

The Changing Face of the Basin-Boundary Region

Like much of rural North America, the Basin-Boundary region is experiencing a significant shift in the size and structure of its population. New data released by the BC government helps us better understand how our communities are changing, and what we need to do to prepare for the years ahead.



Recent population estimates suggest that the total number of residents in the Basin-Boundary region has remained relatively stable since 2011 when the last Census was completed. However, at the sub-regional scale, the story is much different. Three municipalities are showing population increases greater than 2% over the period 2011-2015. Of these, Nelson leads the pack at 4%, or an increase of 431 residents. Conversely, twelve municipalities in our region show population decreases greater than -2%. Creston and Valemount are showing the biggest declines at -11% (loss of the 588 residents) and -6% (loss of 64 residents), respectively.

Even more notable than the change in Basin-Boundary population size is the rapid change in population structure. The number of seniors (65 and over) in our region is now approaching the number of youth (under 25 years). The situation is projected to intensify as the senior population grows by over 40% over the next 20 years, while the youth population remains relatively stable. These projections have important consequences for the organizations that serve various demographic groups in our communities.

"Communities must work together to ensure we are ready and able to support the needs of our growing seniors population," says Corrine Younie, Coordinator of the Age Friendly Community Initiative and Moving Together Project at Nelson Cares Society. "In order to prepare for the future, we are working with the Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute and Selkirk College nursing students to better understand how 'age friendly' our community is. This is part of a provincially funded project focused on developing an Age Friendly Plan for Nelson. We are learning it is not just about ensuring services and social and recreational opportunities are in place, it is also about making sure things like transportation and healthy food are available and accessible to seniors."

As a region, our population is projected to grow by 4.5% over the period 2016-2035, with growth rates highest in the areas surrounding Castlegar (17%) and Fernie (10%). In comparison to the Province of BC as a whole, where the total population is projected to grow by 23%, these rates of growth are low. Given the largely rural nature of our region, however, demographers aren't surprised by the projections.

"A projected population growth for a rural area certainly provides hope," says Ray Bollman, retired Editor of Statistics Canada's Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletins. "One major contributor

to past population growth in the Basin-Boundary region has been in-migration from other provinces (largely from the Calgary area). The Basin-Boundary region has many amenity features that attract in-migrants. Building on these advantages will be needed to ensure the projected increase in population is achieved," notes Bollman.

"Another part of the story is related to emerging economic opportunities resulting from an aging demographic. Things like retirement housing, mobility equipment, and 'aging in place' services will be required, and the mature consumer is expected to spend their money on things like recreation, leisure and their grandchildren," says Dr. Terri MacDonald, Selkirk College's Regional Innovation Chair in Rural Economic Development. "Highlighting these opportunities alongside our amenity assets could be part of future efforts focused on attracting investors, workers and new residents (including seniors)."

BC Stats' population projections are based on past demographic trends that have been modified to account for potential future changes. Of course, they represent only one possible scenario. Our communities have immense opportunity to influence our own future by taking action to promote vitality and well-being across the region.

For a full discussion of population estimates and projections, view the RDI's 2016 [Trends Analysis](#).

RESEARCH FUNDING

A partnership between Teck Trail Operations and Selkirk College has created an annual fund for a Selkirk College student to undertake a community-based research project in the West Kootenay-Boundary region during the summer months. Up to \$10,000 is available to fund a student research intern.

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