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Arkansas Retiree In-Migration: A Regional Analysis

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By looking at which regions of Arkansas welcomed the most retirees over the past decade, communities assessing their potential to draw retirement-aged people may wish to make comparisons between their community and those communities that have proven attractive to the retirement-aged population.

Regional Comparison

Historically, the regions of Arkansas (Figure 1) that are known for mountainous scenery, lakes, rivers, streams and diverse recreational opportunities have attracted the highest number of retirees, whether from within Arkansas or out of state. Between 2000 and 2010, the Ozark Highlands experienced a net in-migration of approximately 12,200 people aged 60 and older, while Northwest Arkansas' net in-migration was nearly 10,600 in this age group. Combined, these two regions comprised nearly 60 percent of the total net in-migration of people aged 60 and older in Arkansas. The Ouachita Highlands and Central Arkansas also attracted people in this age group, each with a net in-migration of about 4,900 during this period. However, the Coastal Plains and Delta regions experienced net out-migration between 2000 and 2010 (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Arkansas Geographic Regions

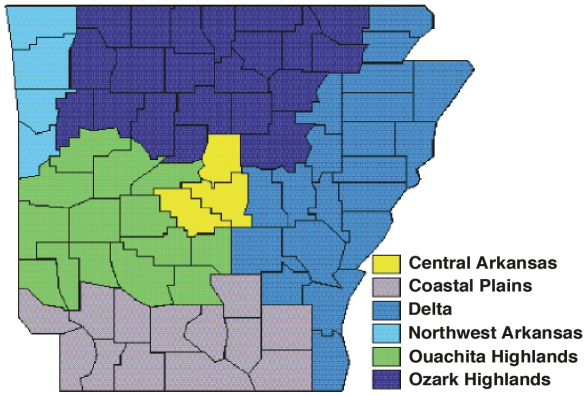
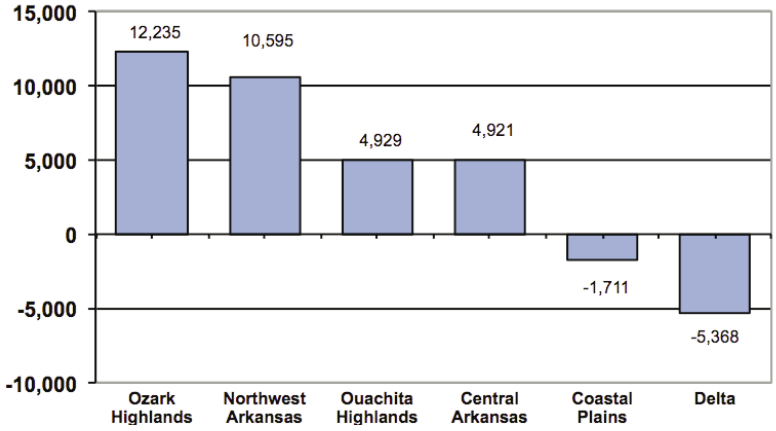


Figure 2. Net In-Migration by Region, Ages 60+ 2000 to 2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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County Comparison

While looking at Arkansas' regional migration is insightful, examining net in-migration by county yields even more useful information to prospective retirement communities. The following charts and map provide a county-by-county look at Arkansas' net in-migration. Net in-migration numbers by county were calculated utilizing population by age data from the U.S. Census Bureau and deaths by age from the Centers for Disease Control.

Benton, Saline, Garland and Baxter counties received the largest net in-migration of retirement-aged people between 2000 and 2010, while Pulaski, Jefferson and Mississippi counties experienced the greatest net out-migration of retirement-aged population during this same period. All four counties with the largest net in-migration of people aged 60 and older market their communities as attractive places to live (Figure 3).

Those counties with the largest net in-migration also have some of the highest net in-migration rates, or net in-migration as a percent of the population in this age group. All counties along the Missouri border, except Randolph and Clay, have high net in-migration rates. In addition to these counties, Saline, Stone, Izard and Faulkner counties also have net in-migration rates of 14 percent or higher.

