

## *Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

The Northeast Region includes the counties of Carbon, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Pike, Schuylkill, and Wayne. The Region's northern and eastern borders are shared with the states of New York and New Jersey. Geographically, the region covers 4,476.1 square miles and, as its name implies, is situated in the northeastern portion of the state, among the Pocono Mountains. The Region is dominated by several major rivers – the Susquehanna, Lehigh, Delaware, and Schuylkill – and dotted by many lakes. The Harvey Lake in Schuylkill County is the largest lake in the state. The region contains a mixture of sections of relatively flat areas and sections of peaks and valleys. The topography has influenced land uses.

The Northeast Region is also a mixture of rural and urban areas and has experienced dichotomous levels of population growth. Lackawanna, Luzerne and Schuylkill counties have been experiencing population losses since the 1930s. On the other hand Monroe, Pike and Wayne counties have seen their populations swell since the 1970s. Carbon County had its heyday in 1930, dipped in 1970 and has since been steadily increasing.

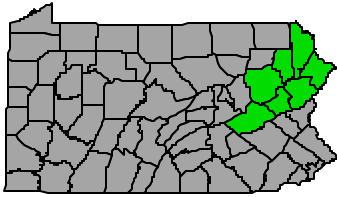
Pike County's population growth has been exceptional. According to the Pike County Comprehensive Plan, "...for the past three and a half decades, Pike has been the most rapidly developing county in Pennsylvania and is among the most rapidly developing counties nationally. U.S. Census Bureau population figures for 1990 - 2000 placed Pike County first in the Commonwealth in

population percentage increase for the decade at 65.6 percent. Using U.S. Census Bureau population estimates starting with Census Day, April 1, 2000, as a base and carrying forward to July 1, 2004, Pike County again had the highest population percentage increase in the Commonwealth at 16.4%. Pike was the single Pennsylvania entry (85th) on the National List of "Fastest Growing Counties in 2003 and was ranked 81st on this list in 2002."

Much of Lackawanna and Luzerne's growth or lack thereof, and to a lesser extent Schuylkill's, is tied to the cities and boroughs of the metropolitan statistical area known as Scranton-Wilkes-Barre-Hazleton. In 1970, three-and-a-half times more people lived in cities, boroughs & first class townships than in second-class townships. These three counties saw a 19 percent decline in their population between 1970 and 2000. The second class townships of these three counties experienced a 35 percent increase in population, but three-and-a-half times more people lived in the urban areas in the 1970s than the more rural areas of the second class townships, resulting in an overall 6 to 9 percent decline in the population of these counties.

### **Key Land Use Trends**

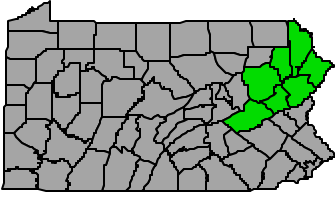
Key land use trends for the Northeast Region were identified by the region's county planning directors through their respective county land use profiles and during a focus group discussion held at the Monroe County Planning Commission office on March 26, 2004 in Stroudsburg,



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PA. The group identified several significant trends for their Region as delineated below.

