

## East Grand Forks area population most affected by 1997 flood

In Minnesota, the population impact of the 1997 Red River Valley flood was greatest in Polk County and the East Grand Forks area, according to estimates from the State Demographic Center and the U.S. Census Bureau. While many communities in northwestern Minnesota have lost population in the past few years, most of the losses are not large or sudden enough to be attributed primarily to the flood. In Polk County, however, the population decline was large and abrupt. Census Bureau estimates show a loss of 1,510 over two years, while the State Demographic Center estimates a decline of 1,120.

### Estimates show different trends

While the Census Bureau and the State Demographic Center both show a substantial loss in Polk County, the federal estimates indicate that most of this loss occurred *outside* the flooded area, while the state demographer's estimates show most of the population decline occurred *inside* the flood-affected part of the county. These disparate trends are probably the result of methodological differences. Without a census, population cannot actually be counted. Instead, it must be estimated using indicators such as tax data, school enrollments, and building and demolition permits. The U.S. Census Bureau and the Minnesota State Demographic Center do not estimate population the same way.

Census Bureau estimated the number of demolitions using a formula based on the age and value of the existing housing. This formula missed the unusually large volume of demolitions that occurred in the aftermath of the flood. The Demographic Center estimate was based on demolition data obtained directly from the affected areas and thus should more accurately reflect the effects of the flood.

The flood's employment impact in Polk County was substantial, especially for retail and service employment. Thanks to the strong economy, however, no substantial boost in long-term unemployment occurred. Clean-up projects created many new jobs, and the tight labor market in the region provided jobs for others.

Published by the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning, this issue of *PopBites* summarizes findings from Martha McMurry's working paper, "Demographic Aftermath of the 1997 Red River Valley Floods." Upon request, *PopBites* will be made available in alternate formats, such as Braille, large print or audio tape. For TTY, contact Minnesota Relay Service at 800-627-3529 and ask for Minnesota Planning. For more information contact:

### Demolition data is often deficient

Both agencies use information on building permits and demolitions as an important part of the estimates procedure. Unfortunately, demolition data is often nonexistent or of poor quality. In the case of Polk County, the

Although the flood had a demographic impact, it apparently has been less than many had expected in 1997. People generally prefer to remain in a familiar area, and flood relief programs encourage residents and businesses to rebuild rather than relocate.



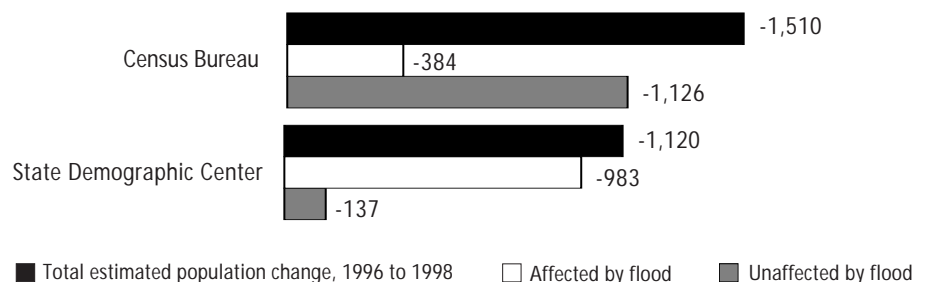
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### State Demographic Center estimates show Polk County population losses were mainly in flooded areas



Note: Affected areas are those affected by 1997 flood.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau estimates; State Demographic Center estimates.