Some counties in the Delta – Mississippi, Phillips and Desha – have the highest net out-migration rates. Pulaski County, which accounts for about 15 percent of the net out-migration in the state, had a net out-migration rate of less than 3 percent. The low rate is because of its large population base. Some counties with a smaller population base have a larger percentage of their retirement-aged people leaving the county, especially in the Delta. For example, Monroe County had a net out-migration of only 283 people aged 60 and older but a net out-migration rate of around 14 percent (Figure 4).

Figure 3. Net In-Migration by County, Ages 60 and Older

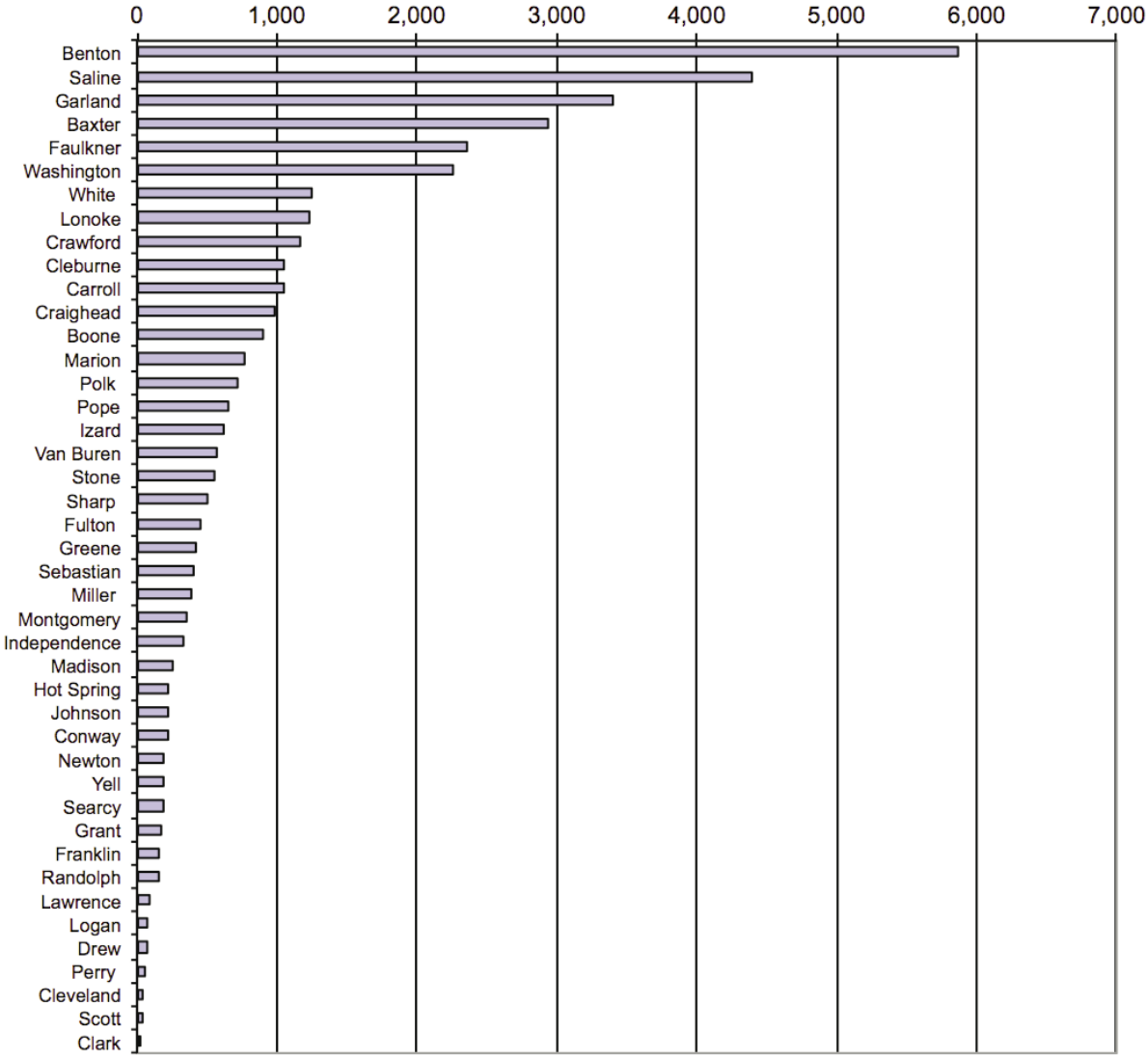


Figure 3. Net In-Migration by County, Ages 60 and Older (continued)

