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Idaho's urban centers see fast growth

By BRYAN CLARK

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BOISE — New estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau show strong population growth throughout Idaho, especially in relatively urban counties such as Bonneville, Ada, Canyon, Kootenai and Twin Falls, according to an Idaho Department of Labor news release.

In December the U.S. Census Bureau reported that Idaho was the fastest-growing state in the nation, growing 2.2 percent between July 2016 and July 2017.

The Census estimates that Bonneville County grew by nearly 2,600 people, a growth rate of just over 2 percent in a year. That puts Bonneville County fourth among counties in terms of raw population growth and seventh in terms of growth rates. Nearly half of Bonneville's increase was due to a high number of births relative to deaths, but about 1,400 people were estimated to have moved to the county.

Ada County, home to Boise, saw the fastest growth in terms of raw population, most of which was due to people moving to the area. The population there was estimated to have increased by about 13,000, with more than 10,000 people moving to the county. But because it's already a populous county, the growth rate there was similar to Bonneville's.

Kootenai County, home to Coeur d'Alene, also grew robustly, with about 5,000 in net population gain, about 4,000 of which were people moving to the area. The northern county also saw the fastest rates of population growth at 3 percent, and net in-migration at 2.5 percent.

The fastest-growing county in terms of growth rate, on the other hand, was rural Adams County, home to the Brundage Mountain Resort, north of McCall. Adams was estimated to have grown by nearly 5 percent since last year. But part of the reason the rate is so high there is that the population is so small at just over 4,000 people. Less than 200 people were estimated to have moved to the rural county in the last year.

Salvador Vazquez is the Idaho Department of Labor's director of labor market information. He said in most of the state, population growth is being driven by in-migration.

"We have in-migration from all the western states, but especially California," Vazquez said.

Vazquez said factors such as a good quality of life, low cost of living and cheap real estate are driving migration patterns.

But in-migration has played a stronger role in growth in the western half of the state than in eastern Idaho, where growth has been driven by birth rates to a greater degree.

“That side of the state is not growing as much,” Vazquez said. He said the reasons aren’t entirely clear, but greater high-skilled job availability in western Idaho appears to play a role.

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