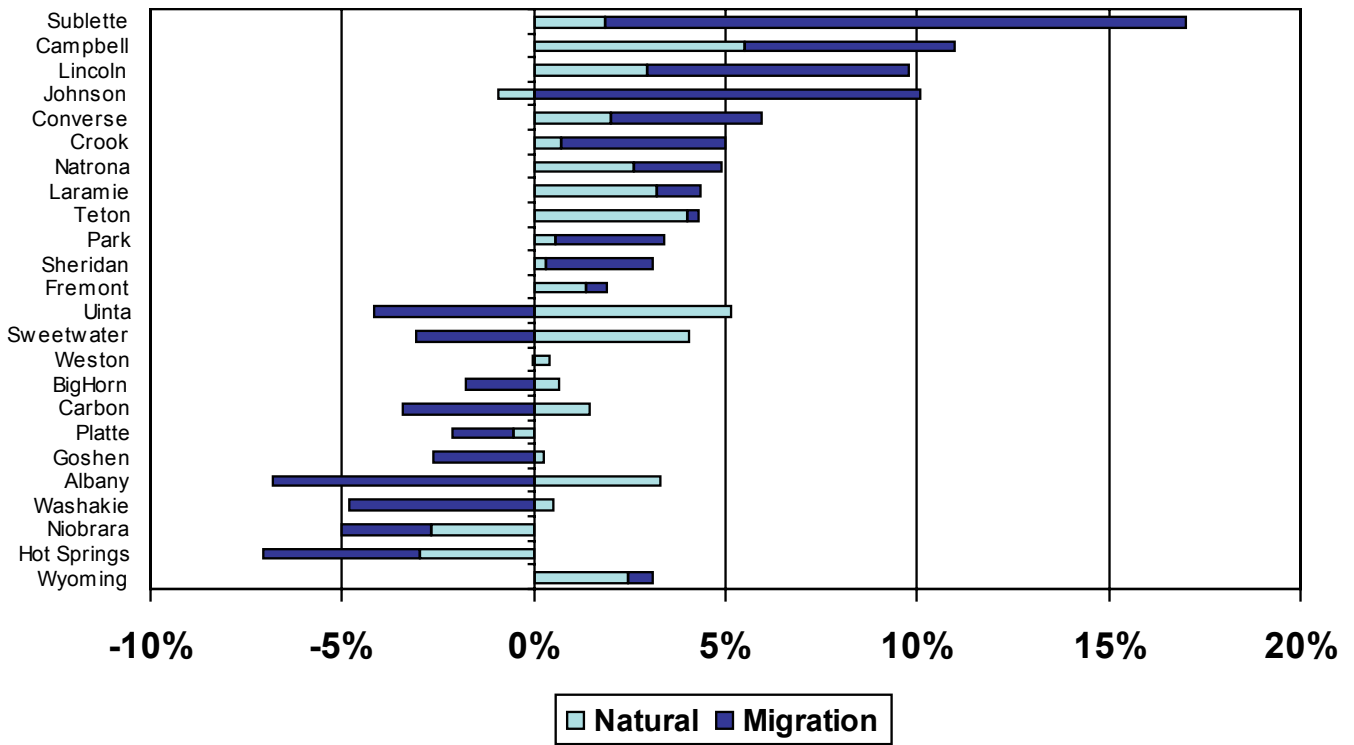


Figure 4. Wyoming Population Growth by Source:2000-2005

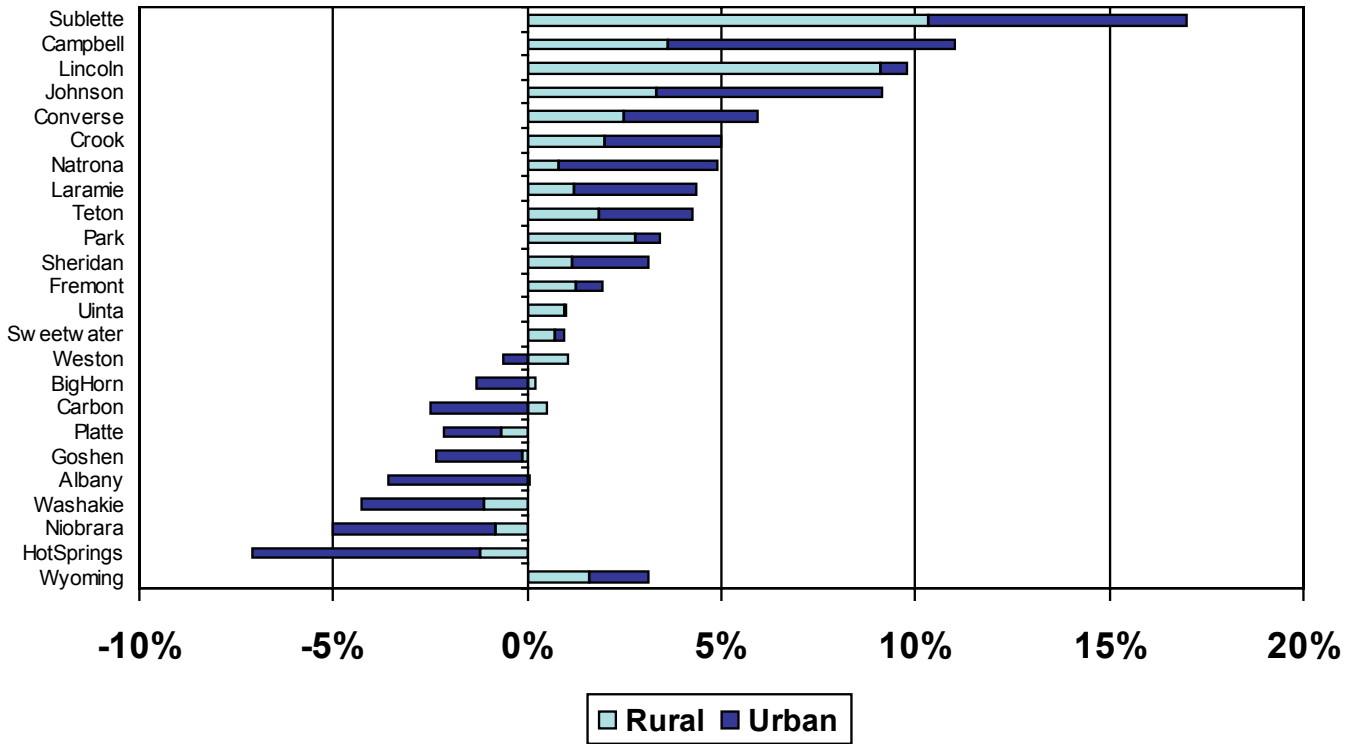


Figure 5. Wyoming Population Growth by Location:2000-2005

**Table 2. Wyoming's Fastest Growing Rural (unincorporated) Areas 2000-2005***Ranked by Population Increase and by Growth Rate*

Place	Population Increase	Place	Growth Rate (percent)
Lincoln County	1,325	Sublette County	18.1
Campbell County	1,215	Lincoln County	17.8
Laramie County	986	Campbell County	10.1
Park County	719	Johnson County	8.0
Sublette County	612	Converse County	7.4
Natrona County	543	Park County	6.4
Fremont County	449	Natrona County	5.2
Teton County	390	Sweetwater County	4.1
Sheridan County	311	Uinta County	4.1
Converse County	301	Teton County	4.1
Sweetwater County	262	Laramie County	3.7
Johnson County	234	Carbon County	3.6
Uinta County	191	Crook County	3.6
Crook County	118	Sheridan County	3.4
Carbon County	80	Weston County	2.7
Weston County	69	Fremont County	2.6

their jurisdictions than in incorporated areas. Overall, Wyoming had a higher growth rate in rural areas (4.86 percent) vs. urban areas (2.35 percent) but the numbers were nearly even when looking at the overall changes in population with an increase in the rural population of 7,609 and an increase in the urban population of 7,903.

Changes in urban and rural populations have important fiscal implications for counties because it costs county governments more to provide services in rural areas than in urban areas (Coupal et al. 2002). A Wyoming study indicates a statewide average of \$2.01 in costs per dollar of revenue generated from rural residential lands (Taylor and Coupal 2000).

Since the year 2000, states in the Rocky Mountain West have seen strong increases in their populations.

Portions of Wyoming, especially the western part of the state and areas of the Powder River Basin, have seen population growth as rapid as any area in the Mountain West. From 1990 to 2000, just over half of Wyoming's population growth occurred in rural areas outside incorporated cities and towns (Taylor and Lieske 2002). From 2000 through 2005, almost half of Wyoming's population growth occurred in rural areas. Population growth and the location of that growth (urban vs. rural) has significant implications for wildlife habitat, scenic views, and county government budgets. It remains true that understanding changing population patterns is a key step in understanding land-use changes and planning for Wyoming's future.





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*Funding for the Wyoming Open Spaces Initiative is provided by private individuals and foundations. If you would like to contribute, please contact us at (307) 766-5080 or [ienr@uwyo.edu](mailto:ienr@uwyo.edu)*

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