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Southwest Florida's increasingly busy roads and countless new developments don't lie: This region is growing, and it's growing fast.

Nearly 23,000 people moved to Collier and Lee counties between 2017 and 2018 — 6,711 to Collier and 16,221 to Lee — with the majority of those people coming to Southwest Florida from somewhere else in the country, new U.S. Census Bureau population estimates show.

In that one-year period, 15,950 people migrated to Collier and Lee counties domestically, meaning they came from somewhere else in the country, according to the census data. Another 6,982 moved to Collier and Lee from another country.

The influx of people from elsewhere easily offset a slight natural decrease in the population; there were more deaths than births between 2017 and 2018 in both Collier and Lee counties.

Subtracting those deaths from the number of new residents, Collier's and Lee's combined population grew by 21,247 in that one-year period, according to the estimates released last week.

"Not surprising," Naples Mayor Bill Barnett said. "People just love Southwest Florida. Period."

And the data show they've been loving the region for a long time now. Since 2010, Collier's population has grown by 55,893 people to 378,488. In that time, Lee County added 134,156 people to grow its population to 754,610, according to the estimate.

The Cape Coral-Fort Myers metro area's 22% growth since 2010 was seventh highest in the country in that period, the Census Bureau reported.

The Villages, a retirement community in Sumter County northwest of Orlando, was the top metro area in the country with 37.8% growth since 2010.

Lee County Commissioner Frank Mann said the region's dramatic growth is a good thing from an economic perspective, but a challenge from an environmental perspective. Still, he said, local governments have done a good job "keeping up with this enormous pressure."

"The proof is in the fact that people keep coming," Mann said. "We have not killed the goose that lays the golden egg, but I'd say that goose is in peril in the not so distant future because I don't know how we can keep this up without threat to our overall environment and quality of life."

Statewide, Florida's population grew by 322,513 between 2017 and 2018, for a total population of about 21.3 million. There were slightly more births than deaths, and more people moved here from abroad (175,670) than domestically (132,602). Most of the international immigrants moved to three counties: Miami-Dade, Broward and Orange.

Only seven Florida counties saw population decreases between 2017 and 2018, led by Monroe County, which lost 1,609 people since 2017, the year it was hammered by Hurricane Irma.

Nationwide, the counties with the largest numeric growth were all located in the South and the West.

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Census Bureau: Fla. top U.S. state for in-migration

WASHINGTON – April 29, 2019 – Movers to and from the U.S. South make up the largest domestic migration flows at the regional level – and notably large flows at the state and county levels are in the South or in the West.

Some of the largest state- and county-level flows are to or from Florida, California or Arizona.

State-to-state migration flows

The 2017 American Community Survey (ACS) state-to-state migration flows table provides estimates of the number of people in the United States moving between geographies within the past year. These geographies include the 50 states, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and abroad.

Moving to Florida

Florida had the most domestic in-movers, with 566,476 people moving from another state within the past year. The states with the next highest in-migration flows are Texas with 524,511 and California with 523,131.

New York lost the most residents to Florida, with 63,722 ex-New Yorkers become new Floridians. The second-highest contributor was Georgia with 38,800 in-movers.

Moving out of California

California had the most domestic out-movers, with 661,026 people leaving the state within the past year. The states with the next highest outmigration flows are Texas with 467,338 out-movers, New York with 452,580, and Florida with 447,586.

Among the five states that received the most out-movers from California, several are adjacent to California or nearby: Texas (63,174 out-movers), Arizona (59,233), Washington (52,484), Oregon (50,109) and Nevada (47,513).

Net migration, flows and mover rates by region

In 2018, 10.1 percent of people (about 32.4 million) in the United States moved.

Net migration

The South continued a pattern of net population gains from domestic migration and has done so most years since 1981.

In 2018, about 1.2 million people moved to the South from another region, while only about 714,000 moved from the South to another region, resulting in a net gain of about 512,000 people. If movers from abroad are included, the net gain from migration to the South is about 959,000 people.

Flows

There are 12 region-to-region migration flows and the five largest in 2018 were either to the South or out of the South. The South drew about 412,000 people from the Northeast, 356,000 from the Midwest and 459,000 from the West. The region lost about 317,000 to the West and 276,000 to the Midwest.

The remaining seven region-to-region flows range from about 54,000 to 162,000 people.

Mover rates

The Northeast had the lowest overall mover rate in 2018, at 7.7 percent. The other three regions do not differ statistically from one another, at 10.4 percent for the Midwest, 10.8 percent for the South, and 10.7 percent for the West.

Compared to the 2018 overall national mover rate of 10.1 percent, the Northeast mover rate is lower, the South and West mover rates are both higher, and the Midwest mover rate does not differ statistically.

The data was announced by Kristin Kerns and L. Slogan Locklear, statisticians in the Census Bureau's Journey-to-Work and Migration Statistics Branch.

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