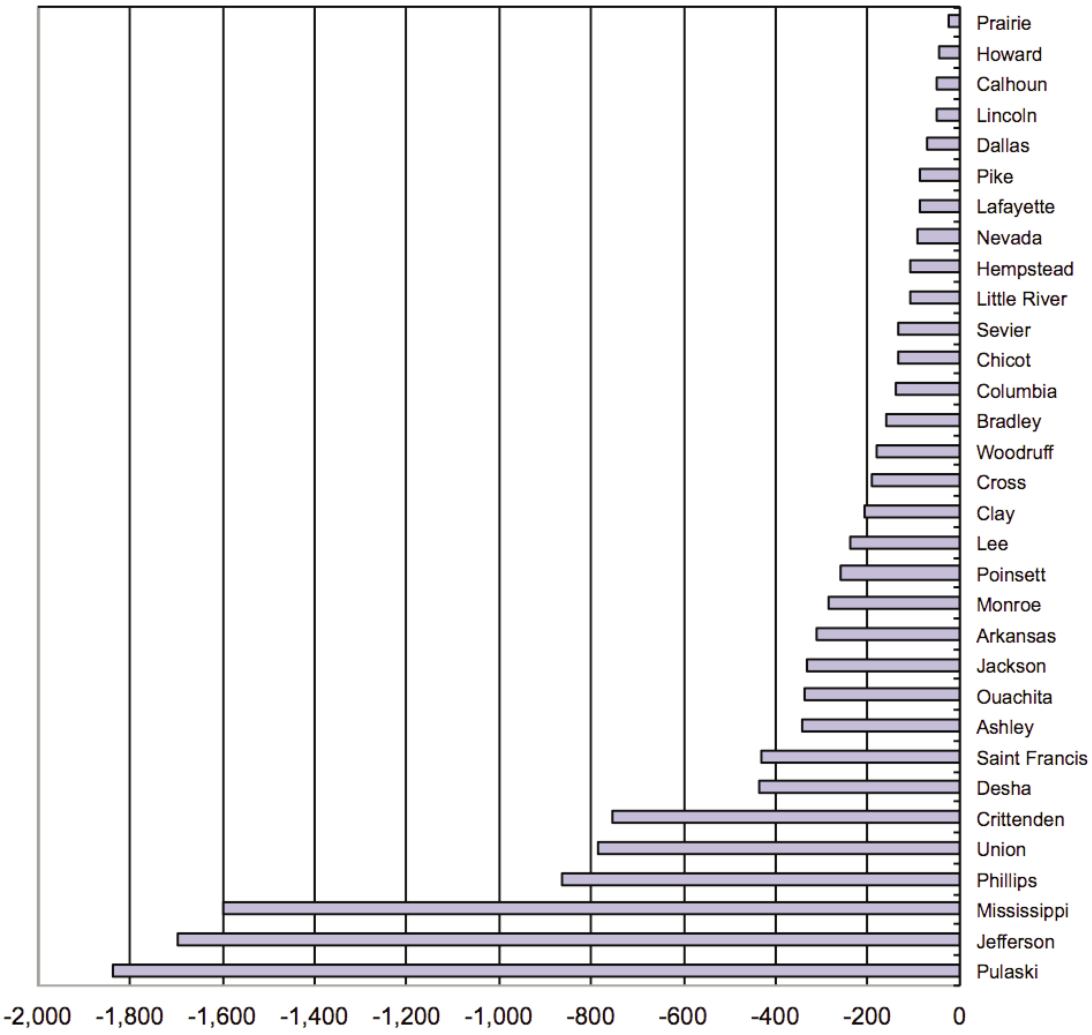
