

Stone, Pearl River counties hot for housing growth

Associated Press

Published: September 12, 2007 12:18 pm

JACKSON, Miss. — Stone and Pearl River counties in south Mississippi are among national leaders for growth in the number of housing units between 2005-2006, according to a new U.S. Census Bureau report.

While significant housing gains also occurred in George County, the bureau reported, losses in the three counties along the coast far outweighed those gains. Overall, the six South Mississippi counties lost more than 9,000 households, but experts say the losses are likely temporary.

"I expect in the next few years we will be moving back toward normalcy," said Barbara Logue of the Center for Policy Research and Planning at the state College Board.

Logue push and pull factors drive the movement of people.

"Hurricane Katrina was a push factor," she said. "People didn't have a choice and had to leave the area to survive."

She said that as the Mississippi Gulf Coast continues to rebuild there will be more pull factors.

"The biggest ... is job opportunities," she said. "As those appear, more people will be pulled back into the area."

Logue said the pull factors are already starting to have an effect, though they may not be apparent on the census data that is current for July 1, 2006.

The housing-estimates data corresponds closely with the population estimates released earlier this year by the Census Bureau.

Pearl River ranked No. 7 on the Census Bureau's list of the 100 fastest growing counties in terms of housing. The county's housing units grew 9 percent from 2005 to 2006. Pearl River County is home to 24,539 households, up 2,018 from 2005. In the five years previous, the county gained an average of 360 units per year.

Stone County ranked No. 58 on the list with a one-year growth of 5.2 percent, up 293 units to 5,895. The previous five years' gains averaged around 50 units per year.

DeSoto County was the only other Mississippi county to make the list — at 57th, showing a 5.2 percent increase.

However, in DeSoto County and its cities, building permits could be headed for one of the lowest years since 1994. Home builders had pulled 1,430 permits by Aug. 31, down 27 percent from the same period of 2006.

DeSoto planning director Jim McDougal said this year will likely turn out to be just a temporary setback in a trend that has led steadily upward since the 1980s.

“You can’t deny the numbers, but we’re not seeing near the drop-off here that other parts of the country are seeing,” McDougal said. “This shows we’re definitely among the top-growing counties in the country.”

Even with the slowdown, DeSoto is on pace to add nearly 2,000 single-family homes this year.

“The overall curve is still up,” McDougal said.