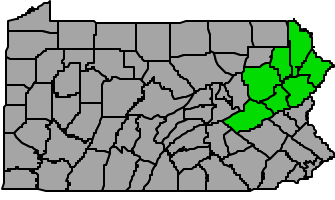
- ☑ **The Northeast region's population growth is diverse.** From 1990 to 2000, the Northeast Region's population growth rate of 5.9 percent was overshadowed by the growth rates experienced in Monroe (44.9 percent) and Pike (65.6 percent) counties (Figure 1). During this period, the region's gross population gain was 71,048 compared to the combined gross population gain of 61,314 for Monroe and Pike counties.
- ☑ **The Northeast Region's tremendous growth is placing greater demands on local public infrastructure and government services.** From 1990 to 2000, the number of housing units in the Northeast Region increased by nearly 8 percent as compared to the state's increase of 6.3 percent (Figure 2). Such growth has placed greater demands on local roads, and the limited and fragmented public water and sewer systems. The proliferation of the region's housing growth has also increased both the use of on-lot disposal systems and the impact on water supplies. Moreover, the region's population increase has also increased the demands for public services, such as schools and police and emergency services.
- ☑ **The Northeast Region's strategic location near the New York and Northern New Jersey Metropolitan Statistical Area coupled with its extensive interstate highway network (80, 84 and 476) is a catalyst to the region's growth.** According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Monroe and Pike counties' combined net population gain of 18,933 people is attributable to the immigration of former residents of New York and New Jersey, most notably the five boroughs that comprise New York City.
- ☑ **Escalating residential and commercial development pressures present a serious threat to the Region's high quality natural resources.** Such resources are a primary reason for the Region's growth trends. Of significant concern is the increasing fragmentation of open spaces, deforestation of watershed lands and increasing levels of non-point source pollution, including erosion and sedimentation and stormwater run-off associated with widespread earth disturbance activities and increasing levels of impervious surfaces.
- ☑ **Biggest threat to the region's undeveloped land is the Clean & Green Law.** Clean and Green legislation is having an adverse impact on land use and the economy. The Clean and Green Act (Act 319), signed into law in December 1974 was intended to protect farmers "from being forced to go out of agriculture or sell part of their land, in order to pay unusually high taxes... the landowner as well as his neighbor's benefit by having the land kept in agricultural use rather than developed."<sup>1</sup> The act has resulted in



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several adverse impacts that have been experienced throughout the Region. The prime concern is the disparity that results from tax shifting between participating real property owners with lower property tax burdens and non-participating real property owners that are subjected to a higher millage rate to make up for the loss in tax revenues. As equally important is the concern that the Clean and Green Program benefits many landowners who are not the benefactors intended by the act. For example, new homeowners from metropolitan areas outside the region are purchasing enough acreage to qualify for Clean and Green and constructing large homes. This is causing a form of large lot sprawl throughout many communities in the region. Additionally, new residents expect municipal services comparable to suburban areas; however, sufficient tax base is not always available to pay for the anticipated services. Finally, the Clean and Green Act is parcelizing or fragmenting the region's forestlands.

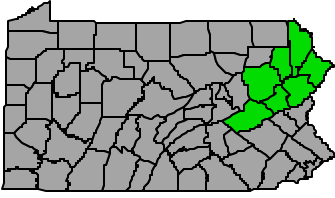
- ☑ **The region's land use controls are insufficient and ineffective.** Most of the region's land uses are regulated through municipal zoning ordinances, but many of these ordinances are outdated and are not based on current municipal comprehensive plans. Moreover, their regulatory provisions are insufficient and ineffective in directing and managing growth, and protecting natural resources.
- ☑ **Standardized statewide land use mapping is essential to accurately portray land use trends.** The State's spatial data inventory and mapping initiative, PAMAP, is necessary and should consider a standardized land use classification system to accurately identify specific land use patterns and trends on a statewide basis.
- ☑ **Historically, the Region's municipalities have preferred to operate autonomously, but increasing growth pressures are pushing the municipalities to cooperate.** Currently, one or more multi-municipal plans exist in each of the Region's seven counties. Approximately, seventeen multi-municipal comprehensive plans currently exist.
- ☑ **The State's transportation planning process creates a fragmented system which impacts transportation and land use region wide.** The region's 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 prioritization of PennDOT's transportation projects has become problematic in the region in that it tends to focus on larger projects and is often driven by politics. Therefore, smaller projects with localized, but nonetheless important impacts, are delayed due to these decisions. This creates a system of local competition for funds with several opposing advocate groups – often from



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the same municipality - vying for funds. With the demand for transportation funding so great, the region cannot even begin to consider the use of alternate modes of transportation.

