ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report offers an overview of population trends in Oregon, based on recent 2000 census information. It focuses on changes in Oregon compared to national trends and other states. The report describes Oregon’s population growth since 1850, changes in the state’s age composition, shifts in ethnic diversity, and trends in household size and composition. Finally, the report highlights implications of these population trends.

This report may be freely downloaded from the Population Research Center website, www.upa.pdx.edu/CPRC/.

OREGON’S MAJOR POPULATION TRENDS

By Barry Edmonston, Director, Population Research Center

Several important population forces are affecting Oregon. The population is growing faster than the national average and, during the past decade, accelerated its rate of increase. Oregon’s population is becoming older, primarily as a result of the aging of persons born during the baby boom. The state’s minority population is growing much faster than the white population. The population is becoming more racially diverse. The average size of households is decreasing. Households are becoming more diverse, with more single person households and families without children.

This report is the first in a series of reports that highlights population changes in Oregon, focusing on changes for the state’s population in comparison to other states. Other reports will offer more detailed description of Oregon’s population changes, including reports dealing with population change for Oregon’s counties, changes in Oregon’s rural population, older Oregonians, racial and ethnic diversity in the state, and other important demographic topics.

Population Growth

Oregon’s population has been increasing steadily for the past 150 years since the first population counts for the state were made in 1850 (see Figure 1). In 1850, the decennial census enumerated 12,000 persons in Oregon. This number is small because the 1850 census was limited to the primarily European-origin settler population and did not include the larger American Indian population. Censuses continued to exclude counts of the American Indian population until widespread enumeration of native peoples began in 1880.

With continued movement westward and arrival of settlers in the 1850 to 1910 period, Oregon’s population approximately doubled every 10 years, reaching 670,000 in 1910. Growth slackened slightly during the 1910 to 1940 period. Immigration to the United States was particularly slow during this period due to poor employment opportunities and the reductions in U.S. immigration quotas. In-migration to Oregon was greatly affected by the economic depression of the 1930s, when job growth was weak and relatively few people moved to Oregon. Even with lower levels of population growth, by comparison to earlier periods, Oregon’s population increased to 1,100,000 by 1940, an increase of 62 percent in the 1910 to 1940 period (see Figure 2).

Larger population increases resumed during the World War II period, with an increase of almost half a million people during the 1940s, a gain of almost 40 per-
cent during the decade. World War II and the following post-war period witnessed heavy demands for lumber and the rapid expansion of industry in the metropolitan Portland area.

Population growth continued at a steady pace in the post-World War II period of 1950 to 1980. During 1950 to 1960, population gains were fueled especially by the higher fertility levels of the baby boom, with Oregonian couples having three or more children on average (see Figure 3).

Although fertility rates in Oregon began to decline markedly after peaking in the late 1950s, in-migration increased in the 1960s, contributing to larger population increases in the 1960s and 1970s. During the 1970 to 1980 period, Oregon’s population grew by more than one-half million persons for the first time, an increase of more than 25 percent that can primarily be caused by a large volume of in-migration.

Economic conditions worsened greatly for Oregon in the 1980s, when a poor national economy and high infla-
tion markedly reduced demands for Oregon’s products and services. Oregon’s experienced net out-migration for several years in the 1980s and, for the first time since 1850, had population declines during three years. Although there was an overall net in-migration to the state during the 1980 to 1990 period, most of the popu-

lation increases were due to natural increase (the excess of births minus deaths). The state’s population during the 1980s increased by 200,000, and the smallest percent change in a decade since 1850.

The 1990s reversed economic and demographic trends dramatically. The population grew by more than 500,000 for the second time, with a gain of more than 20 percent, which increased the state’s population to 3.4 million in 2000.

During the past 50 years, from 1950 to 2000, Oregon’s population increased by 1.9 million. Most of the increase, about 55 percent, results from net in-migration. The state experienced a net in-migration of more than one million people during the past 50 years. The remaining 45 percent of the increase is due to natural increase, with the greatest share of the contribution made during the post-World War II baby boom period.

In terms of population growth, how does Oregon compare to other states? During the 1990s, Oregon’s population increased by 20.4 percent, ranking the state as the 11th fastest growing state in the nation (see Figure 4). As in previous decades, Nevada has ranked number 1, with an explosive growth of 66 percent during the 1990s. Most of the rapidly growing states in the nation, like Oregon, are in a belt of states stretching from the Pacific Northwest, through the central and southern Rockies, to Texas. Rapid population growth has also been seen in Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina.

