

SHERIDAN COUNTY



2014

Comprehensive Plan

Appendix 3: Demographics

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Historic Population Trends

- **Historic Census Population**
- **Population of Age Cohorts**
- **Natural Change**
- **Migration**
- **Dependency Ratio**
- **Median Age**
- **Households**
- **Race**
- **Mobility**

Historic Census Population

Although Sheridan County was officially established in February 1885, the earliest census record of Sheridan County's population came with the 1890 census when the county recorded a population of 8,687 persons, with over 7,000 of these persons living north of the Niobrara River.

Some estimates put the county's 1885 population at 2,948 persons. This is an impressive figure given that the first official white settlement was not recorded until 1881, cattlemen generally avoided the sandhills prior to the late 1870's, and the nearest railroad was nearly 100 miles east in Valentine until 1885.

The county's population nearly tripled in its first five years as the vast areas of unclaimed land and two railroad lines made the area very attractive to newcomers. However, between the semiarid climate that was worsened by drought during the 1890's and the small homestead tracts, many initial settlers found they could not survive. This caused a large outflow of residents, reducing the county's population by nearly a third (30.3%) between 1890 and 1900.

The county's prospects brightened in the 1900's after the passage of the Kinkaid Act of 1904 allowed early homesteaders to add 480 of land to their holdings and newcomers to gain 640 acres. The larger tracts of land, the return of rainfall, and the return provided by investments in irrigation in the 1890's made farming profitable in the area again and attracted additional residents over the next 20 years. By 1910, the population rebounded by 21.5% to 7,328.

The 1910's provided a separate economic boom for Sheridan County. In addition to more persons being attracted to the agricultural opportunities in the north, the First World War cut off potash from Germany enticing many entrepreneurs to develop potash from the alkaline lakes in the southern part of the county. These endeavors proved quite profitable enticing hundreds of persons to the boomtowns such as Antioch. However, after World War II, the domestic potash industry fell off. By 1922, the last potash operation in Sheridan County was closed for good.

This boom increased the county's 1920 population to 9,625, a 31.3% increase from a decade previous. Despite the outflow of people in the southern Panhandle, the 1920's proved to be prosperous for farmers of corn, wheat, oats, potatoes, barley, and rye in the northern part of the county. By 1930, the county reached its all-time census population of 10,793 persons, a 12.1% increase from 1920 and an impressive 78.9% increase from its 1900 level.

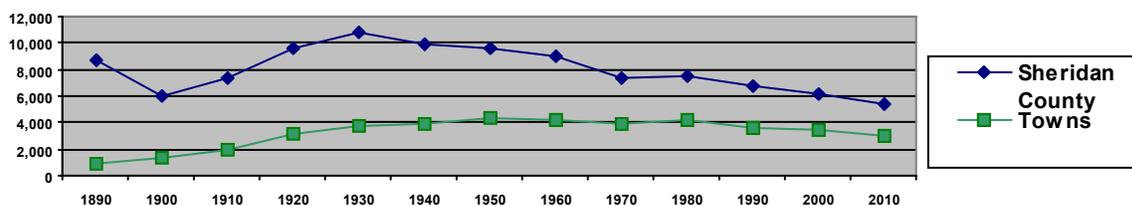
Unfortunately, drought returned to the region in the 1930's. The hardship to farmers along with financial impacts from the Great Depression and the advanced mechanization of farming operations, began a long-term trend of population losses for the county. By 1940, the county population had slipped to 9,869.

The development of irrigation in the western part of the county in the 1930's and the 1940's helped farming operations, but with fewer farmers needed, the number of families continued to decline. Also, the Taylor Grazing Act provided grazing privileges to cattlemen, which was beneficial for the cattle industry, but also reduced the number of persons needed for the local ag economy. By 1960, the county's population had declined modestly to 9,049 persons.

The 1960's proved to be the worst demographic decade for the county since the 1890's. Many young adults left the county to pursue non-farm careers. By 1970, the county population had fallen to 7,285, a 19.5% loss for the decade and a 32.5% decline from the 1930 peak.

The county's four-decade population slide took a respite during the 1970's as the Burlington Northern railroad provided many good paying jobs in Alliance. The 1970's was also a profitable time for agriculture. These two economic drivers helped increase the county population by 3.6% to 7,544. However, a high level of youth out-migration has led to continued population losses for the past three decades. As a result, the county's 2010 population of 5,469 was 27.5% below 1980 levels, the county's lowest population since 1885.

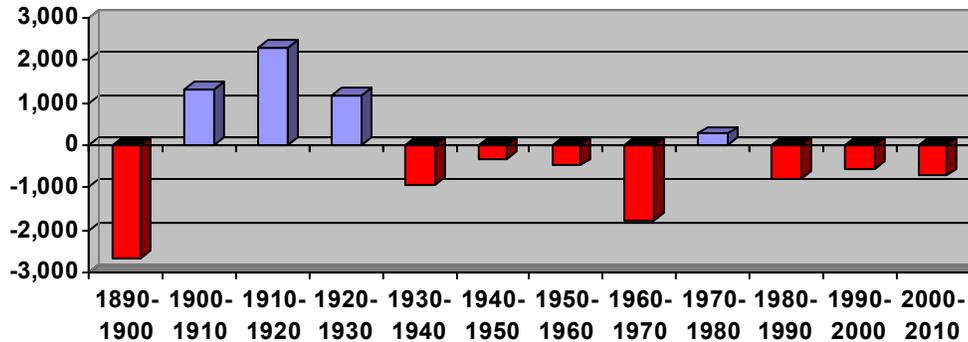
City and County Population by Decade, 1890 - 2010



Population Change by Decade

Sheridan County’s population has declined decade over decade for the past three decades and seven of the past eight decades. The one exception to this trend was the 1970’s when many new railroad jobs were created in Alliance, Nebraska and agriculture was in a profitable cycle due to high commodity prices.

Population Change by Decade in Sheridan County, 1890 to 2010



Population Change 1890 to 2010

	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Sheridan Co.	8,687	6,033	7,328	9,625	10,793	9,869	9,539	9,049	7,285	7,544	6,750	6,198	5,469
Gordon	Na	542	920	1,581	1,958	1,967	2,058	2,223	2,106	2,167	1,803	1,756	1,612
Rushville	484	483	633	955	1,006	1,125	1,266	1,228	1,137	1,217	1,127	999	890
Hay Springs	378	345	408	577	853	819	1,091	823	682	794	693	652	570
Rural Area of Co.	7,825	4,663	5,367	6,512	6,976	5,958	5,124	4,775	3,360	3,366	3,127	2,791	2,390

Sheridan County Population by Select Age Group 1950 to 2010

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
# Under Age 18	3,299	3,483	2,457	2,169	1,882	1,587	1,293
% Under Age 18	34.6	38.5	33.7	28.8	27.9	25.6	23.6
# Age 65 or Older	825	1,109	1,220	1,290	1,401	1,343	1,212
% Age 65 or Older	8.6	12.3	16.7	17.1	20.8	21.7	22.2
# Females 18-44	1,939	1,592	1,222	1,400	1,206	1,078	689
% Females 18-44	20.3	17.6	16.8	18.6	17.9	17.4	12.6

Sheridan County’s Share of Regional Population

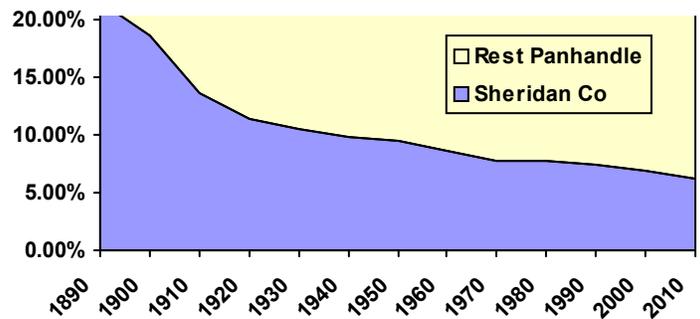
Sheridan County’s share of regional population has been steadily declining for more than a century. In 1890, over one-fifth (21.6%) of residents lived in Sheridan County. However, the county’s share of regional population rapidly decreased to just 13.7% in 1910 due to increases in other parts of the region and a sharp decline in local population during the 1890’s.

Even though Sheridan County had a nice rebound in population between 1900 and 1930, the other areas of the Panhandle grew faster, reducing Sheridan County’s share of the regional population to 10.5% in 1930. Since 1930, the county has been steadily losing population, except for the 1970’s. As a result, the county’s share of regional population has fallen to 6.2% in 2010.

Population of Sheridan County, 1890 to 2010

	SheridanCo		Nebraska	
	People	Change	People	Change
1890	8,687	—	1,058,910	—
1900	6,033	-30.6%	1,066,300	+0.7%
1910	7,328	21.5%	1,192,214	+11.8%
1920	9,625	31.3%	1,296,372	+8.7%
1930	10,793	12.1%	1,377,963	+6.3%
1940	9,869	-8.6%	1,315,834	-4.5%
1950	9,539	-3.3%	1,325,510	+0.7%
1960	9,049	-5.1%	1,411,921	+6.5%
1970	7,285	-19.5%	1,485,333	+5.2%
1980	7,544	3.6%	1,569,825	+5.7%
1990	6,750	-10.5%	1,578,385	+0.5%
2000	6,198	-8.2%	1,711,263	+8.4%
2010	5,469	-11.8%	1,826,341	+6.7%

Sheridan County’s Share of Panhandle Population,



Historic Population Comparison

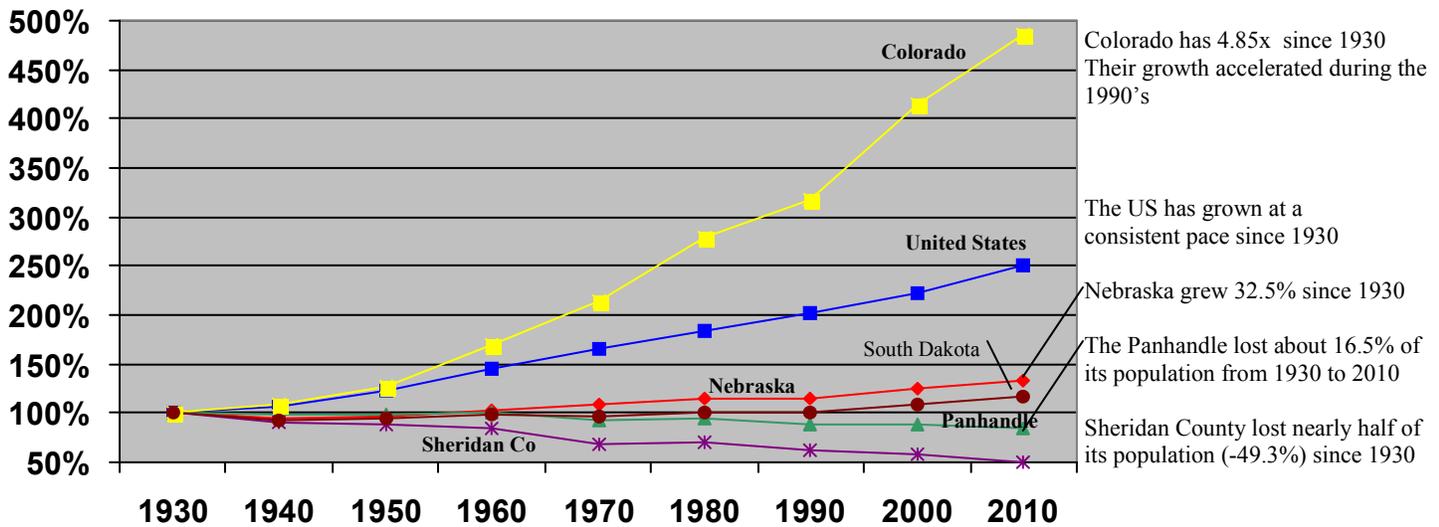
Sheridan County has performed worse than nearly every county in the United States in population change over the past 80 years. The long term population decline continues at a rapid rate. In the past ten years, Sheridan County has lost more than a tenth of its population (-11.8%).

The county’s population loss is even more alarming when examined from a longer time frame. Sheridan County has lost nearly half of its population since 1930 (-49.3%). During the same time, Nebraska increased its population by one-third (+32.5%) while the panhandle region has “only” lost 15%. South Dakota grew its population by 17.5% since 1930.