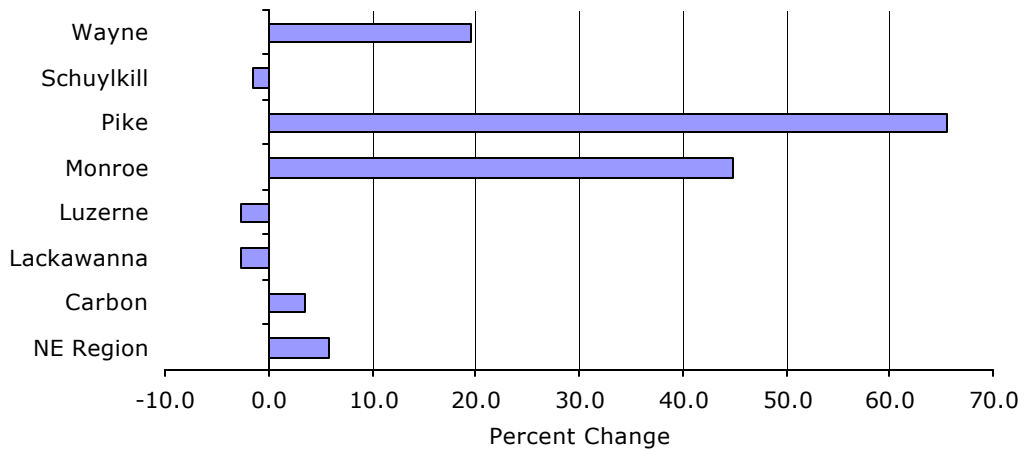
- ☑ **Many of the region's newer housing developments are not affordable for first-time homebuyers and lower income households.** Like many regions throughout the State, the Northeast Region has a lack of housing opportunities that meet the fiscal needs of first-time homebuyers and lower income households.



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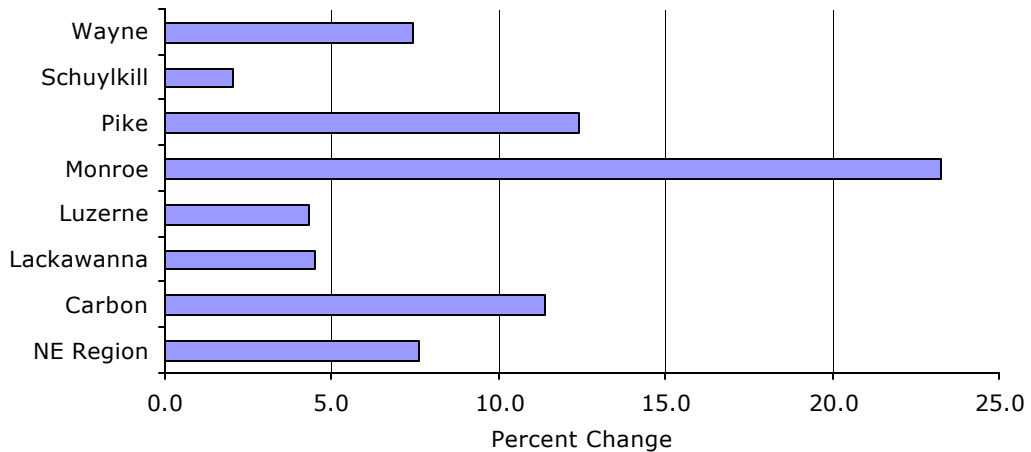
**Figure 1**  
**Northeast Region**  
**Population Growth Comparison, 1990 - 2000**

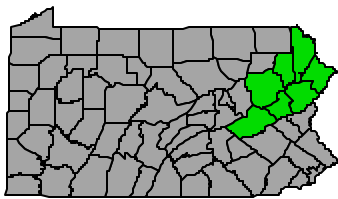
Source: U.S. Census, 1990 & 2000



**Figure 2**  
**Northeast Region**  
**Housing Growth Comparison, 1990 - 2000**

Source: U.S. Census, 1990 & 2000





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<sup>1</sup> General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Joint State Government Commission, "Clean and Green, Staff Analysis of the Pennsylvania Farmland and Forest Land Assessment Act of 1974." April 1997.