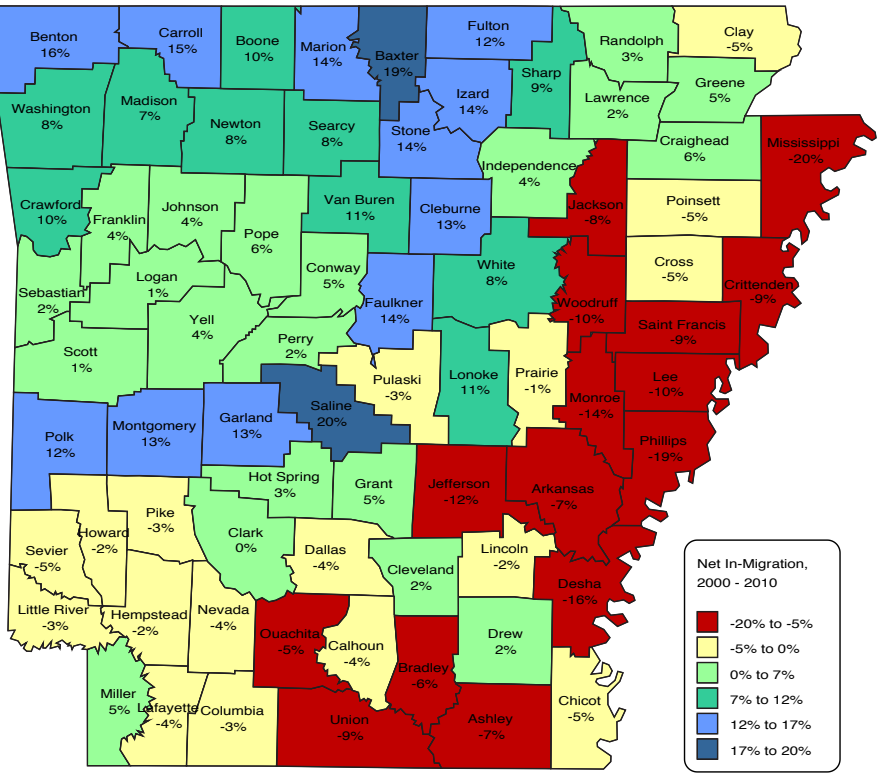


