

Socio-Economic Characteristics and Conditions

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Population

The population in the Palouse Basin is concentrated in several towns and cities, including those of Pullman, Palouse, Colfax, and Albion in Whitman County, Washington, and the communities of Moscow, Viola, and Potlatch in Latah County, Idaho (see Table 1; all recent statistics reported here are based on U.S. Census Bureau estimates and projections). In addition to these population centers, rural residents also reside in those parts of rural Latah County and Whitman County that lie within the Basin.

As Table 1 shows, the population in Whitman County has been declining, with decreases in the populations of its towns and cities, with the exception of Pullman. In contrast, the population in Latah County has been increasing, although there too the growth has occurred in the larger city of Moscow, while the population in the town of Potlatch has decreased; the population increase in Moscow has been approximately 1.5% each year over the last several decades, but it has slowed to under 1% per year since 2000.

Population increases in the cities of Pullman and Moscow are due to several factors. One factor is the growth of these communities as trade centers for the surrounding world areas and towns; this factor is discussed in greater detail in the section of this report on economic conditions and trends in the Basin. A second factor is the influx of retirees from outside the region who are moving here from more populated and congested regions such as western Washington and southern California.

A third factor is the growth in the enrollment of the universities located in these two cities, Washington State University in Pullman and the University of Idaho in Moscow. According to Fall 2007 figures, university enrollment has remained constant in Pullman over 2006, with the number of Washington State University students comprising the vast majority of Pullman's population (approximately 74%); only about 6,500 people are full-time residents, making it just twice the size of Colfax. In contrast, about half of the population of Moscow can be attributed to University of Idaho students, whose numbers have remained fairly constant in recent years; about 11,000 people are full-time residents, making it almost a third the size of the next geographically closest city, Lewiston.

Table 1. Populations of Latah County, ID, Whitman County, WA, and communities in them, with population sizes, changes in them between 2000 and 2006, and proportions in terms of several ethnic categories.

County/Community	Population (2006)	Population Change (2000 – 2006)	Age (Median)	White (%)	Hisp (%)	Asian (%)
Latah County	35,029	(0.3%)	28	94.1	2.7	2.5
Whitman County	39,838	(-2.2%)	25	87.4	3.4	7.2
Moscow	22,356	(5%)	24	91	2.5	1.7
Potlatch	722	(-8.7%)	36	96.5	1.4	
Pullman	25,357	(2.8%)	22	81.3	3.9	5.1
Colfax	2694	(-5.3%)	41	93.5	1.5	
Palouse	917	(-9.3%)	38	95.3	1.7	

As the City of Moscow's most recent Comprehensive Plan (City of Moscow 1999) notes:

The city of Moscow is the county seat and principal population center for Latah County. According to the 1990 census, Moscow had a population of 18,519 persons. This figure accounted for 60 percent of Latah County's 1990 population of 30,617. In 1980, Moscow's population of 16,513 persons constituted 57.4 percent of the county's population of 28,749.

Between 1980 and 1990, the city's population increased by 2,000 persons, or 12 percent. During the same period, the rest of Latah County experienced a 6.5 percent increase in population, and the state grew by 6.6 percent, according to the 1990 census.

The importance of the University of Idaho (UI) relative to Moscow's population is quite sizable. For the fall semester of 1993, student enrollment was 10,018, according to the UI Registrar's Office. Additionally, in 1990 the university employed 1,787 faculty/staff members at the Moscow campus.

Growth of Washington State University (WSU) also has a major influence on the population growth of Moscow as well. Although there is not a large number of WSU students who live in Moscow and commute to Pullman, 20 percent of WSU employees lived in Idaho in 1991. Of the WSU employees who live in Idaho, 77 percent live in Moscow. Therefore, as WSU grows, an increase in Moscow's population can be anticipated.

(This plan currently is being revised and updated; while these figures have changed, they suggest factors that could be considered when modeling population growth in the Basin's communities and rural areas.)

Likewise, in 1999, the City of Pullman also developed a revision of its Comprehensive Plan (City of Pullman 1999), its staff noting that:

The city's 1998 population was estimated at 25,070. This number represents an increase of 6.8 percent over the 1990 U.S. census count of 23,478.

The city estimates that, in 1998, the number of WSU students living in Pullman was 14,500 (comprising 58 percent of the total population). Of course, during semester breaks and throughout the summer months, the student population in town decreases markedly.

Due to the large contingent of university students in the community, Pullman's population is quite young when compared to other cities. About two-thirds of the city's population is 24 years old or younger. Approximately five percent of the population is 65 years of age or older. Through the 1990's, efforts have been made to retain more retirees in Pullman through the provision of appropriate housing and services.

