

# Federal Census every 10 years required

By Vera Sloan

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Why in the world do we have to fill out this darned census again, when the government already knows more than it needs to about our business anyway?

That's a question heard in a lot of places this year.

There is a reason, and to start with, we might ask why this every-10-years count is taken and what it's used for.

For starters, it is a part of the U.S. Consti-

tution, required in Article 1, Section 2, paragraph 3, that a census take place every 10 years to count every person living within the United States.

It means that the Constitution requires the government to count every resident in the United States, both citizens and noncitizens.

Census questionnaires are mailed to every known address with a paid envelope to return them. For addresses that fail to return the questionnaire, a census worker must make a personal follow up.

When the count is done, the numbers tell us who we are and what we need. Information

gathered through the census affects the numbers of seats each state gets in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The information is used to help with programs to help rescue disaster victims, prevent disease, research many markets, locate pools of skilled workers and much more. Statistically, the census is known as the most reliable source of data on the American people.

Figures are used for the Departments of Agriculture, Education, and Health and Human Services to identify areas that may otherwise be difficult to reach.

For our communities, survival without the census is compared to trying to get by without roads and bridges.

The federal government has over \$4 billion targeted to come back to states and local governments for schools, roads, hospitals, elderly

services, tornado warning, emergency management, rescue measures, and the list goes on.

For every person not counted, a county could lose \$1,250 per person for the next 10 years until the next census. Just as an example, if just 200 people in any one county or town fail to send in their census forms, it will cost the county \$2.5 million over the decade.

Can any county in northwest Kansas afford to lose that much?

The census data has a lot of other uses, of course. A company looking to relocate looks at information and data gleaned through the latest census to find a place where it will be able to hire qualified workers.

The government says your census information is safe. Personal information is protected from snooping by the FBI, the CIA, the IRS

## Area's population count

By Tom Betz

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Population trends for northwest Kansas continue to show a downward slide that has been going on since the high-water mark in the 1930 census.

In 1987, people of the High Plains boiled at two easterners, Deborah and Frank Popper, who suggested in a controversial proposal that it made sense for the region to become a "Buffalo Commons" of perennial grassland more like before settlement.

Today, people continue to leave the Plains, and the Poppers' idea appears to grow as land is taken out of farm production and returned to grass under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program.

"A wild ripple spread out over the sea of grass recently when *The Kansas City Star* ran an editorial proposing a million-acre Buffalo Commons National Park on the High Plains of western Kansas," wrote Jake Vail in his article "Hope Is a Thing with Roots" from the April issue of *The Land Report*. "According to Frank Popper, coauthor of the original Buffalo Commons paper, it was the first newspaper endorsement of the idea."

In 1987, the Poppers proposed establishment of a "commons" on the immense dry prairie that stretches from Texas to Canada. They saw large-scale emigration from what historian Walter Prescott Webb called "the least-known, most fateful part of the United States," a direct result of what they termed "the largest, longest-running agricultural and environmental miscalculation in American history." They suggested the government "take the newly emptied Plains and tear down the fences, replant the shortgrass and restock the animals, including the buffalo."

Today, as the country waits to see the 2010 Census figures (due by the end of the year), people on the High Plains are looking around to find ways to slow or reverse the out-migration that has continued over the past 80 years, and based on projections, will continue for at

least the next 20 years.

Population in northwest Kansas continues a downward trend, but people involved in economic development point to increases in building in Colby, Norton and along I-70 as indications the trend may be flattening out, at least for a few towns. In Cheyenne County, the efforts of Bird City leaders brought a dairy and 30 families to the county, but so far the projected population figures don't show an upward trend for either the county or Bird City.

Losing population has taken a toll on schools, medical services and general businesses in many of the counties. A few schools have consolidated, others get by with joint efforts, but most continue to struggle to keep their doors open, hoping the state won't come in and force major consolidation.

A plan proposed in the Legislature last session suggested consolidating about 80 small school districts, excluding those with more than 1,000 square miles. A map of the state showed four possible school districts in western Kansas that could be consolidated within the 1,000-square-mile rule, as most of the existing districts in the region are already at or near that size.

The national unemployment rate of 10 percent is not seen in the northwest region, as the counties are all in the 4 percent or lower range compared to 6.5 percent for the state. A map from the U.S. Department of Labor showing areas of the country where the unemployment has grown leaves the central High Plains, from North Dakota to the Oklahoma Panhandle, as an oasis with continuing low job creation.

The number of jobs available in the region just is not showing the growth necessary to attract people to turn the population trend around.

Could the region lose more than half its people? Population projections starting with 1960 show a decline of nearly 50 percent in the 11-county northwest region when projected to 2025 by the Kansas County Profile Report, published annually by the Institute for Policy and Social Research at the University

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