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NEWS LOCAL

Report relates district population growth to forestry sector cycles

Miner and News

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Julien Bonin

A new Northern Policy Institute report entitled Diversify, Innovate, Invest...and Grow identifies the Kenora district among five of the 11 Northern Ontario census districts to experience population growth from 2001 to 2013.

The report’s author Julien Bonin attributes the decline in population in the six districts to a lack of economic diversification and reliance on primary employment sectors including forestry, mining and telecommunications.

“Northern Ontario’s population fluctuations (between 2001-2013) can largely be associated with the boom and busts of the primary industry sectors such as forestry and mining,” Bonin

stated. "With reliance on these sectors significantly reduced, future trends are harder to predict. (However,) it is clear that economic opportunity and population remain closely connected."

The drastic decline in the forestry sector during this time period is attributed to a heavy reliance on the United States as the single largest export trade partner of raw forest products.

"When the US housing market crashed and the soft wood lumber tariff closely ensued, the forestry industry in Northern Ontario was hard-pressed to remain viable," he said.

However, Bonin also notes that growth occurred in more diversified economies where there were early efforts at innovation in primary industries, investment in major infrastructure, and higher birth rates among Aboriginal populations.


According to the report, the districts that experienced the largest growth are Kenora and Manitoulin at 5.2 percent and 6.5 percent respectively.

"Kenora is an exception, being that its primary industry is forestry while still managing to experience a population growth during this period." Bonin said.

The increase in these two districts is attributed to the high birthrates and overall growth in the Aboriginal population.

The report concludes that fluctuations in Northern Ontario's population are directly related to the boom and busts of the primary industry sectors such as forestry and mining. As reliance on these sectors are significantly reduced, future trends are harder to predict although it is clear that economic opportunity and population remain closely connected.

To read the full report and view the video podcast, visit www.northernpolicy.ca.

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