

Chapter Four
Jail Capacity Forecasts

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Chapter Four

Jail Capacity Forecasts

Forecasting future jail population sizes is, or should be, a policy-based task. The changes that have occurred in United States jail populations during the last twenty-five years provide considerable evidence that shifts in local policies can bring about dramatic increases or decreases in jail populations within a county. Few planners who did jail population forecasts during the 1970s or 1980s were able to foresee the nation-wide policy-shift trends that would lead to dramatic growth in jail populations in the 1980s and 1990s. They were unable to foresee, for example, the greater focus on persons convicted of drunk driving—the snapshot of the jail population on 23 February found that there were a total of 23 persons or 43 percent of the jail population awaiting trial or convicted of drunk driving. In the 1990s, the offense that has impacted most jails in the United States was domestic violence.

Because of this failure of foresight, even those counties that built new jails during the latter half of the 1980s found that space that was supposed to be sufficient until the year 2002 was filled by the early 1990s. In many cases, the decision-makers responsible for the policy shifts at issue had been on hand when the forecasting studies were done; they were no more able than the forecasters to predict where policy emphases would fall during the coming decade.

Too much jail forecasting work done in recent years has assumed that criminal justice system policies in a county will remain the same over the forecast period. In reality, this is rarely the case. When forecasters make their predictions based on the assumption that county decision-makers will make no

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changes in criminal justice system policy, they doom their predictions to failure. No county criminal justice system today can afford not to *anticipate* change. For better or for worse, all county systems will have to change, with increasing frequency, in the years to come. The question is not *whether* but *how* a particular set of policies can be expected to change. Jail forecasters must learn to take the likelihood of such changes into account and try to foresee the various possibilities. As the drunk-driving and domestic violence examples illustrate, forecasters cannot do this without the close cooperation of county decision-makers. Ultimately, the decision-makers are the ones who must decide where the emphasis will fall in the years to come.

Jail capacity forecasts must depend in large part on information made available to forecasters by a county. The forecasts contained in this report are no exception. Much historical information exists on the way the Blue Earth County Jail has been used during the past two decades. Jail admissions, average length of stay, and average daily population figures are available from 1980 to the present.

Attempts to obtain older data, however, proved impossible — the records simply do not exist or are not reliable. An estimate of the forecast of county population was received from Region Nine Development Commission to the year 2025.

As useful as these numbers may be in constructing a picture of what is to come, they will not aid the county unless a consensus regarding criminal justice system policy for the next twenty years is reached. The text, tables, and graphs that follow illustrate several possible population scenarios, scenarios that suggest what the county might expect in terms of Jail bed demand given several possible policy scenarios. No one-policy scenario is the “right”

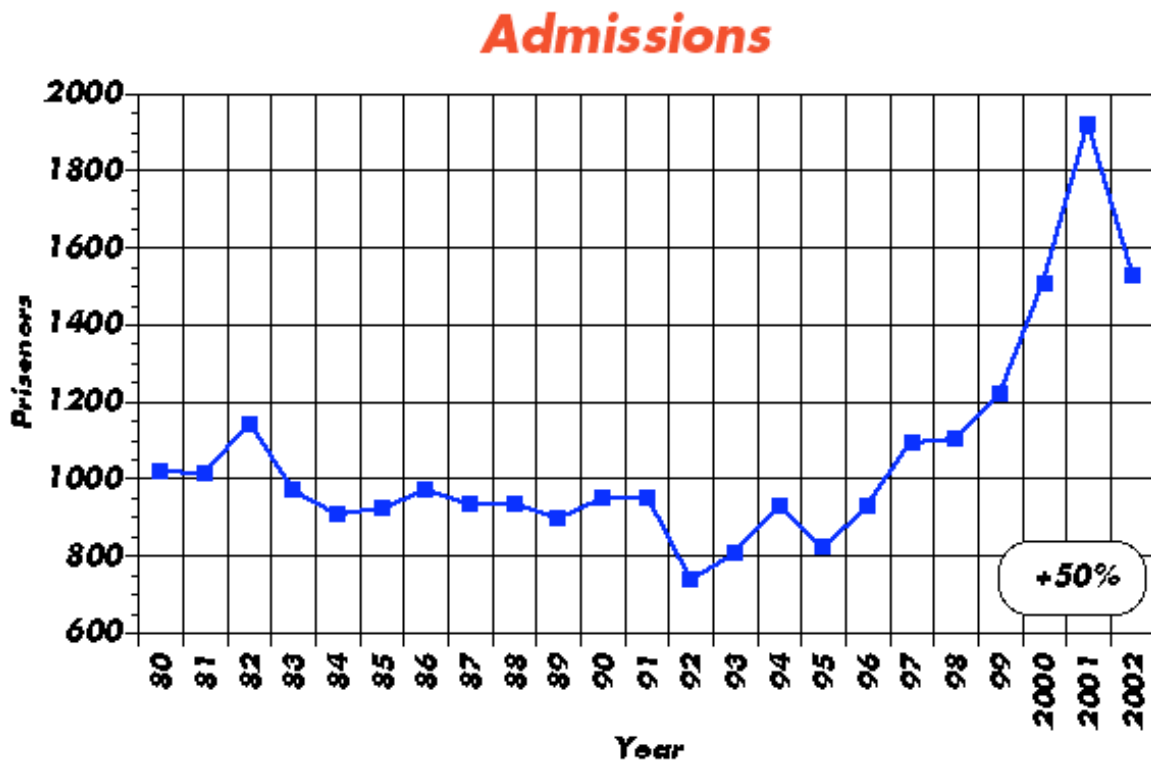
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scenario. It will be up to the county decision-makers to select the view of the future that best represents what they believe to be the most likely direction of county decision-makers, and then plan for jail space on that basis.

