

Atascadero, California

People and Place

Location

Atascadero, covering 26.7 square miles of land and 0.04 square miles of water, is located at 35°28'51"N, 120°40'12"W. The community is situated just north of San Luis Obispo along Highway 101, approximately 218 miles north of Los Angeles and 215 miles south of San Francisco.

Demographic Profile

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the population of Atascadero was 26,411, a 14.1% increase from the 1990 U.S. Census. In 2000 the gender structure was evenly divided with slightly more males (51.5%) than females (48.5%). The median age in 2000 was 38.2, which is slightly higher than the national median of 35.3 for the same year. For the population 18 years and over, 87.3% had a high school education or higher, 18.3% had attained a bachelor's degree or higher, and 4.9% earned a graduate or professional degree. The highest level of educational attainment was a high school diploma or equivalency for 26.4% of the population. In 2000, 81.2% of the population lived in family households.

The 2000 U.S. Census shows that the racial composition was predominantly White (88.9%), followed by Black or African American (2.4%), and Asian (1.3%). American Indian and Alaskan native, and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander each constituted less than one percent: (0.9% and 0.1% respectively). Overall, 3.2% classified themselves as belonging to some other race and 3.3% of the population identified themselves with two or more races. A total of 10.5% identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino. Less than five percent (4.4%) of the population was foreign-born, with 38.0% born in Mexico.

History

The area surrounding Atascadero, a Spanish word indicating a place of plentiful water, was the heart of the Chumash Indian territory for centuries. Chumash hunters, fishermen, and foragers exploited their local marine, coastal, and river resources. In unique redwood-planked boats, known as *tomols*, they regularly transported resources from their offshore islands to the mainland. These mariners imported specialized stone blades and drills manufactured on the islands, plus marine resources such as shark, bonito, and halibut. Chumash fishermen used a variety of nets, traps, baskets, hooks, spears, and plant poisons to catch or stun fish and catch seals and sea otters. On the coast they collected abalone and mussels, and the Chumash trade network passed raw marine materials such as fish, whale bones, and oils to the interior. Although the Portuguese conquistador Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo first encountered the Chumash in 1542, it was not until 1772 that five Catholic missions were established within the Chumash Nation. After the secularization of the missions in 1833, the Chumash population fell into severe decline. In 1901 the U.S. government allocated 75 acres along Zanja de Cota Creek near Mission Santa Ynez to the surviving Chumash community. Today the Chumash have their own business council, a thriving bingo operation, and a federal housing program on

their small reservation. There are approximately 5000 people who now proudly identify themselves as Chumash Indians.¹

Spanish explorers first entered the territory in 1542, but it took 200 years for exploration to get underway. With the explorers came Franciscan friars who began founding missions in the vicinity of Arroyo Grande. Between 1822 and 1821, California came under the jurisdiction of Mexico when it gained independence from Spain. Land grants were made to settlers in the area until, in 1848, California became a territory of the United States and San Luis Obispo became one of California's original 27 counties. Many place names in the area reflect this heritage.² Burgeoning agriculture and quarrying in the area spurred rapid population growth in the late 1800s, facilitated by overland transport options available through the Southern Pacific Railroad line. By the 1950s conveyors were installed on the waterfront for unloading sardine boats that accelerated the commercial development of the harbors of the area in response to newly discovered fishing grounds offshore.³

The settling of Atascadero began with the Franciscan clergy who managed the 60,000-acre Rancho Asuncion until 1833, when the Mexican government secularized the mission lands. In 1913 plans were drawn up for the area and financed by a group of investors from across the country. The City was eventually incorporated in 1979.⁴ Tourism is an important part of Atascadero's economy today, and the community boasts thousands of acres of vineyards, prestigious wineries, almond orchards, nearby lakes accessible to hikers, biking, parks, swimming, historical interests such as Hearst Castle, a zoo, and other outdoor activities.

Infrastructure

Current Economy

The California Employment Development Department lists Atascadero State Hospital as a major employer in Atascadero.⁵ According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 59.7% of the potential labor force was employed and there was a 4.3% unemployment rate (calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the labor force). Of the population over the age of 16, 37.6% were not in the labor force. Of the employed civilian population, 12.2% worked in "Retail trade" and 9.9% worked in "Construction." A total of 24.8% worked in "Educational, health and social services," with 64.9% of those falling under "Health care and social assistance." The local, state, or federal government employed a total of 26.0% of the employed civilian population; however none were reported as working for the government in the "Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and mining" industries. Only 1.0% of the employed civilian population over the age of 16 was involved in "Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting" according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

Atascadero's per capita income in 1999 was \$20,029 according to the U.S. Census, while the median household income was \$48,725. In 1999 a total of 9.0% of the population was below the poverty level. In 2000 there were 9848 housing units in Atascadero, 96.8% of which were occupied, 3.2% were vacant. Of the occupied housing units, 65.6% were owner occupied and 34.4% were renter occupied.

