

GARRETT COUNTY PROFILE

PHYSICAL LOCATION

Garrett County is the western-most county in the State of Maryland and is surrounded on three sides by the states of Pennsylvania and West Virginia as shown on Figure 1. Its neighbor to the east is Allegany County from which Garrett was created in 1872. The county was named for John W. Garrett (1820-1884) who was president of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad from 1858 until his death. Garrett is the second largest of Maryland's 24 counties, containing 666 square miles of territory. As shown on Figure 2, Garrett County is located in the Allegheny Plateau province of the Appalachian Mountains. The county is also situated on the divide between the headwaters of the North Branch of the Potomac River, which flows into the Atlantic Ocean; and the Youghiogheny River which flows into the Ohio River and eventually the Gulf of Mexico as shown on Figure 3. Other major streams in the county include the Casselman River, Bear Creek and Deep Creek in the Youghiogheny Basin, and Savage River in the Potomac Basin as noted on Figure 3.

CLIMATE

Because of its mountainous terrain and relatively high elevation (3360 ft on Backbone Mountain), Garrett County is susceptible to heavy rains and winds during summer thunderstorms and heavy snowfall and blizzard conditions during the late fall and winter months. Precipitation averages between 40 and 48 inches annually as shown on Figure 4, of which a significant portion falls as snow or ice between the months of November and March. As noted on Figure 5, most communities in Garrett County record between 60 and 80 inches of snow per season. Some communities at higher elevations, like Bittinger, at an elevation of 2700 feet, receive more than 100 inches of snow per season. Unlike the remainder of Maryland, Garrett County receives much of its snowfall from air masses generated over the Great Lakes that rise and cool as they cross the Allegheny Plateau. This "Lake Effect" snow can result in 10-12 inches of snow while areas downslope to the east receive little or no snow. By contrast, Allegany County, just to the east, averages 32-36 inches of precipitation and less than 40 inches of snow per season.

Temperatures usually average 5-10 degrees cooler in Garrett County than in the rest of Maryland throughout the year as shown on Figures 6 and 7. In fact, according to the National Weather Service, the coldest temperature recorded in the State was -40 degrees F in January 1912 in Garrett County. In addition, the county has to deal with dense fog conditions during many precipitation events when low hanging clouds hamper visibility. These events occur on average more than 50 times annually as shown on Figure 8. Temperature inversions, which are common in winter, also cause foggy conditions, particularly when warmer air contacts accumulated snow. Occasionally these fog events will last many hours and hamper transportation to a greater degree than snow or ice storms.

A synopsis of weather and climatic data for the Oakland Weather Station is shown on Figure 9. Additional weather information appears in the hazard profiles for winter storms, stream flooding, hurricanes and tornadoes.

GEOLOGY AND SLOPE

As shown on Figure 10, steep slopes along the mountain ridges ensure rapid runoff from rainfall and snowmelt, while the broad limestone valleys in the center of the Plateau contain sizeable wetland areas which create marshy conditions that prevail throughout the year. Flash flooding is a serious problem, particularly down-slope from the major ridge-tops in the Potomac and Youghiogheny River valleys.

The rock units that make up the county's undulating surface contain large deposits of limestone, sandstone and shale as noted on Figure 11. The sandstones also contain bituminous coal, peat and clay that have been mined since the mid-1800's. The broad up-warped valleys also contain natural gas deposits that have been exploited in the past. Normally, the sandstone units form the ridge-tops while the valleys are underlain by softer shale or limestone. Slope failure, particularly in cut or fill areas where shale is overlain by sandstone, is not uncommon. Subsidence in areas underlain by old coal mine diggings is possible in the coal measures.

SOILS

According to the Garrett County Soil Survey, most of the soil associations in Garrett County are related to the rock type of the parent material and the slope of the land. These soils are shown in general fashion on Figure 12. Most of these soils contain steep, stony units that are moderately well drained. Unit 4 soils contain peat deposits and are generally poorly drained. Units 1 and 5 have soils that are generally formed on shales and siltstones that are moderately to steeply sloping, while units 2 and 3 are generally formed on sandstones that are moderately to steeply sloping. Unit 6 soils are formed on sandstone that is usually more resistant to erosion and is steep and stony. Approximately 150,000 acres of land are classified as steep in the county Soil Survey. Another 42,500 acres of land contain soils on colluvial materials at the foot of slopes. These soils have essentially formed on steep slopes and then moved downslope over time. Another group of soils containing more than 11,000 acres are classified as alluvial. These soils have been deposited by streams over time. When disturbed by road construction, surface mining or other land development, soils on steep slopes, colluvial soils, and alluvial soils are more prone to movement than other more stable soil types.

