

County growth rate slows

Growth (City County)
Influx of immigrants maintains population

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SANTA CRUZ — Census experts expect California's population to reach 40 million by 2010, nearly double that of the second-most populous state of Texas, but Santa Cruz County is unlikely to contribute much to the growth.

At 257,000 residents, according to July

IN DEPTH

2002 figures released last week by the state Department of Finance, the county boasted one of the state's lowest growth rates. The county grew only half a percentage point in the year leading up to July 2002, and growth is expected to remain low.

"The growth counties have moved to the central part of the state and away from the coast," said Melanie Martindale, a finance department demographer.

The coast "is costly," she said, noting the high cost of living along it has been more onerous during the current recession. "People are selling their more expensive, coastal homes and moving inland to places like Sacramento County."

As is the case in many of the state's low-growth, coastal counties, immigration is helping prevent the growth rate from slipping to below zero in Santa Cruz, which keeps the population from dropping.

State figures show the flow of people across international borders resulted in 2,227 new residents in Santa Cruz County between July 2001 and July 2002. Though the county's natural

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increase — meaning the number of births minus the number of deaths — produced 1,300 new people, the county showed a net loss of 2,721 domestic residents, meaning that more U.S. residents are moving out of the county than in.

"You have immigrants coming in, and they're just barely under-pacing the number of people leaving the county," Martindale said.

While immigration numbers appear to be increasing statewide, less than a third of California counties, like Santa Cruz, lost more domestic residents than they gained, according to state data.

Experts generally agree on why these people are moving out.

"The classic explanation is economic change," said

IN DEPTH

Jason Schachter, a demographer with the U.S. Census Bureau. "Fewer jobs and higher housing costs."

Specific demographics of the people moving to Santa Cruz County and those choosing to leave over the past year have not been released. The Census Bureau expects to release that data this summer.

Schachter said the statistics will be telling. Demographics such as household income could have severe repercussions on county revenues, hence county services.

"If the people who are leaving are high-tech as opposed to service workers you might be losing tax dollars," he said.

Susan Brutschy, president of the nonprofit Applied Survey Research of

Santa Cruz County by the numbers

The state Department of Finance recently released population estimates for all 58 counties. The numbers cover the period from July 1, 2001, to July 1, 2002. Here's a look at Santa Cruz:

TOTAL POPULATION: 259,000.

OVERALL GROWTH: 1,300 residents (0.5 percent).

NATURAL INCREASE (births minus deaths): 1,794 residents.

NET DOMESTIC MIGRATION: 2,721 residents leaving.

NET IMMIGRATION: 2,227 residents arriving.

— Source: State Department of Finance

Watsonville, said she is already seeing population trends at work.

"You know the demographics are changing because of the situation with the (Santa Cruz) school district. They're having to close two schools because of declining enrollment," she said.

Like Santa Cruz County, nearby Bay Area counties also experienced low to moderate rates of population growth over the prior year, according to state figures. San Mateo County actually posted a 0.15 percent drop in population.

The highest rate of population growth between July 2001 and July 2002 — 3.9 percent — was in Riverside County. The inland counties of Placer, Mariposa, Alpine, Yolo and Stanis-

laus were not far behind.

On average, California counties saw a 1.51 percent population increase between July 2001 and July 2002. This put the total state population at 35,301,000, according to the data.

Natural increase represented about 49 percent of the state's growth, while migration to the state represented about 51 percent.

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