

## Leaving for the city: UI study shows Idaho becoming urban

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho (AP) — A study from the University of Idaho's McClure Center for Public Policy Research shows Idaho has become steadily more urban since the Great Recession. The trend has some worried about the future of the state's rural communities.

"You would expect urban Idaho to lead in growth, but it's quite dramatic," center director Priscilla Salant, one of the study's authors, told the Post Register (<http://bit.ly/1LtV13m>).

Currently about two-thirds of Idaho's population is found in counties the study considered to be urban, including the areas around Idaho Falls, Boise, Coeur d'Alene and Lewiston. The remaining third live in rural counties. That's still more than the national average of about 15 percent.

But if the trend continues, Idaho could look more like the rest of the nation. Since the Great Recession ended in 2009, the population of urban Idaho has increased 6 percent, according to the study. The population of rural Idaho has remained flat, mainly because the Hispanic population in those rural areas also increased by 6 percent.

Half of the state's 44 counties lost population between 2010 and 2014.

Salant said the trend could lead to problems for shrinking or stagnant rural communities.

"It certainly is not promising for those communities, when you have out-migration, particularly of the labor force-aged population," Salant said. "People are going elsewhere for jobs. . It will be hard for those communities to recover."

Rural Clark County has lost more than one of every 10 people since the end of the recession, and Custer County has lost one in 20, according to the study.

By contrast, the areas where population is growing fastest are the state's largest cities.

"Population growth in Ada County has almost been 9 percent since the recession, and that's pretty significant compared to the rest of the state," Salant said.

Job growth is nearly twice as fast in Idaho's urban counties than in rural counties: 4.8 percent compared to 2.6 percent.

It's a problem that has vexed many rural counties for decades, said state Rep. Merrill Beyeler. The Republican from Leadore represents the sprawling 8th District, which runs from Lemhi County in the east nearly to the western border of the state.

Beyeler said there are a variety of things the state should do to aid flagging rural areas, such as shoring up funding for education and transportation and improving cellular service and broadband coverage. Beyeler says that will help integrate rural areas into the global economy.

"I look back at a time when we made the commitment to bring electricity to rural areas, and what that did for rural communities," he said. "As I look into the future, the commitment we need to bring to our rural areas is to bring communication capabilities similar to those available in urban areas. If we don't do that, I think it's going to be really difficult to bring those economies forward."

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