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With just less than nine months until the start of the 2010 Census on April 1, population estimates released by the Census Bureau show downward trends in rural population.

In fact, of the 13 incorporated cities and villages in the five-county area surrounding Chase County, only four—Palisade, Hayes Center, Elsie and Madrid—showed declines less than 10 percent since the 2000 Census.

In the region, Benkelman showed the largest percentage loss from 2000-2008. The 2000 Census showed their population at 1,006. The 2008 estimates place population at 859, a loss of 147 people or 14.61 percent of their 2000 population.

In terms of the largest number of people lost, Imperial's population declined by 220 people from 2000 to 2008. Percentage-wise, that represents a loss of 11.1 percent.

In the 2000 Census, Imperial was the largest of the 13 towns in the five-county area with 1,982 people. The five counties include Chase, Perkins, Hayes, Dundy and Hitchcock.

Wauneta, Chase County's only other incorporated village for Census purposes, showed a 12.64 percent decline over the eight-year period. Estimated population in 2008 stood at 546 compared to 625 in 2000.

Declines smaller  
in four villages

The villages of Palisade, Hayes Center, Elsie and Madrid kept their declines to under 10 percent.

Palisade showed the smallest decline of 6.74 percent with population dropping from 386 in 2000 to 360 in 2008.

Hayes Center's population declined 7.92 percent from 240 in 2000 to 221 in 2008.

Elsie's numbers fell 7.91 percent from 139 to 128 while Madrid's population fell 8.68 percent from 265 to 242.

The county seats of the five counties all lost population including Benkelman at 14.61 percent, Trenton at 10.06 percent, Grant at 11.59 percent, Imperial at 11.10 percent and Hayes Center at 7.92 percent.

County figures warned of decline

Population estimates for 2008 in Nebraska's counties first appeared in March, 2009. Those figures then warned of the declines cities and villages were likely to see in their 2008 estimates.

Of the five counties, only Hayes and Hitchcock showed one-year growth from 2007-2008.

However, all five counties showed a loss in population during the 2000-2008 period.

The regional cities of Ogallala and McCook showed a loss in population during the eight-year period while North Platte showed a slight increase.

Ogallala lost 10.16 percent of its population, from 4,930 to 4,429. McCook gave up 6.98 percent of its size, from 7,994 to 7,436.

North Platte showed actual growth of just under 1 percent, with population of 23,878 in 2000 and 24,107 in 2008.

A breakdown of the populations totals for 2000 and 2008 estimates for the 13 area communities accompanies this story.

**Five-County 2008 Estimated Population**

	2000	2008	No.	%-age
Town	Pop.	Pop.	Lost	Decline
Imperial	1,982	1,762	-220	-11.10
Wauneta	625	546	-79	-12.64
Benkelman	1,006	859	-147	-14.61
Haigler	211	186	-25	-11.85
Grant	1225	1083	-142	-11.59
Elsie	139	128	-11	-7.91
Madrid	265	242	-23	-8.68
Venango	175	152	-23	-13.14
Palisade	386	360	-26	-6.74
Stratton	396	356	-40	-10.10
Trenton	507	456	-51	-10.06
Culbertson	594	530	-64	-10.77
Hayes Center	240	221	-19	-7.92