Some states growing rapidly during the 1990s have accelerated their growth rates compared to the 1980s. If one compares growth rates for the 1990 to 2000 period as well as the ratio of growth rates in the 1990s to growth rates in the 1980s, there are few states that both grew rapidly in the 1990s and have accelerated their population growth. These states are “the nation’s newest population growth centers” and include four states in the northwest (Oregon, Idaho, Utah, and Colorado) and North Carolina. Of these five states, Idaho’s population growth has accelerated the most and Oregon’s growth accelerated the second fastest in the 1990s.

**Age Changes**

Oregon’s population is aging. The state’s population median age—the midpoint of the age distribution, increased 1.7 years between 1990 and 2000, from 34.6 years to 36.6 years (see Figure 5). The major factor pushing up the median age was the continued aging of the large baby boom generation. The baby boom generation refers to the large number of births that occurred after World War II, during the 18-year period from 1946 to 1964. Oregon’s 45- to 54-year age group, which includes the oldest baby boomers, grew by 71 percent between 1990 and 2000. This was the fastest growing age group in Oregon in the 1990s. Several other age groups increased by more than 25 percent during the past decade: in-migration during the decade pro-
ity levels, compared to Oregon, and more children and teenagers. States with older populations result from a combination of factors, including (a) lower fertility that leads to fewer children and teenagers, (b) modest net in-migration that is associated with population aging in place, and (c) net in-migration of elderly. Oregon’s slightly older population, compared to the national average, is primarily due to slightly lower fertility levels and a net in-migration of elderly. Oregon’s median age rose less (1.7 years) than in the nation (2.4 years), however, in the 1990s. This is attributable to Oregon’s greater level of in-migration of younger persons, which helped to retard the overall aging of the population.

Females continue to outnumber males in Oregon, 50.4 percent to 49.6 percent. The male population increased slightly more rapidly than the female population, primarily as a result of slightly higher net in-migration of males to Oregon during the 1990s.

The rising median age conceals some significant age trends in the state’s population (see Figure 7). Not all older groups increased, for example. Although the 65 years and older age group grew 12 percent, this was a lower rate than for the population less than 65 years (22 percent increase). Overall increases in the state’s elderly population reflect relatively slow growth among the younger elderly, aged 65 to 74 years, and more rapid growth for those over 75 years, and even more rapid growth for aged 85 years and older. The slower growth rates for the younger elderly are caused by the low birth rates during Great Depression.

The median age of Oregon’s population is slightly older than the United States, 36.6 years in Oregon and 35.3 years in the United States in 2000 (see Figure 6). States with younger population have slightly higher fertili-
There are some noteworthy differences in Oregon trends for age groups during the 1990 to 2000 period compared to other states. The 15-24, 25-34, and 45-54 year old age groups grew more rapidly in Oregon than nationally. Only the number of Oregon residents aged 35 to 44 years increased less rapidly than nationally.

Ethnic Diversity

Because early Oregon population censuses did not completely enumerate the American Indian population until 1880, the first censuses indicate that Oregon was almost an exclusively European-origin white population. The censuses of 1850 and 1860, for example, report that over 98 percent of the Oregon population was white (see Figure 8, which shows the composition of the state’s minority populations; the state’s white population is not shown but accounts for the remaining proportion of the total population).

Beginning in the 1860s, a substantial number of young Asian men began to move into Oregon. Most of these
men were Chinese and Japanese origin and were either railroad workers or miners. By the end of the 1800s, there were sizeable communities of Chinese, primarily men, in the mining towns of eastern Oregon and in the larger cities and of Japanese, in coastal fishing towns. Oregon’s Asian-origin population increased to about 13,000 by 1890, when it was more than 5 percent of the state’s population (greater, actually, than the 3 percent in 2000).

Because a high proportion of Oregon’s Asian population in the 1800s were male and increasing severe restrictions were placed on Asian immigration into the United States from the 1880s onward, the Asian population began to decline during the early 1900s. By 1950, Oregon’s Asian-origin population had decreased to 7,000, only 0.4 percent of the state’s population. In 1950, as it was in 1850, Oregon’s population was more than 98 percent white.

