

## NEWS LOCAL

## North shrinking, but Nipissing growing

By PJ WILSON, The Nugget Thursday, March 26, 2015 5:58:38 EDT PM



Northern Ontario has lost the equivalent of the population of North Bay since its peak population 20 years ago, according to a study released this week by the Northern Policy Institute.

But the study also shows that five of the 11 Northern Ontario districts – including Nipissing and Parry Sound districts – have actually increased.

Diversify, Innovate, Invest and Grow shows that Northern Ontario's population has lost 54,000 people since 1995, when more than 859,000 people called this region their home.

The population for the 11 districts in Northern Ontario was 805,333 in 2013, a decrease of 54,000.

Nipissing, according to the report, grew by more than 1,000 from 2001 to 2013, an increase of 1.2%

"What the report does is it gives us a baseline to compare to in the future," Charles Cirtwell, CEO of the institute, said in a telephone interview Thursday.

"If you are trying to assess growth or the impact of (governmental) policies, you have to have something to compare it to. That's the value behind something like this."

The study drew data from Statistics Canada which showed the population across Northern Ontario overall declined by 2.2% between 2001 and 2013. Five of the 11 districts – Manitoulin, Kenora, Parry Sound, Greater Sudbury and Nipissing – saw population increases during that period.

The other six districts – Thunder Bay, Algoma, Timiskaming, Cochrane, Rainy River and Sudbury – saw decreases ranging from 4.7% to 12.9%.

"You can see that . . . it's not all bad," Cirtwell said. "Six of the districts are in decline, but Northeastern Ontario seems to have weathered the storm somewhat better."

Cirtwell said there is "direct correlation between the fortunes of the resource industries and resource-reliant communities," with upticks in population accompanying investments in infrastructure, such as new hospitals, new highways or other major building projects.

The regions which saw population growth, he said, have a more diversified economy.

"The growth of First Nations communities were driven by that, to a large degree," he said, pointing specifically at Manitoulin, which had population growth of 6.5%, to 13,538 from 12,713 in 2001.

He admitted events that have occurred in the past year are not reflected in the study, but stressed the study is "laying a baseline" for the future.

"It's just one of the pieces of the baseline, to show where the area was in a 12-year period."

Its strength, he said, will be to measure the impact of governmental policies on specific regions.

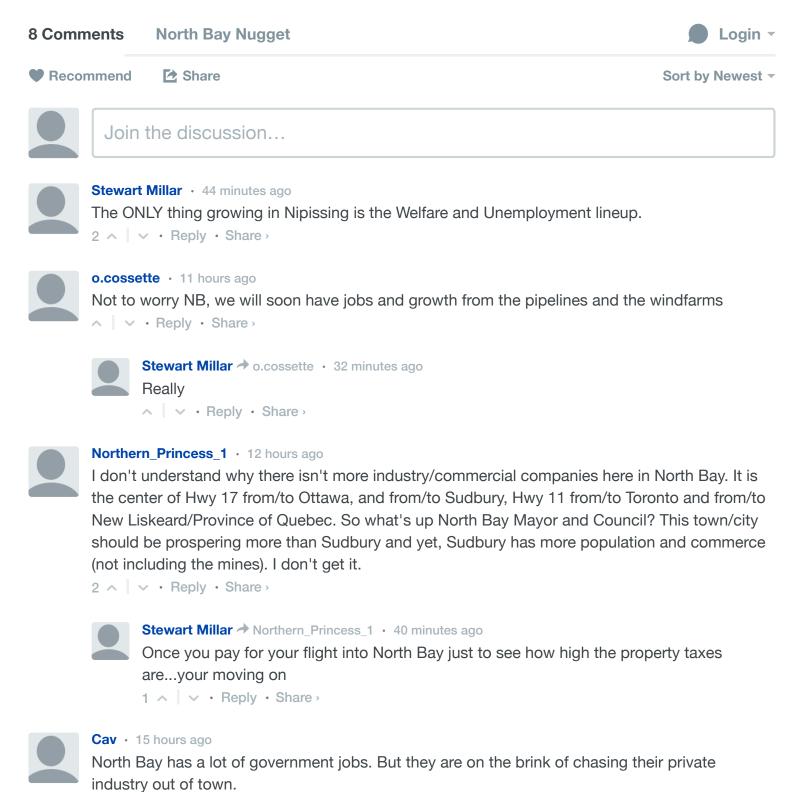
While the study did not look at individual communities, it did note a slower growth rate in Nipissing in the early years following the closing of the Weyerhaeuser mill in Sturgeon Falls in 2002.

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