Governance

Atascadero is a General Law City with a Council-Manager form of government. The City Council is composed of 5 members who are elected at large and serve four-year overlapping terms. The Mayor is elected by Council members to perform ceremonial duties and preside over meetings. The Council also appoints the City Manager, who is responsible for directing all administrative activities.⁶

Atascadero levies a 7.25% sales and use tax rate. San Luis Obispo County uses a 9.0% transient lodging tax rate, which earned \$4,229,463 in revenue for the 2000-2001 fiscal year.⁷ California state law assesses commercial vessels, charter boats, and oceanographic research vessels at 4% of their full cash value.⁸ Vessels registered in California with either the Department of Motor Vehicles or the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) are assessed property taxes by the county tax collector where it is moored.⁹ Some commercial vessels are also subject to a Ballast Water Management Fee of about \$500 per voyage.¹⁰ California levies a fuel tax of \$0.18 per gallon, a portion of which goes toward marine safety and education programs and boating facility administration and development.¹¹

The State of California levies landing taxes that must be paid by fishermen and fish processors involved in the retail sale of fish products. These taxes vary by species and range between \$.0013 and \$.0125 per pound of fish.¹² The California Department of Agriculture also administers two commodity commissions, the California Salmon Council and the California Sea Urchin Commission, which charge fees for marketing and lobbying on behalf of fishermen involved in these specific fisheries.¹³

A California Department of Fish and Game Marine Region Field Office and a U.S. Coast Guard station are located approximately 30 miles away in Morro Bay. Foster City, approximately 211 miles away, is the nearest city that hosts Pacific Fisheries Management Council meetings. The nearest National Marine Fisheries office is over 200 miles away.

Facilities

Atascadero, located along U.S. Highway 101, is accessible by a number of transportation options. Passenger rail service is available via the Amtrak station in Grover Beach, approximately 30 miles away. San Luis County Regional Airport is about 18 miles from Atascadero. The nearest major international airports are in Los Angeles and San Francisco, 218 and 215 miles away respectively.

The public school system of Atascadero consists of seven primary/middle schools and two high schools. There are also three private primary/middle schools and one private high school in Atascadero. Wastewater services are provided to about half of Atascadero residents by the City of Atascadero Public Works Department, the other half of the city uses on-site septic systems. The Atascadero Mutual Water Company operates the city's water systems, while Pacific Gas and Electric supplies electricity to all of San Luis Obispo County. Both the Atascadero Police and Fire Departments administer public safety. Three nearby hospitals provide health services to area residents. Twin Cities Community Hospital is the closest at about 6 miles away, and two other hospitals are within 16 miles in nearby San Luis Obispo. There are at least eight hotels in Atascadero, along with two bed & breakfast inns. The City of Atascadero has no marine facilities (i.e., harbor, docks, etc.).

Involvement in West Coast Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

Landings data for Atascadero were recorded as part of the Other San Luis Obispo County Ports port group which includes the nearby communities of San Miguel, Baywood Park, Grover City, Cambria, Nipomo, Shell Beach, San Simeon, Pismo Beach, San Luis Obispo, Paso Robles, Cayucos, Arroyo Grande, and Oceano. Reported landings for this port group in 2000 were in the following West Coast fisheries (data shown represent landings in metric tons/value of said landings/number of vessels landing): groundfish (9 t/\$110,441/40) and other species (<1 t/\$88/6). See the Arroyo Grande Profile for additional information about this community. There was at least one seafood processor operating in Atascadero in 2000. Specific information (estimated pounds of product/value of product) is confidential.

Atascadero residents owned a total of 14 commercial vessels in 2000, including eight vessels that participated in the Federally Managed Groundfish fishery. According to recorded data the number of vessels owned by Atascadero residents in 2000 that participated in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab (0/1/1), groundfish (0/0/NA), highly migratory species (NA/0/NA), other species (1/0/0), salmon (0/2/7), shellfish (NA/0/NA), and shrimp (NA/2/6).¹⁴

In 2000, four federal groundfish permits were held by four Atascadero residents. Recorded data for the same year indicates that the number of Atascadero residents holding permits in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab (0/1/1), groundfish (0/0/4), highly migratory species (NA/0/4), salmon (0/2/9), shellfish (0/0/NA), shrimp (1/1/6), and other species (1/0/9).¹⁵

According to available data, there were at least 58 commercial fishing permits, including 54 registered state permits, held by Atascadero residents in 2000. Recorded data indicates that the number of state permits held by residents in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab (0/1/1), groundfish (0/0/5), highly migratory species (NA/0/4), salmon (0/2/16), shellfish (0/0/NA), shrimp (1/2/8), and other species (1/0/13).¹⁶