The population nationwide has been growing strongly for the past 50 years. The US population grew by 9.7% in the past decade and has increased its population by 250% since 1930.

Colorado has grown at a much faster rate than both the US and Nebraska as they have nearly increased their population five-fold since 1930. Their growth has been growing at an incredible rate the past two decades as their population has grown 53% since 1990. The number of new residents in Colorado in the past two decades nearly equals Nebraska’s total population and they are expected to grow by another equivalent of Nebraska in the next twenty years.

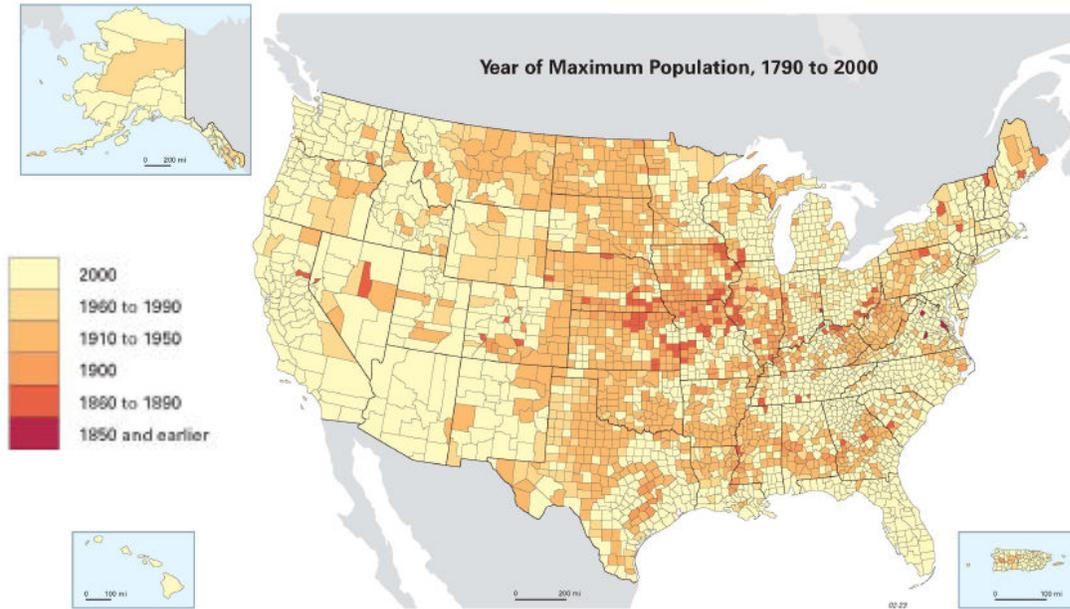
Percentage of 1930 Population, 1930 to 2010



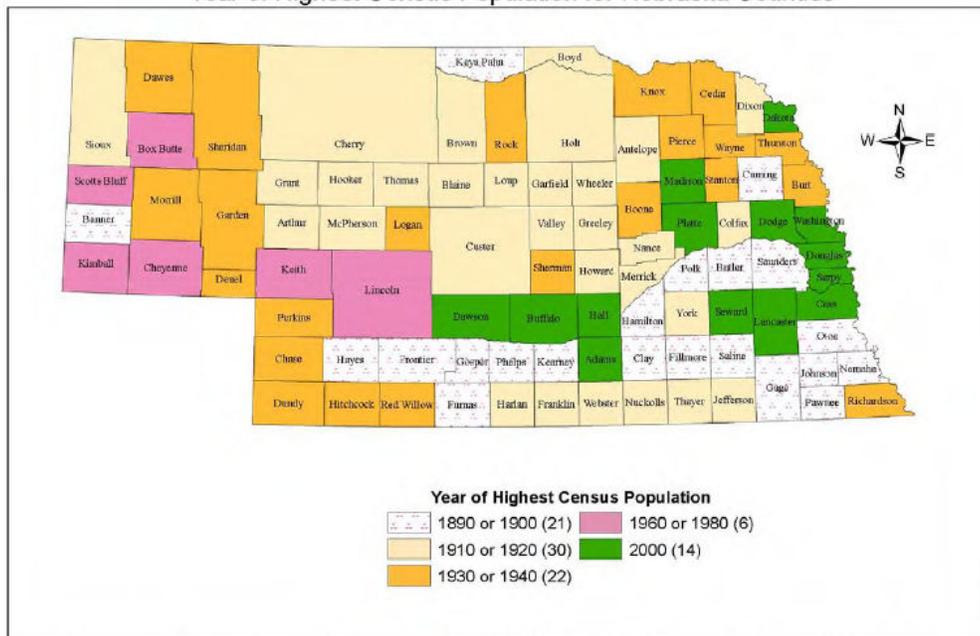
Year of Peak Population

Sheridan County, which reached its peak population in 1930, is typical of Great Plains and Western Nebraska counties as 42 of Western Nebraska's 52 counties reached their peak population in 1930 or earlier.

Although most of Western Nebraska's counties peaked in population more than 8 decades ago, that is not the case for most of the far western counties in South Dakota. Most of these counties are at their peak populations. This provides a good example that counties in this part of the country can still grow their populations.

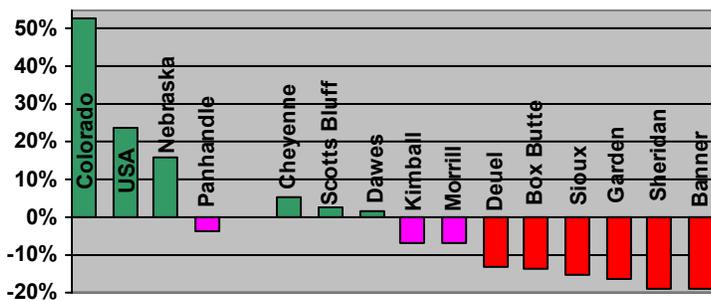


Year of Highest Census Population for Nebraska Counties

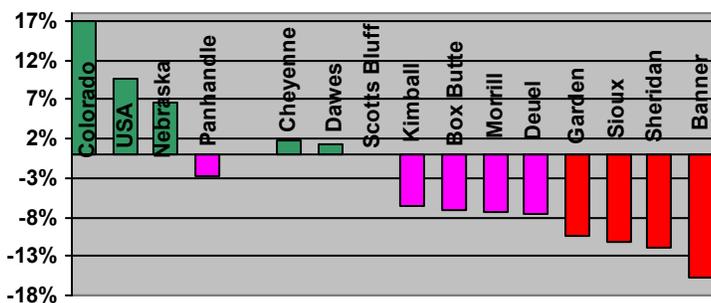


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Censuses; Compiled by: Center for Public Affairs Research (CPAR), University of Nebraska at Omaha
 Prepared by: David Drozd, CPAR - July 12, 2006

Population Change from 1990 to 2010



Population Change from 2000 to 2010



Regional Population Change

Sheridan County has performed below all but one Panhandle county in population in both the 1990's and this decade.

In the past twenty years, Sheridan County has lost nearly a fifth (19%) of its population. More than half of this loss came in the past decade when the county lost 11.8% of its population.

Cheyenne County has greatly outpaced most of the Panhandle in demographic growth in the past two decades with 13.4% growth. Scotts Bluff and Dawes Counties also increased their population from 1990 to 2010, but Dawes County only grew 1.3% this past decade while Scotts Bluff County was essentially flat with just 0.1% population growth.

Critical Mass in Sheridan County

It is very important for rural areas to retain a critical mass of population in order to maintain essential institutions such as schools, businesses, and churches and to provide adequate funding for roads, fire, and police departments. Maintaining a critical mass is also important in order to retain and enable the growth of businesses by having the quality and quantity of labor needed.

Low population density can have significant implications. In many sparsely populated areas, there are relatively few people to pay for vital infrastructure such as school, cities, counties, fire districts, and everything else. This heavy tax burden creates an environment where people often have a strong desire to cut taxes and spending. As a result, existing infrastructures often is allowed to decline, and new facilities are seldom if ever built. This makes these areas less attractive places to live, which leads to future population declines which then continue to perpetuate.

The FDIC's John Anderlik estimates a county needs to have at least 10,000 persons to support services and infrastructure. Some may argue that Sheridan County has not been close to this threshold for nearly fifty years and has managed to survive. However, the county has "survived" by making relatively few new investments and maintaining investments made by previous generations.

Going forward, the county may find itself with a smaller population and a lower percentage of those persons in working age cohorts. This could lead to a wave of consolidation and closures of schools, churches, businesses and government services if more working age persons are not added in this coming decade.

Population Composition

The most significant changes within age groups from 1990 to 2010 were the very large declines in persons under the age of 45. During this period of time, the population of persons under 45 declined by an alarming 33.3%. Even more concerning was the loss in persons in this age group was higher from 2000 to 2010 (-21.5%) than it was in the previous decade (15.1%).

The loss of young adults has been a plight to the County’s demographics for decades. The out-migration of youth has not abated in the past twenty years. Although the number of 18 to 29 year olds “only” declined by 9.7% from 1990 to 2000, there was still a dramatic loss in high school graduates. In 1990, the county had 574 persons 10 to 14 years old. By 2000, the county lost over half of these persons (52.4%) as only a net of 237 20 to 24 years olds remained in 2000.

Although the 18% decline of 18 to 29 year olds from 2000 to 2010 was nearly double the loss of young adults in the 1990’s, the loss of high school graduates was only modestly higher. In 2000, the county had 463 persons 10 to 14 years old. By 2010, the county lost over half of these persons (54.2%) as only a net of 212 20 to 24 years olds remained in 2010.

As a result of this loss of high school graduates, the number of 18 to 29 year olds declined by 25.9% from 1990 to 2010. The decline in young adults subsequently led to a 19% decline in persons under 5 between 1990 and 2010.

The decline in 5 to 17 year olds and 30 to 44 year olds was even higher than the young adult population loss from 1990 to 2010. Between **1990 and 2000, 73 more persons age 30 to 44 moved into the county than moved out or passed away.** However, as a result of 918 people aged out of this age group while just 618 persons aged into it, the number of 30 to 44 year olds declined by 17.1% despite the positive net in-migration.

The county once again had a positive net in-migration of persons 30 to 44 years of age between 2000 and 2010. However, the county only had 5 more persons in this age group move into the county than move out or pass away. Meanwhile 839 persons aged out of this cohort while just 520 persons matured into it. As a result the number of 30 to 44 year olds declined by 27.6% between 2000 and 2010. As a result, **the 30 to 44 year old age group declined by 40% from 1990 to 2010 despite net in-migration in the cohort. This demonstrates the enormous difficulty the county has in overcoming past and on-going loss of high school graduates.**

The large decline of 30 to 44 year olds influenced a large decline in 5 to 17 year olds during the same time period. The number of school-age persons in the county was 34.7% lower in 2010 than it was in 1990. The decline in this past decade of school age kids was 21.4%, slightly above the previous decade’s loss of 16.9%.

The upper middle-age group (45 to 64) was the one demographic bright spot as the number of persons in this age group increased 17.6% from 1990 to 2010. This increase was due to 1,715 persons aging into this age group while just 1,355 persons waned out of this age group. Thus, a net of 161 persons was lost in this age group through net out-migration/deaths. As a result, the county only gained a net of 238 persons during this time period.

The number of retirement age persons also fell from 1990 to 2010. During this time, 1,355 pushed into retirement while 1,212 persons either moved out of the county or passed away. As a result, the number of retirement-age persons in the county declined by 13.5% from 1990 to 2010. Over half of the decline during this time occurred between 2000 and 2010 when the number of retirement age persons declined by 131 persons, or 9.8%.

