

**YEAR-ROUND POPULATIONS ROSE IN NEW YORK'S TWO WILDERNESS PARKS
OVER PAST DECADE CENSUS DATA REVEALS**
*Adirondack Park & Catskill Park Both Record Moderate Population Increases in Contrast
to Other Strictly Rural Areas of the State, Whose Populations Declined*

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ELIZABETHTOWN, N.Y. - U.S. Census figures released this month show that 10 of the Adirondack Park's 12 counties have grown in population since 2000. All three counties that comprise the Catskill Park grew as well.

The growth stood in stark contrast to other exclusively rural areas of the state, which saw their populations decline. Neither the Adirondack Park nor the Catskill Park contains any cities. Most of New York State's population growth since 2000 occurred in urban settings.

"The truth is that New Yorkers are accomplishing a feat in the Adirondacks and Catskills that people in other places can only dream about," said Adirondack Council Executive Director Brian L. Houseal. "Our public lands are getting larger and wilder. Public access to well-conserved private lands is increasing even more quickly. And overall, our year-round and seasonal populations continue to grow.

"It shows that environmental protection doesn't drive away residents," Houseal said. "It reinforces our belief that the Adirondack Park is a special and desirable place to live, not in spite of special land use rules, but because of them."

He added, however, that remote Hamilton County needs special attention. Plus, more funding is needed for local land-use planning to stop suburban sprawl in the Adirondacks.

"The Adirondack and Catskill parks both showed consistent population growth, and were the only completely rural areas of the state to do so," he said. "Trends were generally worse in all of western New York, in rural central New York and in the Southern Tier."

The Adirondack Park is comprised of parts of 12 counties, containing all or part of 92 towns and 12 villages. Only Hamilton and Oneida counties suffered a population loss. Hamilton is one of two counties located entirely inside the Park. Essex is the other and it grew by nearly two percent. Only a tiny portion of Oneida County is inside the Adirondack Park (parts of Forestport and Remsen). Oneida County is home to the cities of Utica and Rome.

The Catskill Park is comprised of parts of three counties (Green, Sullivan and Ulster). Both park's boundaries were drawn along watershed and ecosystem lines, not political boundaries, so they cross many village, town and county lines.

Both rural parks are vital economic engines for the state, hosting millions of visitors each year. Both parks combine strict protection of public forests with a park-wide land-use plan to guide development on private property. In the core of the Catskill Park, private development is guided by the New York City watershed agreement. In the Adirondacks, it is overseen by the Adirondack Park Agency.

"These new population figures are important. They help us judge the wisdom of policy decisions made by the voters and by state officials about our two, big wilderness parks," Houseal explained. "New Yorkers have made a decision to promote a half-and-half mix of public and private lands inside these two parks that stresses environmental protection above the exploitation of natural resources. That is

working to keep the population stable while other small communities have seen population declines."

There were, however, two trends in the U.S. Census data that troubled the Adirondack Council. First was the 11 percent loss of year-round population in Hamilton County. A few towns in Hamilton County saw growth, but most did not.

"We are talking about the loss of fewer than 600 people in total from Hamilton County, which doesn't seem like much in a state of more than 19 million people," explained Houseal, "but that is a big number for the Adirondacks. The people of Hamilton County need and deserve special attention from state economic development officials. We will continue to help local officials push for that."

The second troubling trend was the general loss in population in the Adirondack Park's 12 incorporated villages. It is a sad symptom of poor local planning and zoning, Houseal noted.

"This is something that was identified in a local government survey in 2009, but not taken seriously," Houseal said. "That survey noted that the population of the park's villages was dropping, but not because people were leaving the Adirondacks, or even leaving town. Nearly every village that dropped in population was located inside a town that saw modest to moderate population growth."

"The problem is that local land use codes for villages and towns are too lax. They don't encourage new construction inside of village boundaries, nor do they discourage new construction outside of village limits," Houseal said. "The result is that 90 percent of all private homes in the Adirondack Park are now outside a village or a hamlet. A hamlet is an unincorporated village. Most of the Adirondack Park Agency's zoning rules don't apply inside villages and hamlets."

Funding for local planning assistance has been scant or missing for far too long. Governor Cuomo and the Legislature need to start funding a major local planning effort to save the Adirondacks from suburban sprawl, protect water quality and conserve natural resources."

The decentralization of the park's year-round population is bad for the economy, because it drives up costs for all public services (schools, roads, police, fire fighting, emergency/rescue, snow removal, water/sewage, etc.) and makes economies of scale more difficult for private business.

"It is no surprise that cell phone and internet companies aren't rushing here to do business because people are just too far apart," Houseal said. "Basic services such as land line telephones and cable TV aren't available to everyone in every town. That can be fixed, but it will take better planning and some help from the state in achieving specific community-development goals. It won't just happen by itself."

The Adirondack Council is a privately funded, not-for-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the ecological integrity and wild character of New York's 9,300-square-mile Adirondack Park.