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A. Admissions

The first graphic presents the total admissions per year for the years 1980 to 2002.

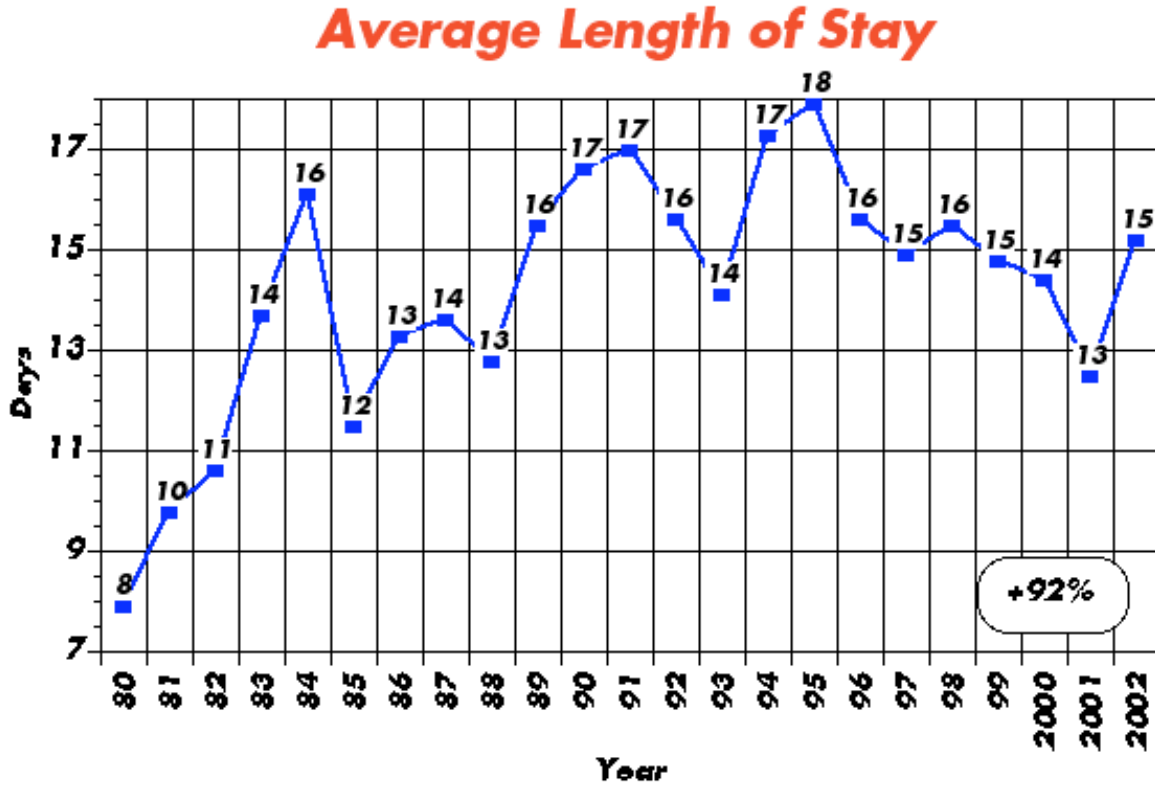


In 1981, the Blue Earth County Jail admitted a total of 1,016 persons. Admissions remained flat and even dropped a few years before beginning rising in 1995. They peaked in 2001 at 1,917. In 2002, there were 1,529 bookings, a change of 30 percent over the study period.

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B. Average Length of Stay

The next graphic shows the average length of stay for 1980 to 2002.



The average length of stay data for Blue Earth County is very interesting. The average length of stay in 1980 was 8 days. It rose steadily until 1984 when the average length of stay was 16 days. The next year it dropped to 12 days and since then has been up and down. The average length of stay in 2002 was 15 days, making for a 92 percent increase over the period.

