

## *Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

The North Central Region is comprised of the counties of Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean, and Potter, and 157 municipal governments. Geographically, the region covers 5,091.6 square miles and, as its name implies, is situated in the north central portion of the State. The Allegheny Plateaus section of the Appalachian Mountains defines the region's terrain, which is rugged and heavily dissected by surface waters that have produced deep valleys and steep hillsides. This geography has greatly contributed to the region's historic and existing land use patterns.

The North Central Region is one of Pennsylvania's most rural areas, given that the 2000 Census reported that 61 percent of its total population is sparsely settled in areas located outside urban areas. The region's current population density is 46 persons per square mile, which is well below Pennsylvania's population density of 274 persons per square mile.

Although rural, the region is accessible given that 7,083.2 miles of roadways, representing 5.9 percent of the State's total highway miles, traverse the six counties. This transportation network includes: Interstate 80, and U.S. Routes 6, 119, 120, 219, and 322.

According to the 2000 Census, the region supported a population of 234,416, which represents a 2.5 percent increase over the region's 1990 population. In comparison, Pennsylvania's population increased by 3.4 percent. As such, population growth is stagnant throughout the six-county region as the economy struggles to recover from

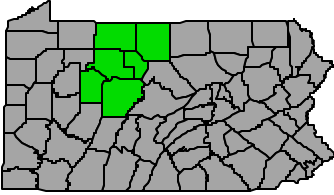
the decline in the region's once-booming resource extraction industries. According to Carnegie Mellon University Professor Robert Strauss, "...Pennsylvania's economy is sluggish or moribund, especially, west of the Susquehanna, and that other parts of the U.S. are enjoying far more than we are the fruits of the longest economic expansion in the history of the U.S. economy."<sup>1</sup> However, based on the Appalachian Regional Commission's economic development classification system, the six counties are classified as "transitional" meaning that they are "...in an intermediate phase of economic development. Such areas have some characteristics that are clearly problematic, yet might also be close (or even be better than) the national average on another key economic indicator."\*

Today, the North Central Region's economy is heavily reliant on the manufacturing industry with a focus on the powdered metals sector. Tourism is also a unique contributor to the region's economy, which, in 2000, generated \$600 million in expenditures by domestic travelers for the Allegheny National Forest Tourism Region.<sup>2</sup>

### **Key Land Use Trends**

Key land use trends for the North Central Region were identified by the region's county planning directors through their respective county land use profiles and during a focus group discussion held at the

\* ARC has developed a system that classifies Appalachia into four categories of economic development –Distressed, Transitional, Competitive, and Attainment. Each of these categories is based on three indicators of economic viability—per capita income, poverty, and unemployment.



## Land Use and Growth Management Profile

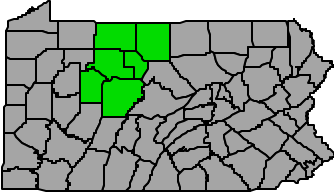
Clearfield County Planning Commission on February 18, 2004. In addition to the county planning directors, the North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission also participated in the focus group discussion.

The impact of statewide public policy on land uses was a common issue that emerged while identifying the regional trends. It was noted that statewide public policy should not be “one size fits all.” Legislative intent and regional and local impacts should be fully analyzed before legislation is enacted or amended. The planning directors also noted that the trends are highly interrelated with transportation issues at the center. A number of other key regional land use and development trends and issues were also identified as outlined below.