Population by Age Group, 1990 - 2010

	1990	2000	2010	Change 1990-2010	% Change 1990-2010	Change 2000-2010	% Change 2000-2010
0 to 4	405	359	328	-77	-19.0%	-31	-8.6%
5 to 17	1,477	1,228	965	-512	-34.7%	-263	-21.4%
18 to 29	740	668	548	-192	-25.9%	-120	-18.0%
30 to 44	1,372	1,137	823	-549	-40.0%	-314	-27.6%
45 to 64	1,355	1,463	1,593	238	+17.6%	+130	+8.9%
65+	1,401	1,343	1,212	-189	-13.5%	-131	-9.8%
Total	6,750	6,198	5,469	-1,281	-19.0%	-729	-11.8%

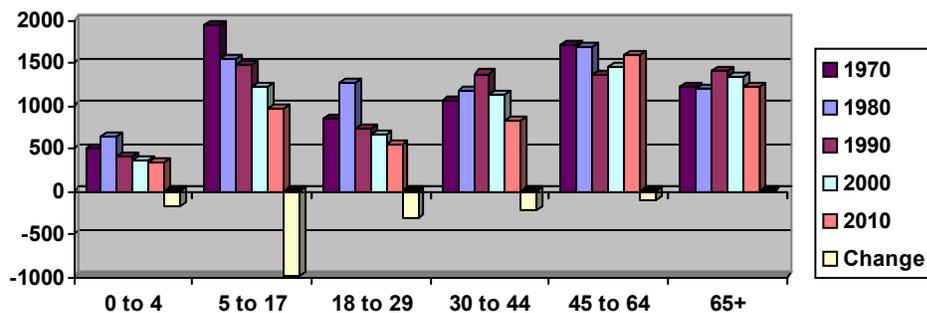
Population Change by Age Group, 1970 to 2010

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	1970-2010	1980-2010	1990-2010	2000-2010
0 to 4	504	631	405	359	328	-176	-303	-77	-31
5 to 9	681	582	584	414	360	-321	-222	-224	-54
10 to 14	810	536	574	463	368	-442	-168	-206	-95
15 to 19	653	637	449	499	321	-332	-316	-128	-178
20 to 24	334	504	267	237	212	-122	-292	-55	-25
25 to 29	331	514	343	283	252	-79	-262	-91	-31
30 to 34	315	475	454	298	261	-54	-214	-193	-37
35 to 39	352	350	488	335	278	-74	-72	-210	-57
40 to 44	382	347	430	504	284	-98	-63	-146	-220
45 to 49	465	448	321	473	315	-150	-133	-6	-158
50 to 54	441	380	305	382	426	-15	46	121	44
55 to 59	423	436	352	317	476	53	40	124	159
60 to 64	374	422	377	291	376	2	-46	-1	85
65 to 69	323	353	383	323	280	-43	-73	-103	-43
70 to 74	305	294	351	293	253	-52	-41	-98	-40
75 to 79	274	264	264	282	252	-22	-12	-12	-30
80 to 84	180	173	208	238	189	9	16	-19	-49
85+	138	198	195	207	238	100	40	43	31
Total	7,285	7,544	6,750	6,198	5,469	-1816	-2075	-1281	-729

Population Change by Age Cohort, 1980 to 2010

1980 AGE	1990 AGE	2000 AGE	2010 AGE	1980	1990	2000	2010	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010		
			0 to 4				328					
			5 to 9				360					
			0 to 4				10 to 14				359	368
			5 to 9				15 to 19				414	321
			0 to 4				10 to 14				20 to 24	405
5 to 9	15 to 19	25 to 29	584	499	252	584	-85	-247				
0 to 4	10 to 14	20 to 24	30 to 34	631	574	237	261	-57	-337	24		
5 to 9	15 to 19	25 to 29	35 to 39	582	449	283	278	-133	-166	-5		
10 to 14	20 to 24	30 to 34	40 to 44	536	267	298	284	-269	31	-14		
15 to 19	25 to 29	35 to 39	45 to 49	637	343	335	315	-294	-8	-20		
20 to 24	30 to 34	40 to 44	50 to 54	504	454	504	426	-50	50	-78		
25 to 29	35 to 39	45 to 49	55 to 59	514	488	473	476	-26	-15	3		
30 to 34	40 to 44	50 to 54	60 to 64	475	430	382	376	-45	-48	-6		
35 to 39	45 to 49	55 to 59	65 to 69	350	321	317	280	-29	-4	-37		
40 to 44	50 to 54	60 to 64	70 to 74	347	305	291	253	-42	-14	-38		
45 to 49	55 to 59	65 to 69	75 to 79	448	352	323	252	-96	-29	-71		
50 to 54	60 to 64	70 to 74	80 to 84	380	377	293	189	-3	-84	-104		
55+	65+	75+	85+	2,140	1,401	727	238	-739	-674	-489		
Total				7,544	6,750	6,198	5,469	-794	-552	-729		

Population Change by Age Group, 1970 - 2010



Distribution of Age Groups

Comparing Sheridan County’s age group distribution to the regional, state and national average shows the county generally has a greater percentage of its population 50 years of age and older than the region state and nation.

On the bright side, Sheridan County’s ratio of 5 to 14 year olds is equivalent to the national rate. While this figure may hold a ray of light for the county’s demographic future, if the out-migration of high school graduates continues at historic rates, the future level of young adults will be even lower than present levels and about half the level of national rates 15 years from now.

From an economic perspective, persons 20 to 50 years old form the heart of an economy’s productivity. This does not bode well for Sheridan County, as its working age ratios are well below population ratios in the state and nation. They are also even below the Panhandle levels which in themselves are not good.

The two largest age cohorts in Sheridan County are in the 50 to 59 year old groups which combined account for 16.5% of the county population. The third highest is the 60 to 64 year cohort with 6.9% of the population.

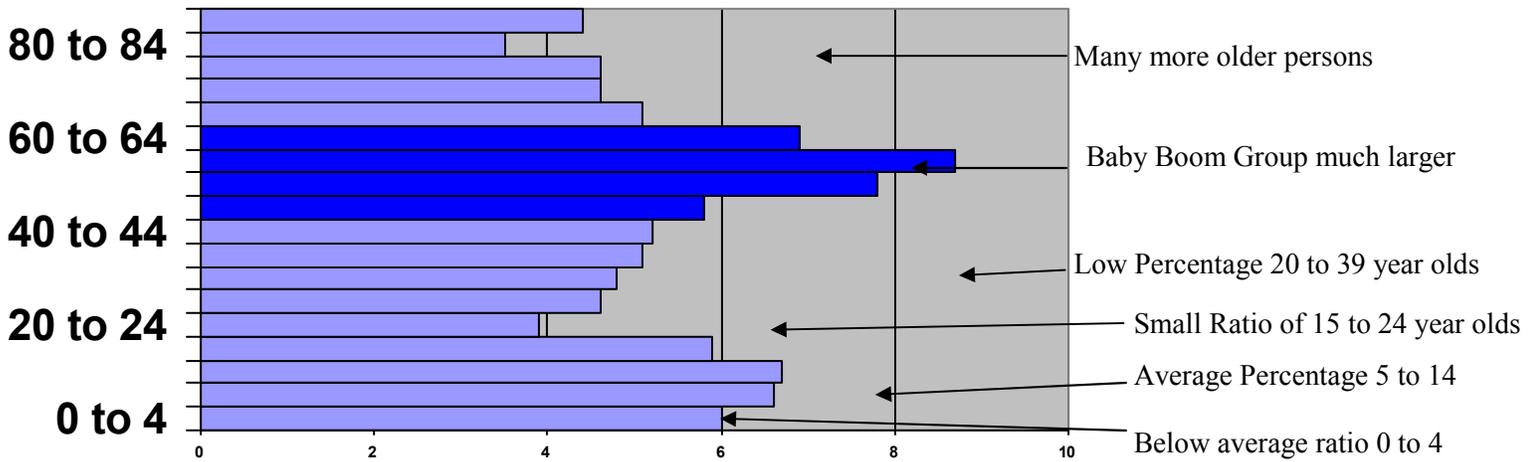
The high percentage of persons within 15 years of retirement could present a very serious long term challenge for the county’s economy. **Nearly half (44%) of Sheridan County’s primary working age population (20 to 64 year olds) will reach traditional retirement age by 2025** while the persons aging into the work force will be fewer in number if traditional migration rates continue. Thus, **if migration rates continue, the county’s working age population could be 20 to 25% smaller by 2025.**

2010 Population Composition Comparison

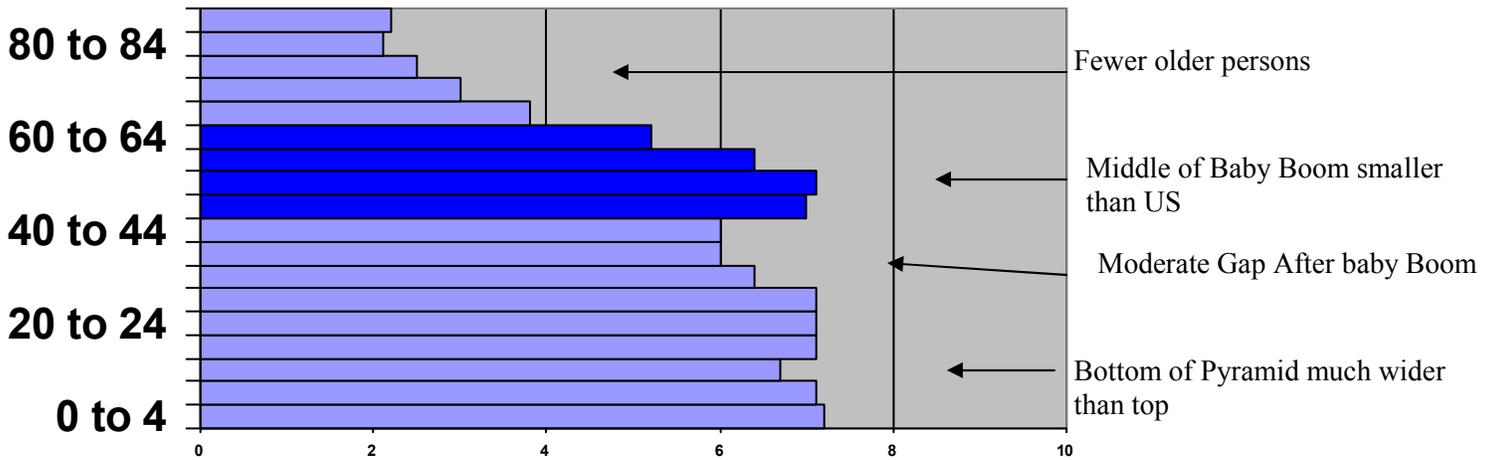
	Sheridan County	Panhandle	Nebraska	United States
0 to 4	6.0%	6.6%	7.2%	6.5%
5 to 9	6.6%	6.6%	7.1%	6.6%
10 to 14	6.7%	6.3%	6.7%	6.7%
15 to 19	5.9%	7.0%	7.1%	7.1%
20 to 24	3.9%	5.9%	7.1%	7.0%
25 to 29	4.6%	5.8%	7.1%	6.8%
30 to 34	4.8%	5.4%	6.4%	6.5%
35 to 39	5.1%	5.4%	6.0%	6.5%
40 to 44	5.2%	5.4%	6.0%	6.8%
45 to 49	5.8%	6.7%	7.0%	7.4%
50 to 54	7.8%	7.7%	7.1%	7.2%
55 to 59	8.7%	7.5%	6.4%	6.4%
60 to 64	6.9%	5.9%	5.2%	5.4%
65 to 69	5.1%	4.6%	3.8%	4.0%
70 to 74	4.6%	3.8%	3.0%	3.0%
75 to 79	4.6%	3.4%	2.5%	2.4%
80 to 84	3.5%	3.0%	2.1%	1.9%
85+	4.4%	2.9%	2.2%	1.8%

Yellow indicates age group is above US level

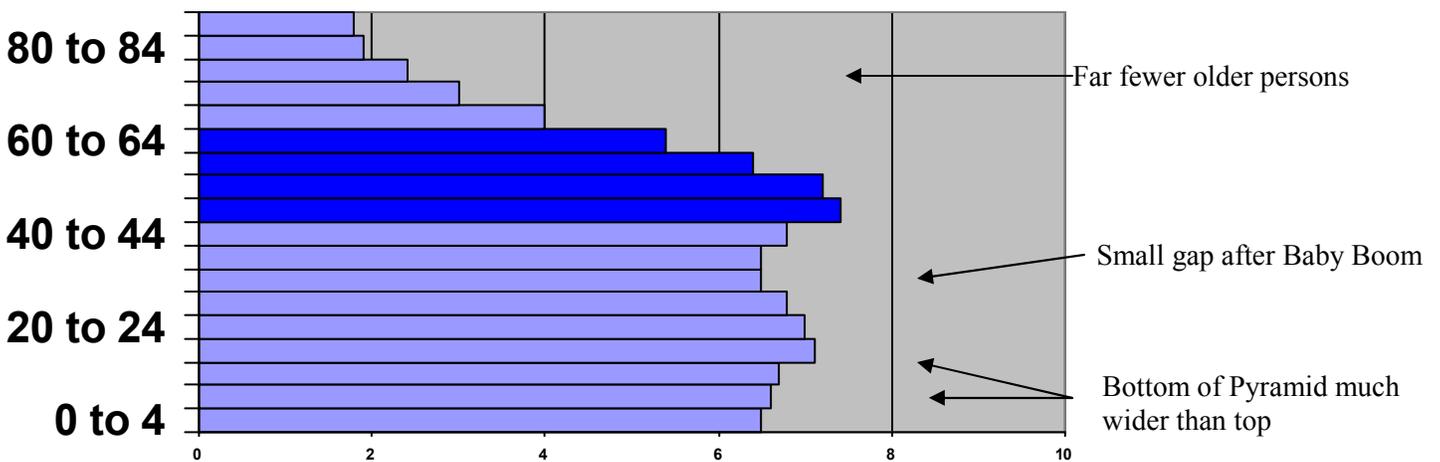
Sheridan County Age Groups as a Percentage of Population, 2010



