
Feature Article: Indian Reserves in British Columbia

The population of Indian reserves in the province, consisting of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, is of general interest but also of more specific interest in the light of land claim negotiations. Information from the 1996 Census on the total population and the number of dwellings on Indian reserves has recently become available.

Since 1981, Indian reserves have been recorded by Statistics Canada as individual census subdivisions (CSDs). According to the 1996 Census, British Columbia had 488 Indian reserve CSDs, three Indian settlements (S-Es) and one Indian Government District (IGD).

When using Indian reserve population statistics, it is important to note that not all persons residing on reserves are Aboriginal peoples - in 1991 only 70% of persons living on reserves in B.C. were of Aboriginal origin. Also the majority of people of Aboriginal origin do not live on reserves - over three quarters of the people reporting Aboriginal origin in the 1991 Census were not living on Indian reserves. Comparable information from the 1996 Census will be available in early 1998.

Provincial Population Living on Indian Reserves

In 1996, 19 Indian reserves in B.C. were incompletely enumerated because of the refusal of some residents to participate in the Census. This is comparable to the 18 incompletely enumerated reserves in the 1991 Census, but down substantially from 64 reserves in the 1986 Census. There were 7 reserves that did not participate in all three censuses, 6 in Squamish-Lillooet Regional District and one in Capital Regional District.

The 1996 incompletely enumerated population living on B.C. Indian reserves was

estimated at 2,347, down 5% from the comparable 1991 estimate of 2,478.

The population residing on B.C. Indian reserves in 1996 was 64,891, including the estimate for the unenumerated reserves. This represented an increase of 19.1% since 1991. The growth in the reserve population was stronger than the 13.5% growth in the total provincial population over the five year period.

Almost one third (21,084) of those living on Indian reserves in 1996 resided on large reserves in urban areas. According to the 1991 Census, slightly more than a third of the people on the urban reserves were Aboriginal. The population of the urban reserves (27.7%) grew much faster than the rural reserves (15.4%) between 1991 and 1996, although the growth of both groups of reserves was stronger than for the population of the province as a whole.

Regional Districts

According to the 1996 Census, the Central Okanagan Regional District had 7,221 people living on Indian reserves, the greatest number of any regional district. Kitimat-Stikine Regional District had almost as many people (7,209) living on Indian reserves but the ethnic characteristics of the two areas are quite different. The 1991 Census indicated that in Kitimat-Stikine, 98% of the people living on Indian reserves were of Aboriginal origin, as compared to only 12% in Central Okanagan.

In terms of growth between 1991 and 1996 in the population living on Indian reserves, the Central Okanagan Regional District had the largest increase (58%), followed by Stikine (42%) and North Okanagan (41%).

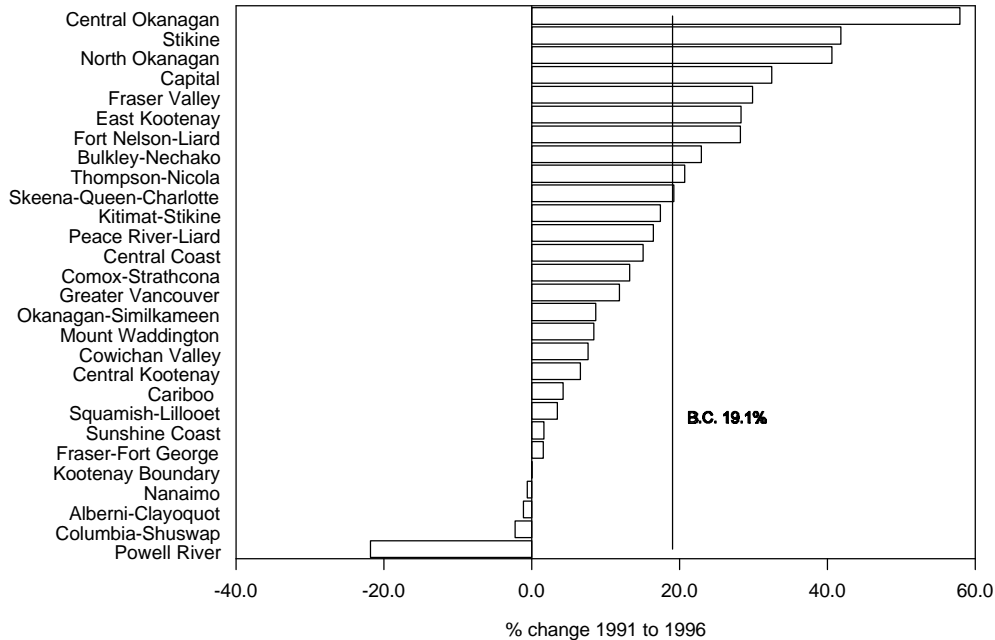
Four regional districts experienced declines in the population living on Indian reserves

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between 1991 and 1996: Nanaimo (-0.6%), Alberni-Clayoquot (-1.1%), Columbia-Shuswap (-2.2%) and Powell River. It is difficult to estimate the magnitude of the decline in Powell River between 1991 and 1996, since

the largest reserve was incompletely enumerated in 1991. However, between 1986 and 1996 the population living on Indian reserves in Powell River fell by 7.4%.

Between 1991 and 1996, the population of Indian reserves in Central Okanagan increased by 58%.



BC STATS

A table of the population of Indian reserves, including the estimates for the incompletely enumerated reserves, is available in the 1996 Census section of the BC STATS web site (<http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca>).

Forthcoming 1996 Census releases over the next year will provide additional information on the social and economic characteristics of the population residing on Indian reserves within the province. The release of Aboriginal information is scheduled for January 1998.

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