Introduction

Leading Trends Influencing North Dakota's Future Population

North Dakota's population grew only slightly over the past decade. Data from the 2000 Census indicate that the state grew by 0.5 percent between 1990 and 2000 reaching a population base of 642,200. This is the smallest relative growth of all 50 states. Three leading trends are seen to influence the state's future population and comprise the underlying assumptions used to project future county populations within North Dakota: rural depopulation, out-migration of young adults and young families, and an increasing proportion of elderly.

Rural Depopulation
Decades of movement of rural residents to the larger cities have depopulated much of North Dakota. This trend of residential consolidation in North Dakota is very similar to that occurring throughout the Great Plains. In the last decade, population growth occurred largely in the metropolitan and Native American reservation counties of the state. In fact, only six of the state's 53 counties grew between 1990 and 2000 (20 percent in Cass, 15 percent in Burleigh, 8 percent in Sioux, 7 percent in Rolette, 7 percent in Morton, and 2 percent in Ward). The long-term trend of net out-migration is expected to continue. Thus, the majority of counties will continue to lose population. Currently, more than half of the 53 counties in the state have a population base below 5,000 residents. By 2020, nearly half of the counties will have a population base below 4,000 residents.

Out-Migration of Young Adults
In addition to the general trend of rural depopulation, another significant pattern that will have a major consequence on the future of the state's population is the out-migration of young adults and young families. The loss of residents in their twenties and early thirties has increased markedly over the past two decades. This trend has created an age imbalance that is very evident in the population pyramids. The loss of young adults means that there will be fewer parents of childbearing age and therefore fewer children. As a result, the number of children will consistently decline for the majority of counties over the next 20 years.

Increasing Proportion of Elderly
Another noteworthy trend is the increasing proportion of elderly (age 65 and older). In 1980, 12.3 percent of the state's population base was age 65 or older; in 2000, the proportion had increased to 14.7 percent. In addition, 27 of the state's 53 counties had more than 20 percent of their population base older than 64 in 2000. Nationally, the proportion of elderly is only 12.4 percent. In addition, North Dakota has the highest proportion in the nation of elderly 85 years and older. These high proportions of elderly are due, in part, to a modest net in-migration of seniors who are returning to the state to be close to family and friends. Elderly desiring to return to informal care networks, already a growing trend in population redistribution, will contribute to dramatic increases as the baby-boom population ages. If current trends continue, the number of elderly in the state will grow by 58 percent over the next 20 years and represent nearly 23 percent of the state's population. In addition, the number of older seniors (i.e., 85 years of age and older) will grow by nearly two-thirds during that time frame.

These trends pose serious concerns for the state. For example, how will counties remain viable in the face of continued rural depopulation? Population losses, which reduce community size, force residents to face rising costs of, increased travel times to, and decreased availability of goods and services. Can counties and the state ensure adequate healthcare in the face of rural hospital and clinic closings? What will be the impact of further school consolidations on communities across the state? In addition, how will communities address the impact of out-migration of young adults? Young adults provide the natural increase for a population base when they have children. Declining numbers of young adults will have an impact on future population growth. Moreover, young adults add vitality, new thoughts, and new ideas to their communities. They are also the newest generation of workers. The loss of this "human capital" will have significant effects on the state. Finally, are counties and the state positioned to offer services to a growing elderly population? Do they have adequate and appropriate housing? How should they deal with those elderly who are isolated? These and other concerns will be important topics of debate among policy-makers.