Ethnic diversity began to increase slowly in the post-World War II period. Several factors affected the growth of the state’s minority population. Employment opportunities developed during World War II for African Americans and, by 1950, Oregon’s black population had increased to 12,000, about 1 percent of the total state population. The black population resided primarily in metropolitan Portland. Black net in-migration to Oregon has been relatively small in recent decades. The black population numbered 56,000 in 2000, less than 2 percent of the state’s population.

Immigration quotas on immigration by national origin were removed for the United States in 1967. One immediate effect was to lift restrictions on Asian immigration that had been in place for almost a century. Asian immigration increased in the late 1960s and early 1970s and, for the first time since the 1880s, Oregon’s Asian-origin population began to increase. Asian Americans increased from 11,000 in 1960, 0.5 percent of the state’s population, to 101,000 in 2000, 3 percent of the state’s population.

The Latino population in Oregon has historically been very small. When the first population counts were made of the Latino or Hispanic-origin population in 1970, there were 32,000 Latinos in Oregon, or less than 2 percent of the state’s population. In the past three decades, the growth of the Latino population has been fueled by high levels of net in-migration – including immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries as well as native-born Latinos who moved to Oregon – and slightly higher levels of childbearing than the white population. By 2000, the Latino population increased to 275,000, or 8 percent of the state’s population. The Latino population increased in every Oregon county in the 1990s, and is now the most widespread minority group in the state.

The 2000 census was the first that collected self-reported racial and ethnic information on more than one racial identity. About 105,000 Oregonians, or 3.1 percent of the state’s population, identified themselves with two or more races, compared to 2.4 percent in the U.S. population (see Figure 9). About twice as many children as adults identified themselves as multiracial, reflecting the increasing number of interracial marriages in Oregon. Three percent of whites, 20 percent of Asians, 23 percent of blacks, 47 percent of American Indians, and 50 percent of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders in Oregon identified themselves as having a multiracial background. In the U.S. census, Latinos are asked to self-report a “race” as well as Hispanic or Latino origin. Most Latinos report themselves as “white” or “other” (writing in such responses as “Mexican” or “Chicano” for example).

Oregon ranks 9th nationally in terms of the percent of population reporting two or more racial origins. Hawaii is unusually high, with more than one-fifth of its people reporting that they identify with two more racial origins. Other states with higher proportions of multiracial persons are usually states with large immigrant or American Indian populations. As shown in Figure 9, states with large multiracial populations, in addition to Hawaii and Alaska, include New York, Oklahoma, and southwestern and Pacific Coast states.

Household Trends

The number of households in Oregon has increased along with population growth. The pace of change for households and population, however, has not been exactly the same. Households in the past, for example, were much larger and, as the average household size declined, the number of households has increased more rapidly than the number of people.

From 1990 to 2000, Oregon’s population grew from
2.8 million to 3.4 million, an increase of 20.4 percent. But the number of households, by comparison, grew from 1.1 million to 1.3 million during the same period, an increase of 20.9 percent.

**Household Size**

In 1900, the average household size was 4.6. The most common household size in Oregon in 1900 was seven or more people. The larger household size a century ago reflects the higher fertility levels prevailing at the time, with more children in families, as well as the tendency for people to live in extended households.

During the first half of the 20th century, the average household size decreased steadily, to 3.4 persons in 1950 (see Figure 10). This decline of 1.2 persons per household from 1900 to 1950 was the result of decreases in households of 5 and more persons and a doubling of single and two-person households (see Figure 11). By 1950, two person households were the most common household size in Oregon.

Average household size continued to decrease in the second half of the 20th century, dropping from 3.4 in 1950 to 2.5 in 2000. In 2000, the most common household size remained the two-person household, comprising about one-third of all Oregon households. Larger households of five or more persons, once the most common household in 1900, had become a relatively rare occurrence in 2000, accounting for only one-in-ten of households.

Oregon’s average household size of 2.5 in 2000 was below the national average of 2.6. Compared to other states, Oregon’s population in 2000 ranked 28th in terms of average household size. States with higher average household size, such as California or New Jersey, tend to be states with younger populations and higher numbers of immigrant families. States with lower average household size, such as North Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia, are more likely to have older populations, including a higher proportion of elderly who live alone, and have fewer immigrant families.