Figure 4. Net In-Migration, Ages 60 and Older



Age of Elderly Migrants

All regions experienced the largest net in-migration of persons aged 60 to 69 and substantially lower net in-migration for people aged 75 and older. The charts below provide an in-depth look at this variation in terms of age (Figure 5).

- The Delta region experienced a net out-migration of people aged 60 and older. However, this region experienced a very slight net in-migration of people between ages 60 and 64 (Figure 6).
- The Ozark Highlands region net in-migration consisted primarily of persons aged 60 to 74 and to a lesser extent people aged 75 to 79 (Figure 7).
- The Northwest Arkansas region was similar to the Ozark Highlands in that there was a large net in-migration of people aged 60 to 74. Additionally, the Northwest Arkansas region net in-migration included more people aged 75 and above (Figure 8).
- The Ouachita Highlands region net in-migration consisted of many people aged 60 to 74, and the region experienced net out-migration for people over the age of 80 (Figure 9).
- The Coastal Plains region net in-migration was highest for ages 60 to 69. This region experienced a net out-migration of ages 70 and older (Figure 10).
- The Central Arkansas region experienced a net in-migration of all age groups 60 years and older (Figure 11).

Figure 5. Net In-Migration by Age and Region 2000 to 2010*

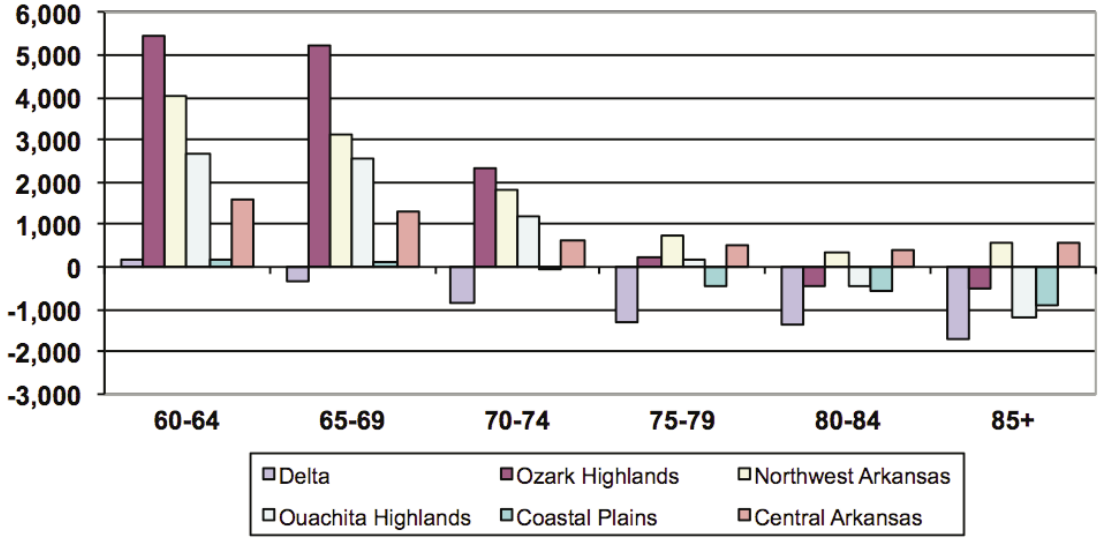
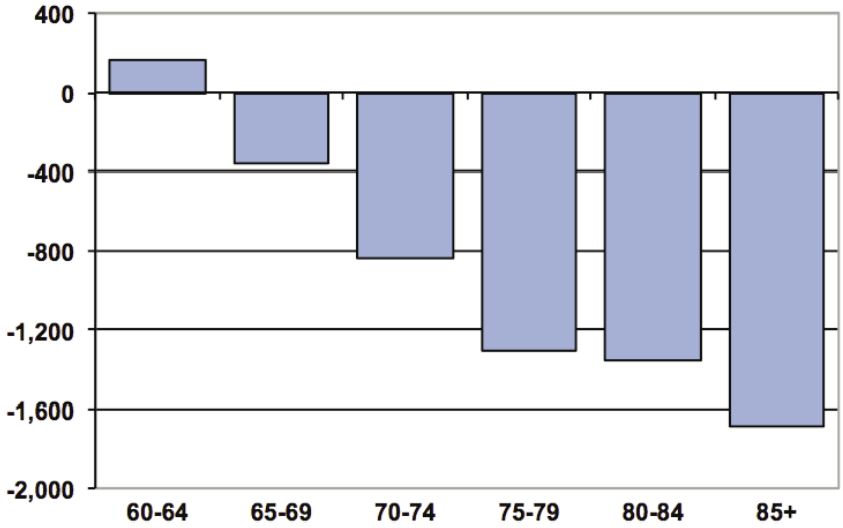


Figure 6. Delta Net In-Migration by Age 2000 to 2010*



*The charts on pages 4 through 6 were derived using population data from the U.S. Census Bureau and mortality rates from the Centers for Disease Control.