1990 census figures show that per capita income in Pullman was \$9,375 and median household income was \$17,886. For the state of Washington as a whole, per capita income was \$14,923 and median household income was \$31,183. The income figures for Pullman are lower than those for the state primarily because of the substantial student population here.

The racial composition of the city's population reflects a largely homogenous, white population, which comprises approximately 88 percent of the total population. The largest non-white racial group is Asian/Pacific Islander, at 8.5 percent of total population. Blacks represent 1.9 percent of the population,

while less than one percent are listed as Native American. Persons of Hispanic origin, regardless of race, comprise 2.3 percent of the population.

Trends in population growth indicate that the Idaho portion of the Basin has increased much more than on the Washington side: growth in the population of Latah County as a whole has totaled 66 percent between 1960 and 2005 (from about 21,000 to 35,000), for an annual rate of 1.47 percent, while the population of Whitman County has only increased 29 percent during that period (from about 31,000 to 40,000). Changes in population of the larger cities indicates a slowing of growth in the city of Moscow in recent years: its population increased from 11,183 in 1960 to 21,900 in 2004, an annual increase of 2.4 percent; however, that growth has slowed in recent years, to 0.7 percent each year between 2000 and 2004.

Projections of future trends in population can, of course, only be a matter of speculation, although recent trends can be used to make assumptions for modeling population growth in the Basin: for example, the City of Pullman's Comprehensive Plan (City of Pullman 1999) notes that:

“In the past, growth in Pullman has been very closely tied to growth at WSU. While WSU is expected to continue to be a major driver of change in the city, the trend in recent years has been to a diversification of the economic base. The WSU Research and Technology Park and Port of Whitman County Industrial Park are home to a variety of businesses building off the research and training of the academic community.

The Washington Office of Financial Management (OFM) prepares population and employment forecasts for each county and the state as a whole. State law mandates use of these forecasts as the basis for long range planning by local jurisdictions. Distribution of the forecast growth within the county is left up to the jurisdictions in the county. Whitman County is also in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan, and has identified the Pullman area as the likely focus for much of the growth in the county. Table 3-3 shows the historic and forecast growth for the county, city, and WSU.

As shown in Table 3-3, the projected population for Pullman in the year 2020 is 33,650. This figure is derived from the OFM forecasts mentioned above. It is important to note that accurate population projections are difficult to attain, particularly when the target date is 20 years or more into the future. There is now, and probably always will be, much debate about the likely extent of future growth in student enrollment at WSU and how that will affect the overall population in the community. Certainly, it is acknowledged that both student enrollment and city population in 2020 could be much lower than that forecasted in this plan. However, apart from state mandates related to the use of OFM's figures, it is considered prudent to use the projections shown in Table 3-3 for this Comprehensive Plan because anticipating the maximum growth scenario places the city in the best possible position to proactively prepare for its future.”

Unforeseen trends also could be a factor that obviously can be considered only once the changes underlying them are recognized; a current example is climate change: forecasts are for higher temperatures in the western U.S. that could well result in significant population growth in the Pacific Northwest, with cooler temperatures providing relatively greater comfort for residents and lower energy costs in future decades, and increased precipitation providing for increased water supply – thereby attracting in-migrating people currently residing in areas that could become significantly hotter and more expensive in living costs, such as the southwestern U.S.

Socio-cultural Characteristics and Conditions

The vast majority of the residents of the Basin are “white,” although the two universities bring some slight ethnic diversity to the area, including people of Asian and Asian American ethnicity, and African and African American ethnicity, as well as other minority ethnic groups that are less represented in the American West but that are growing in numbers.

The presence of the universities in the Basin’s two largest cities also results in lower average ages and annual incomes given the resulting concentrations of university students (with their younger ages and lower incomes) in them.

The median age of 24 years in Moscow differs from the state of Idaho as a whole (35.3 years), and the same trend is found in Pullman, although less pronounced (a median age of 22 years in Pullman, in comparison to 33.2 years for the state as a whole).

As the City of Moscow’s most recent Comprehensive Plan (City of Moscow 1999) notes:

As can be expected of a university town the size of Moscow, the population is weighted heavily in the 20-24 age group, with 23.3 percent of Moscow's population belonging to that group. The median age of 24.4 years is significantly lower than the median age in the state, which is 31.6 years in 1990.