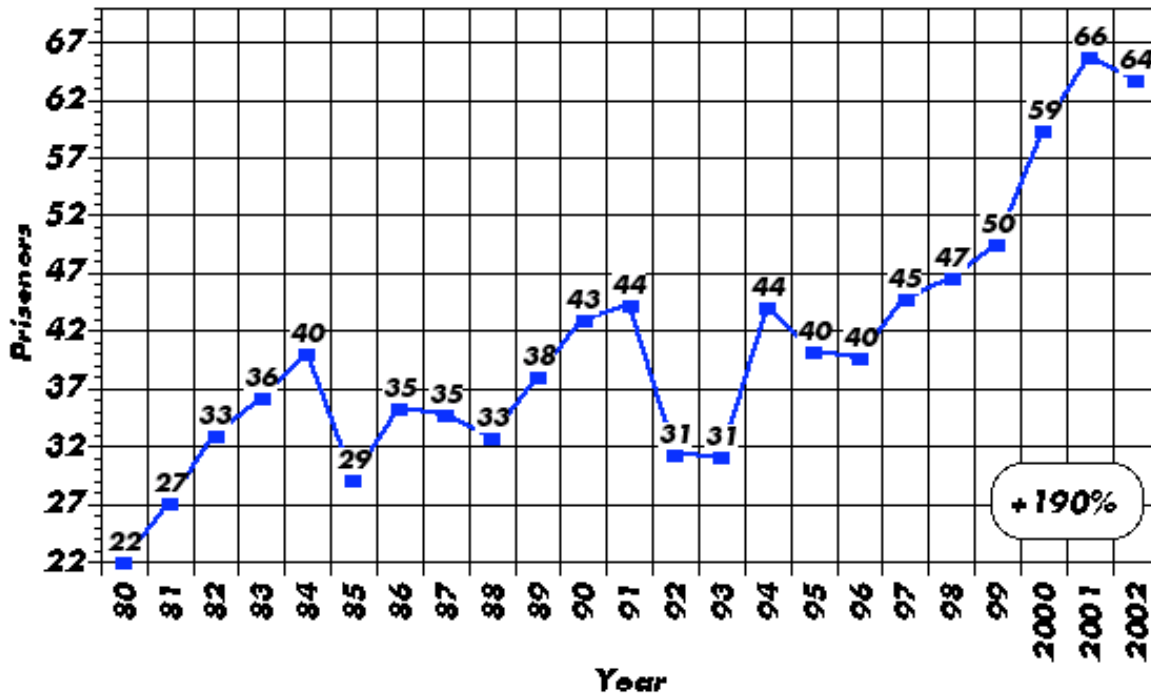
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C. Average Daily Population

1. Totals

The next graphic presents the historic average daily populations (ADP) for the Blue Earth County Jail over the period 1980 to 2002.

Average Daily Population

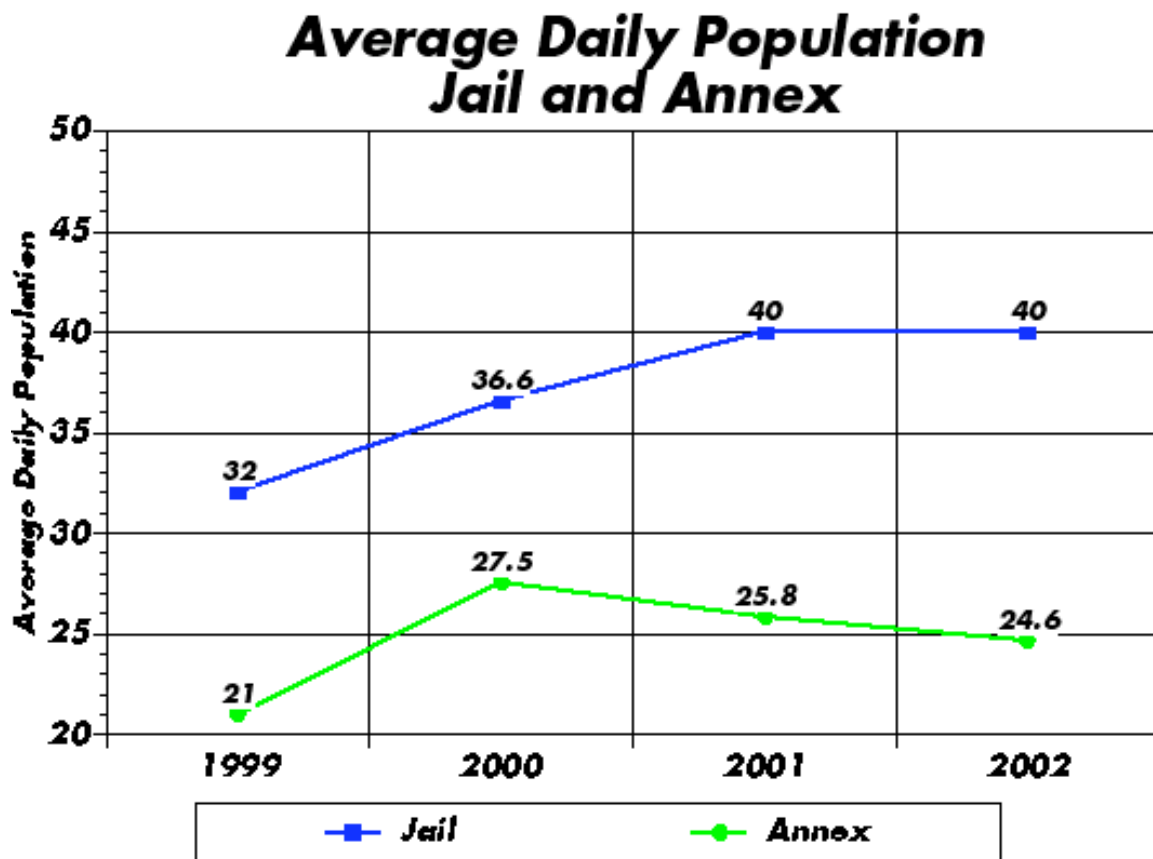


The average daily population was 22 in 1980. The ADP moved within a narrow range until 1995 and 1996 when the population was 40. It has risen steadily since then. The 2002 average daily population was 64, making for a 190 percent increase over the period.

