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UNIVERSITY RELATIONS • MISSOULA, MT 59812 • 406-243-2522 • FAX: 406-243-4520

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Paul Polzin, director, UM Bureau of Business and Economic Research, 406-243-5113.

EASTERN, RURAL MONTANA COUNTIES TOPS FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

MISSOULA —

Montana has experienced a radical shake-up in economic growth in the past few years, with some of the state's easternmost and rural counties growing faster than its western and urban counties, according to a University of Montana economist.

Traditionally, western and urban counties such as Ravalli, Flathead, Gallatin and Missoula have been in the top 10 for economic growth, while more rural counties have ranked lower, said Paul Polzin, director of UM's Bureau of Business and Economic Research. But newly released statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis paint a different picture.

The new numbers show that the top three counties in terms of 2003-04 percentage growth of nonfarm labor income were Fallon (11.3 percent), Richland (10.7 percent) and Blaine (10.2 percent) -- all rural and eastern counties. Only Gallatin County -- with the now-glitzy areas of Bozeman and Big Sky -- squeaked into the top tier at 6.8 percent, just barely making it as No. 10, Polzin said.

Other traditionally fast-growing counties were even lower than Gallatin. Flathead County ranked 14th at 5.5 percent, Ravalli County ranked 21st at 4.7 percent and Missoula County was 40th at 2.4 percent.

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The cause of this economic shake-up is the energy and natural resource boom that has been going on since 2003, Polzin said. Fallon, Richland and Blaine counties are all in Montana's "oil patch." Jefferson (No. 4) and Sweet Grass (No. 9) contain, or are adjacent to, major mining projects. Silver Bow County ranks an unexpected 17th due to the reopening of the Montana Resources Mine.

Energy and other natural resource prices (especially copper) began to increase sharply in 2003, and have continued to rise since then, Polzin said. Oil exploration activity picked up in eastern Montana, and the copper mines in Silver Bow and Lincoln counties reopened. These activities have led to faster statewide economic growth and increased revenues to the state's treasury.

"It will be interesting to compare future trends in county nonfarm labor income with those for county population in the coming years," Polzin said. "The latest estimates still show western Montana leading in population growth. Population may be a lagging indicator, or -- as we also think likely -- the method used by the Census Bureau to make population estimates may take a while to incorporate economic changes."

Nonfarm labor income is used to measure the overall economic growth in an area. A frustrating feature of federal statistics is that they may be out of date as soon as they are released, Polzin said. The 2004 county figures presented here are the latest available. Numbers for 2005 will not be available for another year.

"Based on the statewide data we do have, we are quite confident that the natural resources boom has continued in 2005 and 2006," Polzin said.

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Nonfarm Labor Income, Montana and Counties
2000-01 and 2003-04 (percent change in constant dollars)

2004			2000		
Rank	Percent Change	County	Rank	Percent Change	County
1	11.35	Fallon	1	24.21	Stillwater
2	10.70	Richland	2	9.42	Ravalli
3	10.15	Blaine	3	8.20	Gallatin
4	9.05	Jefferson	4	6.99	Toole
5	8.74	Carter	5	6.52	Judith Basin
6	7.72	Musselshell	6	6.44	Flathead
7	7.46	Madison	7	6.11	Missoula
8	6.96	Glacier	8	6.02	Sanders
9	6.85	Sweet Grass	9	5.54	Meagher
10	6.81	Gallatin	10	5.34	Lewis and Clark
11	6.59	Stillwater	11	5.05	Madison
12	6.47	Toole	12	4.58	Deer Lodge
13	5.56	Big Horn	13	4.40	Lake
14	5.52	Flathead		4.25	Montana
15	5.51	Golden Valley	14	4.24	McCone
16	5.23	Carbon	15	4.03	Yellowstone
17	5.01	Silver Bow	16	3.90	Prairie
18	4.99	Powder River	17	3.75	Glacier
19	4.93	Chouteau	18	3.64	Blaine
20	4.72	Park	19	3.44	Custer
21	4.67	Ravalli	20	3.23	Broadwater
22	4.52	Petroleum	21	3.22	Treasure
23	4.41	Sheridan	22	3.20	Big Horn
24	4.17	Wibaux	23	3.15	Golden Valley
	4.09	Montana	24	3.08	Beaverhead
25	4.03	Yellowstone	25	3.03	Fergus
26	3.86	Meagher	26	2.82	Musselshell
27	3.80	Lake	27	2.22	Lincoln
28	3.65	Cascade	28	2.19	Pondera
29	3.63	Phillips	29	2.16	Hill
30	3.58	Wheatland	30	2.15	Powell
31	3.57	McCone	31	1.95	Jefferson
32	3.33	Hill	32	1.93	Liberty
33	2.91	Custer	33	1.77	Carter
34	2.82	Prairie	34	1.47	Mineral
35	2.74	Lewis and Clark	35	1.44	Rosebud
36	2.62	Garfield	36	1.35	Chouteau
37	2.60	Fergus	37	1.32	Valley
38	2.58	Lincoln	38	1.02	Cascade
39	2.50	Deer Lodge	39	0.54	Roosevelt
40	2.40	Missoula	40	0.37	Wheatland
41	2.23	Sanders	41	0.20	Phillips
42	2.21	Treasure	42	0.12	Granite
43	2.20	Teton	43	-0.04	Sweet Grass
44	2.17	Roosevelt	44	-0.42	Teton
45	1.71	Daniels	45	-0.68	Dawson
46	1.70	Mineral	46	-1.06	Sheridan
47	1.29	Valley	47	-1.20	Silver Bow
48	1.23	Dawson	48	-1.35	Carbon
49	1.04	Liberty	49	-1.45	Richland
50	0.67	Judith Basin	50	-1.80	Daniels
51	0.51	Beaverhead	51	-2.05	Park
52	0.35	Broadwater	52	-2.98	Petroleum
53	0.26	Powell	53	-3.97	Powder River
54	-0.73	Granite	54	-6.35	Wibaux
55	-1.44	Rosebud	55	-8.65	Fallon
56	-1.44	Pondera	56	-10.86	Garfield