

Baker City Population

Baker City's population has been unusually steady, among Oregon cities with more than 5,000 residents. Most of those cities have grown over the past several decades, at varying rates, but Baker City's population has stayed between 9,134 and 9,986 since the 1940 Census. The city's population, at each U.S. Census:

1880	— 1,258
1890	— 2,604
1900	— 6,663
1910	— 6,742
1920	— 7,729
1930	— 7,858
1940	— 9,342
1950	— 9,471
1960	— 9,986
1970	— 9,354
1980	— 9,471
1990	— 9,140
2000	— 9,860
2010	— 9,828
2020	— 10,099

10,000

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The city didn't approach that level during the three subsequent national censuses, although its population didn't drop significantly either. The figure of 9,140 for the 1990 Census was the city's lowest since 1930 (7,858). In the two ensuing head counts, however, Baker City again pushed close to the 10,000 ceiling — 9,860 in 2000 and 9,828 in 2010.

What does it mean?

Besides that additional digit, the city's jump above 10,000 means Baker City is now considered a "medium-sized" city rather than a small one, said Holly Kerns, director of the Baker City/County Planning Department.

"It triggers a number of new requirements for Baker City that haven't been in place before," Kerns said. "Medium-sized cities are required to do an annual report on the housing units that are permitted and produced."

Baker City is also required to conduct a housing needs analysis every six to eight years, followed by a housing production strategy, Kerns said.

Baker City Mayor Kerry McQuisten said the Census figure wasn't surprising, considering Portland State had projected the city's population had surpassed 10,000.

"We were anticipating that this would be the case for several months," McQuisten said.

Contributing trends

Based on statistics over the past decade, it appears that the city's population increase over the past decade was driven by people moving to the area.

According to the Oregon Health Authority, Baker County recorded 2,096 deaths and 1,625 births from 2010-19 — a net loss of 471 residents.

Those are county totals, but about 80% of the total births were to residents in the 97814 ZIP code, and about 77% of the deaths. That ZIP code, however, does include parts of Baker Valley and other areas outside the Baker City limits.

Another telling statistic is the number of active utility accounts inside the city.

That number rose by 128 from December 2015 to December 2020, according to the city — from 4,151 to 4,279.

History of population stability

Longtime Baker County historian Gary Dielman, who lives in Baker City, said the city reaching 10,000 population is a "milestone."

But Dielman, a 1957 Baker High School graduate, said he hopes that milestone doesn't signify the sort of trend that almost every sizeable Oregon city has experienced over the past few decades.

"Growth is not a good word for me," Dielman said. "I've been very happy that Baker's population has remained stable."

Dielman cited Bend as the most notable example in Oregon of the sort of popula-

Ontario Population

1910	— 1,248
1920	— 2,039
1930	— 1,941
1940	— 3,551
1950	— 4,465
1960	— 5,101
1970	— 6,523
1980	— 8,814
1990	— 9,392
2000	— 10,985
2010	— 11,366
2020	— 11,645

tion growth he hopes never happens in Baker City.

Baker City and Bend were of similar size until the 1970s, when the latter city began a growth spurt that accelerated rapidly in the last decade of the 20th century.

In 1930, Bend was only slightly larger than Baker City, with 8,848 residents to Baker City's 7,858.

Bend's margin widened over the next few decades but not dramatically — in the 1970 Census Bend's population had grown to 13,710, while Baker City was home to 9,354 residents.

Pendleton Population

1910	— 4,460
1920	— 6,837
1930	— 6,621
1940	— 8,847
1950	— 11,774
1960	— 14,434
1970	— 13,197
1980	— 14,521
1990	— 15,126
2000	— 16,354
2010	— 16,612
2020	— 17,107

By 1990 Bend was more than twice as large, with 20,469 residents to Baker City's 9,140.

During the 1990s, though, Bend's population more than doubled, reaching 52,029 by the 2000 Census.

Baker City, meanwhile, has had comparatively minor fluctuations in its population over the decades, gaining residents during the 1950s, 1970s and 1990s, but losing residents during the 1960s, 1980s and 2000s. None of those changes, however, was more than 7.9% (an increase from 1990 to 2000).

Neighboring cities along

La Grande Population

1910	— 4,843
1920	— 6,913
1930	— 8,050
1940	— 7,747
1950	— 8,635
1960	— 9,014
1970	— 9,645
1980	— 11,354
1990	— 11,766
2000	— 12,327
2010	— 13,082
2020	— 13,026

the I-84 corridor, by contrast, have all grown during that period, albeit at rates much below those of Bend.