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2. Type of Housing

a. The next graphic shows the average daily population from 1999 to 2002 in the secure portion of the jail as compared with the annex, which houses the Huber prisoners.

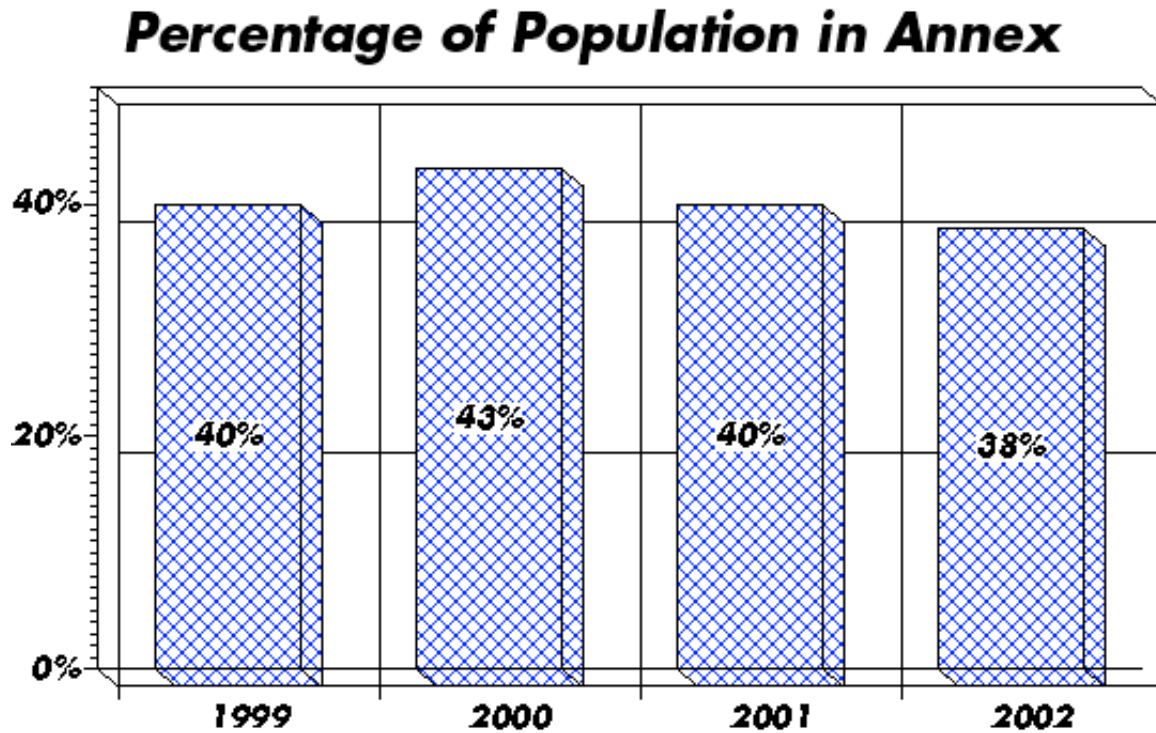


In 1999, there were 21 persons in the annex and 32 persons in the jail. In 2002, the annex population was 24.6 and the jail population was 40.

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b. Annex Percentage

The next graphic shows the percentage of inmates held in the annex as opposed to the secure portion of the jail from 1999 to 2002.