- ☑ **The region’s population and housing growth is stagnant and is shifting from the first-generation communities (cities, boroughs, and first-class townships) to the second-generation communities.** From 1990 to 2000, the population within the region’s cities, boroughs, and first-class townships has essentially shifted into the second-class townships, which has generated a relatively equal amount of new housing units (Figures 1 and 2). Note, that Elk County’s statistics contradict this trend due to the 1994 consolidation of Benzinger Township and St. Mary’s Borough to form St. Mary’s City.
- ☑ **The majority of the region’s new single-family housing units have been constructed in the region’s second-**

**generation communities.** Population shifting from the region’s first- to second-generation communities, coupled with a decreasing household size, has contributed to an ever-increasing number of housing units constructed in the second-class townships (Figures 3A and 3B). This trend, however, has been occurring *even before* the nation’s post World War II suburbanization. Since 1940, 44.6 percent (51,903 units) of the region’s total housing units were built in second-class townships as opposed to only 18.6 percent (21,696 units) constructed in the first-generation communities. These trends show that the demand for housing has increasingly been focused in non-urban areas, thereby, leading to disinvestments in the region’s older housing stock. This, in turn, has contributed to a net loss of quality, affordable housing within the first-generation communities.

- ☑ **The State’s transportation planning process creates a fragmented system which impacts transportation and land use region wide.** Due to the region’s mountainous topography, the highway transportation infrastructure is critical to link communities and move goods. Because transportation infrastructure is a critical issue, the transportation planning process has a tremendous regional impact. However, the State’s transportation improvement programming process is problematic for the region because the majority of the region’s available funds are allocated to larger projects over longer periods of



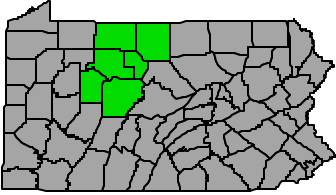
## *Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

time, which leaves little to no allocations to local projects. As such, smaller projects with localized, but nonetheless important impacts, are delayed due to these decisions. Furthermore, this creates a system of local competition for funds with several opposing advocate groups – often from the same municipality – vying for funds.

- ☑ **Although slow, much of the region’s growth is unregulated and unplanned.** Of the region’s 157 municipalities, only one-third of the municipalities have adopted a comprehensive plan, and less than 25 percent have adopted land use regulations. Moreover, a statewide municipal planning and land use survey conducted by the Penn State Cooperative Extension concluded that the majority of the region’s municipalities do not have a planning commission.<sup>3</sup> The lack of interest in planning is, in part, supported by the population’s strong sentiment favoring private property and land ownership rights. Any planning that is done is often reactive – to NIMBY or LULU issues – rather than proactive.
- ☑ **Many municipalities lack the capacity and interest for planning.** According to a recent Penn State Cooperative Extension survey of county planning directors, 70 percent of the survey respondents indicated that “limited support, understanding, interest, and demand for planning by elected officials” was the most significant barrier to effective planning. A majority (69%) of the respondents also indicated

that there is “limited support, understanding, interest, and demand for planning by the general public.”<sup>4</sup> These barriers are indicative of many northern Pennsylvania rural communities that are not experiencing the growth pressures that many south central and southeastern Pennsylvania communities are. As such, many local elected officials are focused on delivering traditional municipal services, such as seasonal roadway maintenance, and do not recognize the need or demand for planning and land use controls. Unfortunately, the ultimate impact on the community is not realized until many small developments are implemented over time without the guidance of a comprehensive plan or proper land use regulations.

- ☑ **Elected county officials too often do not realize the importance and benefits of planning.** The need for community planning is an issue that is too often overlooked by many county officials who do not recognize the linkage between sound land use planning and economic development. Support for and interest in planning by many of the region’s county officials is reflected in their respective county planning departments’ FY 2001-02 operating budgets (Figure 4). Figure 4 presents a comparative analysis of each county’s planning budget in relation to its total population. This relationship shows that for every person, less than the statewide average of \$1.86 was spent on planning. Elk and Potter Counties were the exceptions where more than the



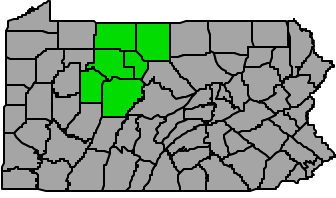
## *Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

State average was spent on planning for every person. This general lack of funding and support also hinders county planning agencies' interests and capabilities to educate local officials on the benefits of planning and provide the much-needed technical assistance in preparing and implementing sound land use policies. This trend exemplifies the need to increase the CCAP's (County Commissioner's Association of Pennsylvania) level of participation, awareness, and interest in county and municipal planning issues and activities.