Nebraska Age Groups as a Percentage of Population, 2010



United State Age Groups as a Percentage of Population, 2010

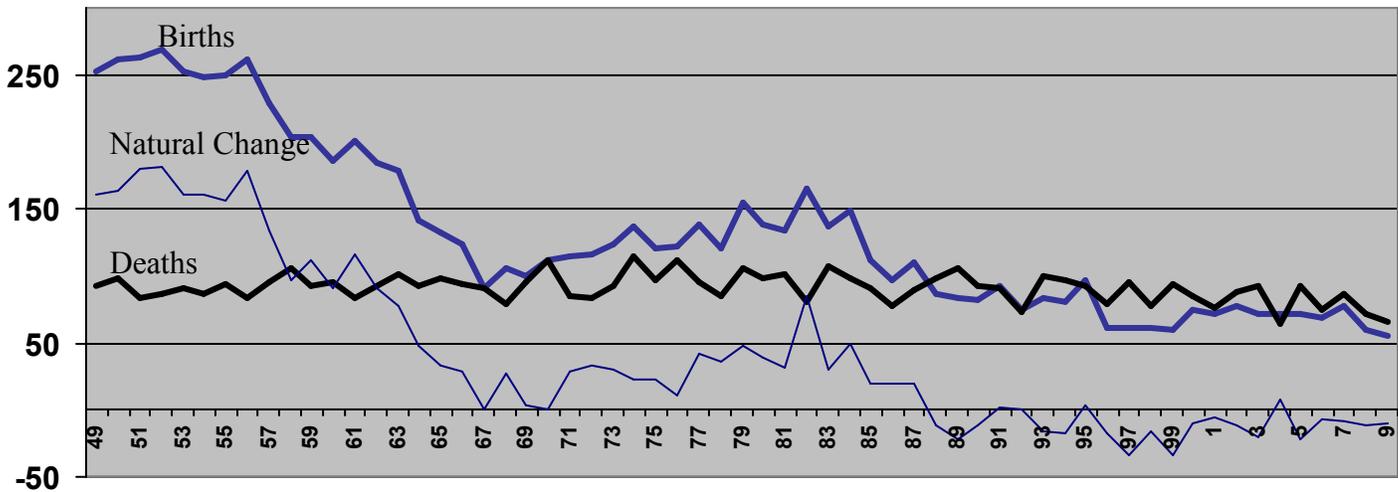


Natural Change

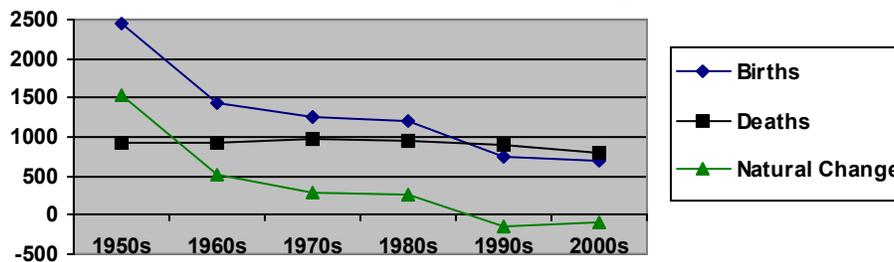
Natural change has historically been a key and underappreciated factor in off-setting much of the high levels of out-migration. From 1950 to 1989, natural change added 2,577 persons to the population which offset nearly half of the 5,366 net out-migrants during the same time. **During the 1950's, the county experienced a net natural change of 1,524 new residents.** (That is 59% of the natural change gains in the 1950 to 1980 period.)

While natural change has historically provided a healthy cushion to offset much of the out-migration, that natural cushion has disappeared as the rate of natural change has turned negative in the past twenty years (there are more deaths than births). **Presently, the net natural change gain reduces the population by 10 persons per year. Whereas 60 years ago natural change was adding 160 persons per year.** Thus, instead of natural change reducing the impact of out-migration, it is now adding to those losses.

Sheridan County Births and Deaths by Place of Residence, 1949 to 2009



Sheridan County Births, Deaths and Natural Change by Decade, 1950 to 2009



Sheridan County Births, Deaths and Natural Change by Decade, 1950 to 2009

Decade	Births	Deaths	Natural Change
1950-59	2,441	917	1,524
1960-69	1,442	925	517
1970-79	1,257	981	276
1980-89	1,210	950	260
1990-99	753	892	-139
2000-09	699	798	-99
Total	7,802	5,463	2,339

Migration

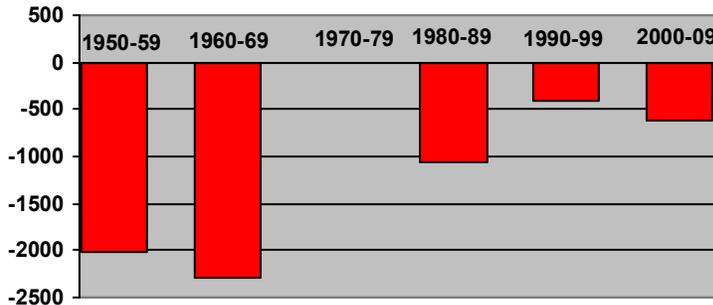
From 1950 to 2009, Sheridan County has had 6,409 more persons move out of the county than into it. This is significant because migration rates are often viewed as a significant indicator of economic performance and opportunities.

A large majority (83.7%) of this net out-migration occurred prior to 1990, though. Since 1990, Sheridan County has experienced a net out-migration of 52 persons per year, which is far less than the 200+ persons lost annually between 1950 and 1970. While this is certainly an improvement, it is also a reflection that the county has far fewer young adults.

There are some positive indicators in the migration rates, though. The county only lost a total of 17 persons to migration during the 1970's, likely due to the expansion of railroad opportunities in Alliance and a strong agricultural economy.

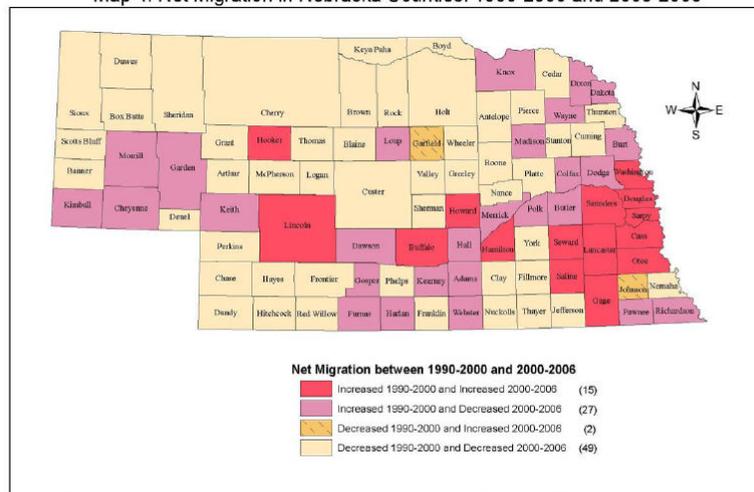
Also, the county has experienced net in-migration increase of 30 to 44 year olds over the past 20 years. Unfortunately, the level of young adult out-migration is far exceeding middle-age in-migration.

Net Migration in Sheridan County by Decade, 1950 to 2009



Decade	Net Migration	Percent of Population	Average Per Year
1950-59	-2,014	21.1%	-201.4
1960-69	-2,281	25.2%	-228.1
1970-79	-17	0.2%	-1.7
1980-89	-1,054	14.0%	-105.4
1990-99	-413	6.1%	-41.5
2000-09	-630	10.2%	-63.0
Total	-6,409	—	-106.8

Map 4: Net Migration in Nebraska Counties: 1990-2000 and 2000-2006



Sources: 1990 and 2000 Decennial Censuses; Cumulative Estimates of Population Change - released March 20, 2007, U.S. Census Bureau
 Prepared by: David Drozd, Center for Public Affairs Research, University of Nebraska at Omaha - March 20, 2007

Place of Birth

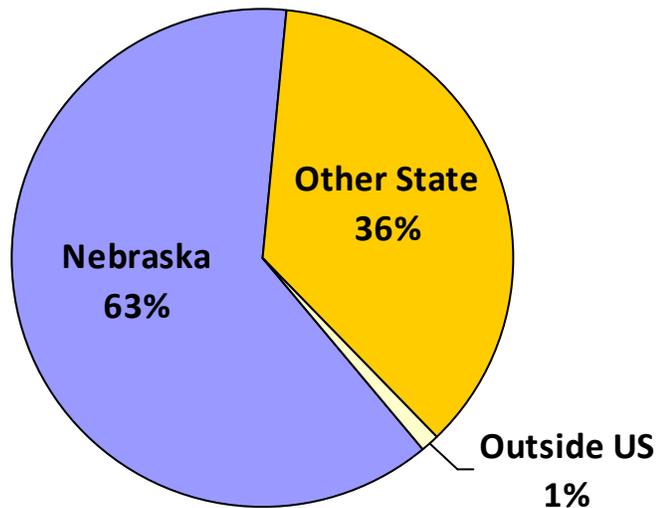
Nearly two out of every three (63%) Sheridan County residents were born in Nebraska according to the 2010 ACS data. This is below the 2000 Census figure which indicated 68% of county residents were born in Nebraska.

Most of the county's residents born outside of Nebraska were born in the United States as 36% of county residents were born in another state. A majority of these persons were born in the Midwest (61.2%) or West (26.5%.) while 9.8% were born in the South and 2.5% were born in the Northeast.

Unlike most places, the number of foreign-born residents actually decreased during the decade. Less than half of Sheridan County's foreign born persons (23 of 57) were not US citizens according to the 2009 Census Bureau. (It should be noted that this does not mean these persons are illegal immigrants.)

Thirteen of the foreign born residents were born to American citizens living abroad while 21 of the foreign born residents are naturalized citizens.

Place of Birth, 2006 to 2010 Estimate



Dependency Ratio

Thanks to the Baby Boomers entering working age, Sheridan County’s dependency ratio has been steadily declining (improving) since 1970, falling from 101.9 in 1970 (which means there were more persons of non-working age than working age) to 89.7 in 2000 and 84.5 in 2010.

This means a higher percentage of residents are of working age which helps increase the county’s productivity and provides a broader base of taxpayers.

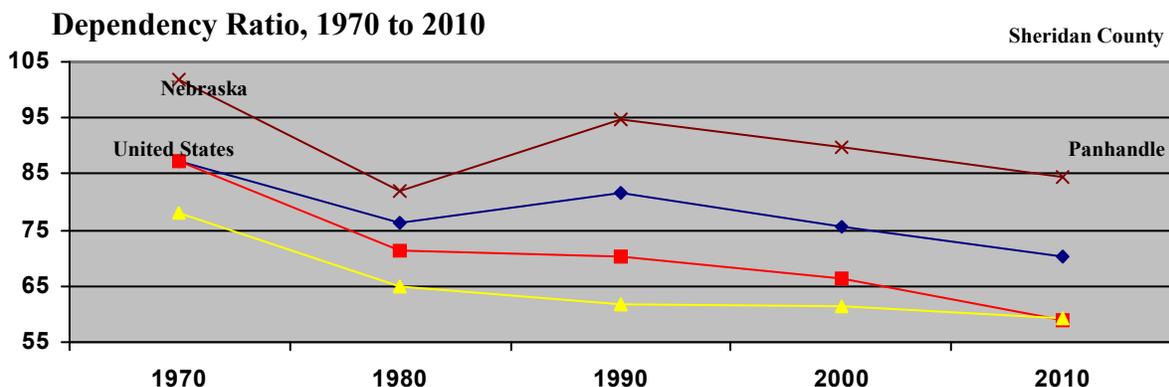
Despite improvement, Sheridan County’s dependency ratio is well above the state and national average. This is not good for two reasons. Economically, it reduces per capita productivity. Secondly, with fewer workers supporting more dependents and their special needs, it places a greater tax burden on those working relative to other places.

