

CHAPTER 4 — POPULATION

This chapter examines dynamic features of Cowley’s resident population. The chapter also recommends a population projection or prediction of future population growth for Cowley.

HISTORIC AND REGIONAL TRENDS

Cowley was incorporated in 1907. In the next decade, the town population reached its peak at around 800 and then steadily declined. The town’s lowest population level was 366 in 1970. Cowley's population has been growing steadily ever since but has still not yet reached its previous high.

From 2000 to 2005, Cowley was the fastest growing community in Big Horn County on a percentage basis. (See Table 2.) Cowley is growing more consistently than any of the other communities—many of the communities that added residents in the 1990s lost population since 2000.

TABLE 2. RECENT POPULATION CHANGE IN BIG HORN COUNTY AND ITS TOWNS						
	1990 CENSUS	2000 CENSUS	2005 Estimate	1990-2000 % Change	1990-2005 % Change	2000-2005 % Change
Big Horn County*	10,525	11,461	11,333	9%	8%	-1%
Basin	1,180	1,238	1,224	5%	4%	-1%
Burlington	184	250	248	36%	35%	-1%
Byron	470	557	548	19%	17%	-2%
Cowley	500	560	582	12%	16%	4%
Deaver	199	177	177	-11%	-11%	0%
Frannie (part)	142	180	182	27%	28%	1%
Greybull	1,789	1,815	1,752	2%	-2%	-4%
Lovell	2,131	2,361	2,277	11%	7%	-4%
Manderson	83	104	101	25%	22%	-3%

(*Big Horn County figures include all towns and the unincorporated area of the county)

AGE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POPULATION

The median age of Cowley residents was 33.8 years in the 2000 Census. This is somewhat younger than the medians for Big Horn County (38.7), for Wyoming (36.2) and for the nation (35.3). To better understand the dynamics of Cowley’s population, it is necessary to examine the age-related structure of the population.

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Age distribution is a representation of the proportions of the town's population that belong to different age groups. Comparing Cowley's age distribution in 1990 and 2000 gives a sense of how the town's age distribution is changing. (See Chart

1.) The following age groups decreased in relative size from 1990 to 2000: Under 10 years old, 20 to 19 years old, 30 to 39 years old, and 80 years old and older. Other age groups increased in relative size, especially the 40 to 49 year olds.

The decrease in many of the younger age groups tends to indicate that Cowley's population is getting older on average. Indeed, the 1990 median age of the town was about 29 years and that had risen to 33.8 in 2000.

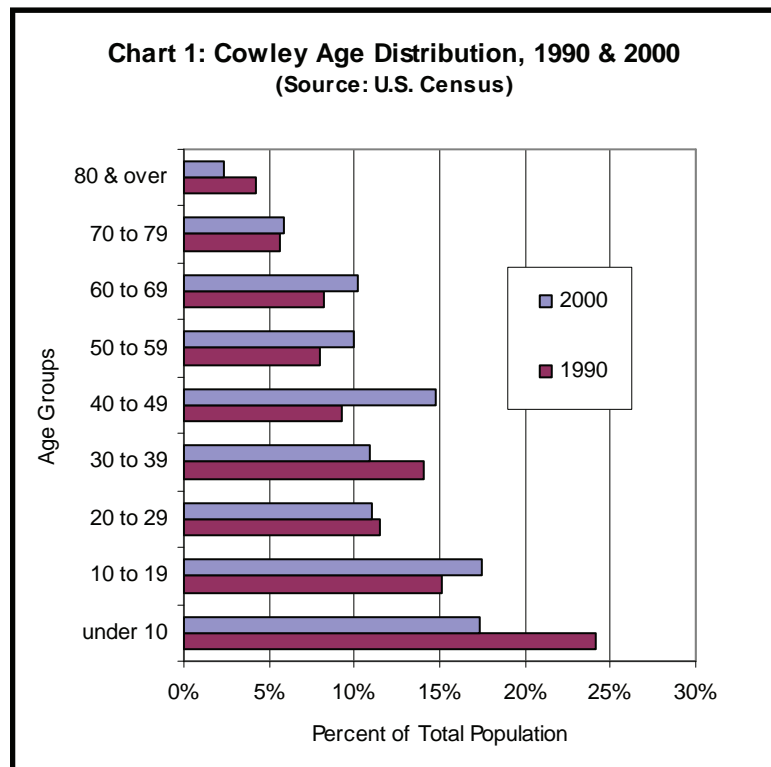
The State of Wyoming publishes predictions on the future age characteristics for counties. The county level is the smallest unit of analysis

for available projections of future age distributions. The trend predictions for Big Horn County may be relevant to Cowley and include the following features:

- ▶ Future changes to the population show the ripple effect of the aging of the baby boom generation; and
- ▶ In general, the population will tend to be older overall than it is now.

The state estimates that Big Horn County, including Cowley, will see the 60 and over age groups increase the most by the year 2020. Among younger age groups, most will decrease in numbers. However, the 30 to 39 age group will increase slightly, according to the state's analysis.

