North Dakota Census Office
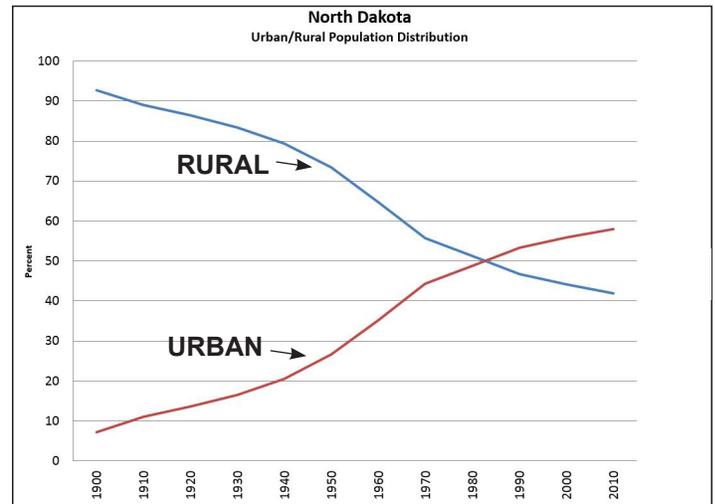
Growing ND by the Numbers

Sharing Population
Seven North Dakota cities overlap the boundaries of two counties. These are Enderlin, Grandin, Lehr, Reynolds, Sarles, Tower City and Wilton. The largest is Enderlin, with an estimated population of 878 located in both Cass and Ransom counties. Reynolds (305 population) has the most even distribution, approximately 30 percent residing in Grand Forks County with the remainder in Traill County.

Source: Census 2010 File SF1

Changes to City Populations & the Urbanization of ND

North Dakota's 357 incorporated cities have been seeing population increases in recent years according to the U.S. Census Bureau. According to the 2014 population estimate, cities combined population represented about 76 percent of the state's total population. The state has seen an increase of about 66,000 residents since 2010. Cities took about 60,000 of this increase, leaving only about 6,000 residents increase in areas outside of city boundaries.

Population increases have been concentrated in a small number of cities in the state. Nine North Dakota cities – Fargo, Williston, Bismarck, Minot, West Fargo, Dickinson, Grand Forks, Mandan and Watford City – account for more than

North Dakota has gradually changed from a rural population state to an urban state. Between 1980 and 1990 the urban population surpassed the rural population and the trend continues. More recently 80 percent of the growth from 2010 can be accounted for in the population of nine cities and 90 percent of growth in just 30 cities. Source: Population Estimate File PEPANNRES 2014

North Dakota's Growth Concentrated in Larger Cities

North Dakota's cities range in population from our largest – Fargo with an estimated 116,000 residents – to Ruso in McLean County, population 4. North Dakota has only 9 cities with a population greater than 10,000, and 132 with populations of less than 100.

Of the 357 cities in the state, 172 are estimated to have grown, 53 had no change and 132 have lost population since the 2010 Census.

In western regions (Minot, Dickinson, Bismarck, and Williston), there are 151 cities. Only 31 (21 percent) of these cities are estimated to have lost population since 2010.

In eastern regions (Devils Lake, Grand Forks, Jamestown and Fargo), there are 206 cities. A total of 101 (or 49 percent) are estimated to have lost population since 2010.

Source: Census 2010 File SF1 and Population Estimate File PEPANNRES 2014

Small Communities
There were 39 North Dakota communities recognized as Census Designated Places (CDP) in the 2010 Census. The U.S. Census Bureau does not produce annual population estimates for these communities as they are not incorporated cities, do not have city governments, and include North Dakota's Air Force bases and communities on Indian reservations. The largest CDP in the state is the Minot Air Force Base with a population of 5,521 in 2010. The smallest was Raleigh, about 50 miles southwest of Mandan with a population of 12.

Source: Population Estimate Program 2014 file: PEPAGESEX.

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53,000 additional residents, or about 80 percent of the growth since 2010.

The U.S. Census Bureau counts areas with population clusters of more than 2,500 residents as urban, and those with less than this number as rural. In 1900, the population of North Dakota was 93 percent rural with only 7 percent urban. Over time that number shifted and by 1990, there was a higher urban population than rural. Only 42 percent of the state's population was considered to be rural by the 2010 Census. Using 2014 numbers, that percentage of rural population has now dropped to about 37 percent. This is caused both by the growth of larger cities in the state, as well as a number of smaller cities that previously fell below the urban threshold of 2,500 now growing to urban sizes. Casselton and Watford City are an example of two cities that have grown to urban status since the 2010 Census. In addition, Horace and Lincoln (suburbs of Fargo and Bismarck, respectively) are both estimated to have grown over 2,500 as well.

Changes to Larger City Rankings Over Time

Fargo has held the largest city banner since statehood, followed by Bismarck, Grand Forks and Minot to round out cities with populations in excess of 40,000. While Fargo's position as the largest city in the state has remained constant, the second, third and fourth positions have changed over time. As recently as 1960, Bismarck was the fourth largest city with Grand Forks in second position, and Minot in third. Bismarck passed Minot to be the third largest city between 1960 and 1970, and then replaced Grand Forks as the second largest city by 1980.

In terms of fastest growing, West Fargo would likely be considered North Dakota's fastest growing city when we consider change from the middle of the last century, growing from just over 1,600 in 1950 to an estimated population of more than 31,000 by 2014. However, if we consider only the time frame since 2010, cities in the northwest region of the state have seen the highest rate of growth. Watford City, in McKenzie County, is estimated to have grown from 1,744 in 2010 to 4,206 by 2014, an astonishing 141 percent growth followed by Williston and Stanley, both estimated to have grown by 67 percent since 2010.

Williston's growth of nearly 10,000 residents between 2010 and 2014 has resulted in it becoming our 6th largest city, surpassing Dickinson, Jamestown and Mandan during this timeframe.

Source: Census 2010 File SF1