

Report warns of state growth to 101 million

[FINAL Edition]

Tampa Tribune - Tampa, Fla.

Author: PETER E. HOWARD

Date: Apr 2, 1999

Start Page: 1

Section: NATION/WORLD

Text Word Count: 1087

Document Text

Copyright Tampa Tribune Company Apr 2, 1999

TAMPA - Florida's population could swell to more than 101 million under densities allowed in land use maps.

With Florida's population topping 15 million, the question remains: How high can we go?

Try 101 million plus.

That's how many people could cram into the Sunshine State, according to an analysis of future land use plans developed for the state's 470 cities and counties. It amounts to stuffing the populations of California, Texas, New York and Pennsylvania into Florida's borders.

Adding that staggering number of residents would turn this tourist mecca into a mass of sprawling development with choking air pollution devoid of farmland.

Water needed to ripen strawberry fields and citrus farms would be diverted to drinking water. Local governments would teeter on the brink of fiscal ruin trying to pay for needed services. Ribbons of new roadway would snake through miles and miles of once-virgin forest and scrubland, environmentalists say.

"Florida would look like the most blighted parts of Los Angeles spread across the entire state," said Frank Jackalone of the Florida Office of the Sierra Club.

"That many people would eliminate most of the wooded areas in the state and would pollute our

rivers, lakes and coastal areas to the point where our wildlife would be in total jeopardy," he said.

Possible? Yes.

Probable? Not really. At least not in our lifetime. Current projections peg the state's population at 20.4 million in 2020.

But a few years ago, a team of planners coordinated through the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council analyzed the future land use maps of cities and counties statewide.

Universally, the maps show a kaleidoscope of colors that designate land for housing, farming, industrial and commercial development. The maps also show how many housing units would be allowed on a particular piece of property.

Using a mathematical formula involving acreage, housing units and people per household, the planners calculated how many people would be allowed to live in the state according to zoning in the land use maps.

The low estimate was 30.5 million people.

Using the highest density allowed brings the total to 101.1 million.

To be as accurate as possible, the planners readjusted the numbers to account for the amount of land that would be used for roads, drainage and other services. But even then, more than 91 million people could be shoehorned into the state.

"We did this as a test of destruction to say, 'Look, this is what we're planning for,'" said Wayne E. Daltry, executive director of the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council in Fort Myers.

"The intent was to help the state land planning effort," he said. "If we're going to make this work, we have to do a better job. "

While the study conducted by Daltry's group may be viewed as merely an academic exercise, conservationists and environmentalists say it points to the soft approach communities take toward planning and growth.

Serious and swift changes are needed in how the state prepares for its future, they say. Future plans were approved without regard to availability of drinking water and the cost of providing municipal services.

"The dilemma is that the state of Florida accepted those numbers and they are in place," said Charles G. Pattison, executive director of 1000 Friends of Florida, a nonprofit organization that monitors statewide growth.

"My sense is that these plans are getting better over time," Pattison said. "The question is whether

we have enough time to make them effective before we do have substantial problems."

Last year the Sierra Club issued a report that ranked the worst American cities blighted by urban sprawl. Seven Florida cities were cited in the report, including Tampa, which ranked 14th among the largest cities. Orlando, Fort Lauderdale and Daytona Beach also made the list.

Growth planning has evolved into the lexicon of the national political scene, as well. In January Vice President Al Gore announced a series of initiatives to protect open space and wildlife habitat and make communities more "livable."

The Democratic administration proposes spending at least \$1 billion next year to combat urban sprawl and pollution.

While it is left up to Florida's local governments to decide how they want to grow, Sarasota and Martin counties receive high marks for having strong development boundaries.

Collier County is receiving attention now because the county is attempting to reduce the densities allowed in agricultural land, a move that concerns some property owners.

Tom Beck of the state Department of Community Affairs said much of the density included in land-use plans was grandfathered in through old subdivisions put on the books decades ago. Beck and Pattison said it's difficult for communities to change the densities because of property rights issues.

But Beck said his agency, which monitors and approves local growth plans, hopes that as communities learn more about how they want their comprehensive growth plans to work, many will "down plan" to get their land-use maps "more in line with population projections."

Hillsborough County has been criticized for having too large an area designated for urban growth. To some, Hillsborough's potential population surge determined by Daltry's planners - 6.5 million people - is frightful.

"Picture the county being six times bigger," said Jim Hosler of the Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission.

"That's six times the traffic. Six times the congestion. Six times the number of kids in school," Hosler said. "It would be time to move someplace else. Time to go to Guatemala."

(Chart) (C) Growing pains

Hot spots

The crush of rising population will be felt most along Florida's east coast and in the Tampa-Orlando-Naples triangle.

Population: now and projected

If it is to protect remaining unspoiled areas, Florida must deal with unchecked growth. Land use plans filed by cities and counties allow for 101.1 million residents, almost seven times the current population.

State

Current: 15 million

Projected by 2010: 17.9 million

Projected by 2020: 20.4 million

High density allowed: 101.1 million

Hillsborough County

Current: 942,322

Projected by 2010: 1 million

Projected by 2020: 1.2 million

High density allowed: 6.5 million

Pinellas County

Current: 892,178.

Projected by 2010: 955,200

Projected by 2020: 1 million

High density allowed: 2.7 million

Pasco County

Current: 321,074

Projected by 2010: 381,000

Projected by 2020: 431,300

High density allowed: 4.3 million

Polk County

Current: 465,858

Projected by 2010: 543,400

Projected by 2020: 608,400

High density allowed: 3.9 million

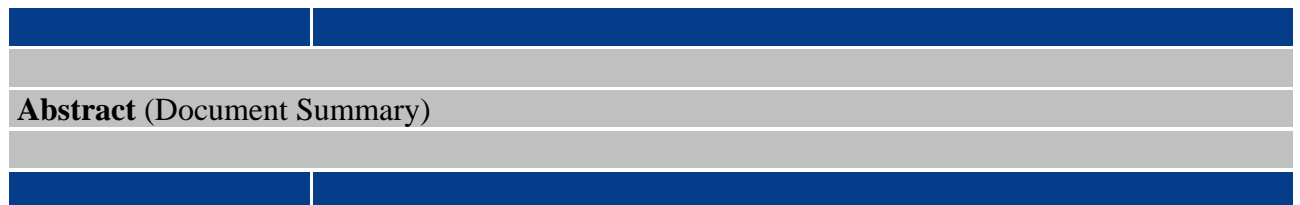
Source: University of Florida, Bureau of Economic and Business Research

[Illustration]

MAP (C) CHART (C); Caption: (Map) (C) Population: now and projected Essex James/Tribune graphic

Credit: of The Tampa Tribune

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.



TAMPA - Florida's population could swell to more than 101 million under densities allowed in land use maps.

That's how many people could cram into the Sunshine State, according to an analysis of future land use plans developed for the state's 470 cities and counties. It amounts to stuffing the populations of California, Texas, New York and Pennsylvania into Florida's borders.

But a few years ago, a team of planners coordinated through the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council analyzed the future land use maps of cities and counties statewide.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.