Due to high levels of youth out-migration which has led to fewer births, the youth dependency ratio has fallen significantly from 68.1 in 1970 to 43.6 in 2010. In 1970, the youth dependency ratio was nearly double the elder ratio, but is now only slightly higher.

Sheridan County has had a high elder dependency ratio for many years, but it actually increased over the past 20 to 40 years despite a small decline in the past decade. In 1970, the county’s elder dependency ratio was nearly double the US ratio. The elder ratio increased from 33.8 in 1970 to 41.1 in 2000, but has fallen slightly to 40.9 in 2010. This is more than double the national rate.

Dependency Ratio, 1970 to 2010

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Sheridan County					
Youth Dependency Ratio	68.1	52.7	54.3	48.6	43.6
Elder Dependency ratio	33.8	29.2	40.4	41.1	40.9
Total Dependency Ratio	101.9	81.9	94.7	89.7	84.5
Panhandle					
Youth Dependency Ratio	63.9	50.7	50.9	45.0	40.3
Elder Dependency ratio	23.5	25.4	30.6	30.5	30.1
Total Dependency Ratio	87.4	76.1	81.5	75.4	70.3
Nebraska					
Youth Dependency Ratio	64.0	48.8	46.3	43.8	41.0
Elder Dependency ratio	23.2	22.4	24.1	22.6	22.0
Total Dependency Ratio	87.2	71.2	70.4	66.3	63.0
United States					
Youth Dependency Ratio	60.8	46.3	41.3	41.5	38.2
Elder Dependency ratio	17.4	18.5	20.3	20.1	17.2
Total Dependency Ratio	78.2	64.8	61.6	61.5	58.9



Median Age

Sheridan County’s median age of 46.1 in 2010 is nearly a decade above the state and national level.

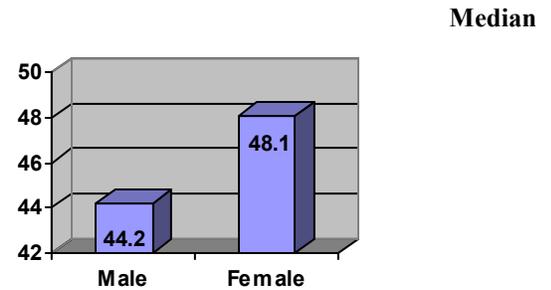
While having a median age a decade higher than the state’s may not sound like a lot, consider that the state’s median age increased by just 6.2 years over the past fifty years while the county’s increased by nearly 16 years during the same time.

The median age of females (48.1) in Sheridan County is much higher than of men (44.2). This is not surprising given that women live longer than men. However, it is more than a decade higher than the state’s female median age of 37.5.

Most concerning about the county’s high median age is that the gap between the county and state levels has been widening rapidly. In just the past two decades, the difference has widened from 5.1 years to 9.9 years.

Median Age, 1960 to 2010

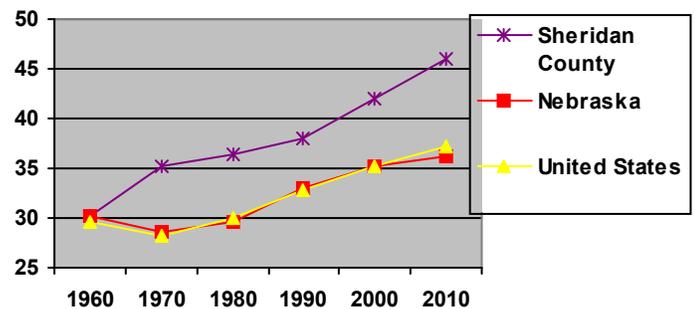
	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Sheridan County	30.2	35.2	36.4	38.1	42.0	46.1
Nebraska	30.2	28.6	29.7	33.0	35.3	36.2
United States	29.6	28.1	30.0	32.9	35.3	36.9
Difference to NE	+0.0	+6.8	+6.7	+5.1	+6.7	+9.9



Median Age by Gender, 2010

	Median Age Population	Median Age Males	Median Age Females
Sheridan County	46.1	44.2	48.1
Nebraska	36.2	35.0	37.5
United States	37.2	35.8	38.5

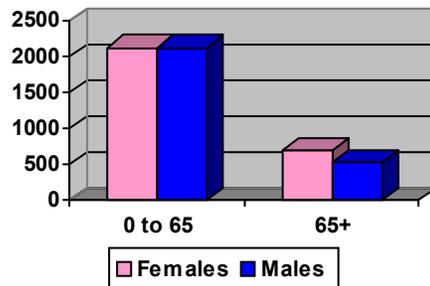
Median Age, 1970 to 2010



Gender

Females outnumbered males in Sheridan County 2,815 (51.5%) to 2,654 (48.5%) in 2010. However, the county has 11 more men under 65 than there are women of the same age. Meanwhile, there are 172 more women (692) than men (520) above the age of 65.

Gender by Age, Sheridan County 2010



Households

Sheridan County experienced a 6.6% decrease in households during the past decade. This moved in the opposite direction that the state’s growth of 8.2% and the national growth rate of 10.7%.

From 1970 to 1980, the number of households in Sheridan County increased by 455, a large □9.3% jump, despite a population increase of just 3.6%. The out-sized growth in households was largely due to baby boomers starting their own households and an influx of railroad workers.

However, the number of households has declined in each of the past decade. In the past 30 years, the number of households decreased by 15.2%. **Despite these losses, the number of households in 2010 is 27 households larger than the 1970 level even though the population has declined by 25% since then.**

The primary reason for the large variance in household/population growth ratios over the 40-year periods was a steep reduction in household size during the 1970's and a steady decline in household size since 1980.

Between 1970 and 1980 the average household size plummeted from 2.99 persons to 2.62 persons as the baby boomers left their parents homes and started their own households. **This helped increase the number of households by 455 during the 1970’s despite a total population increase of just 259 persons.** The average household size continued to decline through the 1980's, but not nearly as rapidly, as they declined from 2.62 persons per household in 1980 to 2.52 in 1990.

Household size fell again during the 1990’s as the 2.38 persons per household in 2000. Household size continued its downward trend in the past decade as the average household size in now just 2.25 persons.

As a result of population loss and smaller household size, the number of households has decreased by 428 households, (15.2%) since 1980.

Households, 2000 to 2010

	2000	2010	Change	% Change
Sheridan County	2,549	2,380	-169	-6.6%
Nebraska	666,184	721,130	54,946	+8.2%
United States	105,480,101	116,716,292	11,236,191	+10.7%

Households, 1970 to 2010

	1970		1980		1990		2000		2010	
	HHS	Per HH								
Sheridan County	2,353	2.99	2,808	2.62	2,618	2.52	2,549	2.38	2,380	2.25

Single Person Households

Nearly a third (31.4%) of Sheridan County’s households are occupied by just one person. Nearly half of these single person homes are occupied by person over 65 years of age.

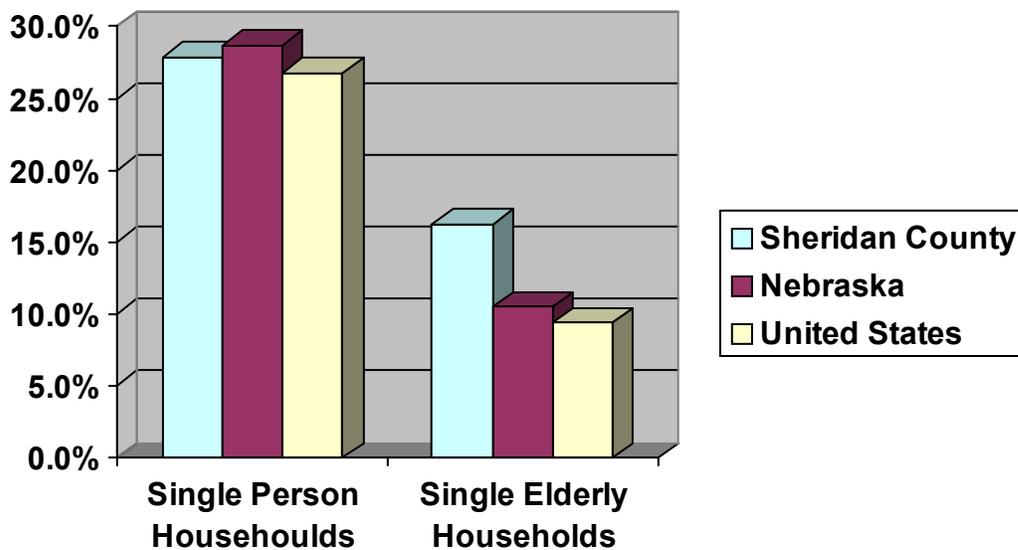
Although the number of single person households has been trending modestly higher over the past 20 years, the number of single person, elderly households has actually been trending slightly downward.

Despite the decline in single-person, elderly households the 16.6% ratio is much higher than the statewide (10.5%) and national (9.4%) levels.

Single-person Households, 1990-2010

	TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS			SINGLE PERSON HH			SINGLE PERSON HH 65+		
	1990	2000	2010	1990	2000	2010	1990	2000	2010
Sheridan County	2,618	2,549	2,380	728 (27.8%)	755 (29.6%)	802 (33.7%)	425 (16.2%)	416 (16.3%)	395 (16.6%)

Single-person Households, 2010



Race/Origin

Sheridan County is predominately composed of persons of European descent with only 421 residents not of Caucasian background.

A large majority of Sheridan County’s residents are single-race Caucasians (84.6%) while 87.4% of the population is at least part Caucasian.

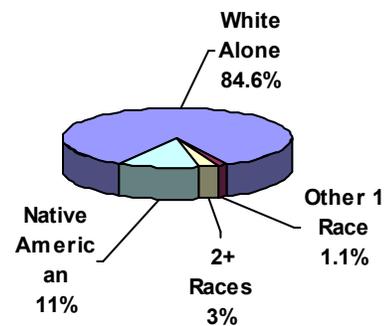
The county does have a significant minority population as 619 (11.3%) of the residents are Native American and 762 (13.9%) are at least partly Native American.

Only 3.1% of Sheridan County residents are of Hispanic origin despite a significant increase in Hispanics statewide.