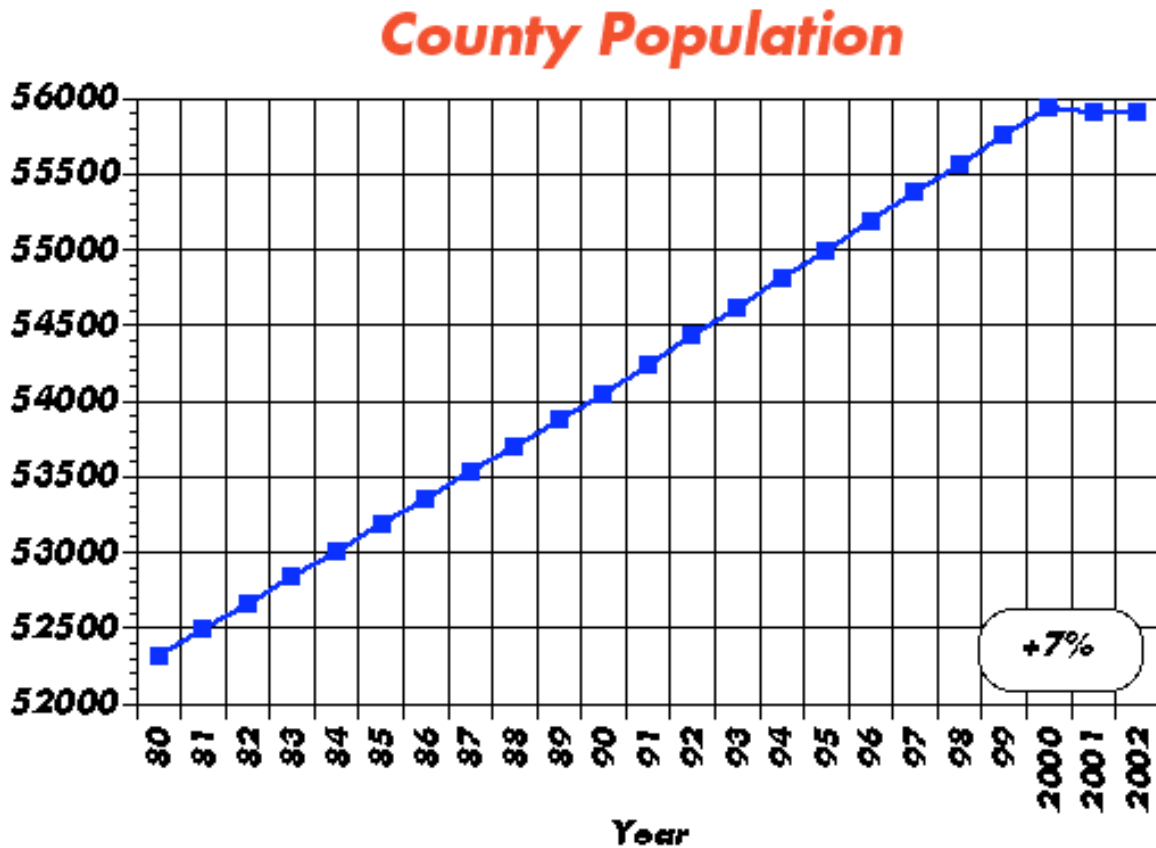
In 1999, 40 percent of the inmates were held in the Annex. In 2002, the percentage was 38 percent.

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D. County Population: Actual and Forecasted — 1980-2025

1. County Population: Actual — 1980-2002

The next graphic shows the actual county population for each year between 1980 and 2002.

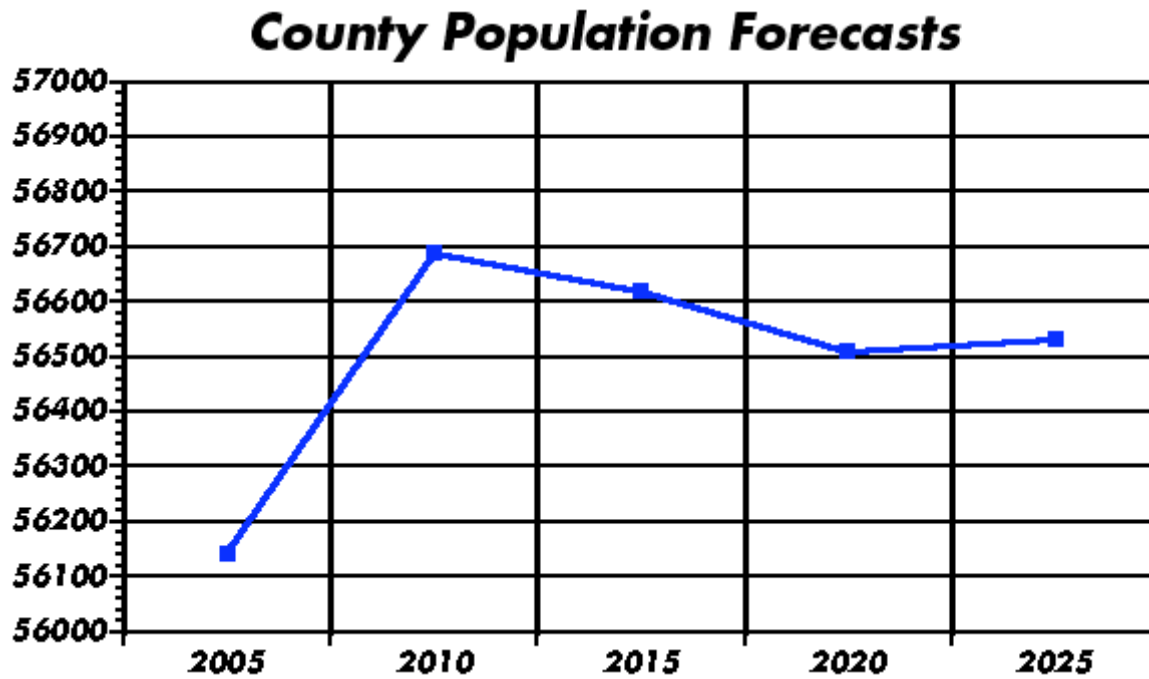


In 1980, 52,314 persons resided in the county. Since then, the population has risen slowly and it is estimated that 55,944 persons live in the county in 2002, a 7 percent increase over the period.