TRANSPORTATION

Throughout its history Garrett County has served as an east-west transportation corridor with I-68 replacing U.S. Rt. 40 as the main highway route through the county in the 1970's. During the same time period the B & O Railroad became part of the CSX transportation system. Today I-68 serves as a major trucking route while CSX serves as both a through rail system and a local rail service to coal mining facilities. Figure 13

shows major transportation routes in Garrett County along with the Garrett County Airport at McHenry that provides local air service. So far as mass transit is concerned, the Garrett County Community Action Agency provides transportation to elderly and handicapped residents through a state subsidized bus service. Finally, Greyhound Bus Lines includes scheduled service along Rt. 40 in the northern part of the county.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Since its initial settlement, Garrett County has gone through several phases of economic development including a period of frontier hunting and trapping beginning before the French and Indian War; a period of rapid transportation development when the National Road (later U.S. Rt. 40) and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad were built across the county, linking the east coast with the developing mid-western states; a period of agricultural development when much of the present day farmland was created; a period of resource development when timbering and deep mining of coal created employment opportunities that led to the creation of a number of the smaller communities in the county; and a period of recreation and tourism development linked primarily to the construction of Deep Creek Lake and its subsequent development as a second home location.

Today, Garrett County has an economy that retains much of its past flavor while it attracts new industrial and commercial growth, particularly in the area near the county seat in Oakland. The county also continues to show strong recreational and tourism development around Deep Creek Lake. Out of a labor force of 13,852 people, 13,069 were employed in 2000, compared to a labor force of 12,700 in 1990 when 11,748 people were employed. The economy of the county has a great deal of variety with significant employment in a number of industrial categories as shown on Figure 14.

POPULATION

Garrett County's population growth has mirrored the above economic periods with higher rates of growth occurring during the early settlement of the county, during the coal and timber booms of the early part of the 20th century, and during the period of recreation and tourism development that continues into the present. In the 2000 Census report, Garrett County had a population of 29,846, an increase of 1,708 over the 1990 Census.

In the year 2000, the incorporated towns in the county had populations ranging from 302 in Kitzmiller to 2,248 in Mountain Lake Park as shown on Figure 15. During that Census year 16,319 people lived in the election districts surrounding Oakland, Mountain Lake Park, Loch Lynn Heights and Deep Creek Lake. This is an increase of 1270 above the number recorded in 1990 by the Census Bureau. During the same decade the northern tier of election districts from Finzel to Accident increased by 687 people. The remaining election districts remained stable or lost population during the decade as shown on Figure 15. A map showing Election Districts appears on Figure 16. Projections completed by the Maryland Department of Planning in 2002 indicate Garrett County's population will grow to 31,600 by the year 2010, and to 32,850 by 2020.

According to the Maryland Hazard Analysis completed in 2000, Garrett County has a high percentage of residents over the age of 65 and a small percentage of residents of Hispanic origin. According to the state Hazard Analysis, these residents are considered “at risk” populations. The U.S. Census for 2000 shows a total of 4,461 residents over the age of 65 and a total of 131 residents of Hispanic origin.

HOUSING

According to the U.S. Census, the county’s residents were housed in 16,761 units in 2000 of which 514 were constructed in 1999 and 2000. This compares to 14,119 units in 1990. In addition, permits for more than 570 single-family dwellings have been issued by the county in the last two years. A substantial percentage of new housing is related to recreation development around Deep Creek Lake and does not represent year round occupancy. In terms of at-risk housing, the Maryland Hazard Analysis 2000 states that there are more than 300 mobile homes in the census tracts in the northwestern part of the county that may be at risk for tornado damage, and a substantial number of houses in the floodplain areas of the Potomac and Youghiogheny Rivers. Table III in Section 4, Vulnerability Assessment shows the estimated number of at risk houses subject to flooding or to inundation from dam failure.

In terms of value, the median value of owner occupied housing was \$86,400 in 2000 as compared to \$60,200 in 1990. Median monthly rents were \$382/month in 2000, as compared to \$310/month in 1990. These values may be somewhat skewed by recreation rentals in the Deep Creek Lake area.