The educational level of the population of Moscow is, as would be expected, among the highest in the state. In 1990, 92.3 percent of the population 25 years of age or older were graduates of high school or higher educational establishments, compared to 79.7 percent at the state level; 78 percent had one to three years of college, compared to 49.3 percent at the state level; and 48.5 percent had four or more years of college, compared to 17.7 percent at the state level.

...the median income of families, households, and persons in group quarters in Moscow... [can be] compared to the state as a whole in 1990. While families in Moscow had a higher median income than in the state as a whole, households and persons in group quarters had lower median incomes than in the state. ...[This] suggests that the highly educated non-students in the population are earning higher than average incomes, while the student population tends to lower the overall median income per person within the city; the student status of a high percentage of the population causes a high proportion of lower income households and individuals.

Poverty statistics also confirm this general finding. According to the 1990 census, 12.4 percent of Moscow families were below the poverty level as compared to 9.7 percent of the families for the entire state. In contrast, 50.8 percent of the persons in group quarters in Moscow were below the poverty level, while the state figure for such persons was 29.3 percent.

Rough Profile of the Basin’s Major Communities

A rough profile of the Idaho portion of the Basin is provided by a comparison of Moscow to Idaho state averages, which indicate that it differs from the state as a whole, as would be expected given the large concentration of university students (with their younger ages and lower incomes):

- Median household income **below** state average.
- Unemployed percentage **above** state average.
- Hispanic race population percentage **significantly below** state average.
- Median age **significantly below** state average.

- Number of college students **significantly above** state average.
- Percentage of population with a bachelor's degree or higher **above** state average.

In comparison, Potlatch, when compared to Idaho state averages, is found to differ from Moscow:

- Unemployed percentage **above** state average.
- Hispanic race population percentage **significantly below** state average.
- Foreign-born population percentage **significantly below** state average.

In contrast, a rough profile of the Washington portion of the Basin provided by a comparison of Pullman to Washington state averages indicates that it too differs from the state as a whole, again reflecting the city's large population of university students:

- Median household income **significantly below** state average.
- Unemployed percentage **above** state average.
- Hispanic race population percentage **below** state average.
- Median age **significantly below** state average.
- Number of college students **significantly above** state average.
- Percentage of population with a bachelor's degree or higher **significantly above** state average.

This profile indicates that Pullman is much more like Moscow than differs from it in these characteristics. In comparison, Colfax, when compared to Washington state averages, is found to differ from Pullman:

- Hispanic race population percentage **significantly below** state average.
- Median age **above** state average.
- Foreign-born population percentage **significantly below** state average.
- Institutionalized population percentage **significantly above** state average.

A large proportion of rural residents in the area, especially those living outside of its population centers, were born in the Basin. Their customs and lifestyles are typical of those found in rural areas of the West, in that they tend to have resource-based and land-production occupations, and are comparatively more conservative in their values and perspectives. One crude indicator of this social characteristic is the number of campaign contributions made by residents of Colfax, WA, in the 2004 election: all but one were made to the Republican Party or its candidates – in a state where a minority (46%) of voters voted for George W. Bush in the 2004 presidential election.

However, in the Idaho portion of the basin's rural areas, an exception is that some proportion of rural landowners either are faculty of the two universities or professionals attracted to the university-town of Moscow, and thus comparatively more liberal and affluent than their neighbors -- or they are even more liberal residents who have been attracted to the area as part of the back-to-the-land movement that began in the 1970's. One indicator of this social characteristic is the proportion of voters in Latah County that voted for George W. Bush in the 2004 presidential election – 50% -- in contrast to a state in which a majority voted for Bush (69%).

It might also be noted that a major segment of the Moscow and rural Latah County population, given a more liberal political orientation and the fact that they have come from other more populated, congested and poorly planned areas of the country, are more concerned than other residents with growth management and the use of government and public policy to advance economic and community development in a way that they see as being progressive and well-planned. Some are opposed to certain kinds of economic activity (e.g., "big-box" retail stores) and have been labeled by others as "anti-growth."

In contrast, some residents of the Basin, especially in rural Whitman County, are more conservative in their beliefs and preferences, and some (including many farmers in the region) are among the region's most conservative, especially in comparison to their fellow citizens on the "west-side" of the state of Washington and in Latah County. These individuals tend to believe that the less government involvement in citizens' lives, the better, and they espouse principles of free-market economics, despite the subsidies that some receive from the federal government. Of particular relevance for water resource management, they are generally in favor of community development through increased economic activity (i.e., "pro-growth"), and would like to see their communities grow in terms of the basic industries and retail outlets available for local services, consumer choices and purchasing options, and general local prosperity, through the jobs, income and economic expansion generated.