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2. County Population: Forecasted — 2002-2025

The next graphic shows the forecasted county population from 2005 to 2025 as provided by Region Nine Development Commission.



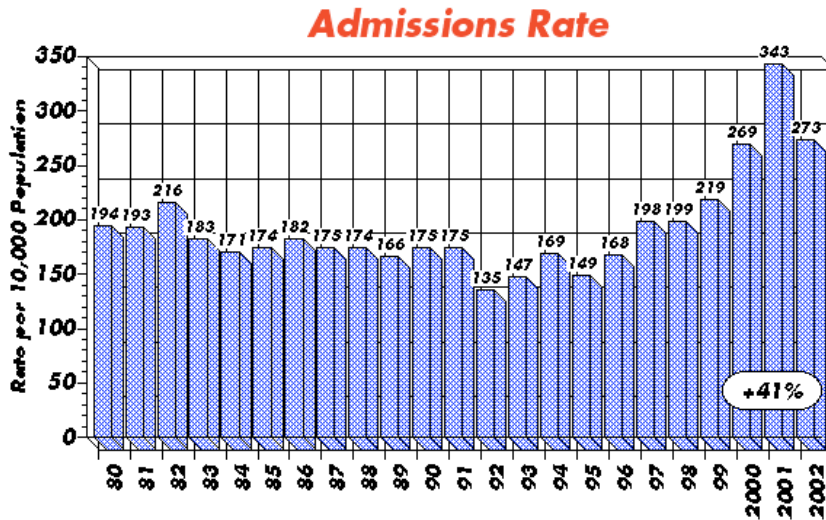
The county population in 2005 is expected to be 56,140. Population is expected to grow to 56,530 by 2025.

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E. Rates

1. Admissions

The next graphic shows the rate of admissions to the Blue Earth County Jail per 10,000 persons from 1980 to 2002.



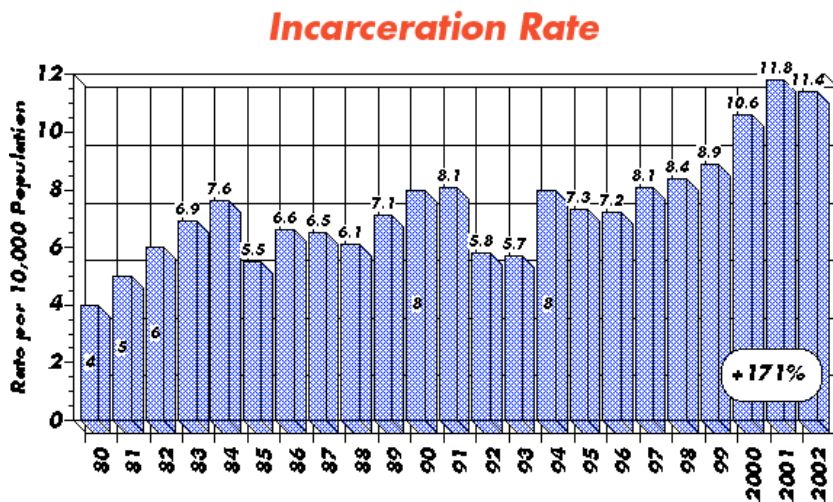
In 1980, the admission rate into the Blue Earth County Jail was 194 per 10,000 population; by 2002, the rate had increased to 273 per 10,000 population, a 41 percent increase.

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2. Incarceration

a. Blue Earth County

The incarceration rate per 10,000 of the population is shown in the graphic below for the years 1980 to 2002.

