

Statewide Population Growth

As the first large wave of immigration in the 1840s increased the rate of change in the landscape, political boundaries began to emerge. Oregon was organized as a territory in 1848, and, with the continuing influx of settlers during the 1850s, was admitted as the thirty-third state in February 1859. The population of the Oregon Territory was first separately enumerated in 1850 by the federal census (see Mapping the 1850 Census, pp. 52-53).

The free land provided by the Donation Land Claim Act to anyone settling and making improvements proved a powerful incentive to pioneers. The 1850s created a boom in the state’s population, almost entirely within the Willamette Valley, and this trend continued into the late 1800s. Economic recession and changes in farming contributed to the first dip in the decadal rate of population growth from 1890 to 1900.

More recently, during the 1940s, Oregon’s population boomed again, with both the natural rate of increase and in-migration greater than any previous decade. In the 1960s, birth rates declined, and the natural rate of increase was the lowest on record except for the 1930s.³⁰ During the decade 1950-1960, however, in-migration increased to 188,000 persons, with a total statewide increase in population of 247,346. The 1960-1970 increase rate of 18.2% was surpassed in the decade from 1970-1980, with a 25.8% increase. However, the total increase in number of people from 1970-1980 was 541,623, which is significantly larger than the number of people added in the previous decade. An economic recession in the early 1980s caused population declines in the first few years of the decade, and contributed to a decadal growth rate of 7.9% from 1980-1990, the lowest rate on record.⁶⁸ Although the *rate* of increase was lower, the *total number of people* added to the state’s population was 209,165, which is almost as many as from 1950 to 1960, and is approximately two-thirds as many as the sizeable increase from 1960 to 1970 (Fig. 72). As the total population increases in size, even small percentage rates of increase result in large increases in total numbers of people.

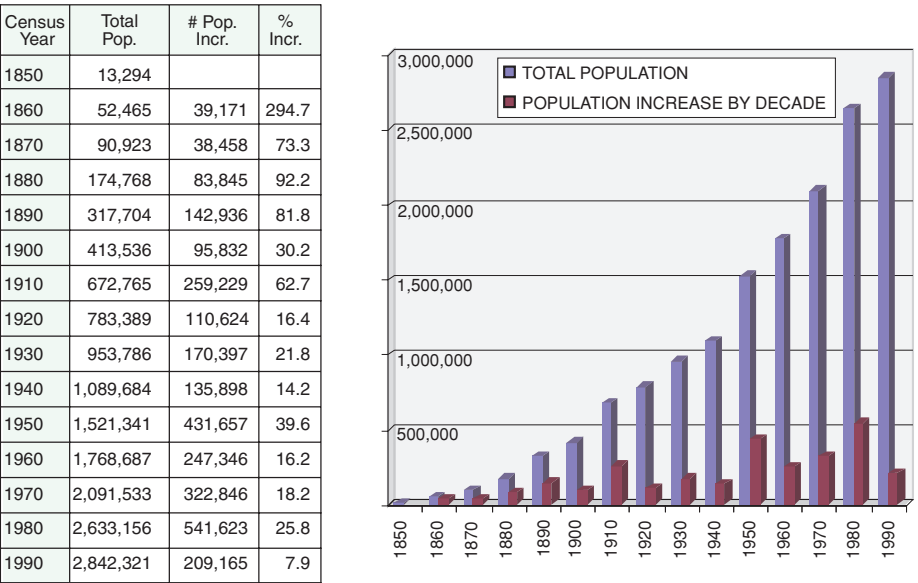


Figure 72. *Population of Oregon 1850-1990 by decade. The table shows total state population and the increase in population from 1850-1860 to 1980-1990, as well as the rate of increase in percentage by decade. The chart shows the total population and increase in population by decade.*

In the 1990s, the population growth rate was again on the rise, as the state and national economies expanded. The lower rate population increase during 1980-1990 appears to be an anomaly, and current trends forecast a doubling of population in the WRB in the next 40 to 50 years.

Population Settlement Pattern and Population Density

Prior to 1850, almost 95% of the EuroAmericans in Oregon lived in the Willamette Valley, without any significant clustering of population. State-wide by 1850, Native populations had been greatly reduced in number by disease, had been removed to reservations, and were soon further reduced in number by wars with immigrating settlers. By 1880 the total statewide population was almost 175,000, roughly approximating the present distribution, with less than one-tenth the present density. Nearly 60% of the state population was concentrated in the Willamette Valley, with a definite cluster in Portland. By 1940, Portland accounted for 39% of the total state population, with most of the population concentrated in urban areas. Non-urban

populations were beginning to decline as a percentage of the total, and in some parts of the state in absolute numbers as well. This statewide pattern continued and in 1970, 40% of the state total lived in the Portland metropolitan area, with another 30% occupying the rest of the Willamette Valley.³⁰

As the state economy continues to change from a resource-based economy, mainly forestry and farming, to a high-tech manufacturing and information-based economy, the pattern of increasing concentration in urban areas, where most jobs are located, and in some rural residential areas, will continue.