- ☑ **Many statewide policies are written as a "one size fits all" solution.** Many of the State's land use-related policies are not applicable to every local situation across the State. For example, the Clean and Green program's 10-acre minimum requirement may indeed serve as an effective open space preservation tool in many of the Commonwealth's urban and suburban communities, but it effectively subsidizes sprawl and fragments forest and agricultural land throughout rural Pennsylvania. Other statewide policies, such as brownfields redevelopment and the KOZ programs, also mimic this problem. Pennsylvania is a diverse state and the need for state officials and lawmakers to understand that one size does not fit all is fundamental to the State's composition as a Commonwealth.
- ☑ **The region is part of a nationwide trend in the growth of non-metro recreation areas.** Affordable land

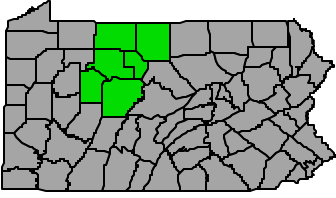
values coupled with the region's wealth of outdoor recreational amenities have contributed to an increase in the number of seasonal housing units. Census data reveals that the North Central Region experienced an 11.4 percent increase in seasonal housing units during the 1990s. By comparison, Pennsylvania's growth in seasonal housing units during this same period was 7.0 percent. A future concern from this growing trend may be the conversion of these seasonal units to permanent dwellings, which, in turn, may increase the demand for public services. In their study of the relationship between population growth and outdoor recreational amenities, Kenneth M. Johnson and Calvin L. Beale summarize this national trend and its impact on rural communities like the North Central Region: "Increased recreational activity, the appeal of second homes, and the influx of former urbanites into rural areas all create the demand for housing and for an expanded business, service, and governmental infrastructure to support it."<sup>5</sup>

- ☑ **The Commonwealth lacks a coordinated, sound land use planning strategy.** Although the power and authority for municipalities to develop and implement their own planning policies should remain as authorized under the Municipalities Planning Code, there is a real need for the Commonwealth to identify a state-level entity to lead an effective and coordinated, sound land use planning policy and ensure that the State's



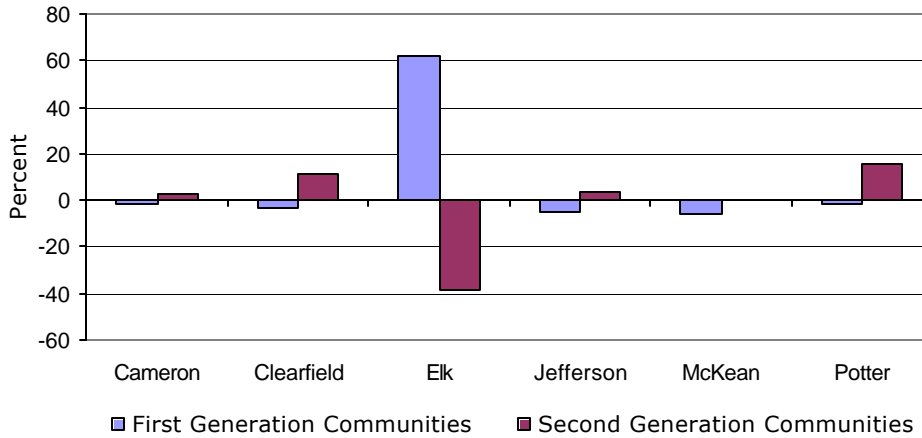
### *Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

various Smart Growth programs are implemented appropriately between state agencies and municipalities. This entity should serve as the professional planning staff to a revived State Planning Board.

