

Growth rate for county 2.3 percent

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SANTA CRUZ — If less is better, then the Board of Supervisors can rejoice.

For the second straight year, the growth rate for the unincorporated part of Santa Cruz County was lower than the goal set by growth-control advocates on the board, while the rising population in the cities drove the county's overall growth rate to 2.3 percent for the year 1987.

The county's population was estimated at 225,408 as of Jan. 1, according to figures just released by the state Department of Finance. A year earlier, the population stood at 220,395.

The unincorporated part of the county — which excludes the four cities — grew at a 1.2 percent rate for the second year in a row, making it the slowest-growing area of Santa Cruz County. The population in the unincorporated area rose from 127,004, to 128,608 on Jan. 1, 1988.

This translates to good news for county supervisors: They met their goal of county growth of 1.5 percent a year or less.

The fastest-growing city in 1987 was Scotts Valley, whose population swelled at a 7.4-percent growth rate, from 7,946 to 8,534, or 588 new residents. The previous year, Scotts Valley's growth rate was 2.5 percent.

Although the rate of growth in Scotts Valley was higher than the city of Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz actually had more than twice as many people move into its jurisdiction. Approximately 1,752 new people were estimated to be living in Santa Cruz in 1987, for a total population of 48,652. The increase translated into a 3.7-percent growth rate, compared to a 1.8-percent rate the year before.

Watsonville was next, with a 3-percent growth rate, which was the same rate as the previous year. The total population of the south-county city now stands at 29,425, compared with a 1987 figure of 28,538.

Capitola continued a long trend of experiencing little residential growth. The virtually built-out city saw an increase of 182 people, for a growth rate of 1.8 percent. The previous year it had actually lost 19 residents.

Santa Cruz County Supervisor Gary Patton, the architect of the growth-control movement, said the statistics proved what he has maintained all along: "County government is the balance wheel to growth, and our system is actually working."

The figures haven't always fallen together so well, though. From 1983-86, the unincorporated area grew at a rate of about 2.9 percent a year, which was above past years' goals of between 1 percent and 2 percent set by the board in its annual review of growth rates.

"Scotts Valley is growing like a hurricane and Watsonville is growing very fast," Patton said. "Overall the county government is trying to slow the growth that's occurring elsewhere."

Scotts Valley City Administrator August Caires cited a number of factors that contributed to that city's high growth rate.

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"From an economic standpoint and the desirability of our location, we're taking some of the growth that would go to other areas of the county, but because of the no-growth government, is not," said Caires.

He said the Scotts Valley growth rate would "raise some eyebrows," but that it was "so high because '87 was a real spurt year. We had four or five residential

developments that are real old ..., coming into completion or in the final phases."

Add to that low interest rates and a new water well that allowed more water hookups, and it amounts to new residential development, according to Caires.

Scotts Valley's average growth rate over the past six years was 3.3 percent, which was lower than the state's, he said.