WRB Population Density 1930 and 1970

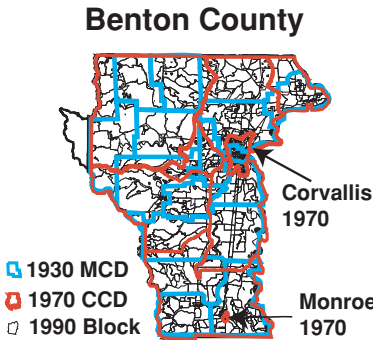
We measure phenomena such as population density to understand and analyze population patterns over time, and subsequently utilize the results in planning and decision-making. Aggregation is the process by which information from the records in a database which describe a particular area are totaled or averaged. But comparisons of data sets are possible only to the extent that the data sets share common definitions. In the case of calculating population densities in the WRB over time, areas of measurement change as the political boundaries like cities and counties change, and as the U.S. Bureau of the Census redefines census boundaries from election precincts to census tracts and blocks. For example, in 1930 there were 443 divisions, called Minor Civil Divisions (MCD), within or intersecting the area of the WRB. But by 1970 the number of divisions was reduced to only 281, with a name-change to Census County Divisions (CCD) (Fig. 73). In contrast, the 1990 calculation for population density was based on census block information, and there were 46,077 census blocks which intersected or fell within the WRB (see pp. 56-57). The areas within the 1990 census block boundaries are much smaller than the MCDs and CCDs for 1930 and 1970 (Fig. 73).

In 1930, the population count was based on election precincts and secondary divisions incorporated as cities and towns. These Minor Civil Divisions were subdivisions of counties, but tended to be rectilinear and did not follow any physiographic features like rivers or ridges. The tabular data were separated by precincts, with the population numbers listed for secondary divisions within cities and totaled for the city precinct,⁶⁹ but the 1930 Census map shows no boundaries for the smaller secondary precincts within the city. This means that, as shown in Map 9, 1930 population density could only be averaged over the available geographic boundary of the larger Minor Civil Division.

By 1970, the census changed from the Minor Civil Divisions to Census County Divisions. The new boundaries were also subdivisions of counties, however, there were fewer districts with larger areas (Fig. 74). In these CCD’s, the tabular data were separated by districts, with the population numbers listed as a total for the district, and then listed by total city population within the district.⁷⁰ For the districts which contained one or more cities, population density, as shown in Map 10, was calculated for the areas within city limits and separately for the areas outside the city limits with each district.

In calculating population density for 1930 and 1970 in the WRB, we calculated the total population density for each district that included areas inside the WRB, and then used the WRB boundary to include only those portions of the areas within the WRB (Fig. 75).

Figure 73. *Boundaries for census in Benton County, 1930, 1970, 1990. In 1930, the Minor Civil Division boundaries tended to be rectilinear and were based on election precincts, whereas in 1970 there were fewer districts with larger areas.*