La Grande, for instance, gained residents every decade from 1950 to 2010, with the largest increase being 17.7% during the 1970s.

La Grande surpassed Baker City during the 1960s, reaching a population of 9,645 in the 1970 Census, to Baker City's 9,354.

Ontario has added residents in every decade since the 1930s, and Pendleton's population has grown every decade except the 1960s, when it dropped by 8.6%.

SURGE

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But the trend reversed starting with the final week of July, with the then-record of 68 cases.

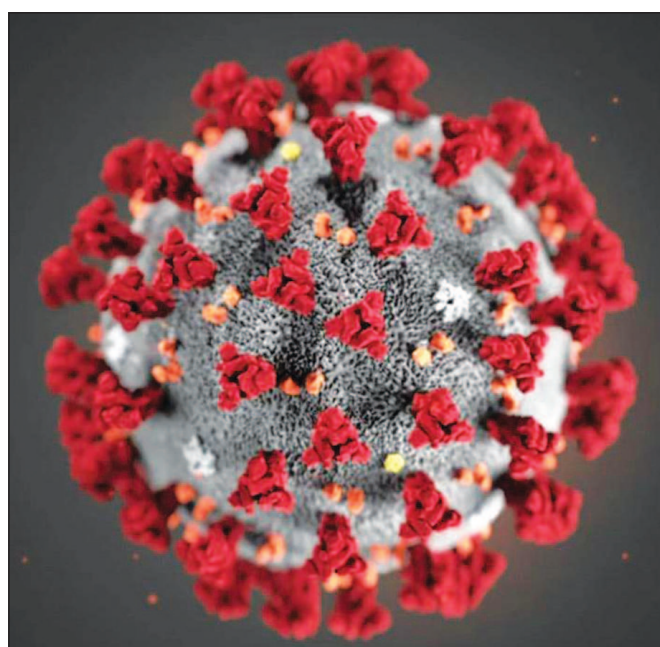
Due to a backlog of case investigations, Staten said she doesn't have data for August regarding breakthrough cases — fully vaccinated people who test positive for COVID-19 — or an age group breakdown of cases.

Those statistics are available through July, however.

Breakthrough cases

According to the Oregon Health Authority (OHA), Baker County has had 15 breakthrough cases through July 31.

That represents 2.3% of the county's total cases — 647 — recorded from Jan. 1, a week or so before the first county residents were fully vac-



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

A coronavirus particle.

nated, through July 31.

Based on OHA reports, the rate of breakthrough cases has risen recently as the more contagious delta variant became the predominant coro-

navirus strain.

The agency's most recent report showed that 19% of cases statewide during July were in fully vaccinated residents. That report did not list

how many of Baker County's 15 total breakthrough cases happened during July.

Of the 55 COVID-19-related deaths in Oregon during July, 82% were people who weren't vaccinated, according to OHA.

Age breakdown

The largest share of Baker County cases during July — 27.6% — were people in their 20s, according to the Health Department.

That age group has the third-lowest vaccination rate in the county, at 30.7% (statewide, 60.2% of residents from age 20 to 29 are vaccinated, according to OHA).

The second-lowest vaccination rate is among the 30-39 age range, at 30.4%. The lowest is 12- to 17-year-olds, who have been eligible only since May. Their vaccination rate is 19.5%. The rate among 18- and 19-year-olds is 39%.

The two age groups with the highest vaccination rates in Baker County — 80 and older, at 68.4%, and 70 to 79 years, at 65.8% — accounted for 6.8% of the county's cases during July.

Lamb blamed Baker County's vaccination rate for the surge in cases in the Aug. 12 press release.

The county's vaccination rate of 47.7% among residents 18 and older ranks eighth-lowest among Oregon's 36 counties. The statewide average is 70.2%.

The rest of the July age group breakdown in Baker County, along with vaccination rates.

- 40 to 49 years, 19% Vaccination rate in Baker County, 40.2%; statewide, 69.6%
- 50 to 59 years, 13.8% Vaccination rate in Baker County, 42.7%; statewide, 70%
- 60 to 69 years, 12.9%

Vaccination rate in Baker County, 53.2%; statewide, 75.8%

- 30 to 39 years, 12% Vaccination rate in Baker County, 30.4%; statewide, 66.3%

- 10 to 19 years, 7% Vaccination rate in Baker County, 23.3%; statewide, 52.8%

- 70 to 79, 4.3% Vaccination rate in Baker County, 65.8%; statewide, 84.9%

- Ages 80 and older, 2.5% Vaccination rate in Baker County, 68.4%; statewide, 78.6%

- Ages 5 to 9, 0.9% (Not eligible for vaccines)

Staten said that although she doesn't have final statistics for the county for the first half of August, preliminary data show that the largest percentage of new cases this month are among people in their 30s.