Race in Sheridan County, 2010

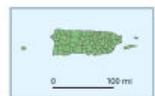
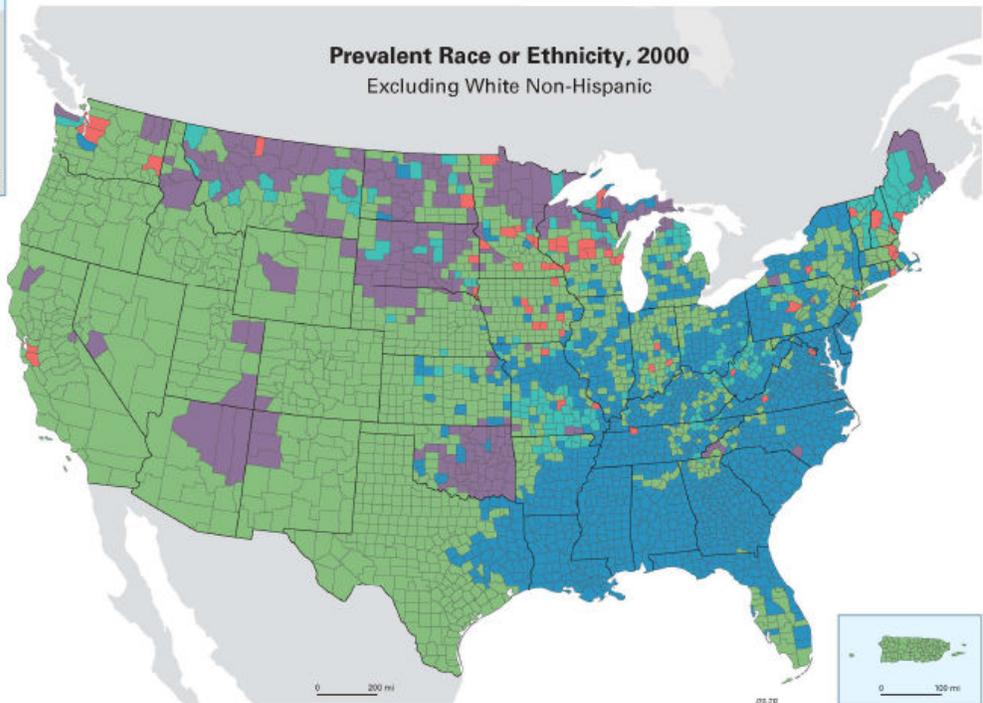
	1 Race	2+ Races	Total
White	4,629	153	4,782
Black	12	16	28
Native American	619	143	762
Asian	18	7	25
Other	29	16	45
Total	5,307	162	5,469
*Total Hispanic	154	17	171

Population by Race and Origin, Sheridan County



- American Indian and Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black
- Hispanic
- Pacific Islander
- Two or More Races

Non-Hispanic Some Other Race group was not the most common in any county; Pacific Islander was most common in Kalawao County, HI



Mobility

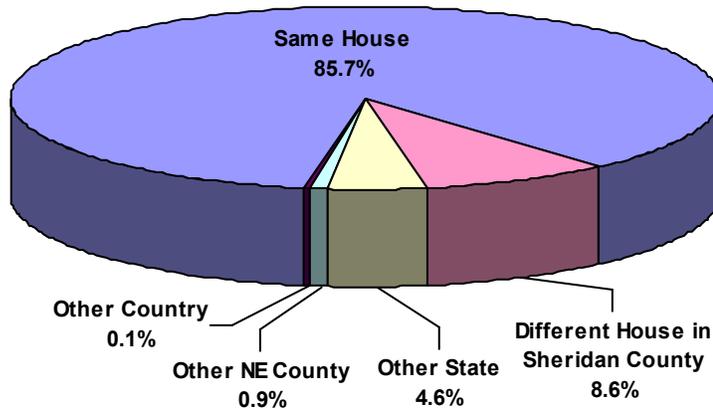
Census estimates shows that 85.7% of residents did not move in the previous year.

Of the 764 persons that did move, a majority (60.5%) of the moves were made within the county. Of the persons who came from outside the county, 47 came from another Nebraska county, 100 came from a Western State outside of Nebraska, 91 came from a Midwest state, 38 came from a Northeast state, 18 came from a Southern state, and 8 came from another country.

Place of residence in Previous Year, 2006-10 Estimate

	Sheridan County		Nebraska
Same House	4,594	85.7%	82.2%
Different House	764	14.3%	17.8%
Same County	462	8.6%	10.5%
Other NE County	47	8.8%	3.9%
Other US State	247	4.6%	2.9%
Elsewhere	8	0.2%	0.5%

Place of Residence previous year, Sheridan County 2005-2009



Population Projections

- Projected Population
- Projected Population of Age Cohorts
- Projected Median Age
- Projected Dependency Ratio
- Demographic Opportunities

Population Projection

Projected growth or decline in the population is one of the most important factors to consider when planning for future development. A fluctuation in total population, as well as changes within age groups in the population, can impact the county in a variety of ways. Potential impacts may include differing needs for public infrastructure and services or making additional land available for new development. The County’s ability to generate or attract new development will also be influenced by changes in population.

Population change is measured in terms of natural change and net migration. The effects of natural change are measured by applying birth and survival rates to 5-year age cohorts. For the purposes of this plan, a Cohort-Survival Projection model is used that incorporates birth and survival rates adjusted to reflect local trends. Migration rates for 5-year age cohorts were developed by reviewing historical migration trends with consideration given to current economic and housing development activity in Sheridan County.

It is important to understand that population projections are not predictions. Unlike a weather forecast where we are using accurate observations within a tested model, population projections are based on assumptions using limited data applied to human actions that will be unpredictably responsive to an unlimited number of future events that can not be known. However, we can make some reasonable assumptions about fertility, mortality and migration based on past and recent history and apply these assumptions to our known age structures to provide a general view of how our demographic composition may look like in the future. We know in ten years people will be ten years older or deceased; the odds of survival by age, the probability of people at different ages having kids, etc., It is much more difficult to gauge migration patterns. Although migration rates can be estimated somewhat accurately using historic trends, migration patterns are dependent upon an aggregate of individual decisions. These decisions can be largely based on ever changing economic and social conditions both locally and elsewhere in the world.

Projecting Sheridan County’s 2010 population to the year 2020 indicates the County’s population may very likely continue its downward trajectory, decreasing by 633 persons to 4,836 persons. Projecting the county’s population to 2030 indicates Sheridan County’s population may decrease by another 675 persons to just 4,161 persons if recent migration trends continue .

Population projections for the twenty year period from 2010 to 2030 shows the county’s population may experience a significant decrease from 5,469 people to 4,161 persons, a 23.9% decrease. Although this looks like a very dramatic decline, it is actually very similar to the outcome one could conclude by simply drawing a trend line over the past thirty years (even though this projection is a more detailed examination conducted age group by age group.)

Although the county is expected to have some net in-migration over the twenty-year period in the 30 to 34 year age group and their children along with a pretty stable population of 35 to 60 year olds, a large percentage of the high school graduates are expected to leave the county and the number of deaths is expected to continue to be above the number of births.

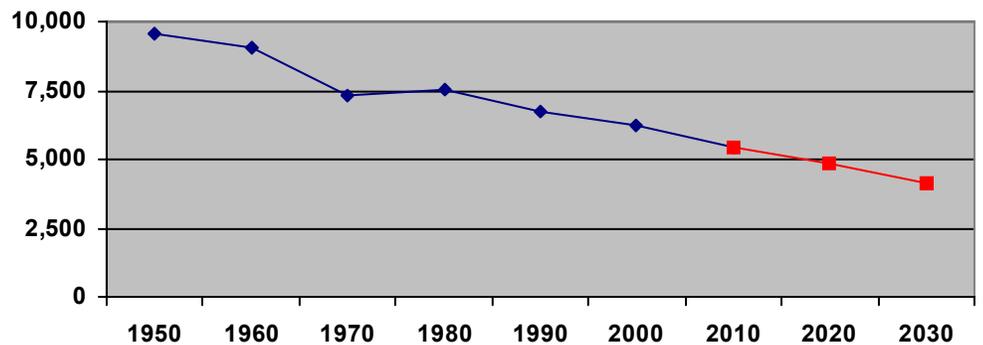
Due to the absence of large employers in the county, it is difficult to be optimistic that there will be a large number of employment opportunities that could reverse the counties net out-migration. With the ag industry no longer needing large numbers of workers, continued dependence on agriculture may provide a very good living for current residents, but the ag economy likely will not require a larger population to support it.

Even though the demographic structure is not primed or well situated for demographic growth; given the small population base it would not take much for the county to reverse its demographic fortune. If the county could reduce its net youth out-migration by even 10%, which would lead to more births and larger household size, the county could stabilize its population. However, to do that would likely require an economic driver or increase in local business creation. If more residents retire in the county than projected or live longer than expected, these would also provide a temporary moderation of the significant population decline expected.

Sheridan County Projected Population, 1950 - 2030

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030
Sheridan	9,539	9,049	7,285	7,544	6,750	6,198	5,469	4,836	4,161

Sheridan County Projected Population, 1960 - 2030



Given the significant projected declines, it is a low probability that the county will significantly under-perform the projected population levels. However, an increase in the level of youth out-migration, a collapse in commodity prices, a natural disaster such as a prolonged and severe drought, a decline in railroad employment in Alliance, a sharp reduction in dollars coming into the county to serve the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation or some other unforeseen event could pull the county population levels even lower than expected.

Projected Population by Age Group

Examining projected populations by age group indicates Sheridan County can expect a large decrease in persons under 60 and a modest increase in persons 60 years of age and older.

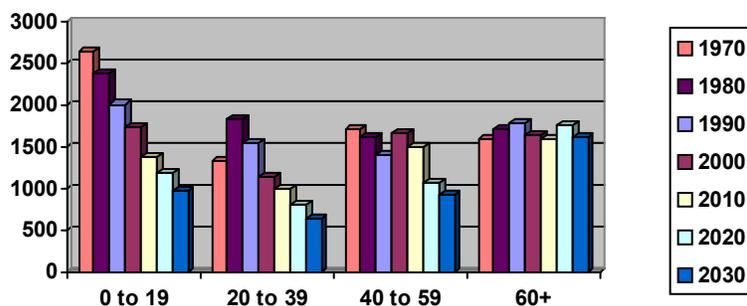
The County’s projected population of 815 persons between the ages of 20 and 39, the heart of the county’s economic and social future, for the year 2020 is 18.7% smaller than 2010 figures and 29.3% less than 2000 figures. By the year 2030, the number of persons between the ages of 20 and 39 is expected to fall to a concerning level of just 644 persons. This is a 359 person decrease that is 35.8% below 2010 levels and only a third of the amount of 20 to 39 year olds the county had in 1980. .

The number of 40 to 59 year old age group could see a drastic drop in the coming decade which could severely impact the county’s labor force. Unless the county can greatly increase its middle age immigration, the county’s 40 to 59 year age group could plummet from 1,501 persons in 2010 to just 1,064 in 2020, a 29% decline. This big drop is expected because a large number of 50 to 59 year olds will age out of this category while the number of 30 to 39 years olds in 2010 is a much smaller group of persons. Fortunately, the rate of losses in the 40 to 59 year old age group will likely slow between 2020 and 2030, but it will still likely decline. Thus by 2030, the number of 40 to 59 year olds could fall to just 927, a 38.2% decline from 2010 levels.

While projecting the future growth in the middle age groups is a bit precarious as they depend on economic growth and retention of newcomers, the growth in the number of persons over 60 years of age in Sheridan County is a higher probability. As the baby boomers move into retirement over the next 10 to 20 years, the number of persons over 60 in Sheridan County is likely to increase significantly into 2020. The number of 60+ persons is expected to grow 11.6% (184 persons) from 2010 to 2020. However, as far fewer people will likely age into retirement in the following decade while deaths will likely increase, the number of persons over 60 may pull back to 1,620 persons which is 8.5% below 2020 levels but still 32 persons (2%) above 2010 levels.

The number of persons under 20 is also a very precarious projection as not only must one factor in uncertain migration rates of their parents, this age group is largely determined by fertility rates. If young adult migration and fertility rates are similar to recent trends, the number of persons under 20 will continue many decades of decline. By 2020, the number of persons in this age group could fall to 1,184 in 2010, a 14% decline. While this is not an optimistic forecast, this decline is actually a small decline in actual number terms in many decades. By 2030, the number of persons under 20 could fall to triple digits. The projection of 970 persons in this age group in 2030 is 29.6% below 2010 levels and an incredible 63.4% drop from 1970 levels.