Although household size decreased in the 1990s, the declines were more modest than those in previous decades. The arrival of new immigrants in Oregon and the tendency of immigrant households to be somewhat larger...
helped to counterbalance decreasing average household size among the aging, native-born residents.

**Families and Non-Families**

According to U.S. Census Bureau definitions, households are classified as either family or non-family households. Family households are comprised of two or more people who are related by marriage, birth, or adoption. Married-couples are the most common type of family household in Oregon. Non-family households are comprised of single persons, or two or more people who are not related. Single persons are the most common type of non-family household in Oregon.

There have been great increases of non-family households, in absolute and relative terms, from 1950 to 2000 (see Figure 12). In 1950, about 10 percent of all households in Oregon were non-family households: almost all were single persons. By 2000, non-family households had increased to almost one-third of all households. About one-fourth of Oregon’s households in 2000 were single persons. About six percent of all households were other types of non-family arrangements, usually two or more people living as roommates.

In 2000, 26.1 percent of Oregon households were persons living alone, only slightly higher than the national average of 25.8 percent. Compared to other states, Oregon ranked 24th in terms of the proportion of households that are single persons. North Dakota had the highest percentage, 29 percent, primarily because it has a relatively old population with a significant number of widowed elderly persons. As Oregon’s population grows older during the next several decades, there is likely to be further increases in the number and proportion of single person households. Persons aged 65 years of age and older, especially women, are more likely to live alone than younger persons. With the advancing age of baby boomers in coming decades, there will be a greater number of elderly who find themselves widowed. The state’s population will experience fairly steady increases as an aging population leads to increases in single person households, with associated declines in average household size.

Married couples remain the most common type of family households in Oregon and in the United States. And, although the number of married couple households has increased since 1950, they have decreased substan-

tially as a proportion of all households. In 1950, married couples comprised more than three-fourths of all Oregon households. Married couples, as a proportion of all households, have decreased over time, especially since 1970. By 2000, married couples made up slightly more than one-half of all Oregon households, a decrease of about 25 percentage points from 1950.

The proportion of married couples with children under age 18 has declined in Oregon since 1960. In 1960, at the peak of the baby boom years, almost 60 percent of married couples had one more children under 18 living with them. As fertility levels decreased and the population aged, there have been fewer married couples with children. By 2000, less than one-half of married couples (46 percent) had children under 18 living with them. Since 1990, most married couples in Oregon are either younger couples with no children or older couples whose children have moved out of the household.

During the past 50 years, there has been an increase in family households other than married couples, growing from about 11 percent of all households in 1950 to 16 percent in 2000. The most common type of “other” family households in Oregon is single women with children.

**Implications**

Oregon’s population growth in the 1990s was more
rapid that previous decades and increased the state’s population at almost twice the national average. Most of the population growth was due to the arrival of new residents, from other states as well as from international immigrants from other countries. The population growth reflected the healthy economy that prevailed for most of the 1990s.

There is general consensus that Oregon’s future population growth will continue to outpace the national average in coming decades. Oregon is located between two larger, growing states – California and Washington – has good economic ties to countries in the Pacific Rim, and possesses amenities that attract in-migrants. During each year of the 1990s, Oregon received a net in-migration of about 5,000 to 6,000 retirees, about 5,000 to 6,000 international immigrants from other countries, and another 5,000 to 6,000 foreign-born persons who moved to Oregon from other states. In addition, there was a net immigration of a considerable number of younger adults who were attracted to Oregon in large part by lifestyle and amenities. Because the attraction of Oregon may not be entirely based on job opportunities for a substantial number of migrants to Oregon, the state’s population tends to increase except in periods of exceptionally poor job growth. This helps to understand why net immigration has continued in recent years even though the state’s economy has been weak, compared to prior years and to other states.

Although the aging of Oregon’s population is apparent, policies often overlook the implications of continued growth in the elderly population. Public institutions and private companies sometimes ignore the fact that their residents or customers are graying. Some companies have started to market and advertise to an older population and to design products and services that meet the changing needs of an older population. But few institutions and companies, however, have rethought thoroughly the ways in which they will deal with an aging population.