Cowley may not be typical of Big Horn County, especially when one considers that the town's growth rate exceeds that of the county and the median age is lower in Cowley than in the county. Cowley will probably not adhere to the age distribution predictions for the county. However, Cowley will likely see growth in the older groups and decreases or small increases in younger age groups.



HOUSEHOLDS

A household is defined as the people living in a single housing unit and does not include people in group housing, such as retirement homes and college dormitories. Changes in household characteristics will tend to drive changes in housing needs. For that reason, household characteristics are important to land use planning.

Most communities throughout Wyoming and adjoining states are experiencing major changes in household demographics which coincide to change the nature of their future populations. These trends include fewer households with children, smaller household sizes (fewer people living in each housing unit), and more single-person households (one person living alone).

Most but not all these trends are evident in Cowley. During the 1990's Cowley's average household size decreased from 3.1 persons per household to 2.8. Meanwhile, the state average household size decreased from 2.69 to 2.55. While Cowley's average household size is larger than the state's, Cowley's dropped by a greater amount in the 1990s. In Cowley, the percentage of households with children dropped by less than three percent while statewide the decrease was seven percent. In Cowley, single-person households held steady at 19 percent of all households in 1990 and in 2000. Statewide, the figure is increasing and stood at about 26 percent in 2000.

It may be that Cowley did not more closely follow the statewide trends because virtually all the town's housing is single-family housing. The town's housing units are conducive to families and may attract them. The absence of apartments, townhouses, and senior housing complexes may make it harder for smaller-sized households to move to or stay in town.

The changing nature of Cowley's population should be a consideration in planning for public services and housing. Public services may need to be adapted to an increasing older population. Housing opportunities will need to cater increasingly to the needs and preferences of an older population with relatively fewer children.

FUTURE POPULATION PROJECTIONS

It is important in town planning to understand whether the population will increase or decrease in the future and by how much. Several different methods are available for predicting future population growth. These predictions, called population projections, will differ in the amount of growth they predict for Cowley. In deciding which projection to use for this plan, the following considerations are noted:

- ▶ The town will continue growing--it has for the past 35 years and especially lately as the town continues to grow while all other Big Horn County communities are static or losing population.

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- ▶ Population growth will be similar to past growth since the basic dynamics of employment, housing demand, and the town's ability to support growth have not changed radically in recent years.
- ▶ The relocation of Rocky Mountain High School and Middle School to Cowley will bring many new jobs to town which will lead to population growth.
- ▶ Retirees, particularly those with family ties in Cowley, will choose to settle in town in greater numbers than in the past.

Finally, the risks or problems associated with under- or over-estimating the growth rate should be considered. In terms of land use planning, underestimating the growth rate can lead to the plan quickly becoming obsolete because the plan failed to identify enough land for expansion. This can lead to a restricted land market and pressure to deviate from the plan. Over-estimating

growth can be dangerous when financial plans for infrastructure expansions are based on revenues from new development that does not materialize. In all cases, the town should monitor growth rates in the future and make adjustments to plans if growth occurs at much different rates than anticipated.

After considering these factors, the most realistic population projection for Cowley was selected. It is depicted graphically in Chart 2 and numerically in Table 3.

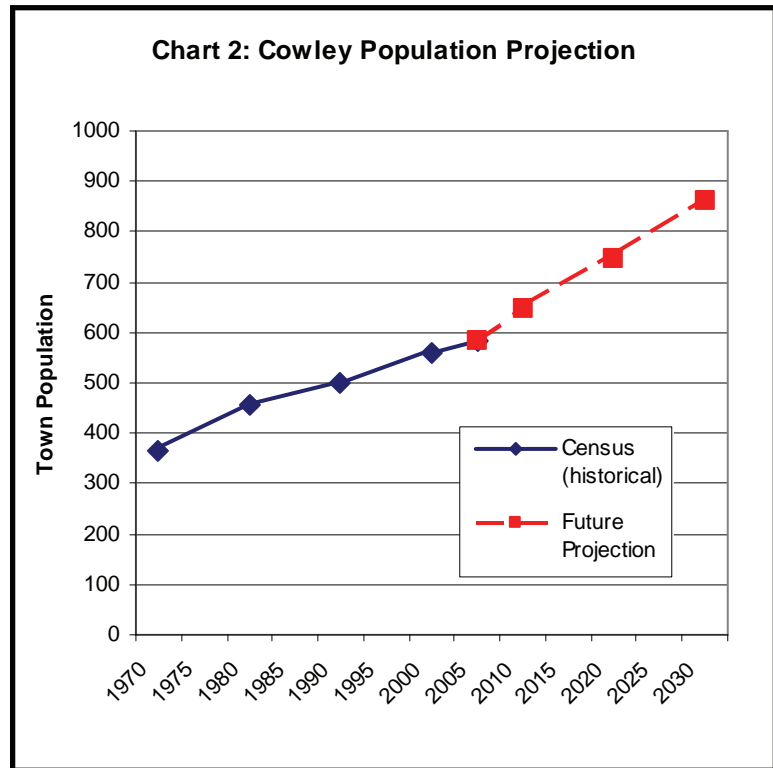


TABLE 3: COWLEY POPULATION PROJECTION

Year	Population
2005	582
2010	646
2020	746
2030	861