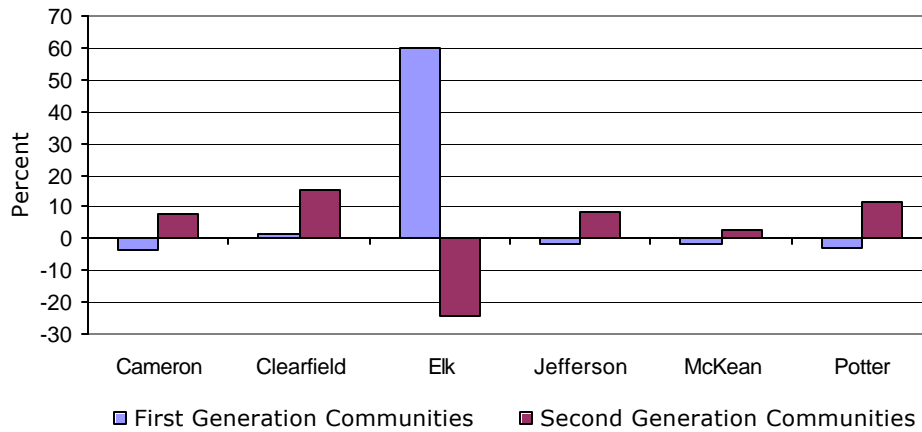


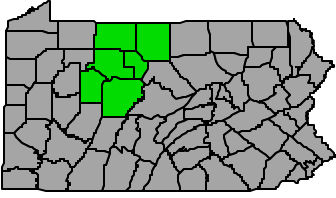
*Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

**FIGURE 1**  
**North Central Region**  
**Population Growth Comparison 1990-2000**  
 Source: U.S. Census, 1990 & 2000



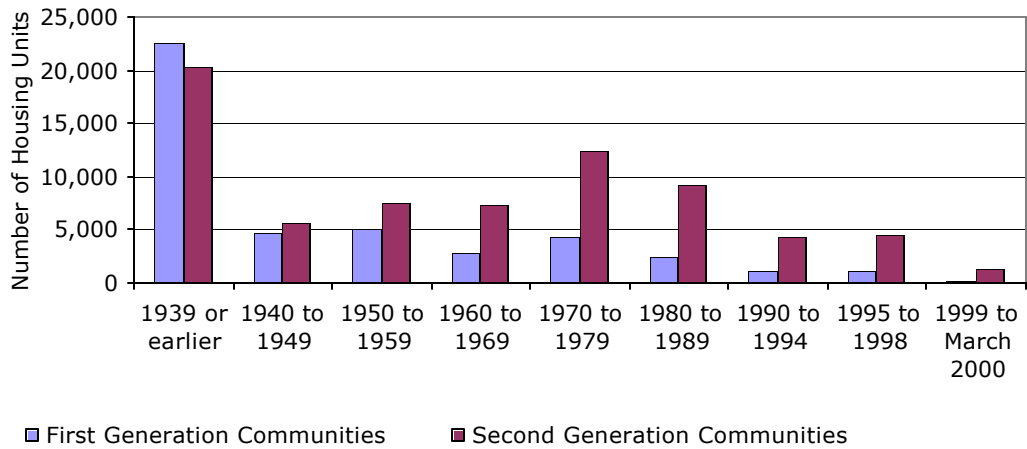
**FIGURE 2**  
**Northcentral Region**  
**Housing Growth Comparison 1990-2000**  
 Source: U.S. Census, 1990 & 2000



