

## *Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

**M**onroe County is located in northeastern Pennsylvania. It borders the state of New Jersey and the counties of Northampton, Carbon, Luzerne, Lackawanna, Wayne, and Pike. Monroe County is touted as having great scenic and environmental value, but is also under significant pressure from population growth and migration. There are 20 municipalities in the County. Four are boroughs and the rest are townships. Stroudsburg, a quaint town with an old-fashioned main street, is the county seat.

Monroe County had the second fastest growing population in the state in the past decade. It grew by 45 percent in the 1990s, and since 1970, the population has tripled. As of the 2000 Census, the population of Monroe County was 138,687. The land area is 609 square miles, resulting in a population density of 228 persons per square mile. Not surprisingly, the County reported the greatest increase in housing units in the state during the 1990s, a 23 percent increase.

### **Existing Land Use Conditions**

Currently, 6.8 percent of the County is considered developed, a 2.9 percent increase since 1992. Approximately 93.2 percent of the County's total land area is undeveloped with 85.8 percent of this total devoted primarily to forest and some agricultural uses.

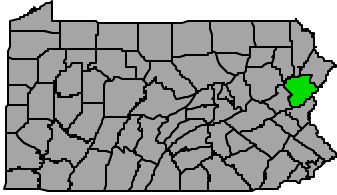
The County's natural beauty is evident by its borders – a ridge of the Blue Mountain to the south, the Delaware River to the east, and the Lehigh River to the west. The County itself lies within the Pocono

Mountains, thus containing many wooded peaks and valleys. Its physical beauty ties directly to its commerce and its desirability as a place to live. The Pocono Heritage Land Trust summarized it this way, "the natural beauty and diversity of the Poconos – the waterfalls, mountain trout streams, scenic vistas, dense forests, rare pine barrens, unique boreal bogs, black bears, otters, deer, bald eagles, and countless other wildlife – are what has attracted people to this region for over 100 years."

Consequently, tourism has been the dominant industry for more than 100 years, offering numerous resorts and a variety of attractions and outdoor activities. This beauty has also attracted new residents who have migrated from New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania's metropolitan regions.

### **Key Land Use Issues**

- ☑ **Monroe County's natural environment is in jeopardy.** This was one of two major challenges presented in the Monroe County Comprehensive Plan. Rural landscapes are being rapidly transformed. Sprawling subdivisions are penetrating the countryside and farmland and forestland are being converted to development. Local residents are most concerned about water supply and water quality. New wells have been brought online in the past decade and there is concern over their impact on groundwater reserves. They are also concerned about the water quality of some of the finest trout streams in the country.



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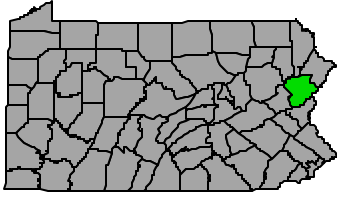
- ☑ **Monroe County has experienced tremendous population growth in the past several decades.** The County's population has increased by 350 percent since 1960, growing from approximately 40,000 in 1960 to almost 140,000 in 2000. During the 1990s, it grew by 45 percent and saw the greatest percent increase in housing units (23%) of all Pennsylvania counties. Unlike most of the other counties in the state, it saw an increase in its household size as well, which is often an indication a lagging housing market.
- ☑ **Much of Monroe County's population growth stems from migration.** Between 1990 and 2000, according to Internal Revenue Service data, approximately 28,000 more people migrated into the County than out of it. Migration accounted for 65 percent of the population increase. While migration between contiguous counties is very common, surprisingly the greatest net influx of migrants came from the New York City area – Kings (Brooklyn) County, Queens County, and Bronx County. Bergen and Morris Counties in New Jersey and New York City, NY were also big contributors of migrants. It is believed that these new residents are attracted by easy access, afforded by Interstate 80, and a relatively low cost of living. With these new residents come new problems. One such problem is that many continue to work in the New York and New Jersey metropolitan regions and thus incur long commutes taxing local roads. Also,

many are accustomed to the high levels of municipal services that are provided in a major metropolitan region, but this level of service is not feasible in the more rural Monroe County.

- ☑ Monroe County is facing a substantial disparity between services needed and tax revenues. The most difficult service demands to meet are the need for schools and libraries and the upkeep of roads. Population growth is substantially increasing school enrollments in Monroe County. Depending on the school district, enrollment has increased between four and 12 percent per year for the past several years. At the same time, property taxes are also increasing, resulting in a substantial property tax burden on residents. New business growth has not kept pace with population growth, which means residents shoulder a greater tax burden than in other Pennsylvania counties. This is especially difficult for retirees on fixed incomes that have lived in the area a long time. The population growth and the unusually high number of long-distance commuters are stressing existing roads that must be maintained out of stressed local municipal budgets.

### **Land Use Planning Activities**

- ☑ **Monroe County is working aggressively to plan and preserve open space in the County.** In the spring of 1998, Monroe County passed a \$25 million open space bond referendum. Subsequently they formed an Open



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Space Advisory Board. This Board has overseen the development of a countywide open space plan that will help to steer initiatives and set priorities for the expenditure of open space funds. The Board has also facilitated the development of open space plans at the municipal level and these plans are now complete. The bond money is being used to purchase property and other related projects. Some of the bond is also being used for agricultural preservation and county open space projects.

- Monroe County has instituted an innovative approach to encourage its municipalities to develop and adopt resource protection ordinances.** The County has set up a program that provides partial reimbursement to a municipality that develops and adopts resource protection ordinances. The County has a list of ordinances, with model language and goals that will be considered under the reimbursement program. These ordinances include conservation zoning, agricultural zoning, open space protection, management of environmentally sensitive areas, and maintaining or developing village and borough centers.