Sportfishing

A number of charter vessels operate in San Luis Obispo County targeting albacore tuna, rock cod, salmon, and other species. Many of these charter vessels also offer seasonal whale watching tours. In 2002, at least 14 charter businesses serviced sport fishermen and tourists in Atascadero. The community is home to one sportfishing license agent. In 2000 San Luis Obispo County residents purchased the following licenses: 43,399 resident sportfishing licenses, 40 non-resident sportfishing licenses, 52 sport salmon punch cards, and 30 abalone report cards. In the port group consisting of Avila Beach and Morro Bay, 12 commercial passenger fishing vessels served 17,759 anglers in 2000. These vessels reported 123,441 landings composed of more than a dozen species. Rockfish (unspecified) and Albacore tuna accounted for 93.9% and 4.6% of the landings respectively.

Subsistence

Local tribal and nontribal community members might be engaged in subsistence fishing in the Atascadero area. However, specific information on subsistence fishing in

Atascadero is not discussed in detail in this Community Profile due to the lack of available data. The California Department of Fish and Game uses the term “recreational” to refer to fishermen that do not earn revenue from their catch but rather fish for pleasure and/or to provide food for personal consumption. Therefore information on subsistence fishing in California is captured, to some degree, within the above sportfishing data.

Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

In 2000 there were two vessels owned by Atascadero residents that participated in North Pacific fisheries. These vessels made landings in the North Pacific salmon fishery, but specific information (landings in metric tons/value of landings) is confidential.

Five Atascadero residents worked as crewmembers aboard vessels involved in North Pacific fisheries in 2000. In the same year, two community residents held state permits for Alaska fisheries and one Atascadero resident held a federal permit for North Pacific fisheries. There was a total of three commercial fishing permits for North Pacific fisheries held by residents of Atascadero in 2000, two of which were Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) salmon permits.

Sportfishing

While the majority of the sport fishermen in Atascadero target West Coast fisheries, a total of 38 Atascadero community members purchased Alaska sportfishing licenses in 2000.

¹ Houghton Mifflin Company. No Date. Encyclopedia of North American Indians: Chumash, [Online]. Available: URL: http://college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/naind/html/na_007400_chumash.htm (access date - September 2004).

² The County of San Luis Obispo Online. 2005. About the County, [Online]. Available: URL: http://www.co.slo.ca.us/SLOCo_InterPortal.nsf/SLOCo_AboutCounty.htm?OpenPage&charset=windows-1252 (Access Date - January 2005)

³ History in San Luis Obispo County. 2004. Timeline, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.historyinslocounty.com/index.htm> (Access Date - January 2004).

⁴ Atascadero Chamber of Commerce. 2005. Historic Atascadero, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.atascaderochamber.org/history.asp> (access date - January 2005).

⁵ State of California. No date. Labor Market Information: Major Employers in San Luis Obispo County, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.calmis.ca.gov/file/majorer/sanluer.htm> (access date - September 2004).

⁶ City of Atascadero. No Date. City of Atascadero: Home, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.atascadero.org/> (access date - November 2004).

⁷ State of California. 2004. California Counties Transient Lodging Tax Revenue, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.sco.ca.gov/ard/local/locrep/adhoc/county/0001cotranslodgtax.pdf> (access date - July 2004).

⁸ State of California Board of Equalization. No date. Property Tax Rules, Rule 151. Vessels Subject to the Four Percent Assessment, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.boe.ca.gov/proptaxes/pdf/r151.pdf> (access date - July 2004).

⁹ California Department of Motor Vehicles. 2003. How to register a vessel, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.dmv.ca.gov/boatsinfo/boatreg.htm#how> (access date - July 2004).

¹⁰ State of California Board of Equalization. 2004. Ballast Water Management Fee, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.boe.ca.gov/sptaxprog/blstweb12.htm> (access date - July 2004).

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- ¹¹ U.S. Department of Transportation. 2001. Provisions Governing the Distribution of State Motor Fuel Tax Receipts: California, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/hwytaxes/2001/california.htm> (access date - July 2004).
- ¹² State of California. No date. Fish and Game Code Section 8040-8070, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycod?section=fgc&group=08001-8070> (access date – July 2004).
- ¹³ State of California Department of Agriculture. 2004. List of Marketing Programs, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/mkt/mkt/mktbrds.html> (access date - July 2004).
- ¹⁴ ‘NA’ refers to data which was not available, for example, due to few or no recorded permit numbers, or the partially permitted nature of a fishery in 2000.
- ¹⁵ ‘NA’ refers to data which was not available, for example, due to few or no recorded permit numbers, or the partially permitted nature of a fishery in 2000.
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