

Wallace County least populous in northwestern section of state

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Wallace County, one of three northwest Kansas counties on the Colorado border, is the Kansas county with the least population density of all.

The Census Bureau figures there is one person for each .6 of a square mile. However Greeley County, the next county south, has the fewest people of all 105 counties.

Wallace County had its greatest population in 1930 with 2,882 according to the U.S. Census Bureau. After 1980 the population started dropping below the 2,000 mark. In the 2000, the census counted 1,749. Estimated population for 2005 was around 1,498 and in 2009 1,408.

Wichita State University has projected the population would be 1,405 this year, 1,287 in 2015, 1,143 in 2020, 1,033 in 2025 and 935 in 2030.

There have been around 300 farms in the county since 1990, with 155,106 acres harvested in 2007, according to Kansas Agricul-

Wallace County Population

Population now – 1,405
Population one year ago – 1,408
Population five years ago – 1,498
Population 10 years ago – 1,749
Population 50 years ago – 2,069
Trend – Dropping an average of 18 people a year.

tural Statistics. That was a drop from 2006 with 173,750 acres. The Conservation Reserve Program by the U.S. Farm Service Agency may have been the reason for the drop.

According to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2008, the county had 278 farm jobs and 788 others. The average income in 2008 was \$26,206. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the average farm income was more than double that, \$52,600.

The unemployment rate for the county as

of May 2010 was 6.1 percent. The unemployment rate in 2008 was 4.6 percent and in 2009 it rose to 6 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Given the small population, it would not have taken the loss of very many jobs to make the unemployment rate rise. The national recession may have had a hand in the rise.

The assessed valuation for the county has dropped since 2006, according to the Kansas Department of Revenue. In 2006, it was \$28.8 million, in 2007 it was \$26.4 million and in 2008 it was \$25.2 million. Despite the fall in valuation, sales tax collected in the county has increased. In 2007 it was \$711,187 and in 2008 \$831,608.

The average age of residents was 39.5 in 2000. If the trend for the average age is older, the 2010 Census will put the average age in the 40s.

The average age was relatively stable from 1960 to 1980, when it started to climb. In 1960, that age was 29.8, in 1970, 29.2, in 1980, 31.3 and in 1990, 34.6. The average in Kansas rose from 26.9 in 1960 to 35.2 in 2000.

Just as the average age has increased,

the number of children under 18 has fallen. Wallace County had 608 in 1980 and 509 in 2000. The state had increasing numbers, from 649,035 to 712,993. If this trend continues, then the public school population in the county will continue to decline. The county has two school districts, one in Weskan and one in Sharon Springs. There may be pressure from the state to consolidate the two.

The county contains 914 square miles with none of its area covered water. It is home to the highest point in Kansas, Mount Sunflower, at 4,039 feet and about 15 miles north-northwest of Weskan.

The county seat is Sharon Springs. In 2009, the population of Sharon Springs was 1,408, Wallace 55 and Weskan 322.

Wallace County has no doctors, dentists or hospital, so people get their medical needs taken care of in bordering counties. There is one nursing home but no assisted living facility. There is one bank. There are no manufacturing, transportation or warehousing businesses in the county.

The number of housing units remained around 792 to 802 from 2000 to 2008.

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