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Sentinel editorial

SC County growth on target

FOR TWO YEARS RUNNING, the Board of Supervisors has set the growth rate at 2 percent for the unincorporated areas of Santa Cruz County. Figures released Monday by the California Department of Finance reveal the board accomplished its goal in last year.

The department says between July 1, 1981, and July 1, 1982, Santa Cruz County's population grew by 3,800 to a total 198,100, or by exactly 2 percent. We believe those numbers to be realistic.

The main purpose of the county's growth management plan, passed by voters in June 1978, was to slow population growth here which on a percentage basis had been at least double the rate statewide. The plan's central theme was that Santa Cruz County should be responsible only for its "fair share" of population growth in California, and that goal also was reached between 1980 and 1982.

The Department of Finance reported the state grew by 1.06 million persons in those two years, or 4.5 percent. The department's two-year figures, using a July 1-June 30 year, show Santa Cruz County population increasing by 8,700 persons in that period, or 4.6 percent.

The Board of Supervisors has jurisdiction only over the unincorporated areas in the county so it can't take all the "credit" for the closeness of those figures.

The city of Santa Cruz, which also has a growth management plan approved by voters in March 1979, helped the county realize its goal. In 1981, for instance, the DOF said the city grew by only 273 persons to 42,752, or .65 of 1 percent. City population figures aren't in for 1982, but its rate of increase is bound to go up since SC issued only 89 building permits in 1981 and 218 last year.

The economy in Santa Cruz County, like that of the entire nation, hasn't been exactly booming in the past years.

However, one segment that has shown a significant jump is the high technology industry. But, the large number of persons being hired by these firms have county addresses.

Specifically, Synertek says more than two-thirds of its workforce is in that category, while Raytek claims 70 percent of its employees are county residents and Seagate reports 90 percent.

There's no question that implementation of growth control Measures J and O threw a wrench in a number of plans for building. However, the activity of the economy itself, with interest rates in the 20 percent range and generally more strict financing requirements, probably would have taken care of most of that on their own.

The recent slowdown in population growth doesn't mean everyone sees Santa Cruz as being a low growth area for years to come. A Sales and Marketing Management survey for the United States placed Santa Cruz in a tie for 14th in "Tomorrow's fastest-growing markets" between 1981-86, estimating population would grow by a total 18.4 percent in those years to 237,500. For the county to reach that figure, the annual increase of residents in our county would have to more than double what has been occurring the past two years.

Those projections probably are a little heavy. For even if we should see ourselves getting out of the recession, the growth control ordinances in the city and county — plus some service limitations in Scotts Valley and Watsonville — probably will prevent a population boom we once knew from happening.