INCOME

So far as household income is concerned, the U.S. Census indicates that Garrett County continues to show improvement in its economic condition with a median household income of \$22,733 in 1990 increasing to \$32,238 in 2000. The poverty rate for the county has also declined from 11.6% in 1990 to 9.8% in 2000.

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Public school enrollment has been relatively stable in recent years with 4,739 students in 2001. Even though the county’s population is projected to increase by 1,754 people through the year 2010, school enrollment is projected to decline by several hundred students during the current decade to 4,320 in 2010 according to the Maryland Office of Planning.

LAND USE PROFILE-COMPREHENSIVE PLAN-BUILDING PERMITS

According to the Garrett County Comprehensive Plan adopted in 1995, most residential and commercial development is concentrated in the areas within or in close proximity to

the county's municipalities and to Deep Creek Lake as shown on Figure 17. Projections in that plan call for a continuation of this development style with most new urban development in the Oakland-Mountain Lake Park area and around Deep Creek Lake through 2010. Secondary growth areas include Grantsville and Accident. The most recent countywide land use tabulations from 1990 showed a total of 426,483 acres of land in the county with nearly 12,821 acres being devoted to urban type development. This was an increase of more than 5000 acres of developed land since 1973. Based on county Permit Records since 2000, it appears reasonable to conclude that another 4000-5000 acres have been developed countywide since 1990. As shown on Figure 18 more than 250 single family dwellings are being built each year with more than 50 % of these being in the Deep Creek Lake Watershed.

Even with this new urban development, the vast majority of land in Garrett County remains in either in agriculture (100,973 acres in 1990) or forest use (294,843 acres in 1990) with more than 77,000 acres in State Forests and Parks. A substantial amount of forest and agriculture land has been mined (10,095 acres) and reclaimed in recent years.

WATER AND SEWER PLAN

According to the 1997 County Water and Sewer Plan, all municipalities in the county have public water and sewer service as shown on Figures 19 and 20. The unincorporated communities of Bloomington, Crellin, and Gorman also have public water and sewer service. In addition, a large area around Deep Creek Lake is served by a public sewer system managed by the County Sanitary District. The Deep Creek Lake area also has a large number of private water systems that serve portions of the lake community. Planned extensions to water and sewer systems are also addressed in the Plan.

MUNICIPAL PERSPECTIVES

The eight municipalities in Garrett County are in large part still the centers for most residential and commercial activity in the county with the exception of the area around Deep Creek Lake. The two largest municipalities (Oakland and Mountain Lake Park) are neighbors while Loch Lynn Heights and Deer Park are within 5 miles of Oakland. Between these four municipalities, the total population was 5052 in the 2000 Census, an increase of 493 since 1990. While the two larger communities provide the commercial hub for the county, Loch Lynn Heights and Deer Park are primarily residential in nature.

The four remaining municipalities are more isolated from the Oakland - Mountain Lake Park area and even though small in population, they continue to serve as hubs for community activities and have commercial activities that serve the surrounding countryside. Accident is located north of Deep Creek Lake on U.S. Rt. 219 in the center of a farming area and has a relatively stable population, while Grantsville is located near the junction of Rt. 219 and I-68 along old U.S. 40. Accident has some new commercial and industrial growth along Route 219, while Grantsville has grown by 114 people since 1990 and has seen new commercial and industrial development along Rt. 40 and at the intersection of I-68 and Rt. 219. Friendsville is located along I-68 near the western

boundary of the County on the Youghiogheny River while Kitzmiller is located on the North Branch of the Potomac River above the Bloomington Dam.

POPULATION PROJECTIONS AND LAND USE TRENDS

As noted earlier in the Population Profile, the Maryland Department of Planning projects Garrett County to have a population of 31,600 by the year 2010, and a population of 32,850 by 2020. The Garrett County Comprehensive Plan projects that most of the population growth and associated urban development in the county will continue to be centered on designated growth areas in the Oakland-Mountain Lake Park vicinity and at Deep Creek Lake and in the secondary growth areas around Grantsville and Accident. As noted under the Water and Sewer Profile, a good portion of the land in these growth areas is served or is projected to be served by public water and sewer as shown on Figures 19 and 20. The Comprehensive Plan states that an additional 50,000 people could be accommodated on the approximately 8000 buildable acres of land within the growth areas shown on Figure 21.