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Energy Boom Slows Aging Across the State

From 2000 to 2007, Wyoming's minority population grew by 12,630, or 23.7 percent. In 2007, Hispanics comprised the largest minority group in Wyoming with 38,409 persons. Newly released population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau indicate that the counties in Wyoming that are experiencing the largest increases in the Hispanic population during this eight-year time span include the mineral impacted areas as well as parts of Northwest Wyoming. Teton County's Hispanic population experienced the largest numeric increase in State from 2000-2007, 1,251 persons or 105.6 percent. During this same time, Sublette County's Hispanic population almost tripled from 112 to 304, or 171.4 percent. Other counties that experienced increases in the Hispanic population from 2000-2007 include Campbell (63.8%), Johnson (54.7%), Sweetwater (25.4%), and Lincoln (86.7%). According to Amy Bittner, an economist with the Economic Analysis Division, "One of the main reasons for the increase in Wyoming's Hispanic population is due to the strong job growth the State has experienced in the last few years. Wyoming's annual job growth in 2006 ranked first in the nation or 5.1 percent. The State then followed-up in 2007 with an annual job growth of 3.9 percent, which was second in the U.S. behind Utah. Counties are experiencing changes to their demographic composition because the State's economy has been performing very well and people are choosing to move to Wyoming due to the demand for labor." Overall, Wyoming's Hispanic population comprised 7.3 percent of the State's total population in 2007, which ranked 22nd in the U.S.

The U.S. Census Bureau also released new county population estimates by age. Since 2005, Campbell, Carbon, Fremont, Johnson, Lincoln, Sublette, and Sweetwater counties have been experiencing declines in median age. Median age is defined as the point at which the half the population is younger and half is older. "The majority of these counties have economies that are dominated by mineral extraction and the decline in median age reflects young workers taking advantage of the job opportunities available due to energy development. These workers are relocating to the State and are either bringing their families with them or are starting families here." Bittner also commented on the aging trend. "The aging trend for Wyoming has been slowing down and the population changes occurring in these mining impacted counties are a reflection of what the State experienced in 2007, with an annual growth in population of 2.0 percent, the fastest Wyoming has grown in 25 years, and ranked the 9th fastest in the nation," said Bittner. Albany, Campbell, Uinta, Sweetwater, and Lincoln counties registered the lowest median ages in Wyoming for 2007. Albany County has the smallest median age in Wyoming due to the large college-age population residing in the City of Laramie attending the University of Wyoming.

In contrast, several of the rural counties in Wyoming that do not have ties to the mining industry experienced a higher median age, which indicates that these counties are aging faster. According to Bittner, "Young people are moving away from these rural areas to seek job opportunities elsewhere. The people that remain in these rural counties tend to be individuals that are baby boomers, retirees, and the elderly population." For 2007, Wyoming's proportion of people age 65 and older was 12.2 percent, but in two rural counties the proportion of this particular age group was more than 20 percent of the county's overall population, Hot Springs (24.5%) and Niobrara (20.9%). In addition, Bittner stated, "Population loss from rural areas is not a unique phenomenon to Wyoming. Rural counties throughout the Midwest, such as in Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma, are also enduring the out-migration of young people that are in search of employment opportunities and lifestyle changes that are accessible in bigger cities and towns." Counties that registered the highest median age in the State for 2007 include Hot Springs, Niobrara, Platte, Washakie, and Johnson.

Detailed population tables are available online through Economic Analysis Division, <http://eadiv.state.wy.us> or the U.S. Census Bureau, www.census.gov