



## Publisher's Notebook

Matt Winters • May 2022

# It's not your imagination: Our communities are growing

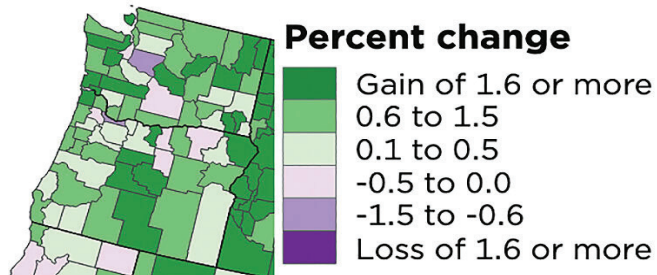
**M**y friend Dian Barker-Sayce, now-retired vice president of the Bank of the Pacific, and I used to almost rub our hands in glee with each new release of census estimates and other wonky demographic information. When you care about our communities as we do, it's gratifying to gain new insights into how they are doing. Data turns hunches into knowledge.

It doesn't take a crystal ball to know that the towns around the Columbia River estuary and neighboring seashore are growing. Rollicking real estate sales and home construction are undeniable.

Between the April 1, 2020, census and July 1, 2021, Clatsop County added 738 full-time residents, climbing to a population just under 42,000. The county had the sixth highest rate gain among Oregon's 36 counties and second highest among the 19 large counties with populations of 40,000 or more, trailing only Deschutes County.

Deschutes is famously home to the growth juggernaut of Bend, so for Clatsop to be mentioned in the same breath is startling.

The big nationwide headline out of the latest census data is that



Clatsop County was the fastest growing county in northwest Oregon between 2020 and 2021, the U.S. Census Bureau reported. Neighboring Pacific County experienced the ninth highest percentage increase among Washington state's 39 counties.

deaths exceeded births in two-thirds of U.S. counties. This was true in Clatsop, where there were 367 births to 488 deaths. It is only thanks to

in-migration of 848 that the population grew. Relocations from other states accounted for nearly all growth. The same pattern held in Pacific County, where deaths outnumbered births 399 to 167, and 720 new residents moved in, of whom 96% were from elsewhere in the U.S.

Pacific County's population rose by 2.5% from April 2020 to July 2021, to nearly 24,000. In percentage terms, it grew ninth fastest among Washington state's 39 counties. It was fifth fastest in western Washington, trailing No. 1 San Juan Islands at 4.3%, and three southwest Washington counties: Wahkiakum, 3.6%, Mason, 2.9%, and Lewis, 2.7%. It's interesting to see this growth spurt in the state's southwestern corner, which stalled out for decades after traditional forestry jobs evaporated.

July 1, 2020, was still early in the pandemic. It will be fascinating to learn whether these trends are continuing. I suspect they are, though at some point, growth may run into a lack of housing inventory. But if even a fraction of current vacation home owners move here full time, they will be welcome contributors to our society and economy.



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