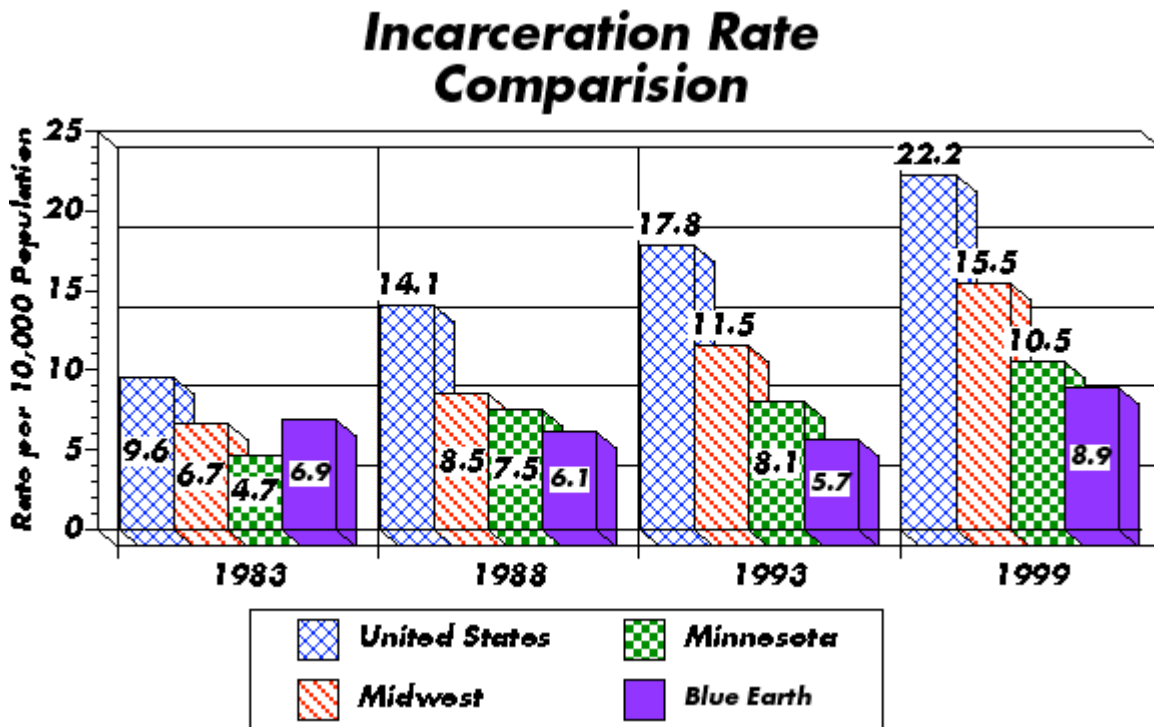


The incarceration rate rose from 4 in 1980 to 11.4 in 2002, a 171 percent increase. This rate is about half the rate of the national incarceration rate of 22 per 10,000 population in 2002.

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b. United States

The next graphic shows the incarceration rates for the United States, Midwest US, State of Minnesota, and Blue Earth County for the years 1983, 1998, 1993, and 1999. The national and state data is taken from the Census of Jails from the Bureau of Justice Statistics.



In 1983, the incarceration rate nationally was 9.6 per 10,000 population as compared with 6.7 for the Midwest, 4.7 for the state of Minnesota, and 6.9 for Blue Earth County. The last year that there is national data available is 1999 when the national rate was 22.2 per 10,000 population as compared with 15.5 for the Midwest, 10.5 for the state of Minnesota and 8.9 for Blue Earth County.

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F. Jail Capacity Forecasts

1. Introduction

A simple method of forecasting the number of Jail beds needed would be to use average daily population increases over the 23-year study period as a predictive base. The Jail population increased by 1.9 persons per year during that twenty-three year period. Using the above method, one might predict that approximately 111 Jail beds would need to be constructed for the year 2025. However, this forecast assumes that the Jail is being appropriately utilized today (that no additional pre- or post trial intermediate sanctions exist that could impact the Jail population) and that the Jail will continue to be used at the same rate over the next 23 years as it has over the past 23 years. Neither of these assumptions is likely to be true. However, a more detailed approach is recommended to be used to develop Jail population forecasts — one in which county officials can help select specific scenarios for the future on which such forecasts can be based.

The factors driving the increasing Jail population in Blue Earth County have been a significant increase in admissions in recent years while there has also been an increase in the average length of stay. The average length of stay over the last 20 years was 14.9 days; and over the last 5 years, the average length of stay was 14.5 days. For the purposes of these forecasts, three estimated average lengths of stay have been used for the year 2025: 15, 18, and 21 days. The admissions rates averaged 192 over the last 20 years and 261 over the last five years. It peaked in 2001 at 343 and in 2002 it dropped to 273. Two different admissions rates are used for these forecasts: 300 and 350.

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2. Adjustments: Peaking and Classification Factors

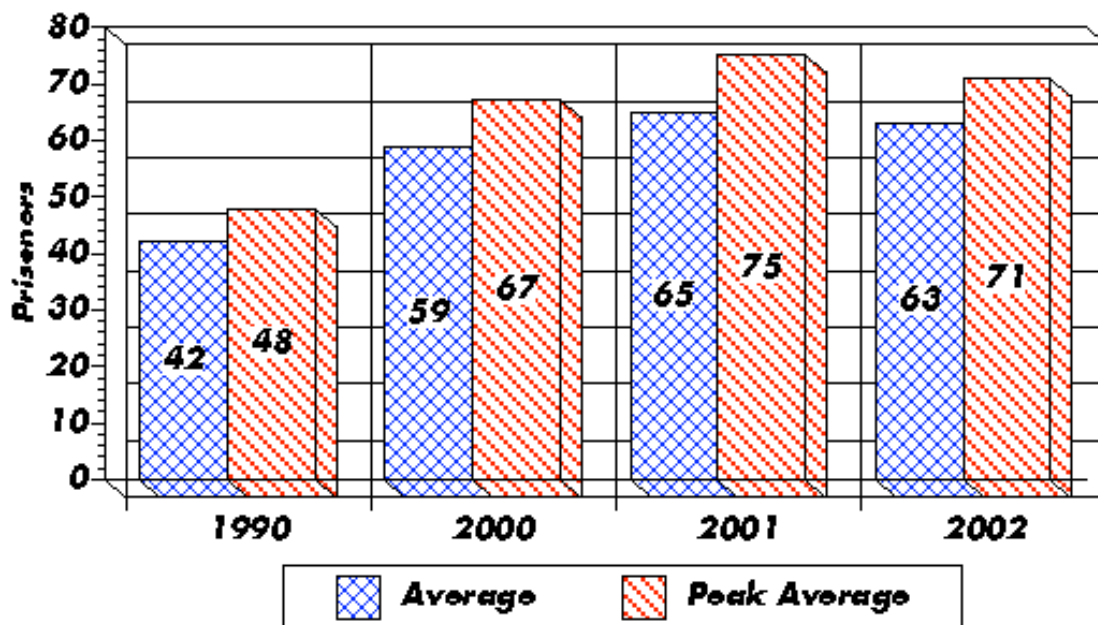
The expected average daily population for each of the forecast scenarios does *not* mean that the county should have this amount of beds available. Since these are daily averages, the county's plans should include allowances for those days (in a given year) when the population surges above the average because of normal fluctuations in admissions and releases.