Figure 7. Ozark Highlands Net In-Migration by Age 2000 to 2010*

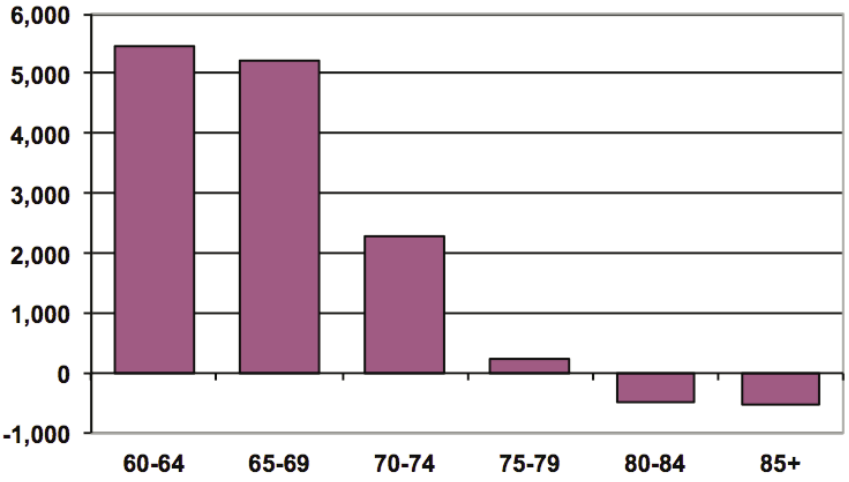


Figure 8. Northwest Arkansas Net In-Migration by Age 2000 to 2010*

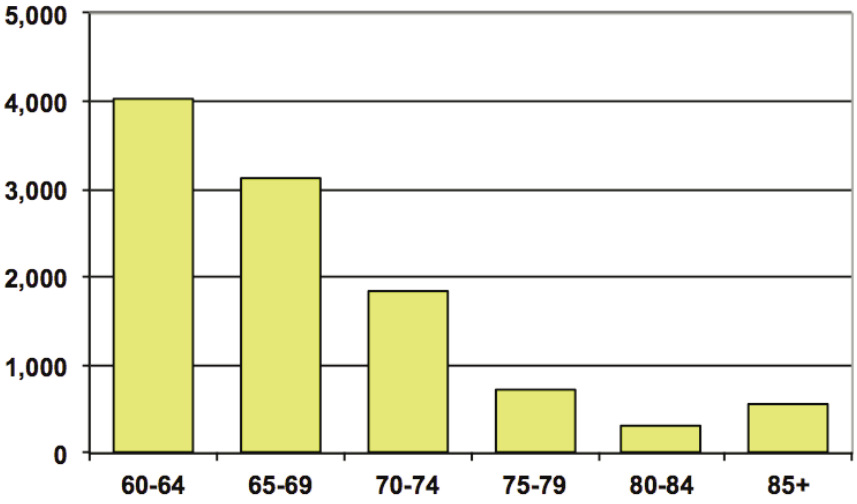


Figure 9. Ouachita Highlands Net In-Migration by Age 2000 to 2010*

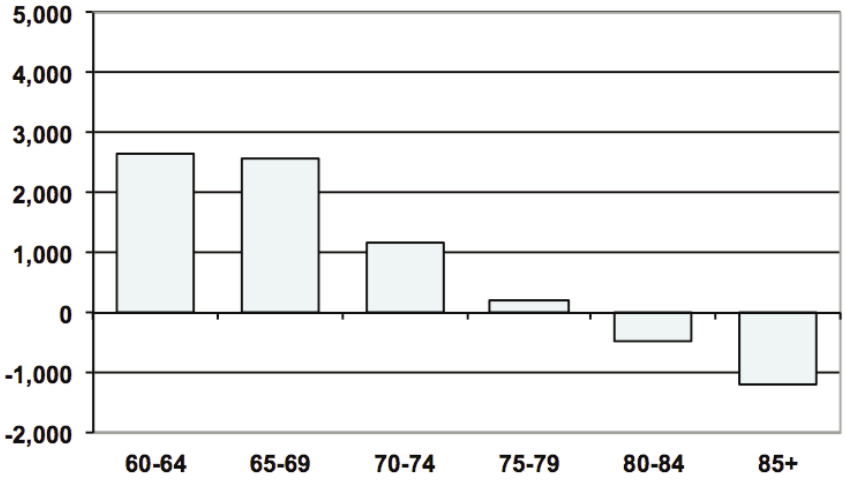


Figure 10. Coastal Plains Net In-Migration by Age 2000 to 2010*

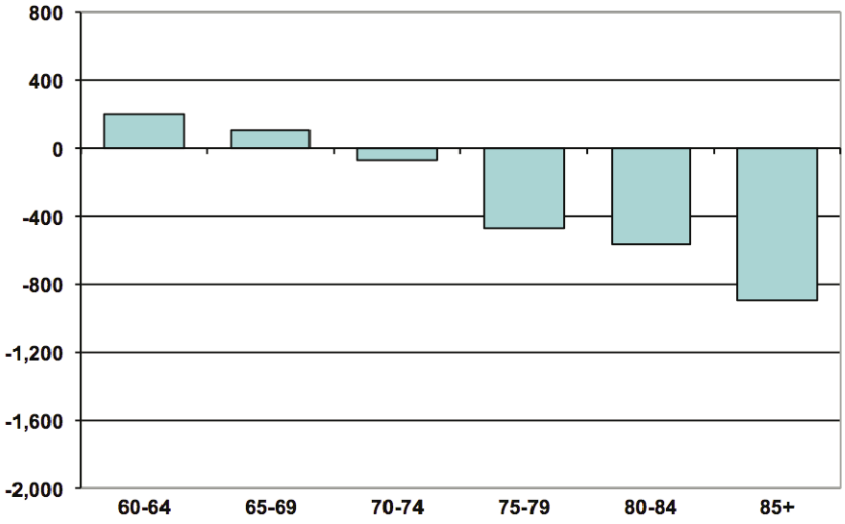
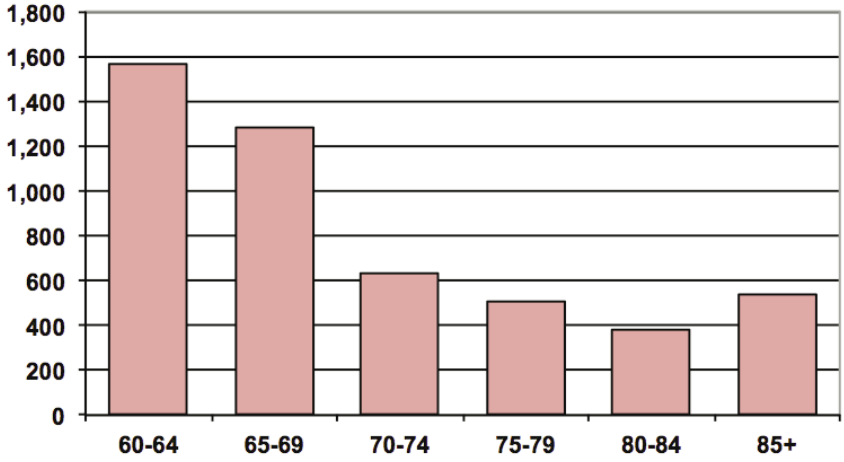


Figure 11. Central Arkansas Net In-Migration by Age 2000 to 2010*



Summary

The Ozark Highlands and Northwest Arkansas regions attract the most retirement-aged people to their communities. The Ouachita Highlands and Central Arkansas regions also attract people in this age group, especially to communities in Garland, Saline and Faulkner counties. However, the Coastal Plains had a net out-migration of people in this age group, and the Delta had the most significant net out-migration of people aged 60 and older.

Benton County attracts the most people in this age group followed by Saline, Garland and Baxter. These counties have planned retirement communities or community leaders who make a concerted effort to attract new retirement-aged residents through targeted marketing campaigns.

The in-migrating, retirement-aged population in Arkansas is younger than the population distribution in this age category in the state. All regions of the state attract more people aged 60 to 69 and fewer people aged 75 and older. As a result, Arkansas' in-migrating, retirement-aged population is younger and likely to be in better health and actively seeking recreational opportunities.

Studies on retirement in-migration suggest a number of factors influence a retiree's decision to locate in a specific community. Factors affecting relocation decisions include not only scenic beauty but also recreational opportunity, climate, availability of quality medical care and close proximity of family. Other factors mentioned in the studies, but having less impact on where a retiree locates, include low taxes, cost of living and availability of business opportunities.

When seeking to attract retirees to Arkansas communities, local leaders and planners should not only understand recent trends and the predominance of desirable and marketable community qualities in the state but also target their marketing to people who desire the amenities the state offers and who will contribute to Arkansas' communities. For a more detailed description of in-migration for ages 60 and older to Arkansas, those interested may reference the fact sheet entitled *Arkansas' Retirement-Age Migration: A Statewide Overview* available through the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service at http://www.uaex.edu/publications/pdf/FSCED2.pdf.

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