In Oregon, the over 65 years population account for 13 percent of the population in 2000, compared to 9 percent in 1950. By 2050, that proportion is expected to rise, on average, to more than one-fourth. Many of our institutions and programs were developed for younger populations and have not yet shed the outdated view that the elderly require a redesign of programs. In terms of businesses, there are more products and services for the elderly to consider than only drugs and retirement homes. Yet, for example, companies spend more than 95 percent of their marketing and advertising budgets on the population under 50 years.

Relatively few people regard increasing ethnic diversity to be a major problem in Oregon. There are, however, aspects of the increasing number and proportion of ethnic minorities that affect public policy discussion. Results from the 2000 census reveal that Oregon’s metropolitan areas have relatively low levels of racial residential segregation, compared to other metropolitan areas. Residential segregation for Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, African Americans, and American Indians in Oregon’s metropolitan areas rank among the lowest 40 percent of all metropolitan areas. Although residential segregation is generally low for Hispanics in the Corvallis, Eugene, Portland, and Medford metropolitan areas, residential segregation for Hispanics in the Salem metropolitan area is ranked among the 40 percent most segregated metropolitan areas.

Many of Oregon’s ethnic minorities are recent immigrants to the United States. There were 289,700 foreign-born residents in Oregon in 2000, of whom 144,800, or 50 percent, arrived in the United States in the previous decade. A substantial number of immigrants in Oregon are ethnic minorities, especially Asian Americans and Latinos. According to 2000 census data, Oregon had 60,500 immigrants from Asia and 106,900 immigrants from Latin America. Immigrants pose several challenges for the state. Immigrants who have recently arrived in the United States are more likely than longer-term residents to have higher levels of poverty, require special attention for English-language training, to experience problems in their access to education, health care, and other public programs, and to have lower rates of homeownership.

There have been dramatic changes in household size and composition over the past century. The average household sized declined from 4.6 persons in 1900 to 2.5 in 2000. The most common household in 1900 was a family of five or more persons. In 2000, the most common household was a two-person couple with no children. The most common types of households in Oregon in the future will be two-person and single-person households, comprising together about 60 percent of the state’s households.

A population with declining household size means that housing growth does not necessarily imply population increases. With fewer people living in existing housing units, there needs to be a substantial expansion of housing in order to deal with moderate population gains. In a few areas, new housing is needed even though the population may not be increasing and may, in fact, be decreasing. The state is already witnessing – in some areas of Portland and other cities as well as smaller towns – areas where population is decreasing even though new housing is being built.

Fewer people per household raise questions about future housing needs. During past decades, a considerable amount of new housing has included homes with three,
four, or more bedrooms. In 2000 about 40 percent of single-person households were elderly persons (about 30 percent were elderly women and 10 percent were elderly men). The aging of the population in coming decades will increase the number, and relative proportion of all households, of elderly single-person households. In the future, the elderly will account for one-half or more of Oregon’s single-person households. In many areas of the state, especially smaller towns and rural areas, the elderly will be the predominant age group living alone. What will be the needs for housing, health care, and social services to meet this changing distribution of households?

Notes
1. Data sources for this report include the U.S. Census Bureau (www.census.gov), Portland State University’s Population Research Center (www.upa.pdx.edu/CPRC/), and the State of Oregon’s Office of Economic Analysis (www.oea.das.state.or.us/).
2. For additional information about Oregon’s population and the U.S. population, the National Center for Health Statistics provides data on births and deaths (www.cdc.gov/nchs/) and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service is a source for information on immigration (www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/index.htm). The Population Reference Bureau in Washington, D.C. is a leading provider of timely and objective information on U.S. and international population trends and their implications (www.prb.org). The University of Michigan’s Population Research Center’s CensusScope is an easy-to-use tool for investigating U.S. demographic trends (www.censusscope.org/). University of Southern California’s Population Dynamics Research Group is a useful source of census information on changing nature of race and ethnicity in the nation (www.usc.edu/schools/sppd/research/popdynamics/).

The goal of the Oregon Outlook Reports is to raise public awareness of demographic information and trends to give the public and elected representatives in Oregon an informed basis for developing policies and programs.

The Oregon Outlook reports are based primarily on newly released census data and are authored by the Population Research Center staff and others with special expertise on the topic.

The Portland Multnomah Progress Board is co-sponsoring a set of reports that focus on the metropolitan Portland area, with each report highlighting the City of Portland and Multnomah County within the metropolitan Portland region.

The Oregon Progress Board is co-sponsoring a set of reports that deals with the State of Oregon.