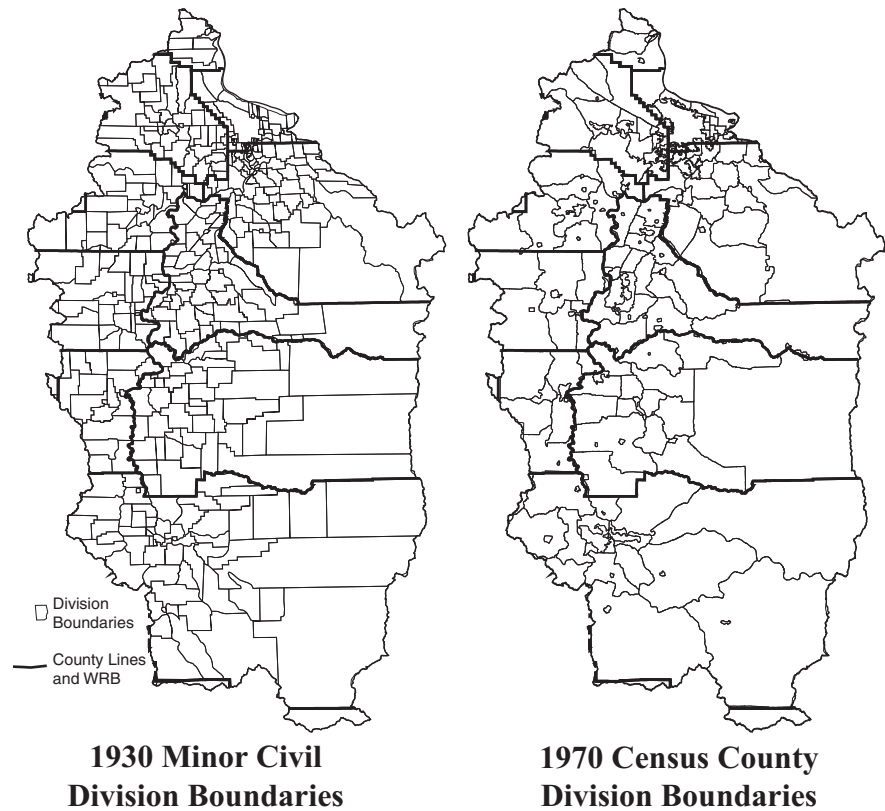
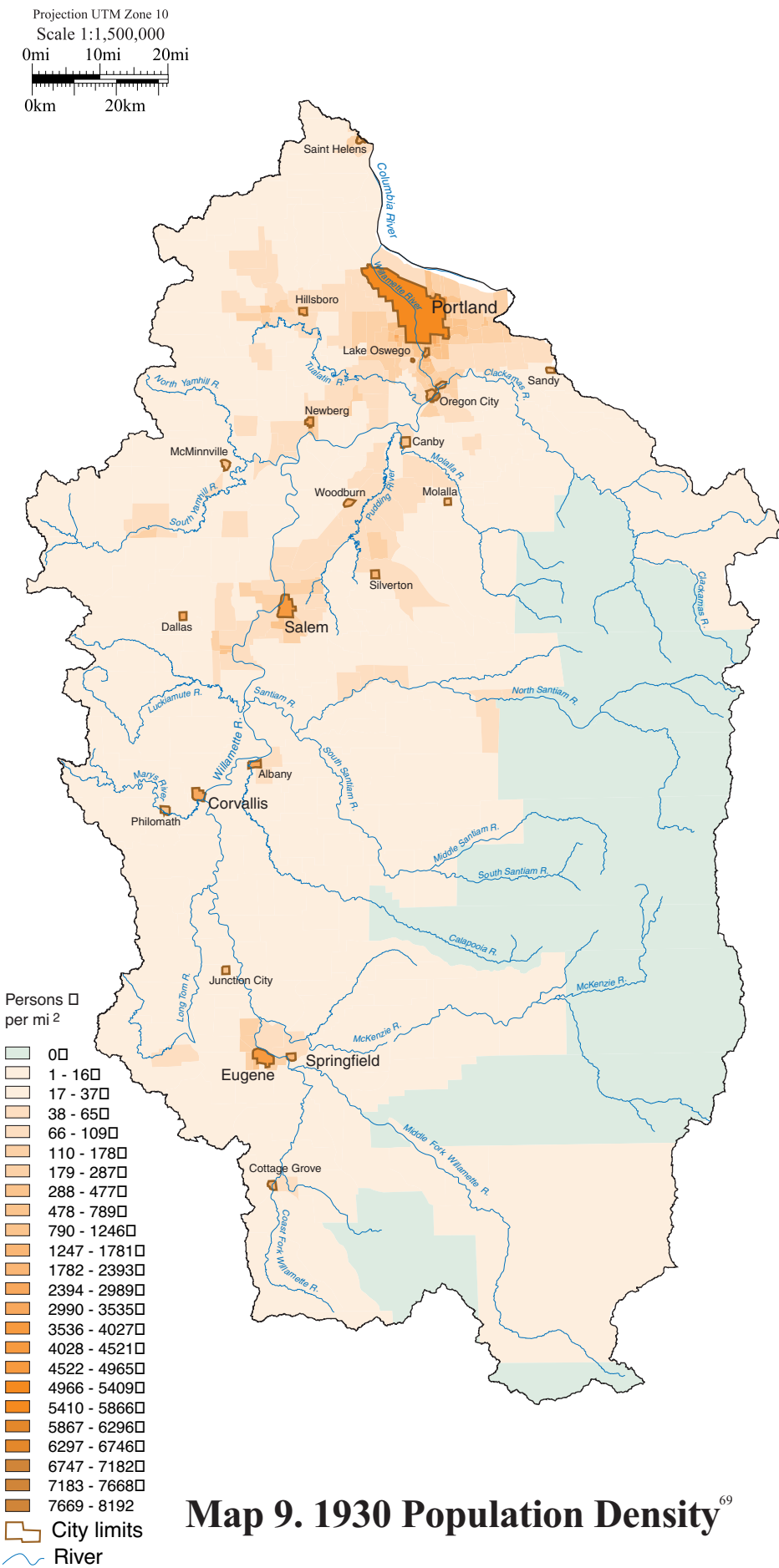


Figure 74. 1930 Minor Civil Divisions and 1970 Census County Divisions. Comparison of MCDs and CCDs shows larger census areas in 1970 than 1930.

Figure 75. *Change in population density 1930-1970.* This map was constructed by using a 1 mi² grid superimposed on both 1930 and 1970 population density maps. Areas decreasing in population density from 1930-1970 are shown in blue. Increased density is shown in orange. Urban cores are decreasing in density while surrounding suburbs are increasing. Population growth in the outlying areas and development of non-residential land uses in city centers contribute to change in densities. The increased density in suburbs and outlying areas is especially apparent in the corridor along the Willamette River.