MOSQUITOES

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The Baker Valley Vector Control District maintains a network of more than two dozen mosquito traps across the 200,000-acre district, which includes most of Baker, Bowen and Keating valleys.

Matt Hutchinson, the director's manager, sends "pools" of mosquitoes — generally 10 to 50 insects — to a lab at Oregon State University in Corvallis where the bugs are tested for West Nile virus.

In 2020 Hutchinson sent more than 230 pools of mosquitoes for testing, but none was positive for the virus.

It was just the second year in the past decade — the other was 2018 — when West Nile virus was not found in mosquitoes in Baker County.

In 2019, by contrast, the virus was detected in four mosquito pools. Two Baker County residents also contracted the virus that year, as did one horse.

This summer, West Nile was first confirmed in mosquitoes trapped on July 19 about 15 miles east of Baker City. It was the first confirmation of the virus in Oregon in 2021.

The infected mosquitoes were collected from a trap put out by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW).



Michelle Gabel/mgabel@syracuse.com-TNS

Mosquitoes can transmit West Nile virus to humans.

Hutchinson said ODFW for the past few years has been collecting mosquitoes in habitat for sage grouse, a bird that has been a candidate for federal protection due to its dwindling populations. He said sage grouse are among the birds that are vulnerable to West Nile virus. The virus can also kill crows, ravens, magpies and jays, and Hutchinson said birds of prey are also susceptible.

More recently, the virus was detected in mosquitoes from five additional pools in the county. Four were trapped on Aug. 4 in the Keating Valley, about 12 miles east of Baker City, and one pool was collected Aug. 3 from a trap set about four miles north of Baker City,

Hutchinson said. Mosquitoes from an ODFW trap, in the same area of sage grouse habitat, also tested positive for West Nile in late July.

The county's total of seven infected pools of mosquitoes is "pretty typical," Hutchinson said.

In general, mosquito numbers have been below average this summer, he said, a trend he attributes to the drought and the resulting scarcity of standing water where mosquito eggs hatch.

But the populations of culex tarsalis mosquitoes, the permanent water species most likely to carry the virus, have been rising over the past couple weeks, especially in the Keating Valley,

West Nile virus in Baker County

2020

No positive tests

2019

4 mosquito pools, 2 people, 1 horse

2018

No positive tests

2017

9 mosquito pools

2016

9 mosquito pools

2015

4 mosquito pools

2014

8 mosquito pools, 4 people, 1 horse

2013

13 mosquito pools

Source: Oregon Health Authority

Hutchinson said. All five of the recent infected pools of mosquitoes were culex tarsalis.

Due to that trend, Hutchinson had arranged to have an airplane spray insecticide in parts of the valley. The first flight, scheduled for Friday, Aug. 13, was postponed due to low visibility from wildfire smoke, but the plane did fly

on Sunday, Aug. 15.

Hutchinson and his workers have also been spreading larvicide — products that kill mosquito larvae before they hatch into biting adults — in the Keating Valley and elsewhere in the district.

In parts of Baker Valley between Baker City and Haines, including the area where the infected mosquitoes were trapped on Aug. 3, culex tarsalis populations have been rising but aren't as high as in the Keating Valley.

Hutchinson said he has been using fogging trucks, which spray insecticide that kills adult mosquitoes, in the Baker Valley, but he will call in the airplane if numbers rise high enough.

Inside Baker City, complaint calls about mosquitoes

have been about half the rate from 2020, Hutchinson said.

The Vector Control District, which receives money from two property tax levies, uses backpack and truck-mounted foggers to deal with infestations inside the city, Hutchinson said.

He advises people, and in particular those who live and work in places where mosquitoes are prevalent, to take precautions to avoid bites, including applying repellent, wearing pants and long-sleeved shirts, and trying to avoid being outside at dawn and dusk, when the bugs tend to be most active.

Hutchinson also reminds residents to check their properties for sources of standing water, such as old tires or bird baths, where mosquitoes can lay their eggs.

"So much of who we are is where we have been."

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