This situation is similar to a storm drain system. A storm drain sits empty most of the year; however, it needs to be large enough to handle the peak run-off from a summer thundershower or melting snow from the mountains. Jail populations are very similar. During peak periods — traditionally weekends, the end of the month, and the summer months — jail populations climb. A jail needs to be large enough to handle the peak periods.

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The next graphic shows the peaking factor for Blue Earth County. The Jail provided the three highest population days each month for each of the years 1999, 2000, and 2001 and the first nine months of 2002.

Peaking Factor Average Daily Population and Average Peak Population



The average difference ranged from 14 percent to 16 percent. Each month's average peak population was determined and then compared with the average daily population to develop the peaking factor. Averaged, it came to 15 percent which is the factor used in the forecasts.

A second factor, classification, was used to allow for the daily need, in any jail, to have a few open beds available for new inmates within *each* classification category. In a jail of this size, an appropriate classification adjustment factor would be two beds for each of the seven primary classification categories. That is, the county should increase its estimate for

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each year by 14 beds to come to a final figure of what will be needed for each of the years in this planning cycle.

3. The Forecasts for 2025

The next set of graphics gives figures for the year 2025 based on an average length of stay of 15 days, 18 days and 21 days.

The tables below show (1) the average daily population, (2) beds necessary to handle peak periods, and (3) beds necessary for classification purposes. These figures are given for each of the two possible admissions rates. Each table then gives the incarceration rate per 10,000 population for each of the two possible admissions rates.

By 2025, it is estimated that 56,530 persons will be living in the county; this figure provides the baseline for the tables.

Year 2025

Average Length of Stay of 15 Days

Admissions Rate per 10,000 Population	Average Daily Population	Total Beds Necessary for the Peak Populations	Total Beds Necessary for Classification	Incarceration Rate per 10,000 Population
300	70	80	94	12
350	81	94	108	14

Average Length of Stay of 18 Days

Admissions Rate per 10,000 Population	Average Daily Population	Total Beds Necessary for the Peak Populations	Total Beds Necessary for Classification	Incarceration Rate per 10,000 Population
300	84	96	110	15
350	98	112	126	17

Average Length of Stay of 21 Days

Admissions Rate per 10,000 Population	Average Daily Population	Total Beds Necessary for the Peak Populations	Total Beds Necessary for Classification	Incarceration Rate per 10,000 Population
300	98	112	126	17
350	114	131	145	20

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G. Conclusion

The forecasts presented in this report are just starting points. The projections are, at best, estimates of what is likely to occur in the coming twenty years. Should the county decision-makers wish to alter any of the scenarios, they can do so by adjusting the key indices of jail use — county population, admissions rate, expected average lengths of stay, the peaking factor, and the classification factor. By adjusting these factors, the decision-makers will obtain different estimates of the required number of jail beds.

There is no guarantee that criminal justice system policy will not change and push jail populations higher or lower than these numbers indicate. The forecasters of the 1980s did not foresee the dramatic rise in jail populations that took place during the 1990s. No one was able to estimate those changes accurately.

Blue Earth County officials must analyze the data contained in this report and adopt a plan for the future of their criminal justice system. Policy shifts that could change the amount of jail space available are detailed in this report. If the necessary changes recommended in this report do *not* occur, then *more* beds than those predicted in this report will be necessary. Left uncontrolled, the present jail population will continue to grow, filling and overflowing whatever facilities are constructed in response to such growth, and leaving Blue Earth County with *no* alternatives for managing the jail population other than simply building new facilities every few years in response to renewed overcrowding. An approach that emphasizes active management, on the other hand, may make it possible to prolong the sufficiency of *new* jail space for a *longer* period — giving Blue Earth County time to explore and try out the many

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viable alternatives to construction that have become available in recent years and are recommended in the next chapter.

A review of all of the data in this chapter suggests that while the forecast methodology suggested at the beginning of this section doesn't allow for the statistical analysis contained in the above tables, the number of beds (111) is within the range of the required number of beds.