Table A. Population Trends in North Dakota by County: 1980 - 2020

County	Census Population Counts			Population Projections			
	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Adams	3,584	3,174	2,593	2,365	2,208	2,075	1,963
Barnes	13,960	12,545	11,775	11,574	11,564	11,629	11,675
Benson	7,944	7,198	6,964	7,101	7,329	7,571	7,835
Billings	1,138	1,108	888	815	775	727	679
Bottineau	9,239	8,011	7,149	6,839	6,661	6,420	6,202
Bowman	4,229	3,596	3,242	3,177	3,181	3,108	3,038
Burke	3,822	3,002	2,242	2,024	1,908	1,780	1,686
Burleigh	54,811	60,131	69,416	70,524	72,531	73,881	74,727
Cass	88,247	102,874	123,138	131,097	137,724	144,880	151,651
Cavalier	7,636	6,064	4,831	4,391	4,070	3,830	3,614
Dickey	7,207	6,107	5,757	5,536	5,426	5,365	5,283
Divide	3,494	2,899	2,283	2,006	1,796	1,600	1,420
Dunn	4,627	4,005	3,600	3,435	3,283	3,110	2,927
Eddy	3,554	2,951	2,757	2,669	2,633	2,550	2,470
Emmons	5,877	4,830	4,331	4,187	4,105	3,925	3,710
Foster	4,611	3,983	3,759	3,637	3,557	3,395	3,216
Golden Valley	2,391	2,108	1,924	1,856	1,800	1,723	1,658
Grand Forks	66,100	70,683	66,109	66,545	67,551	67,988	68,238
Grant	4,274	3,549	2,841	2,531	2,318	2,104	1,890
Griggs	3,714	3,303	2,754	2,557	2,418	2,271	2,099
Hettinger	4,275	3,445	2,715	2,432	2,228	2,046	1,877
Kidder	3,833	3,332	2,753	2,548	2,385	2,194	1,995
LaMoure	6,473	5,383	4,701	4,466	4,310	4,104	3,898
Logan	3,493	2,847	2,308	2,202	2,115	2,032	1,919
McHenry	7,858	6,528	5,987	5,787	5,760	5,736	5,701
McIntosh	4,800	4,021	3,390	3,142	3,041	2,917	2,769
McKenzie	7,132	6,383	5,737	5,391	5,197	5,033	4,924
McLean	12,383	10,457	9,311	8,973	8,820	8,627	8,423
Mercer	9,404	9,808	8,644	8,151	7,751	7,431	7,267
Morton	25,177	23,700	25,303	26,272	27,481	28,550	29,521
Mountrail	7,679	7,021	6,631	6,492	6,518	6,516	6,503
Nelson	5,233	4,410	3,715	3,603	3,592	3,559	3,542
Oliver	2,495	2,381	2,065	1,995	1,939	1,868	1,799
Pembina	10,399	9,238	8,585	8,254	8,125	7,971	7,810
Pierce	6,166	5,052	4,675	4,575	4,579	4,490	4,360
Ramsey	13,048	12,681	12,066	11,591	11,447	11,212	10,958
Ransom	6,698	5,921	5,890	5,834	5,844	5,860	5,840
Renville	3,608	3,160	2,610	2,425	2,352	2,300	2,266
Richland	19,207	18,148	17,998	17,715	17,570	17,414	17,218
Rolette	12,177	12,772	13,674	13,687	13,965	14,019	14,029
Sargent	5,512	4,549	4,366	4,258	4,230	4,225	4,272
Sheridan	2,819	2,148	1,710	1,562	1,477	1,408	1,364
Sioux	3,620	3,761	4,044	4,096	4,223	4,215	4,208
Slope	1,157	907	767	705	675	639	605
Stark	23,697	22,832	22,636	22,220	22,270	22,301	22,360
Steele	3,106	2,420	2,258	2,190	2,134	2,102	2,074
Stutsman	24,154	22,241	21,908	21,452	21,278	21,037	20,737
Towner	4,052	3,627	2,876	2,666	2,521	2,440	2,382
Traill	9,624	8,752	8,477	8,263	8,141	7,987	7,771
Walsh	15,371	13,840	12,389	11,621	11,239	10,776	10,336
Ward	58,392	57,921	58,795	57,427	56,728	56,349	55,809
Wells	6,979	5,864	5,102	4,783	4,593	4,364	4,094
Williams	22,237	21,129	19,761	18,556	17,959	17,318	16,679
North Dakota	652,717	638,800	642,200	640,200	645,325	648,972	651,291

Table B. Population Trends in North Dakota by Age Cohort: 1980 - 2020

Age Cohort	Census Population Counts			Population Projections			
	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
0 to 4	54,752	47,845	39,400	38,254	37,359	37,868	36,579
5 to 9	49,016	52,032	42,982	39,915	38,739	37,668	38,301
10 to 14	51,043	48,820	47,464	43,015	39,968	38,795	37,679
15 to 19	63,977	46,668	53,618	50,411	45,877	42,755	41,547
20 to 24	69,393	47,873	50,503	53,389	49,614	46,251	44,295
25 to 29	58,470	50,154	38,792	37,923	40,487	37,576	34,771
30 to 34	45,687	53,861	38,095	37,316	36,576	38,898	36,153
35 to 39	34,248	50,133	46,991	38,228	36,988	36,074	38,503
40 to 44	29,398	39,887	51,013	46,420	37,925	36,309	35,237
45 to 49	28,631	30,635	47,436	50,267	45,837	37,528	35,876
50 to 54	30,497	26,449	37,995	46,562	49,481	45,220	37,101
55 to 59	29,218	26,268	28,926	34,457	42,337	45,052	41,247
60 to 64	27,942	27,120	24,507	26,272	33,908	41,715	44,436
65 to 69	25,930	24,950	23,142	22,780	26,433	34,106	42,015
70 to 74	21,217	22,591	22,759	21,451	22,942	26,579	34,293
75 to 79	15,301	18,990	19,085	20,938	21,380	22,876	26,493
80 to 84	9,857	13,284	14,766	17,313	20,647	21,042	22,507
85 plus	8,140	11,240	14,726	15,289	18,827	22,660	24,258
Total	652,717	638,800	642,200	640,200	645,325	648,972	651,291