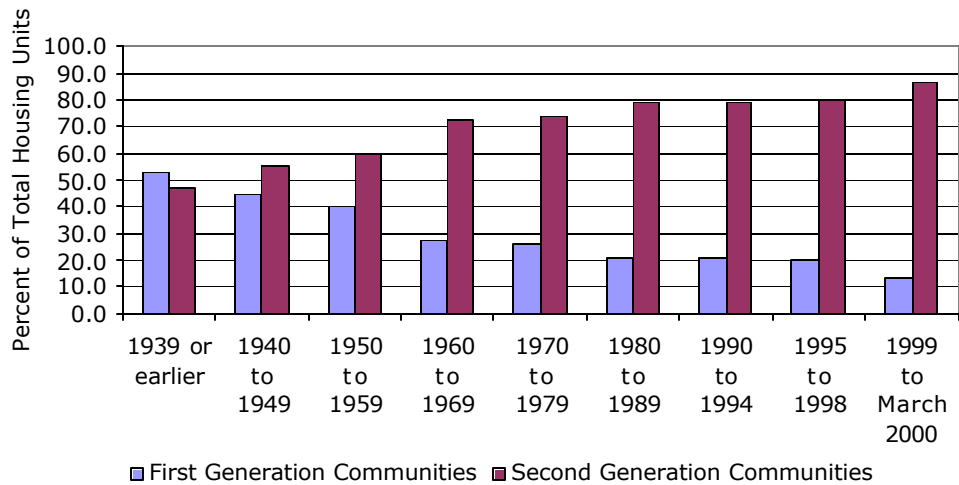


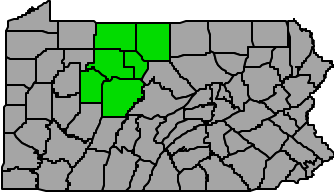
*Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

**FIGURE 3A**  
**North Central Region -- Year Housing Units Built**  
 Source: U.S. Census, 2000



**FIGURE 3B**  
**North Central Region--Distribution of Housing Units by Year Built**  
 Source: U.S. Census, 2000

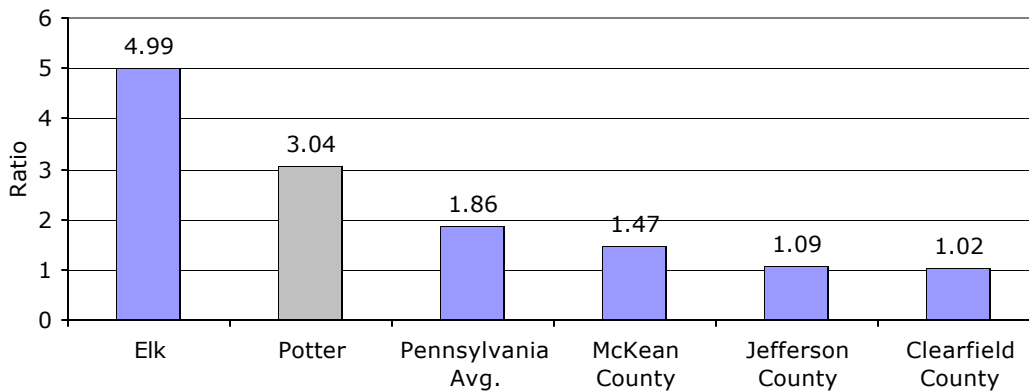




*Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

**Figure 4  
Planning Budget to Population Ratios**

Sources:  
U.S. Census Bureau, 2000  
Governor's Center for Local Government Services



Note: Budget data is based on County FY 2001-02 budgets. Cameron County data was not available during the survey period.

<sup>1</sup> Robert P. Strauss, "Distributional and Economic Effects of Pennsylvania's Local Property Taxes."

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, "2000 Pennsylvania Tourism Industry Highlights Report," Retrieved from <http://media.experiencepa.com/statistics.aspx?site=&stats=econ> on March 1, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Pennsylvania State University, College of Agricultural Sciences, Agricultural Research and Cooperative Extension. "Land Use Planning in Pennsylvania: Municipal Planning Commissions." Retrieved from <http://cax.aers.psu.edu/planning/county.asp>, March 1, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Pennsylvania State University, College of Agricultural Sciences, Agricultural Research and Cooperative Extension. "Land Use Planning in Pennsylvania: Barriers to Effective Planning in Pennsylvania." The Pennsylvania State University, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth M. Johnson and Calvin L. Beale, "Nonmetro Recreation Counties: Their Identification and Rapid Growth," *Rural America*, Vol. 17 Issue 4/Winter 2002.