Projected Population Change, 1970 to 2030



Projected Population Change by Age Group, 1970-2030

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020P	2030P	2010-2020	2020-2030
0 to 4	504	631	405	359	328	265	217	-63	-48
5 to 9	681	582	584	414	360	298	244	-62	-54
10 to 14	810	536	574	463	368	343	278	-25	-65
15 to 19	653	637	449	499	321	278	231	-43	-47
0 to 19	2,648	2,386	2,012	1,735	1,377	1,184	970	-193	-214
20 to 24	334	504	267	237	212	170	158	-42	-12
25 to 29	331	514	343	283	252	162	140	-90	-22
30 to 34	315	475	454	298	261	233	186	-28	-47
35 to 39	352	350	488	335	278	250	160	-28	-90
20 to 39	1,332	1,843	1,552	1,153	1,003	815	644	-188	-171
40 to 44	382	347	430	504	284	252	225	-32	-27
45 to 49	465	448	321	473	315	256	231	-59	-25
50 to 54	441	380	305	382	426	240	213	-186	-27
55 to 59	423	436	352	317	476	316	258	-160	-58
40 to 59	1,711	1,611	1,408	1,676	1,501	1,064	927	-437	-137
60 to 64	374	422	377	291	376	420	237	44	-183
65 to 69	323	353	383	323	280	420	277	140	-143
70 to 74	305	294	351	293	253	326	369	73	43
75 to 79	274	264	264	282	252	218	327	-34	109
80 to 84	180	173	208	238	189	166	212	-23	46
85+	138	198	195	207	238	222	198	-16	-24
60+	1,594	1,704	1,778	1,634	1,588	1,772	1,620	184	-152
BBoom	2,478	2,130	1,715	1,694	1,593	1,482	1,185	-111	-297
Total	7,285	7,544	6,750	6,198	5,469	4,836	4,161	-633	-675

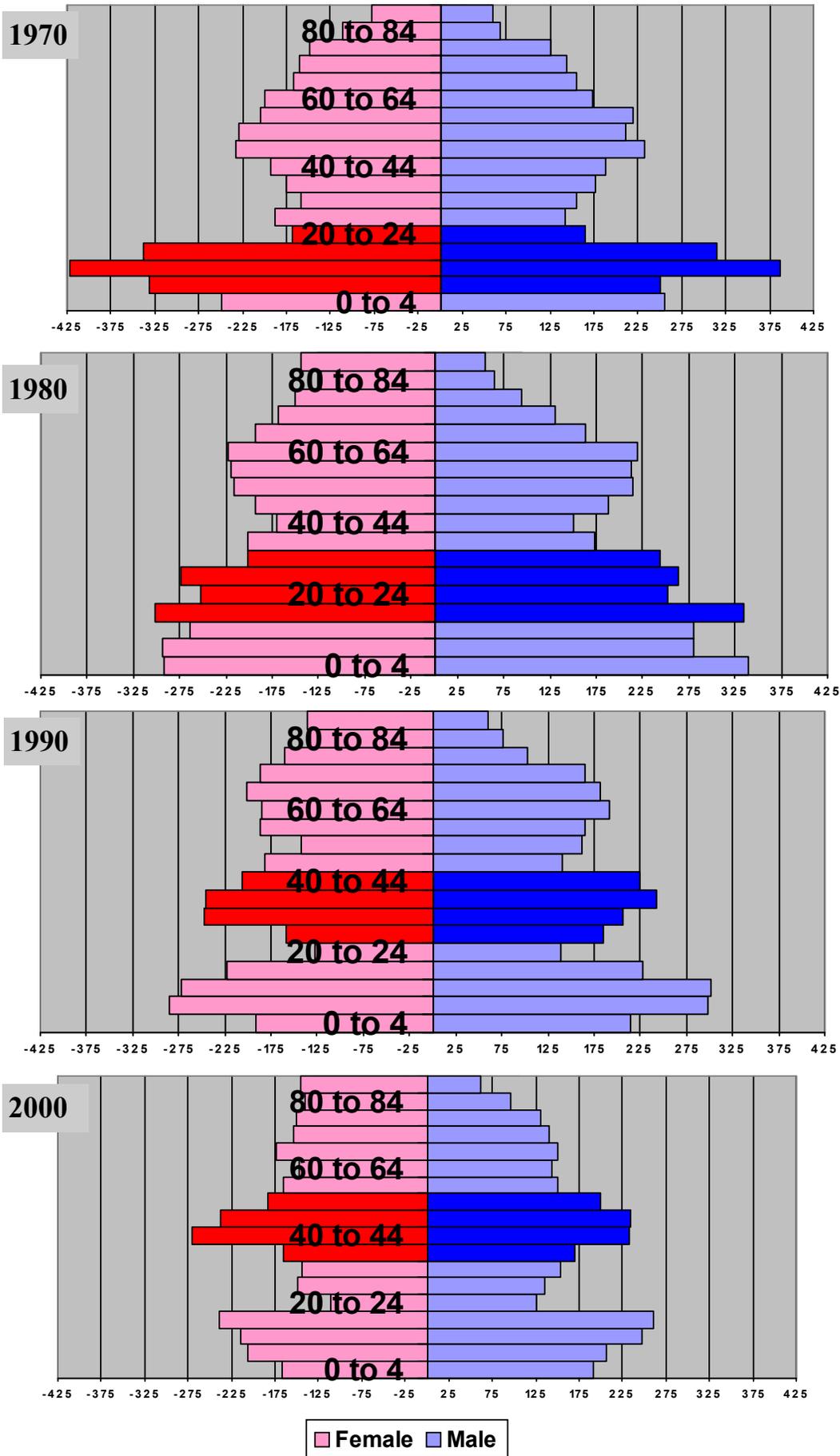
Green: Baby Boomers; 2020 to 2030 Projected

Projected Population by Age Cohort, 2000 - 2030

2000 AGE	2010 AGE	2020 AGE	2030 AGE	2000	2010	2020P	2030P	2000-2010	2010-2020	2020-2030
			0 to 4				217			217
			5 to 9				244			244
		0 to 4	10 to 14			265	278		265	13
		5 to 9	15 to 19			298	231		298	-67
	0 to 4	10 to 14	20 to 24		328	343	158	328	15	-185
	5 to 9	15 to 19	25 to 29		360	278	140	360	-82	-138
0 to 4	10 to 14	20 to 24	30 to 34	359	368	170	186	9	-198	16
5 to 9	15 to 19	25 to 29	35 to 39	414	321	162	160	-93	-159	-2
10 to 14	20 to 24	30 to 34	40 to 44	463	212	233	225	-251	21	-8
15 to 19	25 to 29	35 to 39	45 to 49	499	252	250	231	-247	-2	-19
20 to 24	30 to 34	40 to 44	50 to 54	237	261	252	213	24	-9	-39
25 to 29	35 to 39	45 to 49	55 to 59	283	278	256	258	-5	-22	2
30 to 34	40 to 44	50 to 54	60 to 64	298	284	240	237	-14	-44	-3
35 to 39	45 to 49	55 to 59	65 to 69	335	315	316	277	-20	1	-39
40 to 44	50 to 54	60 to 64	70 to 74	504	426	420	369	-78	-6	-51
45 to 49	55 to 59	65 to 69	75 to 79	473	476	420	327	3	-56	-93
50 to 54	60 to 64	70 to 74	80 to 84	382	376	326	212	-6	-50	-114
55+	65+	75+	85+	1,951	1,217	606	198	-734	-611	-408
		Total	Total	6,198	5,469	4,836	4,161	-729	-633	-675

Yellow: Gains through births; Green: Gains due to in-migration; Pink: Losses due to out-migration; Orange: Loss due to deaths/migration
2020 and 2030 Projected

Sheridan County Comprehensive Plan 2014



Examining population pyramids with the Baby Boomers in bright red (females) and blue (males) on these two pages gives us a good visual understanding of the Sheridan County's past and future populations.

Sheridan County's 1970 population illustrates the County had a very young population that was primed for future growth. This large percentage of young persons provided the county with very positive population momentum which provided the potential for rapid growth in the future if they could retain this young population of baby boomers.

The 1970 pyramid does show with the "tightening belt" in the middle, including the upper level of the baby boomers, that the county was losing large numbers of young adults in the previous decades.

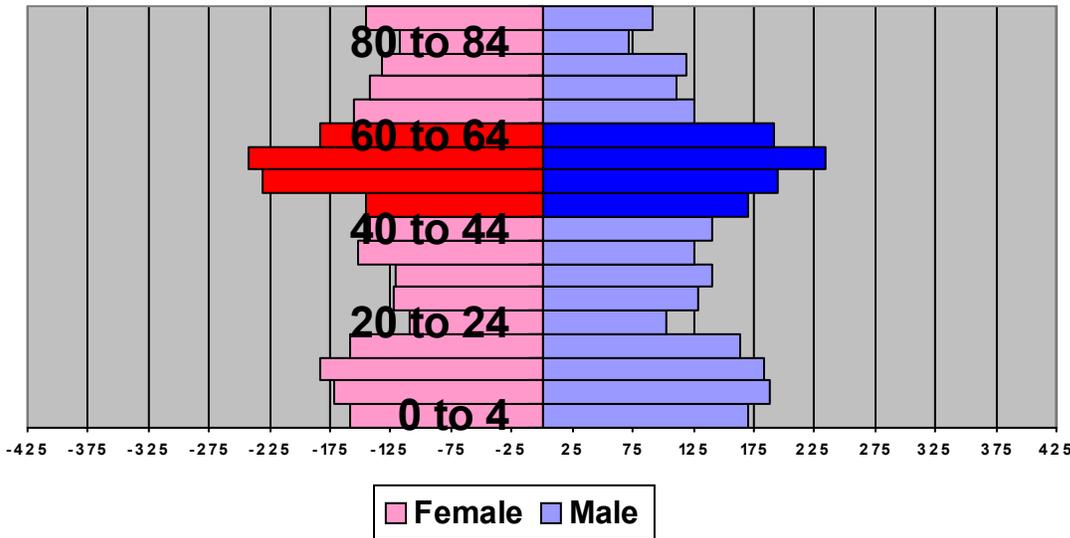
It is visually apparent that by 1980 Sheridan County had lost a pretty significant number of its baby boomers as there is a big gap between the 10 to 19 and 20 to 30 year old age groups. Even though the county had lost many young adults in previous decades, the county still had a young population with positive momentum.

During the 1980's the county experienced really heavy out-migration of young adults, that is very visible by the "belt" being tighter in and around the 20 to 24 year age group. It is also very visible that the county had far fewer young persons than the previous decades along with fewer working age persons even though the baby boomers were fully into the work force.

During 1990's the baby boomers were aging into their most productive working years. While the county continued to lose young adults, they retained far more working age persons previous decades. Despite this improvement, the number of persons under 20 continued to decline.

Even though Sheridan County's internal growth potential wasn't nearly as good as it was in the 70's or 80's, it still projected slight growth in population through natural change if the youth could be maintained.

Projected Population Pyramid, 2010



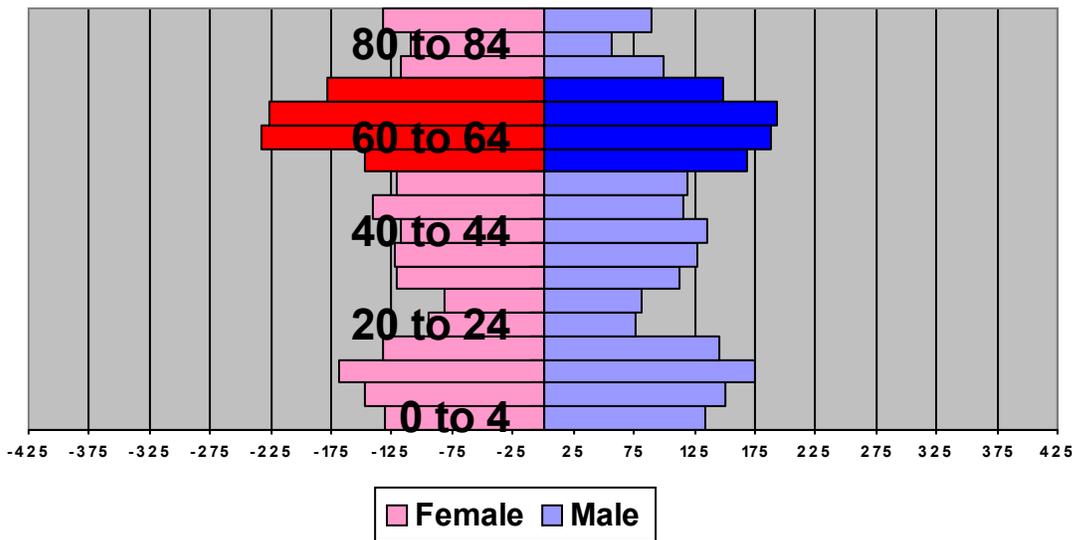
Observing population pyramids of Sheridan County's populations for 2010 and future projections, we can clearly see that if trends continue the county will see an decrease in persons under 60 years of age.

After 2010, the labor force could see a very serious decline in the large number of baby boomers enter retirement. The number of persons over 60 will start to increase after 2010, and ramp up into 2020.

The 2010 population pyramid clearly shows the large number of baby boomers are right on the doorstep of retirement. Whole the age groups behind them are much smaller.

We can also see that the baby boomers make up a large proportion of the labor force, while out-migration is decimating the future labor force.

Projected Population Pyramid, 2020

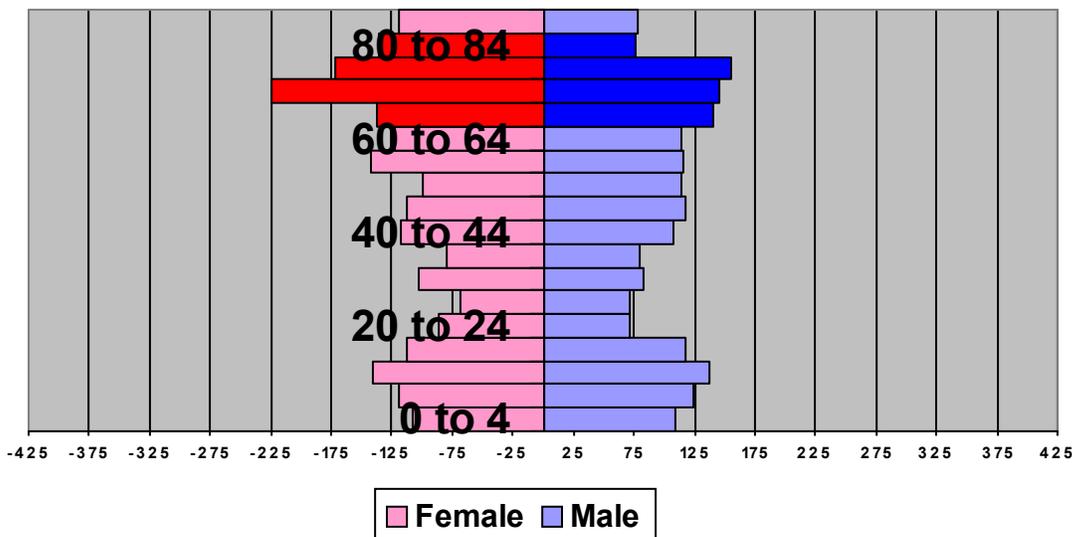


Most of the population losses will be due to youth-outmigration although deaths, which already out-number births, will likely start to increase, especially after 2020.

As mentioned, the labor force is expected to shrink due to a large number of persons aging out of the workforce along with continued out-migration going into 2020. As the number of persons aging out of the labor force is clearly larger than the number of persons aging into the work force, it will be imperative for the county to attract young workers.

This will occur at a time when many of the surrounding counties will also be losing labor force at a significant rate.

Projected Population Pyramid, 2030



As we move into 2030, the baby boomers will be another 10 years older and it is apparent the projection does not expect to see an influx of persons to replace them unless something in the economy drastically changes.

The population momentum in 2030 could be quite negative as deaths will continue to be larger than the number of births.

The baby boomers may continue to be the largest age group by 2020 and by 2030 even though they will have largely moved out of the labor force. It is thus apparent, the future of Sheridan County will be decided by the "next generation" starting in this coming decade. One view is that the county's future relies on its attractiveness to potential newcomers.

Projected Median Age

Sheridan County’s median age will likely continue to climb in the coming decades, although at a slower pace. The median age of the county is projected to increase to 47.3 in 2020 before moving up by another two years to 49.3 years by 2030. Much of this increase will be due to the aging of the baby boom generation along with a decline in young adult migration. However, an increase in the number of deaths will obviously cap an indefinite increase, yet the Baby Boom generation will pull the median age toward 50 in the next two decades. By 2030, one third of the county population could be in retirement, double the ratio the county had in 1970.

Projected Median Age, 1980- 2030

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020P	2030P
Sheridan Co	30.2	35.2	36.4	38.1	42.0	46.1	47.3	49.3
Change	-	+5.0	+1.2	+1.7	+3.9	+4.1	+1.2	+2.0

Projected Population 65 Years and Older, 1970- 2030

Year	Persons 65+	Percent
1970	1,220	16.7%
1980	1,290	17.1%
1990	1,401	20.8%
2000	1,343	21.7%
2010	1,212	22.2%
2020P	1,352	28.0%
2030P	1,383	33.2%

Projected Households

From 2010 to 2030, the number of households in the county is expected to decrease at a rate below the population decline. This counter-intuitive event is expected due to an expected continued decrease in the number of persons per households as a result of young adults leaving their parents homes and elderly couples becoming single households.

Projected Households, 1970 to 2030

Year	Household Population	PPH	Households
1970	7,042	2.99	2,353
1980	7,380	2.62	2,808
1990	6,601	2.52	2,618
2000	6,066	2.38	2,549
2010	5,358	2.25	2,380
2020P	4,738	2.20	2,145
2030P	4,077	2.10	1,941

Projected Dependency Ratio

Sheridan County’s dependency ratio has continued to improve since 1970. This is a very positive trend as it helps to increase aggregate productivity and reduce the local tax burden.

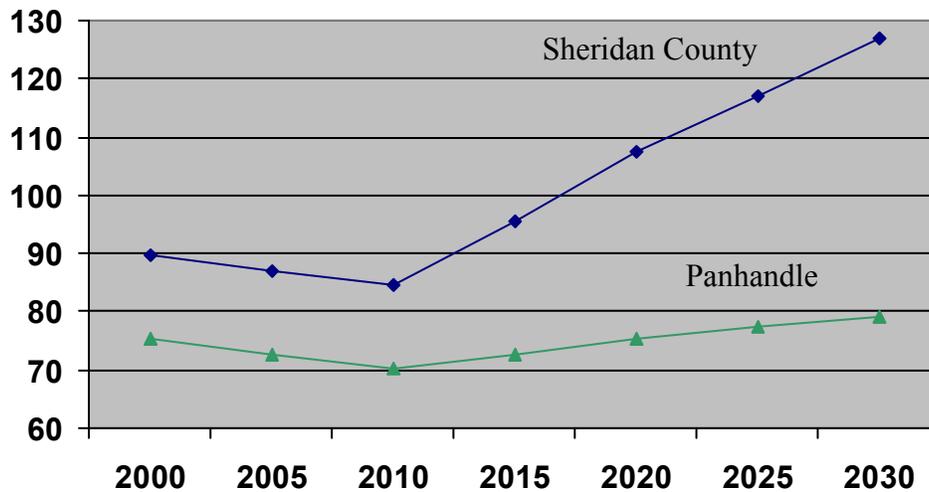
The higher the dependency population, the larger the burden on those who are working as they support those that are not. High dependency ratios also hurt overall productivity as wealth creation is divided by non-wealth creators.

Unfortunately the county’s dependency ratio’s positive trend is about to suddenly reverse as the Baby boomers move into retirement and the age groups behind them are much smaller.

Not only will the county’s dependency ratio likely start to increase, it will do so at a very rapid and pronounced rate. By 2020 there will likely be more persons of non-working age than working age. By 2030, there could be about 1.26 persons of non-working age in the county to every person that is of working age. It will be surprising if the county’s dependency ratio is not among the nations worst, aside from retirement communities in Florida or Arizona.

This is in contrast to the rest of the Panhandle which could see a significant increase in its dependency ratio, but still have many more working age persons than non-working age persons. This could create a situation where a minority of the county’s population could carry much of the county’s tax burden, making the county less attractive for prospective residents and businesses.

Projected Dependency Ratio, 2000 to 2030



Projected Dependency Ratio for Sheridan County, 1970 to 2020

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020P	2030P
Youth Dependency Ratio	68.1	52.7	54.3	48.6	43.6	49.4	51.4
Elder Dependency ratio	33.8	29.2	40.4	41.1	40.9	58.0	75.4
Total Dependency Ratio	101.9	81.9	94.7	89.7	84.5	107.4	126.8

Demographic Strengths

- The county had 78 more persons age 30 to 44 move into the county than moved out or passed away over the past two decades.
- Sheridan County's ratio of 5 to 14 year olds is equivalent to the national ratio
- During the 1950's, the county experienced a net natural change of 1,524 new residents
- Sheridan County had three periods of population growth: 1880 to 1890; 1900 to 1930; and 1970 to 1980
- The agricultural industry, especially the cattle grazing industry, can be quite productive despite a small and declining population
- The number of 45 to 64 year olds in the county increased 17.6% between 1990 and 2010
- Since 1990, Sheridan County has experienced a net out-migration of 52 persons per year, which is far less than the 200+ persons lost annually between 1950 and 1970.
- Sheridan County's dependency ratio has been steadily improving since 1970, falling from 101.9 in 1970 to 84.5 in 2010
- The number of households in the county is 27 households larger than the 1970 level even though the population has declined by 25% since then.
- The county is expected to have some net in-migration over the next twenty years in the 30 to 34 year age group
- The county should retain most of its present population of 35 to 60 year olds over the next 20 years

Demographic Weaknesses

- The strong local agricultural economy does not create enough job opportunities to help offset the long-term population loss
- The county has had three periods of population loss: the 1890's, 1930 to 1970; and 1980 to the present
- The county reached its all-time census population of 10,793 persons in 1930
- Sheridan County's population has declined in seven of the past eight decades
- Sheridan County's population performance over the past 80 years is one of the worst in the nation as the county has lost about half of its population
- The county lost more than a tenth of its population in the past decade
- The number of 30 to 44 year olds in the county declined by 40% in the last two decades despite net in-migration in this age group
- The number of 5 to 17 year olds declined by 34.7% in the last two decades
- Over half the county's high school graduates are leaving the county.
- The county has a below average ratio of persons in every 5-year age cohort between the age 20 and 49.
- The net natural change gain reduces the population by 10 persons per year whereas 60 years ago natural change was adding 160 persons per year.
- From 1950 to 2009, Sheridan County has had 6,409 more persons move out of the county than into it.
- Despite improvement, Sheridan County's dependency ratio is well above the state and national average
- The county has nearly as many persons over 65 as it has persons under 18
- Sheridan County's median age of 46.1 in 2010 is nearly a decade above the state and national level.
- Sheridan County experienced a 6.6% decrease in households during the past decade.
- Projecting the county's population to 2030 indicates Sheridan County's population may decrease to just 4,161 persons if recent migration trends continue.
- Sheridan County can expect a large decrease in persons under 60 in the next 20 years
- By the year 2030, the number of persons between the ages of 20 and 39 is expected to fall to a concerning level of just 644 persons.
- The number of 40 to 59 year old age group could see a drastic drop in the coming decade which could severely impact the county's labor force.
- The projection of 970 persons under 20 years of age in 2030 is 29.6% below 2010 levels and an incredible 63.4% drop from 1970 levels.
- The Baby Boom generation will pull the median age toward 50 in the next two decades. By 2030, one third of the county population could be in retirement, double the ratio the county had in 1970.
- The county's dependency ratio's positive trend is about to suddenly reverse as the Baby boomers move into retirement and the age groups behind them are much smaller.
- By 2020 there will likely be more persons of non-working age than working age. By 2030, there could be about 1.26 persons of non-working age in the county to every person that is of working age.

Demographic Opportunities

- Much of Southwest South Dakota's growth is in close proximity to Sheridan County
- Sheridan County is very affordable compared to a place like the Colorado Front Range making "Equity Refugees" a prime opportunity
- The internet provides opportunities for entrepreneurship even in rural areas such as Sheridan County
- Sheridan County has demonstrated historically that it can rapidly increase its population
- Given the county's small population base, it would not take much for the county to reverse its demographic fortune

Demographic Threats

- Western Nebraska's continued population loss will continue to diminish Sheridan County's political clout
- Nearly half (44%) of Sheridan County's primary working age population (20 to 64 year olds) will reach traditional retirement age by 2025
- If migration rates continue, the county's working age population could be 20 to 25% smaller by 2025.
- The county has had more deaths than births over the last 20 years. This trend will likely continue for the foreseeable future.
- Due to the absence of large employers in the county, it is difficult to be optimistic that there will be a large number of employment opportunities that could reverse the county's net out-migration
- Sheridan County is losing the critical mass of population needed to in order to maintain essential institutions such as schools, businesses, and churches and to provide adequate funding for roads, fire, and police departments.
- A shrinking and aging population could threaten the growth of local businesses
- The county's declining labor force makes it difficult to recruit new business.
- A wave of consolidation and closures of schools, churches, businesses and government services if more working age persons are not added in this coming decade.
- The continued high levels of out-migration of young adults make it difficult for the county to maintain its population even if it has net in-migration of 25 to 50 year olds
- An increase in the level of youth out-migration, a collapse in commodity prices, a natural disaster such as a prolonged and severe drought, a decline in railroad employment in Alliance, a sharp reduction in dollars coming into the county to serve the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation or some other unforeseen event could pull the county population levels even lower than expected are all low probability events that could cause the county to lose more persons than projected.